

## Displaying the Inscrutable at the Royal BC Museum's Chinatown Gallery

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*This paper responds to David Chuenyan Lai's foundational research on Victoria's Chinatown in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, which uncovered a hegemonic understanding of Chinatown as a 'forbidden city.' While this discourse had real-world effects for the Chinese community, scholars have critiqued Lai's understanding of Chinatown as a 'forbidden city' for assuming the dominant discourse was the only discourse, and that nineteenth and early-twentieth century Chinatown was as sealed and fixed as that discourse dictated. This paper performs a close reading of the Royal BC Museum's Chinatown gallery to explore the tension between two interpretations of the past: a 'forbidden city' narrative versus a narrative of porous boundaries and cultural mixing. It argues that Chinatown's self-conscious reproduction of the 'forbidden city' narrative re-inscribes a reductive view of 'otherness' that fails to address the nuanced cultural mixing and cohabitation in nineteenth-century social and urban spaces of Victoria.*

The oldest Chinese settlement in Canada, Victoria's Chinatown, has become somewhat of an urban museum comprised of alleyways and storefronts dating from as early as 1858. While Chinatown is still home to many Chinese-owned businesses, social organizations, and community centres, the “town within a city” has become a major tourist attraction—as a memorial of the past.<sup>1</sup> The fluid boundaries of today's Chinatown juxtapose the self-sealed, Chinese-dominated community of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. David Chuenyan Lai's foundational research on Victoria's Chinatown of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries has uncovered an ugly discourse perpetuated in dominant white society: Chinatown as an insidious, foreboding slum, full of untrustworthy, sub-human foreigners. While this discourse had real-world effects for the Chinese community, scholars have critiqued Lai's understanding of Chinatown as a ‘forbidden city’ for assuming the dominant discourse was the only discourse, and that nineteenth and

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<sup>1</sup> David Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988.

early-twentieth century Chinatown was as sealed and fixed as that discourse dictated.

This paper explores the tension between two interpretations of the past: the 'forbidden city' narrative versus a narrative of porous boundaries and cultural mixing. I tease out these tensions through a close-reading of the Royal BC Museum's *Chinatown* gallery, which specifically aligns itself with the 'forbidden city' narrative. Visitors to this exhibit can stroll back in time to view a reconstruction of Victoria's historical streetscapes. Added in 1992 to the sprawling *Old Town* reconstruction of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century downtown Victoria, *Chinatown* sought to promote a narrative of diversity, which would ultimately push the *Old Town* exhibit beyond exclusively white-settler 'heritage.'<sup>2</sup> But is *Chinatown* the right medium to promote a diverse and nuanced understanding of the past that is attentive to the complex construction of Chinese-Canadian identity?

I argue that *Chinatown's* self-conscious reproduction of the 'forbidden city' narrative re-inscribes a reductive view of 'otherness' that fails to address nuanced cultural mixing and cohabitation in nineteenth-century social and urban spaces of Victoria. Curiously, the narrative of exclusion presented by the museum helped to galvanize a Chinese community in the beginning of Chinatown's 'revitalization' in the 1980s and 1990s, the time of the exhibit's construction. *Chinatown*, therefore, reflects the needs of Victoria's Chinese-Canadian community of the 1980s and 1990s, but misses more recent paradigmatic shifts in understanding diaspora and immigrant identity, which recognize cultural mixing and fluidity, rendering the exhibit an outdated mode to represent Chinese-Canadian history in 2016. As it stands, the *Chinatown* gallery may be the most detailed and historically accurate part of the *Old Town* re-creation, but the elements chosen for display craft a one-sided narrative.

The first half of this paper traces the 'forbidden city' narrative and its opponents through the historiography of racial space in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Victoria and British Columbia. Here, I explore the values and limitations in both the 'forbidden city' interpretation and in the porous-boundary interpretation. I conclude that the 'forbidden city' narrative was indeed a dominant discourse, and is better supported by qualitative evidence, but the porous-boundary interpretation, although harder to prove with qualitative

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<sup>2</sup> *Old Town* was installed in the 1970s.

evidence, offers a sharper analysis that moves beyond hegemonic understandings of race and power. The second half of this paper evaluates *Chinatown* as at once a community-funded centre-piece of the Chinatown community, and as a medium that perpetuates a binary opposition of ‘Chineseness’ to ‘whiteness.’

Throughout the twentieth century, memory of Victoria's pre-1910 Chinatown was wrapped up in myth and mystery. Harrowing stories of grisly death hung around the mythology of Chinatown, including the tale of a beheaded Chinese man whose blood stain could not be removed from one of the “labyrinthine” passages.<sup>3</sup> As well, the pervasive ‘hidden tunnel’ myth provided fertile ground for the growth of ghost stories and paranoia. Legend has it that a complex system of secret tunnels, created by Chinese smugglers to circumvent prohibition and restrictions on opium, were carved through the underbelly of Victoria's ‘forbidden city.’ Produced by white paranoia at the turn of the century, this myth carried through to the 1950s, when members of an excavating city crew discovered what they thought to be one of the famed tunnels, but was actually part of a water reservoir system.

Lai debunks these myths and misconceptions in two major publications: *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (1988) and *The Forbidden City within Victoria: Myth, Symbol and Streetscape of Canada's Earliest Chinatown* (1991). In his second book, Lai disproves the ‘hidden tunnel’ myth. Instead of hidden tunnels, Victoria's Chinese population was able to slip through the fingers of raiding white authorities by ducking into secret hideouts and escape routes. Lai replaces the “tunnel myth with escape reality,” claiming that “the former is mistaken, unreal and false; the latter is understandable, real and true.”<sup>4</sup> Lai's main purpose of writing this book was to demystify Victoria's Chinatown for a wide readership, but he instead reinforces another disputable mythology around Chinatown: the ‘forbidden city.’

Dominant discourse dictated that Chinatown was a “filthy, unsanitary, overcrowded, sinister and insidious slum,”<sup>5</sup> and the people

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<sup>3</sup> David Lai, *Forbidden City within Victoria: Myth, Symbol and Streetscape of Canada's Earliest Chinatown* (Victoria: Orca Book Publishers, 1991), 36; N. de Bertrand Lurgin, “Victoria Chinatown Mysteries 50 Years Ago,” *Victoria Sunday Times Magazine*, 25 August 1951, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

of Chinatown were immoral “long-tailed rice-eating aliens.”<sup>6</sup> The cultural gap was as real as it was nasty. One clergyman described “an almost impassable gulf of race, colour, language, and thought.”<sup>7</sup> The most inflammatory of these accounts seem to be from clergy members or other elites, indicating that these stereotypes were perpetuated by the elite. Indeed, Lai gleans his evidence here from “local newspapers or the biased accounts of policemen or church people.”<sup>8</sup> Whose voices does Lai miss or gloss over in focusing exclusively on these fragments of hegemonic discourse? Surely lived experience does not always reflect a carbon-copy of dominant stereotypes. How accurately can the ‘forbidden city’ label reflect lived experience of historical people in Victoria's Chinatown?

These questions are explored by Patrick A. Dunae et al. in their critique of Lai's conception of discrete racial spaces, “Making the Inscrutable, Scrutable: Race and Space in Victoria's Chinatown, 1891.” The authors use GIS data processing to map racial space in Victoria. Through an analysis dependent on statistical data instead of narrative material, Dunae et al. find a “transactional space where white landlords related to Chinese merchants, where Chinese merchants sold their wares to settler housewives, where bourgeois family men came to gamble” instead of the ‘forbidden city’ in which Chinese people lived entirely in a self-sufficient vacuum.<sup>9</sup> The authors are careful not to underplay the racism in 1891 Chinatown, and certainly do not intend to reflect some sort of utopian society wherein everyone always plays nicely together. However, their view of the ‘un-forbidden city’ may be overly optimistic. Raw data can only prove so much when unsubstantiated with qualitative evidence. The authors admit that GIS can determine physical space, but “delineating social space is more problematic” and requires qualitative, anecdotal, and narrative records.<sup>10</sup>

Here is where I think Dunae et al.'s critique might be stretched a little thin. The authors provide only two pieces of anecdotal evidence in the section on white tolerance of Chinese people. First, the authors

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick A. Dunae, John Lutz, Donald J. Lafaniere, Jason A. Gilliland, “Making the Inscrutable, Scrutable: Race and Space in Victoria's Chinatown, 1891,” *BC Studies* 169 (2011), np.

<sup>10</sup> Dunae et al., “Making the Inscrutable, Scrutable,” np.

discern that a number of white people were satisfied with the performance of their Chinese servants; second, the authors present accounts of 1890s tourists who found Chinatown easier to access than expected—one of whom was able to tour several Chinese emporiums, an opium factory, and, most notably, a joss house (Confucian or Buddhist temple).<sup>11</sup> Likely these tourists' preconception of the impenetrability of Chinatown was coloured by racist rhetoric of the colonial state which sought to, as Kay Anderson points out in her book on racial space in Vancouver's Chinatown, divide "races" both "epistemologically and geographically."<sup>12</sup> Dunae et al.'s narrative sources listed above are excellent examples of how racial space was more porous than what has been previously suggested, but more evidence along this line is required to completely rewrite the geographic divides of ethnicity in nineteenth-century Victoria.

That said, there is still enough quantitative and qualitative evidence here to pose a serious threat to the 'forbidden city' narrative, even if the authors are unable to completely disprove the stark racial lines of 1890s Chinatown. The third decennial census reflects that about 70 percent of Chinatown's population was Chinese; the other 30 percent included 600 people of European descent, and 100 Indigenous people. Instances of intermarriage between Chinese men and Indigenous women speak to degrees of cultural mixing, complicating racial structures elbowed out by Lai's 'forbidden city' apparatus that recognizes only 'Chineseness' and 'whiteness' in opposition to one another.<sup>13</sup>

Renisa Mawani has written extensively on cross-racial encounters in British Columbia, eschewing simplistic, binary renderings of how race was constructed and understood. Mawani

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 41.

<sup>13</sup> See Jean Barman, "Beyond Chinatown: Chinese Men and Indigenous Women in Early British Columbia," *BC Studies* vol 177 (Spring, 2013) for evidence of Chinese/Indigenous intermarriage. While intermarriage was virtually unheard of within Chinatowns, there are a number of accounts of Chinese/Indigenous marriage outside of Chinatowns in BC, including in Victoria. This cultural mixing appears not to jeopardize Lai's interpretation of a culturally vacuumous Chinatown as the marriages did not take place within Chinatown. But that Chinese men lived outside of Chinatown and mixed with other ethnic groups as early as the 1870s suggests a level of cultural mixing and porousness outside the limits of Lai's narrative.

critiques Anderson's conception of how government officials created "Chineseness against Europeaness." She offers, instead, a complex model of how "local bureaucrats generated racial order that rendered 'whites,' 'Indians,' 'Chinese,' 'Half-Breeds,' and 'Negroes' as discrete and immutable species ... physically, morally, and affectively incompatible."<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, Dunae et al. also critiqued Anderson's depiction of Chinatown as the antithesis to biased whiteness (non-Christian, uncivilized, and amoral).<sup>15</sup> Mawani urges us to consider how racial categories "were not determined against whiteness alone ... nor were ideas about race geographically bound."<sup>16</sup> Mawani and Dunae et al. do not make exactly the same point; Dunae et al. refer to how hegemonic racializing rhetoric of the time may have been hyperbolic, while Mawani suggests that this rhetoric was more complicated and inter-relational than hinging on a racial binary.

But these points are not incommensurable. By understanding how race was not constructed by colonial officials in a linear back-and-forth between a dominant and subordinate culture, we can begin to see a multiplicity of ways in which the landscape of Chinatown was more complicated than Lai's construction of monolithic Chinese people living exclusively within the rigid confines of dominant discourse. Moreover, Mawani's thought demonstrates how carving out discrete racial categories was entirely the task of colonial elite; race was a structure imposed from the colonial elites that may or may not have accurately reflected the lived experiences of common people. With this idea of dominant racial discourse in mind, let us return to Lai through the eyes of Dunae et al.: narrative accounts written by society's elites are misleading. The dominant discourse produced by the state had oppressive aims of separating and categorizing 'races,' emphasizing the essential 'otherness' of each group. The situation on the ground must have been 'mixed' enough to create anxieties in the state, causing colonial officials to exert racial control to manage who they saw as their subordinates. The evidence provided by Dunae et al. begins to clarify these tensions between dominant discourse and lived experience, and indeed has broken open the 'forbidden city' narrative for further scholarly debate. But since both Dunae's and Lai's

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<sup>14</sup> Renisa Mawani, "Cross-Racial Encounters and Juridicial Truths: (Dis)Aggregating Race in British Columbia's Contact Zone," *BC Studies* 156/157 (Winter 2007), np.

<sup>15</sup> Dunae et al., "Making the Inscrutable, Scrutable," np.

<sup>16</sup> Mawani, "Cross-Racial Encounters and Juridicial Truths," np.

respective interpretations of racial space have truths to them, and neither can be fully discredited, the question now becomes: what is the most responsible and accurate way to present these historical narratives to the public?

Even if the ‘forbidden city’ narrative cannot fully explain the diversity of lived experiences in colonial Victoria, members of the Chinese community embraced this narrative in 1992, when Virginia Careless and Bob Griffin teamed with Lai to curate a permanent Chinatown re-creation exhibit within the Royal BC Museum’s *Old Town* gallery.<sup>17</sup> *Chinatown* was funded in part by the Chinatown Lions Club, and other individuals from the Chinese community, including Quan Yong Foo, John Nipp, Paul Chen, and John Joe, who contributed their time and energy to recreate a richly textured pre-1910 Chinatown enclave. The curator chose to include businesses that reflected the internal strength of the Chinese community: a herbalist, grocer, tailor of Chinese workmen’s clothing, an employment agency, etc.<sup>18</sup> But does this effect of self-sufficiency go too far, even if it does serve to claim a past of autonomy for Chinese-Canadians? As Joan Seidl remarks in her otherwise glowing review of the exhibit, “Possibly the otherness is too extreme, masking at least some of the connections that tied *Chinatown* and *Old Town* into a symbiotic relationship.”<sup>19</sup> The construction of ‘otherness’ is evident in the exhibit’s proclaimed affective objective: “to make visitors experience the feelings of curiosity, mystery and ‘fear’ in strolling through Chinatown at dusk which was perceived as a ‘Forbidden City’ by the white public in the past.”<sup>20</sup>

The exhibit is indeed as foreboding as it sets out to be; it is a claustrophobic space shrouded in darkness. The entrance to the Chinatown part of the *Old Town* reconstruction gallery is successfully inconspicuous, sequestered away under the steps to one of the main *Old Town* attractions, the Grand Central Hotel. The narrow, low-ceilinged entrance gives way to a sheltered enclave surrounded by tall buildings. Upon entering, the visitor feels as if they have taken a wrong turn and ended up in a place where they should not be. All the shop doors are shut, and one cannot properly make out the distant sounds of conversations in Chinese, cats meowing, and street noise layered in

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<sup>17</sup> Joan Seidl, “Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, *Chinatown*,” *Material Culture Review*, 40 (Fall 1994), np.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Joan Seidl, “Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, *Chinatown*.”

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

dim cacophony in the exhibit's soundscape, even at the museum's quietest hours. The space, although highly detailed and textured, appears inscrutable.

On my fieldwork trip to the museum, I overheard one visitor's reactions to the exhibit. While I was standing in the enclave, a white mother and daughter approached the narrow entrance, the daughter running ahead. The mother exclaimed to her daughter, "Look! This is probably the most interesting part of the whole thing." The mother did not seem to know why the exhibit was interesting she merely held a vague sense of awe and reverence in regards to a space so strikingly 'other.' She may have expected the exhibit to be an opportunity to foster an ethical and inclusive sense of the past in her daughter, but the exhibit was unable to deliver. After running through the precipice, the daughter stopped dead in her tracks, struck by the all-consuming sensory effect of the exhibit space, and cried, "It's so blocked off!" The reverence of the mother and the child's fear exemplify the effectiveness of this exhibit to "make visitors experience ... feelings of curiosity, mystery and fear."<sup>21</sup>

The foreboding sensory effect was deliberate, and it was supported by the community. As Lai points out in his curatorial statement: "The exhibit is unusual in the history of the museum exhibitions because the local community in Victoria has not only financially supported it but also actively participated in it."<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the 'forbidden city' narrative has a social purpose that served the construction and affirmation of Chinese-Canadian identity within the Victoria Chinatown community of the 1980s and 1990s. David Lai cautions against conflating the Chinese community of Victoria with the Chinatown community. Members of the Chinese community may or may not spend any time in Chinatown, or care about its present or future.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is important not to let the exhibit or indeed Chinatown itself speak for the entire Chinese community. But the Chinatown community, at least, were invested in the creation of *Chinatown*, and its narrative of self-sufficiency. Perhaps this was to reaffirm an idea of distinct 'Chineseness' against the dominant white culture in a Chinese community that by the 1980s had become more

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<sup>21</sup> David Lai, "The Chinatown Exhibit of the Royal BC Museum" *BC Historical News*, 27 no. 2 (Spring 1994), np.

<sup>22</sup> David Lai, "The Chinatown Exhibit of the Royal BC Museum."

<sup>23</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns, Towns within Cities*, 257.



assimilated to Canadian life. The impulse to hold Chinese knowledge and history within the walls of the community seems understandable.

*Chinatown* reflects Chinese heritage that extends beyond the traditional bounds of “heritage as the aesthetic of history” and actually gives back to the community.<sup>24</sup> In Canadian public history, ‘heritage’ has become something of a dirty word, because it is usually accompanied by (racist) nationalism: an homage to white-settler origins that lacks depth and specificity. Heritage sites are discernible usually for their presentation of the past with an emphasis on sensory experience. While *Chinatown* certainly fulfils that requirement, its presentation encourages more critical reflection than the typical settler-heritage site (for instance, the rest of the *Old Town* gallery), because it represents the heritage of a minority within the hegemonic white narrative, and because it has a community-enriching purpose, rather than a wholly economic or political objective. But there is still a fragment of a political purpose: the exhibit’s self-conscious construction of the white visitor. The rest of the *Old Town* gallery allows for entrance into the buildings; visitors can wander through intimate spaces of bedrooms, sitting rooms, and shops. But in *Chinatown*, the visitor is made to feel ‘other’ and excluded. Four buildings whose doors are locked to the public surround a dark courtyard where one can peer up at blocked windows on the residential upper floors of the tall buildings, or gawk through half-exposed alleyways. The exhibit is constructed deliberately through white-settler eyes.

Misao Dean interprets *Chinatown’s* white visitor view-point as a subversion of racist division in British Columbia society, “making the visitors aware of their ‘whiteness’ and prompting them to feel themselves as part of an exclusive cultural community.”<sup>25</sup> She contrasts the *Chinatown* exhibit visitor point of view to that of *Point Ellice House*, a Victorian-era heritage building where visitors are encouraged to enter from the servants’ quarters, taking the vantage point of a Chinese houseboy. Dean finds the *Point Ellice* version of exhibiting diversity, by including a Chinese view-point, unsatisfying. She invokes Smaro Kamboureli’s discussion of “sedative politics”—

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<sup>24</sup> Patricia K. Wood, “The Historic Site as a Cultural Text: A Geography of Heritage in Calgary Alberta,” *Material Culture Review* 52 (Fall, 2000), 34.

<sup>25</sup> Misao Dean, “Managing Diversity in the Representation of BC history: Point Ellice House and ‘Chinatown,’” *BC Studies* 136 (Winter 2002/2003), np.

multiculturalism as merely the colourful backdrop to white Canadian dominant culture—to describe how predominantly white visitors peeking at the white-owned house through the eyes of a Chinese houseboy only reaffirms voyeuristic fetishization of the Victorian bourgeois lifestyle and marginalization of Chinese people.<sup>26</sup> Dean argues that *Chinatown*, on the other hand, specifically eschews voyeurism: everything is closed, and the role-reversal of a white audience to feel excluded, instead of a Chinese audience, effectively subverts power.<sup>27</sup> However, we can see in this inversion an affirmation of racial binary, like that projected in Kay Anderson's book, criticized by Dunae et al. and Mawani. *Chinatown* is useful insofar as it is subversive, but in what ways can we see this subversion as a simplistic construction of opposing 'others?'

Preservation of the past is always restricting; the act of defining a culture is by extension an act of confining "self-perception, self-definition, and self-identification."<sup>28</sup> The *Chinatown* exhibit constructs a Chinese self-image in binary opposition to the visitor who, by extension, is always already white and 'other.' But if we are to consider Mawani's words that "knowledges of racial inferiority and superiority were not neatly organized along the orient/occident binary,"<sup>29</sup> we can see how flipping around a binary of white versus Chinese might only reaffirm simplistic renderings of racial categories. What of porous spaces?

The 'forbidden city' narrative encourages a certain amount of fetishizing of an exotic 'other.' As Le Han argues in an analysis of the Museum of Chinese America in New York, such a narrative reiterates old dichotomies of "the West [as] modern and the Chinese [as] traditional and historic."<sup>30</sup> Mawani corroborates: "authorities constituted these 'races' as static, unchanging, and homogenous populations who, for different reasons, were discerned to be 'inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity.'"<sup>31</sup> To understand 'Chineseness' as an essential, non-adaptive, and non-fluid entity is to

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Misao Dean, "Managing Diversity in the Representation of BC history," np.

<sup>28</sup> Wood, "The Historic Site as a Cultural Text," 34.

<sup>29</sup> Mawani, "Cross-Racial Encounters and Juridical Truths," np.

<sup>30</sup> Le Han, "Our Home is Here: History, Memory, and Identity in the Museum of Chinese in America," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 6 no.1 (March 2013), 168.

<sup>31</sup> Mawani "Cross-Racial Encounters and Juridical Truths," np.

impose a teleology on Chinese identity, which remains pure and untainted in the ‘archaic’ first generation and eventually dies out in the more ‘advanced’ second generation. Herein lie the limitations of the ‘forbidden city’ narrative, which houses an idea of essential and mutually exclusive ‘Chineseness’ within the walls of Chinatown. This narrative purports that essential Chinese identity began to break down throughout the twentieth century as Chinese people became more assimilated more into the monoculture of mainstream society.

But maybe the *Chinatown* exhibit should not be completely tossed aside as a remnant of old historiography that missed paradigmatic shifts in how diaspora is theorized and how Chinese-Canadian identity is constructed. As Han reminds us, “the museum [in NY] itself is an integral part of the construction of a Chinese American identity.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, museums can function as “parallel structures to social organizations such as traditional festivals, language schools, and family-based networks and organizations.”<sup>33</sup> If we see *Chinatown* as a social organization, perhaps its social value can outlive its outdated interpretation of diasporic identity. So the way forward from understanding the past in terms of racial binaries imposed by the lingering ‘forbidden city’ narrative may not lie in the revamping of *Chinatown*, but rather, the creation of a new community-engaged museum space to exist contemporaneously with the old.

Perhaps a dialogic, exhibit-box-based exhibition of Victoria's Chinatown and Chinese-Canadian culture could provide a more instructive and nuanced understanding of diasporic Chinese history in Canada. Such an exhibit might best function as an institution of its own, outside of *Old Town* and even the Royal BC Museum. A self-sufficient, community- and government-funded institution that does not function within the walls of an outdated, 1970s, white-settler reconstruction of the past could improve on the pedagogical problems of *Chinatown* by providing more explanatory text, oral histories, and a greater range of experience over time that addresses adaptation and cultural change. Such a project would of course be contingent on community incentive and support, and more research expanding and improving upon the work of Dunae et al. on the culturally-mixed environment of Victoria's Chinatown in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

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<sup>32</sup> Le Han, “Our Home is Here,” 167.

<sup>33</sup> Le Han, “Our Home is Here,” 162.

In this paper I have demonstrated that two interpretations of Chinatown's past stand at odds against one another within the academy. In public history, only one interpretation of Chinatown's past exists. While *Chinatown* was supported by and was productive for the Chinatown community in the 1990s, perhaps a new museum space could better reflect changing academic discourse and new evidence. Recent shifts in how diaspora and how migrant identity is understood (as a fluid, non-fixed, adaptive phenomenon) contradict the former 'forbidden city' narrative. These theories, combined with new quantitative evidence unearthed by Dunae et al., urge academics and public historians alike to reconsider the history of Victoria's Chinatown and Chinese-Canadian identity, and to create more intellectually capacious academic work and museum spaces.

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