MuseumsForward

The gentrification of Chinatown: The museum's role

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Abstract

Within Museum Studies, few researchers interrogate the impacts museums have on their neighborhoods through the lens of gentrification. Building off literature in other fields such as Urban Studies and Cultural Studies that discuss gentrification in Chinatowns, this article analyzes the role of the museum using the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle, Washington's Chinatown-International District as a case study. Interviews with nine community members and Museum staff conducted in 2023 are the basis of critique and recommendations. Study results confirm the need for museum accountability to their communities through expanded access, values-centered decision-making, and relinquishing power. This article builds the foundation for understanding gentrification, commodification of culture, and place identity to contextualize the work of the Wing Luke Museum and to answer the questions: (1) How are community-based museums complicit in erasure and displacement; (2) How can arts and culture both facilitate gentrification and act as a weapon against it? Though this article sits at the intersection of gentrification, Chinatown, and museums, the recommendations are applicable to museums committed to progressive institutional change.

Keywords

Gentrification; Museum; Chinatown; Community-based Museum; Art-washing; Neighborhood Impact; Activism

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Introduction

From preserving historic spaces to providing platforms for artists, Asian American museums have been a powerful contributor to contemporary Asian America (Takaragawa, 2002). However, very little has been written about Asian American museums beyond applauding their successes (Chew, 2009). The museum field, as it attempts to distance itself from its white supremacist roots and current structures, tends to congratulate ethnic museums for their 'community work.' Moving beyond representation in museum content and moving *towards* liberation for impacted communities, museums must assess the impact they have on their immediate localities if they are truly committed to racial justice, equity, and accessibility. This disconnect between the institution and the physical community poses a problem for museums as they struggle with issues of relevance. Research (Estelita Godoy & Borges Luna, 2018; Pottie-Sherman, 2013; Smith, 1996) shows ties between the arts (including museums) and gentrification, though relatively little has been said about gentrification and the arts specifically in Chinatowns. As community-centered institutions, museums in Chinatown occupy a unique position and spark the question: how does one preserve and protect a neighborhood while potentially participating in its destruction?

Community engagement is a growing topic within the literature of museum studies (American Alliance of Museums, 2022; Crooke, 2006; Watson, 2007). Building upon this literature, this article aims to problematize the relationship between museums and their community through the lens of gentrification. As museums continuously claim to be in service of a vague and undefined 'community,' they focus on increasing audiences and bringing 'community members' into the museum. However, existing literature shows that museums are rarely—if ever—interested in addressing the impact their presence has

on the physical community they exist within. From increased policing, tourism, and rent hikes to the ever-shifting place identity and narrative of the community, museums have immense power over the people they intend to serve.

This is particularly contentious for community-based ethnic museums located in Chinatown, as Chinatowns across North America, from Vancouver to Los Angeles to New York, are gentrifying at an alarming rate. The problem this article seeks to address is the lack of gentrification consciousness in Chinatown museums which fuel their potential as contributors to gentrification. As these museums work to preserve Chinatown stories, we must ask: (1) How are they complicit in erasure and displacement; (2) How can arts and culture both facilitate gentrification and act as a weapon against it? Through interviews with community cultural workers and organizers, we begin to answer these questions for the Wing Luke Museum and Seattle's Chinatown-International District (CID). In this research, I argue that museums must be accountable to their communities through expanded access, values-centered decision-making, and relinquishing power. I aim to push museum thinking from liberal identity politics to a commitment for justice and self-determination for Chinatown communities.

Nuanced understandings of the sociopolitical landscape of communities are largely absent in the museum field. Without scholarship rooted in the community, ethnic institutions are tokenized and celebrated without being challenged or criticism does not come from a place of care. From my vantage point, as a resident, museum worker, and organizer in the CID, I have insight into neighborhood politics and direct impacts of neighborhood decision-making. Using the Wing Luke Museum (referred to as the Wing or the Museum) located in the CID as a focal point, this article examines a community-based museum in its cultural and political context. The Wing was established in 1967 to honor the legacy of the first Chinese American elected into office, anti-racist activist Wing Luke (Wing Luke Museum, n.d.-b). Originally an Asian folk-art museum, the Wing has transformed into the only pan-Asian museum in the country, renowned for its "commitment to shared authority," (Bruggeman, 2012). Today, the Wing "reaches 45,000 visitors annually (75,000 pre-COVID)"— nearly half of whom identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI)— through exhibits, tours, programs, and community collaborations (C. Chinn, personal communication, April 2023). According to the Museum, "The Wing is an institution that contributes to and thrives on the community around it," (Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, 2013).

As a community-based museum, the Wing does not fall into the traditional traps of colonialism and white supremacy that most other museums are comfortably situated in. That is not to say the Wing does not have work to do, but rather to state the different context in which the Wing can progress. Community-based and ethnic museums likely have "an approach to the politics of race and space divergent from that of large public museums," (Sze, 2010, p. 513). As the museum field begins to grasp diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, the Wing is a few steps ahead by virtue of a majority POC staff and board, but the mere presence of people of color does not make an institution anti-racist or against white supremacy. The Wing has a nuanced view of DEIA work that is situated in the experiences of AANHPI diasporas and the CID, acknowledging the root causes of injustice largely ignored by other institutions. In the Museum's own words:

> We hold EDI values, including centering communities most impacted by displacement; community-driven strategies led by community self-determination, influence, and leadership; recognition of the complexity of community needs such as economic development, affordable housing, cultural development, education, healthcare, and food sovereignty; acknowledging historic injustices to address systemic racism and institutional barriers; strong, accountable, accessible, transparent, and culturally appropriate solutions; and valuing of existing community cultural assets. (Wing Luke Museum, 2022b)

Grounded in anti-racism and anti-capitalism, this article aims to contextualize gentrification consciousness for the Wing to "[orient] us to existing structural constraints and [index] emergent subjectivities and political possibilities," (Sze, 2010, p. 526). First, Literature Review provides definitions and brief summaries of concepts discussed later in the article. Purpose of Study and Methodology follow to explain the how and why of this study. Next is a multifaceted discussion of the CID exploring the neighborhood context of gentrification. With that grounding, I move into an analysis of the Wing's neighborhood impact. I conclude with recommendations for the Wing that can be adapted by museums based on their place in community relationship development. Additionally, I employ art from local AANHPI artists to ground our discussion in neighborhood creativity.

This article pulls from many disciplines in addition to Museum Studies, notably Urban Planning and Cultural Studies. Outside of academia, expertise is found in the lived experiences of CID community members. Bridging the analytical and personal aspects of this topic, I present interviews and scholarship with the same weight and reverence.

Literature Review

Gentrification

If the last time you heard about gentrification was in the early 2010s, painted with hipsters and coffee shops, shake that image from your mind. In order to recognize museums' direct neighborhood impacts, it is necessary to establish a baseline understanding of gentrification. As P.E. Moskowitz writes, those are "the signs of gentrification, not its causes," (2018, p. 20). Correcting the narrative, they explain, "gentrification is a trauma, one caused by the influx of massive amounts of capital into a city and the consequent destruction following in its wake… Gentrification is not about individual acts; it's about systemic violence based on decades of racist housing policy," (2018, p. 17). Additionally, gentrification encompasses "several related issues, including displacement, economic marginalization, and intracommunity tension," (Sze, 2010, p. 516). In ethnic enclaves such as Chinatowns, gentrification can look like plastic, consumable culture replacing authentic neighborhoods, whiter and wealthier demographics, and police violence. Unfortunately, gentrification is rarely a clear-cut battle; often, community members experiencing gentrification are proponents of neighborhood improvements and fail to grasp how gentrification disproportionately impacts the most marginalized. In Chinatowns, gentrification is a tool used by community elites (business and landowners) to create a tourist-friendly ethnic playground designed for consumption at the expense of low-income residents and workers. The injustice of gentrification is built into racist policy and neoliberal demands for capital over the needs of people.

Coined in 1964 in London by sociologist Ruth Glass, the term 'gentrification' is a "partial concept" (Berbary & Burns, 2021, p. 645). Dahmann describes the coinage as a "belated discovery" that "should not obscure the often-explicit continuation of imperial warfare and colonial pacification," (Dahmann 2018, as cited in Berbary & Burns, 2021). Similar to Berbary and Burns' description of placemaking as an extension of colonialism, Neil Smith employs a comparison between urban pioneering (of which gentrification is a tactic) to the myth of the Wild West. Smith writes, "The frontier imagery is neither merely

decorative nor innocent, therefore, but carries considerable ideological weight. Insofar as gentrification infects working-class communities, displaces poor households, and converts whole neighborhoods into bourgeois enclaves, the frontier ideology rationalizes social differentiation and exclusion as natural, inevitable," (Smith, 1996, p. 16). Intrinsically tied with racial capitalism, gentrification is "about violence, about the decimation of… cultures," (Moskowitz, 2018, p. 17). Later in this article, I will apply Laureen D. Hom's notion of symbolic displacement to experiences in the CID (2020).

Discussion of gentrification is starkly absent in Museum Studies literature, despite the recent interest in community engagement and museum relevance. Lena Sze's work is a breakthrough for community-based museums as the only research to contextualize the museum, gentrification, and Chinatown as interrelated topics. Housed in Cultural Studies, the article *Chinatown Then and Neoliberal Now: Gentrification Consciousness and the Ethnic-Specific Museum* introduces the museum field to gentrification consciousness, defined as "the complicated and conflicting politics that are produced by cultural institutions whose prior affiliations, history, and specific identification with place are critical of gentrification but whose own growth and stabilization as an institution are reliant on the area's continued gentrification," (Sze, 2010, p. 512). In addition to contextualizing gentrification consciousness within the CID, this article examines the role of arts and culture in gentrification.

Artwashing

Defined by Spade in "Placemaking Glossary'' published in the *Public Art Review*, artwashing is "a term for what observers see as the past and present role of public art and creative placemaking in priming markets for the benefit of developers and outside investors, raising price points and enriching municipalities, but displacing incumbent residents, often communities of color," (2017, p. 29). *ArtsFuse Boston* says that the process often "exacerbates class differences, encourages unwanted neighborhood changes, and even takes advantage of undervalued artists," (as cited in Spade, 2017, p. 29). Spade continues, "The term can also refer to the support of art and culture to burnish a corporation's image," (2017, p. 29). In *Museums and City Aestheticization Policies: Controversies Between the Touristification of Public Spaces and the Social Role of Museological Institutions*, Estelita Godoy and Borges Luna define Lipovetsky and Serroy's 'transesthetic' as "the hybridization of art

and culture with consumption," (2021). Art washing in gentrifying Chinatowns could look like public art in front of luxury condos or art walks aimed at tourists, visitors, or new high-income residents.

Community

Like decolonization and diversity, 'community' is a buzzword used—but never defined—by the museum field. Often, museums conflate 'community' with 'audience,' subconsciously centering and inflating the museum's perceived importance. Additionally, minoritized people often experience dissonance when hearing dominant culture say things as 'the Black community' or the 'LGBT community ' because the dominant culture fails to understand the diversity within any subgroup. Young states, "the ideal of community denies and represses social difference, and that the polity cannot be thought of as a unity in which all participants share a common experience and common values," (1990, p. 227, as cited in Hou & Kinoshita, 2005).

To avoid this false homogeneity the CID is often subjected to, this article will be specific regarding groups being discussed and use 'communities' to address the multiplicity of groups. Understanding that 'the CID community' is full of competing interests and viewpoints, this article differentiates between community members and community elites. Danley identifies community elites as "a specific segment who hold the most political and economic power and can extend that power beyond the community to shape political decision-making," (2018; as cited in Hom, 2020). Community members, on the other hand, include grassroot organizers, workers, and residents.

Lastly, while the Wing aims to tell the stories of AANHPIs in the Pacific Northwest, the CID is historically home to Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Black, and Indigenous people. Notably, the CID has always been home to the poor and excluded, including unhoused people of all ethnicities. The narrow view of 'community' used by community elites is employed to dismiss and dehumanize those who do not fit the Model Minority stereotype (specifically non-Asians, unhoused residents, sex workers, and drug users). Racism and classism are barriers to a unified community, a product of white supremacy's divide and conquer method of suppression. This article rejects a narrow view of a 'CID community' that does not include and care for the most marginalized.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this article is to problematize the relationship between the Wing Luke Museum and the CID through the lens of gentrification, using the research questions: (1) How is the Museum complicit in erasure and displacement; (2) How can arts and culture both facilitate gentrification and act as a weapon against it? In addition to developing museums' gentrification consciousness, this article also provides advice for progressive institutional change.

Methodology

Study Design

This study draws on critical ethnography to collect and analyze qualitative data. As defined by Sarah J. Tracy[1] "Critical research is based on the idea that thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations and that data cannot be separated from ideology," (2012, p. 42). Anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist ideologies underpin most interviews and my analysis for understanding gentrification in Asian America. Critical Race Theory as well as Marxist, postcolonial, and postmodern feminisms are prominent qualitative territories that shaped this process.[2] These frameworks resist and reject extractive research as well as introduce an ethic of care necessary for community work.

Additionally, I utilize neighborhood art throughout this article to ground this discussion in the creativity and liveliness of the CID. I selected works that speak to the CID's identity beyond commodification and illuminate the experiences of community members. In conjunction with ethnography, art is intended to remind readers of the humanity of the CID community.

[1] For further definitions and discussion, please refer to Sarah J. Tracy's *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*.

[2] "Marxist feminism links the oppression of women to capitalism…Transnational/postcolonial feminists examine how discourses of gender, race, and citizenship justify and reproduce relationships of dominance within and between nation-states. Finally, poststructuralist or postmodern feminists examine how gender identities are continually reconstructed through societal and organizational discourses of power and hegemony," (Tracy, 2012, p. 55).

Data Collection and Analysis

This research study used semi-structured topical informant interviews from a responsive/friendship stance, defined by Tracy as "a feminist type of interviewing in which participants are treated as intimate friends rather than as objects," (2012, p. 142) and takes a phronetic iterative approach. Interviews were conducted in-person or via Zoom in March 2023 with nine CID community members including Wing employees, artists, and organizers. Interview questions centered on the interviewee's relationship with the CID, the Museum, and the role of arts and culture in gentrification. Interviewees consented to recording (explicitly for note taking purposes). Interviews were analyzed through open coding. Because this research is situated in the real-life politics of the CID, most quotes will not be attributed with a name, specifically quotes criticizing the Museum. While this article is rooted in the love and struggle within the CID, it is important to note I avoid sharing intercommunity tensions for an outside audience. Lastly, news articles alongside Museum press releases and publications are used to provide wider context to the interviews.

Positionality

Like many researchers of color, I come from the community in which my research centers. As a worker, resident, and community organizer in the CID, I am uniquely positioned as a complete participant in this study (Tracy, 2013; Gold, 1958; Spradley, 1980). I have been an employee of the Wing since 2019; additionally, the Wing's current Deputy Director waived the Museum's right of review for this research. I carry my identities as a young, queer, radical Asian America abolitionist into this research.

This research takes place on the occupied lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, specifically the Duwamish Tribe who have yet to be federally recognized by the United States government. I would also like to honor past and present Kumeyaay and Kanaka Maoli whose lands my family resides on.

Chinatown-International District Orientation

Similar to many neighborhood events, let us open with a cultural offering. This poem illustrates the past, present, and future of the CID in the spirit of the Wing's Executive Director Joël B. Tan's statement,

"Chinatown-International District is not a problem to solve, but a treasure to cherish and perpetuate into the future," (Strabuk, 2023). Written and performed for the Wing's 2022 Annual Dinner & Auction, poet and arts educator William Nu'utupu Giles highlights the complexities of a changing and challenging home.

Hometown heroes (for the Wing Luke, after Anis Mojgani)

By William Nu'utupu Giles

this one's for the Lion Dancers

for my florist heavy Chinatown-International District

streets, and the uncles strolling on them

this one's for my educators

on community walking tours

gathering pieces of the past for us to dream on and surpass

marinate me in memory,

not just the flower of dim sum

but the ugly burning grease

the fires we have burned into memory

redlining, INS detention, exclusion

I lost count somewhere between the I-5 freeway

and the push of Sound Transit 4th ave expansion

How many times can you scar someone

and call it progress?

My blood has scars, different. but also the same as yours.

so this one's for the immigrants in there,

who smuggled recipe & memory

for parents of parents who crossed seas and found cold land,

who treaded water in low tides of English.

subtext, sarcasm, any of the

hurt found in new language

for the parents who i sometimes describe as emotionally distant

without knowing the ways this "country" hardened them

made becoming a stone seem—reasonable

but I wouldn't know the difference between sweat and blood in that soup

so I'll just say this one's for the elders who stretch in the morning at Hing Hay Park

who remind me to greet the sun,

to stretch with and for your community

for the neighborhood walks that aren't just walks,

they are the thread around this district's beating heart

these streets paved with bubble tea and hot pot

this one's for the waterbenders of South King Street,

who always keep me hydrated and salty

for Canton Alley and the art it inspires in me

this one's for the gentrification fighters

the activists with fists like burning stars,

chipped yellow bricks

to remind us we lead best, when building

for everyone still fighting against unsound expansion

saying no to 10 years of new construction/pollution/gentrifi-celebration

For everyone who tells the city

you can't keep our streets safe if you destroy them

choke us with construction and fumes.

you cannot bury children of the sun

so for you. who walks these streets, protects these streets

find meaning or love or a reason to smile on these sidewalks, this is for you

my gold people who pave these streets with your beauty

make them sparkle, make them muddy. make them worth fighting for

this is for you. from Japan Town tea to Little Saigon bánh mì

from Chinatown ping pong and new Filipino Town ube

This moment is for you

I pluck it out of the air. And whisper wonder. Whisper grateful

Whisper keep showing up. The Chinatown-International District

This shining lantern atop a hill. How will you add your glow?

Keep showing up. Bring your treasure to share.

I write this in the days after Lunar New Year.

so this one's for those Resting. And those Rising in Peace

for Brandon Tsay who in the face of fear, ran forward, to protect

this poem is for those focusing on grief

an for those focusing on where we are going

if Lunar New Year sets a precedent for what we have ahead

then let us not be afraid. Let us be brave

I do not want to write, running away from tragedy.

I want to write towards you

You, my stellar constellations, treasures drawn in the sky—

impossibly bright stars I get to see & sing karaoke with sometimes

We don't have time to rest.

we gotta smell the garlic from every restaurant we can find

gotta take a Kung-fu class to know my families forms

I gotta walk. With care. Knowing my ancestors walked these streets

and I'm just the closing shift

keeping things nice, and clean, and swept, and homey

for all my sons & daughters

nieces, niblets,

nonbinary babes,

fa'afafine family old and new. For you! to enjoy.

The Neighborhood

Most mainstream narratives orient Asian America[3] as a project born from immigrant struggles turned productive citizens, legitimizing the American Dream through selective memory and storytelling. Rejecting the settler colonial image of Asian "pioneers," how can we more accurately tell the stories of our diasporas? Critical scholarship and radical community members have been reframing Asian America as a story of US empire and exclusion, recognizing the role of the State in migration and settlement patterns. This foundation is critical to understanding the context of on-going struggles in the CID, specifically gentrification and displacement.

Chinatowns have historically been landing pads for Chinese (and often other Asian) immigrants where they could connect to in-language resources for housing, employment, medical care, and culturally specific retail (Hom, 2020). Threatened by the self-sustaining economy and tight-knit community, the State divested in Chinatowns, taking resources out of the neighborhoods so they would fall into disrepair. Both an eyesore and spectacle for white America, Chinatowns became synonymous with vice, making it easier to control, regulate, and criminalize anyone who fell outside of the white heteropatriarchal

[3] "Asian America as a political and ideological formation comes from its relative position, or rather, negotiating and using points of connection across difference to stage new social and political positions," (Kuo et al., 2020).

norm (Naram, 2017). As the State shifted immigration regulations to capture Asia's highly educated workers, the socioeconomic landscape of Chinatowns shifted as well: while Chinatown was maintained by the working poor, new immigrants with capital settled in suburban areas or wealthier parts of cities. Following the Model Minority Myth[4] many say Chinatowns emptied out as upwardly mobile Asian Americans migrated elsewhere; this spatial assimilation theory was challenged by Hom in part because this narrative ignores the poverty and systemic oppression many still face in Chinatowns today. Residents suffer under the common narratives of 'Chinatown is dead' or even 'Chinatown needs revitalization,' (Hom, 2020; Sze, 2010; Zou, 2023). These narratives pave the way for speculative development to displace residents and small businesses as discussed further later in this article. Fighting for the preservation and sustained livelihood of Chinatowns, community organizers across North America keep the 'by us, for us' spirit of Chinatowns alive. From mutual aid to protesting luxury development and racist infrastructure projects, Chinatown organizers are often at odds with the neighborhood business class and the State who seek to create an urban growth machine "to reap the benefits of redevelopment, gentrification, and cultural tourism," (Lin, 2008, p. 123).

In Seattle, the CID encompasses Chinatown, Nihonmachi, Little Saigon, and the often-erased Filipinotown. Located south of downtown, the CID has experienced displacement from its first two locations. The CID and neighboring Central District are geographies of redlined communities of color, restricted by racial covenants in the first half of the 20th century. Though treated as a retail district by the State and public alike, the CID has 1,773 households (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Additionally, the CID has the largest percentage of elders in the city (Wing Luke Museum, 2023). The neighborhood is home to health services, family associations, culturally specific groceries and restaurants, youth and elder care, and cultural hubs. In addition to residents, many AANHPI communities from around the region consider the CID their cultural homes, "thus, the Chinatown-International District is neither purely an isolated enclave nor and urban gathering place for a completely dispersed suburban ethnic hinterland; it is also a downtown beachhead for a newer, much more extensive, but still spatially continuous Asian immigrant community," (Abramson et al., 2006, p. 349). Going from an undesirable slum to Seattle's 'up and coming neighborhood,' the CID's outward identity is in flux, at the

[4] "The model minority myth is a stereotype that purports that Asian Americans have family values and ethics that contribute to their success, dismissing the reality of systemic oppression and racism and positioning Asian Americans as a buffer group between Whites and other racial minorities (Museus & Park, 2015; Wu, 2002)," (Kim et al., 2022).

expense of its low-income community of color. As the neighborhood gentrifies, "new, moneyed, white faces mov[e] into the neighborhood" and "[commit] a cultural war on existing inhabitants," (Zou, 2023, p. 4). Community members against displacement are inaccurately, and offensively, branded as "against building anything new in the neighborhood" by urbanists who are committed to misrepresenting anti-gentrification perspectives and fail to recognize the difference between culturally relevant development and speculative/market rate development that is not geared towards the existing community.[5]

The CID is also home to the Wing, the subject of this study. As a community-based museum, the Wing plays a large role in the history and ongoing formation of the neighborhood. This grounding in the neighborhood is necessary to contextualize the relationship between the Museum and the CID community.

The Community

For community organizers and community museums alike, 'community' is more than a buzzword. Additionally, the media, State, and luxury developers see the CID community as a monolith. This dehumanization primes the neighborhood for capitalist violence through abstracting and distancing 'community' from the people who make up the neighborhood. For the purpose of this article, I will attempt to define the CID community while acknowledging "the polity cannot be thought of as a unity in which all participants share a common experience and common values," (Young, 1990; as cited in Hou & Kinoshita, p. 227).

CID community members:

- Residents, housed and unhoused
- Workers
- Small business owners
- Organizers, activists, mutual aid providers
- Non-resident "cultural subjects [who] identify with a particular place through daily practices or committed discourses" (Kang, 2004, p. 153)

[5] This quote comes from reporter Josh Cohen in March 2023. When confronted about the bias, disrespect, and misinformation in his article, he wrote to CID Coalition, "I appreciate you raising your concerns, but disagree with your interpretation of the article."

This article recognizes the distinction between community members and land-based community elites, defined as "developers, property owners, bankers, and business leaders [who] control development," and "hold the most political and economic power and can extend that power beyond the community to shape political decision-making," (Danley 2018; as cited in Hom, 2020). Community elites are distanced from community values, relationships, and belonging through class status. As Abramson et al. articulate, "The political tension is further intertwined with racial and economic power divisions," because "most property and business owners are of Chinese ancestry (most of them non-resident), while most of the non-Chinese in the District are residents, social service staff, or cultural activists," (2006, p. 349). While hard boundaries of who counts a part of any given community is tenuous at best and actively dangerous at worst, the exploitation and displacement community members face at the hands of community elites is reason enough to draw this distinction. Tourists are not included in this article's definition of community but play a large role in gentrification and museums.

Place Identity

> Our built environment reflects those values back into how we experience it. And we experience and we reflect our values back into the built environment. We have, as much as we've been able to in combating gentrification, reflect values that center for the retention of our traditions and affordability. And oftentimes actually, the reflection of our built environment is just shaped by capitalism, <laugh> by racism. (C. Shimizu, interview with the author, March 2023)

While the lifeblood of the CID is the people who call it home, the neighborhood has an identity beyond its community members. M. J. Kang identifies one component of place identity as "certain distinguishable, self-manifested idiosyncrasies of a place in terms of its spatial form," (Kang, 2005, p. 153). Hom adds, the "four domains of Chinatown's identity: history, built environment, local economy, and political power," (2020). CID history is constantly negotiated as community members and elites embrace revisionist narratives and ethnocentrism. As a major history keeper, the Wing has been criticized by conservative Chinese community members for providing an

accurate, inclusive history of the neighborhood, when they prefer a Chinese American-centric narrative. Sustained history and the built environment are interrelated. As explained by Joaquin Uy on the Radical Filipino History CID walking tour, Filipinotown does not have the same physical presence as Chinatown or Japantown because by the time Filipinos migrated to the area, the buildings were already Chinese or Japanese owned/operated. Today, Little Saigon is experiencing gentrification at a more rapid rate than the CID core because Little Saigon lacks the same historic protections. When historic buildings such as the Elgin Hotel, home of the iconic restaurant and community gathering place Bush Garden, are slated for demolition to build a luxury apartment, we see CID history and built environment traded for increased capital. Community pressure through the campaign Save Bush Garden, in turn, strengthens place identity through "conscious community empowerment, re-established grassroots confidence, and conservation of the vernacular authenticity" (Kang, 2005, p. 153). Kang identifies place identity as "counter[ing] the place- annihilating forces of industrial modernism and the transnational flow of capitalism," (2005, p. 153). While place identity is a primary motivation for neighborhood preservation (Abramson, 2006, p. 344), Chinatowns face the additional issue of commodification.

Commodification and Touristification

As Carol Zou explains in *Belonging Bought and Sold: Chinatown's Complicated Relationship with Gentrification*, consumer spending is "a key source of income and a survival strategy" (2023, p. 11). Zou continues, "Branding a neighborhood for cultural consumption…comes at a cost of erasing non-consumable aspects of culture, such as family structures or practices of resilience, that are vital to sustaining the fabric of a community," (2023, p. 11). The commodification of the neighborhood (and Asian culture generally) is often painted as an economic benefit, and while that is true in many cases, it is rarely named as racism. Though the experience of tourism in the CID differs from the 'human zoos' of previous generations, there is still the element of indulging in the Racialized Other: "What is sought in tourism is distraction, evasion, fun, sensation, pleasure: all things that are commonly classified quietly in the rubric of exoticism…In the face of exoticism, the tourist seeks the other," (Michaud, 2007; as cited Estelita Godoy & Borges Luna, 2018). Because the Wing's audience includes tourists, the Museum must be mindful of contributing to

commodification and touristification of AANHPI stories and the neighborhood.

Figure 1

All of a Sudden (2023) by Blake Nakatsu

Blake Nakatsu, resident of the CID and YouthCAN Manager and Exhibits Developer at the Wing writes of the transactional relationships and exotification:

> It is the destination of many weekend day trips for transient spenders, an extended parking lot for stadium visitors, and it is our cultural home. In droves, all of a sudden, a bustle of customers crowd King and Maynard, only to leave when the day is done.
>
> Our ancestors, upon arriving in Seattle, were segregated Szeinto the CID, Central District and Beacon Hill because of racial covenants preventing people of color from purchasing homes throughout the city and beyond. Our neighborhood provides us comfort and security away from the white gaze, while allowing for a place that affirms our 'otherness' to them.

> What does it mean when the neighborhood where your dad and uncles took their first breaths, and where your aunties took their last, becomes a place for shoppers to show up when it's fun, pose for posh photos in front of our muraled, boarded windows, then hop in their cars? Communities thrive upon collaboration and quality of relationships and transactional interactions only go so far. *How will you show up next time things are hard?* (Wing Luke Museum, 2023)

The argument that commodification benefits the neighborhood economy speaks to a specific type of economy: businesses with a non-local audience, not "residents who want to buy some tea, herbal medicine, and dried [goods]," (C. Shimizu, interview with the author, March 2023). As the neighborhood gentrifies, community members report a change in the type of businesses, from chains like 85℃ Bakery and Dough Zone. Nina Wallace, CID organizer and worker observes, "It's still a lot of restaurants or cafes or food and drink-based businesses, but the vibe is different... It's a lot more of the second or later generation folks starting businesses that are a little bit more geared towards an American audience, middle class audience, people who have more money to spend," (interview with the author, March 2023). Referencing the Mayor's platform to revitalize downtown, CID organizer Jacqueline Wu states:

> Chinatown is considered part of downtown. And downtown means economics. It means commerce. And so this is supposed to be a moneymaking place. *Residents are not supposed to be here.* It's supposed to be commerce only. Wealthy middle-class folks are revitalizing because these aunties— these low-income folks—they're not going to be shopping, they're not going to be eating out every night. They can't afford to! This is not a place for them. They don't fit into the logic of the Bruce Harrell administration. (Interview with the author, March 2023).

Kartik Naram summarizes the contradictions of Chinatown economic development:

> To be sure, "economic development" writ large carries with it both harmful and beneficial consequences. Gentrification can lead to displacement, but it can also lower crime rates, broaden the tax base, and bolster

> public finances. Indeed, discussing gentrification by solely fixating on its positive or negative aspects risks, creating a false dichotomy between unbridled growth and no development. Chinatowns can benefit, of course, from economic growth. Its housing stock, small business revenues, and employee wage rates could all use improvement. But what Chinatown's supporters demand is growth that fairly accommodates the existing population. (2017, p. 38)

Gentrification

> Hostile landscapes are regenerated, cleansed, reinfused with middle-class sensibility; real estate values soar; yuppies consume; elite gentility is democratized in mass-produced styles of distinction. So what's not to like? (Smith, 1996, p. 12)

In the CID, there are differing understandings of gentrification and revitalization, from community members who openly welcome these changes with no critique of the violence they cause to community members who are against displacement but still wish to reap the benefits. For the vast majority of CID community members calling for revitalization of the neighborhood, revitalization means clean streets and well-lit walkways, not settler colonialism. The lack of political education around these topics not only affects immigrant businesses but also second-generation and beyond as illustrated by Hello Em's fundraiser "Let's Gentrify Ourselves" and International Examiner's issue titled *The CID Revitalized.* While small businesses and local journalism are not the enemy of anti-gentrification, the mythos of positive gentrification among community members empowers community elites, developers, and the State to further gentrify the neighborhood. Berbary and Burns summarize, "Revitalization, whether it occurs through placemaking, gentrification's onslaught of upscaled homes and businesses, or settler colonialism's continuous denial of Indigenous sovereignty, is premised on the notion that progress is good when it serves the unquenchable neoliberal capitalist and settler colonial imperatives," (Berbary & Burn, 2021, p. 655).

This article is written in solidarity with Chinatowns and neighborhoods across the US experiencing gentrification. While each city has unique histories, the process of gentrification has been described in specified

stages by Phillip Clay in 1979 and expanded on by Moskowitz (Table 1). Scholars likely could identify the exact stage in which the CID currently sits, but from my vantage point as a resident and organizer, I see elements of each stage present in the neighborhood simultaneously: the Mayor's plan to "revitalize" downtown (including the CID), Koda's luxury condos built next to low-income housing at Hirabayashi Place, local businesses fighting to compete with international chains. This is not to say the CID is fully saturated by market-rate and luxury housing, corporate retail, and that every resident has been priced out but rather, there's reason for concern. The neighborhood still has original buildings, most of which are low-rise. The landscape of the neighborhood has changed over the years but does not yet face the same hypergentrification of Los Angeles' Japantown or Montreal's Chinatown. Using Clay and Moskowitz's Stages of Gentrification, let us examine the landscape of the CID.

Table 1

Stages of Gentrification- Clay and Moskowitz (1979; as cited in Moskowitz, 2018, p. 18)

Stage 0	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
A municipality opens itself up to gentrification through zoning, tax breaks, and branding power	A few 'pioneering' gentrifiers move into a neighborhood, followed by a rush of more gentrifiers	Corporations such as real estate companies and chain retail stores, seeing an opportunity to profit from the arrival of the pioneers, become the main actors in a neighborhood	The only entities powerful enough to change and hypergentrify an already gentrified landscape are corporations and their political allies

Stage 0 in the CID

As discussed in the previous section, “marketing the diversity of Chinatown has in fact been part of developers' gentrification strategy,” (Naram, 2017, p. 35). For small business owners and gentrifiers alike, Chinatown’s association with crime and danger is bad for business. However, an area lush with celebration of culture is much more profitable.

A major steppingstone in the path to gentrification in the CID was the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) that passed through city council in 2017 against the wishes of the CID community. The upzone allowed developers to build taller buildings if they “set aside seven percent of their housing as ‘affordable,’ or else pay into a fund managed by the City” (Robinson, 2017). A major critique from community members was that the fund does not guarantee any affordable housing built in the neighborhood; instead, luxury development in the CID is funding affordable housing somewhere else. Longtime CID activist Uncle Frank Irigon expressed, “My own opinion is, they’re colonizing the International District, and the city is telling us to welcome the builders and developers with open arms… And that’s bullshit,” (Robinson, 2017).

> The city decreases the barriers to developing four big corporate developers for people who are going to build a hotel or luxury housing. But there's maintains these really high barriers for community developers. (N. Wallace, interview with the author, March 2023)

Stage 1 in the CID

On the corner of 8th and Lane sits International Community Health Services (ICHS), Denise Louie Education Center, and Legacy House run by Seattle Chinatown-International District Preservation District Authority (SCIPDA). This corridor is alive with children and elders, and in 2017, a proposed hotel development threatened it all. Though SCIPDA and ICHS wanted to buy the property across the street to expand their services, Hotel Concepts purchased property for $4 million with plans to build a Springhill Suites Marriott hotel, market-rate apartments, condos, and retail (Brothers, 2016). Similarly, around 2018, community developers lost bids to create affordable housing on 5th and Main; instead, owner of the land Tomio Moriguchi (former CEO of Uwajimaya) sold the property to Da Li, an international corporation, to build KODA

luxury condominiums (Wu, 2019). Community organizers worried that KODA would open the floodgates for speculative development. They were right to worry: as of Spring 2023, the CID can expect market-rate upcoming developments Blossom, Fujimatsu, Vibrant Cities, Origin 206 and more. Because the CID's median income is less than half of Seattle's, it is clear that these market-rate projects are not for the existing CID community.

Stage 2 and 3 in the CID

While many Chinatowns face pressure from international capital, much of CID speculative development comes from community elites, "who claim some kind of connection to the community here," (N. Wallace, interview with the author, March 2023). James Wong of Vibrant Cities and Tomio Moriguchi 'celebrate' connection to the neighborhood while actively seeking to gentrify it. I propose a class analysis is needed to counter the identity politics we see in the CID. Based on my experiences in neighborhood meetings and events, I see that poverty is not part of the neighborhood vision for these land-owning elites; and for the poor majority of CID residents, it is disastrous that these men hoard the most capital and political power. Attempts at democracy and public process have been championed by the ISRD Board, with disappointing results.

The International Special Review District (ISRD) Board was established in 1973 to promote preservation and rehabilitation of the CID. The Board has been called 'the last line of defense' the CID has against gentrification, but there are significant concerns regarding the power of the ISRD. Developers "run their own friends and candidates to be on the board so they can… rubber stamp development projects," one community organizer stated (Interview 9, interview with the author, March 2023). When pressed to consider affordability, equitability, access, the Board lacks teeth. "We're told time and time again that that's not within the purview: 'We're only talking about the aesthetics' which I think is a very deliberate way to interpret. And then it leads to things like developers who have no connection to the community like with KODA," said Cynthia Brothers of Vanishing Seattle. While neighborhood concerns like displacement are never considered as a point against the development project, neighborhood concerns that increase control and surveillance are supported by the Board. The

Board's claims to be apolitical and only able to speak to the design of developments are a farce.

Smith writes, "The economic geography of gentrification is not random; developers do not just plunge into the heart of slum opportunity, but tend to take it piece by piece," (Smith, 1996, p. 21). Layered with the map of the historic core of the CID, one can see the speculative development projects popping up along the periphery. Community members are concerned by projects continually coming before the ISRD Board with plans of mass and scale out of place in the neighborhood (like KODA's 17-story tower). As the footprint of the CID shrinks through State action (I-5 freeway, Link Light Rail stations, Charles Street Service Center), the neighborhood is being eaten from inside the borders by private development. Featured in the Wing's exhibit *Nobody Lives Here*, Auntie Bettie Luke summarizes,

> Every encroachment into the CID has NOT been for our benefit. We end up paying the price of safety, health endangerment, and economic loss. Even if it was unintentional or unconscious, every encroachment has contained some form of mainstream racism—systemic racism, institutional racism, economic racism, and/or environmental racism. (Wing Luke Museum, 2023)

Placemaking and Artwashing

> Who gets to define and give value to a space, (un)making it into a valuable place for community? How are these decisions embedded in larger neoliberal capitalist and settler colonial processes of gentrification? (Berbary & Burns, 2021, p. 648)

To start, "the idea of using arts-based strategies for community engagement within a concentrated area is often associated with 'creative place-making,'" explains Callihan and Gardner, "However, this term and process can be interpreted as the need to make a place, or to make something of a place that has little value. Gentrification is sometimes the unintended result of this approach," (2019, p. 270). Berbary and Burns explain that the assumption that places are "empty and void of meaning" is a direct extension of the "violence of settler colonialism and gentrification," (Clouthard, 2015; Haritaworn et al., 2018; as cited by Berbary & Burns, 2021, p.646).

As a historic district, the CID does not face the same placemaking as other neighborhoods. Rather, multiple meanings are prevalent within the neighborhood, for example narratives of resilience or resistance. In the CID, placemaking comes in the form of class discrimination from community elites who "seek to scrub the city clean of its working-class geography and history. By remaking the geography of the city they simultaneously rewrite its social history as a preemptive justification for a new urban future," (Smith, 1996, p. 25).

Many placemaking projects include artwork, such as murals. As Smith warns, "gentrification and art [come] hand in hand," continuing, "For the real estate industry, art tamed the neighborhood, refracting back a mock pretense of exotic but benign danger... Art donates a salable neighborhood 'personality,' packaged the area as a real estate commodity and established demand," (Smith, 1996, p. 17-8). In 2019, KODA Condos and Da Li Development received an Artwashing Achievement Award from Seattle Artist Coalition for Equitable Development for their art gallery of non-local artists celebrating the construction of the gentrifying condo tower (Wu, 2019). KODA has been criticized by community members for their original public art ideas such as suitcase statues and LED cherry blossom lights (the latter of which came to fruition). Steve Sawada of CID Coalition addressed KODA's insensitivity during public comment, "Who wants suitcases when that's such trauma to our generations and our family? To think that that was the first idea that you had is just bananas to me," (Robinson, 2019). As with all developer-led art, KODA's art ideas did "not honor this community but cheapens it and tokenizes it," (Robinson, 2019).

Conversations about artwashing are often limited to art galleries and speculative developers; however, Chinatowns also experience artwashing in the form of night markets. Building off of the earlier section on commodification and tourism, Chinatown night markets "represents an urban landscape shaped by both the expansion of capital markets in devalued inner urban areas and the emerging consumption preferences of the new middle class... urban developers and city managers are engaged in promoting and producing consumptionscapes that cater for the live-work-play philosophies of baby boom professionals and the creative class," (Pottie-Sherman, 2013, p. 172). Many of the vendors are Asian American creatives making work about Asian American culture through the lens of anime, boba, and kitschy references to growing up Asian American. In conversation with artist Monyee Chau, I reflected how this 'boba art' is

not relevant for our neighborhood elders and commodifies Asian America through recognizable, marketable symbols. Chau reflects,

> Do we all need to go through our boba art phase to be able to get to something deeper? How do we get to this place of being able to make work that is really meaningful and helps us understand what liberation can look like for all of us or what it looks like for our communities? And unfortunately, many people stop at the boba phase. I'm also trying to hope for those steps forward because I don't know if I'd be able to be where I'm at until I was able to celebrate [my culture]. This is so painful for me to say, but just being in that liberal phase of my life of making work about these things that aren't actually that important. But is that the step that I have to take so that I can make work that actually feels right and meaningful and is meant for community? (M. Chau, interview with the author, March 2023).

My hope is for Asian American artists and makers to be critical of their participation in CID markets and their art practice generally.[6] While these markets can be extremely important to Asian American creatives, Yolande Pottie-Sherman warns, "The Chinatown Night Market has the potential to breathe new life into harmful Orientalist representation of Chinatown and Chinese space and to encourage white consumption of the 'Other,'" (2013, p. 175). How can we support our creatives and celebrate our cultures without it leading to displacement of our communities? We will explore the ways in which the Wing attempts to answer this question later in this article.

[6] Let us not lose sight of the larger systems of oppression at play. Individual artists are not to blame for gentrification and displacement but should be mindful how their practice feeds into and can be weaponized by institutions. Again, the critique is to provide a larger consciousness of the harms of night markets, not to scrutinize individuals for trying to make a living from their art under capitalism. For further discussion, please read Pottie-Sherman's *Vancouver's Chinatown Night Market: Gentrification and the Perception of Chinatown as a Form of Revitalization*.

Displacement

Figure 2

We Live Here (2022) by Myra Ly-Au Young

As a pillar of gentrification, displacement is not a bug, but a feature. Hom explains, "The threat of gentrification can vary and include concerns of not just physical displacement of buildings and people, but also the psychological and symbolic displacement of the current community," (2020). Yet community elites as well as some community members fail to understand the direct link between gentrification and displacement. Community organizers are not fear mongering when they say, "Gentrification is just another word of displacement," (Y. Yu, interview with the author, March 2023).

Describing the impacts of gentrification, Smith writes, "Evicted from the public as well as the private spaces of what is fast becoming a downtown bourgeois playground, minorities, the unemployed and the poorest of the working class are destined for large-scale displacement," (1996, p.26). As a neighborhood with one of the highest poverty rates in the city, this rings true for the CID (Wing Luke Museum, 2023). The neighborhood has been identified by the city as one of the neighborhoods at highest risk for displacement (Seattle Office of Planning & Community Development, 2016). Between 2007-2014, 350+ low-income families were displaced from the neighborhood (Hong et

al., 2021). As developers focus on micro apartments and high efficiency units, the neighborhood is not receiving the much-needed family-sized housing despite advocacy from working groups and community organizers. 95% of neighborhood households are renting, leaving them vulnerable to displacement (United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

Wing Luke Museum

The Wing, as a history keeper in the neighborhood, remembers people and places lost to displacement. But how can the Museum celebrate them before they're gone? Or better yet, what can the Wing do to ensure their survival, their ability to thrive in place?

> We're part of this ecosystem. We set down roots in the sense there's no separation between Wing Luke Museum and Chinatown ID. We survive and thrive together. (C. Chinn, interview with the author, March 2023)

The Wing Luke Museum is a midsized art and history community-based museum with the mission to "connect everyone to the dynamic history, cultures, and art of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders through vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences to advance racial and social equity," (Wing Luke Museum, n.d.-b). The Museum occupies the East Kong Yick building, 60,000 square feet of galleries, offices, and preserved historic spaces. Renowned in the museum industry for its Community Advisory Committee (CAC) model[7] the Wing is no stranger to community engagement. Jennings and Jones-Rizzi identify buzz words such as 'community,' 'underrepresented,' and 'engagement' which "are used interchangeably to describe programs that extend the work of the institution to include perspectives, values, and the presence of people, as audiences of the institution, who come from different backgrounds as the staff…This notion of equating 'otherness' and community communicates a perspective that assumes that a community and the museum cannot be embodied in the same person," (2017, p. 72). While this dichotomy is the reality for many museums, the Wing is deeply rooted in the CID community. Watson writes, "Museums in the twenty-first century often find it difficult to identify communities and their representatives. In what way does the community differ from the public, or a target audience?" (Watson, 2007, p. 3). Beyond identifying the communities in which the Museum is a part of, the Wing is already doing the work of connecting audiences with communities through community-led museum content. Though it

[7] For almost all exhibits, the Museum convenes a committee of community members with relevance to the exhibit topic to set priorities, make content and design decisions, and plan public programming.

is “difficult to define qualitative and incremental effects of museums upon individuals and groups,” the Wing receives countless comments about their positive impact (Watson, 2007, p. 2). Through exhibits, programs, and events, the Wing is a trailblazer in the field.

In 1992, the Wing opened *Executive Order 9066: 50 Years Before and 50 Years After*, the first exhibition created under the community-based exhibition model. Now, nearly every exhibit is created through the CAC process in which the Museum invites community members to “create exhibits addressing community priorities and contemporary issues,” (C. Chinn, personal communication, April 2023). In 2023, the Museum was awarded the Association of King County Historical Organizations’ Exhibit Award for *Resisters: A Legacy of Movement From the Japanese American* Incarceration. The Wing’s CAC process should be common practice for museums to “empower community members to create exhibitions and tell their own stories on their own terms,” (Chinn, 2006).

Additionally, the Museum serves 8,000 youth a year through free school tours and out-of-school programs year-round. Beyond education, the Wing helps build “cultural identity, heritage connections, and leadership,” with AANHPI young folks (C. Chinn, personal communication, April 2023). YouthCAN, the free after-school arts program for high school youth that I help run, ties artmaking to stories of resistance and resilience in the neighborhood. YouthCAN encourages young folks to engage with the CID beyond transactional relationships and commodification of culture. The Wing can be a springboard for the next generation of AANHPI to develop the tools they need to work towards liberation for our communities.

There is no doubt that the Wing contributes “educational and cultural value to the neighborhood,” but Sze warns “about the possible connection between neighborhood, ‘upscaling,’ cultural institutions, and the effects of gentrification and displacement (2010, p. 511). Aware and anxious about neighborhood impacts, institutions develop what Sze defines as gentrification consciousness:

> Gentrification consciousness describes the complicated and conflicting politics that are produced by cultural institutions whose prior affiliations, history, and specific identification with place are critical of gentrification but whose own growth and stabilization as an institution are reliant on the area’s continued gentrification. This consciousness is a constitutive feature of the current

> institutional landscape of gentrifying and gentrified neighborhoods with recent histories of local, ethnic-specific activism. (2010, p. 512)

How can the Wing thrive and service the neighborhood while their future is in part "dependent on attracting and accommodating a gentrifying class," (Sze, 2010, p. 523)? Sze explains this contradiction as knowing/not knowing:

> Based on a much longer attachment to Chinatown, [the museum] sees that gentrification is present and warily notes the displacement and other detrimental effects of gentrification on existing Chinatown populations (i.e., knowing). But this awareness of gentrification is only partial (i.e., not knowing) because the museum's identification with Chinatown exists within a larger landscape that, offering little in the way of substantive alternative funding and space, touts tourism, culture, and high-end residential development as key routes to economic development with gentrification as a "natural" by-product. (2010, p. 524)

In many ways, the Wing is mindful of its role as an "economic driver," to "[bring] in new customers and customers that will come in and take the neighborhood tour to learn and go on, lifting up our assets," (C. Chinn, interview with the author, March 2023). The Museum states they are "the second largest economic driver for the CID, partnering with 65+ small businesses, and attracting patrons to the family-owned businesses and restaurants," (Wing Luke Museum, 2022b). Especially during the pandemic, the Museum took on this role of a neighborhood anchor. Exhibit Director Jessica Rubenacker shares, "A big part of us choosing to reopen when we did was really in support of the neighborhood…It was heartwarming to hear from other community members that when we did reopen they felt like, even though we were still in the middle of the pandemic—and it was still a really heavy time—they felt like it was like this beacon of light that we were now open," (interview with the author, March 2023). Because the neighborhood still has not financially recovered from the pandemic, the focus on food tours has been a way the Museum supports local businesses while providing a deeper connection between visitors and the neighborhood.

As Sze writes, "There is no model that precisely and empirically tests the economics of the relationship between cultural institutions and their neighborhoods, that pulls out specific institution-generated costs

and benefits while considering larger social and cultural contexts," (2020, p. 512). However, Stephen Sheppard's 2013 study identified museums "as generators of higher property values… partly to blame… for the gentrification of their neighborhoods," (p. 203). So, while on a programmatic level, the Museum supports the local economy, the Wing's impact on property values is less measurable. A quote from the co-founder of New York's gentrifying Museum of Chinese in America sheds light on the matter, "property values in that general area" went up "once people heard that we were gonna be there" (Sze, 2010, p. 517).

In the next section, we will explore the ways in which the Wing as an ethnic community-based museum can still perpetuate these harms through institutional structures and policies.

Figure 3

Wing Luke Museum (2019) by Meilani Mandery

Asian America's relation to whiteness is fraught and often unchecked amongst the light skinned East Asian Americans who dominate the public sphere. While many mainstream Asian Americans have attempted to carve out a space in America's white and Black racial hierarchy, fewer Asian Americans participate in interracial solidarity with other communities of color. As Zou explains, "The uncomfortable truth about Asian America is that whiteness relates to us through paternalism, much more than it relates to the races that it deems

criminal," (2023, p. 9). While there are Asian Americans who believe our liberation is tied together[8] many more cling to the promises of whiteness: capital, status, acceptance. With the knowledge that museums are inherently white institutions, how does an Asian Pacific American museum understand itself?

> The Wing is political. It's woke enough that it draws people who care about Asian American history, but it's unclear if the values of justice and anti-racism are really alive in the institution." (J. Wong, interview with the author, March 2023)

Five years have passed since the beginning of the #MuseumsAreNotNeutral initiative, and many progressive museums agree. However, neutrality looks different in different contexts. For example, here in Seattle, it was expected for museums to publish Black Lives Matter statements during the 2020 uprisings (though many were performative), whereas that would have been seen as a radical act for museums in different regions. For Asian America and museums both, non-neutrality generally means 'speaking out,' regardless of content. Liberalism plagues Asian America, as it does Seattle, where people can recognize the harms of overt oppression while actively protecting the systems that create it (for example, watering down legislation to defund the police). The Wing recognizes it is not an apolitical institution, yet struggles to identify when, where, and how to use its institutional power.

I want to preface any criticism with the understanding that institutions are beholden to many stakeholders with differing perspectives. Ultimately, museums negotiate within themselves how to move forward with all its constraints. While community organizers understand the complicated politics the Museum must navigate, there is serious frustration with the Wing's lack of political will. One community organizer explained, "They're thinking on a geological slow—slower than slow— time horizon for the Museum's existence and purpose and perpetuity. And so they're like, 'Okay, if we make any decision that chips away at our social capital or can jeopardize our status moving forward in the future, does that jeopardize our role to continuously advocate and tell the stories of people?" (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023). If the goal of museums is to "maintain enough power to last forever," we must interrogate what is

[8] "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." -Lilla Watson

sacrificed in the pursuit (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023).

Community organizer Yin Yu has been on multiple CACs at the Wing. She reflects, "it kind of baffled me because it was a nine-month process… I come from grassroots organizing where… we would shift into other movements within nine months, almost a year; so many campaigns would've happened. And it just reminded me how nonprofits are just in that industrial complex, and they move very slowly," (Y. Yu, interview with the author, March 2023). In the museum world, nine months to create a community-led exhibit is impressively quick. But to Yu's point, so much happens out in the real world in that time. While exhibits are time-intensive, there are many other ways museums can use their voice to contribute. In the CID, community organizers have identified concrete actions the Wing can take to support the neighborhood.

Museum Content

> "The past is never dead. It's not even past" - William Faulkner[9]

Writing about the act of remembrance, Watson identifies the role museums play in "not only preserving memories but also in re-ordering them and making sense of them for later generations," (Watson, 2007, p. 4). As one can imagine, this is not an apolitical task. AANHPI diasporas in the US have unique, complex relationships with America and identifying as American. Though the Museum has mostly moved away from their "uniquely American story" branding, much of the Museum's content remains uncritical of US imperialism. As Pilipino American artist Derrick Quevedo writes,

> [White] supremacy has created the perception of this settler state as a 'land of opportunity' so that we give gratitude (and subservience) for our quality of life here in comparison to our homelands. Many of our truths are that the U.S. (and similar imperialism states) are the very reason for our dispossession. It is their invasion, colonization, occupation, and exploitation of our homelands that destabilized them. (Quevedo, 2022)

[9] Faulkner, W. (1951). *Requiem for a Nun*. Random House.

As the Museum enters a new phase, how will the Wing reckon with the historical and ongoing harms of US imperialism? Because "Asian America is socially produced," the Wing has an opportunity to help shape the next generation of cultural and political Asian Americans (Kuo et al., 2020).

Jennings and Jones-Rizzi remind us, "Museums are microcosms of the world around us, ecosystems with their own governments, caste systems, policies, and practices that mirror much of our society at large," (2017, p.64). How can the Wing be mindful of reproducing the inequities of our society? As the only pan-Asian Pacific American museum, the Wing holds the responsibility of representing many communities while also telling the story of the CID. The Wing strives to be as inclusive as possible but nonetheless receives occasional criticism from those who feel underrepresented or even misrepresented. In recent years, the Museum launched an internal initiative to build intentional relationships with Pasifika and Native Hawaiian communities to go "beyond the logic of contribution and [engage] more directly in relation with people," (Morse, 2021, p. 78). While I am not in a position to evaluate the Museum's success (as I am not from Pasifika or Hawaiian communities), the intentionality and reciprocity exhibited by the Wing is a step in the right direction.

When asked about their relationship to the Wing, one CID community organizer explained, "This is not a space for me... I've gone to the Wing for some exhibits here and there, but I've never felt like it was a place that wanted to tell the story of people I care about... it feels so distant to me," (Interview 3, interview with the author, March 2023). Though the Museum often has exhibits on contemporary issues, many stories of marginalized peoples are continually left out, such as experiences from poor, queer, undocumented, or sex-working people. The Wing's New Dialogues Initiative gallery space is dedicated to contemporary discussions, most recently public health, environmental justice, and displacement from public infrastructure projects. This contemporary lens is not found consistently throughout the Museum as a community member challenged, "[the Museum] falls into this safe narration of racial grievances because it's something in the past," they summarized, "It's so much easier to talk about disenfranchisement from more than a hundred years ago rather than what's currently happening," (Interview 3, interview with the author, March 2023).

Nobody Lives Here, the current exhibit in the New Dialogues Initiative gallery interrogates the history of racist policies and forced displacement from the Interstate-5 construction that split the neighborhood in half while destroying homes and businesses. The

exhibit presents the history alongside current issues such as another infrastructure project and homelessness. Though the exhibit provides an obvious critique on gentrification and displacement, one community member who was involved in the CAC process for this exhibit expressed the desire for an exhibit to take a firmer stance on speculative development. "The future of the CID is already here," they said, "We can literally map out a future state because we have all the permit requests; we know all the development that's coming in. What would it look like for us to create an exhibit of the future state and showcasing that to the people? If we don't do anything in this moment, *this* is our future state. And that's a really cruel and harsh reality," (Interview 1, interview with the author, March 2023).

Using another example, as part of the Historic Hotel Tour, visitors walk through an empty SRO (Single Room Occupancy) hotel and learn how migrant laborers lived in these difficult conditions. The tour doesn't connect this history to the current experiences of people still living in SROs in the neighborhood. Rather than discuss contemporary issues of poverty among elderly and migrant laborers today, the image of struggle is left in the past. I see this as an unintentional commitment to the Model Minority Myth, crafting the idea that Asian Americans struggled upon arrival in the past and have since climbed the socioeconomic ladder. Though the Museum verbally denounces the Model Minority Myth, it must analyze internal biases that unknowingly perpetuate it.

Small tweaks in the Wing's content and delivery could drastically improve the relevance of our histories. The Museum is not an advocacy institution, but storytelling could lead to destigmatization for our most marginalized community members. Importantly, representation is not the end-goal but rather tangible improvements for these communities, such as the decriminalization of sex work and poverty. Institutional power will be discussed shortly.

Another community organizer addressed the important role the Museum could play to provide context and precedent for seemingly 'radical' organizing. The Wing could be "priming people in the wider community to better receive some of those conversations so that [community organizers] have to do less political education. I feel like we have to spend so much time dragging people along and trying to make people understand these are the root causes," (Interview 4, interview with the author, March 2023). Specifically anti-gentrification organizing would be aided by the Museum providing political education and the historical context of redlining, racial restrictive covenants, and other racist housing policy. While the Wing has had exhibits on these topics in

the past, how can they become a more permanent and prominent story within the Museum's narrative? As "an active, visible player in civic life, a safe haven, and a trusted incubator of change," the Wing has more access and ability to change the hearts and minds of a wider audience than grassroots organizers do (Hirzy, 2002, p. 9).

Investing in Staff

A past staff member shares, "the Wing has not taken the racial and social equity conversations seriously and invested in training in their staff and in their board," (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023). Now that the Wing is entering a growth period, in which new positions are opening and new initiatives are beginning, will the Wing grow past this? In the last year, the Museum has launched Ohana Weeks, an initiative aimed to provide professional development and break down silos amongst staff. While these dedicated times of internal work are a great step in the right direction, there's opportunity for building group analysis and values. One community organizer urged the Museum to "be really intentional about investing in the training of staff and developing a political awareness and a political alignment around some values that's rooted in a political education that is anti-racist for the culture of the organization," they continued, "And it needs to go all the way up to the board," (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023). As Caitlin-Legutko and Taylor write in *The Inclusive Museum Leader*, museums must codify practices of equity and inclusion to "ensure a more lasting legacy for these values," (Catlin-Legutko, 2021, p. 195).

Community members with relationships with past and present Wing employees have shared concerns of their loved ones "being overworked and underpaid," (Interview 8, interview with the author, March 2023). Recently, the Wing has undergone a staff compensation study, resulting in pay increases across the institution. As Catlin-Legutko writes of museums, "we need to all aim for compensating the lowest-paid staff with a minimum living wage, tied to the cost of living, rather than paying minimum wage," (2021, p. 196). Hopefully these equitable practices are not one-time occurrences but rather a shift in institutional practice that prioritizes the well-being of staff.

Additionally, how can the Museum ensure that relationships between the Museum and community members do not sit with individual employees? One community member who has worked with the Wing

over the years reflected, “I think it's also unfair to have, like their individual staff, who are also, perhaps at these lower compensated levels, to have to carry the burden of that social capital, and bringing that in as an asset to help legitimize an institution,” (Interview 9, interview with the author, March 2023). How can staff, who are community members themselves, “be better resourced and compensated,” from the Museum benefiting from their social networks (Interview 3, interview with the author, March 2023)? One community member suggested a position “dedicated to community relations or outreach,” (Interview 7, interview with the author, March 2023).

Space Use

> More than venues for exhibitions and programs, museums should be more valued places at the heart of community life. Museums should explore more options for making themselves multidimensional gathering places where community comes alive. (Hirzy, 2002, p. 11)

A recurring point made by community members interviewed for this article was the space use of the Museum. Different spaces are available for rent at the Wing; specifically, the Community Hall is popular for corporate and community events. Though there are non-profit rates, rental prices are still far out of reach for volunteer-run grassroot groups who are working on a shoestring budget. One organizer stated, “It's such a beautiful, gorgeous big space that we don't have access to,” (Interview 1, interview with the author, March 2023). Named the Community Hall, it is ironic that the community cannot afford to hold space. Multiple organizers suggested a free or pay-what-you-can for neighborhood grassroots. With no free indoor public space in the neighborhood, the Wing has an opportunity to open its doors for grassroot groups to host workshops, trainings, and other community events.

Neighborhood Mutual Aid

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many museums found ways to support their community through non-traditional routes. *TrendsWatch: Museums as Community Infrastructure*, published in 2022 by the

American Alliance of Museums, identified ways museums can show up for their communities in times of crisis. During the member preview exhibit opening of the *Nobody Lives Here*, the Museum gave platform to a food bank and two mutual aid groups in the neighborhood, encouraging attendees to donate. But what does a sustained relationship with these groups look like for the Museum? One community member suggested water and food distribution, or trash pick-up during neighborhood tours (Y. Yu, interview with the author, March 2023). Beyond passivity, visitors can be actively engaged in the physical community through simple action.

Though lockdown is over, the neighborhood remembers the in/action of local institutions. Grocery delivery, PPE drives, and mural painting initiatives emerged from service nonprofits and community members. Across multiple interviews for this article, community members expressed frustration towards the Wing for their lack of neighborhood aid. One community member reflects:

> It didn't open its doors during the fucking pandemic for COVID relief. That was a request of staff. 'Can we do mutual aid? Can we use our great hall for mutual aid distribution and for grocery pickup?' No, no, no. We're too worried. We don't have the systems in place to keep people safe'. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We were space! We were safe space. (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023)

As the Museum and neighborhood navigate through the ongoing pandemic and a plethora of other forces creating hardship in the CID, the Wing can explore what sustained mutual aid from the Museum looks like. The Museum has existing relationships with neighborhood service providers and mutual aid groups they can strengthen and commit to supporting.

Power/Voice

> The Museum then defaults into neoliberal status quo business-as-usual white politics that often reinforce white supremacy. It's like if you're not actively resisting this system, then the silence fills a void, and the void is filled by replicating harmful practices. (C. Shimizu, interview with the author, March 2023)

Above all, the results of this research show that museums, such as the Wing, could and should make a bigger impact in their communities by using their institutional power/voice. The Wing seems to have some awareness of their impact, one worker explains:

> We're often invited to the table…Our voice, our opinion, weighs heavily — so it's a lot of responsibility as well. As an organization, people always want us to sign on to things, and having our name on a letter… means a lot. (J. Rubenacker, interview with the author, March 2023)

While signing on to letters is an obvious sign of support, there are other ways in which the Museum chooses to wield its power.

In 2022, the Wing received a $1 million grant from Bank of America for "the organization's work to enrich the residential and business communities" in the CID (Wing Luke Museum, 2022a). Specifically, these funds will support "capital building renovations, safety upgrades, and technology platform enhancements at the Museum," and one can question how those specifically enrich the neighborhood residents and businesses[10]. Additionally, the Museum was awarded $20k from NEO Philanthropy's Rapid Assistance Safety Initiative to increase safety in and around the Museum. Among other things, the Wing used some of these funds to install gates in front of exterior doorways where unhoused neighbors slept and relieved themselves. This use of hostile architecture is indicative of the neighborhood's disdain of houseless neighbors. While it is understandable that the Wing and other businesses and residents do not want feces or fires in their doorways, what actions are they taking to ensure public restrooms, safe consumption sites, and shelter in the neighborhood? A doorway to sleep in is safer for unhoused folks than on the street, open to the elements. The Museum is part of a neighborhood-wide safety committee that is sympathetic to houseless folks but actively hostile towards them. While safety is a fraught topic in the CID, weaponizing safety concerns is a tactic of gentrification employed by developers and pro-police community members (N. Wallace, interview with the author, March 2023). As Pottie-Sherman writes, "If Chinatown's streets are clean and frequented by upper-middle class consumers, the risk to potential developers and investors is minimized," (2013, p. 185). In the last few years, community organizers including CID Coalition,

[10] I don't mean to say the Museum should not have gotten this grant, rather that it is a bit disingenuous to say that this money enriches the CID. It does, to a degree. This money would not have gone to direct services, so the Wing is the best way to filter money into the neighborhood in this case. This point is to critique the nature of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex generally.

Decriminalize CID, Eggrolls mutual aid in partnership with Chu Minh Tofu, Drug Use Solidarity Team (DUST), Sông2Sea, and Massage Parlor Outreach Project (MPOP) have hosted workshops to call in community members and community elite to problematize conversations around safety. Coming to these discussions with a people-over-profit mentality, community organizers are working to address safety for all, not just for housed community members. Clearly, these perspectives are lacking in the mainstream CID safety narrative; the Wing could work with community organizers and service providers to better educate staff and board on radical safety. As stated earlier in interviews with community members, the Wing has work to do at the institutional level.

> [The CID] wants to always brush the unsightliness of poverty out of the way, or sweep it away—which the Museum has supported sweeps. And that is to make the neighborhood more palatable to their white patrons. (C. Shimizu, interview with the author, March 2023)

Concerned for the safety of housed residents, community non-profits wrote a letter to the City calling for the removal of unhoused residents (aka sweeps) in the early months of the pandemic, despite the CDC's guidance that "cities should not remove encampments during the COVID-19 pandemic unless every person is offered 'individual housing,'" (Barnett, 2020). In May 2020, the Wing signed the letter urging "the immediate closure of the unregulated homeless camp," and halting city plans for a sanitation station (InterIm CDA, 2020). Meanwhile, CID Coalition gathered nearly 3,000 signatures on their "Stop The Sweeps" petition, citing the need for sanitation, shelter, services, and stable housing. Despite the official suspension of encampment removal in Seattle, the CID continued to experience violent sweeps, legitimized through the institutional power of neighborhood non-profits. One community member critiqued, "I also think that the Museum, regardless of whether or not it says it's not politicized, *it is*. And it would choose when and how to use its political voice as an institution. Maybe it didn't have self-awareness of that. *Calling for sweeps is a political decision*," (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023). When the Wing and other nonprofits say they are against displacement, it's clear they don't consider forced removal of houseless individuals as displacement. Community organizers Alex Chaung and Johnny Mao remind us that "the safety of unhoused people should not be seen as conflicting with the safety of housed residents and business owners," (2023). Despite the immense need for services in the CID, a proposal for expanding a shelter was shot down by community members and

elites in 2022. The Wing did not put out a public statement on the matter and I am unaware of any letters the Museum may have signed regarding the shelter.

The Museum is located one block from the I-5 overpass, a common location for houseless encampments. Mentioned in the *Nobody Lives Here* exhibit, the Museum once again expressed sympathy towards houseless neighbors and appreciation for community organizers like DUST and Eggrolls for providing aid. Beyond representation in content, the Wing has partnered with Eggrolls and local historians on an oral history project to amplify voices of houseless neighbors. This partnership is an example of supporting grassroots through institutional power: Eggrolls maintain creative control while the Wing helps with grant-funding and will hold the stories in their oral history collection. The Wing's complicated relationship with homelessness exemplifies their gentrification consciousness through knowing/not knowing (Sze, 2010, p. 524). Community partnerships like these are necessary for the Museum to be accountable to community needs. While this project does not erase harmful prior exercises of power, I hope it is a turning point for the Museum to invest their resources and voice to support the most marginalized of the CID community.

Figure 4

The Shape of Home (2023) by Luna Rivera

Sound Transit published a Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS) that introduced two main locations for new Link Light Rail stations in the CID neighborhood in early 2022. The 5th Ave options caused immediate uproar in the community due to the location in the historic core of the neighborhood. In response to the devastation 5th Ave would bring, a handful of community members mobilized a pro-4th Ave campaign, despite displacement and disruption guaranteed with 4th Ave's location. Few, if any, neighborhood organizations besides CID Coalition publicly rejected both stations due to the construction impacts, immediate and future displacement, and gentrification.

In April 2022, CID Coalition hosted a public information and listening session in the Wing's Community Hall. I secured the space free of cost to the Coalition by planning an event for the Museum in the Community Hall earlier in the day and personally setting up/breaking down. I am grateful for the Museum for their generosity but am also aware my insider access was likely the factor that led to this space use. Recognizing this was personally a heavy lift for me, I wonder what it would have been like had the Museum taken up the role of convener instead of leaving it up to community members. Would the

conservative contingent of pro-4th Ave community members have had so much power if a trusted source like the Wing publicly expressed their concerns and dispelled disinformation? Had the Wing been more vocal about Sound Transit sooner, I suspect the community would not have become so polarized, though to place blame squarely on the Museum loses sight of Sound Transit's racism.

The Museum's DEIS comment was a thorough analysis of the unaddressed concerns of the community, calling for further study. In the statement, the Museum says,

> Due to the overwhelming cumulative impacts and threats to the neighborhood cohesion, built up over 150 years and amplified by the WSBLE Project, furthering and cascading historical, institutional racism, we are concluding our response with a call for exploration of options for refinements to the proposed alternatives beyond what typically occurs from a DEIS to Final EIS that will not result in displacement within the CID. (Wing Luke Museum, 2022b).

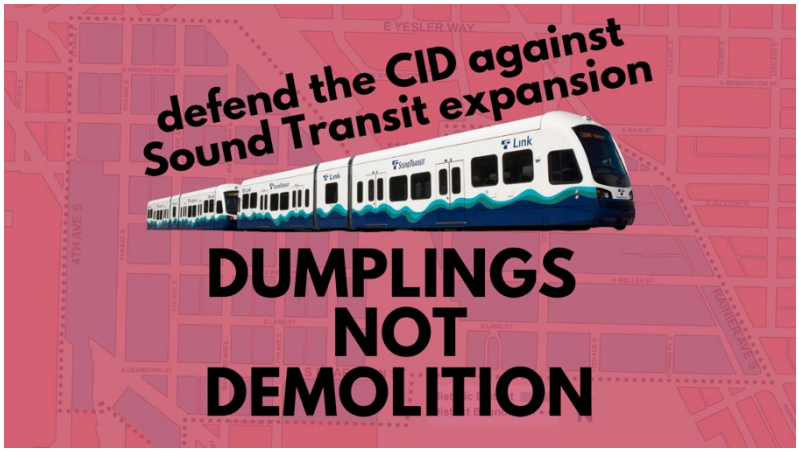
The Wing described the 5th Ave alternative 'unacceptable,' but did not criticize 4th Ave.

One year after the initial public comment period, the conversation shifted from 4th vs 5th to 4th vs North/South. This North/South alternative came out of community outreach and seeks to provide connectivity to the neighborhood without forcing the CID through a decade of construction impacts (as 4th would require). A coalition of community leaders campaigned for North/South, inviting all to sign onto a letter expressing support for North/South. Despite 300 signatures from small businesses, property owners, non-profits, and community members, the Wing declined to sign. Wing employees, board members, and other museum stakeholders signed on as individuals, but the Wing withheld support. The Museum's position reiterated the need for further research and called for "bold investment" in the neighborhood. One community organizer responded to the Wing's lukewarm position, "I wish there was a little bit more risk taking it. And again, within reason, I understand there are constraints but I, yeah, I do wish that leadership there would be more willing to push," (Interview 4, interview with the author, March 2023). Partnering with the most vocal pro-4th Ave group and historic preservation organizations, the Wing held a press conference in May 2023 to announce the CID as one of the most endangered historic places in the country (Strabuk, 2023). Intended as an advocacy tool, this

designation does not provide tangible protections regarding Sound Transit or speculative development. While neighborhood unity is important, the Museum's neutrality on the 4th Ave vs North/South debate is questionable based on this new coalition.

Figure 5

Dumplings Not Demolitions (2022) by Meilani Mandery



While I am personally disappointed in the Wing's decisions around sweeps and Sound Transit, the larger issue is the lack of cohesive political framework within the organization. Recognizing "disaster gentrification, increased racially motivated hate crimes, unjust community development projects, and systemic neglect as primary culprits," the Museum seems to understand the structural issues the neighborhood faces (Strabuk, 2023). Yet, I do not see these values consistently expressed in individual Museum actions. One community leader explains, "They don't need to issue a word on everything, but they need to have a foundation of values, anti-racist values that they're basing their assessments off of. And they don't have that assessment," (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023). This is supported in *Museum as a Space of Social Care*, "They do not act because the conditions required for action to succeed are not in place," (Ahmed, 2012, p. 114–121; as cited in Morse, 2021, p. 82). The community organizer continued:

> That's where I feel like they talk about the Museum's role versus advocacy role. They're like, 'we need to have a diversity of tactics for social change.' In a diversity of tactics, there's always movement capture; the tactic that

> is the most radical never wins. And even when there's a social crack and there's an opportunity to throw down and leverage revolutionary power in the streets, what did the Museum do?
>
> It didn't, didn't throw down around Defund [Seattle Police Department]. Nope… So it's like, the Museum not having a more radicalized politic in place for when those moments happen always will lead it to defer to status quo. And if you defer to status quo, then the process of movement capture kicks in where you're actually working against the revolutionary change when the opportunity arises. (Interview 5, interview with the author, March 2023)

The Museum acknowledges the power it wields and has a comprehensive DEI values statement. Yet, community organizers continue to critique the perceived lack of action. The Wing has a long-range vision, and unfortunately for community organizers responding to immediate needs, the Museum's tactics uphold the status quo in the meantime. While this article cannot cover every involvement of the Wing, the repeated criticisms regarding when and how the Museum uses its institutional voice was the most consistent thread across interviews.

Placekeeping and Community Arts

We've previously discussed the settler colonial practice of placemaking and the weaponization of art to further gentrify neighborhoods. Described "as the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there," placekeeping, on the other hand, focuses on communal memory and self-determination (Creative Placemaking, Placekeeping, and Cultural Strategies to Resist Displacement, n.d.) As Rubenacker puts it, "it's really prioritizing the needs of the community and preserving the cultural memory of that space in a way that resonates with those residents," (interview with the author, March 2023). In public art and event projects, the Wing consults their creative placekeeping/making manifesto:

> Recognize the historic cultural assets of a neighborhood as a foundation, rather than injecting arts as a foreign body or disconnected energy; prioritize ongoing

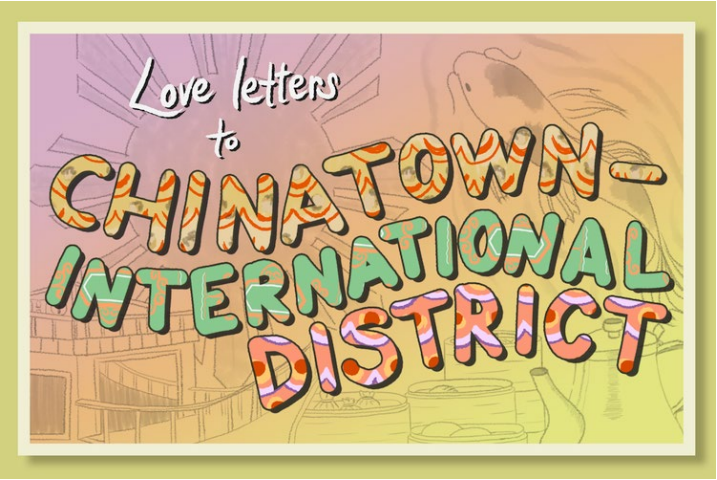
> investment and personal participation in community-directed neighborhood activities, instead of an inward or empire-building focus; building long-term relationships with communities on all their issues, rather than one-shot interests in producing a single arts event or project. (Wing Luke Museum, n.d.-d)

The Museum works closely with many local artists, many of whom are emerging artists. Local artist Monyee Chau reflects, "The Wing was the first place that ever gave me a paid opportunity to do an artist talk… The Wing has really supported me in my career," (M. Chau, interview with the author, March 2023). When asked what makes an artist part of the community, Chau identified community accountability as a main signifier, "Artists and cultural workers are on the ground; we're having those direct relationships with people," (interview with the author, March 2023).

The Wing thoughtfully considers public facing gallery windows in Canton Alley, "What messages are we sending back out into the community?" (J. Rubenacker, interview with the author, March 2023). The Canton Alley windows have been home to #CIDLoveLetters, the Wing's local take on Wing on Wo's Love Letters to Chinatown project. #CIDLoveLetters is an open call, multimedia project that invites community members to "share their thoughts, feelings, and dreams," (Wing Luke Museum, n.d.-a). Additionally, YouthCAN has exhibited artwork in the Canton Alley galleries. Committed to placekeeping, the Museum has a distinct opportunity to help the community "distinguish and understand what does it mean to preserve and engage in the current conditions today" (Interview 3, interview with the author, March 2023) with the caveat that the Museum must continue internal work on gentrification.

Figure 6

Love Letters (2020) by Ellison Shieh



As we sit at this intersection of museums, gentrification, and Chinatown, we begin to understand how to hold multiple truths: the Wing aids gentrification and the Wing works against it simultaneously. "Chinatowns are alive with contradictions," Naram reflects (2017, p. 31). This research has found that museum content *can* be more radical while institutional structure reproduces harm the content critiques. From conversations with both Wing employees and community organizers, it's clear that there is a desire from all for the Wing to work towards a more just future for the CID. "A lot of times the conversation boils down to 'you have two choices: You can either let Chinatown degrade into this old, dirty, poor, whatever, or you can have this luxury development that's going to take us into the future,'" one organizer shares, "I feel like there is a third option there...I want us to just have more imagination. I want us to be able to think bigger," (Interview 4, interview with the author, March 2023). The Wing has always had a "1+1=3" mentality (C. Chinn, interview with the author, March 2023). So what can more imagination look like for the Museum?

Recommendations

Implement a free or pay-what-you-can model for space rentals for grassroots groups

Though museums cannot be extracted from capitalism, the Wing could resist the commodification of their own space (Estelita Godoy & Borges Luna, 2018). Additionally, reducing barriers to access for grassroots

groups and the communities they serve would be an easy way to support progressive change in the neighborhood.

Create an anti-racist set of values for decision-making

Resisting gentrification requires the rejection of white supremacy, imperialism, and racial capitalism. As one community member said, the Museum does not need to have a policy on every single issue but must develop a foundation of values so responding to issues is grounded in anti-racism (Interview 4, interview with the author, March 2023). Reevaluate existing policies through the anti-racist, feminist, anti-capitalist lens to understand why they've failed to stop the reproduction of harm.

Follow the leadership of grassroots groups and lend power and support when called upon

Founded in the Wing's own model for the CAC exhibit process, what would it look like for the Museum to "willingly relinquish control" (Wing Luke Museum, n.d.-c)? Berbary and Burns criticize redistributions of power that "do not fully commit to reimaginings of power that lead to actual distribution versus simple inclusive representation," (2021, p. 651). It is not enough to invite community members to the table; the Wing is positioned to lend power to anti-gentrification organizers in neighborhood settings lacking political analysis. Grassroot groups need co-conspirators, but allyship would be a helpful step in the right direction. Aligning the institution with leftist grassroots groups might be politically risky but it is the only way for the Wing to authentically fulfill its mission of advancing racial and social equity.

Rather than a to do list, this article is intended to be an invitation to the Wing. Change at the Museum has been confined to the institutional structure agreed up by decades of museum and nonprofit leadership (Y. Yu, interview with the author, March 2023). As one community organizer asked, "What conversations do they need to have in order to get to work?" (Interview 1, interview with the author, March 2023). I offer this article to begin the conversation of institutional change to ease the impact of gentrification in the CID. While the Wing does not have an obligation to do everything, they do have a responsibility to the neighborhood as a large player in the CID ecosystem. Moving forward, may the Museum carry the wisdom from Rabbi Tarfon, "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it," (Kulp, n.d.).

While the vast majority of museums are further behind the Wing in terms of community relationships, boundary-pushing content, and gentrification consciousness, it is my hope that this analysis has provided some insight to ways in which the field at large can be more accountable to their communities. Sze cautions, "the institutional ambivalences and strategic deployment of history and ethnicity inherent to [accommodating dominant policy frameworks and ideologies] may actually help neoliberalism in the present to unfold and/or unravel in the future," (2010, p. 526). As the field acknowledges the non-neutrality of museums, how will we wield our power?

Ahmed differentiates between "committing to" and "being committed" (Morse, 2021, p. 81). Are museums pledging commitment to progressive change or are they *bound* in that commitment? It is clear from decades of care and attention that the Wing Luke Museum is bound in its commitment to the neighborhood; I challenge the Museum to develop a deeper analysis based on their existing values and community expertise to fully understand the role they can play in welcoming or resisting gentrification of the CID.

About the Author

Meilani Mandery 周秀明 (she/her) is a young queer artist located in Seattle's Chinatown-International District. Interested in the repoliticization of Asian American, Mandery is a community organizer and arts educator.

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Gung Gung who dreamed of attending the University of Washington: we did it!

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