

Double Decker Dualism: Discourse on Display

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Chicago's metro population of almost 9.5 million people includes dozens of cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities. These diverse groups of people share an identity as residents of the city of Chicago, while still maintaining their own unique cultures and backgrounds. To help tell the stories that make up Chicago, the city is dotted by "little" cultural museums, a term used by Dominic Pacyga when exploring the various ethnic enclaves and their institutional representatives throughout the city.¹ Museums like the Swedish American Museum, the Polish Museum of Chicago, the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center, and the Haitian American Museum of Chicago not only tell the stories of each titular group but also create a web of a larger stories connecting the diasporic and migratory experiences of all the people who make up the city of Chicago. These efforts are particularly clear at the Chinese American Museum of Chicago (CAMOC).

The Chinese American Museum of Chicago (CAMOC), a little cultural museum which opened in 2005, is located in the heart of Chicago's Chinatown. Occupying only a single lot, it is a four-story building that reserves its first two floors for exhibition space. However, despite its small stature, this museum's exhibitions play an outsized role both within the Chinese American community and the city of Chicago. The temporary exhibitions on the first floor educate visitors about Chinese traditions and culture broadly, while the permanent exhibitions on the second-floor focus on the experience of the Chinese American community in Chicago and the Midwest. The permanent exhibition of "the Great Wall to the Great Lakes" explores the migration story of Chinese Americans to the Midwest and Chicago, functioning as a site of memory to help remember this specific community's story, struggles, and successes. However, this exhibit also attempts to appeal universally. Through inscriptions in English, Spanish, and Chinese, it speaks

to a larger audience of Chicago residents who have similar origin stories. These efforts to educate people both within and outside of the Chinese American community on the stories of Chicago's Chinatown helps to connect diasporic communities.

Due to both focal and physical dislocation of the first and second floor, the temporary cultural exhibition and permanent experience focused exhibitions create two vastly different experiences within the same museum. CAMOC physically separates the exhibitions of traditional Chinese heritage and the Chinese American experience. The two exhibitions are forced to work back-to-back, with the temporary exhibitions on the first floor and the permanent exhibitions on the second, rather than side by side. This creates a tension between the two as this physical barrier only emphasizes the change in subject in which CAMOC positions Chinese heritage and the Chinese American experience as two distinct and separate concepts from one another. This tension that exists between CAMOC's two floors and main exhibitions uncovers a larger institutional attempt to serve as a representative and advocate for the Chinese American community within the social and political spheres of Chicago, Illinois, and the Midwest. To position this institution in this way, CAMOC requires both the stories of experience and heritage to be present but does not need them to be organized in a way that unites these two exhibitions. A thorough examination of exhibitional, institutional, and societal contexts of the two types of exhibitions presented by CAMOC helps one understand how this tension is necessary to achieve this institution's goal. While this tension creates two different visitor experiences, they provide CAMOC with the necessary foundation to serve as a mediator building connections between other communities in Chicago.

Through a combined understanding of the organizational setup and the exhibitional minutiae, CAMOC's role within and outside of its institutional walls will be explored. For example, the exploration of the role of multiple languages, specifically within

1 Dominic A. Pacyga, "Chicago: City of the Big 'Little' Museums," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 3 (2009): 55.

the migration-focused exhibit as compared with the heritage exhibitions, further reflects the attempt to engage with the broader community. The public reception and understanding of this museum will be explored alongside the analysis of these exhibitions to help contextualize institutional choices while also providing a chronological understanding of the museum and its exhibitions.

The analysis of CAMOC's external influence and leveraging of institutional reputation will focus on CAMOC's involvement in the recent passage of the Teaching Equitable Asian American Community History Act (TEAACH) Act in Illinois, which requires the teaching of Asian-American history in public schools, and its subsequent implementation. By exploring this museum in detail from specific exhibitions to its legislative priorities, the necessity for the focus on both Chinese heritage and the Chinese American experience becomes clear. Regardless of the tension created by the two, these dueling subjects allow CAMOC to serve as public space and agent which positions this museum as an advocate for the past, present, and future of the Chinese American community of Chicago and Midwest.

The Chinese American Museum of Chicago's explicit goal is the representation of the Chinese American community in Chicago. Its stated mission is "to advance the appreciation of Chinese American culture" in Chicago and the Midwest through its exhibitions with a focus not just connecting the past to the present but looking towards the future of this community.² This statement establishes the museum as a center for Chinese American heritage conservation and as a "little" museum in the context of the city of Chicago. Little museums like CAMOC help fill the institutional but also the cultural gap left by larger museums like the Art Institute of Chicago and the Field Museum. Larger institutions like the Field Museum are physically removed from the specific ethnic communities and are often unable to provide constant ultra-focused exhibitions to robustly conserve and then convey the culture and history of the various cultural groups in the city. Represented

through the inception story of CAMOC when "Dr. Kim K. Tee, one of the members on CAMOC's Board of Directors... [met with] the then-heads of the Field Museum's Department of Anthropology, Dr. Bennet Bronson and Dr. Chuimei Ho" to discuss why there was no museum in Chinatown, the idea for CAMOC was born.³ CAMOC is able to "provide a public space to celebrate the culture of the" Chinese American Community in Chicago and the Midwest that otherwise would not exist.⁴

To fulfill this role, CAMOC creates two distinct public spaces which represent two differing views on how to achieve their mission statement. The two main section museum's exhibitions are housed on the first and second floor, respectively. The first floor is made up of a rotating exhibition which focuses on Chinese culture. The current exhibition is "Chinese Creatures: Myths, Meanings, and Metaphors." Organized as an open room with no definitive path to take, this exhibition is meant to be "an immersive journey into the heart of Chinese cultural symbolism."⁵ By presenting itself as an immersion into Chinese culture rather than a representation of the Chinese American community within Chicago, this exhibition abstracts itself from its physical location, Chicago's Chinatown, and, in its attempt to increase the appreciation of Chinese American culture, the first floor focuses on tradition rather than personal experiences. Even though tradition is the focus, this exhibition is more reflective of Cameron's conception of the museum as a forum which allows for "confrontation, experimentation and debate."⁶ Cameron's designation between forum and temple is not just applicable to museums as a whole but also the exhibitions which reside in them. This is most apparent in the sub-exhibition of Chinese folklore, "Fables and Parables," which actively engages with the viewer.

2 "History and Mission," Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Board of Directors of the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF), May 12, 2024, <https://ccamuseum.org/history-and-mission/>.

3 Michelle Yang, "A House of Memories," South Side Weekly, March 8, 2017, <https://southsideweekly.com/chinese-american-museum-chicago-reflects-chinatown/>.

4 Pacyga, "Chicago: City of the Big 'Little' Museums," 55.

5 "Chinese Creatures: Myths, Meanings, and Metaphors," Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Chicago, April 6, 2024

6 Duncan Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum?," in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004): 19.

The immersive qualities of this exhibition force the viewer to engage with the materials presented. “Fables and Parables” includes a dozen Chinese folk stories printed on colorfully illustrated sheets which encourages the viewer to take and read. Following each individual’s reading, the wall commands each person to “share your thoughts!”⁷ To share thoughts, the viewer takes a sticky note and pen from a table in front of the wall with squares blocked out for each individual story. With no other directions other than sharing their thoughts, the exhibit forces the viewer to confront and experiment with the stories that represent Chinese culture. The outcome of these experiments ranges from one-word statements to poems to drawings which are all put in conversation with one another on the wall.

With Baxandall’s understanding that “exhibitors cannot represent culture,”⁸ this sub-exhibition emphasizes the role of the visitor within the museum experience. This exhibition encourages the interpretative qualities of Chinese cultural symbolism as well as its accessibility. The “Fables and Parables” sub-exhibition and the first floor as a whole exists as a “social occasion”⁹ that results from the exhibitor seeking less to “control or direct the viewer’s mind”¹⁰ while pushing the viewer develop an understanding of Chinese culture within a context that makes sense to them. By doing so, this exhibition, focused on Chinese culture rather than the Chinese American community, allows for each individual who visits the first floor of CAMOC to have a connection and interaction with Chinese culture that could not be achieved without its structureless and interactive organization.

The rotating nature of the first floor opens opportunities for constant reinterpretation of subjects and means of approaching the institutional goal. CAMOC’s vision statement explains the desire to

“build a community around a continuous dialogue.”¹¹ This dialogue is exemplified by the rotating exhibition. The exhibition of “Chinese Creatures: Myths, Meanings, and Metaphors” follows exhibitions such as “Traditional Chinese Festivals: A Celebration of Culture,” “Tofu: The Wonder Food,” and “Chinese @ Play: Toys, Games, and Leisure Activities.” This series of exhibitions continues the trend of the first floor focusing on Chinese culture broadly. These exhibitions like the current one mostly focus on their subjects outside of the context of Chicago. The “Chinese @ Play” exhibition was advertised as a means to “discover the playful side of Chinese culture and civilization.”¹² By constantly shifting the means of exploring Chinese culture as a whole, the organization of the first floor allows for different perspectives and stories to be told.

Karp and Lavine explore the difficulties of presenting diversity and cultural heritage in museums through a study of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston which attempted to build “a stronger bridge to local Hispanic communities.” Even though the goal of engaging with audiences with unacquainted Hispanic artists, the exhibition faced criticisms which Lavine and Karp explain “that no matter how the exhibition was organized, it would have been disputed.”¹³ However, the rotating nature of CAMOC’s first floor allows for this dispute to be influential as this space over time has presented multiple representations of how Chinese culture can be portrayed. This continuous dialogue creates avenues for building a community based around the various parts of Chinese traditions that are exhibited.

The exhibition on the first floor and how it is organized allow CAMOC to be understood in the terms of a heritage museum. The multiple perspectives that the exhibition allows space for through its

7 “Share Your Thoughts!,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Chicago, April 6, 2024

8 Michael Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp, Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 41.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 40.

11 “History and Mission,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Board of Directors of the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF), May 12, 2024, <https://ccamuseum.org/history-and-mission/>.

12 “Chinese @ Play: Toys, Games, and Leisure Activities,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Board of Directors of the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF), May 12, 2024, <https://ccamuseum.org/chinese-play-toys-games-and-leisure-activities/>.

13 Ivan Karp, Steven Lavine, introduction to *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991): 5.

interactive and social nature place Chinese heritage at the forefront. “Heritage is not an existing place, an artifact or an intangible element” but is a constitutive process defined by “activity.”¹⁴ It does not exist just through “being” but relies on visitors’ interpretations, interactions, and reflections on “present concerns, anxieties and ideals.”¹⁵ The “Chinese Creatures: Myths, Meanings, and Metaphors” exhibition does not allow for the visitor to just be a viewer. By being organized as a forum, a place for active participation, interpretation, and debate, the constitutive process is able to take place. For members of the Chinese American community in Chicago, the interactions with this exhibition allow for a reflection and sharing of meanings, memories, and experiences with these traditional Chinese symbols. Defined by continuous and encouraged dialogue, the first floor of CAMOC creates a space to forge a social identity and a community that embodies heritage as defined by Gouriévidis. By being a site of heritage, CAMOC can be put in conversation with the various other heritage museums in Chicago reflected through work such as Pacyga. As the visitor travels up the stairs to the second floor, the subject and means of presentation vastly change.

The second-floor transitions to a focus on the experience of the community rather than cultural heritage. To present this new subject, the second floor organizes its space and presents itself drastically different from the first floor. Unlike the first floor, the second floor is made up of three permanent exhibitions with the viewer being guided through them one at a time. These exhibitions focus on the experience of the Chinese American community rather than the culture as a whole. These experiences are told in the contexts of Chinese immigration, Chinese American veterans, and Chicago’s Chinatown. Together these three exhibitions come together to represent an almost monolithic representation of the Chinese American experience in Chicago. Even though CAMOC has been described as “not attempt[ing] to be an authoritative voice on the experiences of Chinese people in America” because of its “personal touch” through the inclusion of

personal stories,¹⁶ the organization of these exhibitions relegate these stories to the background while the broader community is foregrounded. These three exhibitions, understood with Cameron’s designation of a museum as a temple, place this museum as the definitive conservator of memory and authoritative representative for the Chinese American Community in Chicago and the Midwest.

The exhibition on migration exemplifies the museum as a temple. The “Great Wall to Great Lakes: Chinese Immigration to the Midwest” presents an immersive experience extremely different from the “Fables and Parables” sub-exhibition. This exhibition relies on the centering of the community as a whole rather than individuals and follows a chronological and narrative history of Chinese migration to the Midwest. The exhibition is made up of descriptive plaques, a few items like suitcases and work implements of Chinese immigrants, and mockups of a Chinese owned storefront and hand laundry. As Cameron explains the museum as a temple has a “timeless and universal function... [achieved by] the use of a structured sample of reality,”¹⁷ these reconstructions are physically the sample of reality which gives a view into what the Chinese American experience looked like in the 19th and early 20th century. While this experience is immersive as it surrounds the viewer in the context and experience of the early Chinese American migrants, it restricts the possibility of interaction between the viewer and the exhibition, leaving no room for debate or other perspectives.

The permanence of the second floor solidifies this exhibition’s alignment with the temple rather than the forum. Through encouraging visitor-exhibition interaction, the first floor and rotating exhibitions accommodates and even encourages alternative perspectives while the organization and makeup of the second floor does otherwise. The second floor rejects this model of interactivity with signs of “Please Don’t Touch” on the exhibitions throughout the floor. This lack of interactivity leaves the viewer without the possibility of experimenting with the showcased items or stories and leaves little up for interpretation.

14 Laurence Gouriévidis, introduction to *Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 2.

15 Ibid.

16 Michelle Yang, “A House of Memories,” *South Side Weekly*, March 8, 2017, <https://southsideweekly.com/chinese-american-museum-chicago-reflects-chinatown/>.

17 Cameron, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum?,” 23.

This lack of interactivity allows for these exhibitions to restrict the stories to those that the museum chooses to tell. The denial of individual engagement is additionally reflected in the focus on community rather than individuals.

The centering of the Chinese American community as a whole continues the rejection of personal interpretation. When describing early migration from China, the exhibitions use extremely broad language like “Chinese have been traveling from China for centuries”¹⁸ and “the Midwest community was more accepting of the Chinese [than the East and West]”¹⁹ which makes the subject the community as a whole rather than individual stories or experiences. The “Great Wall to Great Lakes” ends up making a “claim to present [the Chinese American] culture or group” through what is presented as a single and collective experience.²⁰

The components of the exhibition further reflect this representation as a single, collective experience of the representation of Chinese immigration. The increased inclusion and proliferation of migration exhibitions and museums exist within conversations about “the resilience of the national paradigm; the role of museums used as agents of social change; and, finally, the memorial function of museums seen as mediators of recognition.”²¹ The differing perspectives of these conversations come about based on the experience of the story being told but also the means in which the story is told. Specifically in the context of the museum as an agent of social change, the museum becomes sites where previously absent “narratives are made visible and audible.”²² Gouriévidis explains that one of the ways to spur this increased “democratization, participation, and empowerment” of a community’s history is through the use of oral history.²³ While oral histories

are present in CAMOC, they are conspicuously absent from the “Great Wall to Great Lakes” exhibition. The other two exhibitions on the second floor include TVs and videos that present oral histories. The presentation of the Chinese migrant experience does not deploy this democratizing medium to narrate the story of Chinese Americans experiences but it relies on broad and monolithic language to present the story. Through the presentation of this exhibition, CAMOC monopolizes the narrative of the migration experience, and, unlike the first floor, this exhibition is not a “social event” or forum. CAMOC presents itself as the authoritative representative of the Chinese American community in Chicago and the Midwest by manipulating the organization of the second floor which focuses on the experiences of the Chinese American community to restrict the possibility of alternative perspective and interpretations.

The permanence of the second floor further rejects the possibility of introducing different perspectives in describing the story of Chinese migration to the Midwest. Fully representative of this, the reconstructed hand laundry and storefront restricts the viewer’s immersive experience to two very specific migrant experiences. The hand laundry has been featured at CAMOC since its opening in 2005 which reinforces Cameron’s description of the museum as a temple where this “structured sample of reality” serves as “an objective model”²⁴ of CAMOC’s Chinese migration experience.²⁵ The two reconstructions, the hand laundry and store front, combined with the generalizing language of the exhibition result in a general, declarative narrative of the Chinese American community’s migration experience to Chicago and the Midwest. The permanence of the exhibitions, unlike on the first floor, restricts the possibilities for new perspectives to join this conversation while contributing to CAMOC’s authoritative role as the representative of the Chinese American experience in Chicago and the Midwest. The public, through newspapers, reflects this perceived role of CAMOC as representative of the Chinese American community.

18 “Journeys,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Chicago, April 6, 2024

19 “Why Chicago?,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Chicago, April 6, 2024

20 Karp and Lavine, introduction to *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*: 4.

21 Gouriévidis, introduction to *Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics*, 2.

22 Ibid., 10

23 Ibid., 11

24 Cameron, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum?,” 23.

25 Chicago Tribune, “Museum Gives Chinatown Chance to Tell Its Own Story,” Chicago Tribune, May 21, 2005, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2005/05/21/museum-gives-chinatown-chance-to-tell-its-own-story/>.

CAMOC is routinely described as “giving Chinatown a chance to tell its own story”²⁶ and allowing “its people to tell their story on their own terms.”²⁷ Through these media representations, CAMOC has come to represent not only Chinatown but also the whole Chinese American community.

As representative of Chinatown and the Chinese American community, the mission statement of CAMOC stretches beyond its walls. The organization of the museum reflects the tension between representing culture and experience. CAMOC needs both Chinese heritage and Chinese American experiences to effectively extend its reach. CAMOC through its physical and exhibition organization positions these two concepts as distinct entities rather than overlapping and connected subjects. With this distinction, the museum attempts to mediate this tension by almost creating two distinct museums within itself, a Chinese heritage museum and a Chinese American experience museum. Both of which are necessary to achieve CAMOC’s goal. Through its first floor, this museum draws in visitors from both inside and outside of the Chinese American community and encourages engagement with the exhibition to push visitors to understand Chinese culture on their own terms. This is sharply contrasted with the second floor in which the exhibitions relegate the visitors to the role of viewer with little option other than reading and understanding the material as presented. However, even though the two halves of this museum are organized so differently, they work together to effectively educate visitors on Chinese culture while establishing CAMOC as the representative of the Chinese American community in Chicago. Karp and Lavine explain that almost all museums now are forums, but many exhibitions still have temple qualities.²⁸ For CAMOC, the outsized influence of the exhibition as a temple, half the museum, somewhat paradoxically allows for this institution to take part in broader dialogues outside of just this institution’s walls.

26 Ibid.

27 Michelle Yang, “A House of Memories,” *South Side Weekly*, March 8, 2017, <https://southsideweekly.com/chinese-american-museum-chicago-reflects-chinatown/>.

28 Karp and Lavine, introduction to *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, 4.

The role of language within CAMOC reflects the institution’s place within society. By containing a heritage museum and a migration museum simultaneously, CAMOC has multiple avenues to connect with the other “little” museums and ethnic communities within Chicago. The “Great Wall to Great Lakes” exhibition features three languages on its description plaques, English, Chinese, and Spanish. The rest of the exhibitions have only English and Chinese inscriptions with English being the only language features on descriptors of objects. The use of language furthers the distinction between the heritage and migration focus within this museum. By having Chinese and English on all exhibitions, it allows for a constitutive process that Gouriévidis described as making up heritage. This also reflects the bounds of heritage and CAMOC’s commitment to the Chinese American community reflected in their vision statement to “build a community.”²⁹ While for the inclusion of Spanish specifically within the migration exhibition, CAMOC is drawn into dialogue with other communities and museums who have similar migration experiences. This inclusion of Spanish has been part of the museum since its inception in 2005 with the stated purpose “to attract visitors from neighboring Pilsen.”³⁰ The introduction of multiple languages, especially for the purpose of engaging multiple audiences, helps to create a shared memory between diasporic communities.

Through its place as the representative of the Chinese American community, CAMOC is able to develop this cross institutional and cultural solidarity. By mobilizing three different languages within the “Great Wall to Great Lakes” exhibition, CAMOC connects different language speakers that previously were unconnected. Through the development of a memory solidarity, groups that faced discrimination during migration to Chicago and Midwest find a common history. This use of language, like that used

29 “History and Mission,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Board of Directors of the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF), May 12, 2024, <https://ccamuseum.org/history-and-mission/>.

30 Chicago Tribune, “Museum Gives Chinatown Chance to Tell Its Own Story,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 21, 2005, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2005/05/21/museum-gives-chinatown-chance-to-tell-its-own-story/>.

in war museums, serves as “a signal of who may find themselves represented there”³¹ while also allowing for the “agency of others in shaping their own stories.”³² The migration experience portrayed by CAMOC serves as a foundation for greater cross community collaboration and dialogue.

To be able to create a bridge between different communities, CAMOC’s role as the authoritative voice of the Chinese American community must be solidified. This is done through the presentation of the Chinese American experience in temple-like exhibitions. This positions the institution of CAMOC as the authoritative voice of its community within cross-cultural conversations and dialogue. This is necessary because the multi-cultural society can also be understood through the terms of Cameron’s forum, a place of confrontation, experimentation, and debate. Without having an undisputed representative, the Chinese American community risks being left out of the conversations. Through both the mission and vision statements of CAMOC, the desire to represent the importance of “Chinese American culture and contributions... in the American fabric” reflects the institutional priority of joining a societal conversation.³³ While the “Great Wall to Great Lakes” exhibition sacrifices room for multiple interpretations by the visitor, it allows for the CAMOC to represent and engage in dialogue on a societal scale which, through the organization of the museum, is seen as the priority.

While CAMOC enshrines itself as a community representative, it simultaneously relies on the first floor’s heritage focus to effectively engage in this public forum. By leveraging both its role as a community representative and an educator on heritage, CAMOC extends its mission statement to political

fields. In July 2021, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed the TEAACH Act into law. This law mandated that Asian American history must be taught in public schools.³⁴ CAMOC extensively covered the passage of this bill on their website and, through its role as the representative of the Chinese American community, placed itself as a key figure in the implementation of this new law. To ensure that public schools are prepared to teach this material, CAMOC explained that they will continue to emphasize “educating the public about Chinese American history” by assisting “Illinois teachers and others in realizing the goals of the TEAACH Act.” This assistance comes in the forms of open invitations to classes and teachers to this museum and through the creation and distribution of “suggested syllabi of films and materials available for class use.”³⁵

This engagement with the education sector is reliant on the museum as a whole. Without the Chinese heritage or the Chinese American experience, CAMOC would not be able to effectively provide this assistance. By being involved in this the TEAACH Act, CAMOC solidifies its role as the Chinese American community of Chicago and the Midwest’s representative. This is vital as Westermann explains that, while “avenues for genuine humanitarian social change are shrinking, the cultural sector fills [this] critical niche.”³⁶ The organization of CAMOC allows for it “to increase social inclusion” for the Chinese American community itself but also for the Chinese American community within the broader Midwest.³⁷

CAMOC in this capacity can be understood as a socially engaged museum. Even though half of this museum’s exhibitions do not allow for social engagement, the two types of organization within this museum’s exhibitions and the tension they create

31 Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 77

32 William Westerman, “Museums, refugees, and collaborative social transformation” in *Global Mobilities: Refugees, exiles, and immigrants in museums and archives*, ed. Amy K. Levin (New York: Routledge, 2017), 40.

33 “History and Mission,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Board of Directors of the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF), May 12, 2024, <https://ccamuseum.org/history-and-mission/>.

34 “The TEAACH Act is passed!,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Board of Directors of the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF), May 12, 2024, <https://ccamuseum.org/the-teaach-act-is-passed/>.

35 “TEAACH Professional Development,” Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Board of Directors of the Chinatown Museum Foundation (CMF), May 12, 2024, <https://ccamuseum.org/teaach-act/>.

36 Westerman, “Museums, refugees, and collaborative social transformation,” 41.

37 Ibid.

result in an institutional sociability. CAMOC made up of Chinese heritage and Chinese American experience exhibitions “not simply aim to reflect society and its diverse character.”³⁸ These two subjects, heritage, and experience, placed back-to-back, push the viewer to “transform ways of thinking and perceptions of others.”³⁹ The Chinese heritage exhibitions invite visitors of all cultures to engage and relate to Chinese culture. And while the “Great Wall to Great Lakes” exhibition does not leave space for visitor engagement, it confronts a shared experience of prejudice and migratory memory for English, Chinese, and Spanish speaking communities. The overall use of language, shared experience, and cultural immersion with this museum “foster [an] understanding” that represent the critical niche that little, cultural museums like CAMOC fill.⁴⁰

By dividing CAMOC into two separate spaces, Cameron’s framework of temple and forum can be applied to exhibitions themselves. This tension between temple and forum within CAMOC represents how CAMOC’s mission statement extends beyond the physical space of the museum and the boundaries of Chicago’s Chinatown. While Cameron argues that the museum as a “temple stands alone as an obstacle to change,”⁴¹ CAMOC represents how the museum can house both a temple and forum through its exhibitions to achieve its goals. Even if this interaction creates internal tensions, Lavine and Karp explain that regardless of organization “competing parties and interests... exist in any museum.”⁴² The organizational difference and exhibitional designs create the feeling of two museums in one. A heritage museum which occupies the first floor and a migration museum which occupies the second. However, without both, this museum cannot be understood as a socially engaged or heritage museum. By engaging both heritage and experience, even if separately, CAMOC

is able to mobilize these powerful stories, experiences, and traditions to achieve both its mission and vision statements.

The organization of a museum is vital to achieving its stated mission. This paper attempts to analyze the role that exhibitional organization functions and interacts with one another within the Chinese American Museum of Chicago. The tension between different types of exhibition organizations does not necessarily detract from the overall mission of the museum. This still leaves questions on how organization can be understood in conjunction with the subject that it presents and how interactions between exhibitions which take the form of the temple, and the forum can be productive within the museum rather than just for external goals. By doing a comparative analysis of the organization of Chicago’s little museums, the different means and effectiveness of exhibition organizations could be revealed. All these museums exist within a larger network of Chicago cultural and heritage institutions and, while CAMOC is a singular representation of this, this analysis’s focus on tension within museum’s themselves helps to reveal how this web of institutions impacts individual museums and how exhibition’s organization plays a role in both the internal and external goals of these institutions.

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38 Gouriévidis, introduction to *Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics*, 10.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Cameron, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum?,” 24.

42 Karp and Lavine, introduction to *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, 2.

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