Illusions of Ethnic Homogeneity: Rethinking Chineseness in Popular Representations of Vancouver Real Estate

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**ILLUSIONS OF ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY: RETHINKING CHINESENESS IN POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS OF VANCOUVER REAL ESTATE**

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Abstract

Since the mid-1980s, Canada has experienced a rapid intensification of Chinese immigration and capital as a result of economic globalization and neoliberal restructuring. Despite the diverse socioeconomic statuses, geographical origins and worldviews of the ‘Chinese’ in Canada, the perceived changes to the city’s social fabric and built environment is conflated with the imagined and material manifestations of Chinese immigration. Informed by an anti-foundational thought, I seek to expose the illusion of a monolithic Chinese identity through a mixture of Online Reader Commentary (ORC) analysis and comparative historical analysis. In doing so, I hope to create space for a nuanced understanding of the intersections between global political economy, Chinese identity, and BC’s racial formation.
Lay Summary

The primary objective of this study is to interrogate how stereotypes linking Chinese immigration to real estate in Vancouver produce an essentializing notion of Chinese identity. Furthermore, I seek to uncover the effects of this presumed cultural/ethnic relationship to ideas of who 'belongs' in Canadian society and how such seemingly innocent stereotypes are used to covertly talk about race as well as conceal contemporary racism. Narratives of the city being 'bought up' by wealthy Chinese migrants are often used to fuel anti-Chinese, anti-immigration sentiments while obscuring the diversity of the Chinese-Canadian community and global factors that shape real estate in Metro Vancouver.
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Dedication

For my mother, who took the first step.
Chapter 1: Introduction

"When you look at Vancouver ... it seems to me very quickly becoming sort of an apartheid city, where it is not only off-limits ... to low income people and they're concentrated in one neighbourhood and a little bit across the city, but it's also increasingly out-of-limits for middle-class residents."

In 2007 Miloon Kothari, the then-UN Special Rapporteur on Housing visited Vancouver, a major Canadian urban centre along the Pacific coast, and cautioned the city about its growing homelessness rates due to rising housing costs. Visiting a decade later, Kothari made headlines for characterizing Vancouver as increasingly becoming an “apartheid city.” In a city where home ownership costs were 84.7 percent of median household income, the ubiquitous clamour about the ongoing “affordability crisis” and the endless reports restating thereof speaks to its growing reach, impacting households from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Creative destruction under late stage capitalism has transformed Metro Vancouver from a ‘sleepy provincial backwater’ in the 1970s to a desirable receptacle of transnational real estate investment, another node in a hierarchy of cosmopolitan cities competing for greater shares of global capital flows. The resultant unbridled speculation of land and property translates into widening disparities in access to stable housing, distribution of urban resources, and our right to the city, that is to say our right to participate in shaping our social and living environment. Indeed, wading through

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* Metro Vancouver refers to the collection of municipalities within the Vancouver census metropolitan area (CMA) and has been referred variously as the Lower Mainland (geographic-cultural region) and Greater Vancouver (former name of the eponymous regional district). The interchangeable usage of ‘Vancouver’ to designate both the metropolitan area and the city of Vancouver can create confusion when evaluating new coverage and reports on the housing situation.

† This thesis uses both single versus double apostrophe wherein the former denotes a subject-specific meaning, and the latter attribution. Italics are reserved for title case and identifying concepts.
the online response to the housing situation, it was difficult, at times, to wrestle with the palpable urgency of commentators because of the genuine frustration, anger, and desperation that haunts the swift condemnation of political inaction—and the attribution of blame.

Growing up in this city, opinions about runaway real estate prices and housing were as much a part of the social mores as complaining about the fickle coastal weather. Time and time again, the public debate has focused on the extent to which ‘Chinese investors’ and ‘Chinese homebuyers’ are responsible for both the negative and positive outcomes of urban re-development. Being Chinese in a ‘multicultural’ city, common stereotypes about bad drivers in Richmond*, ornery thriftiness, and an obsession with buying property (to name a few) percolated into a constant self-consciousness about how I navigated the urban environment, afraid of the ways I may be read as a foreigner.

In both my past obliviousness and recent reflection, discourse, the call of contending subject positions, and the structural relations that wrap around the many axes of identity all exert an abiding influence upon my subjectivity and, hence, my framing of the study through the questions posed. The statement that ‘Chinese are culturally predisposed to owning property’, whether spoken by a first-generation Chinese immigrant or an anonymous commenter online, evokes both a knee-jerk reaction to deconstruct it as a function of racialization and to accept it as a ‘self-evident truth’ from my own experience.

* Richmond is one of the municipalities within the Metro Vancouver region and closely associated with the impacts of Chinese immigration. While home to historical Japanese fishing village of Steveston (now a waterfront residential community), Richmond has often been noted in news media coverage for its rapid demographic change since the 1970s. During this time, the perception of city has shifted from a rural, predominately white farming community to a suburban Chinese enclave.
Being a 1.5-generation Chinese immigrant in a ‘multicultural’ city can be a balancing act, whether reconciling or holding within the contradiction between how we are perceived as both one of many indiscreet immigrant Others and the complexity of living within hybridized cultural contexts.

Questioning the relationship between ethnographer and subject in anthropology, Johannes Fabian coined the term *denial of coevalness* to criticize how Euro-centric social scientists ontologize contemporaneous colonial (then postcolonial) societies into ‘Objects’ from an earlier point of time in the teleological progression of history. Likewise, the provenance of my study is an observation that the way we talk about the Chinese in Vancouver is fixed in contrast to the narrative of urban change in Vancouver. The history of gentrification into working-class neighbourhoods in the 1990s gradually became forgotten and redeveloped as new consumption spaces to be embraced as part of the city’s changing social fabric and rejuvenation. Yet, Chinese immigrants are often depicted as external agents of change rather than members of the community who experience, engage, and resist these larger urban processes. Whereas the anthropologist-interlocutor analogy is the product of *historical struggle* across space, the Vancouverite-Chinese nexus can be understood as the result of ongoing *racial struggle* within the Canadian settler-colonial project. From the start, my inquiry is less concerned with quantifying the impact of Chinese immigration on Vancouver real estate (and much less concerned with the Gordian knot of ‘whether’) than with interrogating how Vancouver real estate qualifies our perception of Chinese immigration. In the subsequent chapters, I contend that popular understandings of the local housing landscape reproduce a dominant, monolithic
conception of *Chineseness* that makes racial exclusion acceptable under the race-blind ideals of planetary late-stage capitalism. Furthermore, the racialization of Chinese immigrants is neither arbitrary nor new but subjects past racism to the present conditions of BC’s social formation.

Setting the ground for my study, Chapter Two encompasses a discussion of both theory and methodology. The careful interweaving of theory and methodology provides a foundation for postpositivist qualitative social inquiry. Informed by Patti Lather’s *(post)feminist methodology/pedagogy*, I begin laying the foundations of the study’s validity by disclosing my paradigmatic positioning and ideological commitments as a critical race theorist using poststructuralism.\(^7\) Given the many forms and articulations of contemporary racism, I put forward the select works of four Critical Race scholars as the theoretical blueprint for how I interpret, study, and analyze the shifting Canadian racial formation. I use Critical Race Theory to identify the advantages and limits of conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Readership Commentaries from a national online news website.

In Chapter Three I begin my analytical discussion by turning to the discourse of the Chinese as Fraudulent Others. I argue that the current controversy surrounding Chinese homebuyers in Vancouver is the latest manifestation of racial structures that maintain the unequal power relations of Canadian settler-colonialism. The historical exclusion of Chinese immigrants and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples played a critical role in establishing a culturally British white society in BC. By inscribing early Chinese migrant labourers as fraudulent and inferior, the long history of Chinese in BC is erased and, thus,
justifies their expulsion as a foreign Other. In the same vein, the construction of wealthy Chinese homebuyers as fraudulent serves to invalidate and control their newfound social and geographical mobility.

Subsequently, in Chapter Four, I interrogate particular ways that Chinese families are problematized in online discussions of real estate. I argue that normative notions of family and home are mobilized by the state to pathologize immigrant families in a time when some classes of immigrants are able to challenge race-class barriers. Through an alternate reading of immigration history, I locate the current pathologization of racialized families within a continuation of earlier racism. The state deployed immigration policy to destroy, exclude, and regulate Chinese families in order to create and then maintain a white settler nation. Whereas earlier racism was concerned with barring entry and the removal of Chinese families, current conversations in the ORC indicate that Chinese families are constructed through difference based on their migration strategies. In this vein, the Chinese ‘astronaut family’ is a prevailing frame for understanding and problematizing Chinese families that re-genders female migrant bodies in transnational spaces but also draws upon common stories of contemporary Chinese migration.

The analyses and evocation of the racist past in the previous chapters provide the groundwork to invert racialized stereotypes of Chinese people in BC, which I discuss in Chapter Five. As opposed to a fatalistic cultural predisposition, the taken-for-granted consequences of affluent Chinese real estate consumption in Vancouver is due to the contradictions of their class position as mobile capitalists navigating the disciplinary biopolitics of the Canadian state. Taking a macro-level perceptive on the ORC, discursive
maneuverings evoking Chinese identity in the West are governed through an archetype of the extravagantly wealthy and mobile ‘New Chinese’ from mainland China. To be sure, there are now more affluent and professional immigrants of Chinese descent than previous periods of immigration. However, shifts in Canadian immigration policy today emphasize economic immigration over other forms of immigration. The state’s neoliberal human capital approach to immigration pathways results in a structure that limits the type of immigrants that arrive in Canada. What becomes distinctive about the real estate consumption of ‘wealthy Chinese immigrants’ is that they are tapping into the same global circuits of capital as other mobile capitalists. Ultimately, by displacing the importance of ethnicity as race, we move toward both a more nuanced, indeterminate conception of ethnicity in lieu of ‘race’. In doing so, I hope to advance our right to the dignity of housing in Vancouver beyond racial scapegoating, and instead, open up the discussion to how transnational and intranational structures translate into suffering.

Chapter 2: Naked Methodology

While it is widely accepted that race is socially constructed, the details of this construction remain contentious, and there is tendency to recognize the social constructedness of race without questioning the category.1 This complexity presents challenges to individual researchers in sorting out what is meant by ‘race’ and how we engage with it in research. For if ‘race’ is no longer, and never was, a physical truth, how and to what purpose is it reproduced and put to work?

Ironically, I identified myself early-on as a Critical Race Theorist while not really knowing about ‘Critical Race Theory’. Critical Race Theory refers to an area of study and perspective born out of US critical legal studies and the political work and social justice ethic of the Civil Rights movement. However, ‘Critical Race Theory’ evokes a terminological conflict—to the extent that academic territoriality matters—with a Critical Theory of race, where ‘Critical Theory’ denotes a school of thought grounded in the Marxist tradition of the Frankfurt School. Yet, these are only two perspectives out of many that overlay the term through the “heterogeneous emergence (not origin) of radical critique”.2 Some scholars distinguish Critical Race Theory from a ‘race critical theory’.3

These contestations are reflected in, and exacerbated by, the paucity of methodological literature on researching race and racism. Compounding the theoretical problematic, Goldberg argues, “the methodological disposition that one brings to the analysis [of race and racism]...will influence, if not fully determine, its definition...”.4 More generally, I am concerned with the philosophical as well as the methodological problems
of conducting research in and around the highly politicized field of race and racism in a postmodern world.

The general thrust of this chapter is to locate myself on ruptured grounds as a Critical (race) Theorist with post-structural inclinations. Toward this end, I have chosen to cover in one chapter both the discussion of my theoretical framework as well as my methodology. The weaving together of theory and methodology is a necessary process to achieve methodological congruence—the reflexive alignment of philosophical perspective, research questions, methods, and the mode of analysis—in order to ensure the validity of qualitative inquiry in the face of complexity. I have laid out the process in four stages. First, I will articulate the significance of being an ‘anti-foundational’ critical race theorist, which determines the theoretical and qualitative scholarship I utilize. Second, I will flesh out the various theoretical stakes used to pinpoint the contingent definitions of ‘race’ and racism that are operationalized in this study. Then, my focus is on describing my methodology, or its location between the “qualitative research genres” of critical discourse analysis and critical race analysis. Finally, I will describe the methods employed, and the various problems and decisions made over the course of conducting the study. By arriving at and unfurling each of these plateaus, I provide a ‘naked’ understanding of my methodology, revealing limits and all.

2.1 Paradigmatic positioning, discourse, and a poststructural social science

Throughout most of the early to mid-20th century, the sociological literature on race has been largely comprised of empirically driven research that predominantly relied on quantitative methods, as was common in the social sciences at the time. Within this body
of work, the tendency, then, was to produce descriptive accounts of “race relations [which] ended, at the level of theoretical explanations, in reductionistic analysis”. The recognition that there exist multiple and varied racisms, which are historically and spatially specific, exposed the constraints of traditional analytic tools and modes of analysis. The well-known critical race scholar David Theo Goldberg’s (1990) edited volume, Anatomy of Racism, is a telling marker of the new research agenda. Rather than focusing on the social, economic, and political relations between ‘races’, as discrete and identifiable groups, scholarly inquiry increasingly sought to interrogate the interconnections of social identities as well as deconstructing their ontology through “analytic instruments fashioned in social theory, philosophy, and literary criticism”. The new disposition toward theoretical abstraction detached from empirical research, however, is merely symptomatic of an underlying epistemological shift in the social sciences.

The dearth of methodological discussion in critical race studies is partly an outcome of the turn to postmodernism and poststructuralism. Of course, what is meant by the two theoretical paradigms as well their relationship with one another is elusive and contested. Tellingly, even the most masterful descriptions often begin with a warning that the two cannot be disentangled from each other or defined; “refusing definition is part of the theoretical scene”. Rather than ‘either or’, individual thinkers occupy a shifting position along a continuum between the two paradigms, with slippage and overlap. However, a working understanding of postmodern and poststructural thought is needed to put them to work, so to speak, toward particular research projects. I offer Ben Agger’s definition of the two perspectives: “poststructuralism...is a theory of knowledge and language, whereas
postmodernism...is a theory of society, culture, and history.” This distinction is necessary, if only for heuristic purposes and to impose a temporary measure of ‘settled’-ness upon the concepts’ purposeful instability.

Aside from a homage to its roots in architectural style, postmodern thought translates into a theory and a perspective that privileges the localized production of knowledge, multivocality, and rejects objectivity and positivist realizations of ‘Truth’ as well as totalizing grand theories of social structures. Moreover, it is often described as a break from/rupture/erosion/fragmentation of a pervasive Western/universalist/imperialist/ modernist episteme. This rupture parallels, or perhaps more accurately, reflects the transformation of the global economic, political, and social structures that underpinned the “great collective social identities” of race, gender, class, and nation. That is to say, the arrival of “postmodernity” has been heralded by the “historical and material shifts of global uprising of the marginalized, the revolution in communication technology, and the fissures of global multinational capitalism”.

Poststructuralism, like postmodernism, represents a constellation of loosely related positions, which are sometimes conflicting. These positions share many overlaps with postmodern thought. Enabled by the linguistic turn of the 1970s, poststructuralism is premised on the non-innocence of language and the overdetermination of meaning by underlying social structures. Poststructuralism problematizes previous notions of language as a straightforward mirror of reality as “they expose and interrogate language itself as being constituted by, and constitutive of, the social reality that it seeks to represent.” Thus, poststructural thought is concerned with textual analysis, “where text refers to a
representation of any aspects of reality”.

Furthermore, if our words and writing are not fixed entities that convey a singular, stable meaning, but floating signifiers subject to the play of différance, then our notions of objective knowledge and truth, as well as the production thereof, are merely the accepted/imposed myths of that particular epistemology.

A main methodological contributions of postmodern and poststructural thought is an “aversion to clean positivist definitions and categories”. Generally referred to as anti-foundational thought, poststructuralism and postmodernism incite researchers to recognize how epistemological assumptions embedded in our methodological practices may reproduce certain unequal power relations via what gets presented as true. Various social science disciplines have responded differently to the anti-foundational critique of positivism and the erasure of any stable, epistemological ground of certainty. Since the early 1970s, anthropology is a discipline at the forefront of struggling with the consequent issues around positionality, representation, and power. Scholars sought ways out of the crisis through ever intensifying exploration of new writing styles and reflexive practices. Although largely pertaining to ethnography, I believe it is relevant for and, to an extent, reflects the general trend of responses within North American academia. Specifically, across the disciplines, ethnography has become increasingly viewed as a panacean alternative amidst the erosion of a confident, positivist social science. Of course, there is no guarantee of recouping a ‘stable’ ground that can withstand the anti-foundational critique, as was the point of the whole ‘project’: “one is fated to improve on the undecidability...of language through more language, which creates its own problems...”.
However, an equally valid if more humble postpositivist social science is possible. While this may evoke uncertainty on an ontological and epistemological level, doing research from an anti-foundational paradigmatic position is not that dissimilar from the well-trodden process of critical sociological inquiry. At its core, anti-foundational thought calls on researchers to be more transparent in the production of knowledge, reflexive in the reach of our claims, while being both flexible and adaptable in our research design. The rigour and persuasiveness of research is still fundamentally grounded in the questions posed of our social environment, which springs forth dialectically from our personal experience and theoretical commitments. 2.2 Critical theories of race

2.2.1 Theorizing Chinese immigration and race in Canada

The long and racialized history of Chinese in BC, and previously the imperial frontier, has been a keystone in our provincial social imaginary. It is one that has engendered a complex entanglement and mythos that is often problematic and populated with Orientalist imagery. Likewise, academic research has held onto this fascination and evolved alongside popular attitudes toward the Chinese. Early historiography sought to understand the Chinese as a strange and alien curiosity, describing as often as inscribing their foreignness through documentation of their diet, working life, language, habits, and the gleaned social structures of itinerant bachelor communities.

There are two perennial themes in the study of Chinese immigration: the ontological status of race and the relative importance and relationship between racial and economic structures. In this regard, the early works of Patricia E. Roy, W. Peter Ward, and Kay
Anderson represent not only seminal texts on the subject, but cohere to the various positions along the continuum and evolution of this debate.

For Roy, ‘race’ only played an ancillary role serving to reinforce economic-cum-political factors that drove the nativism of European settlers.\textsuperscript{25} Referencing historians studying Chinese immigration in other geographical contexts, she concludes that the dependency on primary resource extraction industries, such as logging, mining, and fishing, resulted in a boom-and-bust cycle that plagued the provincial economy and seeded the racial animosity of white labourers who arrived responding to the same “pull” factors as Asian immigrants. The threat of competition was further reinforced by the widespread perception that Chinese labourers were willing to work for less and averse to labour organizing. Fear of economic competition gradually became a generalized fear of being ‘swamped by Orientals’ in the maturing white British Columbian society and its regional interests. Viewed through such a lens, the political expediency of scapegoating Orientals would result in the various construction of Chinese, and then, Japanese immigrants as the target of ‘racial’ animosity, quantified by the changing relative economic mobility of each community and the geopolitical significance of their ‘homeland’. In this case, race becomes incidental to the evolution of anti-Oriental sentiment, the conceptual definition of which had been reduced to skin colour and other phenotypic traits. Roy takes at face value contemporary stereotypes of the Oriental’s relative strengths and weakness in different industries as a sign that British Columbians had a sometimes-ambivalent view towards them. This black-and-white stance on race and its role, by Roy’s own admittance, was itself a rejoinder to W. Peter Ward’s \textit{White Canada Forever}. 

Contra analyses of class cleavage in frontier wage economy, Ward locates the roots of racial conflict in “social and psychological tensions rooted in regional community then in the early stages of its social formation”. He rejects the overemphasis of economic factors by pointing to the fact that episodes of racial outburst did not neatly correspond to economic conditions and periods of actual economic competition between white and Asian workers. Early European settlers sought to create a culturally British white society on the west coast, which was marred by the presence of Asian immigrants and Indigenous societies, but also by the necessity of their labour and claims to the land. Racism, then, was merely the by-product of cultural contact and the flipside of cultural and national identity formation. Early contact laid the groundwork for enduring stereotypes of squalor, pestilence, prostitution, drug use, and moral corruption about the Chinese, all of which was underwritten by a master narrative of their fundamental unassimilability. While economic structures were certainly a factor, the persistence of anti-Chinese outbursts was entwined with the gradual and periodic development of these stereotypes, nourished and given depth by the tensions of a pluralist society structured in hierarchy.

However, Ward’s attempts to move beyond an economic analysis was still stymied by his conception of race and his analytical standpoint. *White Canada Forever* anchored ‘race’ and viewed the development of racial discourse through a strictly white gaze. Racism was constituted through stereotypes found in the popular attitudes of the dominant group. Ward recognized that stereotypes were often, at best, partial truths about reality, but their significance and meaning was not fully explored, much less did the analysis account for the agency, history, and perspective of those inscribed upon. In some respects, Ward reflected
the interstitial space that the study of race and race relations occupied. Although the pseudo-science of eugenics had fallen out of favour, the racial categories and their de facto divisions remained. Ultimately, the historical account in *White Canada Forever* is limited by the extent to which social construction of race was interrogated.

In tackling the successors of scientific racism, the Canadian literature on race relations shifted as some attempted to engage with ‘race’ as a constructed category, with varied success in providing a fluid and contingent alternative. Toward that end, Kay Anderson’s *Vancouver’s Chinatown* sought to rethink the ontology of ‘race’ and expose contemporary stereotypes about the Chinese as a European creation, grounded in the similarly manufactured imagery, experience, and space of Chinatown. While European in its genealogical origins, racial discourse about the Chinese evolved amidst political and economic circumstances surrounding the transition from colony to nationhood in Vancouver, and Canada in general. Central to the crystallization of racial ideology toward the Chinese was the material effect of disciplinary instruments on Chinatown and its residents. Here, the discriminatory practices and agendas of civic agents, local politicians, and anti-Oriental labour organizations intersected in the formation of Chinatown and in creating a mental association between space and an essentialized notion of Chineseness.

The history of marginalization may seem irrelevant to some, in light of what is often misconstrued as a reversal of socioeconomic fortunes for all Chinese persons today. The role of the state, as well as debates around how race and class factors into Chinese immigration, resonates with the arrival of a later cadre of Chinese immigrants. This later group came from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences of migration.
The elimination of formal racial barriers opened new avenues of upward mobility, while the increasing emphasis on skilled and professional migration shaped the demographic composition and outlook of subsequent immigrants. After Expo 86, the increased visibility of ethnic Chinese in Vancouver has been, at times, met with the resistance by local residents over issues such as pre-construction sales of Vancouver condominiums in Hong Kong, competition in educational resources, ‘Monster Homes’, and ascribed causes of rising real estate prices. During the 1990s, scholars and non-academics alike debated vigorously the significance of the changing social fabric, contending interpretations of anti-Chinese sentiment and the widespread media coverage thereof. On one end of the spectrum, Brian K. Ray, Greg Halseth, and Benjamin Johnson argues that racial discourse, specifically around the historical ghettoization of the Chinese, continues to “[shape] spatial relations and the meaning of place” in Vancouver, which seep into neighborhood level protests against the Chinese. Conversely, scholars such as Thomas A. Hutton are quick to frame race as a marginal factor and even play down the impact of Chinese immigration in Vancouver’s urban transformation. Occupying a middle ground, Katharyne Mitchell views the antagonism between wealthy Chinese migrants, politicians, and the state, on one hand, and the protests of community residents as the manifest struggle between Canadian liberal social ideology and global neoliberal hegemony. A similar line of reasoning is taken up by David Ley whose sophisticated treatment emphasizes the rational calculations of the Canadian state and a cohort of highly mobile business migrants.

Expanding the scope of our perception of Chineseness, Ien Ang interrogates popular suppositions of an overriding homogeneity toward the global ethnic Chinese population.
Drawing on her subjective perspective as a Malaysian-born ethnic Chinese, Ang makes tactical interventions against the discourse of Chineseness, as experienced by those who have been marginalized from the Chinese ‘centre’. Speaking organically, Ien Ang posits that the ‘Chinese’ additive operates as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are not fixed or pre-existent but constantly renegotiated and rearticulated within specific (physical and social) spaces and histories. It is a signifier deployed to impute the subject’s indelible Otherness, in the interest of promoting and protecting the homogeneity of those persons in power.

Thus, agency, as the choice of closure, is wrest from Chinese persons as what Chinese identity represents globally (now bound up and embedded in the language of diaspora) imposes its own cultural politics and social identity. The position of modern China in global geopolitics translates into heightened political and cultural significance for the Chinese state to monopolize the articulation of Chineseness globally. In tandem with the Chinese state’s desire to project ‘soft power’ internationally, the prevalence of ‘ethnic Chinese’ abroad has reached critical mass, abetted by increasing connectivity due to globalization and distinct histories of displacement from political and social upheaval.

Constructed in opposition to ‘the West’ and often tinged with a sense of inherent cultural superiority, the discourse of Chineseness, disseminated from the Chinese ‘motherland’, becomes an instrument of policing westernized and non-conforming Chinese subjectivities through hierarchization and normative standards of ethnic authenticity. The looming return of British-occupied Hong Kong in the 1990s catalyzed one of the most significant waves of Chinese emigration from China in the 20th century. The Hong Kong
Chinese resettled or sought temporary respite around the world, including Metro Vancouver. As I discuss later, the circumstances and experiences of the Hong Kong Chinese diaspora would become incorporated into the racialization of all Chinese immigrants in Vancouver despite originating from a desire to escape the rule of mainland China.\(^{35}\) Put another way, the presumption that the Chinese diaspora exists as a cohesive and unified entity is in itself an outcome of imagined community formation.\(^{36}\) It is a social fact that operates in many ways like race, to craft and impose homogeneity out of heterogeneity. Chineseness, then, is experienced, articulated, and reproduced as a discursive force that “practices pure identity politics on a global scale”, a recourse to reductionism in the face of hybridization, immanent in ongoing cultural globalization.\(^{37}\) For those on the periphery—those Chinese who are deemed inauthentic for whatever reason—it is experienced as subjugation as often as it is experienced as a source of power. Paradoxically, this transnationalization of a quintessential character undermine the clarity of the boundaries between Chinese/non-Chinese; the hybridized subjectivities of Chinese-Canadians are a readily available example.

In many ways, the contending assertions on Chinese immigration is indicative of the diverse communities and social stratification that the ethnic additive signifies. Rather than a clean-cut definition, these are stories of multiple Chinese experiences here and there, each touching a piece of the whole. The removal of formal barriers to social mobility saw the withering importance of Chinatown for those whose families had arrived generations earlier. Concurrent to an exodus of multigenerational Chinese-Canadians from the borders of Chinatown-Strathcona, the arrival of new cadres of ethnically Chinese immigrants
contributes further to the community’s growing discontinuities and incongruous histories. This led to Laura Madoroko’s argument that the lack of a shared history and intracommunity solidarity is a recognition that the diverse class interests and conflicts between Chinese subjects are complex.38

2.2.2 Conceptualizing race

Given the importance of one’s paradigmatic and theoretical positioning to methodology, the most appropriate departure point is to locate oneself within the highly contested epistemological and ontological terrain of race and racism. Moving through the development of Critical Race Theory, I put forth the selected works of Stuart Hall, David Theo Goldberg, Augustine Park, and Sunera Thobani, which inform the contingent theoretical framework of this analysis. My theory-method for analyzing contemporary racism is anchored by the recognition of race as a structure of articulation in its own right. Furthermore, there is a complex entanglement between the historical development of globalization, capitalism and racial neoliberalism. The racialization of non-white immigrants gravitates, indeed, around the role of the Exalted National and the Indian in the particular racial formation of Canada’s settler-colonial society. While racial discourse is enmeshed into our social structures, its persistence and continued efficacy requires the recurring performance of racial discourse. Finally, regional racial maneuverings is complicated by the overdetermined subjectification of Chinese immigrants navigating diasporic geographies. Thus, rather than ascribing to a hard definition of racism, the concept is operationalized by weaving together theorists of varied leaning—each teasing out a salient aspect of its operation.
The formal establishment and development of critical race studies, or ‘race relations’ in its contemporary parlance, is often attributed to the intellectual milieu of the US from the 1930s on, with significant influences from W.E.B. Du Bois’ turn of the century works as well as that of the Chicago School of Sociology. The field experienced its most critical moment during the early 1980s due to the emergence and iconoclastic influence of anti-foundational thought in the social sciences, in conjunction with the reverberations of the 1960s social movements. Subjected to a series of postmodern and poststructural critiques, critical race theories, arguably, has fared worse than most fields of study as “our understanding of race, [Goldberg] suggests, has atrophied”.

Over the last few decades, scholars have gone at great lengths to trace the genealogical development of ‘race’ as a social construct and to invalidate the illusion of its immanence in our biological being. The narrative of its evolution since the 18th century, from whence the idea of ‘race’ was gradually entrenched in our collective social imaginary, has become a mainstay in the modern scholarship on race. Without delving too deeply into this history, racism and systems of racial classification emerged as a central instrument of population management and the exercise of state power, in the context of European colonialism and the emergence of biopolitical governmentality. The purported racial superiority of western Europeans was imposed through a whole series of imbricated discourses and entailing ascriptions around “gender, sexuality, class, colour, citizenship/immigration status, and nationality”. From there, the standard account would note how the culmination of racist logic in European genocide catalyzed a change in the international climate, buttressed by the progress in genetics, which condemned the
possibility of overt racial expression and excised, ostensibly, its vernacular from the popular language. Yet, the death knells of race, as an intrinsic biological quality, merely segued into its “rebirth”, albeit in covert forms.42

Indeed, it is here that we enter into troubled waters as the tenability of such straightforward, innocent accounts meet the many ruptures and conjunctures of our postmodern world. Circumscribed by the effacement of binary logics, the erasure of any pretense to the biological referent in academic theory reflects a contemporary racial politics and knowledge that operates without guarantees. In response, contemporary theorists of race have forwarded new theoretical concepts that range from ‘intrinsic racism’, ‘new racism(s)’, ‘cultural racism’, and ‘ethnocultural racisms’, to name but a few variations. In fact, the very existence and relevance of contemporary race and racism has come under fire. Some seek to displace racism as a central subject of social analysis while others champion more dangerously, solipsistic views of ‘post-raciality’.

Witnessing the racial politics that followed the Windrush Generation, Jamaican-born UK scholar, Stuart Hall, rejected the lack of emphasis on the role of race structures in contemporary political economic theory. He argued against traditional Marxist economism—the view that the components of any given society can be reduced to an expression of its economic base and/or singular mode of production—through a synthesis of Gramsci’s and Althusserian structuralists’ conceptions of hegemony and ideology, respectively.43 Instead, the social formations of a given society and the relation therein comprise of “a complex structure“.44 Within the complex relations of society, the economic, the political, and the ideological-cultural exist as “instances of determination” in their own
right, articulated through tendencies at these various levels. Hall emphasized the determining force of race, as an entity in itself. In other words, processes of racialization are not the afterthought or camouflage of class stratification and, indeed, racial ideology can influence and determine the configuration of the economic structure.

Furthermore, one must abandon essentialist, reductive perspectives of race to understand how it continues to express itself amid the disruptive arrival of the global. The hybridizing effects of globalization, immanent to the maturation of capitalism around the world, undermined the stability of ‘natural’ categories. The specific social, economic, and political structures that underpinned the “great collective social identities” of race, gender, class, and nation simply no longer (wholly) exist. Whereas his analysis on the rise of Thatcherism and the New Times correspond to what he perceived as a moment of hegemonic crisis induced by the fading of post-war class structures, the postmodern turn within Hall’s writings from the late 1980s on reflected his genuine belief that the world was shifting into a new historical conjuncture—of neoliberal globalization:

*The new, post-1970s phase of globalization is, of course, still deeply rooted in the structured disparities of wealth and power. But its forms, however uneven, are more ‘global’ in their operation, planetary in perspective…[T]his new ‘transnational’ phase of the system has its cultural ‘centre’ everywhere and nowhere. It is becoming ‘decentered’…[the nation-state’s] role has been in many respects subordinated to larger global systemic operations…[Similarly] the undoubted hegemonic position of the USA in this system is related, not to its nation-state status but to its global and neo-imperial role and ambitions.*

To be sure, racism continues to exert material force and incite violence in its expected ways of past but racism segments and takes different forms for the marginalized according to multiple axes of nuance.
Indeed, the process of identification makes problematic the concept of ‘identity’ and the agency that stems thereof. Identification is an ongoing unfinished conversation wherein ‘identity’ is the meeting place, at the subject, between the meta-discourse of society—of racism, of patriarchy, of ableism, of coloniality, etc.— and one’s particular subjective experience, as a knowing ‘subject’.\(^{49}\) Thus, we must put to question how the subject internalizes and performs these spatially embedded meanings.

Simply put by the poststructural analytical philosopher David Theo Goldberg, there exists multiple contextually-specific racisms rather than “a singular and passing racism”, wherein racism’s relevancy and existence is condemned to an anachronism existing, now, only in the recesses of a racially amnesiac collective memory.\(^{50}\) Accordingly, Goldberg proposes the concept of “racial neoliberalism” to refer to how racialized discourse, and the modes of its entailing exclusion, is implicated, transformed by, and fundamental to neoliberal state formation and the maintenance and control of flows of capital, goods, and certain people, both domestically and internationally. Specifically, the purported inclusivity, read as colourblind, of a market-determined world makes it possible “to express and expand market possibilities” under the conditions of contemporary global capitalism.\(^ {51}\) However, the tolerance of “mixture” bears its limits as past racist expressions—including its enunciative principles, practices, relations, and institutions—are created anew to assuage a constellation of angsts at the “impending impotence of whiteness”.\(^ {52}\) If Hall was fascinated with heterogeneity as the prevailing condition of the now postmodern world, Goldberg would and does approach the subject by examining and insisting upon the nature
and imposition of homogeneity as a longstanding historical exigency of the modern state—heterogeneity has always existed at and beyond the limits of the state's productive force.\textsuperscript{53}

In *The Threat of Race*, Goldberg (2009) attempts to map out the various geographically-specific modalities of racial discourse globally—*racial americanization*, *racial palestinianization*, *racial europeanization*, *racial latin americanization*, and *racial southafricanization*—and place them within the field of racial discourse, whereas his previous examinations have primarily focused on interrogating the Western episteme.\textsuperscript{54} In doing so, Goldberg directly addresses the question of the 'post-racial' in contemporary discourse—that is, the belief in, claim of, and aspiration to the existing conditions or standard of colourblindness.\textsuperscript{55} This notion, which ironically arises as a post-Civil Rights liberal compromise, picks up where the earlier ‘innocent’ account left off.\textsuperscript{56} Without its biological referent, racial discourse, even as fiction, exerts an undiminished material force and “plays a constitutive, and not merely reflexive, after-the-event role”.\textsuperscript{57} It saturates our everyday interactions and manifests unyieldingly in racially-determined outcomes and inequalities, undermining popular suppositions of a post-race order. The 'spectre of race' haunts us and consistently erupts into public discourse as racialized imagery and xenophobic fears, weaving in and out of debates over issues of immigration and citizenship, social welfare, racialized violence from the state’s militarized police apparatus and the prison-industrial complex, and imperialist wars—to name but a few. Thus, rather than its phenomenological obviation, racism and racial discourse have been hidden, transformed, and relocated by the dominant social ideologies of our time.
In order to map out the changing racial formation of Canadian society, Augustine Park coins the term racial nationalism, “as an architecture of race thinking”. According to Park, the hegemony of racial difference persists, albeit enveloped in a new language of distinction. The contradictions of Canada’s “open society myth...[and the] racialized structures of citizenship” forces the public discourse to identify and ascribe the insider/outsider status in different ways. Building on the work of race scholars since the 1980s, Parks notes how cultural racism has become the new operative mode of racialization. Of course, the concept of culture employed therein is imaginary. Ethnic culture—always read as a non-white minority—undergoes an ontological ossification; one is able to talk about particular cultures as if they were unchanging entities constituted by identifiable and specific characteristics. It is both the justification for continued Orientalism toward non-white immigrants and a signal of structural privilege for those who are read as ‘insiders’. In this sense, ‘culture’ is a power of ascription, beyond individual cases, as the other becomes read through an ethnic label; “it consumes the entire entity of the other while overdetermining her actions and thoughts.”

Similar to developments elsewhere, the prosaic calculus of the neoliberalism not only vilifies dependence on social services but also racializes the lack of self-reliance as distinctly non-white immigrant characteristic. The spread of neoliberal economic policy, especially around free flow of capital, goods, and bodies, is a central impetus to the “qualitatively escalating exclusion” of non-white immigrants, which Park derived from Hage’s concept of pure exclusion. Ironically, Canadian society relies on neoliberal rationality to manage the mobile populations and border fluidity caused by free market
economics. Situated within the neoliberal episteme, maneuverings in the immigration arena is one of the primary ways through which old racist logics can be expressed, while maintaining a “culturally ‘tolerant’ cosmopolitan whiteness.”

She identifies this logic in the evocation of three “allegorical figures”—the recalcitrant alien, the citizen of convenience, and the fraudulent citizen—in public responses to a series of immigration-related controversies. Regardless of whether one is natural-born or how long the actual length of residence, doubt is easily cast over a person of colour’s citizenship. So long as the conviction of racial difference remains, immigration and the very terms of our conversations thereof will remain a skein of racialized hierarchies of power.

Canada, as a settler-colonial society, is inlaid with unequal structures of race power. The country’s undeniable origins stems from the violent conquest and continual divestment of Indigenous peoples. This fact underlines the continuity of the Canada’s trajectory from early colonialism to its current self-presentation as a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and democratic society. The subjugation of the Indigenous plays a role in this ongoing construction on multiple levels. At the very most basic level, the appropriation of land and material wealth provides the foundations of white race power. Furthermore, the social construction of Indigenous persons as the Other allows for the formation of various interrelated identities. These identities are associated with “rights and entitlements...[which] create a material stake.”

Finally, Sunera Thobani argues that Canada’s postcolonial relations are reproduced through the positionality of the Exalted National Subject, the Immigrant, and the
Indigenous. The exalted national subject has strong incentives to reject any claim that would tarnish or take away the psychological and material benefits from the existing power structure. Immigrants and Indigenous persons experience this discourse of exaltation as a daily epistemic violence. The power of the national subject is evinced through the ease in which the common experiences of marginalized groups can be waved aside as an individualized anomaly. It permeates through the psyche of those who occupy the subject position of Immigrant or Indigenous and takes the form of pernicious self-doubt. It affects not only actual immigrants but also any person of colour since the distinction between immigrant and person of colour is so easily ignored. The immigrant is afforded a conditional inclusion in the Canadian subject formation, which is supposed to imbue them with a sense of gratitude and compliance. However, they are constituted as “cultural strangers to the national body” in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{65}

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Mode of analysis

In this study, I utilize a critical discourse analysis framework because it is the most suitable given the purposes of the study and my paradigmatic positioning as a critical race theorist on loosely poststructural terrain. Since discourse, or rather a particular version thereof, is so central to my theoretical and methodological thinking, it is important to explicate how it is being used here. Most popularly associated with the writings of Michel Foucault, the salience of discourse analysis amongst social theorists reflect the general paradigmatic shift away from positivism/post-positivism and the “historical formation of knowledge” within the ‘Western Episteme, in both trajectory and form.\textsuperscript{66} In some contexts,
discourse analysis takes on a rigid meaning as a mode of linguistics that analyzes a narrow understanding of ‘texts’ and the grammatical rules binding groups of statements. However, a Foucauldian discourse analysis is concerned with the way different discourses/discursive frameworks govern the structure of knowledge and the position of the individual subject in the relations of power embedded in the former. Discourse refers to ideas and practices, governed by rules and structures of regularity and operation, referred to as the discursive formation, that are united by a common theme to ascribe meaning, produce subjects, and determine ‘reality’. Furthermore, multiple discourses may exist in a given historical and geographical mapping that contradicts, conflicts, supports, and/or overdetermine one another. In fact, power, always unequal, is enacted through the ability of a given discursive framing to control the terms of understanding and, in doing so, marginalize and obfuscate other discursive framings.

What becomes immediately evident for the inexperienced researcher is that practical texts on conducting critical discourse analysis are few and far between. Foucault’s aversion to producing the method of discourse analysis is understandable in light of his critique of power/knowledge. While recognizing the need for flexibility, my approach to discourse analysis, as an uninitiated researcher, is largely indebted to Gillian Rose. In Visual Methodologies, Rose differentiated between two types of discourse analysis that each had its own methodological emphases—“discourse analysis I” and “discourse analysis II”. The first form of discourse analysis is interested in how the relationship between individual texts and images work not only to produce a discourse but its truth-effects as well. In contrast, the second form of discourse analysis is more attenuated to the social site of
discursive production. It emphasizes investigating the mutually reinforcing and constituting relationship between particular discourses and the specific social practices, technologies, and institutions in which they are embedded and arise. Foucault’s (1973; 1995) empirical work, such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, as well as Arturo Escobar’s (1995) *Encountering Development* provide an excellent example of analyzing institutions and their disciplinary/productive mechanisms.\(^{72}\)

Since the objects of my analysis are online comments within the bounds of individual news articles and I am not primarily interested in the real estate industry itself, I am centrally concerned with language. However, this raises a set of questions around ‘validity’ that has to do with the type of analysis itself, but also with the limited scope of my graduate research. First, discourse analysis I, in its fervour for interrogating individual texts and their interconnections, often sidelines discussions over how those interconnections are drawn and the limits of what is relevant in its empirical work. Of a scholar who exemplified discourse analysis I, Rose says: “[the texts] are related...simply through the category of ‘discourse’.\(^ {73}\) Discourse, as a result, seems to become a free-floating web of meanings unconnected to any social practices.”\(^ {74}\) Similarly, discourse analysis, in relation to anti-foundational thought in general, has been criticized within critical race studies for being overly textual. Here, we see the materialist and political-activist disposition of Critical (race) Theory come to a head with the “posts” turn in the field. However, I do believe that there are aspects of human *being* that cannot be completely overlain by text—and theory in general—whether it is the ephemeralness of human interaction or the “stubborn materiality of the other”.\(^ {75}\) Finally, despite all the above ambiguity, the very effectiveness of
this method is its ability to draw in a wide, if disparate, range of texts, broadly conceived and across multiple mediums. In this regard, I am confronted with the question of validity even from within my own methodological framework, as I essentially deal with two narrow classes of texts. This form of discourse analysis aspires to a breadth and reach that I cannot mimic or achieve in my own work, at this moment. Nonetheless, the concerns seem too pressing to ignore and need to be addressed, even if incompletely and incoherently.

One possibility is to seek recourse in political economic analysis. However, such a route would require one to reconcile fissures between anti-foundational thought and Critical Theory (in Marxist sense). The grounds of contestation lie in the postmodern claim that “the terms of political struggle [has] shift from class as a subject of history to the cultural constitution of subjectivity via the workings of disciplinary power.” Further, the difference between ideological critique and deconstruction—“as a ‘part-for-whole’ of the posts”—is, as Patti Lather states:

Ideology critique is about uncovering hidden forces and material structures in a discursive field organized by concerns for ‘truth’. It endorses a binary of textual/material in its calls for grounding knowledge in ‘the crucial facticity of determinant brute economic reality’...[whereas for deconstruction] indeterminacy and paradox becomes conditions of affirmative power by undoing fixities and mapping new possibilities for playing out relations between identity and difference, margins and centres...[T]he deconstructive shift is from the real to the production of the reality effect.

The question becomes “if I locate myself within a post-structuralist analysis then do I necessarily have to abandon a politico-economic concern for material structures of production?” At the same time, I am hesitant to overstate the fissures between the two sides as I do not think it is entirely necessary or productive. For one, Lather’s characterization speaks to a pre-Althusserian conception of Marxist Critical Theory.
Although structural Marxism’s tendency for theoretical closure is still a point against it, there are aspects of Critical Theory and postmodern thought that share a certain affinity. Ultimately, most discursive works evince some concern for the material conditions as a part of a larger necessary examination of the historical conditions that circumscribe emergent discourses. At any rate, even the most ardent champions of the endlessly textual is willing to acknowledge that material conditions “set the limits of possibility” for racialized discourse, of course, to the extent that the economic does not eclipse the relative autonomy of racialized discourse in the last instance. Moreover, the emergence of discourses, such as nation or race, is facilitated by “the confluence of material and conceptual conditions over a period of time from which arises the definition of the discursive object and the articulation of the field of discourse.”

To take another tack, the significance of political economic structures is also preserved in the ways in which discourses produce subjects, although these structures partly becomes an object shaped and determined by discourse. It assumes relevancy in the “suturing of the subject to a subject position [which] requires, not only that the subject is hailed, but that the subject invests in the position”. It is the associated privilege, in part, that compels the individual to believe in, to defend, and to help maintain the discursive practices and closures of the exalted national subject. Finally, the end of intellectual labour is not theory itself but the political work of subjecting theories to determination of the contemporary conditions, in order to form a contingent ground of analysis.

Thus, I follow Lather’s thinking that, in times without foundation, our best recourse is to move forward with our methodological practices, albeit with intensive reflexivity and
transparency about their epistemological investments and agendas. To establish the persuasiveness of our research, then, requires making visible the ways in which we couch our mode of inquiry in specific bodies of research, i.e. “donning the mask of methodology”; situating firmly our analysis and conclusions in a particular interpretive community; and to practice “a certain modesty in our analytical claims”.³²

We are working in the ruins of theory, methodology, and theory-method. This entails conducting research on a terrain fraught with contradictions on and across multiple levels, from esoteric abstraction to concrete everyday realities. Perhaps, I am oversimplifying Lather’s (2007) densely-layered metaphors, but it seems to me the message is to move forward even if stuck in ‘the old way’ while “troubling” and understanding the problematic nature of the very steps that we take—a double gesture, a double(d) science.³³ What I am left with is the need to weave together a pastiche of methodological practices and theoretical perspectives to understand what race and racism(s) might mean and its consequence for our social world.

2.3.2 Research Methods

Data collection for this study was conducted over the course of eight months in Metro Vancouver. This immersion and close proximity to the social geography and built environment upon which racial discourse governing Chinese identities and real estate are overlain and lived affords me an analytically significant vantage point—an ethnographic sensibility, though I would not claim this to be an ethnography. By living in the city, my own subjectivity becomes a way to ground the fragmented reality and messiness of ‘data’; I can observe how discourses about the Chinese and real estate circulate and are concretely
expressed through my everyday interactions. At the same time, the extensive reading list and literature review, done prior and during fieldwork, provides a buffer against the deluge of ‘pure’ experience from being in the field.

The original research design sought to ground the discourse analysis of ORC with semi-structured in-depth interviews of eight local real estate agents to help identify repetitions in the way locals talk about Chinese immigration and real estate. I believed that Realtors as a group of professionals, who due to their ‘expertise’ and material stake in the issue, can offer insights into the production of racial knowledge about the Chinese. Participants had between seven to forty-two years of professional Realtor experience and were recruited, via email, based on years spent in the industry, recognition by professional organizations such as the BC Real Estate Association’s Medallion Club as a top producer, or prominence within the industry or public discourse (e.g. a host of regular local radio show on real estate and the managing director of a major real estate agency. Four out of the 8 self-identified as white or Caucasian (all male), three as Chinese (two Hong Kong-ese and one Taiwanese, 2 female and 1 male respectively), and one female agent who self-identified as simply ‘Canadian' of mixed ethnic ancestry

While debates over the effects of Chinese immigration on real estate markets are contentious, real estate agents, no doubt, profit from the discursive effects of these common associations. Recalling a public scandal that occurred during the year of my fieldwork, it came to light that a real estate marketing firm had staged an interview with a couple of supposed Chinese homebuyers—who turned out to be employees of the company—as a media strategy to encourage real estate sales during the Chinese New Year.
The interview utilized and reproduced a racialized discursive framing of Chineseness based around “feng shui”, cultural beliefs around “auspiciousness”, and the purported vast family wealth of the mainland Chinese—“[i]f we like this place, we have to tell our parents and they make the decision. Yes, really, Chinese people like to buy during this time [Chinese New Year].”

Despite ultimately excluding the interview dataset, the interview process and initial analysis of the transcript contributes to my lived experience of the city and offers an important mid-stage feedback during the data collection. The ORC dataset allows researchers to examine the cultural and psychological myths that adhere to hegemonic Chineseness, but by itself, is not as well-suited to capturing the interplay and complexity of different Chinese subject positions or counter-hegemonic discourses of Chineseness. My reflections on the “interview dance” shaped the specific codes chosen in the analyzing the ORC and discursive relationships between Chineseness and real estate.

Reflecting on my own racial and ethnic presentation during the interviews of Realtors with ethnic Chinese backgrounds, the varied response received hinted at the complexity of talking about Chineseness. Nuances of gender, geographical origin, and period of immigration in relation to their perception of me produced differences in tone, willingness to talk about race, depth of response, and so on. In the case of a second-generation Chinese-Canadian whose family originated from “Canton”, she took “the way [I] dressed” and my “well-spoken” English as cues that we had a similar background—that we were both very “westernized and [...] very yellow”. Over the course of the interview, she began to feel that it was safe to disclose her complaints about the rudeness and
unwillingness to assimilate of the mainland or “new” Chinese since I would sympathetic and non-judgmental as someone who had more ties to “Canadian culture.” Another memorable recounting, by a first-generation Chinese-Canadian from Hong Kong, included anecdotes about extravagant Chinese homebuyers who view and treat Realtors as personal servants who offer all-inclusive services for every need.

Speaking to the importance of reflexivity and adaptivity approaching research, the interview data set was later removed from the study. This change in design was motivated by two reasons. First, my actual experience of conducting qualitative interviews revealed the difficulties of “studying up”, i.e. the uneven power relation between a “nobody” graduate student and those in a generally privileged economic position. Second, a few of the participants remained wary throughout of my intentions with the project as a relative stranger delving into what some consider a controversial topic in Vancouver. Others such as a white male Realtor from Steveston, a predominately white neighbourhood in Richmond, were determined from the get-go to peddle a shallow, neutral narrative of multicultural acceptance and harmony, despite the widespread coverage and municipal-public meetings over issues such as Chinese language signs in Richmond.

Together, my lived experience in the city and theoretical perspective forms the interpretive framework for my critical discourse analysis of Online Reader Commentary (ORC) from select Internet news articles since 2000. I utilize this method based on Augustine Park’s study of racial nationalism and citizenship discourse using ORC data. According to Park, “ORC, a relatively new phenomenon, introduces greater interactivity among readers [where] the chief significance of studying ORC is that it represents distinctly
public debate in which participants advance normative claims [...] that allows a discursive analysis of the quality of language in a public debate”.

I sampled online news articles from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) English-language news website, CBC.ca. The CBC website was chosen over other national and local news media platforms because it provides a forum for discussion that is easy-to-access and does not restrict readers through a pay wall. In contrast to other news websites, CBC online readership commentary largely takes place on a single webpage and is viewable as a continuous feed. Comments on online articles from news websites such as Vancouver Sun, The National Post, or The Province are gathered from across different social media platforms and generate much less engagement from the readerships. Key words and phrases, such as ‘Chinese homebuyers’, ‘Chinese and foreign ownership’, ‘Chinese and Vancouver real estate’, were used to search for articles the website’s internal search engine. Each article contained links to other related news articles, which provided another lead for collecting data.

Given the variation in relevance and depth of online responses, the number of news articles selected and comments collected largely followed the precedent set by Park’s study. Consequently, only those with at least 500 comments were selected from the articles found on CBC, in order ensure an adequately large sample pool. However, the rationale behind this criterion is not statistical significance. A large sample pool is necessary to reach a point of ‘saturation’ and identify “the grammar and vocabulary mobilized to represent and construct a public issue.” The title of the three CBC news articles selected for the analysis are: “Province to tax foreign buyers of Metro Vancouver homes”; “Vancouver mansion sells
for more than $51M”; Governments terrified of popping foreign-buyer housing bubble.”

Each of these articles, respectively, garnered 881, 583, and 1299 comments, which can be organized by oldest, most liked, most replies, most active, and featured comments.

In her study, the analysis was based on 3 articles, each representing a specific theme—fraudulent citizen, citizen of convenience, and recalcitrant alien. None of the articles that I found could match the level of activity generated by the three articles chosen in Park’s study, which had a combined total of over 3000 comments. Instead, comments were aggregated from groupings of articles addressing a similar theme. These unbounded sites reflect common issues around the Chinese real estate and property investment (e.g., articles reporting the sale of a particularly expensive property to Chinese buyers, coverage of policy debates and politics over foreign capital and real estate, analysis and speculation over the role of Chinese capital on Vancouver’s “housing bubble”, etc.). In order to generate the ORC data, I organized each article’s comments by “most liked” and sampled the first 100 comments. The operative assumption is comments that are voted up by other online readers would loosely validate the comments relatability to the public.

To generate my own analytical categories, two successive rounds of coding was conducted. I proceeded to code the sample comments from the three CBC news articles by drawing upon literature review of secondary sources and my own subjective experience in

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* Online Reader Commentary can only be ‘found’ on the respective webpage for a given news articles. Citation for the ORC will consist of end notes for individual comments, rather than appearing in the Bibliography. The primary location information of each ORC reference will include the username of the commentator and the article on which the comment was made. Articles are labeled as A-1, A-2, A-3. The three labels correspond respectively to the CBC articles, “Province to tax foreign buyers of Metro Vancouver homes”; “Vancouver Mansion Sells for $51M”; and “Government terrified of popping foreign buyer housing bubble.” You can navigate to the appropriate webpage and organize the reader comments in descending order by ‘Likes’, to search for a specific ORC response.
The codes produced in the first round were then reorganized into major and sub-themes to elicit the discursive relationship and hierarchy between the disparate comments and the underlying social significance of ORC patterns. These categories are used for the second round of coding to test the persuasiveness of this nascent hierarchy. The resultant three major themes were Fraudulence and Deviance, Family and Home, and Unstoppable Wealth. Organized into these categories, the sub-themes of each serve to tease out one aspect of the racialization and homogenization of Chinese subjects, which is expounded in the analytical discussions in Chapter Three, Four, and Five.

The seemingly arbitrariness of this method’s design is in part due to its relative novelty as a “source of sociological data”. Despite the profound impact of the Internet on how we experience and understand our social reality, the methodological literature largely remains prefatory and focused on its potentials. The most promising methodological developments have come from the field of ethnography. Since the mid-1990s, discussions on Internet ethnography, or netnography, has emerged in recognition of the need for multi-sited ethnography as globalization stretches human experience across transnational settings. Moreover, the drive to tell social stories render ethnographers particularly sensitive to the ways that social and political phenomena increasingly take place in “hybrid environments, where the physical and the virtual overlap and interact”. Similarly, if somewhat disarming, the field of marketing research has become a source of innovation for ‘computer-mediated communications’ research. Yet, this nascent corpus offers limited relevance as most of the advancements has been focused on areas such as the use of online questionnaires or blogs to gather data from a mass audience; implications of interviews
done over emails, text-based messenger services, or video calls; and synchronous and asynchronous online observation of online communities via forums, listservs, social networking sites. In contrast, Park’s study remains the only example of using news media ORC as data source for non-ethnographic qualitative studies.

Further, I am confronted with the same methodological concerns and limitations faced by Park’s study. First, since comments are made anonymously, “one of the principal limitations of this data source, is the extent to which [...] ORCs are reflective of a broader prevalence in political belief”.\textsuperscript{94} Even for websites like the Vancouver Sun where readers comment through their Facebook accounts, the researcher can only make tenuous inferences based on the commentators name and profile photo, if even applicable. That being said, generalizability, in the strictly quantitative sense, was never an important quality in her research design. Similarly, the way in which Chineseness, or what can be said about Chinese identity, is presented neither establishes a positivist connection to reality nor is it merely an innocent interpretation thereof.

Following that, a second critique arises around the significance of the ORCs itself. Nowadays, it seems commonsensical to dismiss online comments as having no basis in reality, either as group of harmless statements or a repository of right-wing conservatism made amongst strangers. To these concerns, I offer a theoretical rejoinder that builds off of Park’s own explanation. The crux of the problem falls upon how the ORCs are conceptualized. Echoing post-Habermas conceptualizations of the public sphere, the ORC represents an arena of discursive contention between diverse actors that intersects but remains distinct from “official state, expert, or media discourses”.\textsuperscript{95} More than an anarchic
coming together of strangers, it is a “social space created by the reflexive circulation of
discourse”. This reflexive circulation occurs through the ongoing interaction between
readers and with the article itself. Importantly, the public is historically bound, as it only
exists through this activity, occurring in the present. Thus, what may appear as anachronic
racist statements is more indicative of which discursive practices still remain relevant.
Racial discourse, and discourse in general, only exists and has power insofar as it functions
to interpellate individuals as subjects. In other words, discourse only exists in the utterance
and action of concrete bodies. The totality of the system of racial representation and
hierarchization forms a part of the subjectivity of individuals thus positioned. The content
and act of commenting is one example of the regular material and physical practices that
constitutes racial discourse.

2 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1993), 38.
6 Marshall, Catherine and Gretchen Rossman, Designing Qualitative Research (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016).
7 Martin Bulmer and John Solomos, Researching Race and Racism (London: Routledge, 2004).
10 David T. Goldberg, Anatomy of Racism, xiii.
13 Agger, Critical Theory, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, 111.
14 Cheeks, Postmodern and Poststructural Approaches to Nursing Research, 18-21.
16 Lather, *Getting Lost*, 5.
17 Lather, *Getting Lost*, 40.
18 Lather, *Getting Lost*, 40.
26 Ward, W. Peter, *White Canada Forever* (Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University, 1972), xxiii.


65 Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 25


73 Rose, Visual Methodologies, 224.

74 Rose, "Contexts of Interpretation,“ 152.


77 Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy Within in the Postmodern*, 104.

78 Idem.


80 Goldberg, David T., *Racist Culture*, 43.


84 Huffington Post, “MAC Marketing Solutions exposed for fake Vancouver real estate investors,” February 14, 2013, The HuffPost BC, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/02/14/mac-marketing-solutions-fake-vancouver-real-estate-investor_n_2680499.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ20vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAJbhyn476Lo0oBaj1o4dM6lG8QqoKqCUuUJlkTQsrvUH2RoNywGeLW1AyewpF6nk52OPl-PlgNMc4724uL6qAKdFEmkHhWlRJ-DV4BphNhKZLOxZry53P30lY0kBEK7q66uyCdwFwvIPzlyDbWcDp5k5_614PlIZoEbeCZgx8B.


86 These quotes are drawn from one of eight interview that were transcribed. However, this dataset was removed from this study and not used directly in the analysis. As such no unique identifiers were assigned to the interviewee, the name of whom will not be disclosed to maintain anonymity.


89 Park, “Racial Nationalism and Representations of Citizenship,” 582.


43
Chapter 3: Fraudulent Others

[The Chinese] never marry or settle in any country but their own, and are more apt to create immorality than otherwise...their consumption in all cases is confined to articles of the first necessity, and they do little to assist in the accumulation of wealth in any country where they may be located. Fourth, they hoard their money with the intention of sending it away to the country whence they came, so that its accumulation and exploitation is an absolute loss to the people amongst whom it is amassed. Large sums are in this way yearly sent away from British Columbia that would otherwise, if circulated in the colony, add vastly to its prosperity. Fifth, they evade payment of the taxes to which the citizens of the colony are subjected, and thus are the most privileged class, while they are at the same time the most unprofitable. Sixth, they are inimical to immigration; they fill every position that could be occupied by a good colonist, and from their peculiar mode of living can afford to do it for much lower remuneration than any Europeans or Americans.

—Excerpt from Cariboo Sentinel circa 1890.

Evaluating the polarizing media coverage of Chinese immigrants, one might reasonably forget that Chinese settlers had played a critical role in the nation’s formation. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was not only the linchpin of the BC’s entry into confederation but the Dominion government’s strategy to expand and formalize its territory, was only possible through the exploitation of Chinese railroad workers, often to fatal consequences. The Chinese, at one point, constituted 40 percent of the non-indigenous population on the BC mainland. In the particular history of BC, the presence and contributions of Chinese migrants, who were near-exclusively male and in search of the Gold Mountain’s promise of wealth, was a constant that affected many aspects of colonial society.
I argue that the current controversy around Chinese immigrants and the real estate market is rooted in idiosyncrasy of settler-colonialism in BC. By tracing the contours of early Chinese history, we can disrupt and question contemporary narratives of Canada as ‘the white man’s land’. Racism toward the Chinese made it possible to justify their exclusion from the nascent national identity. Constructed as inferior and undesirable, the European production of the ‘Chinese race’ gave impetus for repeated attempts to regulate and discipline the community. Connecting the historical racialization of Chinese immigrants with their perception as fraudulent Others in the Online Readership Commentary, I will identify the similar discursive practices and repackaged imagery used to construct dominant notions of Chineseness, then and now.

3.1 British Columbia: Structured in dominance

3.1.2. The role of Chinese labour

In assembling settler-colonialism, the dispossession of Indigenous lands enabled white European colonial settlers to stake a claim as “first-comers” who, by virtue of having “developed” the land, were more deserving of it.¹ The formation of an essential, if vague, set of “Canadian” characteristics, ideas, and values grew out of this socio-spatial mapping, inextricably tied to the establishment of national territoriality and the mythology of East-West colonial expansion.² Chinese settlers, for better or worse, were indispensable to the feasibility of the settler-colonial project.

Chinese migration to Canada began in earnest during BC’s Gold Rush era. This cohort of Chinese migrants began arriving at the colony on Victoria Island in the late 1850s. They came to BC by way of San Francisco, after chasing riches during the California Gold
Rush in the decade prior. The influx of both Chinese and European prospectors would result in the creation of the colony of British Columbia, covering most of the present-day BC mainland, before merging with the island colony in 1866. Facilitated by a quickly assembled trans-pacific recruitment system, Chinese migrant labourers were indispensable to the establishment of many industries and tertiary services and business, such as domestic work, import-export houses, laundry operations, telegraph line construction, etc.

To an extent, these ‘bachelor’ migrant workers filled the need for exploitable workers in the colonies after slavery was abolished within the British empire in 1833. Labour shortages were a common and recurring problem in the mainland as well as the island colonies, exacerbated by the transient and seasonal nature of work in the frontier economy. Further, the British Colonial Office desired immigration from the wealthier classes, who, so it was thought, would bring servants to help populate the colonies. However, porous borders to south, where parcels of land were offered freely through the US Homestead Acts, and prospecting in the vast wilderness of the BC mainland, meant that landless servants could easily move on to better opportunities.

While Chinese workers typically earned less than half (or even a third) of their white counterparts, the wage gap reflected the widespread belief in racial ideology and the perception of Chinese people as an inferior race rather than the choices of Chinese workers themselves. Some were less sanguine about the value of Chinese labourers, but even those who viewed them positively, spoke from a position of noblesse oblige. According to one contemporary opinion on the threat to white miners, Chinese workers were not direct competitors and “their presence in the mines [do not] at all interfere with the enterprises
of the superior race; for it is well known that they are unable to resort to those mechanical appliances requisite for the working of rich diggings...” Although their ‘lowly nature’ precluded them from more prestigious and higher-paying professions, the Chinese were constructed as a simple but hardy folk who are well-suited for and content with menial labour, domestic servitude, and industrial work. Their position in colonial society was decidedly perceived as an ancillary one that was secured through their utility to the advancement of civilized white society. Yet, stereotypes about their willingness to work for lower wages and to cross the picket lines, ultimately, benefited the interests and profiteering of employers and local administrators.

3.1.2. The politics of anti-Chinese agitation

Despite white perceptions of Chinese inferiority, some historians have characterized race relations between Chinese and white settlers in the 1850s and 1860s as one of relative peaceful co-existence. To be sure, the Chinese were not seen as ‘desirable’ but, according to Patricia Roy, white attitudes toward them were “remarkably tolerant”.6 Early talks about regulating and discouraging Chinese immigration was decidedly less palatable to the public than a mere decade later. Before confederation, Chinese people were provided the same formal legal right as white European immigrants under British colonial policy; Chinese men had the right to vote for councillors in the colonial legislature as male inhabitants of the colony. Even BC Chief Justice Sir Matthew Begbie, who infamously stated that ‘the Chinaman is in every respect the reverse of a European’, noted that “he could not recollect anything that could be called agitation against the Chinese until Confederation”.7
Racial prejudice against the Chinese existed among white settlers prior to Confederation, especially on the mainland colony of British Columbia, and was informed by the migration of working-class whites from the south. The circulation of anti-Chinese racial discourse along the US and Canada Pacific coast reveals the ways that migration captures not only a movement of people and goods but also of ideas and social-political systems. The Fraser River Gold Rush (1858-1864) drew tens of thousands of gold-seekers to the BC mainland, many of whom arrived from the US. During the waning years of the California Gold Rush in early 1850s, most of the easily accessible claims had been taken and larger commercial operations replaced individual prospectors to extract harder to reach veins. Presaging a similar turn-of-events in BC, a growing population of unemployed white workers catalyzed a shift in public opinion from the relative acceptance of Chinese prospectors, workers, and merchants to organized anti-Chinese agitation and political intervention. Consequently, both groups of disillusioned white workers and persecuted Chinese migrants brought with them experiences of racial conflict and the ‘Yellow Peril’ from the south.

The fading heyday of the Fraser Gold Rush heralded a period of economic depression that fleshed out anti-Chinese sentiment in popular thought. Beginning in the mid-1860s, unavailing prospectors and unemployed white workers dispersed from the depleted gold fields, with some returning to the larger settlements. Faced with a stringent labour market, nascent concerns about economic competition for Chinese workers gained traction in press coverage and the colonial legislative assembly. The nub of complaints against the Chinese were focused around the “custom of sojourning, of working hard, living frugally, and always
planning to return home”. Since many Chinese migrants were married ‘bachelors’, those who were able to accumulate enough money on meagre wages to afford passage home while retaining some savings, would understandably seek to reunite with their families. The excerpt from the Cariboo Sentinel at the beginning of the chapter reflects well the various ascriptions that framed the Chinese as a secretive, itinerant society of bachelor backpackers. Additionally, sojourning, as well as both temporary and permanent migration, had already been well-established as a common practice in response to times of hardship; the history of overseas Chinese includes the waves of emigration to South-East Asia beginning in the 15th century.

The regulation of Chinese labour and immigration would become a flashpoint in the provincial legislature, and also for the incipient relationship between BC and Ottawa. Contemporary historical sources point to local and provincial politicians as a prolific promulgator of anti-Chinese rhetoric after the 1860s. The significance of this shift, according to Peter Ward, is that anti-Chinese racism became a “public issue”, as a topic of perennial discussion in the provincial legislature and in inciting the rise of organized nativist groups and protests. The recurring appearance of these nativist organizations, though each fervidly short-lived, signaled the gradual formation of a culturally British-derived, West Coast identity centred around white supremacy; the Workingmen’s Protective Association was succeeded sequentially by the Anti-Chinese Association, the Anti-Chinese Union, and then, the Knights of Labour. This identity was anchored in the belief that British Columbia was the white man’s land, and thusly, whites should be entitled to the resources and opportunities that the Chinese had availed themselves to. Uncurbed
Chinese immigration represented no less than an existential threat to the growth of a modern and civilized society in BC. Since the province’s entry into the Dominion in 1876, this sentiment had been only further reinforced by Ottawa’s repeated stymying of anti-Chinese legislation, in favor of ensuring an adequate supply of cheap labour for railroad construction. From Victoria, such reluctance to restrict immigration evinced the lack of understanding from the ‘East’ and the difference between the two regions. The rancor incurred by Ottawa’s indifference to BC’s ‘plight’ during the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, which ultimately affirmed economic value of Chinese immigration, was foregrounded by the easily-incited outbursts of anti-Chinese protests and mob violence over the next decade.

The political expediency of pitting white workers against their Chinese counterparts became more salient as East-West migration of white labourers was intensified by the CPR’s completion, for which many Chinese workers had risked their lives. During the Royal Commission, witnesses testified to the utilitarian calculus of anti-Chinese politicians in BC, who were looking to secure the working-class vote. Of course, Ward cautions against equating the prominence of white labour movements in anti-Chinese agitation with Sinophobia as an exclusively working-class preoccupation, since different views on the Chinese were shared across social cleavages. Instead, the relatively young province lacked other established social institutions for its expression and formal representation.

Such was the case leading up the infamous Vancouver Anti-Oriental Riots that took place in the fall of 1907, which was also already the second race riot in the city’s short history. Despite declining Chinese immigration at the turn of the century, the Vancouver
Trades and Labour council sponsored the creation of Vancouver’s own version of the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL) to ferment public support for the concurrent and latest legislative effort to restrict Chinese employment. The AEL stemmed from the eponymous American organization, which originated from a similar racially-tense atmosphere in San Francisco two years prior. In addition to the local labour movement, the Vancouver branch quickly “attracted support from middle-class whites” including politicians of all stripes.10 On September 7, 1907, the AEL organized a protest parade and public meeting at City Hall. What began as a spectacle to reinvigorate public support for the issue quickly descended into a rioting mob that swept through Chinatown, vandalizing and attacking Chinese owned businesses and homes.*

3.2 The racial project in British Columbia

3.2.1 Creating Chineseness

In identifying the British imperial project in BC, one can see the various and contingent political, as well as economic circumstances to which racial discourse about the Chinese was put to work and developed. Yet, I constantly return to this idea of ambivalence, a central motif in many postcolonial/diasporic writings. It brings to mind the early dissonance of views on ‘Orientals’ between the different levels of government, for one, and between B.C. employers and white labour movements, for another. To be sure, the existence of a ‘Chinese race’ was never in doubt, but, as is often the case, a racial stereotype

* The Vancouver Race Riot occurred two days after to a similar riot broke out in Bellingham, Washington. The timing and involvement of the American Asiatic Exclusion League prompted some to suggest that the riot was due to out-of-town agitators.
can hold within itself a dualism that inscribes the labouring Chinese body as both industrious and degenerate. For Bhabha, such dissonance also reflects the function of “stereotypes-as-suture”\textsuperscript{11}. Stereotypes act as the primary mode of identification through which the subject of the Other is fixed, and while various stereotypes may contradict each other, the emergence of each stereotype reflect a strategic purpose. The unity of racial discourse lay not in its specific expressions but the endurance of such discursive categories itself, able as they are to continually accrue meaning, function, and practice over time. Regardless of the contemporary views on John Chinaman, the validity of the ‘Chinese’ category is well-rooted in the fact that “it is not prejudice [or purely economic or political motivations] that has explanatory power but rather the ideology of racial difference that informs it”\textsuperscript{12}. It is in this sense which Anderson argues that the notion of a distinct and homogenous ‘Chinese race’ is a contrivance of European provenance, naturalized in quotidian representations of Chinatown in the white settlers’ social imaginary.

In this vein, the material and discursive construction of Chinatown has historically been a cornerstone in BC for the reification of ‘Chineseness’, both as a signifier and a set of signified social and power relations, and another locus in the rhizomatic movements of ‘race’ in the Canadian social formation. The ‘raw’ sensory input of the place, its feel, smells, and optics, was appropriated and filtered through the orientalism of a euro-centric gaze\textsuperscript{13}. As a fiction of the Orient in an ‘Occidental’ place, Chinatown was racialized ground for projection, thusly, constituted by “a set of historical categories[…] idealized racial typifications tied to notions of slumliness, physical and ideological pollution of the body politic, sanitation and health syndromes, lawlessness, addiction, and prostitution.”\textsuperscript{14} And,
while economic and social marginalization created (and upkeeps) its boundaries and material realities, Chinatown’s existence and deviance were ascribed to the Chinese character’s natural proclivity for agglomeration and degeneracy.

The significance of ‘Chinatown’, then, is that it becomes a generative site for establishing the whole epistemology of separation, which we will later reflected in legal and social institutions. Segregating the Chinese community was more than just socioeconomic oppression, it was a mode of knowledge production. Under the European gaze, the artificial products of racial segregation—poor sanitary conditions, Tuberculosis epidemics, dilapidated buildings, etc.—became a way to further pathologize the Chinese body as similarly disease-ridden, inferior, and deviant; in doing so, a mandate for exclusion, and when expedient, eradication was created. The recycling of old racial stereotypes for political advantage is evident in the city-led efforts to impose ‘sanitary reform’ in Chinatown, recurring episodically until the neighbourhoods ‘cultural heritage’ became a desirable trait under Discourses of sanitation and hygiene, especially within the rhetoric of urban decay/renewal, has historically been inundated with heavily stigmatized racial and class connotations. Presaging inner-city gentrification processes in many US and Canadian cities during the late 20th century, such ‘reform’ amounted to draconian application of city and public safety/health ordinances that targeted what local officials perceived as a blight upon the city, to which the solution was the usual prescription of wholesale condemnation and demolition.

Indeed, Goldberg cites Chinatown as a powerful example of how racial marginality is produced in periphractic space. The racial Other is subjected to a process of spatial
circumscription, whether physical or imagined, that delimits access to city and its corridors of power and consumption—“Chinatown is at once of the city but distant from it, geographically central but spatially marginal”.

The ongoing spatial production of racial marginality is well-illustrated by political machinations during the early 1920s in Vancouver. In particular, the refurbishing of older Chinatown imagery provided a powerful rationale for displacing and dispossessing the Chinese community. In the decade prior, job scarcity due to (ironically) a collapsed real estate boom sensitized the city’s working population to the modest mobility gained by the Chinatown merchant class and “the wartime ‘Oriental’ penetration of agricultural land and jobs”.

Additionally, the institutionalization of eugenics and nationalistic imperial contest in most Western countries over the previous two decades gave further credence to notions of racial hygiene/purity, which, in turn, emboldened local politicians and municipal administrators to draw upon a politicized rhetoric of social decline against the Chinese community. The circulation of racial stereotypes and notions of racial purity by local press, municipal government, and the Asiatic Exclusion League resulted in a number of moral panics that were capitalized upon to administer and discipline Chinatown and its residents.

Opaque representations of hazy opium dens were disseminated in the local news media, indicative of a ‘commonsensical’ understanding of Chinatown as the centre of crime and drug trafficking in Vancouver. Despite documented widespread of non-Chinese drug use, Chinese residents were blamed and construed as a priori dangerous agents of criminal activity, who profits from corrupting respectable white folk by trafficking cocaine and morphine. Old associations of Chinatown were fleshed out into new moral panic around
'snow-parties' in Chinatown. At the time, ‘snow-parties’ were a common trope of ‘Oriental immorality’, alleging insidious attempts by Chinese drug traffickers to lure white women into a life of addiction and prostitution. Leon Ladner, Conservative member of parliament for Vancouver South, provided the following description:

*Chinamen of great wealth, engaged in this odious practice, give parties at which white women, whom they employ, as hostesses. Young girls are invited from about the city... interspersed among these young people are two or three addicts who are trained and whose business is to inveigle other people into the use of narcotics.*

Similar descriptions were propagated in local news reporting and by opportunistic public figures in Vancouver society. The Chinese Benevolent Association, whose members were trying to combat the stigma of drugs in Chinatown, decried these allegations by pointing to the Police Commissioner's own admission that “Chinese vendors are merely convenient used and that the traffic is controlled by persons other than Chinese [and that] not so very long ago China went to war with Great Britain in an endeavor to stamp out that evil.”

3.2.2 White Canada forever

In the introduction of their book, *Dragon Networks*, Susanto and Susanto confidently state, “most ethnic Chinese businesses are family owned since family is the foundation of Chinese organizations, including businesses.” Odd as it may seem, this broad generalization is characteristic of popular and scholarly obsessions with contemporary Chinese transnationalism. Published as recently as 2013, it is part of a body of literature in China studies that seek to locate ‘Chinese’ capitalism’s triumphant success at the nexus of Confucian values, family ties, and a growing middle-class; the Chinese's
competitive advantaged lay in opaque ‘bamboo' or 'kinship' networks. In the late 20th century, China’s economic growth and integration into global capitalism had precipitated an outward migration of this latter cohort of skilled workers and professionals. For many, the expansion of a mobile middle-class is a crucial element in explaining the global reach and local impacts of the Chinese diaspora. In responding to uncertain political and economic conditions, the migration strategies and household practices of Chinese families are held as exemplary of the flexible logic and economic rationality required to succeed in late capitalism. By identifying the benefits and restrictions of various nation-state regimes, they select multiple sites for accumulation, consumption, and reproduction to advance the prosperity of the family unit. Integrated into planetary circuits of capital, these diasporic subjects can overcome local hierarchies and the racialized, (post-)colonial idiosyncrasies of the nation-state by dint of wealth and a culturally-derived economic rationality.

Thus, we see the continued spatial reproduction of racial alterity in myriad discursive mobilizations, physical or imagined circumscriptions, and representations of built form at varying scales. The significance of these convoluted overdeterminations is that racial amnesia is made plausible. Specifically, racial nationalism’s intensifying demand to exclude speaks from the loss and decline of a mythologized white Canada of yore, due to the arrival of particular kinds of immigrants. The containment and erasure of racialized presences serves to obscure the culpability of racism and colonialism in producing white space.²⁰ In Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, and Aubrey Kobayashi’s edited collection, *Rethinking the Great White North*, scholars identify the geographically-contingent combination of discursive and material tactics that uphold its pristine imagery.²¹ In popular
imagination, the whiteness of Canada’s snow-covered landscapes is analogous to the racial character of the nation. As a symbol of what has past, there is a temporal aspect—a nostalgia for the untamed wilderness that was marred by the corrupting influence of all things urbane (and thus, non-white).

In this vein, changes in local communities due to (re)development has engendered a longing in the ORC, which I had characterized as “Ditchmond nostalgia”. The eponymous term of this ORC node refers to the ubiquity of dykes and irrigation canals in Richmond, which disappeared as the city expanded its public infrastructure and moved away from agriculture. Ditchmond encapsulates this nostalgia for a simpler time, before urban development spurred on rapid population growth and a drastic demographic shift. According to census figures, Richmond’s population is now 54 percent ethnically Chinese, whereas the Chinese and Japanese communities combined had amounted to just 5.5 percent of the population in the early 1970s. The ambiguous and difficult to pinpoint meaning of “ways of life” is obliquely depicted in shared memories of long time Richmond residents on a popular community Facebook group, You grew up in Richmond, BC if...

While pastoral recollections of jumping ditches, catching frogs, and early morning rooster calls may be specific to Richmond, Ditchmond nostalgia is an expression of white anxiety toward changing social milieu that focuses on local community bonds and neighborhood character, on an intimate and often mundane level. For OR Commentator David Henry, revenue from the foreign buyer’s tax “should go directly into a maintenance fund […] to tidy up the exterior of these empty and deteriorating homes and the cost of lawn-mowing, etc.” Concerned with losing a sense of community, one OR commentators
stated thusly, “one has to ask what kind of city or town you want to have—a vibrant community where residents are engaged on a daily basis or one with dark windows?”

This online reader seeks to identify the negative impacts that upwardly mobile people of colour have had on the community, while emphasizing desirability of continuity and respecting the (white settler) historical legacy. On the surface, some of these responses might be read as benign comments that are pro-community and anti-development in nature, but the source of their ire is oft grounded in those racialized perceptions of urban centres as places of crime. Reminiscent of the common safety and neighborhood civility-related justifications for white flight from the city to the suburbs, OR commentator mover is glad to have traded homes in Vancouver and Toronto for “a smaller place with a more sense of community and [that is absent the sounds of] the police and police helicopters all night long, [and where] people actually say hello to you on the streets and neighbors lend a helping hand.”

Putting aside more overt racial connotations, there is a perceived correlation between large, dense urban populations and criminality that offers another way to criticizing high levels of immigration, a connection more plainly drawn by some—we are letting too many immigrants in and most settle in Vancouver or Toronto”.

Further, concerns over community change are often identified with a loss of control over how Canadian-ness is defined, with who can claim Canadian identity and resources that should rightfully belong to Canadians—by which the meaning is more accurately described as ‘European’ Canadians. Rather than kowtowing to immigrants, as it were, real Canadians—that is, of ‘old stock’— should learn from the “Swiss [who] don’t sell their souls for a few bucks. They are generally much more selective about who and what they allow in,
and what they allow them to do when they are here.” Indeed, multiple OR responders have claimed as unfair that “We Canadians aren’t allowed to own real estate in China, so why should their citizens own ours?”

The problematizing of changing ethnic composition of local neighborhoods has “relatively little to do with physical change per se, and instead is reflective of a long history of ideas about immigrants, race, and place in suburbs.” The rise of “foreign” control, historically defined, in the form of increasing Chinese shares in the real estate market is fabricated as a ‘new threat’, “while long-term foreign investors (like the Guinness family) had over time assumed national credentials in the popular imagination”. The residents’ protests at being the numerical minority and lamentation at the erosion of local ways of life “[elicit] an era of racial privilege that evoke[s] the colonialist mentality of white property ownership and Chinese positions of servility that [draws] on this ‘natural’ landscape as theirs by right, erasing the colonial legacy of racial and class segregation integral to its construction.” Moreover, Richmond had already begun to experience the pains of rapid suburbanization, changing urban landscapes and diminishing rural spaces, prior to significant levels of ethnic Chinese immigration. Protestations around the loss of a rustic and quiet urban environment, in contrast to the post-war construction boom in Vancouver proper, would only later become associated with the arrival of the Chinese. In such ways, the differential imaginings around what constitutes “foreign” control is informed by the historical racialization of various groups.
3.2.3 Fraudulent Others

In the preceding section, I identified the discursive maneuverings required to replace the settler-colonial roots of the Canadian social formation with a melioristic history of racial progression. It is a revisionist view in which racialized ‘latecomers’ are expected to be grateful for the tolerance of Canadian culture. Rather than a pragmatic decision that acknowledges a racist past, Canadians generously share their resources and welcome unwanted immigrants to Canadian shores. The current revanchist urgency of racial nationalism seeks to secure the hegemony of whiteness in our social order against the demands of those who continue to seek racial justice. While the repeated performance of historical erasure and white settler mythology is used to justify white privilege, racial nationalism seeks to defend the status quo by breathing life into condemned stereotypes from the past and giving new meaning to old racial signifiers.

The seamless transition between characterizations of Chinese as both backwards and ascendant, admired capitalists and greedy speculators, reflect the instrumentalist movement of racial discourse. Ascriptions of fraudulence, along with stereotypes of extravagant wealth, are the most common expression of this racial thinking in the Online Readership responses. The equation of Chineseness with fraudulence serves to police race-class borders by focusing on the problematic racial Other for transgressing said borders (rather than their oppressive provenance and the machinations of other structures of articulation). The fraudulent Other as a mode of control, by delegitimizing Chinese mobility (socioeconomic and geographical), resonates deeply within BC’s social history as well as the three allegorical figures, identified by Park—the *recalcitrant alien*, the *citizen of*
While the three figures are intertwined and coordinate (with contingent emphasis) the various discursive practices that form public understandings of citizenship and civilization, the figure of the fraudulent citizen provides a core imagery for the Chinese in BC and an identifier for polluting bodies to be ‘cast out’. The assumption is always already that Chinese real estate consumers (and ‘foreigners’ in general) are, by their nature, dishonest—Doug Dewan muses, “I wonder how [the foreign buyers tax] will get enforced and what loopholes foreign buyers will use to skirt the system.”

Chinese immigrants, as the fraudulent Other, are attributed with clearly defined ideas of how they cheat to dominate and drive up prices in the Vancouver real estate market. Chinese immigrants are depicted as fully cognizant of the laws and values that characterize Canada’s ‘open society’, which they are quick to take advantage of rather than embracing Canadian liberal values. In order to flip properties for profit, Chinese homebuyers navigate, bend, and evade Canadian real estate rules in an unprincipled manner by soliciting “Canadian partners” to skirt residency requirements and “transferring [property] via numbered company, local agents, friends, etc.” Nowhere is the savoir faire of these rule-dodgers more apparent than in evading Canadian taxes. Unlike Canadians who “pay their taxes”, the OR commentator Painful Reality asserts that “Asians never declare world income as required by law”. Across the online reader responses of all three articles, the characterization of Chinese immigrants as dyed-in-the-wool tax evaders is the most common expression of their fraudulence.
Their alleged motives for tax evasion are sometimes tied to another common critique disparaging Chinese immigrants as non-contributors to Canadian society and the economy, since “they largely fall into the super rich yet pay no income tax bracket”.\textsuperscript{41} Such claims are substantiated by the existence of certain (unspecified) neighborhoods in Vancouver where its residents are “70% Chinese [but yet] 60% of adults in the area are on welfare.”\textsuperscript{42} To be sure, fraudulence and allegations of ‘scamming’ or ‘burdening’ society have been commonly associated with racialized folks, but for Chinese migrants, they are also depicted as not contributing enough. In that sense, Chinese persons are simultaneously too wealthy for an ‘inferior’ culture and too poor as historically imagined denizens of the Third World.

Furthermore, Chinese presence in neighborhoods and membership in social stratum (with their attendant means of class reproduction), hitherto inhibited by overtly racist policies and culture, are depicted as a result of their inherent criminality and lack of scruples. Whereas criminalization functioned to maintain segregation in previous periods, the assumption of ill-gotten wealth is used as a call-to-action to prevent further encroachment and manage racial proximities. Accordingly, common OR responses contend that money-laundering is the underlying reason for Chinese economic activity in real estate, “since most of the Asian real estate investment is, if not in practice, in the spirit of money laundering [...] especially in China”.\textsuperscript{43} While less frequent than the accusation of tax evasion, almost all of them directly state or imply that Canadian immigration policy and the real estate industry have coalesced into a money-laundering scheme.\textsuperscript{44} Inadvertently, highlighting the past criminalization of Chinese people, explains how the
criminal connection between foreigners and real estate is similar to “in the past [when] drug money was washed in Canadian Casinos”. Another commentator, under the name ‘Smoking Gun’, weighs-in on the $55 million mansion sale as an ‘expert’ with years of experience in banking and the mortgage industry:

Many Chinese nationals are denied mortgage financing in Canada because they are unable to satisfy our banks with authenticity where their down payment is sourced from [...] So Mr Chen skirted the Canadian banking screening system by transacting this as a FULL cash purchase. The province has an additional $1M in it’s cash account. Mr Chen will sell his house in the near future ... more than likely at a loss ... for reasons only known to him. Another interesting factoid: Nearly 10% of homes purchased in BC are transacted with cash ... hmmm ... what other part of BC’s economy is totally transacted with cash???

Despite a lack of information in news reporting on the sale’s financing or whether it was a cash transaction, Smoking Gun indirectly implies that the purchase was made for money-laundering purposes and flouted Canadian financial regulations. It is unintelligible for the commentator that Mr. Chen could be wealthy enough to afford this property without having done so illegitimately. Something as perfunctory as a property transfer tax is depicted as government collusion, in order to support a narrative of fraudulence. Whatever the finer details of this transaction, any ‘skirting’ of rules or morally dubious behavior involved more likely occurred as part of the normal operation of capitalism. After all, it is the wealthy that knows best how to hide and retain their wealth.

Furthermore, there are two important insights from analyzing specific practices of ORC, which arise from allegorical figure of the fraudulent citizen. First, there is rarely any attempt to distinguish between racialized citizens and the fraudulent foreigner, leading to what Park described as “the easy elision between fraudsters and all non-white citizens”.
Second, this purposeful ambivalence is used to prop up bad faith normative evaluations of racialized citizens and non-citizens when an attempt is made to distinguish between fraudulent and ‘legitimate’. In the following example, the commentator presents the alleged social permissiveness toward the problematic Other in contrast to and as unfair for “legitimate immigrants”:

*Under this system, a "Canadian of convenience" (there are LOTS of them in China) can keep on buying up his BC investment properties and not pay this new tax, while a legitimate immigrant who lives, works, and contributes to the community here, does have to pay.*48

In the context of applying the foreign buyer’s tax, the paradoxical implication of singling out Chinese immigrants and citizens as deviant is that the problem of foreign ownership needs to be addressed by moving beyond legal status and civic rights. Ostensibly, the justification is that Chinese immigrants are ‘bad apples’ compared to other law-abiding immigrant groups. One OR response sardonically remarked, “investor class” immigrants (those that buy their way into the country) contribute less and pay less in taxes than refugees (those that flee war zones and show up with just the shirt on their backs).*49 In practice, as repeatedly shown by immigration and diaspora writers, the valuation of one marginalized (im)migrant group over another is used to point out the specific ways that the ‘problematic’ culture is too patriarchal, too extremist, or too violence. Media and recent public discussion abound with other contexts where travails of the model-minority immigrant are deployed to oppress the, now, undeserving and burdensome refugee. Rather than a picture of complex diversity, what remains is reductive binary of how racialized immigrants should be and how they are. The former ideal acts as a strawman for reproducing Canadian-ness and acceptable difference, and the latter is an accusation of the
many ways in which all non-white Canadians/persons cannot approximate to Canadian-
ness and, indeed, do not desire to do so.

The overt racial reference found in early history of racism toward the Chinese have
been replaced to similar effect with coded language of ethnicity and national origin. In a
world of nation-states, public perceptions of the international status quo become the font
for shaping local racial discourse and rendering each country summarizable through a few
oversimplified cultural facts and the lens of geopolitics, shorn of its postcolonial and racial
underpinnings. For this reason, KeloBC accuses the Federal government of charging a one-
time fee to let in “money-launderers ([their] way of referring to ‘Communists’ that have
more than the average person in China).” In lieu of ‘race’, the place of origin provides a
new overriding marker of difference as Western perceptions of the Chinese state are
distilled into intrinsic characteristics of Chinese peoples. And, as an overriding marker, the
place of origin literally supersedes the overtly acknowledged class cleavages and the
inequality of capitalism, in the ORC. When another commentator pointed out that the
original owner, who founded the American social game developer Zynga Inc., had actually
committed fraud, littlesnowelf retorted, “yes, manipulating your own company’s stocks is
scammy behaviour as well [but] at least for however long it lasted, Zynga was contributing
to the economy.” Even when forced into a ridiculous proposition, there is significance and
imbued importance to racial difference that cannot be wholly encapsulated by class
analysis.

The enduring motif of ‘Communist China’, from the days of McCarthyism and the
Red Scare, is given new life to signal corruption and gross inequality. Aside from the charge
of tax evasion, the most common expression of morality-based delegitimization trades on an assumption that any substantial amounts of Chinese wealth are a function of the unjust exploitation of workers and ‘ordinary’ Chinese people. This follows a reputation that has been long established through its role in the globalization of production and pervasive human rights critiques brandished against China, both often mobilized by for political purposes. Characteristic of OR responses, the paternalistic concern for the Chinese masses is notably deployed by the following commentator as a justification for exclusion:

*Here is China, not too long out of communism with investors buying offshore properties [when the country has] nearly 0 worker rights, perhaps just a step or two above slavery, questionable freedoms (for the average person) questionable ethics, horrible environment and multimillion/billionaires buying up foreign properties. Do we even want citizens with their wealth acquired under such dubious circumstances?*

In some instances, we see 'mainland China' function in similar ways, which is why we are exhorted to denounce Mr. Chen to do right by “the factory workers that he treats like dirt that made all his money for him. Just like Apple, using slave labour to increase their profits to the highest in the world”. Understandably, I would speculate that ‘mainland Chinese’ is the more relevant and common marker in popular parlance, especially for the many ethnically Chinese peoples who originated from without or have immigrated during earlier periods.

Yet, it must be asked who is it in practice that constitutes the mainland Chinese? Much like production of Chinatown or juxtaposition of marginalized groups, these distinctions to sort out the ‘bad’ Chinese from the ‘acceptable’ are moralistic evaluations imposed from a place of power and privilege. In effect, it is the privilege of speaking
authoritatively on who can belong and how, but also of an exemption from genuinely distinguishing and accounting for the diversity within the category of ‘Chinese’. It is difficult to imagine what meaning such distinctions hold when the proposed response so often amounts to nativist call-to-action; the slippage between criticizing ‘foreigners’ or the ‘mainland Chinese’ and restricting all (non-white) or Chinese immigration?

There remains a similitude in the discursive structure between the historical and contemporary racialization of Chinese peoples. Even if the particular statements have changed (though sometimes not even that), the organization of the problematic Other around nodes of fraudulence reveals the ongoing reproduction of racism in the Canadian social formation. In the subsequent chapters, we shall see the ways that Ward’s typification has endured but also the transformation of racial discourse as it adapts to new material conditions, political circumstance, and social milieu.

1 Roy, A White Man’s Province, 9.
2 Anderson, Vancouver’s Chinatown, 35.
5 Ward, W. Peter, White Canada Forever (Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University, 1972), 28.
6 Roy, White Man’s Province, 5-7.
7 Anderson, Vancouver’s Chinatown, 46.
8 Roy, White Man’s Province, 8.
9 Ward, White Canada Forever, 30-35.
10 Ward, White Canada Forever, 191.
11 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 95.

Goldberg, Racist Culture, 198.

Goldberg, Racist Culture, 199.

Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 111.


Baldwin, Andrew, Cameron, Laura, and Audrey Kobayashi, eds., *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada*.


David Henry in A-1.

larchtree in A-3.

Mover in A-3.

TimSmithui in A-3.

Sageantoine in A-3.

Ian Hynds in A-1.


Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line*, 34.

Rose, “Contexts of Interpretation,” 478-482.

Ibid., 486.


Thobani, Sunera, *Casting out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law & Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

Doug Dewan in A-1

Bill Lee in A-1

PainfulRealty in A-2

AArkerhielm in A-1; PainfulRealty in A-2; lizardlady, sledgie, Stop Immigration Scams, Sydney777 in A-3.

Ethan R Wright in A-1.

Stop Immigration Scams in Vancouver in A-3.

David Kelln in A-1.

Brian O’Connell and Jeff Quigly in A-1; Favorite Purpose in A-2; on-line reader and Real Priorities in A-3.

Ed Hudson in A-1.

Smoked Gun in A-2.


Seth Kiraly in A-1.

Think Ashraf Fayadh – I’m fuelled by down votes in A-2.

KeloBC in A-2

Tinysnowelf in A-2.

Trubowitz, Peter and Jungkun Seo, “The China Card: Playing Politics with Sino-American Relations,” *Political Science Quarterly* 127, no. 2 (Summer 2012), pp.189-211.
Chapter 4: Impermissible Families

I do not care if this property sells for $50 million or $500 million. I care about the stupidity of our federal government in regard to property issues. Here is my idea for foreign real estate buyers (most try to hide money; my opinion). 1. Has to be permanent resident and has to reside for more than 270 days/year in Canada. If less than 270 days/yr for a period of 10 years - loss of permanent residency and the property(s) will be auctioned off. 2. Properties cannot be transferred to family members for 30 years. I think that would be the proper way to stop the insanity.¹

In the ensuing chapter, I will trace the pathologization of Chinese immigrant families as different and problematic in a time where certain classes of Chinese people are better positioned to challenge racial-class hierarchies and dominant representations of family in Canada. To explicate how dominant notions of home and ‘family’ are mobilized under the racial state, we must begin by excavating the sedimented layers of social relations, embedded meanings, and contested discourses that form this distinction between normal Canadian families and abnormal immigrant families. First, as I have posed before, I argue that this Othering is a re-articulation and continuation of earlier racism by providing the historical deployment of state immigration policies to exclude, destroy, and later regulate Chinese families for the sake of maintaining a white settler nation. Second, whereas earlier racism was used to justify barring physical entry, I will examine the ways that the ORC emphasizes the migration strategies of Chinese immigrant families today to inscribe geographical dispersal as the basis of their essentialized difference and racial Otherness. Finally, I will unpack the popular trope of Chinese ‘astronaut family’, as a prevailing frame for understanding and problematizing Chinese families, to explore the ways that female migrant bodies are re-gendered in transnational spaces and processes.
4.1 Familial interventions of settler-colonialism

4.1.2 Colonial history of Chinese families

In conjunction with the racial construction of Chinatown in Chapter Three, the legal codification of Chinese people as a foreign race, distinct from Europeans, was another keystone of the nascent regional identity centered around the fiction of white British settlers as the province's founding people. Poignantly, the first act of the newly founded provincial legislature was to disenfranchise categorically all people of Chinese-origin. However, concerted effort and mobilization were required to replace the various roles and positions occupied by Chinese people in the regional economy with white settlers.

Articulated as a ‘sacred and imperative duty’, the state used anti-Chinese immigration policies as a means to create and preserve a culturally British, white settler society. The 1885 Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese immigration was enacted, partly, in response to concerns in BC that the 17,000 Chinese labours, contracted to build the CPR, might settle on the West Coast where the last spike was to be driven. Effective January 1, 1886, the Act stipulated a $50 ‘Head Tax’ on all persons of Chinese-origin entering the country, regardless of nationality or status as a subject of the British empire. For those who could afford the Head Tax, passage to Canada was complicated by a requirement that ships could only carry one Chinese immigrant for every fifty tonnes of its weight. Importantly, Anderson argues that the Act reinforced the legal reality of a state-defined ‘Chinese race’ by creating an administrative structure apart; new immigrants to Canada were effectively divided into “people of Chinese [and] the other, all people not of Chinese origin, who were covered by the general Immigration Act”.

2
Prior to the 1885 Act, Chinese immigration comprised mostly of male workers who sought work in the frontier economy to remit earnings or facilitate later family immigration. The gender imbalance, estimated at 52 women to 1,995 men in 1867, was maintained through the Head Tax, up until the postwar era. Due to the prohibitive costs of the Head Tax (which increased progressively to $500 per person), Thobani states “many Chinese men, as is well known, lived out their lives in Canada as ‘married bachelors’ because their wives and children were forced to remain in China.”

The combination of this imbalance and social taboo against miscegenation assuage some of the BC government’s antipathy toward the 70 percent of CPR workers who settled across the province.

In this way, the efficacy and discursive underpinnings of the racist immigration policies reside in the manner in which it constituted Chinese women, and through them, sought to destroy the Chinese family. The perception of Chinese women as “morally degenerate, sexually depraved, and endowed with a fecundity more animalistic than human” lay at the heart of fears about the ‘whiteness’ of the nascent nation being overwhelmed. In debating whether Chinese women should be exempt from the Head Tax to allow for family settlement, then Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald opined: “the whole point of this measure is to restrict the immigration of the Chinese into British Columbia and into Canada... If wives are allowed, not a single immigrant would come over without a wife, and the immorality existing to a very great extent along the Pacific coast would be greatly aggravated”. The impact of the Head Tax fell disproportionately on women and “became the ‘most important constraint’ on the immigration of Chinese women.” While
working-class Chinese men could borrow money from family and wealthier Chinese men to pay the Head Tax, few women have access to same resources.

Seemingly simple, these fears of being overrun reveal an abiding nexus between race and gender, with undertones of classism toward the working class that were more closely entangled with racialization in earlier periods. While white women were extolled as ‘mothers of the empire’, they were constituted through patriarchal relations of the family, wherein the capacity to impart and spread the moral artefacts of the ‘civilized’, at times perceived as ‘duty’, reside in the male body. Tellingly, concerns of miscegenation during the anti-Chinese sentiments of the early 20th century warned of the corruption of ‘proper white women’ by immoral ‘Chinaman,’ but the Otherness of non-white women could be tamed and eradicated in her subordination to white patriarchal family rule. In this way, the 1887 amendment to the Act refined the legal definition of ‘Chinese’ to “a person born of a Chinese father irrespective of the nationality of the mother,” whereas Chinese women married to “British and Christian subjects” were no longer considered ‘Chinese’ under the act, and thus exempt from the tax.\(^7\) Understood relationally and as subordinate, the conditional and reductive constitution of female subjects and their experiences normalizes enduring gendered structure of (post)colonial societies. This dynamic will prove to be a recurring and crucial theme for our later analysis of the contemporary Chinese family. Ironically, after this long history of state-sanctioned efforts to prevent the possibility of family life for Chinese migrants, the benefits and importance of family life for immigration settlement and integration would become, ostensibly, a common pathos used to justify later reunification policies in the 1960s.
4.1.2 Family reunification

The family, as an eminent site of socialization, took on renewed significance in nation-formation during the creation and expansion of the welfare state in the mid-20th century, an important historical conjuncture in the development of capitalist societies. Emanating from devastating early 20th century experiences of capitalism’s contradictions, manifesting in cyclical economic crises, the idea that the wellbeing of the nation depended on the wellbeing of the national family became a cornerstone for expanding social program. Emanating from devastating early 20th century experiences of capitalism’s contradictions, manifesting in cyclical economic crises, the idea that the wellbeing of the nation depended on the wellbeing of the national family became a cornerstone for expanding social program. Understood as an ideological code (analogous to genetic code), Dorothy E. Smith considers the Standard North American Family (SNAF)—a legally-married, heterosexual household organized around the male breadwinner/female care-giver model—as a universalized archetype that informs the operationalization of ‘family’ in government statistics and studies, thereof across disciplines, and thus pervasive of our everyday notions of family.

This sexual division of labour was institutionalized through distinct male/female tracks in social programs wherein one focused on “contributory social insurance” that stabilized wage-income and the other on “means-tested social assistance”, respectively. The latter was meant to supplement a family’s income with the assumption that women, responsible for the labour of household reproduction, would mainly rely on the wage-earnings of the husband. In aiding the material reproduction of the National Family, the Canadian state reaffirmed the hegemony of its heterosexual and patriarchal form.

Concurrently, the transition to a welfare state in Canada transformed and reinforced the settler-colonial state’s racial character by redefining the relationship between nation
and its subjects as one of shared characteristics and qualities, rather than purely shared racial status as white Europeans. In the aftermath of WWII, the Canadian state strategically refashioned its national identity as marked by humanitarian compassion by emphasizing the importance of family reunification in its immigration policy. This tentative opening of immigration was filtered through racialized criterion of ‘preferred and non-preferred nationalities.’ The perception of Canada’s humanitarianism on the international stage yielded many benefits to the state. This perception was also extended to its nationals; a discursive shift reconceived Canada as a nation of kind and caring people. In other words, the state’s citizens were deserving of the post-war expansion of the proverbial social safety net because they embodied its ethos of compassion and care. White women, in particular, were incorporated into the economy through the expansion of the public sector. Moreover, large-scale labour integration allowed for their self-constitution as morally superior and economically independent. The National Family, too, became endowed with moral worthiness and was presented as comprised of egalitarian relationships.

Non-white immigrant families were disparaged as ‘undeserving’, a ‘burden’, and a threat to the welfare state. In comparison, the National Family was portrayed as egalitarian and economically productive. Immigrant families were seen as prone to ‘abusing’ social programs as well as being more ‘close-minded’ and hyper-patriarchal due to their ‘traditional’ values and ways of life, reeking as it did of Orientalist tropes of the ‘Other’. Their ‘backwards’ culture renders the immigrant family incapable of reproducing the purported liberalism and compassion of Canadian nationals. Ironically, immigrant women were thought to more likely require social assistance given their economic dependency.
within said patriarchal family structures. The stereotyping of racialized families as dependent on welfare (evoking tropes of ‘Black welfare queens’ and ‘lazy boat people’ fleeing South East Asia) represents a recurring nexus for the production and disciplining of race, as well as justifying the claw-back of the welfare state in the 1990s. For this reason, Patricia Hill Collins views the rhetoric and practice of the traditional family ideal as an intersection for gendered/raced systems of oppression and national identity.

While few Chinese immigrants were formally recorded during the Exclusion period, the championing of family reunification by the Canadian state was a pragmatic decision and follows a larger pattern of immigration policy influenced by demographic considerations and perceived or real economic need for labour and capital investment, notwithstanding other significant racial and political determinations. In fact, family-sponsorship represented a third of all immigration between 1946-1966 when economic recovery and growth in Europe meant a decline in immigration from ‘preferred’ nations. To be sure, non-European immigrants were denied rights to sponsor extended family members and subjected to arbitrary age minimums for sponsoring parents. Despite the alleged removal of race-based immigration criteria in 1962, the unequal distribution of rights to family was de facto maintained through nationality-specific clauses and the discretion of immigration officials. At any rate, debates over the desirability and significance of family reunification figured prominently in establishing an ostensibly ‘race-neutral’ points system in 1967 and the subsequent modifications that led to the 1976 Immigration Act. The increasingly bureaucratic and complex pathways to immigration resulted in a paternalistic stance on what immigrant families should look like.
With the assumption that immigrant families are problematic, family reunification policies under 1976 Act sought to regulate and re-shape Chinese families in the moralizing image of the National Family, exalted as egalitarian and caring, but contradictively, heteronormative and patriarchal in form. Similar to the gendering of social programs, immigrant families would be remoulded through a similar bifurcation of immigration into independent class and family class. Applications to the independent class are determined by a points system that framed the desirability of potential immigrants as the function of calculated, objective merit, based on factors such as occupational experience and demand, education and training, language skill in French or English, age, and prearranged employment. In contrast, family class immigrants rely on their relationship with immediate family members, defined as “spouses, unmarried children under 18 years of age and parents of qualified Canadian citizens or permanent residents.” These categories, as a technology of governmentality, become the first point of contact between migrant bodies and the state; the subject is torn from the anchors of personal history and seen again within the logic of its policies. Such immigration categories ascribe dominant discourses of family and citizenship that exert a powerful suturing effect by re-writing migrant subjects and determining their conditional incorporation into nation. This restrictive conception of familial relations affirmed the primacy of the nuclear family while invalidating the role of the extended kinship network in Chinese family life. A well-established body of feminist research has documented how dialectics of gender stratification in countries of origin and Canada produce gendered outcomes, both material and symbolic, in immigration. Not only are visa officers more inclined to process women under the family class, also the
tendency within Chinese families for men to emigrate and ‘pave the way’ for later family emigration means that women are less likely to immigrate under the independent class. However, the common refrain that family reunification was desirable for its ameliorating effect on the settlement process and the importance of family as a social safety net is based on the previously noted sexist division of labour. In explicating the sociological implications of this categorization, Thobani states it as such:

*The ideological context of the independent class, including its nomenclature, organized it as a masculinized category. In western patriarchal terms, men are defined as independent economic agents, as heads of households in their own right as men, whereas women are largely defined as their family and economic dependents. The point system integrated these deeply patriarchal constructs, constituting male immigrants as productive. In contrast it feminized the family class and rendered invisible the economic contributions of those it defined as ‘dependents.’*

The cultural nuances of familial relations, variances in the interplay of intimate power dynamics, and the potential mitigating effects of support from one’s kin are quashed by increased economic dependence through the family class’ sponsorship regulations. Under the sponsorship agreement, the ‘dependent’ is denied access to social assistance programs and all financial responsibility, as well as the provision of necessities of life is devolved to the sponsor for up to ten years, well beyond the three to five-year requirement for citizenship eligibility. In absolving itself of such accountability, the state reveals the inherent inequalities in the distribution of rights and entitlements and, ultimately, institutionalizes the alleged ‘Otherness’ of Chinese familial relationships.
4.2 The grammar of difference

4.2.1 (Dis)similar geographies

In the contemporary globalized, mobile, neoliberal period, where individuation, risk, and uncertainty are defining elements, wealthy families are able to adopt diverse migration, investment, and household strategies to embody the flexible logic of accumulation. Constituents of this elite class move to take advantage of the diverse context of capital as it travels through international and local circuits. Theirs is a lifeworld composed of the enthusiastic turn-of-the-century discourses on the global village, shrinking worlds, and cosmopolitan hypermodernity—acolytes of ‘globalization from above’. Yet, the seemingly mundane realities of this echelon are made an exception for the Chinese family. In analyzing the ORC, I understand that the fixation on transnational Chinese families (and Chinese families as transnational) reflects the ways that ‘race’ constantly changes to adapt past racisms to the conditions of the current conjuncture. The problem with ‘Chineseness’ is that it is always conceived as something essentially different. Today, I contend that the basic grammar of its essential difference is their geographical dispersal.

The looming return of British-controlled Hong Kong to China catalyzed one of the most visible migration of Chinese people to Canada in recent history. Between 1987 and 1996, over 30 000 Chinese immigrants arrived in Canada, from Hong Kong alone. Seeking to escape the uncertainties of the handover, this new mobile class of migrants were generally wealthier, more skilled, and schooled under the British education system, iconically captured as the “multiple passport holder” by Aihwa Ong. Some families chose
to separate and relocate family members around the Pacific Rim to prepare for eventual return or a more permanent stay. In many ways, this generation represented the first encounter between Canada and the new Pacific mobility. The sum of this experience, gleaned from neighbourhood conflicts and interrogations of belonging and status at the border of race and class, continues to inform how Chinese migrants are known and seen here.

It is this very perception of the Chinese family’s transnationalism that forms the basic unit of essentializing their difference. In contrast to the nuclear structure and territorial boundedness of the National Family, the fluid geographical distribution of capital and bodies in Chinese households is framed as disloyalty to the settler nation project in their fundamental Otherness and allegiance to familial self-interest. Referring to UBC’s Vantage College, which helps first year international students’ acclimate to the new environment, OR commentator [3] laments that “in B.C. they build universities for the ‘satellite families’ […] using public lands to expedite foreign ownership while deliberately excluding citizens of Canada.”

While ORC references to the family context are relatively uncommon, the uniformity of these comments proves intriguing for the ways in which Chinese family contexts are presented monolithically, but more importantly, as a social-symbolic threat to the National Family. If depictions of foreign homebuyers are often expressed in the ubiquitous disembodied figure of a wealthy, mobile businessman, the dynamic and varied contexts of Chinese families are reduced to mere shadows coalescing around the ‘astronaut family’ concept. Coined by Ong, the astronaut family refers to an arrangement where
individual family members are scattered across national borders; this is usually depicted as a strategic choice to protect family interests and reduce risk in uncertain national and global markets, build cultural capital through a cosmopolitan overseas education, expand transnational business networks by establishing multi-local household space, etc. Typical narratives describe how the husband/father works in Asia while the wife/mother and children establish a home base abroad while seeking citizenship and providing education. It is referenced in a constellation of metaphors (such as satellite families, parachute kids, astronaut families, etc.) that have come to signify practices of flexible citizenship required under late capitalism.\textsuperscript{25}

The generalization of Chinese family’s transnational structure as problematic is articulated through stereotypes that focus on economic aspects of this historically and politically contingent family arrangement. The family is depicted as an economic unit focused on capital accumulation and managing household wealth. Specifically, the ORC evinces a recurring criticism of how Chinese migrants unfairly use their transnational household structure as a means of transporting and investing capital in real estate markets, although these manoeuvrings are unequally accessed and far from ubiquitously deployed by the Chinese peoples in Vancouver. In order to secure a “safe house and a place to put their money should things go wrong for them in China”, the Chinese family is conceived as a highly efficient organization with a singular objective: “foreign money […] is transferred into the hands of those who have landed immigrant status courtesy of the Canada or Quebec Immigrant Investor program to buy real estate.”\textsuperscript{26} According to multiple commentators, the inevitable failure of the BC Foreigner Buyer’s tax and other such
measures are guaranteed unless the state bans property transfers to family members. Identified as “students”, “homemakers”, and “resident caretakers”, family members of the business migrant are only intelligible as a means to game Canadian law and protect assets by evading tax and real estate law.\textsuperscript{27}

Here, we return to previously-trodden ground as the gendered division of labour, both within the national family and inscribed onto immigrant families, reappears in the way OR comments frame Chinese families as passive economic dependents, in contrast to the mobile and disembodied images of power that dominate stories of the (male) Chinese investor. Playing on Park’s citizen of convenience, not only are wealthy Chinese investors using Canadian citizenship as a way of securing a ‘safe place’ to "park their money [but also] their families here while paying no income tax. [Their families] live in technical poverty and enjoy our social systems".\textsuperscript{28} The wife/mother and children, then, are deprived of agency and are under the patriarchal control of the investor migrant through their economic dependency. Moreover, they are presented as subservient to the flexible demands of capital in a global real estate market. Furthermore, in line with recent media coverage and public concern over ‘low-income’ households living in high-value properties, the perception is that income earned abroad is never declared so that ‘housewives’ and ‘caretakers’ not only enjoy public systems such as health, transportation, and education but abuse the tax credits, family and social support programs available to low-income families.

Of course, that is not to deny the salience of gendered hierarchies in Chinese families, however, its articulation is contingent on context. The nature of these reductive stereotypes simultaneously creates and hides various harms and inequalities. As we have
seen previously, this geographically dispersed arrangement between Canada and elsewhere was never a choice until recently, though ‘choice’ has been and is increasingly dependent on one’s socioeconomic position. Moreover, the willingness to be subjected to prolonged separation is antithetical to images of emotional-cum-geographical closeness that undergirds the conceit of the traditional, middle-class family ideal. Denied of emotional ties, the Chinese family’s purported difference is rendered as an ontological incompatibility that justifies being excluded from the national body politic. That only some families do, or are even able, to conform to this image is lost—“the point is not that all Chinese are painted by the same broad brush of elite narratives but that the image of the border-running Chinese executive with no state loyalty has become an important figure of era of Pacific Rim capital”.

4.2.2 Re-gendering migrant bodies in transnational space

Indicative of the complexities of transnational social fields, the migrant body is also overdetermined by the self-constituting practices borne out of economic and social necessity. While economic reforms in China hailed greater integration into global capitalism (albeit state-mediated), many overseas Chinese, consisting of the historic diaspora in South East Asia, subjects of British empire in Hong Kong, and the growing exodus from the mainland itself, lived on a knife-edge between the opportunity for riches in China and political uncertainty, manifesting in events such as the Tiananmen riots and periodic crackdown on outward flow of capital. While some abandoned the ancestral motherland altogether, others prudently utilized the family network to maximize opportunities, both abroad and on the mainland. The realignment of the Chinese family as
global denizens of capital required a new disciplinary regime that emphasized the centrality of familial blood ties over national identity. Consequently, a particular revival of Confucian family ethics based on filial piety, hierarchy, and order, poignantly rather than a social ethic, was disseminated through family business empires that arose in the Asia-Pacific after 1960s.\textsuperscript{31}

The image of success portrayed by business tycoons, such as Li Ka Shing, who was a prominent and public investor in the development of Vancouver’s downtown core, is inextricable from the family morality of restraint and humility, fraternity and loyalty, and virtue and hierarchy. For the scions of elite families, “filial piety is instilled through the force of wealth.”\textsuperscript{32} The family patriarch is not only the company head, but the one who strategically moves his sons internationally to receive the right education, accumulate the right experiences, and establish the right personal and business networks to further the family empire and eventually takeover; Li Ka Shing’s two sons were sent to Vancouver and Toronto separately as interlocutors of the family business while pursuing Canadian citizenship. To reiterate, it is a familial regime entrenched in gendered roles and patriarchal relations. The high-profile movements and coverage of these business families, and their proximity to the success of Asia-Pacific capitalism, underlines why this particular type of Confucian family ethic now resonates with so many overseas Chinese, as well as perceptions thereof within China, and the Indigenous non-Chinese business classes of South East Asian countries.

Although seen as a problem by some on this side of the Pacific, the historically-contingent familial regime of the Chinese astronaut family becomes a point of pride for
middle-class and elite overseas Chinese and an aspirational ideal for class mobility for those still living in the highly stratified, hypercompetitive environment of Asia-Pacific economies.\textsuperscript{33} That the astronaut family as a universal schema for understanding Chinese migrants fails to capture even the diverse axes of identity differentiation (through sexual orientation, geographic origin, social and political values, etc.) within the heterosexual Chinese family points to its normative social and political functions. In different context, states have used such heteronormative family schemas as the evaluative criteria to regulate and shape its populous by providing symbolic and material support to certain families. For example, the Chinese state’s push to modernize and expand internationally in the 1980s coincided with a state-led effort to remould the traditional family structure into a three-family household through the One-Child Policy.\textsuperscript{34} For some, the state's social engineering project can be interpreted as seeking a demographic ‘modernization’ to align fertility rates to those in so-called developed capitalist economies of the West. In the same vein, formal policy around gender equality under the Communist government resulted in higher female labour participation rates and earlier adoption of the dual-income household model in China than in North American countries.\textsuperscript{35}

Within the context of complex habitus engendered by the astronaut lifestyle, the ORC offers a glimpse into the way that migrant bodies are re-gendered in transnational spaces. For OR commentators, the perception of undefined amounts of wealth and a put upon immigrant-friendly government means that one can spot the well-heeled housewife in “the Asian Mercedes pull up [at the Richmond food bank] to take ‘free food’ intended for the homeless”.\textsuperscript{36} The idealization of a carefree, luxurious housewife who is economically
dependent on a working husband abroad trivializes the fact that women disproportionately bear the costs of navigating through transnational spaces. Within the strategizing of the astronaut family, the feminized work of home-making and childrearing underscores the fact that it is often women who make career sacrifices as they relocate abroad as part of the vanguard along with the children. The very terminology of the ‘Astronaut’ (*taikungren*) plays on gendered semantics in its original Cantonese, expressing both the multi-sitedness of the subject as ‘frequent flyers’ but also its masculinized nature as a ‘man without wife’. As Ong notes, the gendered form of the astronaut family can be seen in the way that astronaut wives in the US are “euphemistically referred to as ‘inner beauty’ (*neizaimei*), a term that suggests [...] ‘my wife in the Beautiful country (America)’ (*neiren zai meiguo*)”.

The immediate loss of career experienced by migrating is coupled with larger trends of de-skilling and downward mobility experienced by migrants of colour entering into Canada’s racialized, gendered labour market. Chinese immigrant women are increasingly comprised of skilled workers and business owners, a trend reinforced by the deepening class stratification of Canadian immigration policy. Where experience and education afforded professional and entrepreneurial achievement in China, the emphasis on local (read Western and superior) credentials and experiences results in higher rates of under- and unemployment for Chinese immigrant women in Canada, regardless of their previous class privilege. The racial discourse that valorizes white workers and devalues racial Others, manifesting in bias in hiring practices and a disciplinary, masculinized white business culture presents another set of problems to surmount. As female migrants, they also face a double oppression due to gendered access to different forms of market work,
exemplified by the way migrant women of colour are structurally funnelled into domestic work sectors. Accordingly, Lalaie Ameeriar argues that skilled immigrant women of colour are often reinserted into the labour market as a pool of cheap labour, whereby success is dependent on stripping away their otherness and exceptions are only found in feminized industries of care such as nursing. Put another way, the culmination of past labour in building up status, social capital, and cultural capital in China is lost in translation.

These costs also reveal themselves in the way that geographical distances create various lines of emotional and social separation that cuts across familial ties and bonds. Despite the salience of transnational arrangements among Chinese immigrant families, the high-costs of separation mean that it is only viable in the short-term. Even then, it is not uncommon that family separation catalyzes marital collapse. In his exploration of Hong Kong Astronaut families in Vancouver, Ley observed that depression and anxiety was a common response for Chinese women in Canada living the astronaut lifestyle, which also underscored an important ameliorating role played by local NGOs like S.U.C.C.E.S.S and ethnically-specific religious organizations and communities in Vancouver. Regardless of whether the woman works in these transnational arrangements, the loss of social and communal ties, as well as the emotional toll of separation, is compounded by the trauma of settling into a new place as the racialized Other. Reflecting the challenges of a fragmented family structure, some ‘astronaut wives’ [in California and Vancouver] sardonically refer to themselves as “widows or computer widows” as they take up the labour-intensive work of maintaining the home and raising children abroad.
In cases where the husband joins the family, whether permanently or for a seasonal visit, relative differences in work and business opportunities between East Asia results in a difference of status and disturbed identity formation that creates friction between family members, encapsulated in the oft-mentioned metaphor of ‘immigrant prison’. Delving into the emotional aporia of reunification in Johanna Water’s 2004 study, respondents described the situation variously: ‘the boss is back! And then he controls the family’ or, to quote another interviewee, ‘When he stays in Canada, he is always at home. Everything, he don’t like. He argues to me. If he stays in Taiwan [...] my heart is free.’

The erasure of such struggles and challenges stems from gendered divisions of the public and private sphere on both sides of the Pacific that regulate visibility and value. The narrow, passive rendering of female Chinese migrants as ‘astronaut wives’ obviate the emotional labour done by women, invariably critical to the process of migration and maintaining these family strategies. Lauster and Zhao cogently capture this tendency in our contemporary understanding of migration as the purview of ‘economic/labour migrants’, a (fictional) frictionless world of workers on the move. Specifically, they argue that migration and settlement, and relatedly maintaining transnational familial practices, are labour-intense processes that rely on and is motivated by the never-finished work of home-making, articulated as: settling in (“the process of assembling together the things and places of daily life to be inhabited”); settling down (“the stabilization of interactions with people as well as with places and things”); and settling for (“[prioritizing] he stability of home– for one’s self and/or one’s loved ones–over achieving a higher status elsewhere”). While ‘settling in’ and ‘settling down’ can be easily grasped as the
undervalued, and often unseen, work of social reproduction, the type of activities involved in our everyday routine, “such a purchasing household good, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, socializing children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties” depend on the particular environment inhabited. The dislocation of uprooting home to immigrate to another country can be a jarring ordeal as one attempts to reconstruct everyday life while adjusting to the social and physical geographies of the new place; differences even in terms of accessibility and variety of stores and things to do are drawn into sharp relief. These seemingly mundane obstacles from setting up utility accounts, finding places to shop, figuring out how much to pay, different transportation norms and experiences, and even adjusting to differences in kitchen layout and the type of cooking that can be done. Parallel to the material assemblage of home, migrant women in care provider roles also juggle the social and emotional homemaking work of ‘settling down’, of binding together not only the routine of different family members but connecting the family through affective relations, anchored in particular times, activities, and places. This work is done even when separated by facilitating regular contact over digital mediums, organizing familial rituals of gift-giving, and dispensing blessings during the myriad Chinese and Western cultural celebrations.

Despite the abrupt end of previous career trajectories, Chinese women are often actively accumulating various forms of capital to create new opportunities in Canada or in preparation for a triumphant return, leveraging the “symbolic migratory capital” gained abroad. While some will pursue further education to acquire university diplomas,
certificates, and more specific skills training to either reproduce past career trajectory in Canada or to move into a lateral field, others might build new social networks and relationships with others in a similar position through a variety of leisure, self-development, and social activities, including language classes, sports clubs, health and finance/investment seminars, religious organizations, and art classes. In a similar vein, racial-cultural barriers to the mainstream labour market incentivizes the movement of Chinese immigrant women into niche industries supporting the flow of people and capital between China and Canada. Utilizing the cultural capital built up in China, unrecognized here, Chinese women might find work in real estate retail and development, immigration consulting, international student housing, Chinese-focused tourism ventures, to name but a few examples.

Aside from cultural-class notions of traveling and respectability for women, the important role of an ‘overseas’ or ‘foreign’ education in family migration strategies combined with gendered discourses that designate emotional support work in children’s education as ‘mother’s work’ result in an overarching expectation and greater pressure for women to be the one that migrates along with the children. Despite stark social stratification in East Asian countries, education remains a widely recognized avenue of social mobility and class reproduction, sought after by rich and poor alike. Importantly, the perception of its accessibility through effort and talent has produced a hypercompetitive education system where the child’s academic achievement becomes a function of parental support work and/or resources to engage with the vast industry of supplemental learning.
and educational supports. In this cutthroat environment, a ‘rarefied’ international education offers both a reprieve and opportunity to build cultural capital.

An international education, understood predominately in the context of Western countries, is also an important class artefact that speaks to the role of cosmopolitanism, understood broadly as “an openness to foreign others and cultures”, in reproducing the material conditions of global capitalism and one’s ability to consume, produce, and accumulate therein. Specifically, as places of consumption and the means of production are stretched across borders, people are pressured to accumulate new forms of social and cultural capital to prove that they can live and work in diverse cultural contexts, or risk falling into the rapidly growing global class of capitalism’s ‘losers’.

Conversely, as much as the wealthy caretaker is derided, their absence is again problematized and sensationalized in popular representations of ‘parachute kids’ in Vancouver. Referred by some in the ORC as ‘satellite kids’, the term refers to the children of families where both parents returned to the country of origin for work. The children often arrive during their high school or middle school years with little control over the decision. The parents may make home-stay arrangements for the child whereby room-and-board is provided by a local, never-before-met family in exchange for a monthly fee, though “some lived by themselves [or] with relatives such as grandparents”. Although the one or both parents may come initially to help set up, the child is then left alone to acquire a Canadian education and citizenship. As alluded to above, some arrive as young adults transitioning into post-secondary education. The deleterious effects of this lack of supervision have been studied and publicly speculated upon, from the disruption of
adolescent-young adult identity formation, loneliness stemming from separation and local language-cultural barriers, vulnerability of being pressured into gang life, and the difficulties of adjusting to a slower, more mundane urban life. Yet, the most common takeaway in the public eye is the irresponsibility of the parents and the overindulgent youths in freely gifted high-end sports cars. Mundane traffic offences become a subject of local media coverage and speculation when the public is sensitized to representations of the jet-setting, materialistic life style of Chinese youths ‘parachuted’ from abroad.

Given that it is predominately men who stay behind for market work, it is significant that the intimate work of social reproduction, erased by overlapping capitalist and patriarchal systems, is thrust upon the wife. In its family rather than commercial context, the labour of love, of caring and nurturing sustains an entire affective system of socialization and interaction that shapes us into relational beings, capable of living within and moving through complex social systems and communities. The way that gender marks certain bodies as “love laborers” and caretakers of these affective relations represent a distinct dimension of inequality and structure of articulation that is “arguably the principal form of exploitation that applies to them specifically as women” and “as a discrete site for generating gender and, increasingly, racially related injustices. Rather than an afterthought, the place and everyday activities of home-making, often done by women, literally makes possible economic migration.

Given the varied costs of migration, these challenges may be seen by critics as further justification for curtailing Chinese immigration to Vancouver. Indeed, in Flexible Citizenship, Ong reflects upon how the “astronaut family as a trope of Chinese postmodern
displacement also expresses the costs of the flexible accumulation logic and the toil it takes on an overly flexible family system.” However, returning to Lauster and Zhao’s examination of Chinese migrants between Beijing and Canada, the importance of home-making as more than assuaging temporary discomforts, and migration as part of home-making rather than re-orienting to new labour markets, opens our perception to the ways that transnational practices are often deployed in preparation for a later stable family life. In explaining the reasons behind “settling for’ less-than-ideal situations” in Canada, the respondents cite the hectic fast-paced lifestyle and demanding market work in Beijing, along with food scares, lack of confidence in the social welfare system, the inability to save up, and environmental concerns as disruptive obstacles to achieving an idyllic middle-class life. Rather than emphasizing the way globalization enables, and forces, middle-class workers to be flexible and mobile economic migrants in seeking the ‘optimal’ work opportunity, we must enlarge our analytical scope and understand how home-making and seeking the ‘optimal’ place of home informs the long-term migration strategies of migrant families.

Over the course of this chapter, I have approached the above question from a number of angles to evince how familial discourse is mobilized to mark and pathologize Chinese families. Drawing from the history of Chinese immigration to Canada, the salience of gender and family as sites of state control and racialization, from legal differentiation and discrimination during early state formation to formal exclusion during the interwar years, provides an important context to contemporary debates. Similarly, the politics of family reunification policy in the post-World War II era, where overt racial categorization is condemned, reveal the iniquitous pragmatism of Canada’s purported post-racial
humanitarianism while highlighting the ways that ‘race’ and racism prevails, albeit refashioned and in covert forms. Consequently, the ‘labour of race’ continues in its insistence on essentialized ‘cultural’ differences between Canadian and Chinese families. Specifically, the contemporary problematic of Chinese families focuses on the expanded transnational family space of certain privileged groups within the Chinese diaspora, articulated through the ‘astronaut family’ in both academic and public discourse. At the same time, the gendered and raced experiences of Chinese immigrants in Canada stems from the complex entanglements of changing social structures and state agendas on both sides of the Pacific. While the family forms only one aspect of current fixations on the Chinese in Canada, it offers an opening to understanding how wider global processes translates into local racial conundrums in the ensuing chapter’s discussion of the Chinese in Vancouver’s real estate market.

1 KeloBC in A-2.
2 Anderson, Vancouver’s Chinatown, 57.
3 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 130.
4 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 92.
5 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 59.
6 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 314.
7 Anderson, Vancouver’s Chinatown, 58.
8 Collins, Patricia Hill, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” Hypatia 13, no. 3 (1998), 62-82.
10 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 106.
11 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 110.
24 *Real Priorities* in A-3.
26 Kerry Hird in A-2/1.
27 Douglas Druin in A-1.
28 Sydney777 in A-3.
36 Painfulreality in A-2.
37 Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 129.
42 Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making,” 178.
Zong, Li, “Recent Mainland Chinese immigrants and Covert Racism in Canada,” 111.


Shik, “Transnational Families,” 73.


Chapter 5: Unstoppable Wealth

Foreign investment in the housing market and immigration both must cease. When I see what has happened to the country my ancestors built and paid for, including the elevated costs to hard working, paying Canadians to simply live and exist, including the increased taxes to support immigration, the ghettos we now have to contend with, the crime, constant accommodations and erosion of decent Canadian values, I defy any politician to point to anything positive here and which is not abusive to Canadians. One can thank PE Trudeau for starting this mess. Canada is a country on a one way path to destruction. No more immigration.

In the middle of my fieldwork for this study, I had presented some tentative findings at an academic conference, wherein a local historian who had wanted to discuss the topic further approached me. It was a fleeting conversation, but what has always stuck with me was his comparison of the current situation in Vancouver to the British occupation of Hong Kong; the Chinese were now the colonizers, brandishing their economic might and bending the urban landscape to their will. Despite the numerous problems with this analogue, it is not an uncommon sentiment these days, at the very least, it speaks to commonly-held beliefs about the wealth of recent Chinese immigrants and the power dynamic between them and ‘Canadian’ locals.

From a normative perspective of power and international relations, the rapid economic reforms and liberalization of Deng since the 1970s yielded significant geopolitical and economic cachet. Felt from within and without the diaspora, the contemporary formation of Chinese identity is strongly entangled with an aura of ascendant wealth and power. In Western countries, this is embodied in the discursive figure of the newly wealthy mainland Chinese migrant, entailing a discursive shift for Chinese subjects within the
Canadian racial formation. However, as seen in Chapter Three (Fraudulent Others), this apparent advantage or class mobility does not confer acceptability, civility, or respectability, but rather is used pejoratively and as a means of exclusion.

I do not seek to dwell on exact nature of the Chinese state or the complicated ramifications of economic reforms (vis-a-vis their relationship to either communism or capitalism, the morality of its authoritarian state apparatus, or the contradictions of changing societal cleavages and skewed distribution of gains). Instead, my discussion follows from the recognition that, in toto, Chinese nationals have been empowered to move abroad and exercise their newfound wealth due to the polyphonic historical shifts that “successfully [transformed] the existing, stored-up power of labor into energy that mobilizes and propels—into capital”. While the growth of a mobile middle and upper strata in Chinese society offer a straightforward reading, it is the emphasis on ‘capital’ (i.e. the state’s integration into global capitalism) that bears relevance for the behavior of Chinese subjects abroad, and perception thereof. More specifically, I argue that what is important for understanding the Chinese in Vancouver is the mimetic pivot by Chinese subjects toward reproducing the consumption and accumulation practices of their capitalist counterparts in the West. Therefore, ironically, they challenge the unequal colonial relations inherent in the global capitalist order by taking part in the very economic system that sustains said order.

In this penultimate chapter of the thesis, the concepts and analysis, accrued thus far, are put to work in untangling the set of discursive relationships and assumptions that cohere into a discursive regime governing a singular conception of Chinese identity from
the discursive practice of global real estate. In other words, whereas the preceding two chapters examined how past and present discursive acts mingle to produce particular assumptions about Chinese subjects today, this chapter will explore how these assumptions, as a whole, are implicated in both our perception of the local real estate market and how social and economic changes are made tangible. Rather than elucidating the heterogeneity of Chinese subjectivities, per se, I seek to identify the particular manner in which the behavior of a disparate ‘diaspora’ is generalized within BC’s social formation. While Chinese subjects are problematized in varied ways, I argue that discourses evoking Chinese identity in the West are governed through an archetype of the mobile ‘New Chinese’ from mainland China, who is defined by astronomical wealth, a culturally-deterministic attitude toward property-ownership, and their ostentatious overseas consumption. Subsequently, I expose the state’s structuring effect on the proliferation of this archetype through immigration schemes and public policies, designed to advance its neoliberal human capital immigration agenda. Finally, I will invert the assumptions about Chinese cultural inclination toward buying property by etching out an alternate reading of real estate consumption as a driver of the contemporary capitalist development.

5.1 Globalization and neoliberal subjectification

In the previous chapter, I argued that the transnational familial strategies of Chinese families are understood through a lens of economic rationality and cultural determinism. However, globalization moves the habitus of certain classes of people into the transnational social field, attuning them to global flows of capital and bodies while shaping new subjectivities. Building off of Aihwa Ong’s seminal elucidation of ‘flexible citi
way-of-being that reflects the postmodern episteme) through experiences of the Asia-Pacific Chinese diaspora, scholars of migration, globalization, and diaspora often reference a concatenation of Pacific Rim affluence, transnationalism, and flexibility to describe modern Chinese subjectivities, and vice-versa.

Whether critically or prescriptively, the transnationalism of wealthy Chinese diasporans is seen as emblematic of ‘globalization from above’. By globalization from above, I am alluding to an agenda and process over the last few decades to expand and maintain global capitalism by reconfiguring local geographies to facilitate greater economic integration, interstitial interactions, and fragmented production as well as accumulation processes. Mediated by the advancement of information and transportation technology, this planetary capitalist project is borne by a loose constellation of states, global financial organizations, transnational corporate entities, and elite subjects. It is the gradual process toward, and a prefigurative vision of the world that services the power elites of everywhere. Resuming the teleological progress of early economic liberalism, stalled by the exceptions of the welfare state, globalization from above is emanant from the migration of neoliberal rationality.

In particular, four characteristics of neoliberalism bears relevance here. First, neoliberalism avails itself as a pervasive mode of governing national subjects that rearranges state practices, institutions, and social relations through transfigurative policies, valorizing free market and trade, privatization, deregulation, and self-reliance—the end goal being subjugation of all aspects of society to market forces. Second, in the context of the China and other Asia-Pacific countries, neoliberal rationality is less about making
“efficient” all aspects of society than a technique for “fostering self-actualizing or self-enterprising subjects [...], to increase their capacity to make calculative choices in the fast-expanding information industry”. In order to bolster this small stratum of educated elites, the process relies on the regressive re-arrangement and reification of existing social stratification to maintain a large captive pool of disposable human capital. Consequently, at its core, neoliberalism is a technology of population management and transformation. Neoliberalism seeks to place racial difference under erasure, to convert the human population, at a global scale, into flexible and interchangeable labour. It is not a project of or claim to racial justice, but instead, it merely hides the fact that planetary capitalism continues to be underwritten by both pre-existing and novel inequalities across, between, and within national formations.

In mapping the discursive regime of Chinese identity, the generalized ascription of ‘astronomical’ and ‘unstoppable’ wealth is a dominant property ordering Chineseness in its monolithic form. The assumption of extraordinary wealth reveals itself as a thematic constant throughout the ORC. For example, in response to the then Liberal provincial government’s proposed tax on foreign homebuyers, Ray Brady stated, “Fifteen percent is nothing for millionaires and billionaires, what joke!...” Public policy and the regulatory power of governments are rendered ineffectual in the face of their affluence, engendering a certain cynical commonsensical awareness of capital’s power. Directly quoting a Realtor’s opinion from a Vancouver Sun article, as one OR commentator posts: “This will do absolutely nothing to change housing affordability. Do you not understand how much money these foreign buyers have?” Chinese bodies, as mentioned previously, are conflated
with Chinese capital, indefinite and incontestable, but their subjective experience is also made locatable within the narrow confines of economic transactions.

In the same vein, the impact of the ‘New Chinese’ is felt and materialized in the always already moralized condemnations of their supposed ‘ostentatious overseas consumption’. In Vancouver, a common facet of this obloquy is the perceived association between high-end sports cars and young Chinese students. OR commentator Daniel Antos’ observes, “I have foreign students in my condo that drive McLarens, Ferraris & Lamborghini in an area that rarely saw such vehicles a few years ago…” Even in Hong Kong, the antipathy toward mainland Chinese, conceived as separate from Hong Kong Chinese in the city’s complex post-colonial milieu, percolates as locals single out “Chinese tourists and immigrants who are guilty of being undeserving consumers, whether of infant formula or public health care.” The problematization of Chinese consumption is represented in the news coverage of Chinese subjects moving about globally, whether as uncivil and uncultured tourists or ravenous consumers of high-end luxury brands and products.

Consequently, the subjectification of skilled and entrepreneurial Chinese migrants is shaped by the differing migratory practices of neoliberalism from around the Pacific Rim. If knowledge is the ideological metaphor of neoliberalism, then, Chinese subjectivities are presented a metaphor for its ideal subjects. In the information age, knowledge as a metaphor for neoliberalism is an aspiration to instantaneous free movement across the globe, and simultaneously, a carrier of isotropic use-value within capitalism’s transnationally fragmented structure. In that sense, the story of skilled and entrepreneurial
Chinese migrants encapsulates the World Bank’s exhortation for ‘emerging economies’, referring to the former colonial and communist countries, to “shift from a focus on the production of goods…to the production of educated subjects.”

However, even while projecting cosmopolitan values of openness and color-blind mobility, the state, “always already a racial state” as Goldberg asserts, utilizes increasingly discriminating racial discourse to manage the mixture of migrants who heed the call of opportunity from without the borders. Aside from its economic tenets of free-market capitalism, deregulation, and privatization, neoliberal ideology espouses a social conception of the individual. The neoliberal subject is the master of their own fate and can achieve socioeconomic mobility on the basis of individual ability to compete in the market.

One can make out the precursors of the ‘New Chinese’ in the emergence of Asian model-minority discourse during the 1980s. The hegemony of neoliberal discourse provides the crucible for new conceptualizations of Chinese identity. Aside from its economic tenets of free-market capitalism, deregulation, and privatization, neoliberal ideology espouses a social conception of the individual. The discourse of Chinese as “competitive, self-enterprising, market driven, instrumentalizing, highly productive” closely aligns with neoliberal valuations based on the idea of human capital. Following a similar logic, Ong notes how “hierarchical schemes of racial and cultural difference intersect in a complex, contingent way to locate minorities of colour from different class backgrounds.” That is to say, the recognition of full citizenship and entitlement to a national sense of belonging for any particular non-white ethnic group depends on the perceptions of its relative contributions to society by the dominant powers; it depends on
the ability “to reduce their burden on society and build up their own human capital—to be ‘entrepreneurs’ of themselves.” Regardless of personal history, ethnic/racial identity, or national origin, immigrants are consolidated at the nexus of pre-existing racial/ethnic categories and contemporary migration routes, and “ideologically positioned within the hegemonic” racial formation of the destination country.17
5.2 The racial state and capitalist geographies

In Canada, the logic of neoliberal economics was folded into an Asia-Pacific strategy whereby the country would foster economic linkages with high-growth economies bordering the Pacific Ocean. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Vancouver’s integration into the then-nascent Pacific Rim economy heavily structured the local formation of ‘New Chinese’ subjectivities. In an age defined by free trade and transnational competition, the built environment and social geography of cosmopolitan cities are strategic assets for the state’s ongoing maneuvering to better position themselves to take advantage of global flows. Toward this end, a coalition of state, provincial and municipal government, and regional Canadian capitalists orchestrated a calculated campaign in the 1980s to re-brand Vancouver as a global city, a conduit for Asian capital transfer not only for the province but the rest of Canada.\(^\text{18}\)

The desire to court the Asia-Pacific capital had informed events and decision-making leading up to the 1986 World Exposition on Transportation and Communication and its aftermath. In particular, efforts were made to target Hong Kong capitalists whose laissez-faire business culture was well attuned with the neoliberalization of the Canadian immigration system from the 1980s on.\(^\text{19}\) According to Kathryne Mitchell, “using the rhetoric of globalization as both inevitable and desirable, local and provincial politicians reworked the image of Vancouver as a sleepy provincial town...into an image of a world city ‘naturally’ connected most directly with Hong Kong and other key cities in Asia”.\(^\text{20}\) Despite a reported $300 million loss, the project was key in facilitating the purchase and redevelopment of the former Expo site to Hong Kong’s premier investment tycoon, Li Ka-
Shing. Li’s involvement would attract the attention of other Hong Kong capitalist and set off the transformation of the downtown through a series of high profile megaprojects, such as the construction of Concord Pacific Place. While Vancouver’s downtown area has a history of cyclical re-development, Expo ’86 marked the beginning of globally-minded gentrification. And, importantly, the hypervisible role of wealthy Chinese investors challenged the inherent racial hierarchies of Canadian social liberalism while sensitizing public perception to the connection between Chinese investment and displacement from capitalism’s creative destruction.

The regional Pacific Rim strategy was complemented at the Federal level by new criterions of immigration, which privileged economic migrants who ostensibly could bolster Canada’s global competitiveness upon arrival, by dint of mandated capital investment and/or human capital. The creation of new Business and Investor class categories of immigration was integral in facilitating the sharp increase in Chinese immigration in the late 1980s. The business and investor immigration programs (BIP) operate on the condition that applicants make a significant investment into or own a Canadian business within two years of landing. The type of business is also subject to various conditions reflecting the aspirations of Canada’s economic strategy. However, the pro-development, pro-Chinese government agenda fostered a change in the local social-physical landscape due to the rise of new ethnic-centred urban forms and the transformation of old immigrant enclaves.

Transnational capital investment and mobile entrepreneurs from the East-Asian economies in the era of intensified globalization has acted as the catalyst for the change
and expansion of the built environment and socioeconomic structures of both old Chinatowns and new “satellite Chinatowns”. Concurrently, sustained immigrant population growth, along with broadening employment opportunities and limited housing options in traditional ethnic neighborhoods, initiated an outward migration of non-white ethnic groups into the suburbs.

In Canada, this phenomenon has been extensively investigated in major gateway cities such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. The urban geographer Wei Li coined the term *ethnoburbs* to understand the formation of suburban ethnic clusters encompassing both residential and business districts. The establishment and gradual maturation of ethnoburbs are dictated by a self-reinforcing cyclical relationship whereby the establishment of an ethnic economy, vis-à-vis “ethnic-owned and –operated business”, attracts new co-ethnic immigrants as potential consumers, workers, and entrepreneurs, and vice versa. Suburban municipalities such as Richmond experienced a surge in Chinese-owned businesses, precipitated by the consumer needs of the burgeoning middle-class Chinese population. For would-be Chinese investors, the ethnic-orientation of these businesses and reliance on co-ethnic business networks are crucial for succeeding in a unfamiliar and sometimes hostile business environment.”

However, the hypervisibility of Chinese immigrants and the stated objectives of the Canada’s neoliberal human capital approach to immigration masks both the racial experienced by Chinese immigrants and various cleavages within the Chinese diaspora. Despite the lower barriers to access, those who must participate in the co-ethnic economy pay a heavy toll due oversaturation in such niche markets and continued barriers to
alternatives.\textsuperscript{31} Whilst the new immigrants were wealthier in general, it was only a small portion consisting of the super-rich that was able to penetrate the more expensive neighborhoods of Vancouver proper.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, the concentration of the Chinese immigration and capital in Vancouver must be viewed in relation to larger changes in state goals and immigration policy.
5.3 Changing meaning of ‘Home’ and the role of real estate in late capitalism

The discourse around Chinese people’s imagined and material influence on the city evinces a type of racialized urbanism whereby urban space becomes constructed so as to lend seemingly irrefutable proof to a discourse of “cultural ghettoization”, depicted as an intrinsic Chinese sociality.\(^{33}\) In the specific locale of Vancouver, it gave rise to the colloquial term "Hong-couver", in reference to the prevalence of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants in the 1990s. The term references the urban growth and change that coincided with higher-levels of Chinese immigration, but it is sustained by the foregrounding and pathologization of a growing presence of non-white bodies and accompanying “cultural specificities”, such as Chinese language signage, architectural aesthetics, and “Asian”-themed enterprises.\(^{34}\)

For *jbwilson24*, the writing is on the wall: “come on, look at the demographics. Vancouver is now an asian city. I hate going back there because it looks like the third world”.\(^{35}\) A supposition that undoubtedly trades on tired racial tropes, the alleged ‘Asianization’ of the built environment offers a rallying point for mobilizing resentment and recurring resistance of white residents who believe that they are now a ‘minority population’\(^{36}\) — “about bloody time! Why did they wait so long [to implement a tax on foreigners]? Vancouver has become the newest province of China...”\(^{37}\)

Indeed, this “nativist” logic is best encapsulated by the descriptive tendency to frame the phenomenon, variously, as an invasion or a wave crashing into Vancouver, or even, as noted before, an affliction or disease in the body politic. The dehumanization of and disdain toward the Other find full expression in the racial subtext of comparisons that liken Chinese immigrants to an invasive species; “we worry about Zebra mussels and Purple
Loosestrife, yet not Chinese or South Asian immigrants who have the same effect.”

Sometimes metaphorical, but often literal, the prospect of ongoing non-white immigration is equated to an invasion by the country of origin littlesnowelf:

> I am dumbfounded that Canada still doesn't have any restrictions on foreign ownership of its land and residential properties. Most Western countries do, especially those that have had to fight off invasions in the past...they understand the true value of their land. Meanwhile, most of Vancouver has already been sold off piecemeal to Asians.

Despite operating within the established rules of the real estate market, the 'buying up' of Canadian space by ostensibly ‘foreign’ homebuyers become tantamount of a military occupation.

The self-evident veracity of this identification of Chineseness with real estate consumption is evinced in the vilifying anecdotes of nameless Chinese individuals “who showed up...and bought 40 homes that day...” and “condo showings” that felt like “being in China [because] most of the purchasers were Asian”. Hyperbolic descriptions are reinforced by a litany of short sarcastic quips about how surprising it is that a Chinese businessman/immigrant bought the property, in response to the CBC news article on the $55 million home: “a Chinese businessman bought it? Why that’s preposterous”; “And look who the buyer is....what a shock”; “Another Chinese immigrant buying up Vancouver...what else is new.” Underlying the comment is a psychological association between Chinese affluence, commodified domesticities, and rising real estate prices, which are steeped in the recurrent media portrayals of Chinese-Canadians as “opportunistic businessmen buying out Vancouver” in the 1990s. The Orientalist imagery of a teeming 'Third World’ populace is seemingly validated by the adverts of local Realtors who exclaim, “Market your
property directly in CHINA! Your property will be marketed and advertised in China in Mandarin. 1.7 million Chinese consumer visits monthly. $1,073,000.00 Average property purchase price...”43 Importantly, by texturizing the abstraction of Chineseness through overseas consumption, Chinese identity is once again framed as out-of-place, the perennial Other, allowing their movement and actions to be construed relationally to where they ought to be, against the imagined spaces of the Canadian settler-colonial nation-state.

The centrality of real estate in constituting Chinese racial difference is perceivable in the ORC and everyday discursive acts evoking Chinese culpability for the city’s housing crisis. According to OR Commentator Paul_from_Montreal the fact of the matter can be summed up thusly:

*I now live in Vancouver and I’m priced out of the market. I don’t care where these "buyers" are from, all I know is I can’t afford a house here because Asian money has made it impossible. Nothing "racist" about it, it is what it is and it’s common knowledge Asians are responsible. There are NO checks or balances to protect ordinary people against this kind of thing.*44

In other words, the discursive relationship between Chineseness and real estate consumption is tethered not only by an inscription of cultural predisposition and ‘unstoppable wealth’, but also, the consequences of consumption inevitably beget unaffordability for residents in Vancouver.

The attribution of housing unaffordability is a foundational pillar for upholding the racial nationalist narrative that was identified in Chapter Four. The ‘New Chinese’ is construed relationally as the antagonist in a David-and-Goliath struggle between ‘ultra-rich Chinese’ and ordinary, middle-class Canadians. The latter are the real victims who are being punished for the country’s wrongheaded liberal permissiveness toward foreigners.45
Adding to, and at times interwoven with, the long list of social ills attributed to immigration, the effect of Chinese real estate consumption on unaffordability is the obscene consequences of elite indifference to the plight of “Ordinary taxpayers not able to afford to live here and [their] tax dollars helping immigrants to take, take, take...” While the above iteration may seem extreme, it stems from the taken-for-granted assumption about Chinese homebuyers and unaffordability in the city, which is shared across gamut of OR responses.

The inscription of cultural affinity toward property ownership underpins the pathologization of Chinese real estate consumption. Yet, to approach consumption behavior strictly in such terms is an anachronistic view that ties contemporary Chinese subjectivities to its oft-fetishized ancient cultural legacy, and thusly a historical predilection located in the past. Consequently, whereas the agency of Western subject (as a denizen of modernity) can be articulated through individual choice, the enunciation of Chinese subject is “repeated, relocated, and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic.”

The mis-reading of causes over the high rate of property ownership amongst the Chinese, often taken as a common indicator of their wealth, has less do with property than as a way to whitewash expressions of an “East Asian/Canadian dichotomy” through a language of “profit versus sentiment” and “developer versus community.” Such representations suppress the various economic and social realities faced by groups within the Chinese community. The compositional diversification of the Chinese population,
within the last decade, entails the increasing presence of individuals occupying lower socioeconomic statuses.\textsuperscript{49} For example, the bimodal housing landscape of Richmond, comprised of expensive single-family detached housing and condensed high-rise developments, evinces the class stratification within the Chinese community. In reality, the congested apartment units found in northern Richmond correspond to the limited housing options available for poorer recent immigrants.\textsuperscript{50} Even in the heyday of wealthy capitalist immigration from Hong Kong, larger percentages of Chinese population in Richmond occupied the “low-income household” category than residents of European heritage.\textsuperscript{51} Accordingly, David Ley, Peter Murphy, Kris Olds, and Bill Randolph have shown that housing is more of an affordability problem for Chinese households than for European households.\textsuperscript{52} On average, housing costs, e.g. mortgage payments, consumes 40 percent of Chinese household income.\textsuperscript{53} While investment and profit does often factor into the mental calculus of recent immigrants, it often overshadows their real desire to settle down and become part of the community.\textsuperscript{54}

Indeed, recurring themes in the online reader commentary pushes us to rethink the relationship between ‘home’, housing, and social life. Despite the wide-reaching impact of increasing housing unaffordability and its disproportionate effect on already marginalized and poor communities, ORC reactions emphasize the progressive erosion of the Canadian middle-class’ ability to own homes in the city as the “real” casualty of speculative real estate.\textsuperscript{55} It is a mourning of the fact that “middle-class earned money is no longer enough to buy a home that even a decade ago would have been easily affordable.”\textsuperscript{56} To be sure, commenters hold onto the belief that home ownership should be earned, and attainable
through 'hard work', but their anecdotes and descriptions of ownership as an ordinary expectation is at odds with the picture of increasingly uneven distribution of urban resources that I have sketched. For OR commentator Seventizz, this is evidence that “we’ve already lost our middle class who can afford urban homes, despite middle-class highly skilled workers representing the majority of contemporary Chinese immigration.”

Certainly, the above disconnects can be read through, and do evoke, racial politics but, to destabilize assumptions of Chinese culpability, we need take into account how racialization is concurrently entangled in other, albeit related, changes to social life. First, there is an ideological shift that increasingly emphasizes the importance of housing-ownership as a universally desirable good but also as the dominant conception of 'home'. 'Home', of course, is a dense construct that is laden with affect and ideologies, simultaneously a psychological resource for imagining social life and constituted by its inhabitance in our daily experiences. For ‘home’ hails not only a physical dwelling, but establishes in our imagination a specific assemblages and orderings of home artifacts and space, ranging from common objects such as family photo albums and furniture to its demarcation into use-spaces for sleeping, dining, and entertaining, and proximity to parks, schools, and other public spaces of social life. Poignantly, Susan Smith describes ‘home’ as having “many meanings and manifestations: a point of departure, return, or arrival; a feeling or a memory; a performance and a thing; and so on.” Previously, we have encountered ‘home’ as an ongoing process of ‘home-making’, a source of conflict in its relation to family structure and familial strategies, and a historical legacy dictating “middle-class imaginings of proper life and lifestyle”. To quote one OR commentator, for whom
Vancouver’s high-end luxury properties are a sacrilegious conourse between wealth and extant classed (and raced) ideals of home life, “my housing dreams don't extend much beyond having a nice little house, surrounded by forest, with enough room to have a fairly nice library”\(^{60}\). This repetitive positioning of the ‘normal’ Canadian who aspires to ‘modest’ housing ownership, but would never broach the abnormal realm of ostentatious mansions associated with wealthy Chinese, places the Chinese homebuyer as an aberrant force beyond the pale, a distortion to social liberalism’s natural order.

Yet, while the category of ‘home’ is not exhausted by ‘housing’, as a physical shelter for and a material manifestation thereof, Smith argues that its material manifestation as housing, and especially as owner-occupied housing, has become a hegemonic ideal and the dominant mode in many English-speaking, late capitalist societies.\(^{61}\) The political economy of ‘home’ has played an important countervailing role to the capitalist tendencies toward economic crisis, or ‘systemic risk’ (in the neoclassical economic parlance). Under Marx’s model of accumulation, investments into the built environment form the secondary circuit of capital, where the primary circuits encapsulate the structure of relationships between labour, bourgeoisie, capital, and the means of production. As capitalism’s inherent contradictions result in a tendency toward overaccumulation—manifesting in falling profits, overproduction of commodities, and intensifying labour exploitation—surplus capital is transferred between secondary circuits, and also tertiary circuits, in order to seek more robust returns on investment. Given that “accumulation is the means whereby the capitalist class reproduces both itself and its domination over labour”, crises of accumulation in different stages of capitalist development precipitate the self-preserving
creative destruction that is expressed in urban processes as cyclical concentrated re-
development of the built environment. In reality, the evolution of the urban environment
is a complex process, overdetermined by autonomous structures of articulation (e.g. race,
gender, culture, etc.), unique histories and trajectories of individual urban environments,
and pursuit of varied experiential qualities of lived spaces (e.g. aesthetics, visual cultures,
etc.) outside of the economic substructure. To be sure, capital's determinative quality
cannot fully encapsulate urban life, however, the analytical productive synergy between
capital and urban outcomes alerts us to how, in some ways, Vancouver's latest phase of
urban re-development and housing crisis is the product of processes that occur across
transnational spaces and have taken place through successive time periods.

The deregulation of financial markets, especially in regard to mortgage lending and
speculative investment, and the creation of new derivative financial services and
instruments based on residential mortgage loans provided both incentive and means to
bolster housing-ownership. Lax mortgage lending rules made it easier to purchase property
on the margin and the increasing fungibility of equity transformed the hitherto locked
value of this fixed asset into mobile financial capital—“housing itself became fictitious
commodity when it was taken over by finance”. Coinciding with new forms of neoliberal
governmentality, “owned homes [become] a hybrid of money, material, and meaning”
under the new property regime.

The inertia toward creating and maintaining a housing commodity market,
connected to financial capital flows, catalyzed an emendation of citizenship discourse.
Appeals to nation-state-based allegiance gave way to the new civic dictates to consume and
optimize individual and household productivity. Investment into owned-housing was normalized as the premier vehicle for mobilizing household cash and, importantly, accumulating wealth. In doing so, home-ownership became a moral evaluation that distinguishes the abjection of “dependent, renter, households (with ostensibly problematic welfare needs)” from the exaltation of “enterprising, home-owning, individuals (with seemingly autonomous, self-directed lives)”.

However, racial exclusion can still be enacted through resurfacing of old racist stereotypes. A prominent example is the markedly different treatment of the 599 undocumented Chinese paupers who arrived in ships on the coasts of BC in 1999. The media justified the provincial government’s decision to incarcerate and deport all but 16 of them by recycling past ideas of the racialized Chinese body as a carrier of disease and criminality. Underneath the narrative of the “multicultural-loving and peaceful Canadian citizen” is the lingering juxtaposition of the Other (the Indigenous, the black, the non-white newcomer, and the refugee) against the normativity of the nation’s two white European founding groups, the British and the French. While the activation of racial discrimination remains contingent on the convergence of the particular social, cultural, economic, and historic context, it becomes clear that our conceptions of Chineseness draws upon a continuously growing psychological reservoir of racial ideas about the Chinese.

Consequently, our understanding of Chinese immigration to Vancouver must account for the ways that hegemonic notions of Chineseness imposes uniformity and hides complex social realities. The emphasis on ‘astronomically’ wealthy mobile migrants can obfuscate the sheer size of and salience of multiple mobile subject positions within the
ethnic Chinese diaspora. Ang notes that “in the midst of the postmodern flux of nomadic subjectivities we need to recognize the continuing and continuous operation of ‘fixing’ performed by the categories of race and ethnicity, as well as class, gender, geography, etc. on the formation of ‘identity’...in the context of specific social, cultural and political conjunctures.”

In this case, the fixing of Chinese bodies within the contemporary hierarchies of power is strongly connected to the evolution of urban landscape. The particular ‘ethnic’ quality of living in Vancouver, seen through racially/culturally imputed manifestations of Chineseness in the built environment and individual stereotypes becomes part of the “visual scopic regime...[that] invent and sustain new racial hierarchies” of inclusion and exclusion.

1 Majority in A-3.
5 Ray Brady in A-1.
6 Marty Lee in A-1.
7 Daniel Antos in A-1.
10 Ong, “Neoliberalism as a Mobile Technology,” 5.
36.
14 Jun, Race for Citizenship, 131.
15 Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making,” 737.
16 Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making,” 739.
17 Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making,” 742.
11 Mitchell, Crossing the Neoliberal Line, 43.
12 David Ley, Millionaire Migrants, 55.
16 Ling, Jan, Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 75-105.
19 Li, Ethnoburb, 42.
22 According to David Ley, members of other ethnic enclave economies (e.g. Korean businesses) face similar problems to a lesser extent due to comparatively lower spatial concentration. See Ley, Millionaire Migrants, 110.
23 Mitchell, Crossing the Neoliberal Line, 31.
26 jbwilson24 in A-2.
28 David Kelln in A-1.
29 Robert Loblaw in A-2.
30 Littlelesnowef in A-2.
31 O’Canada in A-3.
32 Beachhead in A-2; joecalgarian in A-2; Wild Hogs in A-2.
34 o4cryingoutloud in A-2
35 Paul_from_Montreal in A-2.
36 Rick Lenz in A-2.
37 Herbivore but not a sheep in A-2.
38 Bhabha, Homi K., The Location of Culture, 51-52.

Ray, Millionaire Migrants, 144.


Ley, Murphy, Olds, and Randolph, “Immigration and Housing in Gateway Cities,” 6.


Dmitri Doolan in A-1; Omnimodis78 in A-3; ktkat194 in A-2.

Omnimidis78 in A-3.

M_i_right? In A-3.


Mitchell, Crossing the Neoliberal Line, 163.

Travis Scott in A-2.


Chapter 6: On being Chinese

“This is a classic tale of revelation that can undoubtedly be told in countless variations and versions by many people through the world, articulating the all-too-familiar experience of a subject’s harsh coming into awareness of his own, unchosen, minority status. ‘Chineseness’ here is the marker of that status, imparting an externally imposed identity given meaning, literally, by a practice of discrimination.”

“I’ve been back to China and I’ve had the experience that the ex-patriot American writer Amy Tan describes; when she first set foot in China, she immediately became Chinese. Although it didn’t quite happen like that for me I know what Amy’s talking about. The experience is very powerful and specific, it has to do with land, with standing on the soil of the ancestors and feeling the blood of China run through your veins.”

In interrogating the racial production of ‘Chinese’-ness through Vancouver’s housing landscape, I contend with the recurring challenge of discerning conceptual boundaries of racial categories in the postmodern era, defined by globalization and the spread of neoliberalism. Undoubtedly, the ontological basis of ‘race’ is different now, that is to say, not entirely fixed by biology, and the processes of racialization are even more ambivalent and ambiguous. To be sure, the racial discourse of ‘John Chinaman’ was an imposed European fabrication that did not capture fully even the complicated contact zones between European and Chinese communities throughout BC’s settler-colonial history. However, the positive feedback loop of globalization and technology innovation has enabled new migration routes and the proliferation of different stories of being Chinese, even though some are made more visible. Racial formation and activation are a contingent and dynamic process, taking manifold forms depending on place, time, and histories. The tectonic shifts in global geopolitics toward China has engendered both hope of reinvigorating economic growth and what Goldberg described as the West’s ‘tolerance
of mixture}. China's twentieth century resurgence challenges the normalized historical hierarchies of race resulting in Janus-faced expressions of angst and praise.

In response, the recent scholarship on the Chinese diaspora and immigration, largely spearheaded by members of the Chinese diaspora, has become increasingly critical to popular suppositions of an overriding homogeneity towards the global ethnic Chinese population. We are, as Ien Ang reminds us, a quarter of the world’s population. Nonetheless, the examination of Chineseness as a hegemonic category has heuristic value, even if it does not exist out there. Diasporic intellectual Ien Ang argues, “Chineseness is a category whose meanings are not fixed and pregiven, but constantly renegotiated and rearticulated, both inside and outside China”. Thus, one must inquire into its functions and mechanisms of operation within specific spaces and histories in order to reveal local systems of racial classification.

I identified the dominant manifestations of Chineseness in Vancouver through a critical discourse analysis of the Online Readership Commentary from three CBC news articles. Growing up and conducting fieldwork in Vancouver, my experiences as a racialized immigrant underlines a curiosity toward my racialized surroundings. This ethnographic sensibility informs my data collection and interpretative framework. In addition, the three CBC articles were chosen for their particularly high levels of readership response and their subjects, which provides a cross-section of common themes in the conversation around Chinese immigration and real estate. Informed by critical theories of race, my analysis of the historical and contemporary discursive construction of Chineseness reveals its importance for both BC and Canada’s racial formation, while highlighting the continued
relevance of race as social control in an era of post-raciality, engendered by the spread of neoliberal ideology. The intensity of ORC responses reflects readers’ real concerns of being ‘priced out’ of the city and a fraught sense of agency amid deepening global capitalist relations and changing economic structures.

Throughout the course of this study, one recurring theme was the underlying similarities of the discursive practices that racialized and racializes Chinese subjects. In Chapter Three, I highlighted these similarities by tracing and comparing the historical racism toward migrant Chinese bachelor-labourers, immediately prior and after Confederation, to modern day ascriptions of fraudulence and inferiority thrown at wealthy Chinese immigrants, investors, and homebuyers. Assumptions of deviance and moral degeneracy are used as justifications for their physical and metaphorical exclusion while invalidating their claim to the land, whether as ancestral home or a place of new beginnings. The narrative of the Chinese body as obtrusive and foreign relies on the white European imaginings of an idyllic past. The racial exclusion that bore the formation of Chinatown and subjected its residents to iterant ‘slum-clearing’ and anti-drug trafficking initiatives emphasizes the role of spatial construction and control in racial production. The racial alterity of space is evident, even now, in the way certain neighborhoods and cities within Metro Vancouver are framed as communities undergoing disruptive change, the cause of which is oft-attributed to the arrival of Chinese homeowners.

While ostentatious homes and luxury supercars are visible flashpoints of local conflict, racialization also fabricates intangible differences to maintain the alleged homogeneity of the settler-colonial nation. In fact, Canadian settler-colonialism has
historically targeted the Chinese family through discriminatory legislation and immigration policies to regulation, destruction, and exclusion. The moralization of family context speaks to its significance in the exercise of power and the constitution of the national subject. The analysis and discussion in Chapter Four shows the importance of family as a site of nation formation and racial exclusion. The material and symbolic resource invested in the *national family* serves also to exalt the character of the nation-state, thus reaping benefits at a time of increasing cosmopolitanism. Furthermore, the dominant notion of what family looks like and entails provides the reference point for constructing the essentialized difference and unassimilatability of Chinese families. Through analyzing a combination of ORC and secondary sources, I identify the transnationalism of some certain Chinese families as the current basic grammar of difference used to further inscribe racial characteristics. Ultimately, I argue that the actual experiences of Chinese families are overdetermined by the shifting structures and gendered discourses as they navigate across different social fields.

However, the celebration of mobility and entrepreneurialism offers a narrow window into the kaleidoscopic lifeworlds of Chinese subjects. While this phantasmorgic production can offer a comforting self-constituting resource to the downtrodden abroad, they are tales of “mobile managers, technocrats, and bankers”, for whom “boundaries are always flexible.” It is undeniable that there are, now, more wealthy and mobile Chinese people on-the-move. However, this emphasis on the transnational and economic buries the experiences and struggles of those who arrived in Canada during earlier periods and different contexts. Due to the lack of popular ethnographic accounts differentiated by class,
gender, linguistic differences, and political allegiances, it is those who are trapped here, by choice or lack of means, that must bear the brunt of local backlash, articulated through a confluence of anti-globalization, anti-development, and racial-nationalist rhetoric.

In Chapter Five, I interrogate the Otherness of Chinese-Canadians shaped through the hyper-visibility of middle- and elite class Chinese migrants. This hyper-visibility draws upon a process of racial whitening via the hegemony of neoliberal ideology. However, the idea of Asian uplift as a contemporary discourse or in reference to new geopolitical relations is enacted, either positively or negatively, at the juncture of persisting racial hierarchies and purported race-neutrality of global capitalism. Thus, the symbolic production of space in Vancouver becomes the nexus through which the floating racial imagery of past and contemporary constructions of a perceived hegemonic Chinese identity is grounded. In such ways, the diverse range of socioeconomic statuses and identities of the Chinese community, which roils against uniform racial classification, is homogenized through the racialized representations of a changing urban landscape.

Consequently, the problematic of Chinese identity and Vancouver real estate lay at the intersection of race and class, but also, in the way it is weaved into larger economic processes. On one level, tensions arise as a historically marginalized group that is perceived to be transgressing geographically organized social hierarchies, especially, one caught in regional idiosyncrasies of white supremacy within the larger Canadian colonial project. At the same time, the operation of market-mechanisms engenders growing inequalities and accumulation by dispossession, of which housing is only one dimension. In relation to housing unaffordability, Chinese subjectivities are positioned as a source of misery and
suffering, rather than the inherent contradictions of capital. The focus of local protest against a monolithically conceived notion of Chineseness eclipses cleavages between subjects and the potential for class solidarity.

What becomes lost are the forgotten varied histories and paths by which those identities, already detached from the Chinese nation-state, are hailed to the Chinese diaspora. Recalling our theoretical discussion on Chinese identity as an open signifier of dispersed routes, the problematic hegemony of a singular Chineseness, with its manifold origins, is expressed in the bullish ascendancy of the Chinese state’s geopolitical windfalls. How, for example, are we to account for the centuries-old history of the Southeastern Asia Pacific Chinese émigré, or the markedly different racial and cultural subjectification of Chinese-Canadians who had put roots here generations ago?

The conundrum, then, is how do we form a ground for action if our conception of identity has dissipated and the truth of our (or is it theirs?) history is bracketed in a mix of many ‘truths’. The current dispersal of identity politics has as much to do with changing global economic structures as the realization, in the theoretical and the social, that there still exists many more silenced voices and histories. Moreover, while “immigrants have thus constituted their subjectivity variously as abject outcasts, humble supplicants, deserving and stubborn claimants, ambitious assistants in the hegemonic Euro-Canadian project, and sometimes even as revolutionary activists”, their positioning within Canada’s power structure results in a disposition toward certain subjectivities. Specifically, the pervasive idea that we, as immigrants, are in some way indebted to the nation brings us to see ourselves “through the eyes of the nation.” Navigating the subjective affect of a singular
notion of Chineseness is an unfolding of the nuances of being whilst caught between the gravitational pull of two imposing discourses of Chineseness, of 'living between the East and the West'.

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1 Ang, On Not Speaking Chinese, 37.
2 Ang, On Not Speaking Chinese, 49.
3 Goldberg, The Threat of Race, 342.
7 Ong, Flexible Citizenship, 134.
8 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 16.
9 Thobani, Exalted Subjects, 162
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