

Feeding the “Greenest City”: Historicizing “Local,” Labour, and the Postcolonial  
Politics of Eating

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*Abstract*

Employing a feminist “post”-colonial analysis, this text reflects on the invisibility of racialized agricultural labourers, and the ways in which temporary foreign worker programs reinscribe racial hierarchies and historical functions of empire. In establishing a context for present-day exclusions, I examine emerging research on Chinese farming in what is now Vancouver, roughly from the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1885) to the end of the “exclusion era” (1947). Offering a counter-narrative to the assumption that ‘local food’ is inherently more ethical and sustainable, this analysis interrogates idealized notions of local food production. Highlighting continuities between historical racial hierarchies and contemporary state-sanctioned exclusions, I assert that inequalities are not coincidental by-products of the agricultural system but are central to Canadian food production. The existence of temporary foreign worker programs is the latest solution to critical “cheap” labour shortages and the permanent demand for this labour in the agricultural sector.

*Keywords:* local food, low wage labour, Vancouver, British Columbia, Chinese farms

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*Résumé*

Le texte ci-dessous emploie une analyse féministe, « poste »-coloniale, qui tient compte de l’invisibilité des travailleurs agricole racialisés, et les façons dont les programmes de travailleurs étrangers temporaires réinscrivent les hiérarchies raciales et les fonctions traditionnelles de l’empire. En établissant un contexte qui comprend les exclusions actuelles, j’examine la recherche nouvelle au sujet d’agriculture chinoise, à ce qui est présentement Vancouver, dès l’achèvement du chemin de fer de Canadien Pacifique (1885), jusqu’à la fin de « l’ère d’exclusion » (1947). En offrant une narrative qui contredit l’assomption que les « aliments locaux » sont intrinsèquement plus équitables et plus durables, cette analyse interroge les notions idéalisées en ce qui concerne la production alimentaire locale. Soulignant les continuités existantes entre les hiérarchies raciales historiques et les exclusions actuelles sanctionnées par l’état, j’affirme que les inégalités ne sont pas simplement des sous-produits concomitants du système agricole, mais qu’ils sont au cœur de la production alimentaire canadienne. L’élaboration de programmes de travailleurs étrangers temporaires est la solution la plus récente pour contrer la pénurie critique de la main d’œuvre « à bon marché » et la demande permanente de ce genre de travail au secteur agricole.

*Mots clés:* aliments locaux, travail à bon marché, Vancouver, Colombie-Britannique, agriculture Chinoise

**“...No Dogs and Chinese Allowed”**

*Those legendary words framed the entrance to  
a park in British-ruled Hong Kong.*

*Perhaps that’s why some Chinese eat dogs.”*

-Elaine Woo, “They Eat Dogs” (2010)<sup>1</sup>

*“Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.”*

-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du Gout, ou Meditations de  
Gastronomie Transcendante* (1826)

The Vancouver farmers market at the height of the summer harvest offers stacks of biodynamic beets, mounds of fragrant figs and champagne peaches, pink oyster mushrooms, and an heirloom rainbow of carrots. An army of well-groomed dogs hunts for fallen french fries to the tune of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” as performed by a trio of schoolchildren on tinny violins, their quavering harmonies punctuated by an occasional (endearingly) sour note. But for the startlingly high price tags, the farmers’ market experience is an overwhelmingly pleasant contrast to the fluorescent lights and power pop soundtracks of big box food retail.

Adrift in this bucolic haze, the visitor is faced not only with markers of plenty, but also with the slogan: “*You are what you eat. Prepare to meet your maker.*” Who selected this passage, and were they aware of the explicit social justice message of the Book of

Amos? Perhaps it was just a catchy phrase out of context. A cascade of questions follows. How does the slogan's distance from its prophetic origins mirror a disjuncture between this very market and its social and historical location? Who are our "makers" and do we meet them here? Whose realities are made visible or invisible in the imperative to buy local food?

"Meeting your maker" serves as our departure point for interrogating idealized notions of local food production. What follows is part of a wider project that explores how, in a time of growing food insecurity, we might locate "good food" with respect to the lived realities of people who are more likely to be the objects (and not subjects) of public and policy discourse. This research focuses on key historical moments where exclusion is made salient through human relationships with food. The present article foregrounds neglected figures from British Columbia's agricultural realities: racialized labourers and diasporic communities. By shedding light on racial hierarchies embedded in the past and present of local agriculture, this text highlights the continuity between historical race-based exclusions and contemporary state-sanctioned exclusions apparent in agricultural work. This analysis draws attention to the ways in which "the past is constitutive of the present," how capitalism seeks out particular bodies for particular forms of labour, and the ways in which diasporas (past and present) may be viewed as contemporaneous rather than binary (Cho 11; Mitchell 2013).

In situating the agricultural realities and aspirations of Vancouver's local food movement, I investigate the obscured history of Chinese food production in what is now Vancouver, British Columbia. I begin by establishing a contemporary context for these reflections as they flow from a concern for transnational labourers and the intersecting, systemic oppressions which are mapped onto migrant worker bodies. As this exploration hinges on racial categories, I situate these blurry taxonomies ("white" and "Chinese") in the geographically—and historically—specific context of British Columbia, roughly from the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 to the end of the "exclusion era" in 1947.<sup>2</sup> An overview of Chinese truck farms and produce peddling during this period fleshes out an historical and juridical setting so that we may engage in a focused, illustrated analysis of racialized food producers as "post"-colonial<sup>3</sup> subjects. In this, I draw from Renisa Mawani's examination of the colonial contact zone (2009), Lily Cho's analysis of the Chinese diaspora(s) in Canada as linked to postcolonialism (2010), and Avtar Brah's writing on transnational labour and late twentieth century capitalism (1994). Finally, I draw out the ways in which the colonial past is constitutive of the agricultural present, sketching a brief portrait of racialized agricultural labour in contemporary context and indicating a site for deeper exploration.<sup>4</sup> I apply lessons from Ien Ang's "I'm a Feminist But..." (1995) to suggest a way forward to transforming the future of food systems out of deep concern for the systemic, entrenched, and racialized injustices faced by food producers past and present.

*"...Perhaps the body holds a genetic memory  
of hunger, lack and privation  
stamped into its neurons—"*  
-Evelyn Lau, "A Grain of Rice" (2012)<sup>5</sup>

With a population of 2.3 million (2011) The Metro Vancouver region is the third largest urban area in Canada. It is situated between the cold coastal waters of the Georgia Straight and the lush agricultural fields of the Fraser Valley, a location that offers unique access to fresh, diverse, and locally harvested foods. A global movement around local and sustainable food systems has taken root in this fertile region. Increasing popular interest in local food is reflected in municipal policy milestones such as the formation of the Vancouver Food Policy Council in 2004 and the publication of Vancouver’s first food charter in 2007. “Local food” took centre stage in 2011 when city staff unveiled an ambitious campaign to become the world’s Greenest City by 2020. The Greenest City Action Goals summarize a reorientation of municipal policy around environmental issues, including the goal to “become a leader in urban food systems” (City of Vancouver 15). In 2013 the city released its first food strategy (*Vancouver Food Strategy*, henceforward “VFS”) which includes a baseline analysis of Vancouver’s food system: “Citizen interest in community gardens, farmers markets, urban farms, beekeeping, backyard hens and other community food projects has never been higher” (23); food is set to become “a centrepiece of Vancouver’s green economy” (41, 46).

Not far beneath the surface of this growing momentum is a longing for cozy, close-knit communities and seasonal, locally produced and wholesome foods. Farmers’ markets are seen as “vibrant community gathering places” and the *Vancouver Food Strategy* describes a growing general awareness of the importance of local systems:

whether it’s having a local food market within walking or cycling distance or enjoying the opportunity to grow our own food, getting to know our local growers, having access to affordable, nutritious and culturally diverse food, participating in community composting programs, or taking part in community food celebrations (VFS 15, 9).

Residents are encouraged to participate in local food production through the revival of such endangered arts as home canning, hobby beekeeping, and chicken husbandry (VFS 89; 51). Support for local food production fosters regional resilience and aims to decrease reliance on resource-intensive imported foods and industrial agriculture. It is also linked to nostalgia for imagined agricultural abundance. Former Vancouver City Councillor Peter Ladner writes:

Bringing more fresh food production closer to home is an unparalleled win-win-win move. When urban agriculture flourishes, our children are healthier and smarter about what they eat, fewer people are hungry, more local jobs are created, local economies are stronger, more neighbourhoods are greener and safer, and our communities are more inclusive. Everyone ends up smiling (xi-xii).

These nostalgic aspirations are not restricted to the Vancouver context but reflect broad tendencies in local food advocacy as captured by advice from California professor and food activist Michael Pollan: “Don’t eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food” (Pollan 148). In analyzing alternative food discourses in the United

States, Julie Guthman describes this tendency as reaching for “an agrarian past that is far more easily romanticized by whites than others” (275). She suggests that racialized food producers and their descendants are less likely to view “local food” as a panacea given their personal encounters with agricultural challenges.

Vancouver’s municipal government advertises local and sustainable food as fuel for healthy and vibrant communities, extolling its virtues as “a powerful catalyst for fostering inclusive neighbourhoods” (VFS 9). Health, vibrancy, and inclusion—but for whom? In conflating these ideals with “local and sustainable food” the discourse begs the question and renders invisible differential power relations that saturate all aspects of our food system, from global trade to local distribution and access. Together, these tropes produce a food fantasy of plenitude and camaraderie that obscures complex material realities of exclusion and hardship. Guthman argues that this romanticized “agrarian imaginary erases the explicitly racist ways in which, historically, American land has been distributed and labour has been organized” (276), a logic that can likewise be mapped onto Vancouver’s agricultural realities, past and present.

Since the 1970s, Canada’s noncitizen, migrant population has dramatically increased (Preibisch and Otero 174)—a trend that is particularly evident in the agricultural sector. Choudry and Thomas (2013) observe that Canadian society has been “built upon the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples and waves of migrant and immigrant labour” (213). Consistent with this assessment, British Columbia has historically looked to “poorer, non-white countries as a source of cheap labour, for dangerous occupations, with inferior employment and citizenship rights” (Fairey *et al* 13). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, BC farmers petitioned the federal government to admit South Asians and Japanese workers for the purposes of agricultural labour (Fairey *et al* 13), and to this day a significant proportion of BC farmworkers are Indo-Canadian women whose racialized and vulnerable status limits their alternative employment options (Fairey *et al* 5). As late as 2003, approximately 98% of BC’s farmworkers were South Asian immigrants with limited or no English proficiency (Preibisch and Otero 178).

The composition of BC farmworkers began to shift significantly from 2004 onwards, as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) placed increasing restrictions on the family reunification immigration program. These changes severely limited the numbers of older South Asian adults immigrating to Canada, and thus contributed to a labour shortage in BC’s agricultural sector (Fairey *et al* 14). Echoing the previous century’s petitions to admit racialized labourers for farm work, the horticultural sector responded by lobbying the provincial and federal governments for the right to hire temporary migrant workers through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) (Fairey *et al* 14). Within five years of introducing the SAWP to BC, Mexican migrant workers grew to represent half of BC’s seasonal agricultural workforce (Preibisch and Otero 178), and by 2008, temporary worker entries to BC began to outpace those of permanent resident-stream immigrants (Preibisch and Otero 175).

Preibisch and Otero (2014) note that agriculture is not only “one of Canada’s most precarious job sectors, it is also one of the most dangerous” (179). The reliance on racialized and migrant labour in Canadian agriculture today must be understood in terms of transnational political and economic configurations, however, the

racialized dynamics of food production draw our interpretive gaze to history—to a matrix of empire, migration, and diaspora. According to the *Vancouver Food Strategy*, “Vancouver’s first ever farmers market took place at Trout Lake Community Centre in 1995” (12). A cursory glance at Vancouver’s food history reveals that the Trout Lake Farmers Market is only the latest incarnation of local farmers marketing goods, and that indeed, swathes of food producers and vendors have been actively barred from full participation since Vancouver was called Gastown and Chinatown was Saltwater City. Therefore, before returning to a brief analysis of migrant labour in contemporary context, let us consider this earlier history.

### “A Shipload of Coolies”<sup>6</sup>: Theorizing Race, Locating Post-colonial Subjectivity

*“Under the strain of bigotry, they were outlaws. Chinamen didn’t make the law of the land, so they would always live outside of it. In fact, it was a crime for them just to be here. The result was submerged, but always there: violence, with the same, sour odour of trapped bodies under duress.”*

-SKY Lee, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (221)

Racial categories can mask uncritical assumptions around difference, and, if deployed without reflection and rigour reproduce assumptions that they are discrete, objective, and immutable. The premise of *a priori* races has shaped and justified the development of unequal power relationships (Anderson 9). As such, explicating analytic categories is imperative to nuanced investigations. Kay Anderson notes the limitations of invoking “universal white prejudice” in explaining colour-based stratification (245), while Mawani emphasizes the absence of ontological essence in slippery and relational racial designations (11).

In spite and because of “regimes of racial truths,” this text employs racial designations such as “white,” “Chinese,” “Indo-Canadian,” and “Mexican” as elements in “a conceptual and material geography where racial categories and racisms were both produced and productive of locally configured and globally inflected modalities of colonial power” (Mawani 6; 5). Echoing the notion of race as process, Mitchell calls attention to “the determined and determining *historically and geographically* developed processes that make ‘race’ in its various, and often contradictory guises” (93). Having been “fostered and forged through deep political investments,” (Mawani 12) racial taxonomies were not (and are not) merely descriptive, but are evaluative, expository, and generative of tremendous material and psychic consequences. These investments are inscribed onto bodies and spaces and their lingering persuasiveness speaks to the resilience of imperial constellations of power.

Cognizant that heterogeneous “whiteness” has been described, for example, by Vron Ware (1992) and Sinha (1995), I employ the term with reference to the labels employed by colonial authorities in formalizing privilege and governing exclusion. In this, I borrow from Guthman’s exploration of “the unbearable whiteness of alternative food” wherein she acknowledges “whiteness” as a messy, complex and controversial concept (266). Whiteness “shakes apart into positionalities distinguished by class,

mobility and lifestyle” (Slocum and Saldanha 6); it is variously used to refer to “the phenotype of pale bodies, an attribute of particular (privileged) people, a result of historical/social processes of racialization, a set of structural privileges, a standpoint of normalcy, or a particular set of cultural politics and practices” (Guthman 266). Thus, I outline a historical context for Chinese immigration to British Columbia where “Chinese” is without ontological substance<sup>7</sup> and is not defined by “China” as a shared point of origin. Instead, the term is applied with reference to the legal, juridical, and social weight of the category as located in a specific time and place.<sup>8</sup>

Large scale Chinese migration in the latter half of the nineteenth century coincided with the dissolution of the transatlantic slave trade (Chan 21). In lieu of African slaves, plantation owners in European and former European colonies looked to China and India for cheap or coerced labour (*ibid.*). Chinese labourers moved in large numbers to Australia and California to prospect for gold, and to Peru and Cuba as part of the infamous “coolie trade” (Chan 7). The majority of emigrants were from the Pearl River (Zhu Jiang) Delta, a 110km by 80km area of southern Guangdong Province (Yee 5; Ward 15; Chan 18) that had become a site of extraordinary population pressure and critical resource shortages. The prospect of mass starvation during this period was linked to natural disasters (floods, droughts, and blight) and population growth, but also to human-wrought devastations occurring from the 1840s onwards (Chan 20). Perrault writes of acute rural poverty, high taxes and the influx of war-fleeing refugees and bandits to the region:

The majority of the people were peasant farmers trapped in the grip of a centuries-old feudal system. The Manchu [Qing] Dynasty (1644-1912), the last of China’s great imperial dynasties, was in final decline...By 1850, the population of surrounding Guangdong province had soared to 28 million. Nearly one million delta people lost their lives in regional wars, and 150 000 others in local battles over land and water (18-20).

These “regional wars” included the Anglo-Chinese (Opium) Wars of the 1840s-1860s, myriad effects of which wreaked decades of political and social disorder (Chan 20-23). Ward asserts that economic motives were the main drivers behind emigration (15) while Perrault writes of “the lure of foreign prospects in distant lands” that “launched a voluntary exodus of males” (20). Studies of Chinese migration to British Columbia have focused on racism and colonial proximities (for example, see Ward 1978), however, the postcolonial analysis benefits from a wider lens with which to nest the specific location within broader operations of the British Empire. Rural unrest and rebellions were triggered in part by enormous tax increases that followed from unequal treaties forced upon China by Britain, France, and other Western countries (Cho 42). Britain’s forceful “opening” [of] China to foreign trade” (Chan 22) bears directly on the apparently voluntary exodus from Guangdong province during “a formative period of British settler colonialism” (Mawani 7).

The early Chinese community in colonial British Columbia is commonly referred to as a “bachelor society,” and indeed, the migration was distinctly gendered (see for

example Lee; Anderson 79; Yee 106; Mawani 110; Cho 41). Through the 1870s and 1880s, a small number of Chinese women lived in British Columbia, however, white settlers widely believed these women to be prostitutes or concubines (Ward 8). These assumptions fuelled restrictive immigration laws designed to prevent Chinese women from jeopardizing “the moral welfare of the entire white community, not just the Chinese quarter” through their interactions with vulnerable and upstanding white men (Ward 8). The laws also reflected fears that Chinese families would settle in and overrun the colony (Mawani 109-110). Cultural conventions further compelled women to remain in China to care for parents-in-law, stymieing potential for women’s migration and contributing to long-term family separations (Perrault 26). By 1931, more than 70 years after Chinese workers began arriving in the colony, 22 999 Chinese men were employed in British Columbia compared to only 161 women, whose two categorical ports of entry were “wife” or “prostitute” (Anderson 150; Cho 164).

Lily Cho asks how we might place a feminist critique within “a project that seems to be almost entirely about men” (163). The space of this text does not allow for a fuller engagement with sexuality and class gradations in early Chinese society in British Columbia<sup>9</sup>, however, as Cho reflects: “Feminist work is not only about engaging with women as objects of inquiry, but also, among other things, is a methodological engagement and a commitment to subjective experience and subjectivity” (163). With this commitment in mind, we can examine the development of Chinese farming in Vancouver from 1885 and onwards.

#### “Early Morning on Pender Street, Looking West”: A Portrait of Chinese Food Producers

*“B.C. was so white then. So many places were forbidden to Indians, dogs, Blacks, Jews, and Chinamans.”*

—Lee Maracle, “Goodbye, Snauq”

Paul Yee’s *Saltwater City* (2006) includes a 1904 photograph of the corner of Pender (then Dupont) and Carrall Streets. The caption reads: “Chinese vegetable farmers brought in their products to sell to peddlers who took them from door to door (22-23). Another photo, circa 1920, features a young Chinese man posing next to a delivery truck. “Delivery trucks such as these were common throughout Vancouver”—reads the accompanying text—“Everybody got to eat, after all” (Elsie Yet qtd. in Yee 55.). In 1945, city archivist J.S. Matthews fondly recalled buying vegetables “from the Chinaman at the back door” (in Yee 59). Who was the ubiquitous “Chinaman” at the back door? Who were his suppliers, where did they grow food, and how did they come to occupy these roles?

Early Chinese migration to British Columbia began in 1858 as Chinese prospectors, having been initially drawn to the California Gold Rush, began to move north in further search of gold (Yee 10). By 1881-1885, entrepreneurial gold mining in British Columbia was in decline, leaving an estimated 15 000-17 000 Chinese migrants in search of work; these prospectors helped to fill Canada’s demand for cheap

labour, specifically the labourers required to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway (Ward 16; Cho 42; Yee 11). At an economic and social disadvantage, Chinese labourers “accepted” the most dangerous jobs, yet were compensated at half the wages given to white labourers (Yee 11). A sobering estimate suggests that “one Chinese worker died for every mile of CPR track laid” (Perrault 21, 23).

With the hammering of the last CPR spike in 1885, the vilification of the Chinese began in earnest. Blame rained down for a wide range of moral and economic problems plaguing Canada’s west coast (Mawani 152). In the wake of the railroad’s completion, thousands of Chinese labourers were stranded without work and faced economic uncertainty in a socially hostile environment (Chung Collection Exhibition), their employment opportunities constrained by the racist attitudes of the day. The following comments by John Robson, provincial secretary and future BC premier, are perhaps representative: “I consider their habits as filthy as their morals, in both eating, drinking and sleeping. They sleep in beds not fit for dogs and live in filthy hovels. How can they be clean at all?” (qtd. in Perrault 21). Wing Wong recalled his experience upon arriving in Canada during this period:

The discrimination was so bad you couldn’t get any other work except housework. That was forced, you had to do housework because you went into the house and no one saw you. That way, people didn’t mind. But if you went into the public to look for work, you sure got beat up (qtd. in Yee 56).

The purpose of relating these fragments of personal history is not to indulge in narratives of victimization or to sensationalize experiences of violence, but to describe the tandem functions of racism and fear in governing workers’ livelihood options during this period. Inclusion of these anecdotes also honours histories of trauma from which modern diasporas have emerged (Cho 40). Stereotyped views toward the Chinese cut across class divisions and permeated the consciousness of white settlers (Ward 14), although the constitution of racial boundaries was certainly contested, blurred, and multi-directional (Mawani 2009). While there were exceptions, and not all who held discriminatory views did so with equal conviction, hostility towards “John Chinaman” reflected the consensus of powerful voices (Ward 14). Building on this consensus, the Federal *Chinese Immigration Act* (1885) limited Chinese immigration by imposing a head tax of \$50 to enter Canada (Yee 14). Accordingly, Chinese immigration declined, but surged again in 1890 as would-be migrants found creative ways to secure the necessary funds (Yee 14). In 1903 the tax was increased, with some exemptions, to an exorbitant \$500 (Ward 61). Federal legislators finally slammed the door in 1923, amending the *Act* and making Chinese immigration a virtual impossibility (Cho 72). These amendments would not be repealed until 1947, and came to be known unofficially as *The Exclusion Act* (Perrault 21; Cho 72). Mawani terms this confluence of factors “a *political death* through restriction, deportation, and exclusion” (29).

It is within the context of this hostility that former miners and railway workers used innovative strategies to survive. Work in salmon canneries and lumber mills was invariably compensated with lower wages than white employees earned for the

same work.<sup>10</sup> Chinese workers were more likely to be laid off in lean times (Perrault 31) and faced mass unemployment and even starvation during the First World War and the Depression. Unemployment among BC Chinese spiked to 80% through a combination of white women’s entry into the wartime industrial labour force and the introduction of provincial regulations banning Chinese workers from government projects and underground mines (Perrault 42-43).

Filling gaps in the frontier and wartime economy wherever possible, Chinese workers gradually began to move from menial jobs to door-to-door peddling and street vending, establishing laundries, tailor shops, restaurants and groceries (Chung Collection Exhibition). The baskets, horse-drawn carts and trucks of Chinese produce peddlers became fixtures on Vancouver’s streets, providing an important service in a time before household refrigeration was common (Yee 59). However, as early as 1894, Vancouver civic bylaws had restricted the sale of food products to “permanent” business locations and imposed fines on peddlers (the peddlers largely proceeded with business as usual) (Yee 59). By 1918 the city had imposed a \$100 licensing fee on peddlers, a fee which disproportionately (and, not accidentally) affected Chinese vendors. The newly formed Vegetable Sellers Association negotiated the fee down to \$50 plus police protection from the thieves who frequently stole goods from trucks (Yee 59).<sup>11</sup> By comparison, licenses for “permanent” shops only cost \$10 at the time (*ibid.*).

The systemic and racialized discrimination expressed in city bylaws had echoes elsewhere. Decades later, Yun Ho Chang recalled the contradictions of racialized hunger and his work as a Depression-era vegetable seller:

The CBA [Chinese Benevolent Association] raised their own funds for this [soup kitchen] relief. There was no government help at all. I was still working, because I was selling vegetables and they’re a daily food necessity. The people I sold to were rich people and white people, because most of the white people had social assistance to help them (qtd. in Marlatt and Itter 41).

Imbruce (2012) notes that the development of alternative food systems among immigrant populations has yet to be “adequately analyzed, empirically or theoretically, in the food system literature” (357). As in other areas of early 1900s Chinese settlement in North America<sup>12</sup>, Vancouver’s vegetable peddlers created their own networks of production, procurement, and exchange. Recall that the great majority of Chinese migrants hailed from the Pearl River Delta, and most were versed in intensive wet-rice agricultural techniques, fruit and vegetable growing, and tea and indigo production (Ward 15; Chan 19). While they possessed extensive agricultural skills, would-be Chinese farmers faced systemic barriers to accessing land, and developed creative strategies to be able to farm for a living.

Yun Ho Chang quit vegetable peddling in 1926. His story is illustrative of, and an exception to, the barriers facing aspiring Chinese farmers: although it was illegal for Chinese people to own land at the time, he was able to purchase a 3 acre farm (near the present-day intersection of Knight St. and East 28<sup>th</sup> Avenues) some 4.5km from Chinatown and accessible via semi-rural roads. The seller was a judge who used his

personal influence to push through the highly unusual sale “under the equal rights principle” (Marlatt and Itter 39).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, despite the fact that the Chinese were not permitted to own land, by the turn of the last century approximately 130 Chinese farmers were leasing land on the Musqueam Indian Reservation (unbeknownst to the Department of Indian Affairs), approximately 9km from Chinatown, or from white farmers throughout the region in exchange for land clearing (Yoshizawa and Phung; Perrault 32). Musqueam Elder Larry Grant recalls both the importance of the farms and the invisibility of the producers:

That’s the real important part, I think, of the work that was going on here was the relevance of the Chinese farmers in this unknown corner of the area that was actually growing vegetables to supply to the stores and to supply to the markets like [retail chain] Safeway and that, to help feed the citizens of Vancouver. Very few people really understood that that’s where their vegetables were coming from (qtd. in Yoshizawa and Phung).

Industries such as canning, sawmills, and domestic labour affirmed colonial race- and class hierarchies as summed up by comments from Henry Bell-Irving of the Anglo-British Packing Co.: “It is the destiny of whitemen [*sic*] to be worked for by the inferior races” (qtd. in Anderson 36). It was only in industries such as laundering and truck farming that Chinese workers escaped relegation to the lowest occupational tasks and pay (Anderson 36). Ultimately, the increasing success of Chinese truck farming and peddling was a cause for agitation among white farmers and grocers. In 1921, at the behest of the BC Board of Trade, the provincial government commissioned a study to “inquire into and devise means of providing a remedy to the serious menace of an Oriental influx into several of the richer agricultural areas of BC” (Anderson 111). The study found that “Chinese” (Canadian-born and otherwise) cultivated and distributed 90% of the province’s supply of “truck produce” (*ibid.*).

“Oriental” willingness to work for lower returns and the economic “advantages” it created was a recurring cause for white settlers’ grievances. A 1921 observer wrote: “The Chinese are successful [in truck gardening] owing to their tremendous energy and to their frugal habits of life...Where the average wage of the white labourer is \$5 a day, the Chinaman will work for \$3 to \$4.50 a day” (qtd. in Anderson 112). This supposed willingness to work for lower compensation was, of course, symptomatic of economic and social marginalization. 1926 minimum wage legislation in the lumber, canning, and mining industries (Anderson 150) pushed Chinese workers into the agricultural sector; rather than increase Chinese workers’ pay, many employers chose to replace them with white workers (Perrault 62). Thus Chinese labourers moved into farming, blending innovation and traditional knowledge against a backdrop of racism and the economic conditions which limited their participation in other forms of waged employment. By 1941, 20% of BC Chinese were working either as farmers or as farm workers (Gibb and Wittman 7).

One of the early industries that the Chinese were permitted to get involved with was agriculture and there was a strong history

in Vancouver, Metro Vancouver, of Chinese truck farming. It’s important for people to realize that given certain circumstances, what did our grandparents do? They made the best of a situation. They developed businesses, industries, major companies, farms, provided employment, nutrition to the community (Hayne Wai qtd. in Yoshizawa and Phung).

The precariousness of farm life crossed racial lines, however, Chinese farmers faced particular challenges in obtaining seeds, fertilizers, and food staples due to discrimination and limited English language proficiency (Perrault 34, 37).<sup>15</sup> Ostensibly to stabilize farming incomes, a 1927 provincial law instituted minimum produce costs (Perrault 58). This had devastating effects on Chinese farmers, wholesalers, and peddlers who had only been able to survive by underselling the competition. In 1934 the BC Coast Vegetable Marketing Board even barricaded bridges to prevent Chinese-grown produce from reaching the city (Perrault 74). In effect, independent Chinese farmers were breaking the rules of an occupational hierarchy which had placed them strictly in a position of service for whites, thus destabilizing the boundaries of a highly racialized society (Anderson 112). Indeed, the growth of Chinese agricultural operations was a key justification for the exclusionary 1923 *Chinese Immigration Act* (Gibb and Wittman 7).

#### “Everyone Ends Up Smiling”: Local Food and the Greenest City in the World

*“Before the war, Chinatown was very quiet...the Chinese could seldom bring their families over...But nowadays Chinatown is crowded with women all out shopping. It’s at least 10 times more prosperous now. In the old days, the grocery stores used to sell just some stock provisions and a few odds and ends. Now they sell a whole variety of fruits and vegetables, and they’re not limited to season.”*

-Yun Ho Chang, *Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End* (1979)

The Second World War ended Depression-era unemployment with a proliferation of war-related job opportunities. Some Chinese chose to enlist in the armed services and growing awareness of this and other war contributions helped to soften white Canadians’ attitudes towards the Chinese (Perrault 96, 98). Through the levelling experience of the Depression, labour organizers began to acknowledge that employment competition between “whites” and “Orientals” was engineered by employers and was counter to all workers’ economic interests (Anderson 151-152). Finally, as the full scope of Nazi atrocities became known to the general public, the white pride movement declined in popularity (Perrault 99).

After much concentrated lobbying, the provincial government granted Chinese-Canadian citizens the right to vote in 1947, shortly followed by federal and municipal voting rights (Perrault 99). Granted franchise, Chinese-Canadians were now able to enter previously forbidden professions; the 1923 *Exclusion Act* was finally repealed in the same year (*ibid.*). These changes coincided with sweeping realignments in postwar

geopolitics, in which old imperial formations imploded and the philosophy of white racial supremacy—the glue of European empires—became increasingly brittle.

The paradox of Asians as un/wanted migrants in the contemporary West continues to be documented (see Coloma 2013), however, many histories of the Chinese in Western societies end when the harshest forms of discrimination were outlawed at the close of WWII (Anderson 145). Belief in the existence of races endures in a narrative of European progress wherein whiteness remains whiteness but advances and becomes more tolerant (Anderson 145; Cho 71). It is therefore essential to foreground these vestigial (and typically invisible) tendencies as they structure contemporary practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism (Shohat and Stam qtd. in Mills 696). The progression from 1947 to the passing of Canada's celebrated *Multiculturalism Act* in 1988 suggests a linear history of increasing racial tolerance (Cho 72). Cho writes: "This is, of course, the story that Canada tells itself about its own history of racism (the story goes something like this: we were bad before but we are learning, we are becoming more enlightened and more tolerant, and we are getting better now)" (72).

Without compromising the region's rich specificities, we may locate Vancouver's contemporary local food movement within a broader global field of post-colonial relations, global capitalism, and diaspora. In considering the realm of racialized spaces and food systems, Slocum and Saldanha invoke Foucault's ubiquitous concept *biopolitics*, arguing that it must be more explicitly racialized as an analytic frame if we are to understand the ways in which biopolitics seep not only through institutions and discourse, but also "the division of labour, the stock exchange, supermarkets, advertising, habits, and affects such as hunger and disgust" (2). Mishra and Spivak delineate between old and new diasporas, contrasting slavery and indentured labour with transnational migration (qtd. in Cho 10). Cho builds on this work, suggesting "old" (involuntary) diasporas are not fully distinct from "new" (voluntary) jet-fuelled transnational mobilities (211). In drawing together the concept of diaspora, racialized migration over time, and the production of food, it is helpful to ask "*What is race* in the spaces where food is grown, sold, transported, eaten, thrown away? How can farming, gardening, provisioning, picking, tasting...be understood better when racial biopower becomes the explicit lens?" (Slocum and Saldanha 2). What are the "commonalities and differences of racialized foodscapes across different regions, countries, and epochs?" (*ibid.*).

Cho has argued that the most powerful possibilities of diaspora studies lie in its exploration and illumination of the connections between the disparate old and new (11). Where, for instance, may we locate connections between peasant labourers fleeing a society in turmoil and jet-setting businessmen carrying multiple passports (11)? In returning to our original exploratory question around migrant labourers in present-day BC agriculture, I draw on these analytic tools to illuminate systemic, racialized oppressions which are (re)produced in local food production. How do we connect threads between past and present? While Cho grapples for linkages between Chinese peasant migrations of old and the movement of transnational capital, I seek to unhitch racial specificity ("Chinese") from the narrative thread, reflecting instead on the ways in which the Chinese diaspora of old coexists with, and is re-mapped onto, racialized

migrant agricultural labourers today. Slocum and Saldanha assert that food markets are racialized because they “inherit patterns of colonialism,” and more generally that capitalism continues to position “phenotypes into hierarchies” at every turn (14).

...if race is segregation and categorization, the twin forces of European settlement and industrial capital are its main drivers. But being forces of what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorialization (mobility and resignification), this means bodies are continually rearranged. What stays constant is the fact of discrimination, while the criteria shift (Slocum and Saldanha 3).

The history of Chinese exclusion in BC is well documented, while Chinese farming is frequently mentioned and invites deeper exploration. Paucity in the historical record is manifestly agnotological, an indicator of marginalization; despite the high visibility of Chinese vegetable trucks, vendors peddled their wares to white Canadians’ *back* doors and were subject to fines for engaging in a service largely viewed as essential. Further, the agricultural activities of their suppliers were governed by a matrix of state- and non-state restrictions saturated with racial prejudices that bled out, well after 1947.

When my parents came [in the 1950s], there were not a lot of options...and it wasn’t always fair—because of the racial thing. My dad would go down to the [white] wholesaler’s in his truck, with a truck full of vegetables, and they would just take it from him, because they could. They would just take the vegetables and then not pay him. They could do that. I’m not saying it’s right; it’s just the way things were then. It was a different time (Elaine Wong qtd. in Gibbs and Wittman 12).

The relative obscurity of this history reverberates in the invisibility of racialized agricultural labourers in contemporary local food discourse. Farmers markets may be vibrant spaces of community gathering, but their festive celebrations of abundance—“inclusion, health, and vibrancy”—are also disconnected from material conditions of poverty that labour legislation enables in the domestic agricultural sector. That racialized agricultural workers of today have as much (and as little) in common with Chinese labourers of old rides the crest of colonial trappings; in this sense, the operations of late capitalism and global inequalities reinscribe earlier functions of empire.

Broadly speaking, Asians in contemporary Canada are the largest minoritized demographic and are perceived as “model minorities” who have overcome discrimination to become fully integrated into the neoliberal, multicultural mosaic (Coloma 580). All explicitly discriminatory restrictions for Chinese migrants were removed as part of broad changes to Canadian immigration laws beginning in the 1960s (Perrault 99; WCDWA 9). Coloma (2013) highlights the paradoxical position of Asians in twenty-first century Canada, where economic usefulness continues to be the key to entering

“Canada’s racialized gates of labor, migration and eventual citizenship” (580), a social and economic landscape whose antecedents lie in nineteenth century migrations (583).

Given overt anti-Asian hostilities and regulations from the nineteenth century onwards, it is understandable that the general public perceives the post-1967 period as a positive transformation in Canadian racial attitudes and race relations (Coloma 585). However, the final repeal of explicit laws excluding Chinese immigration dovetailed with the 1966 introduction of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), a “guest worker” program created to address acute agricultural labour shortages. Through SAWP, Canada looked to the Global South (particularly the Caribbean) to recruit a class of workers whose stay in Canada would be limited to eight months at a time. These migrants would enter Canada without the occupational mobility of other immigrants; their ability to engage in entrepreneurship or free market employment would be legally impossible (WCDWA 9). Four decades later, SAWP continues to supply Canada with agricultural workers; it currently operates in nine provinces and has served as the template for all other Canadian temporary foreign worker programs. It brings approximately 25 000 workers to Canada each year and the program, introduced to address critical labour shortages, has become “a temporary solution to a permanent problem” (WCDWA 8). From 2002 onwards, agricultural workers also began to enter Canada under the new *Stream for Lower-Skilled Occupations*. Under this program, workers may remain in Canada for up to twenty-four months (WCDWA 13) and the number of sending countries increased to over 80.

Just as early Chinese migration to North America responded to the demands of global capitalism and Opium War-related turmoil at home, the agency of “guest workers” moving to and from Canada is framed by forces of global inequality. Economic inequalities within and between regions, global mobility of capital, people’s risk-taking agency in pursuing opportunities, political strife, wars, and famine drive contemporary migrations (Brah 613) just as they did a century ago. It was not merely coincidence that Chinese labourers left the harsh circumstances of the Pearl River Delta to fill demands for cheap labour elsewhere; this movement of workers was integral to and flourished alongside European imperial expansion (Mawani 7). Neither is it a coincidence that global dependence on temporary labour continues to rise: approximately 2.5 million temporary workers entered Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in 2006, roughly three times the number of workers who entered on a permanent basis in the same year (WCDWA 8).

In 1860, Colonial Governor James Douglas expressed his contempt for Chinese migrants: “They are certainly not a desirable class of people, as a permanent population... but are for the present useful as labourers, and, as consumers, of a revenue-paying character” (qtd. in Ward 25). The present-day reader is likely to recoil from such overtly discriminatory opinions, yet the policies which valued Chinese labour in stark economic terms live on in the contemporary, systemic treatment of migrant workers. Just as the early Chinese community in Canada was known as a “bachelor society,” the majority of modern migrant agricultural workers are married men, with a small but growing minority of single mothers (Fairey *et al* 15). The workers are employed in seasonal field work, greenhouses, canneries, nurseries, and warehouses (Fairey *et al*, 2008, 11), and play key roles in food production and distribution in Canada, yet they are

unlikely to settle with their families in Canada. They are not provided with any route to permanent residence and even those who are... face years of separation while they work their way through the various qualifying and processing stages of their immigration journey” (WCDWA 34). SAWP and other migrant labour programs are designed to keep a temporary work force available to Canadian employers without allowing workers access to immigration pathways to permanent residency (WCDWA 17). Built on structures and practices which assure a ready supply of exploitable labourers, these conditions value labour above settlement or family reunification—priorities which perpetuate racial inequality as an organizing principle of food production in Canada. This facilitates the circular migrations of a “permanent and perpetual” body of racialized workers (Ramsaroop and Wolk 254-255), recalling the economic and social push-pull of earlier Chinese exclusions.

Until 2004, the majority of BC farmworkers were Indo-Canadian women in their 50s and 60s who had been sponsored by younger family members. In 2004, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) began to restrict the admission of parents and grandparents through the family reunification program (Fairley *et al* 14). As BC farm owners had been accustomed to paying seasonal farmworkers minimum wage (or less) and providing substandard working conditions, employers struggled to find adequate numbers of domestic workers willing to work under these conditions (Fairley *et al* 14). Rather than raise agricultural minimum wages or improve work standards, BC joined the SAWP, seeking temporary workers to fill the gap (Fairley *et al* 14); most of these workers come from Mexico. David Fairley, Director of the Vancouver-based Trade Union Research Bureau, estimates that 31 000 farm workers are employed in British Columbia at the height of the agricultural growing season, of which approximately 50% are immigrants (Creating Social Sustainability in Our Food Systems, 2015). He further subdivides this 50%, estimating that half are Indo-Canadians with citizenship rights, while the remaining workers are migrants employed through temporary visa arrangements (2015). Hanh (2014) estimates there were approximately 40 000 migrant farm workers employed across Canada in 2012, of whom more than 6000 were working in British Columbia. The majority are recruited from Mexico and Jamaica and employed through SAWP (Hanh 2014).

Migrant agricultural workers have compared the conditions they experience to slavery and indentureship. In studying temporary foreign workers’ experiences on Ontario farms, Wolk and Ramsaroop (2009) observe that it is common for workers to say that they “work and live under conditions no Canadian would accept” (255). Lax enforcement of laws enables unscrupulous recruiters and employers to exploit vulnerable workers with illegal recruitment fees and dangerously inadequate housing (WCDWA 26, 24). Exclusion from basic human rights and labour legislation and the inability to obtain educational opportunities for children (despite years of employment and paying taxes in Canada) are further abuses cited by advocacy groups (Wolk and Ramsaroop 255). Lucy Luna of the Agricultural Workers Alliance has decried the ways in which temporary migrant workers are treated as “replaceable” and “disposable” (qtd. in Ryan 2013). What global and economic forces create conditions in which people would leave behind their families and engage in these forms of dehumanizing labour? The space of this text does not permit an extensive examination of the myriad

driving factors, however it must be noted that the apparent willingness of thousands of people from the Global South to labour in precarious circumstances is not a convenient coincidence. Just as Chinese peasants were once displaced by unrest and the forceful “opening” of China to foreign trade, we can briefly look to the disempowerment of Mexican peasants by the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as an illustrative example.

NAFTA established a free trade zone between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, and although it came into effect in 1994, the opening of the Mexican economy began through the late 1980s (Otero 388). The resulting flood of inexpensive, subsidized United States grain into the Mexican market led to widespread bankruptcy among small-scale farmers who struggled (and largely failed) to compete with the imported goods (Otero 392). In response, Mexican agriculture shifted away from lower-value staple foods (such as grains) for domestic consumption towards higher-value fruits and vegetables for export, however, this did not generate enough employment to absorb bankrupted and displaced peasants (Otero 389, 385). Prior to the opening of the Mexican economy to free trade, the country produced sufficient amounts of staple food crops (rice, maize, beans, and wheat) for domestic consumption, but by 2005 had become largely dependent on imported foods (Otero 389). Unable to compete with the prices of imported staple goods, many small-scale farmers became redundant to the Mexican economy, triggering a rural unemployment crisis and driving large-scale emigration to the United States and Canada. Of this exodus, Otero (2011) observes the pitfalls and the potential:

Agricultural liberalization, then, has provoked the greatest population exodus that Mexico’s countryside has experienced in its history. As a result, far from having achieved increasing living standards for Mexicans, NAFTA has actually increased the country’s food vulnerability and dependency, a point not lost on its detractors. It is this very confluence of negative impacts that sparked the widespread peasant resistance movement and may yet influence the future direction of neoliberal globalization in North America (392)

### Meet Your Maker: “The Racial Thing” Produces Local Food

*“The work would be more hard for the Canadians because the Canadians not going to work in the coldness...No one would get up three in the morning to pick apples or pick tobacco to make eight dollars an hour. Our hands swell or burn. This is why we do it, we have no choice [to stand up for our rights].”*

-Worker testimony (in Ramsaroop and Wolk 261-262)

*“The future will bring even more attractions to Chinatown a new chapter  
to open that will bring pride and testament to the early Chinese struggles  
and triumphs in Canada”*

- Rachel Wong, “Urban Syntax” (2014)<sup>16</sup>

Avtar Brah asks: “What regimes of power inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora?” (616). What makes one diasporic formation different or similar to another? In observing the striking similarities between Chinese agricultural work and temporary agricultural work since 1966, we note both similarities and divergences. Early Chinese migration (re)produced a “global division of coerced labour [that] followed the geographic boundaries of the European empires” (Chan 21). While SAWP is based on labour agreements with 13 countries (including Mexico and Caribbean countries), the number of sending countries climbed to more than 80 with 2002 legislative changes (CBC 2013). These changes, reflect the diffusion of global power structures and realignments of old colonial geopolitics. Brah has argued that “diasporic journeys are essentially about settling down, about putting roots ‘elsewhere’” (616). As we have seen, Chinese migrants’ access to land, labour, and citizenship was severely restricted. Yet despite their economic motives and the general lack of intentionality to set down roots abroad (Ward 15), many did emigrate for life. Similarly, racialized agricultural workers (particularly temporary migrants) face a gamut of barriers to safe and dignified working conditions, permanent residency and citizenship, and family reunification options. Still many, driven by economic necessity, return year after year. Their continuing presence and shared social and economic marginalization creates a diasporic community that is linked to countries of origin, but also to community, and conditions shared across a particular class of racialized “guest workers.”

Brah notes that international migrants are “negotiating their personal agendas in a political context in which the demand for their labour has been set against increasing political pressure for tighter immigration controls” (627). Across the global food system, the vulnerability of racialized migrant workers (who are often not fully “legal” and/or do not speak the local language) are largely at the mercy of employers (Slocum and Saldanha 8). Any distinction between *settlers* and *migrants* maps awkwardly onto the complex and multi-directional movements of early Chinese migrants as it does upon the vulnerabilities inherent to modern migrant labour. Perhaps these figures are both settlers and migrants—and neither—their diasporas and invisibilities being mutually constitutive and coexistent vis-a-vis the Canadian demand for cheap labour in the production, processing, and distribution of food.

The curious amnesia surrounding the racialized histories of BC agriculture spills over into an erasure—both of current land and labour relationships in the Canadian food system, and of the privileges which enable nostalgic reminiscing about the abundant and delicious past. The end of Chinese Exclusion signalled the progression of white “tolerance,” but into this juncture flowed a new set of workers to fill agricultural demands. These workers are linked to the old Chinese migrations not by immutable racial origins, but in their subject positioning as low paid, socially and economically marginalized, highly necessary and skilled workers. The invisibility of their labour is

compounded by the assumption that racial discrimination has passed, thus submerging the experiences of workers in a discourse where local food is implied to be unequivocally good. Yet it seems clear that “local” cannot be taken to be synonymous with “ethical,” and our domestic appetite for migrant labour is fed by global forces of economic inequality:

“buy local” strategies enable healthy living for a few at the expense of a racialized workforce that produces their food. These existing inequities are not a by-product of the system; they are a central tenet in food production across Canada. Simply put, it’s not coincidence that racialized workers are imported and exploited to put food on our table (Ramsaroop and Wolk 262-263).

Old and new diasporas coexist in the forgotten history of Chinese food producers and the invisibility of racialized food producers today. An emerging body of research is beginning to make this history known (e.g. Gibbs and Wittman 2013; Phan 2011; Yoshizawa and Phung 2012) with details being documented by local scholars in collaboration with Aboriginal elders, Chinese senior farmers and their descendants. The past is reproduced in the present as “new” diasporas inherit marginalized subject positions from the “old,” transmogrified and following the contours of old imperial pathways and inflected with the functions of twenty-first century global capital.

As Ien Ang points out, “white/western hegemony is not a random psychological aberration but the systemic consequence of a global historical development over the last 500 years” (197). In contextualizing the concept of local food, we are faced with “difference, conflict, disruption, dissension” (Ang 200), and thus claiming solidarity within the local food movement proves ethically treacherous. Racialized food producers, being defined as external to the symbolic space of the mainstream local food movement, experience within/without it multiple forms of exclusion and silence(ing). It is an irony that Vancouver’s *Food Strategy* speaks of the need to engage immigrant and ethnic communities (29) when, in fact, “ethnic” communities have long been engaged in food production out of necessity. In untangling our own subject positioning with respect to the complex and pressing issues of agricultural workers’ rights, it is useful to borrow Ang’s phrasing “*I’m a feminist but...*” applying to “local food” a richer and more complex politics of inclusion that is historically grounded, deep, and wide in its social perspective. While Ang problematizes the politics of inclusion (203), we can consider the possibilities of shifting our disempowering, unsustainable food system through a politics of partiality (Ang 204), engaging multiple perspectives in strategically allied—layered and conflicted—dialogic processes that grow from the inside out. Who are our makers? What renders them forgotten, exploited, and socially less than the eaters? What does ethical participation in the food system require of us? How can we challenge systemic discrimination? What forms of food system participation perpetuate the erasure of racialized food producers from our history, pushes them to our peripheral vision? The present text is an invitation to continue engaging with troubling aspects of our food systems (including the turn to local foods) that are too-often hidden in plain sight.

Reflecting on the linkages between old and new diasporas opens up ways of understanding “the heterogeneity of diasporic communities while still attending to the continuities of specific historical experiences of displacement” (Cho 10). In seeking to create a sustainable food systems movement that is inclusive and accessible, it is not simply enough to “add multiculturalism and stir” or to advocate for buying local food: genuine food systems change must build directly upon understandings of the deployment of race, citizenship, and empire as they are central to food production, distribution, and consumption. As we stroll through the “first ever farmers market” in a city that aspires to be the greenest on earth, we must ask ourselves “how these signifiers slide into one another in the articulation of power” (Brah 619), and how we fit within them. In doing so, we prepare to meet our makers.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Ricepaper: Asian Canadian Arts and Culture*. Vol. 15.3(2010): 13.

<sup>2</sup> Overlapping within the same time period, forms of state-sanctioned violence against racially-defined groups (including the displacement and oppression of Aboriginal peoples [Maracle 2005], internment of Japanese-Canadians during WWII, treatment of South Asian migrants (Ward 1978)) must be acknowledged but cannot be adequately addressed within the space of this text.

<sup>3</sup> I represent “post”-colonial in quotation marks out the outset to flag the ongoing manifestations of colonial relations in present times. Post-colonial is used through the remainder of the text.

<sup>4</sup> This area is worthy of far deeper analysis than is possible within the space of this article. See for example, Preibisch & Otero, “Does Citizenship Status Matter in Canadian Agriculture? Workplace Health and Safety for Migrant and Immigrant Laborers” *Rural Sociology* 79(2), 2014, pp. 174–199.

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Lau. *A Grain of Rice* (30)

<sup>6</sup> “Mrs. Florence Goodfellow, who lived in Hope [British Columbia] during the 1860s recalled that a ‘shipload of coolies’ once arrived from China and ‘all of the families got some for houseboys.’ (Ward 26).

<sup>7</sup> And perhaps would more appropriately be rendered in lower case, as “chinese.”

<sup>8</sup> Anderson observes heterogeneity within the Chinese community in Vancouver to the point of such pronounced class distinctions that these were perhaps even more sharply delineated than in the European community (75).

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller treatment, see for example Richard Fung and Sara Diamond’s

documentary *Dirty Laundry* (1996).

<sup>10</sup> Gillian Creese explores the relationship between lower Chinese wages, white resentment, and the development of labour unions. See “Exclusion or Solidarity?: Vancouver Workers Confront the Oriental Problem” (*BC Studies* Vol. 80: Winter 1988/1989).

<sup>11</sup> Chinese support organizations such as the Chinese Benevolent Association, Chinese United Association, and Chinese Salvation and Welfare Committee proliferated after 1923 and responded to the needs of community and provided mutual aid and support during harsh economic times (Anderson 150; Perrault 3).

<sup>12</sup> See Valerie Imruce’s “From the Bottom Up: The Global Expansion of Chinese Vegetable Trade for New York City Markets (2012) to compare a parallel but remarkable similar history.

<sup>14</sup> This anecdote affirms that anti-Chinese discrimination was not universal, although Chang asserts that he was “the only Chinese in Vancouver who was able to buy property then” (Marlatt and Itter 39).

<sup>15</sup> Around 1907, Chinese migrant and entrepreneur H.Y. Louie leveraged his increasing English skills and existing agricultural knowledge to open a retail and grocery supply business catering to the needs of Chinese farmers (Perrault 34). As the wholesale food supply business was the domain of Vancouver’s wealthy elite, Louie’s move raised the ire of powerful enemies who used their influence to block his ability to purchase from major suppliers (Perrault 34, 62).

<sup>16</sup> *Ricepaper: Asian Canadian Arts and Culture*. Vol. 18.3 (2013): 19.

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