

‘Feeding Our Chinese Stomachs’: Understanding Chinatown as Place Through the Lens of Culturally Significant Food

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Introduction

For over 130 years, Vancouver's Chinatown has been a mainstay for the Chinese diaspora living in Vancouver and beyond. At its peak, Chinatown was a bustling neighbourhood. In the morning, the streets would team with residents on their way to buy groceries or take in the day at a local café. The night sky would be lit up with neon signs pointing residents to their favourite chop suey restaurant or noodle house. This is the Chinatown that many of the older residents, particularly those who have lived in Chinatown for a few generations, remember.

Fast forward to today, and the pioneers of Chinatown past probably would not be able to recognize the Chinatown that exists now. The neighbourhood has undergone tremendous change due to ongoing gentrification, rising real estate prices, poverty, and the introduction of non-Chinese businesses, to name a few factors. What was once a lively neighbourhood is now silent as Chinese restaurants and grocers board up their stores to move away or close down for good. But while the businesses are going away, their faithful patrons continue to show up in Chinatown. The result? Some Chinese seniors are wondering where they will go for their daily *yin-yang* coffee, wonton noodles, or groceries for that week. As these changes progress, it has a significant impact on Chinatown as a place. As people move away, businesses close down, and new capital enters into the neighbourhood, what does this mean for the character of Chinatown?

When it comes to understanding place, there is the physical, built environment. The discussions around preservation, particularly in a neighbourhood such as Chinatown, typically revolves around maintaining heritage buildings, preserving 'traditional' frontage, and the upkeep of certain buildings and sites of importance. However, just built environment alone overlooks a number of aspects that make up culture. This would include things like language, art, social practices, festive events, and in this specific case, food. For the purposes of this project, I want to know how food plays a role in this relationship to place and what have been some of the factors that have led to the changes that we see in the present.

This project came out of a desire to hear the stories that Chinese seniors had with food in Chinatown – what their memories are, what places they frequented, and what life is like now that some of these places no longer exist.

Situating Myself in the Research

I was born in Canada into a Chinese family. My dad is from Singapore and my mom is from Hong Kong. I grew up in Surrey, BC, far away from Vancouver's Chinatown. When I was younger, T&T Supermarket was already engraved into my mind as the store where we would get Chinese things. Given the physical distance between Chinatown and Surrey, I had no relationship to it growing up. I may have gone to Chinatown with my family a few times for dim sum or dinner with family friends, but even then, we would go to places in Richmond or Vancouver.

My interest in the experience of Chinese-Canadians came after I took Socials Studies 11 in high school and learned about the Head Tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act. Prior to any of this, I

was indifferent to my culture and even resented it at times because I knew that I did not look like any of my friends, most of whom were either Caucasian or Filipino. But when I heard of the injustices and racism that Chinese-Canadians had to face ever since they began to arrive in Canada, I could feel a deep obligation in my heart to learn more.

Once I got into university and became a little more mobile with transit, I found myself going back and forth between home and Vancouver. Going into Vancouver allowed me the opportunity to explore parts of the city that I had never been to, and this included Vancouver's Chinatown. I started these explorations around 2015, and right from the beginning I had noticed the closed up shops, the 'for rent' or 'for lease' signs, and the shiny new stores and buildings. I remember thinking that the new buildings and high rises looked odd against the lower, two-storey businesses that had paint chipping off the roof. But month after month, I started to notice significant changes with more traditional businesses closing and a great turn over of newer businesses. Along with that, the atmosphere of the neighbourhood began to change.

I did some research on the history of Chinese-Canadians in Vancouver and really took interest in the gentrification of Chinatown. Vancouver's Chinatown is a particularly unique case study because of its location and proximity to the Downtown Eastside. In comparison to other Chinatowns that I have been to, Vancouver does stand alone. I found myself feeling a bit of 'gentrifier's guilt' as well inside of me. I wanted to help preserve the Chinatown that many of the elders and early pioneers fought to create under the attack of intense racism and xenophobia. But at the same time, recognizing my age and purchasing power thanks to the privilege I have inherited from my parents and as a first-generation Chinese-Canadian, I was (and still am) and frequent patron of a number of the businesses that I would criticize for coffee, lunch, or a treat. My interest in Chinese-Canadian history, in gentrification, and in place-based politics and the meanings of place created a unique nexus for me that landed me here in this paper.

As I saw Chinatown changing around me in the very limited time that I have come to know it, I knew that elders would have an even greater sense of the overwhelming changes that Chinatown has faced over the years. This project is dedicated to them, and to give ownership of a Chinatown that once was strong, vibrant, and culturally significant. Perhaps, if we work hard enough, Chinatown can still be as strong, as vibrant, and as culturally significant as it once was.

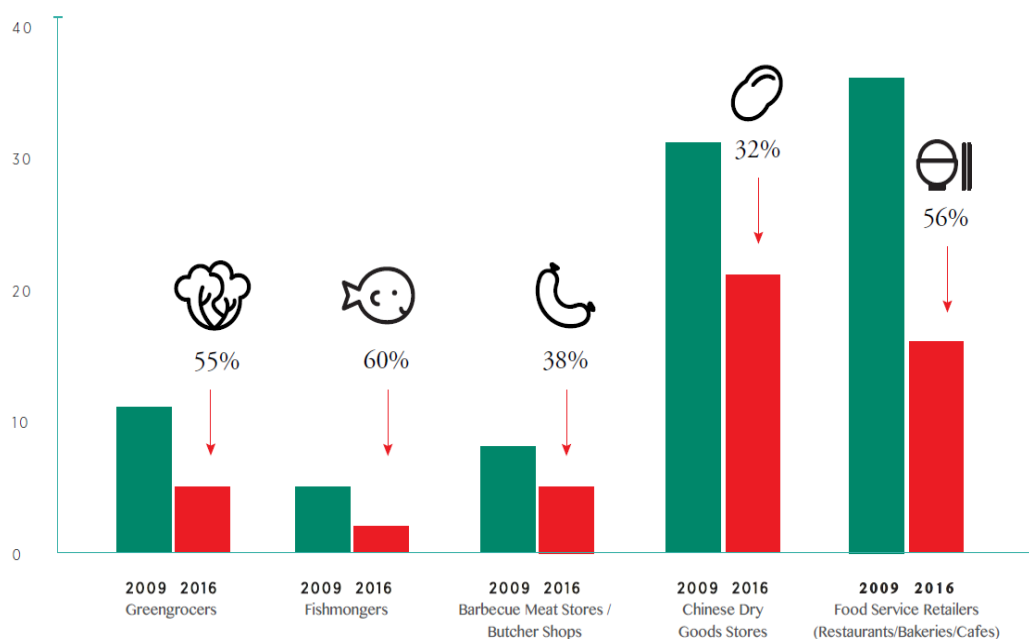
Literature Review

In putting together this project and deciding my approach, I did a lot of reading on gentrification in the neighbourhood and the commodification of poverty as well as reports by different non-profit organizations in Chinatown.

As part of this project, I spent time talking to folks who do advocacy work in the neighbourhood. One of those people was Kevin Huang, Executive Director of the Hua Foundation. Hua Foundation is a "youth-driven non-profit based in Vancouver dedicated to bringing together the worlds of cultural heritage and social change with an socio-environmental

lens” (Hua Foundation, 2019). Hua Foundation came out with a pivotal piece of research that really sparked my interest in cultural food assets and the importance of culturally significant food in Chinatown. The Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report by Ho and Chen (2017) opened my eyes to the immense changes happening that I could not even keep track of with my own two eyes as I walked down the street. The data, which looks at the loss of cultural food assets in Chinatown in the period between 2009 and 2016, divided these assets into 5 categories: greengrocers, fishmongers, barbecue meat stores/butcher shops, Chinese dry goods stores, and food service retailers (which would include restaurants, bakeries, and cafés). In all categories, the 7 year period showed significant decline in all areas – upwards of 60% in some (Ho & Chen, 2017). Figure 1 gives an overview of the findings regarding loss cultural food assets.

Figure 1: Loss of cultural food assets in Chinatown between 2009 to 2016. Source: Ho & Chen (2017).



Given that this included data up to 2016, I was curious to know about what happened from 2016 all the way to the present. I reached out to Huang to see if there were any updated numbers with respect to those reported in the 2017 report. The biggest change came in greengrocers: in 2009, there was a reported 11 greengrocer shops. That number decreased down to 5 in 2016, a 55% loss in greengrocers (Ho & Chen, 2017). At the time of our correspondence in early 2020, this number is now down from 5 to 3 grocers, a further loss of 40%. With BBQ meat shops and butchers, the number stayed the same between 2016 and 2020 at 5 shops, which is a 38% decrease from 2009 as reported in the Food Security Report (Ho & Chen, 2017).

But the biggest and most varied change comes by way of restaurants. Ho & Chen (2017) note that this category of ‘food service retailers’ saw a decrease of 56%. Huang noted that in the years between 2017 and the present, it was not only Chinese businesses or restaurants closing and being affected. In fact, newer businesses were also not immune, and Huang observed that there is

a high turnover and replacement rate in Chinatown when it came to these businesses. Some examples of this are noted in **Appendix 3**.

Aside from the 2017 Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report, a lot of my early research and research design comparison was centered around gentrification in Vancouver's Chinatown and the surrounding neighbourhoods of the Downtown Eastside and Strathcona. A key article by Burnett (2014) looked at the ways in which businesses, primarily restaurants, were gentrifying the Downtown Eastside and in many ways 'commodifying poverty'. Walking through the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, Strathcona or other parts of the neighbourhood, the contrast between run down, derelict buildings and homelessness up against trendy cafés and expensive restaurants are nothing new. Burnett (2014) also pays attention to how Chinatown has experienced not only residential gentrification but also a capitalization of "the history and the cultural value of the area" (p. 168). Keeping in mind that this was written right in the middle of the time of the Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report's data set is, Burnett (2014) mentions the "Chinese grocers, butchers, herbalists, and tea and ginseng stores...and restaurants and bakeries" that do exist (p. 168). However, there is also an undeniable change in the types of restaurants present as well. And while some take over previous tenant spaces without drastically changing the look of the original building, one only has to look to Union Street to see how "the spaces of consumption have become significantly more upscale" (Burnett, 2014, p. 168). This creates a kind of poverty tourism where members from outside of the neighbourhood go into neighbourhoods that they have no connection to for a meal or coffee at a destination business. This point is summed up well by Burnett (2014) at the end of her article:

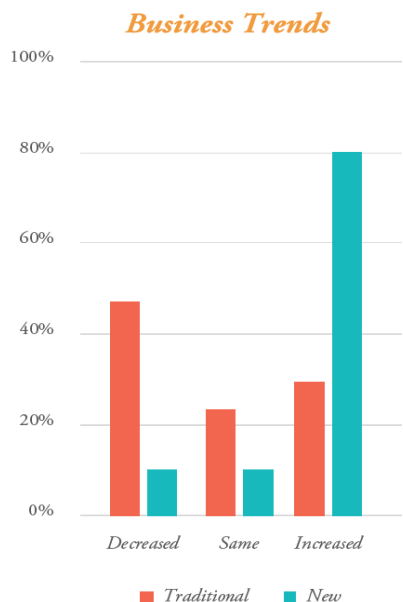
...if poor and marginalized populations, the others encountered by adventure diners, are required to be the element of authenticity that draws consumers to the neighbourhood, it remains to be seen if poverty and social exclusion are by-products or necessities of gentrification in the Downtown Eastside (p. 173).

The Carnegie Community Action Project produced a report in 2017 called "We Are Too Poor to Afford Anything" in response to research like that of Burnett's (2014). The purpose of this report from the Carnegie Community Action Project was to identify retail that caters to the low-income community, but the findings of this report found that even retail that is supposed to cater to this community is still unaffordable (CCAP, 2017, 4). The report highlights how gentrifying retail create zones of exclusion which stigmatizes low-income communities and reduces their access to food and services that are affordable, and areas where they feel welcome. The focus of this report typically looked at the Downtown Eastside, which also included Chinatown. Their research process also included Chinese seniors and held the process in both English and Chinese so as to include this community in the process.

Ultimately, this report came up with a few recommendations to improve the livelihoods of residents who live in the Downtown Eastside when it comes to gentrification, including

implementing measures to stop the creation of new zones of exclusion and protecting shops that cater to low-income residents – both of which are applicable to the Chinatown community (CCAP, 2017). The outcomes of this report are highlighted in various articles (see Chiang, 2017; Baker, 2017) which further elaborate on the community’s response to the zones of exclusion that are created. These articles also shed light on the lived realities and experiences of members of the

Figure 2: Business trends in Vancouver's Chinatown for traditional and non-traditional businesses. Source: Lee (2018).



Downtown Eastside who typically are discriminated against, potentially due to appearance or class (Baker, 2017). Unfortunately, this type of treatment towards community members is not unusual, and this certainly comes up in Chinatown with the added barriers of language and race.

Finally, a piece of research that helped me to understand more deeply the relationship between food and community and how this could play into social cohesion is the Vancouver Chinatown Social Cohesion Report by Lee (2018) of the Hua Foundation. This report built upon the Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report by Ho and Chen (2017) discussed earlier on in this section. Lee (2018) looked at the importance of “social cohesion and strong networks” in their role of “intangible heritage and culture, and the successful, active working business-to-business relationships in Vancouver’s Chinatown” (p. 7). Figure 2 shows research gathered by Lee (2018) and their research team with regards to business trends that traditional and non-traditional businesses have seen. For the purposes of their research, Lee (2018) defines ‘traditional style businesses in Chinatown’ as those businesses ‘that carry on key functions (social, cultural, economic) in Chinatown throughout its history...[that] often, but not always, have a Chinese orientation’ (p. 56). ‘Non-traditional style businesses in Chinatown’ are different in that “they have a higher barrier to access due to their business model and pricing of their products and services...with the majority of their patrons being new residents of the neighbourhood or destination visitors” (Lee, 2018, p. 57). The graph and the report as a whole helped me to understand the different struggles and perceptions that shop and business owners had with regards to this crisis. Unfortunately, a graph such as the one shown in Figure 2 points to a fact that is further supplemented by the lived experiences that I have heard in my research through interviews and anecdotes.

Research Questions

The aim of this paper is to look at how Chinese seniors relate to the place of Chinatown. I have a particular interest in the way that food impacts that relationship. As such, my research question is: How do Chinese seniors relate to the place of Chinatown through the lens of

culturally significant food? Further, these sub-questions have emerged to supplement my understanding of these relationships: What impact has the loss of or decreased access to cultural food assets in Vancouver's Chinatown have on Chinese seniors? What is the impact of culturally significant food for Chinese seniors who either live in Chinatown or frequent it on a regular basis? Finally, how have these changes in culturally significant food availability impact their relationship to Chinatown?

These questions were informed through initial research and early interviews done with seniors who either live in Chinatown or have had a long term relationship to it. It is clear that Chinatown has experienced significant losses when it comes to cultural food assets, restaurants, and the places where folks can buy culturally significant food either for groceries or for a meal with family or friends. In the spirit of doing a phenomenological study, these questions served the basis of the interviews conducted with participants. The semi-structured nature of the interview was meant to remain open-ended so as to allow for conversation to be led by the participants. While I am of course interested in seeking answers to the above questions, I am also interested in the unique and lived experience of these seniors. Each participant brought with them their own history and perspective based on their own lived experience, which makes for a very rich project that can showcase a variety of perspectives. Given how extensive these interviews can be, I have chosen to focus on the stories of 2-3 seniors so that more depth and focus can be given to them.

Each of these interviews are meant to pull out different themes as they relate to the questions and to understand how these changes may have impacted participants in a personal and particular way. Complete interview guides have been included in **Appendix 1**.

Method

The following highlights the process of my phenomenological study that is based in Vancouver's Chinatown. It is worth mentioning that the in person interviews were thankfully done before COVID-19 became as serious as it currently is, and before there was an imposed city-wide shut down of all services. Once the shut down was imposed, further communication with my participants was done over the phone to practice social distancing and ensure that they remain safe and healthy, as they are a vulnerable population.

Participant Recruitment

This research project provided an opportunity for Chinese seniors to be able to tell their story and explain the importance of culturally significant food in their own lives. Instead of having someone speak for them, they can vocalize their own opinions, thoughts, and emotions. This required for trust building between myself and the community. I saw it as an invaluable opportunity to build relationships with community members and learn directly from their own experiences and past. I was fortunate to connect with a number of seniors, and ultimately, the seniors I spoke to highlighted the different ways that culturally significant food or lack of impacted their way of life and ultimately their relationship to Vancouver's Chinatown.

For this project, I spoke with three Chinese seniors who frequent Chinatown on a weekly basis, sometimes multiple times a week. With the help of Yarrow Intergenerational Society for Justice, a youth driven non-profit in Chinatown, I presented at a community meeting for Chinese seniors to gauge interest and recruit for potential participants for the project. I presented in Cantonese, and a member of Yarrow was there to provide Mandarin translation so that all could understand. Community organizers in Chinatown also helped to spread the word about the project by word of mouth, using the flyers I had prepared with the help of my translator.

As I went about my recruitment, I learned more about the relationships that different Chinese groups have with Chinatown. I learned about migration flows and how those folks who speak Mandarin typically have arrived to Chinatown (or Vancouver more broadly) more recently. Those who speak Cantonese or Toishan typically reflect those populations of the diaspora that have come to Vancouver much earlier; some potentially born here. As such, their relationship to Chinatown is different and more closely aligned with what I am looking for. At this point, I decided that I need to focus my scope a little more to reflect this fact and focused in on Chinese seniors who spoke Cantonese. I unfortunately could not include those seniors who spoke the Toishan dialect because I didn't have a proficiency in it. While this part of the scope was reduced, I also opened up the location where participants lived to beyond the bounds of Chinatown, as many of them have moved away to be closer to their children given old age.

The determination of who would be included came about through a pre-interview process. Initially I had about 7 contacts who were interested, and I pre-interviewed 7 of them. Pre-interviews were conducted on my own so that I could get to know the potential participant and they could get to know me. It served as an opportunity for us not only to get acquainted, but for me to hear their stories first hand and for the seniors to ask any questions about my research that they would like. This portion was not recorded, though there were some notes taken for my information and use only.

From these 7 contacts, some decided that they could not move forward with the research process. In the end, 3 seniors decided to continue on and they formally gave their consent to participate by signing a consent form, which was written in Chinese so that they could read and understand. The decision to go with three seniors took into account the consent and desire for Chinese seniors to go forward with the project, as well as a choice to hone in further into these seniors' stories. Other considerations included my own timeline to complete this project by the end of the semester, which took into account the ethics process, my schedule, and to respect the seniors' time.

Participant Profiles

The three Chinese seniors that I spoke to all gave their consent to having their name and biographical information featured in the paper, and can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Biographical information of seniors interviewed

Name	Mei Li	Eva Cho	Mary Chang
Age	59	72	72
Arrival to Canada	1992	1972	1970
Current place of residence	Vancouver	Burnaby	Burnaby

Semi-Structured Interviews

These interviews took place in public places that were mutually agreed upon by both myself and the participant, and only the audio was recorded for transcription and eventually documentary creation purposes. These interviews were semi-structured, and each interview informed the next interview, to keep in the spirit of phenomenology. As the process went along, I went back to talk to previous participants who had earlier interviews to follow up and ask them questions that came up in later interviews.

All three of these interviews were conducted with the help of a translator. I asked questions in English, and they were translated into Cantonese to the participant. The participant would respond in Cantonese, and their responses would then be translated back into English for me. I decided to have a translator present despite the fact that my language skills are fairly proficient because I wanted to ensure that I understood the responses that were shared during the interview so that I could ask appropriate follow up questions.

Transcription and Data Analysis

Following the completion of the interviews, I began transcribing the English portion of the interviews. While the Cantonese portion could not officially be transcribed, I reached out to my translator to clarify any responses from the participants given in Cantonese for further understanding. I went through the transcriptions along with the recorded audio twice: once to read through the English responses and pull out common themes and responses, and a second time to listen more closely to the Cantonese responses to add more to the English translations. I was able to do this mostly on my own given that my Cantonese language skills are fairly proficient, but as mentioned, I did consult my translator for additional help and clarity.

The audio recordings and transcriptions of the interview served as the data that I pulled themes and compared responses from. Using the data from the transcript, I used Nvivo to highlight the prevalence of themes as they relate to the food scene that came about across the three interviews. As a note, Nvivo was used solely for the English translations from the interview. All of this takes into consideration the Chinese responses from participants, which have also been considered when comparing themes across interviews. Major themes across interviews were also pulled out based on the number of times they came up in the transcript, and a table (which can be found in **Appendix 2**) was used to sort out these key themes as well as other organizing material

such as mentions of restaurants and stores, emotional responses, and participant observations. These themes are discussed at length in a later section.

Stories from Chinatown Past

The bulk of the data came from three semi-structured interviews conducted with seniors who have a unique relationship to Chinatown, and in particular, to their food scene. What follows are summaries of the senior and their relationship to Vancouver's Chinatown, the food scene of the past, and how the progression of changes in Chinatown has impacted the seniors, their wellbeing and their overall relationship to Chinatown.

“Once they started to break ground...things started to change”: Mei Li’s story

After moving into Chinatown proper in 2001, Mei Li found employment in a variety of different stores and restaurants. In particular, Ms. Li highlighted her experience working part time at a Hong Kong-style café in Chinatown called *Kuan Wong Ji*, an owner-operated business that had two levels to its dining space. At peak hours, Ms. Li recalled how busy she found herself while she worked a shift.

Ms. Li: [W]hen it is busy, both upstairs and downstairs will be bustling and opened...During weekends, it will be so busy that I have to be running up and down the stairs. And also, not only does it serve local foods such as congee and noodles, it also has a barbecue shop in the front [main level] that sells barbecue ducks, barbecue pork or [soy sauce] chicken. And during festive seasons, people would pre-order some of these barbecue items to bring home or for their festive needs, and there are also cooked food for takeout orders. So business was really good.

Aside from local residents gaining employment at the café, Ms. Li also noted how *Kuan Wong Ji* was a staple for the community due to the hospitality of the owner-operators.

Ms. Li: The prices of this restaurant...are fair. A lot of nearby workers and residents there always go there to eat and order. The boss actually makes his own barbecues. He even knows how to make some local specialties such as five spice meat or even the chicken feet, and he actually knows how to make some other local delicacies; for example, the ‘both-sides’ fried noodles.

Despite the popularity of *Kuan Wong Ji*, shortly after Ms. Li stopped working there, she noticed that the business had closed down. When asked if she knew why the restaurant was no longer open, she speculated that it probably had to do with high rent prices.

When it came to buying groceries or going to restaurants to her own meals, Ms. Li points to a number of anchor businesses in the neighbourhood: *Maxim* and *The Boss* for baked goods, *Sunrise* and *Lekiu* for groceries, *Yuen Cheung* for meats and barbecues, and *Zhong Guo Peking Sum Yong* for dried goods used in soups, tea, and medicine. Of the businesses listed here, all are still open for business, though she notes the *Lekiu*, which is a major Chinese-food importer that was started and still owned by the prolific Louie family, has now moved its factory from its location on Prior Street (Lee-Young, 2016). In its beginnings, *Lekiu* was also a grocery store before it shut its door and focused solely on Chinese food importing and distribution. Currently, *Lekiu* is located in South Vancouver facing the Fraser River.

Though most of the businesses that Ms. Li frequented still remain open, one major difference she notices is the prices. Since she is a retiree on a fixed income, she was particularly conscientious of that.

Ms. Li: [T]here's a place called Kent's Kitchen [a Chinese fast food restaurant that sells traditional dishes] that used to sell dishes between \$4-5, but they just started to raise the price. Local cafes may be selling some traditional rice cakes at [a price of] \$4 but eventually it also went up. The whole chicken used to be \$7, but it becomes \$15!

Despite the fact that there are some shops that still exist in Chinatown, Ms. Li finds that she actually leaves Chinatown to buy her groceries and food for cooking. Notable places she will go to are Crystal Mall in Burnaby or Richmond. Not only are the prices a lot more affordable outside of Chinatown, but she also finds that the quality and selection of goods surpasses that of the stores in Chinatown.

Ms. Li: Chinese shops...in Crystal Mall also offer a lot more varieties and places for us to shop, and...you can buy things cheaper there and it would be better quality as compared to places like Sunrise in Chinatown, whereby you may be paying less, but the quality is just not so good...as a result, it might be better to buy from places in Metrotown or Crystal Mall.

All of this contributes to an overall diminished quality of Chinatown: restaurants and stores closing down, rising food prices, the availability of culturally significant food elsewhere, and development. The changes surrounding food availability and the neighbourhood more broadly make Ms. Li very uncomfortable; in particular, she notes the growing number of homeless folks and the street markets that can be found along Main and Hastings Streets. Along with the homelessness crisis, gentrification has impacted Chinatown greatly. In Ms. Li's memory, she noted that it was around 2008 when things started to significantly shift thanks to the development of new buildings.

Ms. Li: [E]ventually somewhere around Georgia [Street], Union [Street], once they started to break ground and have the first building there, things started to change. It is evident that ever since that building has been completed...other buildings started to come. And that seems to be the turning point when places started to shut down or at least take a turn or start to change.

“It’s not just the business, but the social aspect of it”: Eva Cho’s story

In her words, Eva Cho’s relationship with Vancouver’s Chinatown started far before she started living here with her family about 11 years ago. When she first immigrated to Canada in 1972, she lived in Regina, Saskatchewan. Her connection to Chinatown was through her parents, who lived in Vancouver while she lived in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Cho: Whenever I come, I will definitely come and pay a visit to the Chinatown. My parents would bring me there for sure. We will [eat] wonton noodles, congee, and other types of fried noodles and rice, [a]nd sometimes we go to dim sum.

Regina, Saskatchewan, would probably not be the first Canadian city to come to mind for an abundant population of Chinese people. 2016 Census data shows that people of Chinese ethnicity make up 2.8% of Regina’s population (Statistics Canada, 2016). It is clear, then, that if there are not a lot of Chinese people around, chances are the availability of culturally significant food for Chinese folks would be limited at best. It is clear why, then, Ms. Cho had an affinity for Vancouver’s Chinatown. Ms. Cho’s enthusiasm and love for Vancouver’s Chinatown was certainly evident throughout the interview, particularly all the time that she spent there when she would visit her parents from Saskatchewan.

Aside from enjoying cultural delicacies and visiting her parents, Vancouver’s Chinatown played a vital role in sustaining the Chinese restaurant that she ran with her husband in Saskatchewan. Given the fact that many of the ingredients and specific groceries and goods were not available in Saskatchewan, Ms. Cho relied on different stores and manufacturers to send goods back home.

Ms. Cho: I always have to order my supplies from a company called Yuen Fung. And that is where I got all my supplies: Chinese mushroom, all sorts of dried shrimps and products, all the special beans that we eat [like] mung beans, red beans and all that kind of stuff.

Ms. Cho had memories of a big catalogue filled with pages of ingredients and goods. Like many, she would flip through the catalogue and check off what goods she wanted to purchase, and those goods would be shipped to wherever they needed them to go. Figure 3 shows an example of what the front of the *Yuen Fong* catalogue looked like. Similar to *Lekiu*, which was mentioned in Ms. Li's story, *Yuen Fong* Company was integral for supplying "Chinatown businesses and restaurants across Canada and some parts of the United States with traditional Chinese goods", and they eventually closed in 1982 (Bjarne Tokerud Bookseller, 2012, para. 1).

Figure 3: The cover of a *Yuen Fong* catalogue, circa November 1960. Source: Bjarne Tokerud Bookseller (2012).



In Ms. Cho's memory, closures have come about for a number of reasons. Ms. Cho noted that there was a fire that burned down a business, and it never re-opened. But for the most part, she notes that many of the businesses have closed down and moved away, and in their place, new high rises were built. For example, once Ms. Cho moved to British Columbia in the early 2000s, she noticed that *Yuen Fong* had already shuttered their doors. This began to be a pattern that Ms. Cho noticed as she settled in and came to visit Chinatown.

Ms. Cho: My memories of Chinatown always included the barbecue shop...one that I used to go [to] has been closed because of a new high rise. There are many other places that sells all these dried goods, actually many have gone out of business. And one thing that I hold close to my heart are all these places that sells buns and bakeries – again, many of them are closed.

For Ms. Cho, she understands that change of ownership is inevitable. However, it is the "slow death" of Chinatown and the resulting loss of businesses that has had a particularly profound impact on her.

Ms. Cho: Many of our friends will still come to Chinatown now when they come visit, and not seeing some of [these] restaurants... is a loss to us...I understand that there will be changes in the ownership, but I hope that if someone closes the door, someone else would buy that business and continue it...We want to see Chinatown to continue to have this bustling past.

The businesses where she bought her groceries were more than just a transaction of money for goods – there was a community that drew her in and relationships that she will always think back on. This is evident in the fact that even though she does not live in Chinatown proper, she will still take transit to go down to Chinatown.

Ms. Cho: Even though I have to commute into Chinatown, I will still do so because I have the feelings for the place. And the other reason is that the stores that we used to patronize, the workers, the boss, we are like friends. We can talk to each other. It is more than just buying goods and products from them. Whenever we go, we can spend some time and chat about everything.

The community aspect of Chinatown is a clear marker of its identity. Thinking back to the time when Chinatown was first created in the 1850s, it was really created out of a necessity to keep all Chinese folks together and prevent interracial mixing, mostly from the perspective of Caucasians (Anderson, 1991). In many ways, Chinese folks were forced to stay together to protect themselves from the incessant racism of the time. The communities formed around different villages where immigrants came from as well as dialects of the Chinese language spoken. Chinatown was a place where Chinese people could eat the food that was culturally significant to them, and many of them went on to open restaurants, grocery stores, and more because many men were denied work and thus relegated to more feminine and domestic roles (Anderson, 1991). This was a trend here in Vancouver, but also can be traced throughout much of North America.

Ms. Cho and her family arrived in Vancouver well after the time of Chinese men being forced into the restaurant business and the racialization that occurred in the neighbourhood. But the roots that many of the restaurants and stores had created the basis for a thriving and lively Chinatown – one that, month after month, Ms. Cho notices is in great decline. When asked what she thought impacted the closures, Ms. Cho pointed to the fact that many businesses, which used to have multiple locations, decide to close up shop in Chinatown.

Ms. Cho: ...A lot of stores are closing, and some of them actually used to have one store in Chinatown and maybe another store in Burnaby, in Crystal Mall. But because of the business, you know, going downhill, and the law and order and the general environment in Chinatown in decline, some of the stores that used to have both locations, they would tend to close the one in Chinatown and combine their business into the one in Burnaby.

She further illustrated her point with a few stores that she used to frequent for veggies and a dried goods store called *Hap Sing*.

But when asked where she bought her groceries and food now, Ms. Cho says that it all comes down to practicality and location for her. She noted that now there are plenty of options for her to buy these groceries; most notably, a number of T&T Supermarkets in different locations. Previously, Chinatown was the only place where Chinese people could get these goods that were particular to what Ms. Cho described as ‘the Chinese stomach’.

Ms. Cho: As the Chinese, there are certain foods that we would eat...and those are the cultural types of food that we can get here [in Chinatown] with choice because there are a number of [stores] that used to sell them. And by coming down here, we can pick and choose what we need for ourselves...these are the things we would eat from young and want to continue to make for our families.

It was evident throughout the different interactions I had with Ms. Cho, she is incredibly fond of Chinatown and really wants it to continue on. Though she is in early 70s, she and her husband still make multiple trips down to Chinatown during the week from Burnaby to take part in a number of activities, from singing, dancing, grocery shopping, and most importantly spending time with friends. Chinatown for Ms. Cho is more than just stores where she can buy her groceries: As mentioned above, there is an aspect of community that, as stores close their doors and move on, so too do the friendships and connections. In our interview, she brought up the preservation of Chinatown, a popular term in the rhetoric around Chinatown's current state and the future it has. But ultimately, Ms. Cho is of the belief that as a Chinese person, she needs Chinatown.

Ms. Cho: It [Chinatown] is a place that has got businesses and that has got our cultural values and is very special to us. It is actually a place...for people to come and meet with each other and exchange – it's a place of exchange. And I really hope that Chinatown can continue and its cultural specialties and all that can carry on.

“With all these new stores, then it cannot be called Chinatown anymore”: Mary Chang’s Story

When I first met Mary Chang, I asked what her relationship to Vancouver's Chinatown was like and how food might have tied into it. Originally when she arrived, she lived on Union Street on the outskirts of Chinatown. Her husband, after picking her up from the airport, took her into Chinatown to have a meal and then took her around to the different shops to buy the goods they would need – groceries, dried goods, meat and vegetables. Ms. Chang continued to navigate the busy streets of Vancouver's Chinatown and had quite an affinity for it, so much so that even when her husband had to move to Nanaimo for work, they would continue to go back to Vancouver's Chinatown to buy their goods. I found this to be quite surprising, given the fact that Victoria's Chinatown was much closer to Nanaimo than Vancouver's Chinatown.

Ms. Chang: The road to Victoria, the drive is pretty long. So we would rather...take the boat over to the Vancouver Chinatown. More importantly, there are only two stores in Victoria Chinatown selling the stuff that we would like to purchase...whenever we come over, we will stop for dim sum and we would buy our necessities before we return, including, of course, all the fresh produce. [It's] so much more vibrant.

It is interesting to note that it Victoria is home to Canada's oldest Chinatown, and not Vancouver (Johnson & Simone-Bowen, 2019). But while there were a few stores and areas where Chinese goods were bought and sold, it became clear for Ms. Chang that she preferred Vancouver's Chinatown since they had more variety. For Ms. Chang and her husband, they would come at least once a month to buy goods and groceries to bring back home, as well as having meals at the restaurants they liked.

Once the Changs moved back to the Lower Mainland for her son to go to university, they did not stay in Chinatown but still would make regular trips to Chinatown for groceries. However, it was about the late 1980s that Ms. Chang started to notice changes in the availability of restaurants and stores in Chinatown. She pointed to anchor businesses such as *Lekiu* and *Yuen Fong* – both of which are no longer in their original locations. When asked to describe some of the changes and how these changes impact her shopping and wellbeing, she expressed great disappointment for the fact that a number of stores are no longer there. An observation that Ms. Chang made was the number of businesses that have closed or moved on, and the high-rises built in their place. When it came to businesses moving on, I asked Ms. Chang what she thought was the reason for all of these changes and closures.

Ms. Chang: ...The advent of stores, especially with...Asian products for sale, and the springing of all these T&T's or even Superstore that has got their hands on Chinese products, we no longer really need to come to Chinatown.

Particularly, Ms. Chang noted ingredients such as particular sauces like oyster and soya sauce as well as different kinds of tofu. These products used to only be available in Chinatown, but over time, distributors of Chinese cultural products began to connect with major supermarkets. As availability of these products outside of Chinatown began to rise, many Chinese seniors – including all three of the seniors I spoke to – may opt to purchase their goods closer to home. While this might be out of convenience, Ms. Chang also mentions that sometimes, she really does not have a choice and sometimes even feels forced to go to stores like T&T.

Ms. Chang: ...There are less and less stores that are still in business in Chinatown, even if I want to buy traditional stuff, their stores are not there anymore...whereas in the big stores, the products are readily available. So it literally sometimes forced me to go to the [Western] stores to by what I want and what I need.

With availability of Chinese cultural goods increasing outside of Chinatown and the decline of Chinese shops within Chinatown, it raised a difficult tug of war that I spoke to Ms. Chang and all the seniors about. I asked Ms. Chang how she felt about the current state of Chinatown and the different kinds of businesses that have moved in place of the stores she used to frequent.

Ms. Chang: ...With all these new stores...it cannot quite be called Chinatown anymore because they are not selling the Chinese products that we used to know, and the patrons are not Chinese anymore. It's more and more being patronized by Western-cultured...people and younger generations of people that don't share the same background...the new stores that come in, they are selling products that are not [our] 'cup of tea', so to speak.

As Chinatown continues to experience growing pains and changes, many wonder if there is a chance for Chinatown to be returned to being the vibrant neighbourhood that it used to be. But asked about these changes and how to preserve Chinatown, despite her fond memories of what Chinatown used to be, Ms. Chang expressed this sentiment that there is really nothing that she can do. In a sense, she recognizes that Chinatown cannot be saved by her alone. Even if she were to bring a group of her friends together, there is little that she can do. She says that she would feel a great deal of sadness and grief, and in many ways, she already feels that way given the changes that have already taken place throughout her life here in Vancouver.

Ms. Chang: I would be very sad if Chinatown ceased to exist. But I have to say, it is something that is not under my control. I can't quite help it...But the reality is really what is left in Chinatown is just the one fish store, three meat stores, only two or three grocers, and four major bread stores that offer the regular items that [Chinese] elders need. The major intersection that was once so busy, so fully of stores, there is really only a handful of them left. And it does give me a sense of grief, seeing what is happening now in Chinatown.

Common Themes from Interviews

These three interviews provided me some insight into what Chinatown was like during its heyday. The end of the two World Wars and the transition into the 1950s and 1960s saw Canada as a country move towards embracing multiculturalism as opposed to favouring some cultures over others – a far cry from the Chinese Head Tax and the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, which was only repealed in 1947. The rhetoric around a multicultural society required that Chinatown be “celebrated and protected for its uniqueness as one of Vancouver’s key ‘ethnic neighbourhoods’” (Anderson, 1991, p. 209-210). Changes really started to come about in the 1950s. In his book *Saltwater City*, Paul Yee (1988) wrote about how Pender Street saw a massive change as Chinese restaurants and supermarkets opened, along with businesses that previously were never found in Chinatown like TV stores. Chinatown was a tight-knit community, with neighbours being able to bump into friends as they walked down the street, (Yee, 1988).

All three seniors mention similar memories like what Yee (1988) describes here about meeting with friends and socializing with neighbours and store owners. However, there were also some underlying themes that persisted throughout the three interviews that had some negative

sentiments associated with them. In particular, these themes came about when speaking about the ways in which Chinatown has changed, how food accessibility has become reduced, and ultimately how this impacted their shopping habits, wellbeing, and overall relationship to Chinatown. Broadly speaking, they can be divided into three major themes:

1. Availability of Chinese and Asian goods at T&T and cities such as Richmond
2. Guilt and a ‘tug of war’ between preservation and convenience
3. Overall discontent with the state of Chinatown today

These themes came out through the interviews and were further assessed by using Nvivo to go through the interview transcripts.

Availability of Chinese and Asian goods at T&T, Richmond

A common name that came up throughout my interviews and casual conversations with these seniors was T&T, a supermarket that has quite a presence in the Canadian supermarket field. 1993 was the year that Cindy Lee, a Taiwanese immigrant, opened two supermarkets – one in Burnaby and one in Richmond – that had a goal of “bringing the best Asian fresh food and groceries under one roof” (T&T, n.d.). Though T&T had a rocky start in their initial break into the supermarket industry, T&T slowly rose to dominate the Chinese and Asian market. Across Canada, there are 27 locations, of which two are a spinoff market named Osaka. British Columbia alone currently has 10 locations, all of which are located in and around Vancouver and the surrounding Lower Mainland.

With these stores, as mentioned by participants, the products that were once solely available in Chinatown were more accessible to them. As Ms. Chang mentioned, she would sometimes try to go seek out a product at a Chinatown store but it would no longer be open. As such, she would have to go to T&T for her groceries because the quality and type of goods may be better and more easily available. Ms. Cho also found herself in the same boat, listing off three different T&T locations that she would go to frequent for her groceries. For Ms. Cho, it all came down to convenience and where she found herself that day.

Ms. Cho: If I will be in Burnaby, then I will probably actually go to the T&T there [in Metrotown]. But if I'm coming to Chinatown...there's also T&T in Tinseltown [also known as International Village Shopping Centre]. And the T&T at East First Avenue...I also patronize sometimes [when] I visit my brother.

Another big destination for groceries aside from T&T is Richmond, where a large portion of the Chinese diaspora lives in the Lower Mainland. When asked about how she felt about going elsewhere to buy groceries, Ms. Li spoke to the diminished quality in Chinatown. Because of this and the fact that she now has a little more time, she opts to go out to places like Richmond to buy her groceries.

Ms. Li: [B]ecause now I'm retired and I have more time and I got the bus pass...[if] there is a sale elsewhere, then we just go and sometimes we even venture all the way to Richmond to a place called Fong Tai. And all these places, they offer more varieties and they even sell specialty items such as wonton wrappings and all that, that you can use to make your own food.

Ms. Chang summed up this theme quite well when what she felt towards buying groceries in Richmond or T&T instead of going to Chinatown. Her response was quite blunt, but also pointed to the simple fact that there really is nothing that can be done when it comes to saving stores that cannot be saved due to high rents or a lack of relevance in the neighbourhood.

Ms. Chang: If there are more stores open and more varieties to choose from, I, and for that matter, a lot of the elders in Chinatown would buy here and we would not have to go to the nearest big box stores to buy what we need. And because now they [the big box stores] also sell the fresh fish and the fresh meat, a lot of...the variety that we need. So we really don't have to go to Chinatown.

Sense of guilt, tug of war between preservation and convenience

The previous theme that came up about T&T and other stores selling Chinese goods and groceries also highlighted this notion of guilt and an internal tug of war between preservation and convenience. As mentioned previously, preservation has become a fairly popular word when it comes to navigating the future of Chinatown. But even among seniors and those who have deep roots and relationship with Chinatown, there seems to be a discrepancy – both internally and

externally – with what the best way to move forward is.

Figure 4: Men on street in front of Sai Woo Chop Suey House at 158 East Pender Street, captured by James Crookall. Source: City of Vancouver Archives (1936).



In talking to Ms. Cho about this topic, she overall had a sense of optimism and desire for Chinatown's preservation. In her interview, she reiterated over and over the need for businesses that sold Chinese goods to continue on. If there are closures, Ms. Cho really hopes that new businesses will come to fill those voids: *"I really want to see that even if some stores are closing, some others would open up to take its place."*

Ms. Chang shared a sense of disappointment and grief when she thinks about how Chinatown has changed from the bustling neighbourhood that she would ferry back and forth just

to get to. The reality is that a lot of the anchor Chinese businesses are unable to continue on, and as opposed to Chinese businesses coming to fill their place as Ms. Cho would hope, different kinds of businesses have opened up that are far different from what Chinese folks would be used to, ranging from Tim Hortons (located right at the corner of Main and Keefer Streets) all the way to shops such as Mello (a cashless café serving artisanal donuts), Hey Kokomo (a plant-based café), Dalina (an Italian-inspired grocery and café) and Virtuous Pie (a vegan pizza and ice cream shop). When I walked through Chinatown with Ms. Chang and pointed out a number of these new places to her and asked if she has ever patronized any of them, she laughed and said that none of the products are very suitable for herself or for the elderly.

One thing that is interesting to note on the topic of preservation is the number of new restaurants that have opened up in Chinatown that seem to be making an attempt to help preserve Chinatown's 'Chinese-ness'. Businesses that come to mind include Chinatown BBQ, Bao Bei, and Sai Woo. Chinatown BBQ, which opened its doors in November 2017, was a nod to traditional Chinese BBQ shops and Cantonese cuisine that was affordable for the residents – mostly Chinese seniors – who lived in the neighbourhood. The restaurant was opened by Carol Lee, a major figure in Chinatown known for her philanthropic work (Gill, 2018). While Chinatown BBQ aimed to be an accessible and familiar space for residents that served up culturally significant food, the same cannot be said for businesses like Bao Bei and Sai Woo. Both are considered higher end restaurants that, while they serve Asian inspired dishes, cannot truly compare the traditional dishes that Chinatown residents would be familiar with. At Sai Woo for example, bowls of noodles hover around \$17 each, while protein entrees hover around the low \$20 range (Sai Woo, n.d.). Just around the corner, French-Chinese fusion restaurant Bao Bei offers a \$45 tasting menu and a dish of fried rice starting at \$19 (Bao Bei, n.d.).

When I mentioned that these types of businesses did exist, all participants were surprised at how expensive dishes were. The exception of course was Chinatown BBQ, which Ms. Cho expressed delight in given that there were some businesses trying to cater to those in the neighbourhood. Ultimately, even though businesses like Sai Woo and Bao Bei may have good intentions with their fusion menu and Asian-inspired décor, the fact remains that many seniors, like those that I interviewed, would not find these types of restaurants to be accessible or even close to being like the cultural dishes that they are used to eating. This creates a divide between those who rely on Chinatown for their food and groceries and guests who come to the neighbourhood for destination dining – a polarizing environment that changes the overall feel of the neighbourhood, and further isolates seniors who may already feel isolated.

Overall discontent with the state of Chinatown

Finally, a theme that came up throughout the interviews and early discussions with seniors was an overall discontent with the current state of Chinatown. For many of the seniors who had experienced Chinatown at its peak, many were quick to note how the neighbourhood has deteriorated almost to the point of it being unrecognizable. This came through explicit statements

made by the seniors, but also in the tone of their voice. There was a great deal of sadness and grief, but also frustration at the fact that many of these changes are beyond what any one of them can do. Ms. Li mentioned how the Chinatown Night Market, which discontinued in 2018, ultimately could not carry on due to poor attendance and the changes in the neighbourhood.

Ms. Li: ... [I]n Chinatown, there are a lot more homeless issues...and now all I see is always drug addicts, people...selling on the streets...and also you hear sirens all the time and it's just this uncomfortable feelings that make me feel that it is not a pleasant place to go[.]

Ms. Chang had similar sentiments about the changes in Chinatown. Though she still goes in weekly for activities, socialization and to buy groceries from time to time, she says that “the neighbourhood has gotten worse in terms of the cleanliness and disciplines and all those things.” Further, Ms. Cho observes that perhaps the fact that Chinatown’s overall environment “is going downhill and the law and order [is]...in decline” contributes to the closures or stores moving away and consolidating their businesses outside of Chinatown.

For all three of these seniors, I cannot imagine the heartbreak and frustration that must come with seeing the neighbourhood change in such a way from what they remembered it to be many years ago. In having casual conversations with different seniors in other settings, this is a similar feeling that ripples through the neighbourhood and seniors with close ties to it. But in the balance of trying to gain back more Chinese businesses and the continuing waves of new, non-Chinese businesses coming in, Ms. Chang’s quote seems to sum up the internal tug of war, which bears repeating: *I would be very sad if Chinatown ceased to exist. But I have to say, it is something that is not under my control.*

Personal Reflections and Conclusion

As mentioned, I did not have a personal connection to Chinatown until I started going Downtown for school at about late 2015. As a Chinese-Canadian, it seemed strange to me that I did not have that connection, or that my only perception of ‘Chinese-ness’ and buying culturally significant foods were rooted in weekend trips to T&T Supermarket after church or stopping at a variety of shops whenever we made the trip out to Richmond for dinner. It never occurred to me that this was a daily part of the lives of many Chinese seniors. More importantly, I learned that Chinatown was really *the* place for them to find nutritional and culturally significant goods.

My parents moved to BC in 1991, and during that time they would go with my grandmother from Surrey to Chinatown for groceries. At this time, T&T had not opened yet, and the only thing closest to them in Surrey was a small Asian supermarket called *Hen Long*, which is still in operation today. They would go every two weeks to Chinatown to buy certain groceries and supplement the rest with trips to nearby *Hen Long*. T&T opened their first BC locations in 1993, and the location in Surrey would later open up in the mid 1990s, around the time I was born

in 1996. According to my mom, this was the moment when she noticed that they stopped going to Chinatown as well. In fact, when her mom (my grandmother) immigrated to Canada and started living in Surrey in the mid 1990s, she rarely went to Chinatown because of the fact that T&T was less than a 5 minute drive away.

When I started this project, the question of T&T was always on my mind. Whenever I go to Chinatown, I always get off the Skytrain at Stadium-Chinatown station and cut through a little plaza at the end of Keefer Street. At the bottom of the stairs is a sign for T&T, and I could not help but wonder every time I walked by how it impacted the stores further down the road in the heart of Chinatown. As I walked through the Millennium Gate along Pender Street and took in the old buildings with signs of businesses past still hanging from the awnings, I always found it interesting to see non-Chinese or Asian businesses on the street. Over the years, the non-Chinese businesses really started to take a hold on Chinatown, and while there were a number of businesses that still existed, the reality was that Chinatown's landscape was changing.

Ms. Chang's blunt description of sadness at the potential passing of Chinatown and the fact that her hands are basically tied are how I feel as a young Chinese person. I feel almost a little more responsible because I continue to frequent different businesses that have come into the neighbourhood to take up space. I am a huge fan of studying in Dalina while drinking a coffee and going to German-inspired Bestie for a beer and currywurst, and if I ever have a desire to feel extra healthy I know I will pop by Virtuous Pie for a "Stranger Wings" pizza – a vegan take on a buffalo chicken wing pizza. But simultaneously, I have a huge affinity for the steamed *bao* (bun) at New Town Bakery, which has now been in Chinatown for over 40 years and is a staple institution in Chinatown. I love the smell of BBQ meats as I walk down the street. And even though I sometimes cannot stand the smell of Chinese herbs and dried goods, I cannot begin to imagine what Chinatown would be if these shops with all these smells and sounds ceased to exist, or if anchor institutions like New Town are forced to close their doors because there is no more business.

Figure 5: The exteriors of New Town Bakery, a Chinese bakery and café at 148 E Pender Street (left) and Virtuous Pie, a vegan pizza shop at 583 Main Street. Sources: New Town Restaurant; Virtuous Pie: burnkit.com



Given New Town's wide appeal, it too has become a destination restaurant where newcomers are told that they have to go and patronize it if they are to truly experience Vancouver's Chinatown. However, most of the Chinese stores and restaurants are not so lucky. This added to the continuous wave of gentrification highlights the fact that Chinatown will never be what it once was, and month after month, things will continue to change. While I feel grief about this change too, I know that my grief, while valid, cannot compare to that of actual residents or seniors who rely on it. For many seniors, including Ms. Li, Ms. Cho, and Ms. Chang, Chinatown is more than a place of nostalgia and exchange. It is their whole life. Many of these changes are out of everyone's control, like big box stores coming into the Asian goods market or seniors being forced to move away to be closer to their children and families for the purposes of care. As new high rises go up, rent continues to also climb. Being an outsider looking in, it can be easy to feel like there is no hope left for Chinatown.

However, I have come to see that this is not the case. There are a number of youth organizers and non-profit groups, like the aforementioned Hua Foundation and others such as Yarrow Intergenerational Society for Justice, Youth Collaborative for Chinatown, Chinatown Transformation Team and other individuals who work tirelessly to provide programming and resources for Chinatown's most vulnerable residents and fight for Chinatown's preservation. While it may seem like all hope is lost, there are glimmers of light in the many young folks who do take time out of their day to visit with seniors, support local businesses and do various forms of community activism on their behalf.

There also seems to be a greater focus on intangible heritage when it comes to the discussion around heritage preservation in Vancouver's Chinatown. The aforementioned groups all take part in activities that help to inform and educate the younger generation on cultural practices, food recipes, art and culture. Further, the City of Vancouver recognized that a lot of revitalization efforts have solely focused on buildings and public spaces. They now see the need to view both "tangible and intangible cultural heritage as synergetic and equally important" (City of Vancouver, 2020, para. 3). The City also has a Chinatown Transformation Team that is dedicated to developing "a long-term Cultural Heritage Asset Management Plan (CHAMP)" in collaboration with the community (City of Vancouver, 2020, para. 7). It is my hope that this serves as the next right step in understanding the importance of all aspects of Chinese heritage in Chinatown.

In terms of further research and points of interest, I would love to see more in-depth interviews with seniors, especially the really elderly ones who have lived in Chinatown all their life on their take and personal history with Chinatown. I recognize that my project is very small given the scope of the course and the time allotted. Another area would be why there has been such significant turnover of newer commercial tenants and restaurants in Vancouver's Chinatown. Finally, I would love to hear more from youth advocates and community organizations who continue to do work in the neighbourhood even though they may not have a direct connection to the neighbourhood. For myself, my connection has been my own ethnic heritage, but I realize that

there are a fair bit of activists and organizers who are not Chinese. I am curious to know what prompts them to help out and what motivates them to contribute to a cause that clearly is not just 'Chinese' in nature.

I recognize that at the end of the day, there may be nothing more that we can do to actually 'save' Vancouver's Chinatown. Further, different residents, organizations and stakeholders will have very different definitions as to what it means to 'save' Chinatown. For new businesses and developers, they see their high rises and the influx of new business as new life, a way to revitalize what has been dying for quite some time. For the seniors who still rely on the groceries and Chinese goods provided by the stores, they require a return to culturally significant goods so that they can continue to live their daily lives and stay rooted to their culture. Both sides will see themselves as being the correct way of 'saving' the neighbourhood.

As for me, I see myself with a foot in both worlds, and even after all this has been done, I do not have a correct answer for anyone. But I hope that we continue to respect the culture and heritage of a people that have made significant impacts on the City of Vancouver as a whole. There is a greater need to preserve heritage beyond the walls of a building or public space. At the end of the day, a building is just that – a building. But culture and heritage lives on through people. Therefore, a greater focus on preserving this intangible heritage – whether it is food, language, knowledge transfer, cultural practices, and the like – needs to take place. This is not to say that development should not happen, but there needs to be a greater emphasis on inclusive community building to allow for Chinese residents and seniors to feel connected to their home, while also creating a welcoming space that allows for folks of all backgrounds to experience the rich cultural heritage that the Chinese brought with them to Chinatown more than 150 years ago.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview guide

1. What are examples of culturally significant food?
2. Where do you usually purchase culturally significant food?
3. What is accessibility to culturally significant food like for you?
4. What do you like about culturally significant food?
5. Why is culturally significant food important to you?
6. How does culturally significant food impact your daily life?
7. How have you seen the neighbourhood change over time with regards to restaurants and cafés?
8. How do these changes make you feel?
9. What are examples of places that you used to frequent that no longer exist? How does that make you feel?
10. What connections do you have to Vancouver's Chinatown?
11. Now that there is a greater availability of Chinese/Asian goods elsewhere, how do you feel about going elsewhere to buy your groceries as opposed to Chinatown?
12. What are some things that you feel that you could do to help preserve Chinatown?
13. What are some things that other people (younger generation, the government, etc.) could do to help preserve Chinatown?
14. How would you feel if Chinatown ceased to exist?

APPENDIX 2. Data Analysis Table – Common Themes

	Mei Li	Eva Cho	Mary Chang
Arrival to Canada	1992 from Guangzhou, China	1972. First went to Saskatchewan. Came to Vancouver around 2009. Parents lived in Vancouver prior to her arrival.	1970. First lived on Union Street, then moved to Nanaimo (Vancouver Island), and then back to Vancouver in about 1988/1989
Current city of residence	Vancouver (Strathcona neighbourhood)	Burnaby	Burnaby
How often do you come to Chinatown?	Pretty frequently, almost every day	A few times a week	While living in Nanaimo, she would come to Vancouver's Chinatown once a month. Now she comes a few times a week.
When did you start to notice the change in Chinatown?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2008 with the advent of the Woodward's building • New buildings started to go up around Georgia, Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Started to notice changes about 2-3 years ago (2017/2018), though it is a slow decline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary started to come to Chinatown a lot less beginning in the 2000s with the advent of greater availability of Asian/Chinese products in stores (i.e. T&T, Superstore) • New buildings started to go up
What are some of the biggest changes that you've noticed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building of high rises • Food prices have increased • Availability of Asian foods at Asian Supermarkets (i.e. T&T) and even at Superstore • Local stores can't really compete to big chain stores • More Western businesses i.e. Tim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Western businesses/cafes i.e. Tim Hortons • She would notice that businesses would close, or businesses that she remembers going to would no longer be there. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage of stores and restaurants are still up though the businesses are no longer there. In the past, the restaurants would be on the second level while the bottom would be retail. • In the past when she moved back in the late '80s, she would go so frequently to Chinatown (weekly). Now there isn't really a need to with so many Asian products available in big box stores like T&T, etc. • Mary has noticed that the neighbourhood has gotten a lot worse – a lot less clean

	Hortons, Starbucks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of the stores that Mary used to frequent have shut down, and eventually a high rise is built in their place
How do these changes impact you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't go out as much to eat Shopping habits → going to T&T more Might even travel longer distances to Burnaby (Crystal Mall) or Richmond to buy better products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lot of the restaurants/food places that she used to frequent are closed now Some of the new cafes have locked washrooms, which is a little inconvenient She comes to visit friends a lot and does activities here, so she used to buy groceries and/or go to eat food in the area. As more places close down, it starts to become less convenient. Less opportunities to meet up with friends She'll come to Chinatown to buy groceries if she's nearby, but otherwise she will go to T&T wherever she may be (East 1st Ave, Tinseltown, Burnaby) Chinatown has a lot of culturally significant foods available, and a lot of choice which Chinese people are used to. As more close, there is less choice. Will see friends less, or perhaps meet friends in a different place that is not Chinatown. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lot of the shops that Mary used to frequent are gone This forces her to go to other places to buy her products, such as T&T and Superstore
Feelings/observations towards changes in Chinatown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality and availability of products has diminished When family comes to visit, they might take seniors further away because of parking Folks that go to Science World/False Creek to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feels sad and sorry about these changes "I really want it to continue and for Chinatown to be preserved for as a place for Chinese, for Asians, to buy their stuff and to be able to go there and eat the types of foods that we know." (6:17) She wants for more Chinese restaurants/cafes to carry on Some stores that used to have multiple locations now close the location in Chinatown and move to another place like Crystal Mall (Eva notes Hap Sing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lot of the products that seniors want to buy, they can longer buy because the stores are gone If some new stores that had these traditional products opened, Mary feels that there would be more business. All the seniors that live in Chinatown would go there. At this point, Mary feels that there is no need to buy in Chinatown, particularly for her who lives in Burnaby

	<p>visit, they probably would not come into Chinatown to visit and go to the eateries there</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness, poverty, drug use is a major issue • Overcrowding with homeless people that typically are not Chinese people 	<p>for dried goods, a veggie store, etc)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As she sees more of these stores closing, she really hopes that new ones will take their place so that there can be more choice available to her and others • She notices more tourists, groups of students, coming in to see Chinatown. It is important for Chinese but also for Vancouver as a whole. • “Chinese need Chinatown” • Chinese stores in Chinatown freely display their products outside, whereas Western type of stores have doors, you have to open the door to go inside and see it • Businesses may have noticed that business in Chinatown is declining, so they pre-emptively moved away or closed down. Businesses are not concentrating in Chinatown anymore. • When these stores/restaurants go out of business, it is a pity – “it’s not just business, but the social aspect of it” (46:32) • Eva realizes that she comes to Chinatown less and will meet her friends elsewhere. She notes that this could contribute to the decline of Chinatown businesses • While she was still living in Saskatchewan, when she would visit her parents she would always come to visit Chinatown and ask her parents to take her to different places to eat, visit, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There used to be a lot of stores that sold Chinese products: 1 fish store, 3 Chinese meat stores, 2-3 grocers, 4 major bread stores that offer the regular items that the elderly folks need • She feels really helpless, it’s not under her control if Chinatown ceased to exist • She is saddened by what is happening in Chinatown.
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APPENDIX 3. Closures of ‘new’, non-Chinese/non-Asian businesses and their replacements

As mentioned in the paper, I was in contact with Kevin Huang of the Hua Foundation to talk about updates to the figures states in the Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report by Ho and Chen (2017). One of the observations, which I share entirely, is the number of turnover among businesses, particularly ‘new’ or ‘non-traditional’ businesses. Below is a list that shows a culmination of the restaurants and businesses observed by Huang as well as myself. It should be noted that this list is by no means exhaustive; it is part of personal observation that I have done personally and with the help of Huang.

Address	Old business tenant	Current business tenant
212 E Georgia Street	The Brixton	Wheat and Barley
251 E Georgia Street	Mamie Taylor’s	<i>Space still vacant</i>
611 Gore Avenue	Fluffy Kittens	Hey Kokomo
721 Gore Avenue	The Pie Shoppe	<i>Space still vacant</i>
789 Gore Avenue	Roost Café	Hunnybee Bruncheonette
185 Keefer Street	Juniper	<i>Space still vacant</i>
550 Main Street	Rhinofish	<i>Space still vacant</i>
587 Main Street	Starbucks Coffee	<i>Space still vacant</i>
636 Main Street	Greenderful Juice and Salad	Buttermere Patisserie
648 Main Street	A20 Pizza	Straight Outta Brooklyn NYC Pizza
39 E Pender Street	Perks Café	Cell Guru (*note: not a food business anymore)
75 E Pender Street	The Message Café	<i>Space still vacant</i>
230 E Pender Street	Aubade Coffee	<i>Space still vacant</i>
288 E Pender Street	Phen Phen Filipino	Manpuku
291 E Pender Street	Klaus Kaffehaus	La Boqueria
620 Quebec Street	Pazzo Chow	Say Hello Sweets
237 Union Street	The Tuck Shoppe	<i>Space still vacant</i> (*note: this space has undergone a lot of turnover) Potential will open Harvest Noodles in this space (William-Ross, 2020).

There are also examples of new, non-traditional businesses that have opened up in places where previous tenants were traditional businesses. However, the traditional tenants have left the spaces vacant for a while. Such an example includes Propaganda Coffee (209 E Pender Street) which previously was Gibo Health Food Ltd (Morrisson, 2014).

There are examples of restaurants that are the first tenants in brand new buildings, including the Starbucks location listed above that is now closed. Some examples of this are Dalina (687 Main Street), Jukes (fried chicken, 182 Keefer Street), Umaluma (non-dairy gelato, 235 E Pender Street) and Mello (donuts, 223 E Pender Street). There is also a new apartment building that has gone up at 303 E Pender Street (at the intersection of Gore and Pender) where a juice bar and a salon are slated to open up on the ground floor commercial spaces.

I would like to also point to the fact that a number of businesses, particularly non-traditional businesses, that have been forced to temporarily close in the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. Such examples in Chinatown include The Union and The Keefer Bar (William-Ross, 2020).