

Calgary



Chinatown Memory Book



Introduction

In July 2020, Council approved a Notice of Motion to rename James Short Park and James Short Parkade, located on the boundary of Chinatown. This engagement will identify a new name(s) for the park and parkade, and gather ideas on how to acknowledge Chinatown's history, people and culture in a meaningful way.

From its founding in 1885, Calgary's Chinatown has had three locations and the Chinese community has been oppressed and discriminated against by government policies and citizen actions. Renaming the park and parkade is a way to acknowledge some of these past wrongs and recognize the contributions of the Chinatown community.

In effort to learn about life in Chinatown, we asked citizens to share their memories. The following pages are a combination of submissions we received online at engage.calgary.ca/renameJSP and from in person engagement sessions.



您对在唐人街的生活有何回忆?

日常生活是什么样的? 何事让您感到开心? 何事让您感到被排挤或被歧视?

您對在唐人街的生活有何回憶?

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What is your memory of life in Chinatown?

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I have been working in Chinatown for almost 30 years. Looking back, it is true that all businesses flourished in the old times. During every weekend and public holiday, many people came to Chinatown with their friends and families for dim sum and shopping. We used to have street events every year which attracted many visitors to Chinatown. However, as time goes by, it is not what it used to be. many businesses are moving to other places for development. Chinatown is not what it used to be anymore. Now, many parking spaces have been cut down. The one-way lane, which is under construction, results in the diminishing of parking spaces. Therefore, the number of people travelling to Chinatown keeps declining day by day. People who are still struggling to survive in Chinatown like us are seriously being marginalized by all of these changes. I hope the city can help us.

I hope the parking rate can be remained the same as before. It can be \$5 whole day after 11AM on Friday; \$2 whole day on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays. Thus, we can attract more Chinese visitors so as to revitalize Chinatown.

The older generation has said that YEUNG, KING NING / YANG, JING NAN (杨景南) made great contributions for the Chinatown. I propose using his name.

Cantonese YEUNG, KING NING

Mandarin YANG, JING NAN



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I have been in Canada for over 20 years and lived in Chinatown for 9 years. I think Chinatown is excellent. It is convenient for grocery shopping and to enjoy teatime. It's even easier to take the public transit and it takes you pretty much everywhere you want.

Before the pandemic, we were treated with opera or concert performances once or twice monthly in the summer--totally free of charge. There were also affordable and fun tours offered by the local communities. One-day or multi-day travel programs were available for our choice.

As for being isolated or discriminated against, I haven't noticed or heard of it.



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My favorite activity in Chinatown is to play mahjong after enjoying tea and dim sum with my besties. We felt helpless and discriminated against when we were told to go back to China, by people of other ethnicities. Canada is a multicultural country. In this case, it means all of them should go back to where they are from. I propose the park to be named as China Park.



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About five or six years ago, a serious traffic accident happened at the intersection of Centre Street and Fourth Avenue. An SUV ran onto the sidewalk and crashed into the wall of a building. An elderly Asian woman was knocked down and seriously injured. Those who were present were all stunned. A young white male approached the woman to see if she was okay. He tried to wake her up, and encouraged her to hang on until the ambulance arrived. This young man was really brave and warm-hearted. He demonstrated the spirit of caring for and helping each other, and inclusive care of the Calgarians. This scene was deeply rooted in my mind and encouraged me to learn from the young man.



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[ILLEGIBLE] in Chinatown eliminates its enemy simply by taking away our properties. They took away the elderly apartment Oi Kwan Place, [ILLEGIBLE] building offered by the provincial government. Even Wing Kei building did not survive from them. There was nothing the Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association could do to stop them. In the future, if they decide to terminate the elderly in Chinatown, none of us will be able to survive from them. The provincial government can do nothing to help us by then. The residents of Chinatown are hopeless. I have lived in Calgary for more than 40 years and now Chinatown has taken over by [ILLEGIBLE] the underworld. They just die hard.



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One generation plants the trees in whose shade another generation rests.

My husband and I live in the Bowside Manor. Every day, we walk through the bustling Chinatown to shop for Chinese gourmet at groceries and sometimes to visit a bank for business. There are famous buildings characterized by Chinese elements, namely the Chinese Cultural Center, the Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association guarded by the Chinese guardian lion statues, and Sien Lok Park. Two marble lions stand on both sides of the park where a bronze sculpture telling the history of the Chinese predecessors' great work for a century; relief carving on the pointy tower demonstrating the life and work of the Chinese. More than ten restaurants with flavors of different regions in China, attract many Chinese to visit, recalling the taste of their hometown. Every day we come to the park for a walk, chatting with our friends, enjoying the sunbath. From time to time, we would recall and discuss about the bravery and courage of the Chinese predecessors.

What a beautiful and well-equipped Chinatown! We enjoy our life here and hope for the best for Chinatown.



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As many of you know, the Third Avenue, southeast of Chinatown, is a high-risk street for pedestrians. There are often vehicles parked on the street, blocking the view of drivers and pedestrians; the street is narrow; and pedestrians sometimes take risks crossing the road and shopping on both sides of the street. An old lady I know was injured and fractured in a traffic accident right within this section in Chinatown. It completely changed her life, leaving her unemployed and out of the social circle she used to connect with in Chinatown. She is not as mobile and health as she once was; you do not see smiles on her face anymore. Although the authority has taken some steps to improve the issue, it is still a concern to us. What I can do is to remind people I know to be extra careful on that street, and to pay extra attention to cars travelling in both directions. Do not attempt to cross the road improperly.

Some sections along the road are similar to pedestrian streets or the roads within the parking area. The city may consider a speed limit in such sections. Since such sections are short in length, a speed limit such as 30 km/h or 10 km/h will not take drivers much time. Not to mention many elderly Chinese are living along the street. Even the speed limit in residential areas has been set as 40 km/h. Maybe I am not thoughtful enough, but I do hope the traffic issue on the street can be better addressed and taken care of.

When shopping in Chinatown, it is hard for anyone to ignore the graffiti on the walls of buildings. I'm glad the government has taken a number of steps. For example, wall paintings, lanterns, posters, etc. are used to improve Chinatown. However, we can do better in stopping and eliminating illicit graffiti. It needs contributions from parties including property owners, Chinatown and the Chinese community organizations, the Police, and the city. I expect the city to act as a leader in solving this persistent problem.

Original submission translated to English



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Title: Double Greeting Snack House

Many Saturday mornings in the 1980s, my family would drive down to Chinatown and line up for dim sum at the Double Greeting Snack House. We would wait for what seemed, to a little kid, like hours, and then squeeze into the tiny restaurant, sharing a table with another unknown family because it was the only way to get so many people in at one time. It gave me such a strong sense of community, to gather with strangers over delicious food.

Comment on original post:

- ➔ I was infinitely impressed by the multilingual host who took everyone's order while they waited in line. It wasn't just that he spoke so many languages but more importantly, he could figure out which language to use as he approached the various diners in the queue. He always had a tough time when he reached me, couldn't guess which 😊.



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Title: My weekly dose of Chinese culture

I was enrolled in the Calgary Chinese Public School as a child, learning Chinese on Saturdays in the building where Peerless Bubble Tea currently is, and then moving to the Cultural Center shortly after it was built. Each week, I was immersed in Canadian English school and culture from Monday to Friday, but I grew to look forward to Saturdays. Well, maybe I didn't always look forward to Chinese school on Saturday mornings, but I knew I could look forward to having lunch in Chinatown after school. In those days I recall line-ups at every single restaurant at lunchtime in Chinatown. When a new food court opened up where Gong Cha is now, or when Dragon City Mall opened, I would be so excited to try out the newest restaurants, or check out the shops selling Sanrio toys or Chinese sweets while my parents bought Chinese groceries. We couldn't pass by a bakery window without catching the smell of Chinese pastries, or a meat shop with bbq pork or duck hung up in the windows. Even seeing the live fish being butchered and cleaned on the spot was so different from everywhere else in Calgary, but it was like home for me. The sights and smells of Chinatown really are what I remember most.



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Title: 我識睇 Notes on the Fridge

In the age before mobile phones, Canadian families used to leave notes on the fridge for the kids. I was rather perplexed when a woman once told me that doesn't work for her and her kids. Between the three of them, they spoke English and Cantonese at varying levels though none could communicate in a language that met the cognitive level of everyone involved and it was even more difficult to find common ground with the written languages. The kids never learnt written Chinese (different from Cantonese, a spoken language) and the mother wasn't able to express herself writing in English. Hence no notes on the fridge.

In all the years of Chinese school supplemented with parental prodding, learning to read and write in Chinese was the be-all and end-all. No one really justified why I had to go to Chinese school on the weekends while I did English and French on weekdays, and had homework seven days a week.

To this day I am still the only one amongst the siblings who can read a menu in Chinese, which is often different from the translated content offered in English. I have yet to meet another person raised on this continent who can read Chinese, it is already rare to have even a spoken heritage language.

Someone once pointed out that the hardest thing to make out is dark or light soy sauce. Though the label is clear in Chinese, it is just soy sauce in English. They would have to hold the bottle up to the light and swish the liquid around to figure out which was which.



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Title: Time flies

I grew up on the streets in Chinatown. From learning Chinese traditions, Kung Fu, Lion Dance and eating dim sum and bbq pork buns. This Calgary Chinatown shaped who I have become.



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Title: 食包包食飽 Butter Roll 2

The writer, Butter Roll Girl, grew up denying herself the layers of identities that brought hurt and shame, evading her otherness, pretending to know only the official languages and even avoided using chopsticks. Never looked back until she had a family of her own and founded a Chinese language school.

Then many years lapsed before I became involved again. It all started with a utility box.

Around 2015, the utility box located at the northeast corner of the historic Canton Block was art-wrapped with photos. The selected photos were taken at the foot of the Lions Bridge when the bridge was completed in 1916, mere paces from the Canton Block, which has been thriving since 1910 as the heart of the Chinatown community. Nearby, on the bank of the Bow River, the area was used as a Blackfoot encampment from the late 1800s until the turn of the century and at one time included the Tsúùt'ínà.

The top of the utility box reads "Chinatown 華埠" yet show only dozens of white people in the photos.

Given the significance of the area for both the Blackfoot, the Tsúùt'ínà, and the Chinatown community, why do the images selected not reflect that? Vanished and displaced, from our community living room.

Gentrified and erased. In 1916 and in the 2020s.



My perception of identity was provoked by a utility box.

呢個唔淨止係一個訊號箱咁簡單 —— 我要為華人爭返啖氣，為華埠佔返塊地！

我為大家隆重介紹「訊號箱嘅故事」—— 散佈喺卡加利唐人街四個重點角落(總共五個箱)，係華埠最新嘅藝文景點。

YMCA 華人基督教青年會嘅歷史圖片 (其中兩面)

以及 seth cardinal dodginghorse 嘅作品：「和解前的真相 *truth before reconciliation*」(另外兩面)
廣東樓區，獅子橋橋尾

I am reclaiming the corner at Canton Block for the community. **Erasure addressed, one footprint at a time.**

胡樂怡 Janice Wu 嘅作品：「係時候療傷、和解 *Time to Heal*」

東方廣場對面

Lo S.T. [read LOST] 嘅作品：「得閒飲茶 Duck, Hen, Yam, Cha」

呢件藝術品嘅主題係向各地唐人街嘅原始定居者同遺產語言 —— 廣東話同台山話 —— 致敬。
聯邦大樓後面，近河邊

evelyn244.wixsite.com/dhyc

余 Wil Yee 嘅作品：「時光與老虎 *Time and Tigers*」

銀龍酒家對面

請大家欣賞公共空間嘅藝術創作。一齊去吸收，去感受！

Comments on original post:

➔ It is no surprise there are few archival photos of Chinese people during the completion of the bridge from this period since Chinese immigrants were not seen as legitimate citizens; nor even real "people." We often forget that this is during a period of "white" Canada where municipal, provincial, and national leaders were openly hostile to Asian immigrants.

➔ What a lovely, creative way to display history! Well done!



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Title: Connecting to my heritage through good food, celebrations

As a 2nd generation Chinese Canadian, I grew up struggling between taking pride in my Chinese heritage and understanding the Western culture. Chinatown was a place where I could connect with loved ones over food. My family, cousins and grandparents would frequently meet for dim sum and Peking duck to celebrate birthdays or get together. I would also enjoy the bubble tea cafes and bakeries with my friends or visit Dragon City to check out specialty goodies, cute stationary and toys.

I've always admired how Calgary's Chinatown celebrates traditions and culture - from the lion dances to the street festivals and volunteer-driven community that organizes these events in Chinatown.

In recent times, I've noticed a lack of a cohesion in Chinatown. Many restaurants I enjoyed in the past are no longer in operation and visiting the malls often becomes a quiet time. As Calgary reopens and the community continues to support Chinatown, I hope to see the same vibrant culture I remembered growing up.

Thank you for keeping the traditions alive and helping this Chinese Canadian embrace her heritage!



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Title: First home away from home

As a 1.5 generation Canadian, Chinatown was my family and I's first home away from home. In a country that was full of foreignness, having familiarity (in the food, faces that we saw, and the language that we could hear) that reminded us of the country we left behind brought a little bit of comfort. My fondest memories were of living in the same apartment building as some of my childhood friends that had immigrated around the same time as us (or they would live in a build 2 min from us). We would meet to play, figure out how to best prank our poor neighbours downstairs, and our parents would get together to discuss whatever adult stuff we didn't care about at the time. Chinatown marked the beginning of a lot of Chinese immigrants' journeys trying to make it work in a new country.



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Title: Delicious baked goods

We should call the James Short parking lot the Chinatown parking lot. Would provide a good boundary for the community



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Title: Butter Roll

My Chinese school teacher was of Toisan heritage, as of almost everyone else in Chinatown. As Canto speakers who lived in the suburbs, we were the exception, from the second wave of immigration. The Toisan matriarch who taught our tiny weekend class would always ask Peter, a big hockey-playing lad, to go buy her a butter roll at the beginning of each class. He was bigger than most adults and certainly the biggest kid in any class. She would hand him some coins and place the order for a butter roll, saying the words 'butter roll' with a Toisan accent. It was the same butter roll ask, every weekend. I remember how the flaky pastry would sit around her lips and the crumbs would quiver when 雷師奶 Mrs. Louie spoke during class.

Though I've never gotten one from a bakery and still don't know what it really is to this day, I imagine it was some old-timey homey American food perhaps once made by Chinese cooks and houseboys for their employers then later popularised in Chinatown bakeries.

For the Canto speakers who can read Chinese, 師奶 (si naai) is an honourific used in Toisan to convey respect to a female teacher; unlike Canto, where 師奶 means middle-aged housewife. All the teachers in the Chinese school were called 師奶, a form that is long lost with the spread of other spoken languages such as Cantonese and Mandarin.

雷師奶 Mrs. Alice Louie was a deaconess who founded the Montréal Chinese Presbyterian Church in the 1940s, during the time of the Chinese Exclusion Act. For much of the last century, Chinatown churches doubled as schools, the only place that offered Chinese language classes for the children. Regardless of one's religious background or lack of, parents sent their children there to learn the written Chinese language.



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Title: Reminds me of my childhood

My grandfather used to take us to China Town every week for groceries and snacks. My best memories are of us downtown, either in the mall or going through shops. Working downtown as an adult brought me much joy to the reminiscence of my youth while sitting in the park. Too much of it has changed and the city doesn't put the money into its upkeep like it does other places in our city.



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My papa and sister seeing them and my papa saved my life once.

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- Daily life is easy as everything is nearby
- My walks in the many parks and by the river is very enjoyable. It's a treat to be able to go out and breath in fresh air.
- I did not feel discriminated against at any time.



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Having live in this area twice since my first arriving in Calgary, in 2008 until 2010 and again from 2014 to current I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to be immersed in the culture of Chinese Canadians. From the benefits of food, traditional dress, daily life of the residents, vendors having a place to share their way of life within ours to the pride shown to all that we Canadians were interested in being a part of a small piece of a place so far away without having to travel across the world to enjoy.



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日常生活是甚麼樣的? 何事讓您感到開心? 何事讓您感到被排擠或被歧視?

What is your memory of life in Chinatown?

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My grandma lived in Chinatown and we would walk and get Chinese pastries and buns every Sunday. We would go to the multicultural centre for dimsum after.



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As a person of color, I have never felt more warmth going through Chinatown, but "going through" is all I can do as being a wheelchair user not much is accessible.



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My favourite memory of Chinatown was going for dim sum with my family at Dragon City Mall every Sunday.

We would then go shopping at Silver Dragon Mall!

I am glad The City of Calgary has acknowledged the discrimination that Asians here face in this city.



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I remember coming to Chinatown every Saturday or Chinese school then going to dim sum with my family at U & Me after school I always looked forward to that. Diamond Bakery was always a treat, especially the owner giving me free red bean brown sugar bowl cakes when we went for buns. Chinatown was mostly positive memories and since I am Chinese Canadian, I felt very welcome and included.



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Being essentially brought up in Chinatown, I have many memories tied to the place. In my childhood, I would accompany my grandmother to Chinatown for a whole day of errands; grocery shopping, browsing cute stationary, jade & jewels, then stopping by the bakeries for some buns and egg tarts. Even as I grew, being Chinese Canadian, I felt drawn to Chinatown, often times hanging out with friends there trying new street foods and – of course – drinking bubble tea. Honestly, I felt very included within the Chinatown community and I have mostly positive memories about it growing up and even now.



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I have lived in Calgary for 20 years. Chinatown is the first stop when I arrived. I have a very old feeling as everything seemed to in 1950

Time flies and a lot of change in Chinatown, it is not old anymore. Calgary's Chinatown is also multicultural and welcome everyone.

Since a lot of development in the North, I don't go to Chinatown as often as before. I wish Chinatown can still develop and modernize as time goes.

Unfortunately discrimination is still around but it is not because I am Chinese, it is human nature. One bad apple will continue to raise problem



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When in the summer usually I will see some serious selling vegetables and plants on the street.

Grow up in Chinatown learning things from school.

Food is pretty good and cheap in here a lot different restaurants to try.



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We used to enjoy our life in Chinatown not only for its unique culture we also enjoyed the authentic Asian foods with the expansion of bicycle path zone we have less parking space and we can hardly find a parking spot. Visiting Chinatown now has become costly and inconvenient. We feel the city is discriminating the Chinese community and does not listen to different voices. We feel frustrated.