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Project Proposal: Peter and Ana Lowens Special Collections Fellowship
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Artefacts of Chinese Canadian Diasporic Pasts, Presents & Futures: An Art Project

Project Context

As a mixed-race daughter of Chinese immigrants, I have experienced firsthand the generational silence that permeates the Chinese Canadian diaspora on issues like discrimination, displacement, and exclusion. Drawing on materials from the UVic Chinese Canadian collection, together with contemporary materials exploring the ongoing surge of exclusions and hate against the Chinese Canadian diaspora, I propose to create an exhibit that visualizes the continuities and disjunctions between archived Chinese Canadian history and contemporary Chinese Canadian experiences. Fiona Lam and Cathy Park Hong, among others, have noted the link between the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 and ongoing anti-Chinese racism,¹ and the archives of the Exclusion Act have been meticulously compiled by the Chinese Canadian Museum in Vancouver.² Within this broader ongoing dialogue, I aim to provoke questions surrounding the curation of material diasporic histories: what gets saved, and what gets excluded? What is found in subtext? How does an archive labelled “Chinese Canadian” contribute to malleable views of the diasporic present, and how do we frame the present in the context of its paper trail? Such questions are pertinent to the diaspora and to archival studies in general.

Methodology

My research will have three main stages: a survey of the archive, a collation of materials, and an artistic output. Spending time with the Chinese Canadian archive will enable me to

¹ See Hong’s *Minor Feelings* (2020) and Lam’s essay “Bad Days” (*The Fiddlehead*, no. 292, 2022).

² For information on the CCM’s ongoing archival exhibit, “The Paper Trail to the 1923 Exclusion Act,” see: <https://www.chinesecanadianmuseum.ca/exhibitions/paper-trail-1923-chinese-exclusion-act>.

broadly conceptualize its contents and begin to pull items for comparative analysis against contemporary artefacts and literature. Collating these materials across time will create a “map” through which I will identify the continuities and gaps that will form the foundation of my artistic project. One part of my methodology will consist of comparative material analysis; the other part will be the creation of an art project that will combine archival images and text, contemporary images and text, and my own original creations in response to both.

Outcomes & Significance

My work on Dr. Jenstad’s *The Map of Early Modern London*, my learning in Dr. Boyarin’s *In the Archives* capstone (ENSH 483), and my ongoing exploration of my own family archives have shown me the power of archives to combat silence and raise critical perspectives for the future. Using the UVic Chinese Canadian collection as a basis, I intend to build an accessible and imaginative material collage connecting items to each other across time, while presenting my analyses artistically via visual and prose “unessay” creations. The project will fit into a display case or table, and will prompt viewers to hold their own present-day experiences in, or views of, the Chinese Canadian diaspora against the material histories that inform those experiences or views. A Lowens Fellowship would enable me to explore an archive that is as pertinent to Canadian society today as it is to my personal life, and to mobilize my findings meaningfully. As a fourth-year Honours English student and an MLIS aspirant, I’m excited at the prospect of deepening my experience with archival research. I believe this project has the potential to be deeply impactful, and I would love to be able to realize it with the support of UVic Libraries.