ACAM 320J FINAL REPORT
"TYING A STORY OF CHINATOWN"
A Chinatown Story Mapping Project

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About

The Chinatown Story Map is an interactive digital mapping tool and community storytelling project which showcases the rich histories, culture, and dreams that people have for the future(s) of the community. Users have the ability to engage with the map, read others' stories, and add to it themselves to collectively tie together a larger story of Chinatown. This report details the intentions, goals, project process and future visions/dreams of this mapping project.

When interacting with the map, users can zoom in and out and click on different pins. Each pin is a story in both English and Traditional Chinese which is tied to a specific coordinate on the map. These locations may be active, like Sunrise Market, or places that have closed or face uncertain futures, such as Chinatown Supermarket and 105 Keefer St. Despite this, they are integral to the story of Chinatown. Although location and place is integral, our map is story centered on the individual experiences of community members. The map has been developed as a big storytelling project to visualize the ongoing history of Chinatown as full of many stories- continuous, dynamic and alive- an alternative approach to other projects which may centre on a "preservation of heritage".

Grounding & Guiding our Work

As a project on mapping and understanding place- we position and ground this project on the lands on which it is taking place and imagined. UBC is a colonial institution that actively occupies unceded territory, of the hənʼq̓əminʼəmʼ-speaking Musqueam people. Chinatown is also on stolen and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Positionality and location is especially important to our project with maps as they are historical and present-day tools of colonization which marginalize, enforce eurocentrism, and "legitimize" settler colonialism through territorial claims- for example, furthering logics such as terra nullius. Borders are colonial imaginations which must be challenged and dismantled as we reimagine our spaces and the ways in which we are and want to be in community. **One way this has been done is the practice of counter or re-mapping which challenges colonial mapping imaginations.** Our project takes inspiration from other work including native-land.ca, Musqueam place names map, Chinatown Sound Map, the 360 Riot Walk and queering the map.

Project Relevance and Importance

Chinatown is a place that has seen mass displacement and migration. Where Indigenous, Asian, Black, and other marginalized communities were pushed in and out of through colonial force. Although faced with segregation, violence, and racist policy, it is a community with a tradition of resistance, mutual aid and solidarity building. To this day, colonial interests try to pit communities against one another, to further marginalize the poor and working class, drug users, unhoused folks, seniors, undocumented migrants. Narratives dividing Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside. But this is not tradition. Our project aims to reimagine space and the ways in which people have built community and experience Chinatown beyond imposed borders which divide and instead centre community visions and the imaginations of futures which centre collective wants and needs.

Chinatown on the Map

City zoning states that Chinatown is the area mapped below, the few blocks centered around Pender Street. However, Chinatown happens and is experienced far beyond these lines that are not recognized by the city in a formal manner. Those who belong to the community do and should be able to define for themselves where Chinatown is and limitations of the "dominant map" do not recognize the inherent overlapping and reshaping of communities over time. However, dominant city mapping also has implications on the community. Zoning designation of HA-1 (shown above in yellow) and HA-1A (shown above in red) districts dictate which areas are "protected" and National Historic Sites. This impacts construction, grants, what is considered "heritage" and the resources that are allocated.

Situation
Historical Streets

PROTECTED

The city has designated E Pender St. as a heritage area. What about the rest of Chinatown? What will we lose and what needs should we design for?

E PENDER ST

KEEFER ST

MAIN ST

E GEORGIA ST
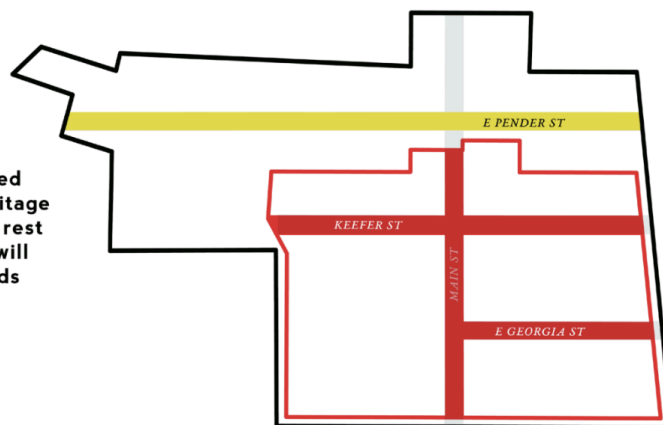
Artwork by Emily Tso. Excerpted from "The Zoning and Geography of Chinatown Explained" by Louis Lapprend, Chinatown Stories Volume 1 (Reprinted in 2021)

Past Community-led Mapping Alternatives

In Nicholas Blomley's "Landscapes of Property" (1998), he highlights the community remapping of "vancouver's" CRAB Park, in response to the "Seaport Centre" development proposal of the waterfront. Community members and activists reconstructed their own landscapes of how the community would be impacted by the development from a community view and made their own community visions for the future. Blomley explains "Not only does the language of these maps- (the geographic names, texts, and so on)-advance the claims to local entitlements, but the representations of space itself
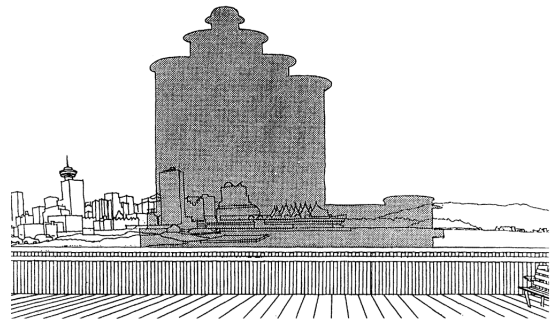

Figure 5. "Orthnographic drawing of Seaport Centre, as seen from Crab Park" (Artists Michael Banwell and Lawrence Lowe, 1994).
SOURCE: *Carnegie Action Project Newsletter*, p. August 1994. Reproduced with permission.

Mockups by community members displaying how the Seaport centre would "rob Crab park of its sunset". Excerpted from Blomley pp. 601 (1998).
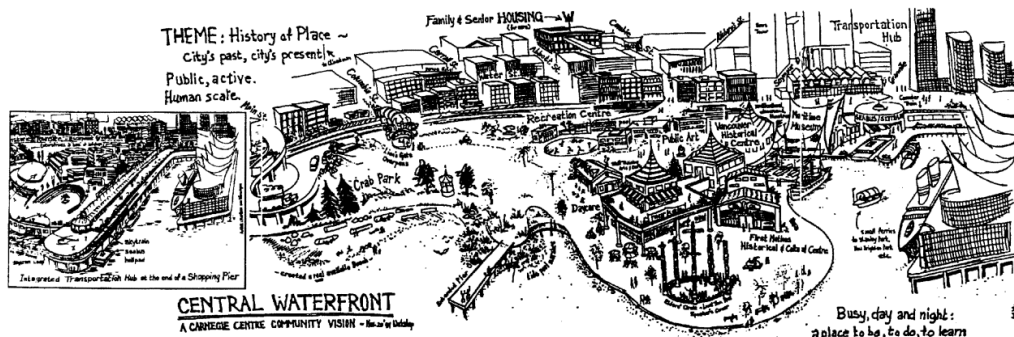
attempt to both destabilize the enframings of the dominant map...and reframe space in ways that speak to local histories of use and entitlement... **Expertise, and the associated entitlements to space, was predicated on local histories of landscape production and occupation."** (600)

Figure 6. "Picture This": Community-based landscapes
SOURCE: *Picture This: Drawings Created by Downtown Eastside Residents*, 1994 (copy on file with author). Reproduced with permission.

Excerpted from Blomley, pp. 603 (2018)

An undated announcement titled "Seeing is Hearing" from the carnegie community centre stated *"To really grasp what a massive intrusion Seaport Centre would be on the fragile environment around it. .. you have to see it from ground-level, the level where it would be experienced every day by people, not just by birds or developers artists"(600).* Similarly, with our map we aim to challenge divisive colonial notions and provoke alternative conceptualizations and imaginations of Chinatown. **Our map aims to illustrate how community members experience Chinatown by centering "community views and visions" and placing community members as the "experts" who are entitled to the space as they imagine.**

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The Map: Tying as an Approach

The Chinatown Story Map is a collective community storytelling project where anyone can contribute their experiences, reflections, and dreams, weaving them into the larger narrative of Chinatown. It's a living tapestry that connects stories to the places where they happened, creating a dynamic portrait of the community.

- **Tying Stories to Places**

"Tying" means linking the stories we've gathered to the locations that hold them. Take New Town Bakery, for instance—a site that has accumulated countless memories over time. For some, it's a beloved tradition; for others, it's a source of nostalgia or the comforting smell of freshly steamed buns. These shared experiences tied to a single place form a blend of emotions and imaginations, shaping our collective memory of Chinatown. Through the map, these memories are preserved, shared, and intersect with others' experiences, deepening our understanding of Chinatown's significance.

- **Tying Themes Across Time and Space**

The map reveals how common themes and emotions resonate across different locations in Chinatown. For example, under the theme of Dreams and Futures, we see stories that intertwine with specific places:

- At New Town Bakery, a storyteller reflects on Chinatown's future over an egg tart, imagining revitalization that is both responsive and responsible.
- At 105 Keefer Street, people united to fight against gentrification, driven by a shared goal of preserving their community.
- At Massy Books, a First Nations resident reflects on building kinship and rethinking strategies to resist colonial projects in collaboration with other communities.

These stories, though seemingly distant, are deeply connected through shared love and vision for Chinatown. They showcase how hopes, struggles, and aspirations bind together to form a dynamic network of relationships and dreams.
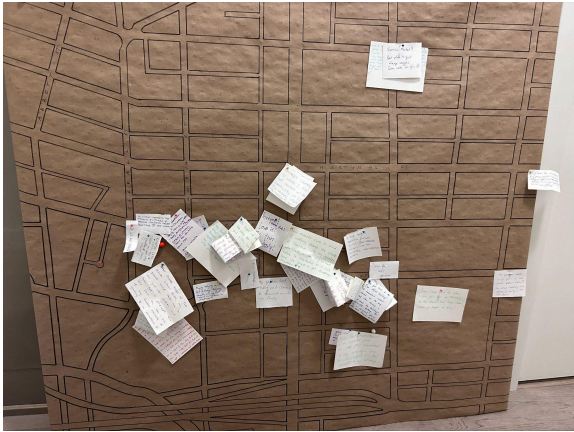
- **Tying People to a Brighter Future**

By connecting stories to locations and then to each other, the map brings new life to Chinatown's history and future. It highlights the enduring ties—between people, places, and narratives—that sustain Chinatown's spirit.

Ultimately, the Chinatown Story Map aims to connect people to Chinatown and Chinatown to a brighter, more inclusive future. These connections are the heart of the project, ensuring that the legacy and vitality of Chinatown endure for generations to come.

Project Process and Deliverables

Our project consisted of various stages, involving numerous "back-and-forths" with Chinatown Today. We pitched ideas, received feedback from both our community partner and course instructors, and continually assessed our own capacities. Initial project ideas included hosting an "open-mic" style community story-sharing event, using an online story submission platform to add stories to the map, and designing a digital walking tour or utilizing the map as a guide for an in-person walking tour.

Our final project goal was to create a digital story map based on the existing story collections from Chinatown Today—physical map and digital publications—to revitalize these stories, making them accessible to a wider audience and amplifying their impact. At the same time, we aimed to leave room for future possibilities, ensuring that the project could continue to evolve and potentially achieve the goals mentioned above in the future.

Deliverables:	1. Archival Research (Methods)
Archival Research Process Document: 📄 Archival Wor…	All submissions that are currently on the map are from archival materials (no "new" stories were collected in the project process). This was done by reading all 5 volumes of Chinatown Stories and extracting stories that mentioned specific places that could be placed on our map. We also digitized Chinatown Today's physical story map that they have brought to a few events in the past (see below).

	2. Organizing Map Data
Stories to Map Spreadsheet: 🟩 Stories To Map	After identifying stories that were to be mapped, we developed an organizational method that was user friendly, could be filtered easily, and have the ability to be modified in the future. Data we organized for the map included point coordinates, title of story, story text, translation of text (traditional Chinese/English), further resources/links (if applicable), themes and a check box to indicate whether the story had been placed on the map.
	3. Mapping Stories (Format & Content)
Initial Version (Location Based) Final Version (Story and Themes Based):	Stories were mapped using Google "My Maps" which is a free mapping tool available to those with a google account. We researched multiple mapping platforms however other softwares that were more visually appealing/customizable required payment. This is something that can be considered in the future if funding becomes available. Our initial map was "location based" where there was one pin on the map per story location and multiple stories could be scrolled through when clicking the pin. However, with feedback from our community partners we developed the map to have each story be a pin that users can click on and engage with. Stories were also organized in layers on the map as "Past", "Present", and "Future". However, we felt that a timeline was too constricting and did not properly encapsulate stories that transcend such timelines. This resulted in the shift to have the map **organized by themes.** When reading through the volumes, three themes emerged: "Grief and Loss", "Community and Connection", and "Dreams and Futures". Having a themes based and story based map allows for Chinatown to be understood

	and visualized as a space that could never be severed of its many elements- from its pasts, futures, community centers, seniors, youth, meat mongers, mah jong nights. On this map everything plays out together across timelines in space and time, held in conjunction with one another and all integral to the story.
4. Developing Promotional Materials and Other Resources	
Story Submission Form Instagram Posts: Canva Template Tiktok/IG Reel Content Blog Post	• Story Submission Form for people to submit their story. Updated links to be added once map is live on CT's website • Instagram Posts and Canva Templates that CT can use in the future to post on instagram to promote the map • Instagram Reels/Tiktoks: A sample Tiktok video and other footage of story map locations that CT can use in the future. • Blogpost for Chinatown Today's Website: To be featured on CT's website to introduce our project.
5. Ensuring Future Usability	
Final Report Quick Links Project Guide	• This Report and the Quick Links Guide has been developed so that all material that we developed will be in the hands of the Chinatown Today team and available for their use. All documents are stored in their google drive and transfer of ownership for the maps and spreadsheet will also be done. • Multiple videos of story map locations were taken which Chinatown Today can use in the future following the template/format we made in the original video. • We also printed out a physical map on A0 paper with the same colours as our digital map that can be used for future events by Chinatown Today. This will help the map reach community members who do not use/have readily access to the internet or a device that can easily access the map. This physical map can also be another way that Chinatown Today can promote the map with community members that do not know about the digital component.

Future Plans with Chinatown Today:

- **Spring Festival Event:** Alongside other organizations based in Chinatown, Chinatown Today will be hosting a Spring Festival event in February where the physical and digital map can be incorporated as part of the event.
- **Update the Directory Map:** Chinatown Today has an existing digital directory map with information focused on stores and community centres in Chinatown. It has not been updated in a while, much of the information is outdated, and we will help revamp the page.
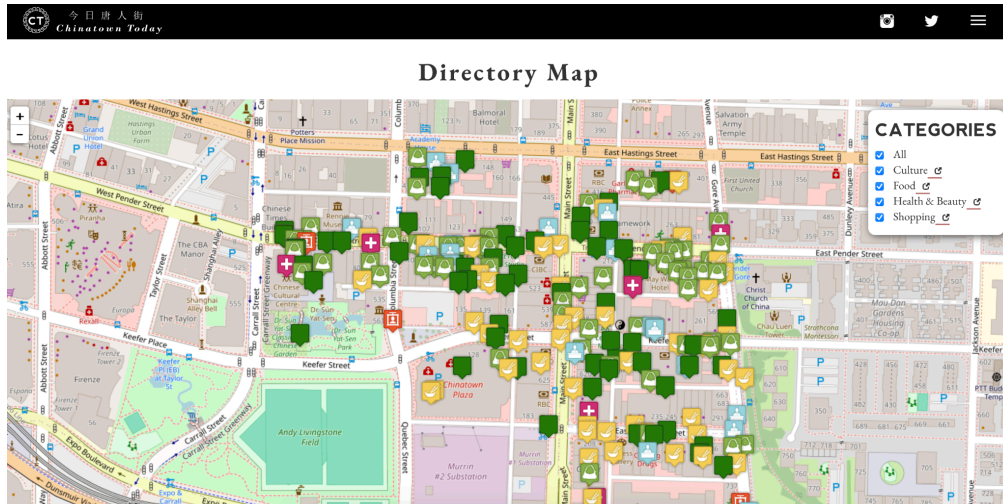
Project Implications and Futures

The Chinatown Story Map has shown us the incredible potential of storytelling as a tool for preserving and reimagining the cultural fabric of a community. Dreaming about the future of this project, we envision it becoming a living, breathing archive—a dynamic space where past, present, and future narratives converge.

One potential future is expanding the map to include more personal, intergenerational stories, amplifying the voices of youth and elders to showcase how Chinatown evolves while holding on to its roots. We could integrate interactive features, such as virtual walking tours narrated by community members, or AR technology to bring historical landmarks to life for visitors.

We also dream of the map evolving as a platform for community collaboration—allowing users to keep adding their own stories, photographs, and memories, online and in-person. For example, the map can be further integrated into future community events, serving as a platform to create shared memories and foster a deeper sense of belonging among participants. We hope that by using this map, it would not only deepen the project's inclusivity but also create a collective record of the lived experiences that make Chinatown vibrant and resilient.

Finally, we see the map as a bridge between communities—a space to foster dialogue about cultural preservation, urban development, and belonging. By embracing technology and storytelling, the Chinatown Story Map could inspire other neighborhoods to document their own stories, ensuring that local histories are preserved for generations to come.

For us, dreaming about this project's future means imagining it as a tool not just for preserving memories, but for creating new ones—a place where people can connect, learn, and grow together.

Conclusion

The Chinatown Story Map project serves as a testament to the power of storytelling in bridging the past and present while imagining new possibilities for the future. By adopting community-engaged research methods, we have prioritized collaboration with community members and organizations, ensuring the project reflects the lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of those it seeks to represent.

In addition, our mapping process is deeply informed by decolonized practices, recognizing the importance of working with and for people, not just places. By centering human experiences and relationships, we have sought to honor the complexity and richness of Chinatown's stories while resisting the objectification of its spaces. This approach highlights the ongoing interplay between culture, identity, and geography in a way that respects the community's agency.

We also recognize the work that remains: to further expand the inclusivity of the map, amplify underrepresented voices, and explore innovative ways to engage with the community. This project is not an end in itself, but a beginning—a foundation for ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

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