

Is there a future for CHINATOWN?



MAXINE MA

"My whole Chinese ancestry cries out in protest"

It's Chinatown, MY Chinatown

By MAXINE MA

So they want to tear down Chinatown. My whole Chinese ancestry—all the tradition of lotus blossoms, temple gongs, ancient cymbals and tiny women with tiny feet—cries out in protest. I was born in Toronto, am 5'5", and wear size 8 shoes. My feet are tormented daily, when I squeeze them into the fashionable sharp-toed shoes, but my shoe size does not show any sign of diminishing. I teach Grade 1 at Dundas Public school in Toronto and I sing "God Save the Queen" every morning in class. In short, my outlook on life sounds very Occidental, but it doesn't diminish my liking for Chinatown.

But few live there

After all relatively few of Metropolitan Toronto's 9,000 Chinese live in Chinatown, which germinated over 65 years ago, and still provides Toronto and its tourists with tradition, Oriental mysteries, Chinese food and a look at a smattering of native Chinese. Rumors of expropriation threaten all that Chinatown means. What else can provide such diverse benefits? Chinatown is ready to redevelop into a multi-million dollar attraction in the heart of the city. Surely the city will not deprive itself of such a landmark. The 1961 census shows only 15,155 Chinese out of a population of 6,236,092 in Ontario. In the whole of Canada there are 58,197 Chinese in a population of 18,238,247. What has it been like being Chinese where the number of these people is still limited? For one thing you have more chance to be distinctive.

The only one

I was the only Chinese girl attending Eglinton Public School and the only one with black hair and almond eyes. If I were an entertainer, wishing to join a TV group, I have been told that this distinctive appearance is a hindrance to the blending desired in a small group. It is also a drawback for would-be actors. Not many presentations require Orientals. My big acting opportunity came in "Teahouse of the August Moon" at the Red Barn Theatre. Chances for modelling jobs are improving. A Chinese model was used at the Canadian National Exhibition this year. A glance through current fashion magazines shows the occasional Oriental model. My appearance is just right for the Hawaiian act which I do with my sister at dances and social clubs. Also, there are the times when an Oriental girl is needed for a special pageant, for hosting a "Mandarin Party", or a "Hawaiian Night." Here, I have priority over blue-eyed blondes. My mastery of German, French and Italian is more fluent than my Chinese, and I use them just as rarely. When I taught English classes to New Canadians it was fun to see the reaction when I used these languages. Most of the Toronto Chinese of my generation have now blended into the Canadian way of life. They shop away from Chinatown, speak English as their first language, mix socially with Caucasian friends, and eat Canadian food.

Exposed to customs

Those who were raised in Chinatown, will perhaps have been more exposed to the Chinese customs and language than the few who were not. Their elders have encouraged them to marry one of their "own kind", to preserve their language and customs. The number of professional Chinese in Toronto is constantly increasing. The Teachers' Directory for Metropolitan Toronto lists at least 25 Chinese names. At least 18 Chinese doctors' names are listed in Toronto directories. Dentists, nurses, scientists, engineers, statisticians, accountants, optometrists, architects, ministers, economists, lawyers and musicians of Chinese origin are readily available. To exemplify this we could look at one Toronto Chinese family. One girl is an outstanding musician with three degrees—Mus. Bac., LRSM and ARCT. Her sister is a singer. A brother is studying for his Fellowship of Surgery. His wife is also a doctor. Another brother is a well known architect. Another member of the family is a chemical engineer. As education and economic status improved, many of the Chinese uprooted themselves from Chinatown. Their Chinese associations become fewer. Clubs such as the Canadian Chinese Association and the bowling club draw some Chinese together, but many break away. The trend seems unlikely to continue, however. Chinatown's location has been traditional. Chinatown wants to stay. Why not let it decide for itself?

By GERRY BARKER
Star Staff Writer
Chinatown is fighting for its life. Long bedevilled by threats of expropriation and dislocation to another part of the city, it was slung into action by recent statements of Alderman George Ben that Chinatown is "an eyesore" and should be shifted six blocks west.

FORM COMMITTEE

Fifteen Chinese property owners formed a committee under the leadership of Harry Lem, a partner in the Lichee Gardens restaurant.

The group owns 60 per cent of all property in Chinatown—a "T"-shaped area running north from the new city hall on Elizabeth St. and spreading along Dundas St. between Bay St. and University Ave.

The committee sent letters to Mayor Philip Givens and Board of Control members requesting a commitment from the city that no action be taken to alter Chinatown until the group submits its proposal to council.

Just what this proposal will entail is being kept secret.

But it likely will request that Chinatown remain where it is and that its overhaul be handled privately by the Chinese.

Nestled like an unwanted child at the back door of the new \$30 million city hall, Chinatown consists of dreary parking lots, social clubs, gift shops, restaurants, grocery and butcher stores and creaky-staired tenements.

Only 1,500 Chinese live in the area, but it is the communal focal point for all Metro's 9,000 Chinese. It's where they shop, meet and talk, marry, seek jobs, gamble, gossip and educate their children in the traditional tongue.

It's where you find the bustle and hubbub of commerce and daily life—Chinese style: Clutches of young men



HARD WORK is done by Betty Wong, 6, on her lesson of printing difficult Chinese characters. But will her future be in expropriation-menaced Chinatown?

stand patiently every day at 4 p.m., waiting for the squadrons of small cars that take them to their jobs in outlying restaurants.

Bean sprouts, the staple base of most Chinese dishes enjoyed by westerners, grow in stone crocks in the dank basement of a Dundas St. store.

USING THEIR NOODLES

Noodles, all shapes and sizes stream out of rolling machines in a Grange Ave. plant.

Chic Chinese women step into grocery stores scattered along Dundas St. to poke melon, scrutinize roasted ducks and haggle over the current price of a shark's fin.

Daily, in the Chinese public school on Beverley St., B. F. Wong, full-time restaurant operator and part-time principal, runs five classes with a firm hand to ensure perpetuation of Chinese history and language.

Young men gaze at the Chinese script posted in store windows advertising for help in the scores of Chinese restaurants dotting the Metro area.

On a cold Sunday night in a steaming restaurant, Jack Chong shyly leans over and kisses his new bride, Lee Yee Hing, on the cheek as the wedding feast guests munch through a nine-course banquet—the figure nine linked in tradition as a way of wishing

the new couple everlasting success and happiness.

As an insight to the thrifty nature of the Chinese, the guests are supplied take-out cartons for the leftovers.

The Chinese community keeps largely to itself.

DUE TO UNCERTAINTY

The clans or families—Lem, Wong, Lee, Chen and Loong Kong Association—have their own social clubs and all are served by the Chinese Community Centre on Hagerman St.



TRADITION IN CHINATOWN: Matchmaker Paul Chong speaks at a wedding feast while bride Lee Yee Hing and new husband Jack Chong listen. It took

The centre spawned the redevelopment committee.

"Chinatown's ugliness is due to the uncertainty of what's going to happen," Mrs. Jean Lumb, committee member and partner in the Kwongchow Tavern, said.

"Merchants don't want to invest in refurbishing businesses if they are going to be torn down. Remember, 75 per cent of Chinatown was expropriated over a 10-year period to make way for the new city hall—this made businessmen wary."

Mrs. Lumb said the committee is striving for city assurances that businessmen can retain their property to all redevelopment of Chinatown.

NO PERMITS

"We want to build a Chinatown that will not only attract tourists, but the Chinese as well," Mrs. Lumb said. "The only way Chinatown can be kept alive is with Chinese people." Ray Lee, operator of the

two years for Paul to bring Miss Hing to Canada from Hong Kong where she taught school. Toronto's Chinatown is where Chinese meet socially, seek jobs, wed.

Nanking Tavern and a member of the committee, disagrees China-town is an eyesore—with a qualification.

"Nothing has been done in the past few years because the city has not issued building permits for major repairs or renovations," Mr. Lee said.

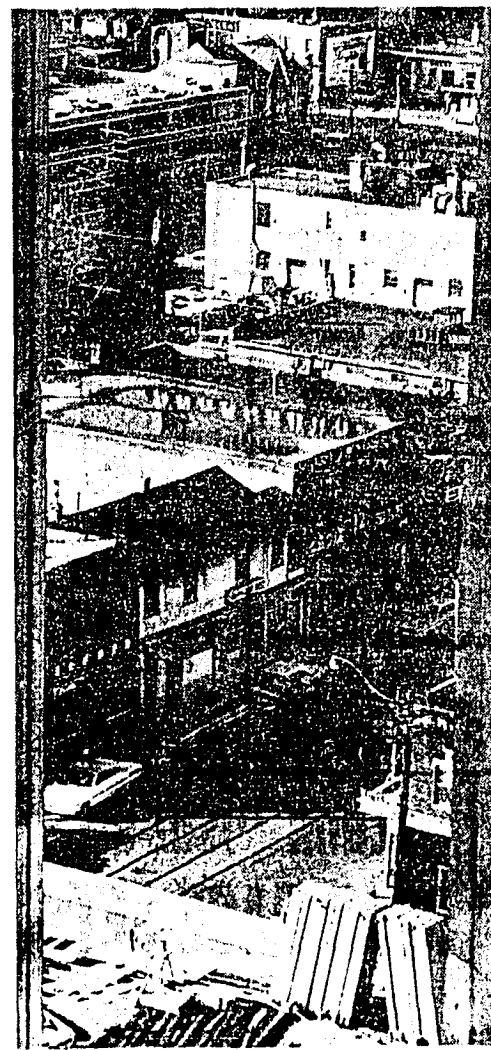
He added the city has been accumulating funds since 1950 to expropriate Elizabeth St. properties to permit possible extension of the new city hall north to Dundas St.

Some Chinese greet community redevelopment plans with skepticism.

Ken Lee, a noodle manufacturer on Grange Ave., feels it will be impossible for the committee to redevelop the area itself.

"It will have to get help from the federal and provincial governments," he said.

Mrs. Lumb argued: "We are aware of the problems we face in redevelopment . . . but we have to start somewhere."



DREARY CHINATOWN, at the back of the new city hall, consists of parking lots, social clubs, gift shops, restaurants, grocery stores and rickety tenements.



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