

Gladys Nipp and Stephen Mah Family Award 2022 Winner
Research Proposal by Xue Ma, Faculty of Social Sciences

It was a moment of surprise when I found out about the digital archive of the Chinese-Canadian Collection at UVic's Library. Having long been interested in the ethnographic portraits of ethnic restaurant businesses through media methods such as documentary and photography, I find the digital archive a dispensable collection of Chinese immigrants' life in Victoria, which speaks to my research interests in the livelihood history of Chinese immigrants in larger geographic regions of Canada and North America. My proposed research activity is an ethnographic documentary that portrays a small selection of Chinese restaurants in Victoria that are owned by Chinese-Canadian immigrants. In documenting their present livelihoods while comparing with past memories, this documentary seeks to provide an alternative and accessible way of telling the histories, narratives, and sentiments of the workers and owners who navigated North American society through the food that is connected to their ethnic identity. Using ethnographic filming as a way to tell the stories of immigrants is a way to bring academic knowledge closer to the public. I'm a firm believer of making knowledge accessible to all, especially the kind of knowledge that tells histories and stories of people that are historically and systematically marginalized in a society.

Opening restaurants is often a way for immigrants to make a living upon arrival to the new society, to support families. Restaurant business has long been argued to be a marker for immigrants to maintain their identity, or creating a sense of belonging in the host societies. UVic Library's digital archive of *Chinatown's Newsletter* (since 1994) provides the historical contexts of the Chinese ethnic restaurant businesses in Victoria, particularly with the advertisement sections in each issue of the Newsletter that allows me to trace the ethnic restaurant networks. In addition, photographs and paintings of these restaurants from *Victoria's Chinatown online collection* will be part of the visual material presented to the restaurant owners for them to share

their narratives of the past memories and Chinatown's food stories. The collection of *Mathew Ko Colour Films: Victoria's Chinatown and Region*, particularly the "Rice Bowl Festival with lion dance. Victoria Chinese Public School (1939)" is another precious visual artifact that enriches the understanding about food and ethnicity: food is not only a marker of ethnicity, it is also a powerful tool for ethnic groups to achieve political ends.

With the support from this unique collection of historical artifacts on Chinese-Canadians' life in Victoria, my proposed filmmaking will be enriched not just with historical contexts, but also the sensorial elements these archives bring to the portraits of the ethnic restaurants. The documentary will also be part of a series of student-organized film screening events at UVic Anthropology. If granted, the Gladys Nipp and Stephen Mah Family Award will be used to support filming this ethnographic documentary and bring the stories of the food and the people who work in these Chinese restaurants at the oldest Chinatown in Canada to UVic students and the general public through public events.

496 words