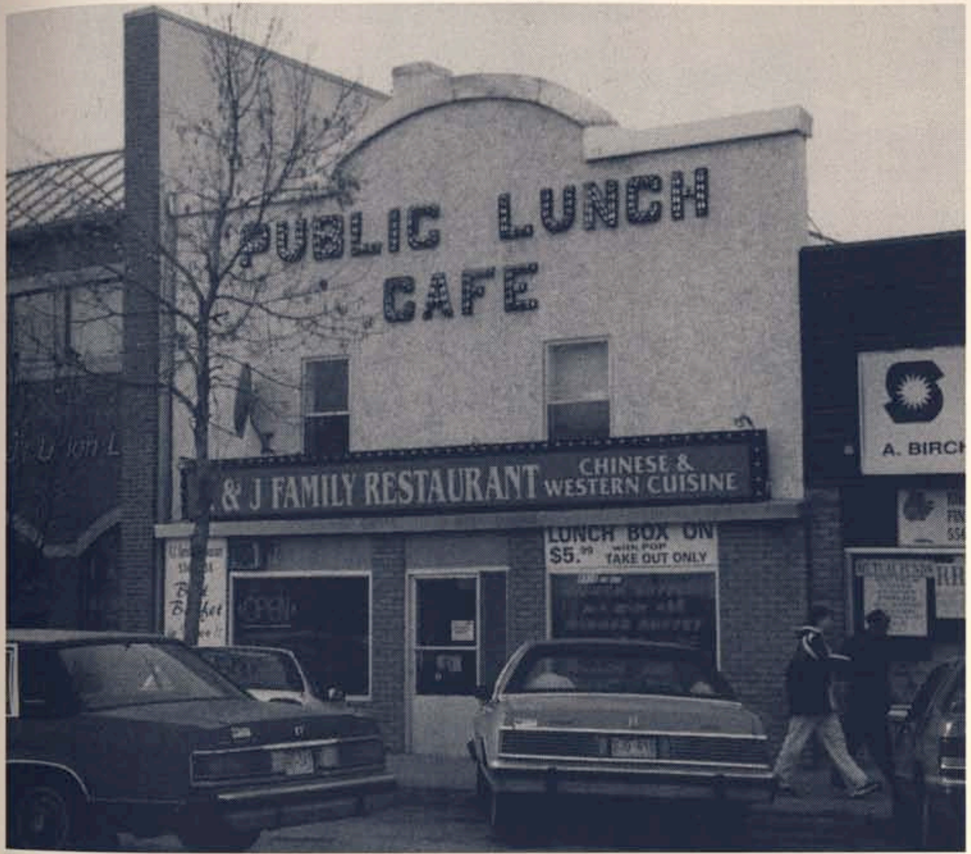
Chapter Two

On the Menu: Time and Chinese Restaurant Counterculture

Almost nobody does it anymore. If you take the slower road south down the middle of Alberta from Edmonton to Calgary, following the old rail line, you will cut across Main Street, Olds, Alberta, where you might stop for lunch at the A & J Family Restaurant (figure 3). In 1915 you would have stepped across the railway platform (the railway stopped running a long time ago but the station is still there, empty and abandoned) and ordered a hot lunch at what was then known simply as the Public Lunch Counter (figure 4).

There is a long history to the small town Chinese Canadian restaurant. Work on Chinese diaspora communities in Canada has tended to focus on representations of Chinese immigrants in large urban centres such as Vancouver and Toronto. While locations such as Vancouver's Chinatown continue to be crucial sites for exploring Chineseness in Canada, relatively little attention has been paid to the more disparate but nonetheless persistently present communities of Chinese people in small towns across Canada. This chapter explores the small town Chinese Canadian restaurant and traces the possibilities of Chinese diasporic agency in the text of the menus. Taking a slower path, along the abandoned rail lines that carry in them the echo of a history of indentured Chinese labour,[1] and stopping in at the restaurants that are inevitably located near now empty train stations, I hope to recover the bond between slowness and memory embedded within the Chinese restaurant menu.

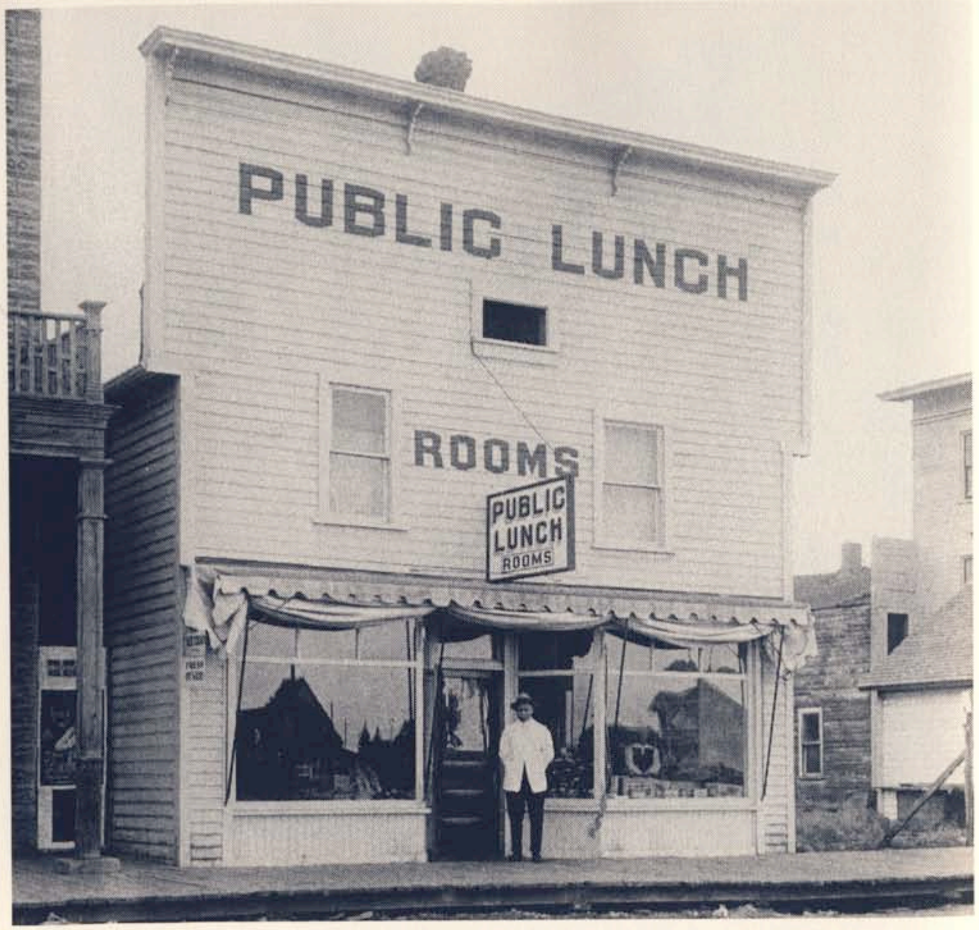
I want to situate my reading of the menus as an intervention against two broad displacements that I see happening in Chinese diaspora studies specifically as well as in diaspora studies more generally. First, the spatial metaphor of diasporic mobility risks displacing the temporal challenges that diasporic subjects pose to western European narratives of



3 A & J Family Restaurant, Olds, Alberta, 1999. Courtesy of the author.

progress. Second, the idea of the metropolitan trajectory has been taken too literally and mistaken for a trajectory of metropolitan migration. Let me begin by addressing this latter displacement, which will lead to my discussion of the former.

Diasporic agency has been conceived almost exclusively within an urban focus. The difference I want to highlight here seems like a straightforward one – diasporic populations are not always urban in the locations of their settlement. Particularly if we pay attention to the old diaspora of indenture and slavery, we can see that the urban space is simply not the only place where diasporic subjects ended up. In 'Rethink-



4 Public Lunch Counter, Olds, Alberta, 1911, Courtesy of Glenbow Archives.

ing Diaspora(s),' Khachig Tölölyan argues that the '*nation's* aspiration to normative homogeneity is challenged not just by immigration but also by various forms of cultural practices and knowledge production, *especially in major urban centers* and in the arts and humanities departments of many North American and Australian universities' (4, latter emphasis mine). Tölölyan's subsequent observations in the article about the need for rigorous attention to the ways in which diasporic critical practice may in fact collude with the very forms of hegemonic power that these critical practices see diasporas as challenging are crucial for future thinking on

diaspora as a critical category.[2] However, his emphasis on the urban migrant betrays an exemplarizing of metropolitan trajectories. Tölölyan's discussion gestures to a wider tendency in current diaspora discussions that naturalize and emphasize the diasporic as a particularly urban formation. Writing about Martin Delany's experience in England, W.E.B. DuBois's time in Germany, and Richard Wright's encounter with France, Gilroy argues that black literary traditions do

> not fit unambiguously into a time-consciousness derived from and punctuated exclusively by changes in the public, urban worlds of London, Berlin and Paris. Writers, particularly those closest to the slave experience, repudiated the heroic narrative of western civilization and used a philosophically informed approach to slavery in order to undermine the monumental time that supports it. (197)[3]

I want to hang on to Gilroy's important observation regarding an alternative temporality that challenges a European national imaginary, but I also want to pause on these 'urban worlds of London, Berlin and Paris.' For Gilroy, one of the strongest arguments for diasporic agency lies in reading diasporas as challenges to hegemonic nation state formations.

Diasporas have been read as social formations that contest the integrity of the European nation state. Tölölyan, for example, observes that just as the nation state has begun to encounter limits to its hegemonic desires, diasporas have emerged in intellectual discourses as exemplary communities of this particular transnational moment (4). Building on his work in *The Black Atlantic*, in *Against Race* Gilroy argues that 'consciousness of diaspora affiliation stands opposed to the distinctively modern structures and modes of power orchestrated by the institutional complexity of nation states. Diaspora identification exists outside of and sometimes in opposition to the political forms and codes of modern citizenship' (124). Although *The Black Atlantic* has undergone a number of important critiques,[4] Gilroy's exploration of a counterculture of modernity and, connected to that, his insistence on an alternative temporality of diasporic cultural expression have been ground-breaking interventions in diasporic thinking. In *Against Race*, Gilroy holds that diasporas allow for the emergence of complex subjectivities that work against forms of nationalism:

> Valuing diaspora more highly than the coercive unanimity of the nation, the concept [of diaspora] becomes explicitly antinational. This shift is connected with transforming the familiar unidirectional nature of diaspora as

> a form of catastrophic but simple dispersal that enjoys an identifiable and reversible originary moment – the site of trauma – into something far more complex. (128)

And yet, within the complexity of this explicitly antinational social formation, the worlds of London, Berlin, and Paris remain as the birthing places of the black literary culture.

By insisting on the urgency of a turn to examining a non-metropolitan diasporic subject, I am not arguing for a fantasized idyllic notion of a rural subjectivity. As Raymond Williams deftly illustrates, 'the country and the city are changing historical realities' (*The Country and the City* 289) and it would be a mistake not to see the larger narratives within which a fantasized conception of the metropolitan and the non-metropolitan are situated. In Williams's study, the changing meaning of country life is related to the changes in city life, and these changes need to be traced within the larger story of the progress of capitalism. Making the connection between agrarian capitalism, plantation colonialism, and neoimperialism, Williams observes, 'What the oil companies do, what the mining companies do, is what landlords did, what plantation owners did and do' (293). And within this story of the advance of capital, there is also the story of the dislocation of peoples.[5] The usefulness of the analyses in *The Country and the City* has little to do with who lives in the country or the city or even what the country or the city might be, but with what those concepts stand in for and how they are used. Following from this conceptual focus of Williams's work,[6] I want to assert a conceptual rather than demographic argument. While it is true that many Chinese immigrants in Canada did settle and continue to settle in non-urban locations, my turn to the small town Chinese restaurant as a crucial locus for reading diasporic agency lies in my sense that a spatial reading of diasporic agency (which is related to a demographic reading) has eclipsed a temporal one. The presence of the diasporic other in the heart of European and North American metropolises – a presence that takes up space in cities such as London, New York, or Vancouver – is a spatialized vision of disturbance that does not always take into account the ways in which diasporic populations might, as Gilroy has so presciently argued, challenge the singular and homogeneous temporality of European and North American progress.

Turning to the non-metropolitan migrant enables a more specific exploration of temporal agency. It is my contention that turning to a more differentiated and specific idea of diasporic arrival enables the exploration of a diasporic temporality that not only interrupts what Homi Bhabha, in 'DissemiNation,' identifies as the nation's narrative time, but poses an alternative to it. I am not suggesting that rural life contains an intrinsically slower temporality than that of the urban. That would be part of the progressivist narrative wherein cities are the sites of bustling activity and rural spaces are the locations of the idyll and the pastoral. Rather, I am suggesting that in differentiating and specifying diasporic arrival, in seeing the relationship between old and new diasporas rather than treating them as distinct, we can locate a temporality that not only interrupts the homogeneous empty time of the narrativized nation, but is also alternative to it. What I mean by slowness then is this other register of temporal experience. However, as I will discuss more fully in the final section of this chapter, I also see this alternative temporality as engaging oppositionally with the dominant narrative of temporal progress, of slowing it down by insisting on the presence of the past in the present.

To return now to the first displacement, the displacement of a diasporic temporality onto spatiality, locations such as Chinatown become exemplary sites. Displaced, racialized subjects move into the city and assert their otherness by building communities within communities, cities within cities, and disturbing the balance of homogeneous whiteness on which the metropolitan rests. In a number of excellent discussions of Chinatowns in North America,[7] the conceptualization of Chinatown as an ethnic enclave emerges with surprising consistency. While there are some variations, these texts inevitably circle back to the boundedness – either self-imposed or enforced from without – of the urban Chinese communities.[8] Because they represent a dispersed and yet ethnically and racially coherent population, or give the impression of one, Chinatowns have become a convenient spatial metaphor for the Chinese diaspora in North America. The metaphor mistakes the space of Chinatown as *the* space of the Chinese diaspora. The prevalence of the assumptions within this spatial metaphor overshadow the potentially disruptive temporality of diasporic communities.

The mistaking of Chinatown as the space of the Chinese diaspora lends itself too easily to a liberal multiculturalism where the spatial presence of otherness enhances rather than disturbs the liberal state. It is not just that non-urban populations are left out in the assumption that Chinatown is an urban microcosm of China itself, but that this perception of the microcosm, the miniaturization of a racialized culture, neutralizes it as an oppositional site.[9] This assumption reveals more than just the museumization of a cultural space. It also uncovers the paradoxical trajectory of assimilation that enhances dominant culture's sense of its own inclusive superiority. Chinatown is an accepted part of the urban landscape and provides a space of consumption and amusement. It is not that there is no agential potential in Chinatown, but that the overwhelming emphasis on Chinatown as a spatial metaphor for the Chinese diaspora risks occluding other forms of agency emerging in other locations. In not looking for the kinds of oppositional work that might be happening outside of Chinatown, we risk mistaking a spatial presence for an agential spatial haunting. The idea of the enclave suggests a model of assimilation that never has to engage with the ways in which Chinese diaspora populations have done more than just occupy space in Canada, but have fundamentally challenged and, as I will discuss, constituted Canada's own notion of itself.

In contrast to Chinatowns, the small town Chinese restaurant is anything but an enclave. Although equally pervasive in terms of its dissemination across the Canadian landscape, it suggests a different kind of incorporation – one that is much more precarious if only because of its relative isolation. And yet, in that precariousness, these restaurants produce what I will call a countercultural space, a space of alternative temporality expressed through the culture of the restaurant counter. Rather than being a city within a city, as Chinatowns imply, they suggest a different model of negotiating otherness wherein the incorporation of otherness becomes a moment of serving back to Europe-in-Canada its own images, desires, and fantasies.

Sometimes abandoned where rail line contracts ended,[10] sometimes voluntarily seeking out locations for new work, a significant number of early Chinese migrants settled in non-urban locations, in small towns and villages throughout Canada. These migrants have no place in a metropolitan migrancy. They do not perform a return to the center. Rather they engage in a form of emplacement. Through texts such as the menus of small town Chinese restaurants, we can trace some of the ways in which they participate in the scripting of their incorporation into the body politic of Canada.

In the latter half of this chapter, I will explore some of the ways in which Chinese cooks and restaurateurs create and then contain the particular text of nationhood on the menus of small town Chinese restaurants. The homogeneous empty time of the Chinese restaurant menu emerges from the hands of Chinese restaurateurs as a subversive text that defines and delineates the idea of Canada for Canadians. In this sense, I locate the agency of Chinese diasporic subjects in Canada not in an impossible return to the metropole, but in the engineering of a mechanics of incorporation. The naturalization of the Chinese restaurant in the landscape of small town Canada attests to the way in which Chinese migrants have embedded particular forms of knowledge and practices, disseminating a vision of what 'Canadian' and 'Chinese' mean through the text of the restaurant menu.

By exploring the culture of the counter as a counterculture, I am focusing on the ways in which Chinese diasporic subjects transform the position of servitude into a space of the serving back, a space where the subversive potential of serving percolates to the surface. The counterculture of my project clearly is not the counterculture of *The Black Atlantic*, although I am indebted to the space Gilroy has made by making the problem of time a central one for conceptualizing diasporic agency.[11] The counterculture of this project is grounded in the long smooth counter that runs along the length of the restaurant separating the server from the served. Across that shiny expanse, the menu will be passed back and forth, a text that not only mediates the separation between server and patron, but is also read over and over again, presented over and over again – a simple, pedestrian exchange that carries within it the possibilities for something more.

While Gilroy's discussion of the disruptive and alternative temporality of black expressive counterculture dwells on an outer-national agency, one that transcends the borders of the nation state, this chapter explores a reading of agency within the host nation. Rather than reading the agency of the menus within the boundaries of Canada, I want to understand this agency within the larger parameters of a diasporic rubric. In this sense, the subversion of the menus needs to be read as informed by the dislocations of colonialism as well as the continuing difficulties of negotiating the assertion of otherness within a predominantly white cultural space and within the legacy of dislocation. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, a reading for agency that is conscientious of the precariousness of migrancy calls for an attention to the ways in which the agential has become entrenched within the everyday.

In turning to Chinese restaurant menus as countercultural texts, I want to come back to the argument I began in chapter 1 and further elaborate my reading of agency in terms of incorporation. For Gilroy, black music functions as a means by which the 'living memory' of the past oppression carries into the present. In the Chinese restaurant menu, I read a strategic incorporation that is not about assimilation, but is in fact its opposite. Small town Chinese restaurants are a sign not of assimilation but of dissimulation. If, as I have argued, sweet and sour pork served back to Europe-in-Canada a sign of its own excessive greed and embedded into the dish a nominal resistance, how can we read the resistances that are embedded within the menu itself?

The menu textualizes the food that is served. As Rebecca Spang notes in her historical work on the rise of the contemporary restaurant, the menu is a representational text: 'Sharing the name "menu" were two linked, but rarely identical, entities: the food a restaurant served and its bill of fare. The first resisted duplication and could be described only imprecisely, but the physical object called the *carte* – product not of the variable kitchen but of the reliable printing press – was infinitely reproducible and easily evoked' (Spang 184). There is always already a difference between the food on a menu and the food that is actually served. More importantly, the reproducibility of the menu provides a precise and reliable account of one aspect of the restauarant's representation of itself. Spang highlights the gulf between the menu and the food that might actually be available, on or off the menu, at any particular restaurant. While I will return later in the chapter to these issues of the mechanical reproduction and the menu as a highly representational text, for now, let me simply ask, What, then, does the Chinese restaurant menu represent?

The menus I will discuss in this chapter span a century of Chinese immigration to Canada. I read them as texts produced and reproduced within the social and political pressures of what it has meant to be marked as Chinese in Canada over the last century. From outright exclusion to restrictive immigration laws to a policy of official liberal multiculturalism, the menus in this chapter must be read as texts that have had to engage with the socio-political reality of being Chinese in Canada. The earliest menu is from 1923, the year that the Exclusion Act came into effect. Then there is the Diamond Grill menu from the 1950s that marks a period immediately after the end of exclusion. The contemporary menus are taken by following an old north–south Albertan rail route that no longer exists. They reflect the legacy of nearly two decades of official multiculturalism in Canada. As with all ephemera, the restaurant menus have come to me partly through archival research, but also through the inevitable idiosyncracy of word-of-mouth, happy accidents of discovery, and the generosity of collectors. The menus that I present in this chapter are by no means a complete or coherent archive. In my dream world, I would have a set of menus following the rise and

persistence of a single restaurant. Lacking this dream menu collection, and despite the loose historical trajectory I have traced above, my reading of the menus is necessarily symptomatic rather than comprehensively chronological. These menus are not precise representations of the time of their existence, but rather are suggestive of historical moments and the history that I read them against. It is as an intervention within the nation state's desire for a homogeneous and progressive narrative of emergence, and the assertion of an alternative temporality, a particular form of slowness, that I want to situate the menus as texts of diasporic agency.

In his book of poetry about his father's restaurant in Nelson, British Columbia, *Diamond Grill*, Fred Wah writes that 'maps don't have beginnings, just edges. Some frayed and hazy margin of possibility, absence, gap' (1). Reading the menu as a map to an alternative discourse, this chapter explores three margins, three spaces of possibility, that work together to produce the agency of Chinese migrants – an agency that emerges not in a haunting of the metropolitan centre, but in the persistence of the pedestrian, the slow embeddedness of everyday life.

Canadian or Western Food: Inventing Canadian Food

What is Canadian food? Is Canada a nation devoid of a national food culture? One of the most curious features of the small town Chinese restaurant is its matter-of-fact definition of Canadian food. Boldly ignoring any sort of existential crisis about the definition of Canadian culinary culture, Chinese restaurants have gone ahead and named Canadian food for Canadians.

Nowhere else is Canadian food more consistently defined than on the menus of small town Chinese Canadian restaurants. Although dishes such as tourtière, Atlantic seafood chowder, or Beaver Tails are arguably more 'Canadian' than the hamburgers and French fries that are typical of the 'Canadian' portion of the Chinese Canadian restaurant menu, this menu specifically names a series of dishes as Canadian or Western. More than that, 'Canadian' is often used interchangeably with 'Western.' I want to suggest that one margin of possibility for locating Chinese diasporic agency in Canada lies in the way in which Chinese cooks and restaurateurs name and define Canadian and western for Canadians. The question is not so much what exactly is Canadian about hamburgers and fries, but what it means for this version of Canadianness to circulate with such persistence through the Chinese restaurant. After all, what does it mean that the Chinese restaurant has become a defining locus of Canadian food culture?

In his essay 'Steak and Chips' in *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes gestures towards a way of reading the semiotics of food and national culture. For Barthes, an 'item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies' ('Psychosociology' 21). Reviewing the story of General de Castries's first meal after the armistice in what is now Vietnam, Barthes associates chips, *les frites*, with Frenchness:

> Chips are nostalgic and patriotic like steak. *Match* told us that after the armistice in Indo-China '*General de Castries, for his first meal, asked for chips*' ... The General's request was certainly not a vulgar materialistic reflex, but an episode in the ritual of appropriating the regained French community. The General understood well our national symbolism; he knew that *la frite*, chips, are the alimentary sign of Frenchness. (*Mythologies* 63–4, emphasis in original)

Barthes's description of the Frenchness of *frites* links the alimentary sign not only to French culture, but also to a moment of French colonialism and nationalism. Chips function in this story to signify and consolidate French power on foreign and colonized soil. Even in Indochina, the general will have his steak and chips. As Keya Ganguly notes in her consideration of the diasporic and postcolonial politics of food, 'Not only does Barthes's parodic take on alimentary investments expose the patriotic zeal about food matters to be ideological in the same way as are political pamphlets or advertisements; more pointedly, he highlights something singularly "mythological" with respect to the French for which we can find no equivalent within Indian culture, diasporic or otherwise' (*States of Exception* 125). Ganguly's reading of the mythological import of the French fry emphasizes the possible role of food in the iconography of ideology and power. Observing the 'basic, muscular, efficient' imagery that chips signal, Ganguly argues that 'unlike effete "exotic cooking," steak and chips connotes something of a work ethic; like their imperial counterparts elsewhere, the French know how to get down to the business of ruling ... Whereas the commonplace about food is that one eats to live, it appears that the Frenchman eats to rule' (126–7). And yet a few decades after the French general's meal in Indochina, when the idea of French food became ironically synonymous in the West with the effete exoticism of haute cuisine,[12] on the contemporary Chinese Canadian restaurant menu, *les frites*, French fries, have somehow become an integral part of what is understood as Canadian.

In placing the French fry, what had been no less than a singularly mythological symbol of French colonial power, under the category of 'Canadian,' the Chinese restaurant menu does more than simply gesture towards an increasingly homogenized fast food culture. The French fry's migration from French national symbol to being a staple of what is labelled Canadian on the Chinese restaurant menu gestures towards one way in which Chinese restaurateurs serve back to Europe-in-Canada their own ideas about westernness. The interchangeability of 'Canadian' and 'Western' on the menu is neither accidental nor innocent. The collusion between Canadian and Western situates the idea of Canada within the terrain of whiteness, something that stands in stark opposition to the plural and multicultural visions of Canadian nationalism that have been such a significant part of post-1970s Canada. Of course, the idea of western is a relative one both geographically and ideologically. But in the case of the menus, what is Canadian is not only associated with a trajectory of western European culture, it is also explicitly not Chinese. The back of the Club Café menu situates the 'Western Favorites' directly across from 'Suggestions for Chinese Dinner.' The Bacon Cheeseburger is all that the combination '(A) Dinner for 1: Pineapple Chicken Balls OR Sweet and Sour Shrimps With Chicken Fried Rice 6.00' is not. As the set-up of the menu suggests, Chinese food is not only the antithesis of 'Western' food, it will never be western. Separated by the law of the conjunction where a 'Chinese & Western Smorg' could never plausibly be collapsed into 'Western Smorg,' the logic of a westernness that depends upon the Chinese on the other side of the conjunction emerges as a repetition of the logic of exclusion.

In the accepted view of Chinese immigration in Canada, critics have pointed to the ways in which the head tax and exclusion laws indicate a legacy of legal racism whereby the Canadian state defined itself over and against Chinese.[13] That is, Canada is not Chinese. This idea of the need for Canada to maintain its national homogeneity through the legal exclusion of supposedly non-assimilable racialized groups is not new. What is different about the menus is that they repeat a racist rationalization of their own exclusion.

Remembering that it is Chinese cooks and restaurateurs who have developed these menus, there are two ways to read this embedding of Canadian racist rationales of exclusion. The first would be that these Chinese immigrants have internalized the rationale of racism and this internalization has emerged in the production of the menu. This is a painful reading that suggests that the work of institutional racism has been thorough in producing subjects that will act within the realms of their own inferiority. In sociological work on race, this is what has been identified as the damage hypothesis, where the damage done to racialized subjects over a period of time produces an 'inferiority complex' or the idea of 'white preference.'[14] However, I am not sure that this is the only or the most productive way of reading what appears to be the repetition of the rhetoric of racial exclusion on the Chinese restaurant menu.

My reason for this lies in my sense that the crucial work of grieving and thinking through the effects of racial damage is an internal – both in the sense of being internal to a racialized community and internal to the racialized individual – investigation. I will return to considerations of damage, grief, and loss in the final chapter of this book. For now, in this specific consideration of the menu, I will stay within the realm of a more externalized negotiation where the menus are a means through which Chinese Canadian subjects have negotiated the precariousness of being both minority and residually migrant. Within this negotiation, let me read the Chinese restaurant menu's presentation of whiteness in Canada somewhat naively and then move to what I hope will be an enabling reading.

Let's take it as a given that menus are about attracting business. Given the isolated existence of small town restaurants, where there tends to be only one in every town, this business is invariably white. The logic of the menus is then primarily that of attracting white consumers. Within this simplistic narrative of consumer demand, we can trace the embedding of a highly aware and agential representational praxis that is all about negotiating and alleviating the perceived threat of their otherness. These menus are texts of survival. For example, the 1950s Diamond Grill menu, the first menu in my archive where Chinese food appears, exists against the backdrop of the end of exclusion in 1947.[15] The menu's echoing of the logic of racist exclusion whereby Chinese is not Canadian needs to be read within a rubric of a highly self-conscious self-positioning. Inhabiting the precarious space of diasporic subjectivity means that there is necessarily a moment when you anticipate what is expected of you, of your body as it moves through space, of your language as you communicate to others, of your vision of the host country where you should be grateful for a space within reach of the comforts of advanced capitalism in the First World. The establishment of a Canadian menu that is explicitly not Chinese is an act of agential self-positioning.

Chinese cooks served back to Europe-in-Canada a narrative of Canada's own national emergence. Returning to where I began in this section, let me now suggest that Chinese cooks have stepped in and named a national food culture for Canadians by negotiating the presentation of their own continuing exclusion.

The history of the menu, Spang observes, is intimately related to that of the novel and the newspaper. Following from that relation, the menu needs to be read as a formal manifestation of print culture closely tied to the narrative of a national imagined community. Along with Benedict Anderson's linking of the novel and the newspaper, the menu can be thought of as a textual form that helped to consolidate a particular idea of national culture. Like the novel and the newspaper, the menu benefited from the rise of mass print capitalism in the eighteenth century. Spang suggests a close connection between conceptions of French culture and the French restaurant menu. Drawing on the doubled meaning of *la carte* – the map and the menu – Spang notes that the menu provided a tangible, bound, iconic space in which to imagine the space of the nation (192–3). The *carte*, the map, the menu, remains with us as one of the primary means by which food is represented, textualized, as a metonym of the boundaries of the nation.[16]

The menu as we now know it – a printed object, often folded in quarto or as a small booklet, with a list of the restaurant's offerings and the prices next to them – is intimately related to the history of European literary innovation. Exploring the development of the restaurant through print culture, Spang traces the changes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French menus with the innovations in French literary production:

> The shape and appearance of menus changed considerably during the nineteenth century, but each new format was shared by every place that was 'a restaurant.' The menu's layout consistently mimicked the century's typographic innovations: first a single large folio, packed with columns of closely printed type; then a small booklet, leather-covered and bound with silken cord; then again a single sheet, hand-decorated with languid goddesses and stylized flowers. Thus, while the early menus looked like the newspapers of the Consulate and the First Empire, mid-century menus resembled fat realist novels, and those of the Belle Époque, poster art. The menu kept pace with the era's literary productions because it was itself a sort of literary product, the restaurant's most marked – and marking – generic innovation. (Spang 189)

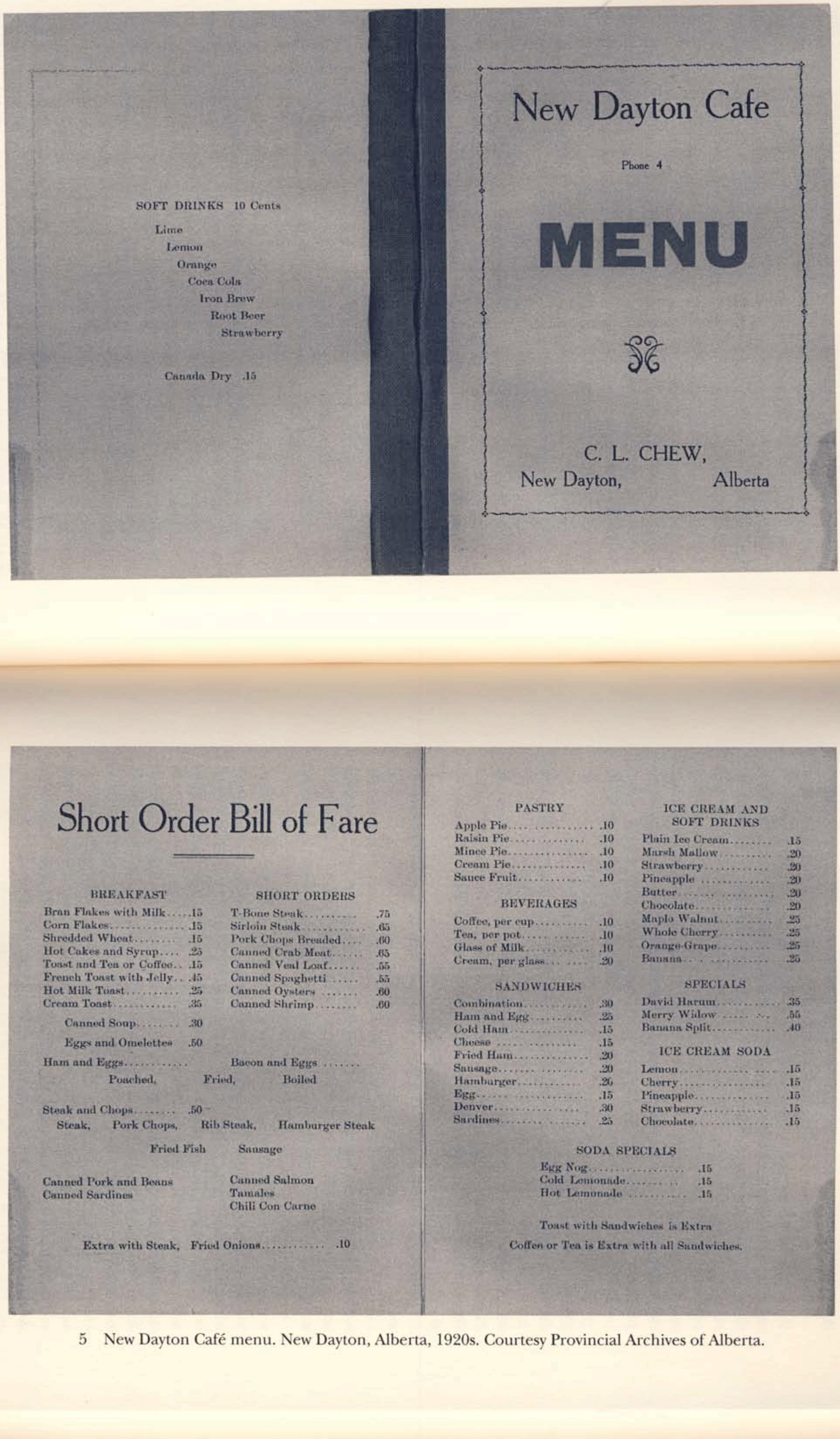
In the imaginary community of a dining public, the production of the menu as a text whose typography and form adopted an increasingly stable structure helped to stabilize the restaurant as a distinct industry. The introduction of a printed menu marked one of the most significant moments in the invention of the Western restaurant. In eighteenth-century France, the printed menu distinguished the restaurant from other public eating establishments such as inns or cafés, and standardized what would become an industry. 'Before restaurants could be distinguished from one another, they first had to be separated from all other eateries, and the highly standardized menu structure did just that, making a number of businesses into a specific sort of cultural institution' (Spang 188–9). Although the eighteenth-century French restaurants of Spang's study are far removed from the Chinese restaurants of this discussion, both institutions nonetheless share a name and a genealogy. The menu, like the novel, reflected the changes in European typographic traditions.

Through the form of the menu, Chinese diasporic subjects re-code Canadian settler colonial discourse. A formal consideration of the menu gestures to the way in which Chinese restaurateurs have seized a specifically European, French in this case, restaurant convention and used it as a means of reproducing and disseminating Chineseness while defining the idea of Canada for Canadians. Spang's connection between the menu and the novel brings us back to some of the earliest work in postcolonial studies, wherein the empire wrote back to the centre by seizing imperial tools.[17] The postcolonial novel wrote back to the metropolitan novel, the generic literary form that consolidated an entire European literary tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The diasporic Chinese menu functions also as a seizure of a form of cultural representation.

However, the standardization of burgers and fries as typical offerings on the Canadian side of the Chinese Canadian restaurant menu is a relatively recent occurrence. Turning to a menu from the 1950s, we can see that hamburgers and French fried potatoes are a very small part of a multitude of non-Chinese food offerings. Unlike contemporary menus that mark the categories of Chinese and Canadian or Western explicitly, the Diamond Grill menu of the 1950s does not name its non-Chinese dishes as Canadian or Western. The non-Chinese food offerings are plentiful and diverse, going far beyond hamburgers to include seemingly more sophisticated dishes such as 'Lyonnaise Potatoes,' 'Fresh Cracked Crab en Mayonnaise,' 'Lobster à la Newburg,' and 'Waldorf Salad.' In contrast, the Chinese food offerings almost seem like an afterthought, tacked on at the end of the menu, after the listing of the beverages and just before the Fountain menu. Small town restaurants operated by Chinese people did not always serve Chinese food. In the 1920s, when New Dayton was a thriving small town that had not yet been swallowed up by Lethbridge, Charlie Chew's New Dayton Café did not serve any Chinese food at all (figure 5).[18] Even though the proprietor's name was clearly emblazoned on the front of the menu, and thus New Dayton Café as a restaurant was operated by a Chinese migrant, like the Diamond Grill it does not declare itself to be a Chinese restaurant, much less a Chinese and Canadian one. Moreover, there is almost no consistency between the 1923 menu of the New Dayton, the 1950s menu of the Diamond Grill, and that of contemporary restaurants such as the Club Café or the Parkview. The westernness of the menu constantly shifts, reinventing itself throughout the period of this sample.

In the menus that we have, from 1923 to the present, the food offerings under the category of Canadian or Western serve back a narrative of Canada's development through various forms of capitalism. On the relatively simple short-order and fountain menu of the New Dayton Café the interests of early Canadian agricultural and railway interests dominate the offerings. The phone number is a single digit and the bill of fare is equally basic. The New Dayton menu consists largely of canned food and simple sandwiches. The most exotic or foreign-sounding offerings are not Chinese dishes but rather the Mexican-inflected items: Chili Con Carne and Tamales. Long before the incursions of the fast food's Taco Bell (where you still can't get a tamale), in 1923 New Dayton, a town that no longer exists, you could get a tamale in small town southern Alberta. These Mexican influences on the menu are not surprising when you keep in mind the trajectory of migrant Chinese labour. Not only did they come across the Pacific, but also up from the mines and railways of California.

Compared to the simplicity of the New Dayton, the Diamond Grill's vision of a short-order menu is lush and sophisticated. The wealth of the Diamond's western food offerings reflects the boom economy of post–Second World War Canada. The Diamond Grill's four-page menu is crammed with offerings. The number of menu items alone is staggering compared to the New Dayton menu. There are twenty-five kinds of 'Diamond Grill Choice Steaks and Chops,' twenty-five kinds of 'Eggs or Omelettes,' twenty-nine kinds of 'Sandwiches,' and over forty-nine fountain menu offerings. Reflecting the increasing prevalence of manufactured food, the breakfast offerings list a number of brand-name cereals that are still with us today and connected to some of the largest multinational food producers in North American – Rice Krispies, Grape Nuts, All Bran, Shredded Wheat. The modernity of the Diamond Grill



SOFT DRINKS 10 Cents

Lime
Lemon
Orange
Coca Cola
Iron Brew
Root Beer
Strawberry

Canada Dry .15

New Dayton Cafe

Phone 4

MENU

C. L. CHEW,
New Dayton, Alberta

Short Order Bill of Fare

BREAKFAST	
Bran Flakes with Milk	.15
Corn Flakes	.15
Shredded Wheat	.15
Hot Cakes and Syrup	.25
Toast and Tea or Coffee	.15
French Toast with Jelly	.45
Hot Milk Toast	.25
Cream Toast	.35
Canned Soup	.30
Eggs and Omelettes	.50

SHORT ORDERS	
T-Bone Steak	.75
Sirloin Steak	.65
Pork Chops Breaded	.60
Canned Crab Meat	.65
Canned Veal Loaf	.55
Canned Spaghetti	.55
Canned Oysters	.60
Canned Shrimp	.60

Ham and Eggs........ Bacon and Eggs ....
Poached, Fried, Boiled

Steak and Chops........ .50
Steak, Pork Chops, Rib Steak, Hamburger Steak

Fried Fish Sausage

Canned Pork and Beans
Canned Sardines

Canned Salmon
Tamales
Chili Con Carne

Extra with Steak, Fried Onions........... .10

PASTRY	
Apple Pie	.10
Raisin Pie	.10
Mince Pie	.10
Cream Pie	.10
Sauce Fruit	.10

BEVERAGES	
Coffee, per cup	.10
Tea, per pot	.10
Glass of Milk	.10
Cream, per glass	.20

SANDWICHES	
Combination	.30
Ham and Egg	.25
Cold Ham	.15
Cheese	.15
Fried Ham	.20
Sausage	.20
Hamburger	.25
Egg	.15
Denver	.30
Sardines	.25

ICE CREAM AND SOFT DRINKS	
Plain Ice Cream	.15
Marsh Mallow	.20
Strawberry	.20
Pineapple	.20
Butter	.20
Chocolate	.20
Maple Walnut	.25
Whole Cherry	.25
Orange-Grape	.25
Banana	.25

SPECIALS	
David Harum	.35
Merry Widow	.55
Banana Split	.40

ICE CREAM SODA	
Lemon	.15
Cherry	.15
Pineapple	.15
Strawberry	.15
Chocolate	.15

SODA SPECIALS	
Egg Nog	.15
Cold Lemonade	.15
Hot Lemonade	.15

Toast with Sandwiches is Extra
Coffee or Tea is Extra with all Sandwiches.

5 New Dayton Café menu. New Dayton, Alberta, 1920s. Courtesy Provincial Archives of Alberta.

is distinctly steeped in the economic shifts and changes of 1950s North America.

Finally, on the contemporary menus, the Canadian or Western food items, reduced largely to variations of hamburgers and fries, are the culinary embodiment of late capitalist streamlined efficiency. As Ester Reiter's work on the politics of fast food demonstrates, the hamburger signals an entire economic shift. Reiter notes that the growth and development of the fast-food industry in Canada, following the patterns in the United States, marks a major shift towards the commercialization of domestic labour. The production of the hamburger in North America is part of a growing oligopolic model of industrialization that is premised on a notion of 'the interchangeable worker.' It signals a change in the organization of domestic labour wherein more and more North Americans dine out for the sake of dining (Reiter 165). Moving from the issue of labour to that of culture, David Bell and Gill Valentine connect fast food to an increasing homogenization of culture wherein 'the line between dependability and monotony' is a fine one (135). In culinary terms, the hamburger exemplifies a late capitalist economic situation wherein flexible labour and the homogenization of a particular global culture are indicators of new regimes of capital accumulation.

Turning back to the Chinese restaurant menu, the reduction of the non-Chinese items on the menu to variations of hamburgers and fries suggests that the menu reflects the changes in Canadian economic development without actually changing the ways in which the restaurant actually operates. Retaining the essence of the 'mom and pop' businesses that Reiter notes as the precursor to the invasion of the franchised fast-food industry in Canada, the restaurants take up the changes in the industry but do not fall into the destructive rhythms of the fast-food industry, where labour is increasingly so unskilled as to be interchangeable. The hamburger and fries may be iconic of the fast-food industry, but their appearance does not necessarily change the rhythm of the Chinese restaurant's long-established short-order formula. Chinese cooks adapt and adopt the menu, but are outside of the rhythm of typical fast-food production. This difference in the temporality of the Chinese restaurant is something that I want to return to in the last section of this chapter. Here, what I want to emphasize is the absorptive power of the Chinese restaurant menu. The menus adopt fast food under the rubric of 'Canadian' food and adapt to shifting culinary desires while sustaining a sense of the Chinese restaurant's coherence and consistency. Maintaining the Chinese restaurant as an institution on the main streets of small towns, the restaurant menu moves from tamales to Potatoes Lyonnaise to hamburgers, serving back to Canada culinary icons of its own economic shifts.

Like a novel progressing through the empty national time of Canadian nationhood, the Canadian menu grows into itself. In the clocked and calendrical temporality of Canada's surfacing into nationhood, the story of national emergence can be read in the simultaneity of its progressive shifts from the simple short-order and fountain menu of the New Dayton, to the full and impressive selection at the Diamond, and then to its streamlined modernity at the Golden Wheel.

Chinese Food: Reproducing Chineseness

Let me begin my consideration of the Chinese food on the menu by taking for granted that the Chineseness of the Chinese restaurant menu needs to be read as highly constructed. Despite the promises of 'authentic Chinese food,' let me assume that the construction of Chineseness on the menu is one that is acutely self-conscious and at least partially aware of the ramifications of its constructions. I hope to shift the weight of the discussion away from questions of authenticity and towards the problem of the dissemination of particular narratives of 'authentic Chinese food.' Rather than asking whether or not sweet and sour pork or chicken chop suey might qualify as 'real' or 'fake' Chinese food,[19] the question then becomes what I take to be a more pressing one: How does the Chineseness of the menu circulate? What does the menu as a text of counterculture reveal about the way in which some diasporic subjects have negotiated their otherness in the precariousness of migrancy?

In this section I want to look at the ways in which Chinese cooks and restaurateurs produce and define a particular kind of Chineseness for Euro-Canadian consumption. If, as the preceding section has argued, they produce and define a Canadianness that explicitly excludes the category of Chinese, what of the representation of Chineseness on the menus? The current critical canon on the representation of minority and postcolonial subjects falls into two general camps. On the one hand, oppressed subjects are subjected to stereotypical representations and on the other those subjects represent themselves. Either you are represented by power or, in the agential casting of the question, you take power and represent yourself. In Asian American literary criticism, for example, this has emerged in the conjoining of two lines of arguments: Through mechanisms such as immigration and labour laws, US citizenship defined itself over and against Asian identities;[20] and in the cultural work of Asian Americans – and here literature has perhaps the most substantial body of critical reflection behind it – Asian Americans represent themselves.[21] This agential-self representation is generally cast in terms of countering damaging stereotypes and fighting for a vision of Asian American identity that is free of ideological racism. Yen Le Espiritu summarizes this double movement, observing that

> categories of difference, race and gender relations do not parallel but intersect and confirm each other, and it is the complicity among these categories of difference that enables U.S. elites to justify and maintain their cultural, social and economic power. Responding to the ideological assaults on their gender identities, Asian American cultural workers have engaged in a wide range of oppositional projects to defend Asian American manhood and womanhood. (106–7)

In Asian Canadian critical work, similar kinds of arguments have emerged. Exploring the work of anthologies, Lien Chao observes that the publication of Asian Canadian anthologies such as *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* signify 'the collective and social advancement and cultural development of contemporary Chinese Canadians in society' (166). In 'Tang Ao in America,' Donald Goellnicht notes that the 'familiar ... stereotype of the Chinese laundryman or waiter' must be understood in conjunction with what had been the less familiar knowledge of the role of Chinese labourers in building the Canadian railway (198). Similarly, Glen Deer argues that 'the diversity of Asian North-American writers must always be re-asserted against the stereotypes of the public imagination' (14). The issue of negative stereotypes of Chinese Canadians is a continuing general concern in Maria Ng's essays 'Chop Suey Writing' and 'Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu Manchu at the Disappearing Moon Café.' Roy Miki closes the 'Asiancy' chapter of *Broken Entries* with a hopeful call for Asian Canadian self-representation, wherein 'writers from a diversity of subject-positions can develop the conditions in which social justice can be achieved through language free from the tyranny of hegemonies of all kinds ... where writers of color, including Asian Canadian writers, can negotiate their (non-totalizable) specificities – without looking over their shoulders for the coercive gaze of homogenizing discourses' (123). Miki's hopefulness looks forward to a space where Asian Canadian writing is free from the coercions of a backward glance. Miki's backward glance forcefully echoes Louis Althusser's famous turning back towards power, the interpellation of the subject by the policeman's hailing (Althusser 174). Perhaps, however, we might read for an agency within that backward glance that exceeds the project of countering negative stereotypes.

Remembering that there is another language of emplacement, another register outside of anglophone Canada's hailing of the Chinese subject, perhaps, there is a mode of self-representation wherein the coercions of the backward glance are anticipated and produced within the mode of that anticipation. This anticipation is partly Judith Butler's point in *The Psychic Life of Power*. The paradox of interpellation is that, in order to be interpellated, individuals must already recognize themselves as subjects to be interpellated. Catching Althusser on the very temporal progression he depends upon but then attempts to discount,[22] Butler asks, 'What, prior to the subject accounts for its formation?' (117). She then proceeds to point out the paradox of interpellation:

> Althusser begins 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' by referring to the reproduction of social relations, specified by referring to the reproduction of social skills. He then distinguishes between skills produced in the firm and those reproduced in education. The subject is formed with respect to the latter. In a sense, this reproduction of relations is prior to the subject who is formed in its course. Yet the two cannot, strictly speaking, be thought of without each other. (Butler 117)

Where Butler's analysis then turns to the problem of desire, my analysis pulls this problem of the prior into one of racial formation. That is, the question of what it means to hail a racialized subject elicits the knowledge that, prior to the subject's formation, there is a distinctly different body of knowledge already circulating for that subject. In the production of Chineseness on the restaurant menus, I read a representation of Chineseness that situates the project of 'representing ourselves' within a highly strategic mode.

In the previous section, I argued that the Chinese restaurant menu serves back to Europe-in-Canada a narrative of its own nationness. That is, the menu's bold declaration of what Canadian food is presents to Europe-in-Canada a tradition, however obviously invented, of its own. Following from that, I argue that the Chinese portion of the menu complements the Canadian one by serving up a highly self-conscious stereotypical Chineseness that nonetheless produces anxiety through the mechanical reproduction of the menu.

Unlike the western dishes on the menus, the Chinese dishes have changed relatively little since their first appearance on the 1950s Chinese Canadian restaurant menu. The contemporary menus' offerings of Chinese food may be more numerous than those at the Diamond Grill, but they read as merely variations on the same reliable basics that the Diamond Grill offered. Turning to the back of the menu to the 'Diamond Grill Special Chinese Dishes,' you will encounter Chicken Chop Suey and Rice first on the list. At the Diamond, you could get one kind of chop suey. At the Golden Wheel, there are five to choose from – Vegetable, BBQ Pork, Chicken, Beef, and Shrimp. Different, and yet basically the same. The menu mechanically reproduces a particular stereotype of Chineseness.

Although chop suey is a dish that has become iconic of inauthentic Chinese food, it can be revealing to consider it as a sign of Chineseness under negotiation through reproduction. The Diamond Grill menu explicitly names chop suey as Chinese. In that naming, the menu textualizes Chineseness, providing a medium through which Chineseness can be reproduced and disseminated. As Spang notes, menus develop in dialogue with one another – one restaurant will copy another's. In this process of pilfering and printing, a standardized restaurant cuisine emerges.

> As restaurateurs (and café-keepers) copied and reused menus, they disseminated a specialized terminology to a wider and wider audience. Insofar as very similar texts, if not exactly the same dishes, were available in a wide variety of eateries, names could spread semi-independently of that to which they had once referred... The menu, by fixing names and titles, both addressed the fantasy and further created the expectation of identity and uniformity. Eaters were not meant to be uniform, but the eaten was, and if it was not, then differences ought to be understood and apparent, capable of being erected into a taxonomy. (191–2)

The print menu has helped to standardize what we have come to know as Chinese food. The menu develops dialogically with one menu echoing the offerings of another one in an entirely different location. The menu is not only a record of displacement but also one of emplacement – it puts into place a kind of Chineseness which persists through the dissemination of the menu.

The standardization of Chinese dishes produces a soothing sameness in the representation of Chineseness on the menu. Just as you can walk into any small town in Canada and expect to find a Chinese restaurant, you can sit down at any one of these restaurants, open the menu and find chop suey. Chop suey's representation of Chineseness produces a fixity and stability in the Chineseness in Canada. Meditating on the colonial stereotype, Homi Bhabha notes in 'The Other Question' that one of the hallmarks of racial stereotypes is that of a fixity of representation: 'The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference ... constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations' (75). The Chineseness represented on the menu functions within a persistent kind of stereotypicality. In the glowing artificiality of the red sauce for sweet and sour pork, there is a phantasmatic fixity to the representation of Chineseness on the menu. Walking into the Parkview Restaurant in Thorhild, Alberta, a diner could reasonably expect to eat the same Lemon Chicken that they would eat at the Golden Wheel in Ponoka, Alberta. The expectation of a kind of sameness, a regularity to the experience of the menu speaks not only to the rise of the Chinese restaurant as an institution, but also to the institutionalization of a kind of standardized Chineseness disseminated through the menus of Chinese restaurants across the landscape of western Canada. Looking at the menus across a span of geographical space, they *are* remarkably similar. They are organized the same way, they have the same categories of food items (appetizers, soup, chop suey, chow mein, egg foo yong and so on). They are structured along the lines of similar culinary expectations.

However, unlike colonial texts, the menus are texts where the fixing occurs by those who are stereotyped. The Diamond Grill menu, for example, fixes and names the category of Chinese. The menu institutionalizes the category of Chinese through items such as chop suey and chicken chow mein. This standardized sameness creates a language of Chineseness which functions as a different textualization circulating within Canadian culture. At once at the margins of culture, disparately spread out over vast geographies and away from urban centers, the consistency of the menus nonetheless asserts a pervasive Chineseness which departs from the definitions of Chinese perpetuated in Canadian law.[23]

As Bhabha usefully argues, a critique cannot be located at the level of whether or not good or bad stereotypes are being perpetuated; rather, it needs to be centered around the process of subjectification itself (75). In that sense, it would not be enough simply to say that an apparatus such as the restaurants produce counter-stereotypes which challenge the 'negative' ones of a Euro-Canadian regime. And yet, in the case of the stereotypical Chineseness produced by Chinese restaurateurs on the menus, Chinese diaspora subjects are producing and perpetuating Chinese stereotypes. These are not necessarily 'positive' stereotypes that have been put into circulation. In fact, the images in circulation eerily echo the projections of the dominant culture. In that sense, they are actually serving back to power precisely its own projection. The unsettling moment happens not in the production of a stereotypical trope (fake Chinese food, the Chinese cook) but in the reproduction of the eerily familiar coming from the other.

There is an excessiveness to the representation in the Chineseness on the Chinese restaurant menu. It is so simple, so uncomplicated, so palatable in that it is exactly what whiteness might expect of Chineseness. This staging of difference contests the ambivalence of colonial power because it exploits that ambivalence. And so the sameness. 'The process by which the metaphoric "masking" is inscribed on a lack which must then be concealed gives the stereotype both its fixity and its phantasmatic quality – the *same old* stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability, or the stupidity of the Irish *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time' (Bhabha 77). Yet, it is the Chinese diasporic subject who re-tells the same old story. It is the subject of settler colonial dominance who facilitates, through the space of the restaurant and the text of the restaurant menu, the compulsive return to the stereotype. It is comforting because it anticipates projected desires. It is exactly what you ordered, what you wanted, given back to you. It fulfills the colonial hunger for itself; they consume their own projection.

The menu stabilizes a kind of Chineseness which offers its consumer the possibility of a reassuring uniformity not only in the Chinese food on the menu, but also in the Chineseness which Chinese food signifies. Chinese restaurant menus present a comforting, palatable Chineseness that can be reproduced and disseminated through the institution of the restaurant. The Diamond Grill menu presents eight unassuming 'Special Chinese Dishes' – items such as Chicken Chop Suey and Rice, Chicken Noodle, Chinese Style, Egg Fooyong and Sweet and Sour Pork Spare Ribs and Rice. The Chinese portion of the menu is very small compared to the restaurant's offerings of more than twenty-five different egg dishes, thirty different sandwiches and thirty-two sundae options. The Chinese food on the menu does not challenge western ones for representational space on the menu, nor does it challenge the non-Chinese diner in terms of its content. The Chinese food items on the Diamond Grill's menu have become standard fare at Chinese restaurants across the prairies. While the contemporary menus have more options, all of the dishes that the Diamond Grill offered are still there. The uniformity of Chinese food on the menus suggests the creation of a uniform Chineseness that could be reproduced, disseminated and identified.

At the same time that the menu names and makes knowable a palatable Chineseness, it also troubles the possibility of fixing an authentic ethnicity. Inherent in the notion of reproduction is the problem of the original. While the menu allows for a mediated form of cultural contact, it also complicates the idea of an authentic or original Chineseness. The apparatus of mechanical reproduction in the printing of the restaurant menu mocks attempts at authenticity. Walter Benjamin argues in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' that mechanical reproduction challenges the idea of authenticity: 'From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense' (224). As Eduardo Cadava notes, Benjamin refers not to the fact of reproduction, but to the possibility of reproducibility: 'technical reproduction is not an empirical feature of modernity ... Rather, it is a structural possibility within the work of art' (42). While Benjamin's critique relates specifically to the work of art, and not to constructions of race and ethnicity, his analysis of authenticity bears upon this discussion. Benjamin saw in photography the potential deconstruction of '[t]he presumed uniqueness of a production, the singularity of the artwork, and the value of authenticity' (Cadava 44). Rey Chow argues that

> we need to extend Benjamin's conceptualization, a conceptualization that is ostensibly about objects – works of art and their mechanical reproduction – to human beings. Once we do that, we see that in our fascination with the 'authentic native,' we are actually engaging in a search for the equivalent of the aura even while our search processes themselves take us farther and farther away from that 'original' point of identification. (*Writing* 46)

Chow makes a useful connection between the aura of the original work of art and that of the authentic racial other. Because my use of Benjamin is limited to the reproduction of Chineseness on the small town restaurant menu,[24] his analysis of the condition of reproducibility is particularly apt.

It makes no sense to ask for authentic chop suey. We already know that it is a copy of something that is outside the margins of the menu.

Any number of chop suey dishes can be produced, but no one is more authentic than another. The reproducibility of Chineseness embodied in the restaurant menu frustrates the construction of a knowable authentic Chinese subject at the same time that it offers up a palatable Chineseness that gives the impression of knowability. As Benjamin observes, reproducibility endangers the authority of the object.

> The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (221)

The reproduction of Chineseness on the menu jeopardizes the authority of the Chinese food on the menu to stand in for Chinese – it puts into question the possibility of knowing Chinese authoritatively through the Chinese food on the menu.

In naming Chineseness for the Euro-Canadian community, Chinese food on the restaurant menu brings to the surface the uneasiness of attempts at knowing and identifying otherness. Chow writes of the possibility of the native's gaze reflecting back on the colonizer in the colonial gaze:

> Contrary to the model of Western hegemony in which the colonizer is seen as a primary, active 'gaze' subjugating the native as passive 'object,' I want to suggest that it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native's gaze. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the colonizer 'conscious' of himself, leading him to his need to turn his gaze around and look at himself, henceforth 'reflected' in the native-object. (*Writing* 51)

Similarly, Eleanor Ty argues that the authors in her study of Asian North American literature 'disrupt visible signs dealing with the expectations of being Asian Americans or Asian Canadians ... They reciprocate the gaze and destabilize the set of meanings commonly associated with their Asian bodily features' (11). The menu functions on this order, delivering or serving up a palatable Chineseness at the same time that it jeopardizes its own authority as a text of Chineseness. Chinese food on the menu betrays the version of Chineseness that white communities can consume, revealing more about whiteness than Chineseness. More than that, Chineseness on the menu tells us about how Chinese diaspora subjects negotiate the reproduction and dissemination of Chineseness.

The menu attests to a self-conscious and utterly aware production of fictive ethnicity. It functions as a reminder that the racialized other herself might also produce an inauthentic and imperfect Chineseness as a strategy of resistance. The legacy of the menu suggests that Chinese diaspora subjects exploit the menu's capacity for the reproduction of a cultural space in order to produce an ethnicity that can be made palatable and frustrates the desire for an authentic Chineseness.

Slowness and Alternative Temporalities

In this final section, I want to consider the ways in which Chinese diasporic subjects do not simply insinuate themselves into the dominant discourse; rather, as the history of legal exclusion suggests, they are constitutive of it. They emphasize the roots of Canada's national emergence in the routes of diasporic agency.

Unlike many of the non-Chinese items on the Diamond Grill menu, chop suey retains its place on contemporary Chinese Canadian restaurant menus. The white or western items feel antiquated and anachronistic. We know what Chicken Chop Suey or Sweet and Sour Pork Spare Ribs might be. On the other hand, a Love Me Special fancy sundae or a Manhattan Sandwich feel foreign, as though they belong to another time or space. This stability of the Chineseness of the menus across time stages the disjuncture between the historical shifts in whiteness and that of Chineseness.

The progressivist reading of this disjuncture would be the dominant one of European progress – whiteness changes, advances and develops more rapidly than Chineseness. Extending this reading towards a liberal multiculturalism, you might even say that as whiteness advances and becomes more tolerant, it allows for an increasingly visible Chineseness on the menu. Each menu successively contains more and more Chinese dishes. The New Dayton menu of 1923 offers no Chinese dishes at all. The Diamond Grill menu of 1951 offers eight and contemporary menus such as the Club Café or the Parkview reverse the Diamond Grill's proportions of Chinese food, offering mostly Chinese food and only five or six Western Chinese. What might be the meaning of this increasingly visible and overt Chineseness on the restaurant menus? I want to caution against the temptation to link the increasingly visible Chineseness of the menus with the political liberalization or opening up of Canadian immigration policy. On the surface, this link would seem to make sense. In 1923 Canada passed what became unofficially known as the Exclusion Act – a change to the *Chinese Immigration Act* that made Chinese immigration into Canada virtually impossible. In 1947 Canada repealed the act, allowing for limited Chinese immigration. In 1988, Canada passed the *Multiculturalism Act*, an attempt to officially acknowledge cultural difference and pluralism in Canada. Accordingly, it would make sense to think of the increasing Chineseness of the restaurant menus as following the trajectory of these changes to Canadian immigration policy.

However, this reading would presume a linear and causal history of increasing tolerance. This is, of course, the story that Canada tells itself about its own history of racism (the story goes something like this: we were bad before but we are learning, we are becoming more enlightened and more tolerant, and we are getting better now). It is a story that follows a liberal notion of progress as well as an easy historicist notion of history's linearity that is deeply problematic in terms of its objectification and dismissal of the past.

Let me propose that the Chineseness of the restaurants is not just outdated, but it is *out of time*. In his discussion of the problem of the writing of minority histories, Dipesh Chakrabarty challenges Fredric Jameson's injunction to 'always historicize': 'historicizing is not the problematic part of the injunction, the troubling term is "always." For the assumption of a continuous, homogeneous, infinitely stretched out time that makes possible the imagination of a "always" is put to question by subaltern pasts that makes the present, as Derrida says, "out of joint"' (111). The heterogeneity of the time of the Chinese restaurant menus challenges the continuous empty one of European history. Within the outdatedness of the restaurants, we can read a form of diasporic resistance.

The first lines of the menu read: 'Diamond Grill, Nelson's Newest and Most Modern Restaurant.' From the perspective of the twenty-first-century reader, the Diamond Grill's claim to be modern seems quaint and yet antiquated. And yet, contemporary small town Chinese restaurants are also seen as being quaint and outdated. The Diamond Grill's antiquity relates to the antiquity of contemporary restaurants such as the Club Café in Innisfail (figure 6) or the A & J in Olds. They are old, relics. There is a sense that very little has changed. On contemporary menus such has those of the Club or Golden Wheel, the Chinese food offerings are largely elaborations of the Chinese dishes at the Diamond – different kinds of chop suey, chow mein, egg foo yong, and so on.

Compared to the cosmopolitan bustle of twenty-first-century China-

CLUB
CAFE
CHINESE FOOD
GIFT LOFT
P
ANGLE PARKING FOR VEHICLES UNDER 6 METERS IN LENGTH ONLY
P
2 HOUR

6 Club Café, Innisfail, Alberta, 1999. Courtesy of the author.

towns of Vancouver and Toronto, these restaurants seem old-fashioned and out of step with the changing pace of new immigration patterns and new immigrant identities. This quality of being out of step brings us back to Homi Bhabha's theory of the time lag or belatedness of racialized subjects.[25] It is what Gilroy has marked as the counterculture of modernity and 'the living memory of the changing same' (*Black Atlantic*, 198). From the perspective of history, this belatedness would be what Chakrabarty has called the time knot of subaltern history – that is, the idea of a plurality of times existing together or the disjuncture of the present with itself (109). Whether we read the discordant time of the restaurants as belated or disjunctive, it contains an alternate or different temporality that challenges the desire of late-modern capitalist formations to write them out of the present. This is more than just the story of survival. This is about slowing down and occasionally br(e)aking the relentless flow of late modernity's desire to hurry away from that which it has marked as non-modern. 'It is the function of the *lag* to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal its "gesture," its *tempi*, "the pauses and stresses of the whole performance"' (Bhabha 253). The menus assert a slowness in the construction of Chineseness that poses a challenge to the speed of a supposedly new global order that insists on its own newness.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, by slowness I do not mean the characterization of time in non-urban space as idyllic and somehow slower than that of the metropolis. In reading small town Chinese restaurant menus, my goal has been to explore a diasporic temporality and the idea of the time lag. There is some sense of a connection between speed and modernity (think, fast food) that these menus challenge. As Reinhart Koselleck observes, there is an intimate relationship between speed and European modernity. He argues that in the period from 1500 to 1800 'there occurs a temporalization (*Verzeitlichung*) of history, at the end of which there is the peculiar form of *acceleration* which characterizes modernity' (5, my emphasis). Koselleck recounts Robespierre's famous 1793 speech on the Revolutionary Constitution, in which he declared: 'The time has come to call upon each to realize his own destiny. The progress of human Reason has laid the basis for this great Revolution, and the particular duty of hastening it has fallen to you' (cited in Koselleck, 7). In contrast to Luther's era, where 'the compression of time is a visible sign that, according to God's will, the Final Judgement is imminent, that the world is about to end,' Koselleck notes that 'for Robespierre, the acceleration of time is a task of men leading to an epoch of freedom and happiness, the golden future' (7). Robespierre's inauguration of the individual autonomous agent of history who would 'realize his own destiny' heralds an era where rational men should rush headlong into the possibilites and promises of a progressive future.

In many ways, Chinese diaspora criticism has also embraced a notion of a liberatory modernity, of a friendlier future peopled by modern subjects. In analyses that call for a move beyond a perceived idea of an outdated Chineseness, the desire for a certain freedom from the past is part of a larger goal towards a more agential understanding of the Chinese diaspora subject in North America. In her article 'Can One Say No to Chineseness?' Ien Ang argues that one of the central problems for Chinese diaspora studies is that of modernizing Chineseness and, at the same time, creating a modernity that is Chinese:

> Central to the intellectual problematic of cultural China is what one sees as the urgent need to reconcile Chineseness and modernity as the twentieth century draws to a close. There are two interrelated sides to this challenge. On the one hand, the question is how to modernize Chineseness itself in a way that will correct and overcome the arguably abject course taken by the existing political regime in China, a course almost universally perceived as wrong ... On the other hand, there is also the question of how to sinicize modernity – how, that is, to create a modern world that is truly Chinese and not simply an imitation of the West. (229–30)

Ang's call for modernizing Chineseness belies an investment in an idea of the march of historical progress wherein Chineseness needs to catch up to European modernity. Similarly, Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship* also invests in a sense of urgency around the need to separate old and new diaspora subjects. Ong argues for an agential view of modern Chinese transnationalists who 'subvert the ethnic absolutism born of nationalism and the processes of cultural othering that have intensified with transnationality' (24). This appeal for a consideration of a new migrant subjectivity divorced from the old one of indentured and migrant labour movements hopes to fend off contemporary racism by arguing against archaic representations of Chineseness that are not representative of contemporary Chinese diasporic populations. Similarly, in her discussion of racist stereotypes and Chineseness in Canada, Maria Ng surveys recent Chinese Canadian literature and asks for a movement away from what she understands as derogatory and stereotypical representation of Chinese Canadians. Ng suggests the need for a movement away from representations of Chinese Canadians that are too tied to the past:

> Although they represent a kind of reality of earlier immigrant lives, and although they are experiences that need to be recorded and remembered ... a wider and more inclusive representation of Chinese Canadian lives is needed, not only to prevent the continuing impression of a nondifferentiated ethnic group called the Chinese but also to include and empower the lives of recent immigrants who are contributing to the Canada of the twenty-first century. ('Chop Suey' 184)

Ng's call for differentiation between the Chinese immigrant of the past and the new Chinese immigrant of the present assumes an understanding of Chinese immigrant subjectivity as one that has become progressively more sophisticated, more removed from the degrading positions to which earlier immigrants were relegated. In the 'immigrants who are contributing to the Canada of the twenty-first century,' there is a suggestion that the immigrants who contributed to the Canada of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are outdated and no longer representative of the contemporary Chinese Canadian subject.[26] And yet, this desire to make the past past suggests that the history of Chinese immigration in Canada has followed a trajectory of increasing cosmopolitanism.

This desire risks relegating what might be considered old diaspora subjectivities to the dustbin of Chinese diaspora history rather than thinking through the ways in which these identities not only haunt modern diaspora subjectivity, but are also constitutive of it. Recognizing the constitutive role of the past, Chakrabarty suggests that 'difference is always the name of a relationship, for it separates just as much as it connects ... One could argue that alongside the present or the modern the medieval must linger as well, if only as that which exists as the limit or the border to the practices and discourses that define the modern' (*Provincializing Europe*, 110). In differentiating the new diaspora from the old, the history of coolie labour migration lingers on the border of the cosmopolitan transnationalist entrepreneur. Vijay Mishra proposes the idea of a 'diasporic imaginary' as a way of thinking about the way in which old and new diasporas work together in the construction of diasporic subjectivity. He also warns of too easy a celebration of transnationality and deterritorialization. Cautioning against reading diasporas as '*the* ideal social condition,' Mishra suggests that essentialist narratives of homeland and exile will continue to haunt them so long as the specter of racist culture persists ('Diasporic' 426). Mishra's identification of the perseverance of racist culture is important for thinking about why attempts by new diaspora subjects, savvy and educated flexible citizens, cannot break through in a cultural space that will continue to question their right to full citizenship in the first place.

I do not want to glorify the old-fashioned or the outdated. Nor do I want to assert the Chinese cook or restaurateur as the ideal Chinese diasporic subject. However, I am doubtful of claims to the new, to something that too easily divorces itself from an ugly past of state-sanctioned labour exploitation and legalized racism. In her discussion of the problem of developing a materialist feminist historiography, Rosemary Hennessy argues that newness can function as a particular kind of conservatism:

> The conservative face of the new appears in its function as a mechanism whereby oppositional modes of thinking are sutured into the prevailing regimes of truth in order to maintain a symbolic order. The discourse of the new can serve to anchor emergent modes of thinking in traditional categories that help support rather than disrupt the prevailing social order ... In its conservative manifestation, the appeal to new-ness serves as the guarantor of repetition, an articulating instrument whereby the *preconstructed* categories that comprise the symbolic infrastructure of the social imaginary are sustained through moments of historical crisis by their dissimulation in the guise of the new. (103–4)

As Hennessy observes, the desire for newness can sometimes conceal a certain conservatism. Declarations of the agential exemplarity of the new diaspora risk re-entrenching the conventions of the old. In the premature requiems ascribed to small town Chinese restaurants, there is a sense that they are not only not representative of contemporary Chinese Canadian subjectivities, but also that they are moving towards extinction.

Part of this movement towards a premature requiem is tied to a pervasive narrative of increasing urbanization. In this narrative we will all eventually live in major cities, our food will come from mega-agricultural operations, and the small town will eventually die. I find this narrative suspicious. The air of inevitability has the imprint of one of European modernity's favourite narratives – progress, the march of time towards some sort of developmental utopia where, in this case, we will all be transnational cosmopolitans identifying more with our mega-cities than our national boundaries. The declaration of newness carries in it the desire for a divorce from what has been declared uncomfortably old and old-fashioned. Chinese Canadian restaurants are old. But they are not extinct. Chinese immigrants still work as cooks. Even though the Chineseness of Chinese Canadian restaurants doesn't seem to fit with the new image of savvy and educated Chinese immigrants, I want to hang on to the politics of their unsuitability. Rather than jettisoning their Chineseness as unrepresentative, I have tried to think through the way in which their lack of fit with what might be called new Chinese diaspora subjectivity reveals the repetition in the rupture of new diaspora subjectivity. It is not that Chineseness should be stable or that it is doomed to a cycle of being tied to coolie labour trajectories; rather, the restaurants suggest an alternate and simultaneous temporality that is out of step, that challenges the European narrative of linear progress. In reading against the grain of a history that wants to progress into a future of increasing liberalized tolerance with racism as an unfortunate spectre of its past, I am not suggesting that diaspora criticism should cling stubbornly to the racism of the past. Instead, I am hoping to make way for a reading of resistance that recognizes the kinds of strategies and negotiations that might be at work in negotiating the racism of the everyday.

The menus retain the traces of the culture of the counter, where the long shiny plastic expanse separating the server from the served is not always a singular line. Counters can circle back on themselves, but to move in between them you still have to feel for the modern in the anachronisms of the present. In a prose poem commemorating the two connected horseshoe-shaped counters at the Diamond Grill, Fred Wah writes:

> These two counters have been designed for maximum use of a small space and are laid out to perform one continuous unit running past the soda fountain and up to the till. The only door in this Arborite feedlot is really a gate between the first counter seat and the glass display case of the till and can only be opened by those of us who know how to operate its very modern latch, hidden so you have to finger it from the bottom. This café is the newest and most modern establishment in Nelson (before the new Greyhound depot) and, of all its doors, I enjoy this gate with the secret latch, this early instance of the power that comes from camouflage and secrecy. (33–4)

In the culture of the counter, the line separating the server and the served maintains the appearance of shiny Arborite solidity. But there is a secret latch, a modern latch, where you feel your way through the underside of the plasticity of rumour and memory to pass. This secret passageway is partly about the way in which the culture of the counter turns the sadnesses of servitude into a counterculture of agential self-positioning. It is also about the countercultural habit of pushing the smugness of the present up against itself. Wah's insistence on the modernity of the latch against the outmoded materiality of Arborite suggests that inhabiting the precariousness of migrancy depends on an understanding of what it means to live in the present while still feeling, sometimes blindly, for the past.

I recognize that it is not only the desires of middle-class ascendancy that might cause those in the Chinese diaspora to want to keep the past in the past, to be swept up in the giddy momentum of a triumphancy where we have, through the sacrifices of sweat and blood, achieved the small signs of gaining a toehold in a ruthless world of socialized racism – a house in a good neighbourhood, children with university degrees, a front lawn that does not have to do double duty as an extra vegetable patch. It is very tempting to fight to 'arrive' and then to turn and say, *I am not one of them. Don't confuse me with them.* These are not easy pasts. But declaring them to be in the past, rather than recognizing that the 'new' Chinese immigrant is just as likely to be a dishwasher at a Chinese restaurant or a garment worker as she is to be a member of the transnational elite, works precisely within a racist regime where the linear march of time and progress wants to situate the dispossessed simply as an unfortunate feature of the non-modern. The precariousness of migrancy means that the ugly head of racism will always threaten to emerge. The words 'go home' will continue to resonate. It is because of this that we need to find a way to move in slowness and embrace the constant intrusion of the past in the present. The secret bond between slowness and memory lies in finding a way to make peace with pasts that harbour pain and humiliation.

In considering the Chinese Canadian restaurant menu across space and time, I have been arguing for a way of reading the menu as a text that bears witness to the agency of Chinese Canadian diaspora subjects in their scripting of 'Canadian' for Canadians and their production of a Chineseness. These representations challenge the notion of authentic Chinese at the same time that they serve up a comforting and fixed Chineseness. They also challenge the progressive and linear time of European history. These menus stage the constructedness of Euro-Canadian time. Against the speed of an insistently globalized world order that denies the constitutive role of the past, the diasporic agency of slowness emerges in the time of the menu.