

Asian Canadian Studies

Unfinished Projects

I

In an essay that investigates “why interethnic antiracism matters now,” George Lipsitz asserts that “while ethnic studies is doing very well, ethnic people are faring very badly” (296). In making this assertion, Lipsitz seeks to identify and confront the implications of “the disparity between the status of ethnic studies and the status of ethnic communities” in the United States (296–97). He acknowledges that this disparity stems in part “from the personal failings of individual scholars, from the elitism and ideological conservatism at the core of academic career hierarchies, and from the isolation of many ethnic studies scholars from the activities of actual social movements” (297). But he also underlines that “the ethnic studies paradigm itself, as it has emerged historically, is also partly responsible for the problems we face” (197)—a point that has been addressed in a variety of ways by prominent ethnic studies scholars in the United States over the past twenty years (see, for example, Hirabayashi and Alquizola; Kim; and Omi). Particularly problematic for Lipsitz is what he calls “a one-group-at-a-time story of exclusion and discrimination rather than an analytic, comparative, and relational approach revealing injustice to be the rule rather than the exception in our society” (297). For Lipsitz, new forms of capitalist exploitation and new forms of racism in the postindustrial United States demand “new methods, theories, and strategies” to help us investigate what he calls “the interconnectedness of oppressions” (297).

Lipsitz’s wake-up call, directed to scholars working in US ethnic studies, does not translate smoothly for scholars working on Asian Canadian topics. In Canada, to the untrained eye, *ethnic studies itself appears to be faring*

badly. Despite the impressive collective efforts of scholars and community workers to set up specific research centres and even entire universities that serve the needs and interests of racialized communities¹—efforts that have, in part, helped to legitimize and make possible the shape of current critical projects, about which I have more to say below—the legacy of “ethnic studies” in Canada, understood as such, remains in many instances markedly and unapologetically inattentive to questions of race.² But changes are occurring. Over the past ten years, doctoral dissertations on various Asian Canadian topics have been completed in Canada and elsewhere—dissertations that have not only produced original knowledge about Asian Canadians but also, in various ways, attempted to realign the critical bases of Asian Canadian inquiry.³ Some scholars have set up new academic programs to try to transform the discipline-based, one-group-at-a-time approaches that characterize much existing scholarship on Asian Canadian topics.⁴ Meanwhile, some academic departments in Canadian universities have recruited faculty members in new fields that explicitly recognize the importance of Asian North American studies.⁵

In the midst of these evolving developments, I wish to ask why Asian Canadian studies projects might matter now. But before I turn to the specifics of my argument, I want to underline that the shift in my terminology from “scholarship on Asian Canadian topics” to “Asian Canadian studies projects” is not accidental. I’m using these two terms to name overlapping yet distinct approaches in the existing scholarly record. “Scholarship on Asian Canadian topics” names the various kinds of academic work done, typically through established disciplinary approaches, about some aspects of Asian Canadian history or culture or social formations. While obviously diverse in its aims, its methods, and its disciplinary commitments, this body of scholarship, considered as a whole, typically conveys a limited awareness of and engagement with the social movements and the intellectual histories that have, since the early 1970s, enabled “Asian Canadian” topics to become visible as sites of knowledge production. To ungenerous readers, the body of scholarship I’ve gathered here may be characterized as “academic business as usual—but this time it’s about Asian Canadians.”

The second term I’ve introduced, “Asian Canadian studies projects,” names scholarly work that also addresses some aspects of Asian Canadian history or culture or social formations. But these projects, despite critical disagreements and diverging methodological or political commitments, nevertheless attempt to work out of an awareness of the social movements, the cultural

activism, and the intellectual histories that have enabled the category of “Asian Canadian” to come into being. In this sense, Asian Canadian studies projects are not content with only producing new studies about Asian Canadians—that is, they are not content with simply considering Asian Canadians as objects of knowledge—but instead attempt, in distinct and sometimes conflicting ways, to understand and possibly transform various discipline-based sites of knowledge production. To sympathetic readers, these critical projects attempt to say, explicitly or implicitly, that, “Yes, we need to address topics concerning Asian Canadians, but academic business as usual needs to be examined too!”

To explain why I distinguish these two terms, I’d like to take a quick detour to provide an example from English literary studies in Canada. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, we accumulated, in the existing scholarly record, many published critical essays on Joy Kogawa’s celebrated novel *Obasan* (1981). In other words, when we look at the Kogawa example, we see that there’s no lack of scholarship on Asian Canadian topics during this period. But the visibility of scholarship discussing *Obasan*, along with the prominent circulation of Kogawa’s novel in the teaching and critical discussion of Can Lit during this period, raises the question of whether, as Roy Miki has asked, “formerly ethnocentric institutions, such as CanLit, [are] being radically transformed by the inclusion of a racialized text” (136). When we examine the critical record produced around *Obasan*, we find comparatively little scholarly work that has attempted to situate Kogawa’s novel in the context of Asian Canadian cultural history and comparatively little work that has viewed it as a site in which problems in the discipline of Canadian literary studies may be made visible. With some important notable exceptions—such as the work of Roy Miki, Scott McFarlane, Donald Goellnicht, and others—there were comparatively few Asian Canadian studies projects that asked, as Miki does, whether the “possibility of an ‘inclusive university’ depends not only on the inclusion of racialized texts and writers on the curriculum, but . . . [also on] the expertise of academics of colour in a critical mass sufficient to transform literary studies into a vital mode of social and cultural critique” (178).

At this point, we might rightly ask whether it’s logically sound to use critical discussions of *Obasan* as an example to understand the many and complex vectors of Asian Canadian studies scholarship produced since the 1970s. In fact, as I’ve argued elsewhere, it may be more precise to think of the case of “Kogawa criticism” as an expression of the particular contradictions facing Canadian literary studies over the past two decades as critics have attempted

to confront the difficult implications of reading a “racist past” in a “multicultural present”—that is, as they have attempted the genuinely difficult task of transforming the discipline of Canadian literary criticism to address representations of racialization and racist exclusion in Canada (see Beauregard, “After *Obasan*”). Debates in other disciplines and in other locations may not fit precisely—or may not fit at all—within this particular problematic. Out of numerous possible examples, we could consider the case of cultural geography and the important work done by scholars such as Katharyne Mitchell on the role of transnational capital in reshaping our understanding of Vancouver’s built environment.⁶ Mitchell’s work has not been explicitly concerned with disciplinary codes or with the contradictions of the existing scholarly record, but it has nevertheless pushed forward our understanding of received notions of “Chineseness” on the west coast of Canada in the 1980s and beyond. Certainly, the questions we ask and the critical problems we face will vary depending on our disciplinary commitments, the institutions in which we work, and the critical problems we try to investigate.

So how might Asian Canadian studies projects matter to us now? To address this question, I want to explain some of the reasons why I’ve arrived at my current thinking about these matters. I’ve been reading and thinking about Asian Canadian literature since I moved to Vancouver in 1993 to start an MA at the University of British Columbia. As I read these texts, and as I learned more about the larger social text surrounding them, I was consistently struck by the power with which Asian Canadian cultural production (including literary writing and the visual and media arts) was dynamically pushing forward—and in many cases offering sustained challenges to—received ideas about Canada. But while Asian Canadian cultural production continued to push forward in the 1990s, English studies in Canada responded—sometimes belatedly, sometimes not at all—in ways that I found profoundly discomfiting at that time. Why was that so? To put matters bluntly, English departments in Canada in the 1990s appeared to be more comfortable including *Obasan* as course material than including people of colour as faculty members. In this time period, we witnessed a dramatic proliferation of articles on texts such as *Obasan*, but we didn’t witness a similarly dramatic reflexive turn that could question the unselfconscious uses of Kogawa’s novel and other Asian Canadian cultural texts as signifiers of multicultural inclusiveness in English studies in Canada. This is not a happy story, and it’s not one I retell with any joy. Given these conditions—which, I want to make clear, were *not* uniformly the same across different institutions

and were *not* passively accepted by many of us working within and outside these institutions—I felt dissatisfied with the growing proliferation of “coming to voice” critical narratives that did not, at the same time, analyse and question the exclusions in our profession and the circumscribed terms on which certain racialized voices were being heard and discussed.

As I write this essay, I realize I’ve become markedly more hopeful about the potential critical contributions of Asian Canadian studies projects. To be sure, many of the problems I’ve noted above remain with us today. We have not crossed any finish line in a race to address and transform the exclusions inherent in academic practices in Canada. But as I’ve been reading the essays collected in this issue, I must admit I’ve been astonished by the clarity with which the contributors have traced the pasts and imagined the possible futures of Asian Canadian studies. In this respect, we could note the theoretical rigour Christopher Lee brings to his examination of the “enacting” of the term “Asian Canadian” in the landmark *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979) and beyond, or Iyko Day’s meticulous tracking of the historical fluctuations in race concepts in Canada and their significance for our understanding of “Asian Canadian” as a socially constituted category. We could note Donald Goellnicht’s acute investigation of Asian Canadian canon formation to ask how and why the work of Roy Kiyooka and Fred Wah may be important to our understanding of this critical frame. We could note Marie Lo’s original analysis of model minority discourse and visible minority discourse (the latter being one of the Canadian state’s notable contributions to contemporary English-language governmental discourses of racialization) in the paratext surrounding the literary work of Evelyn Lau. We could note the critical range Glenn Deer brings to his analysis of the profound changes Greater Vancouver has undergone since the Asian Canadian movement in the 1970s, changes that are legible in its built environment and in representations of urban and suburban spaces in Asian Canadian writing. We could note the remarkable ethical engagement Roy Miki brings to what he calls “global drift” and the shifting grounds of national identity and subject formation in Canada. And we could note the principled ways in which Rita Wong and Lily Cho situate the formation of Asian Canadian subjectivities in colonial histories, thereby asking (following Wong) what “decolonizasian” could look like through a close examination of Asian and First Nations relations in literary texts, or asking (following Cho) what renewed examination of colonial archives could tell us about the historical interconnections between the African slave trade and

the “routes of indenture” of Asians in the Americas. Taken together, these contributions suggest that Asian Canadian cultural criticism has entered an exciting and profoundly generative phase.

It may be tempting to view the remarkable critical work collected in this issue as a point of *arrival*. In other words, while it’s been widely recognized that cultural workers have been producing work that has been understood as “Asian Canadian” since the 1970s, it may be tempting to view the current critical moment as one in which Asian Canadian cultural criticism has finally *caught up*. Without discounting the power Asian Canadian cultural production has accumulated to put into play new ideas about history and identity and representation, and without minimizing the potentially transformative power of contemporary Asian Canadian cultural criticism, I sense that notions of “arriving” and “catching up” may impede rather than further our understanding of how we’ve come to the present critical conjuncture. We could ask, “*Arriving*” *where*? “*Catching up*” *to what*? There’s no single running track here and, given the complexity of contemporary social formations and historical and cultural representations, no set end point to contemporary Asian Canadian critical projects, whose points of engagement continue to be multiple and varied.

That being said, I sense that there may nevertheless be something distinct and noteworthy about the current critical moment. To explain why, I want to clarify some of the reasons why I believe this is *not* the case. First and foremost, the current critical moment does not gain its importance from somehow springing miraculously out of nowhere, from emerging as a fully formed set of critical projects that have somehow built themselves up from scratch. Scholars working in the current moment have instead, in various ways, taken up and extended the challenges and complexities of previous critical moments, ranging from the remarkable convergence of essays, poetry, interviews, short fiction, and photography collected in *Inalienable Rice* through to many subsequent projects, including the special issue of *Canadian Literature* on *Asian Canadian Writing* edited by Glenn Deer almost a decade ago, that have reframed our lines of investigation and points of intervention.⁷ Discounting the significance of these earlier moments—and, as Henry Yu has underlined in his study of what he calls “the origins and consequences of a widespread fascination with the Oriental in the United States” (9), the importance of other earlier key sites of knowledge production too—does not help us to understand how and why contemporary Asian Canadian projects have taken their present shape.

It's also worth stating as clearly as possible that the present critical moment does not gain its strength from naming, and then mapping out, a presumably stable identity—that is, from anchoring itself to a stable referent we can now, finally, call “Asian Canadian.” As a marker of identity, the term “Asian Canadian” has *always* been spatially and historically contingent, from its emergence in cultural activism and panethnic coalitions in Vancouver and Toronto in the 1970s through to the different ways the term may continue to be mobilized, as Stephen Sumida has said of the term “Asian American,” as an “analytic category, not an identity” (807). On a related note, Asian Canadian projects have not moved to a critically generative phase by setting up and nestling into a single, stable institutional location—that is, by setting up and working within something we could now comfortably call “Asian Canadian Studies” with a capital S—in which we could recognize a stable curriculum, set standards for hiring and promotion, and a defined institutional space dedicated to teaching and conducting research on “Asian Canadian” topics. As Lily Cho points out in her contribution to this issue, scholars working on Asian Canadian topics have not been trained in this way, and any serious engagement of the contemporary formations of Asian Canadian studies scholarship must take this fact into account.

Contemporary Asian Canadian projects have not sprung fully formed in our midst. They do not speak to a self-evident collective identity. They have not been produced in already-formed and securely institutionalized Asian Canadian Studies programs. Given this situation, I want to suggest that *Asian Canadian studies projects may matter now precisely because they have been developed and continue to operate in such unsettled terrain*. Despite facing varying forms and combinations of disciplinary parochialism, multicultural fascination and tokenism, and institutionalized white privilege that persistently downplays the social force of whiteness in Canada, Asian Canadian critical projects produced inside and outside Canadian universities have managed, remarkably, to thrive. And it's noteworthy that these critical projects have, in many instances, rejected a simple additive model of knowledge production (i.e., adding new studies to the critical record—“but this time the studies are about Asian Canadians”) and instead sought out what R. Radhakrishnan has called, in his discussion of “conjunctural identities” in Asian American studies, “a different modality of knowledge” (252). Radhakrishnan has pointed out that it's crucial to investigate *Asian-America* (which he uses in this hyphenated form) not merely as a demographic census marker (i.e., as a given category or a set identity) but also as “a political-epistemic category”

(253). On a similar register, contemporary Asian Canadian projects encourage us to reconsider the term “Asian Canadian” as *not* a stable marker that names an already-constituted object of analysis but a “political-epistemic category” that can draw from what Radhakrishnan identifies as “the adjacencies that have developed among the several disciplines that constitute the humanities” (259)—and, I would add, the social sciences too.

So instead of thinking of the current critical conjuncture as a moment of *arrival* or a moment of *catching up*—and instead of viewing it as an attempt to name or describe a stable identity we can now, finally, call “Asian Canadian”—we may productively view the present moment as an opportunity to critically address and transform social and institutional conditions that are not of our choosing. We may well wonder how Asian Canadian studies projects might intervene in currently configured academic formations or how they might articulate these formations to community-based activism and practices of the everyday. There is much work to be done in this respect to connect Asian Canadian studies scholarship to the larger project of social transformation. As I write the introduction to this issue, I remain struck by the many points we could—but have yet to—pursue. I want to stress that this is not simply a matter of adding new materials to existing “Asian Canadian” approaches. It is instead a matter of recognizing, as Stephen Sumida and Sauling Wong have underlined in their discussion of Asian American literature (4), that the perspectives presented here do not *represent* the identity and culture of “Asian Canadians” but instead *present* strategic bases from which to rethink social and cultural formations in Canada. There continue to be many critical perspectives that we need to bring into focus—this, among other things, indicates the potential future significance of Asian Canadian studies scholarship—and the ways we think about Asian Canadian studies and why it might matter will need to change accordingly.

II

Out of many possible lines of intervention, I want to investigate one topic: the ways that existing Asian Canadian studies projects have worked—and continue to work—within various structures of *multicultural governmentality* in Canada. What does this mean? At least since the early 1970s—in other words, at least since the period roughly coterminous with the formation of the Asian Canadian movement as a collective social and cultural movement—state discourses in Canada have, in distinct and evolving ways, encouraged particular expressions of “cultural difference” and named these

expressions as constitutively part of the Canadian nation. These forms of encouragement have functioned as a form of *government* in the precise sense discussed by Michel Foucault. “To govern,” in his famous formulation, “is to structure the possible field of actions of others”; for Foucault, “government” designates “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick” (221). In this sense, multicultural governmentality names the diverse and evolving ways in which the conduct and the expression of designated “multicultural others” may be encouraged, directed, and managed.

For racialized and ethnicized communities in Canada, the management of “cultural difference” did not spring up fully formed in 1971 with the Trudeau government’s introduction of official multiculturalism and the accompanying White Paper tabled on October 8, 1971. We could note, out of many possible examples, a remarkable scene in Wayson Choy’s novel *The Jade Peony* (1995) that represents a classroom in Strathcona School in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside in 1941:

In Miss E. Doyle’s classroom, at least, there was no name-calling; in class, no pushing, no kicking. Not even whispering. Her commands were simple, and simply barked: “Sit.” “Eyes front.” “Feet flat on the floor.” And all the boys and girls obeyed. . . . Miss Doyle, with her loud gravel voice, was the guardian of our education. With hawk-eyed precision, she reined in her Third-Graders with a kind of compassionate terror, blasting out a delinquent’s full name as if she were God’s avenging horn: each vowel of any name, however multisyllabled, whether it was Japanese, East Asian or Eastern European, Italian or Chinese, was enunciated; each vowel cracked with the clarity of thunder. (173–75)

In commenting on this scene, the character Sekky observes that “inside Miss E. Doyle’s tightly disciplined kingdom we were all—lions or lambs—equals” (184); at the same time, though, there was, against Miss E. Doyle’s “thundering authority,” absolutely “no appeal” (185). Choy’s novel thereby marks out, in a way that aligns his narrative with many postcolonial literary texts, the *classroom* as a crucial site of discipline and subject formation—that is, as a site in which each subject’s name would be carefully and forcefully *enunciated*.⁸

But while the management of “cultural difference” in Canada did not simply begin in the 1970s, we can nevertheless recognize significant changes in modes of governmentality in the 1970s and 1980s. This shift is well known and has been frequently discussed in contemporary scholarship.⁹ Among contemporary critical accounts, we could note Himani Bannerji’s observation that “multiculturalism” is “not a cultural object, all inert, waiting on the

shelf to be bought or not”; rather, it’s “a mode of the workings of the state, an expression of an interaction of social relations in dynamic tension with each other” (120). We could recall Smaro Kamboureli’s discussion of the 1988 Multiculturalism Act as a kind of “sedative politics”—that is, “a politics that attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them” (82). We could consider Eva Mackey’s observation that, through the Multiculturalism Act, “the state did not seek to erase difference but rather attempted to institutionalise, constitute, shape, manage, and control difference” and note her insistence on recognizing the fact “that despite the proliferation of cultural difference, the power to define, limit and tolerate differences still lies in the hands of the dominant group” (70).

This last point remains crucial for understanding the question of multicultural governmentality. To elaborate this point, I want to take another quick detour, this time to the work of Ghassan Hage, a cultural critic who has investigated with considerable wit and insight questions of multicultural governmentality in Australia. Particularly memorable in this respect is Hage’s reading of a children’s book called *The Stew that Grew*, which Hage glosses as a story set in Victoria, Australia, during the gold rush “about how miners from different ethnic backgrounds combined the various ethnic-specific ingredients in their possession and made the ‘Eureka stew’” (119). Hage tells us that the stew begins with Molly O’Drew and her husband, Blue, attempting to make a meal out of four potatoes in a cauldron. Molly remarks, in Hage’s reading, that “It wasn’t much of a feast,” and, noticing some tired and hungry miners, she attempts to transform the situation to “make our own Christmas stew” (qtd. in Hage 119). At this point, in Hage’s retelling, all the “ethnic” characters step forward and contribute to the stew: “O’Malley rose first with some Spuds, then it was the Rudds turn with some carrots that Blue chopped to pieces and bounced the lot in. Then came Taffy with leeks and Nell with a turnip, old Hugh with some barley and Leopold with some Brussels sprouts, Maria Mazzini with some zucchini, Heinrich and Hans with some sauerkraut, Jacques with onions, Abdul with garlic, Wong the Chinese with a bagful of peas, and many others” (119–20). Finally, after Johnny Barcoo has tossed in “Yams and the tail of a red Kangaroo,” Blue makes the final contribution to “the stew that grew”: “Then the last thing of all was cast in by Blue /—but just what it was, nobody knew” (qtd. in Hage 120). Hage’s brilliant retelling of this story underlines the significance of what he calls “the Anglo who just could not stop cooking” (118)—that is, the fact that, “while everyone throws in their ingredient, one person is allowed

a monopoly over cooking from the beginning of the story until its end: the White Australian ‘Blue’ (120). In this way, the story assigns to Blue what Hage calls “the hard work of regulating the mix” (123)—represented by *the as-yet-unnamed contribution he makes to the stew*.

Hage’s analysis of Australian cultural politics through “the stew that grew” resonates (Australia-specific ingredients such as red kangaroo tails notwithstanding) with the question of multicultural governmentality in Canada. In Canada, as Hage notes about Australia, “containment does not mean exclusion. It involves a far more complex process of positioning”; practices of containment, in turn, “aim at *regulating the modality of inclusion* of the Third World-looking migrants in national space instead” (133). In the meantime, the *pleasure* of the story—generated through its rhythms and rhymes, with its strategic withholding of key information, and so on—signals the important point that contemporary forms of multicultural regulation are not straightforward repressive social processes but involve what we might call, following “the stew that grew,” the pleasures of hotpot cooking—the pleasures of being part of social processes of multicultural mixing.

How, then, might we understand the work performed by contemporary Asian Canadian studies projects? Given the range of the interests and the diversity of the locations of these projects, it seems counterintuitive to think of each as *only* obediently lining up to contribute a single ingredient to a larger white-directed multicultural stew. Yet it seems equally counterintuitive to understand Asian Canadian studies projects as *only* voluntary efforts that somehow stand outside the modes of government that have—in distinct ways in different places and at different times—helped to reshape Canada into a “multicultural” social formation since the 1970s. It may be more precise to note that the cluster of Asian Canadian studies projects that I’ve described in this essay has emerged alongside these modes of governmentality—and, in doing so, has thereby worked in the spaces of “cultural difference” recognized (as always, in deeply circumscribed ways) by white multiculturalism—but *they have not accepted these terms of recognition as an endpoint to larger projects of social transformation*. Projects as distinct as the critical activist work of DAARE (Direct Action Against Refugee Exploitation) to contest the scapegoating and incarceration of undocumented migrants from Fujian province following their arrival on the west coast of Canada in the summer of 1999 (see *Movements*); Rajini Srikanth’s analysis of the cultural politics of commemorating the 1914 *Komagata Maru* incident in Vancouver among South Asian communities in North

America; Mona Oikawa's rigorous critique of the gendered racialization that underwrote the internment of Japanese Canadians in the 1940s and how this history might be remembered otherwise; Masumi Izumi's nuanced examination of postwar Japanese Canadian community in Vancouver, with a focus upon "the dialectical relationship between government policy and community initiatives" in the reclamation and transformation of the Powell Street area in the 1970s (309); and Pura Velasco's powerful examination of the unjust global political-economic conditions (including the probability of abuses scripted in the terms of Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program) that circumscribe the lives of Filipino and Filipina migrant workers in Canada—all speak with clarity not only about where Canada has been but also about how and why Canada must change.

III

As I was helping to assemble this special issue, Doudou Diène, a special rapporteur for the United Nations, filed a report entitled *Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination* (2004) to the Sixtieth Session of the Commission on Human Rights.¹⁰ The report is based on Diène's visit to Canada in September 2003 to "assess the present situation in Canada, with regard to the question of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia, and hence the state of relations between the various communities, against the country's characteristically multi-ethnic and multicultural background" (2). The Diène Report is a remarkable document that pulls together historical and contemporary sources to state unequivocally that, "owing to its background and its specific characteristics, Canadian society is still affected by racism and racial discrimination" (20). Among its fifteen conclusions and recommendations, the report urges the federal government and provincial governments to implement outstanding recommendations from the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples;¹¹ the Nova Scotia provincial government to consult with communities of African origin and "re-examine the conditions of their relocation, particularly from Africville, . . . with a view to granting them reparation" (25);¹² and the federal government to "restart consultations with members of the Chinese community in Canada in order to consider the possibility of compensating the descendants of persons who paid the head tax or members of their families who were affected by that measure" (25).¹³

Following the release of the Diène Report in March 2004, many newspaper articles and letters to the editors of newspapers in Canada focused

on the question of *reparation* and *compensation* for the forceful removal of former Africville residents and for remaining Chinese head tax payers and their families. The print media responses to the question of head tax reparations that appeared in late March 2004 were, at times, predictable—as in the case of *Edmonton Sun* columnist Mindelle Jacobs, who observed that “The past is the past. Let’s move on” before advising us to “celebrate our multicultural success story.” Some responses were also astonishingly myopic—as in the case of a letter to the *Vancouver Sun* signed by “Chris Haines, North Vancouver,” who stated (apparently without irony) that Charlie Quan, a ninety-seven-year-old surviving head tax payer, “should simply be thankful that he was able to leave China, whose future oppressive communist government would not have given him the same opportunities he had in our wonderful free market society.” Other responses to the question of head tax reparations were strikingly caustic. In another letter in the *Vancouver Sun*, signed by “Diana Fuoco, Vancouver,” the author identified herself as a granddaughter of head tax-paying immigrants before directly admonishing the same Charlie Quan to “quit your complaining, count your blessings and savour each day in this wonderful country.”

These letter writers were responding to an article by Petti Fong in the *Vancouver Sun* in which Fong tells us, with sympathy and care, the story of Charlie Quan, a Vancouver resident who arrived in Canada in 1923 as “a skinny 15-year-old kid with more ambition than education” and immediately went to work in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, to pay off his enormous debt, which included eighty dollars to pay for the twenty-day passage from Guangzhou to Canada and five hundred dollars to pay for the head tax levied on prospective Chinese immigrants to Canada. “I didn’t have much,” Quan says. “More debt than anything in the beginning. For years, a lot of debt.” The article reports that Quan worked for nearly twenty years in Saskatchewan and then, since 1942, in Vancouver, where he started two grocery stores with his wife. During this time, “he was so busy having a life in Canada that he didn’t think about seeking repayment for the head tax he had paid.” “It’s okay for me now to go,” Quan says. “The only thing that I want to see is the government pay back the money they took from me.” At this point in his life, Quan states simply, “It’s been a good life in Canada. . . . But I don’t want it to end with getting no word from the government.”

Surviving head tax payers, in fact, finally have heard from the federal government of Canada. On June 22, 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood up in the House of Commons to “offer a full apology to Chinese Canadians

for the head tax and express [his] deepest sorrow for the subsequent exclusion of Chinese immigrants” (Harper). The language utilized by Harper in his address (including his characterization of the head tax period as “an unfortunate period Canada’s past”) was strikingly similar to the language utilized by then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney almost 18 years earlier in his apology to Japanese Canadians on September 22, 1988.¹⁴ Yet what was substantively different in this case was that the apology and compensation provided by the federal government of Canada in 2006 were *not* the result of a negotiated settlement. Harper’s announcement subsequently generated a complex mix of euphoria (that the federal government of Canada had finally acknowledged its wrongdoing) and critique (that the “symbolic payments” were to provide compensation to living head tax payers and to the living spouses of head tax payers only—and thereby redress only a fraction of the Chinese immigrants and their Chinese Canadian descendants affected by the head tax). In response to Harper’s announcement, Colleen Hua, the National President of the Chinese Canadian National Council, stated flatly: “We need meaningful redress for all head tax families” (“Chinese Canadians”). The mixed feelings at this moment of redress are powerfully captured in Karen Cho’s NFB podcast representing the June 22, 2006 announcement and its immediate aftermath, a podcast that concludes with a stark reminder that “While approximately 300 survivors will receive direct compensation, 4000 families of descendants were excluded from the redress package.”¹⁵

When reading the complexity of this moment, we would do well to recall Lily Cho’s important critical work on the question of “head tax racism” and redress. In 2002, Cho asked, “would it be enough that [then Prime Minister] Jean Chrétien reenact the scene that Brian Mulroney played in 1988 [in the announcement of the Japanese Canadian redress settlement] where redress becomes the site of a self-satisfied national political consolidation?” (“Reading” 81).¹⁶ Likewise, we can ask: Is it enough that Prime Minister Stephen Harper attempted to reenact this scene? Cho’s question about head tax reparations—which draws upon critical rethinkings, by Roy Miki and others, of the implications of the Japanese Canadian redress settlement—is part of a larger critical examination of how redress might be put in the service of an antiracist critique that is not content to *end* with narratives of Chinese exceptionalism (narratives that gain their purchase from the fact that “Chinese” subjects were named and differentiated from “other” subjects precisely through—among many other factors—the legal mechanisms of head tax legislation) but instead attempts the genuinely difficult work of

“find[ing] new ways to consider more substantially coalitions and historically overlapping and interconnected oppressions in order to carve out of the residue of racist culture a powerful antiracist critique” (“Reading” 81).

In this respect, Lily Cho’s critical intervention brings us back to George Lipsitz’s observations, with which I began this essay, concerning the “interconnectedness of oppressions” and the “new methods, theories, and strategies” that we need to address them (297). Cho’s intervention also brings us back to the Diène Report and why it matters as an important signpost of the contemporary moment. A key point that the Diène Report makes clearly and repeatedly is that “The lack of any intellectual strategy is a serious handicap in Canada’s undoubted efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia” (23). In this regard, the report underlines the need to address areas that include “the building of identity, the writing of history, education programmes, value systems, images and perception” (23). The Diène Report’s rationale for making this point is that “Any attempt to eradicate the racist culture and mentality . . . requires, apart from the force of law, mobilizing intellectual tools to dismantle its deep-rooted causes, mechanisms, processes, expressions and language. *The law forbids, condemns, redresses and remedies but does not necessarily bring about a change of heart*” (23; emphasis added).

When I presented a version of this paper in San Francisco, Henry Yu noted the problem of knowledge production in Asian Canadian studies by asking, “What will the knowledge production be for?”¹⁷ What will Asian Canadian studies be for? At its base, Asian Canadian studies tries to develop and mobilize some of the “intellectual tools” called for by the Diène Report to try to bring about, directly or indirectly, some kind of “change of heart.” In this sense, it tries to bring about what Gayatri Spivak has perceptively called, in her discussion of education in the humanities, “an *uncoercive* rearrangement of desires” (526). When we examine the case of Chinese head tax redress, we may appear to be looking backward to late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Canadian history. But in doing so, we are in fact asking how this case raises fundamental and persistent questions about Canada’s present—and the sort of place Canada might possibly become. For Asian Canadian studies scholars, Yu’s question about the *goals* of knowledge production serves as a necessary reminder to disentangle and rigorously differentiate what the disseminators of disciplinary codes and top-down pressures at universities expect us to do and what, in the current critical conjuncture, actually needs to be done.¹⁸ It’s my hope that the essays collected in this special issue can help us to keep this distinction clear. And it’s my hope, as we

face the many and varied *unfinished projects* in Asian Canadian studies, that these essays can help to furnish some of the intellectual strategies needed—as Stephen Slemon has powerfully observed—to help transform Canada into a place that can potentially be “just” (Slemon, Afterword 323).

IV

Many people have helped to bring this special issue into being. My former colleague and guest coeditor, Andy Yiu-nam Leung, initiated the idea of having a special issue on Asian Canadian literature, and helped to synchronize our goals with the practical demands of journal publishing. The contributors to this issue delivered, with energy and grace, a set of manuscripts that consistently exceeded our high expectations and helped to direct, in deeply substantive ways, the arguments and the sense of hope I’ve tried to put forward in this introduction. Here particular thanks are due to Henry Yu for generously contributing his afterword; to Chris Lee for expertly coordinating this issue’s collective epilogue; and to Glenn Deer for providing thoughtful feedback throughout. At an earlier point in this project, Kevin Flynn provided sharp readerly eyes and feedback that helped to strengthen the issue as a whole. And warm thanks are due to Margery Fee and the production staff at *Canadian Literature* for graciously taking on this issue and steering the manuscripts through the publication process. Thanks to their efforts, *this* project is finished.

Finally, I wish to note that this issue was initiated and assembled in Taiwan, which is where both Andy and I are currently based. Scholarly work on Asian Canadian topics has taken a decidedly international turn at least since the 1980s, with substantial contributions made by scholars based in the United States, Australia, Europe, Japan, and elsewhere in Asia. The commitment of students and scholars in Taiwan to work through questions of cultural identity in these postcolonial times is, to my mind, particularly noteworthy in this respect and is palpable in all aspects of my scholarly life. This issue attempts to *speak across* in the hope that, in doing so, it can encourage its readers to bring the challenges of facing the “unfinished projects” of Asian Canadian studies some place close to home.

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Technology, Taipei, 16 December 2003; to members of the Department of Ethnic Studies and the Canadian Studies Program at the University of California at Berkeley, 26 April 2005; and to members of the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, University of Western Ontario, 28 May 2005. I'd like to thank the other panel participants in San Francisco as well as audience members at each event for their questions, feedback, and engagement, with particular thanks to Lily Cho, Daniel Coleman, and Kyoko Sato for their generous comments and suggestions. Support for helping to edit this special issue and for researching and writing this essay was provided by the National Science Council in Taiwan (NSC 94-2411-H-007-034) and is gratefully acknowledged.

NOTES

- 1 Here we could note the Centre for the Study of Black Cultures in Canada at York University, which “endeavours to serve as a stimulus to and focal point for faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, as well as independent scholars who are pursuing research in African Canadian Studies, at York and elsewhere” (“About the Centre”), and, on a broader scale, the First Nations University of Canada (formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College), which has been active since the fall of 1976 and whose stated mission is to “acquire and expand its base of knowledge and understanding in the best interests of First Nations and for the benefit of society by providing opportunities of quality bi-lingual and bi-cultural education under the mandate and control of the First Nations of Saskatchewan” (First Nations University).
- 2 For a discussion of this point, see Coleman and Goellnicht, who, in noting the founding of the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association and the Research Centre for Canadian Ethnic Studies at the University of Calgary in 1968, observe that, “In the Canadian context, ‘ethnic’ was equated with linguistic and cultural pluralism, so that European and nonwhite ethnic cultures have been treated the same; in fact, European ‘ethnic’ groups (defined as all Continental cultures apart from the British and French) have traditionally dominated the field of Canadian ethnic studies” (9).
- 3 For dissertations focused on various “Asian Canadian” topics produced since the late 1990s, see Beaugard, “Asian Canadian Literature”; Cho, “On Eating Chinese”; Day; Fu; Khoo, “Banana Bending”; Koh; Tara Lee; Lo; McAllister; Oikawa, “Cartographies”; and Rita Wong. For publications that attempt to push forward comparative and cross-national critical analysis, see also Khoo, *Banana Bending*; Khoo and Louie; Ty; Ty and Goellnicht; and Yu and Beaugard.
- 4 One example is the Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies (INSTRCC) at the University of British Columbia, a program that provides institutional support for student fellows to work on projects involving oral and family histories, film-making, and website production; these projects, which range across the histories and cultures of various Asian Canadian communities, are intended to foster an approach to learning in which “students are not passively receiving what is already known but [are] actively creating new knowledge” (“Initiative”).
- 5 We could note here the 2003-04 opening in “Asian North American literatures” in the Department of English at the University of Toronto—the first time, to the best of my knowledge, that a tenure-track position at a Canadian university has been configured as such—followed by similar searches at the University of British Columbia in 2005-2006 and Simon Fraser University in 2006-2007.
- 6 See Mitchell, “Facing Capital,” which, along with the numerous articles and book chapters

she published in the 1990s, is a sustained attempt to grapple with shifting modes of racialization and racist exclusion in the context of what she calls “a tremendous movement of people and capital from Hong Kong to Vancouver” in the late 1980s (4)—an attempt that has appeared in book-length form in Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line*.

- 7 For a partial list of key critical moments as they have appeared in anthologies and special issues of journals since the late 1970s, see Coleman and Goellnicht, *Race*; Deer; *Inalienable Rice*; Lowry and Kong; Miki and Wah; Paul Wong; and Yu and Beauregard.
- 8 On this last point, see Stephen Slemon’s observation that “one of the most insistent arguments made by postcolonial writing . . . is that colonialist literary learning is at the primal scene of colonialist cultural control” (“Teaching” 153)—a topic Slemon has revisited in his afterword to the essay collection *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*.
- 9 For a cogent summary of this shift, particularly as it pertains to racial formations and concepts of “race” in Canada, see Coleman and Goellnicht, especially the section of their essay entitled “Multiculturalism at Midcentury” (7–11).
- 10 A full copy of the Diène Report is available through the “Charter-Based Bodies Database” on the website of the United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights; see <<http://www.unhchr.ch/data.htm>>.
- 11 “As shown by the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, published in 1996, the persistent marginalization of aboriginal peoples is the result of the breakdown of a viable partnership between native peoples and the Europeans who settled in Canada, and later with the Canadian State. The context and scope of that partnership were determined in several treaties, which are still valid. The representatives of the aboriginal peoples maintain that the current management of aboriginal affairs by a federal ministry prevents their development. What they want is relations on an equal footing, free of any paternalism, between aboriginal peoples and non-aboriginals, based on signed treaties” (Diène 12).
- 12 “Africville was one of the settlements of Blacks who came to the shores of what is now known as Nova Scotia. It dates back to the 1700s and one of the first purchases of property deeds was recorded in 1848. . . . The period between 1913–1973 saw industrial growth at the expense of residents of Africville. A bone-meal plant, a cotton factory, a rolling mill/nail factory, a slaughterhouse, and a port facility for handling coal were built within earshot of residential homes. In the 1950’s, the [Halifax] city dump was moved to within 100 metres of the westernmost group of Africville homes. . . . By 1960, the city of Halifax embarked on an urban renewal campaign, which would forcibly displace the residents of Africville in order to make room for industrial expansion. After 150 years of collusion between the provincial Government and the business community, including through abuse of power, neglect, encroachment and invasion of hazardous industrial materials, in 1970 all of the community was forcefully removed without proper compensation” (Diène 13–14).
- 13 “The Chinese Immigration Acts took the form of a head tax imposed on every person of Chinese origin entering Canada. From 1895 to 1923, it varied from \$50 to \$500. The Government of Canada made a sizeable profit from the imposition of the head tax on Chinese people. Between 1886 and 1923, the total revenue collected from Chinese [immigrants to Canada] is estimated at Can\$23 million” (Diène 14).
- 14 In this respect, we could note Harper’s assertion that “even though the head tax—a product of a profoundly different time—lies far in our past, we feel compelled to right this historic wrong for the simple reason that it is the decent thing to do, a characteristic to be found at the core of the Canadian soul” (Harper)—an assertion that forcefully locates

head tax racism “far in our past” (even as Harper directly addresses living head tax payers present that day in the House of Commons) while attempting to consolidate, through this apology, Canada’s putative “decency.”

- 15 Karen Cho observes: “The apology was a bitter-sweet moment for the Chinese Canadian community It was moving to see the last living survivors on hand to witness the apology, yet at the same time, it was heartbreaking to think of the thousands of others who had passed away during the struggle for redress and whose families were not included in the redress package” (“NFB’s CITIZENShift”). Her podcast *Chinese Head Tax—Canada* (2006), which tracks the official apology on June 22, follows up on her earlier NFB documentary film *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (2004), which includes interview footage with surviving head tax payer Charlie Quan and other community workers involved in the redress movement. For a short discussion of Cho’s film, see Fiona Lee.
- 16 “[I]n 1988 an agreement was reached between the federal Government and the National Association of Japanese Canadians to redress State treatment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. The Japanese-Canadian redress is seen as an important milestone for that community and for Canada and could . . . eventually inspire future solutions for [the] Chinese head tax case” (Diène 14–15).
- 17 Yu asked this question as a discussant on a panel on “Asian Canadian Studies: Pasts and Futures” at the Association for Asian American Studies, San Francisco, 8 May 2003.
- 18 On this point, see Glenn Omatsu’s observations delivered at the first Asian American studies departmental graduation ceremony at the University of California at Los Angeles in June 2004: “Creating a ‘department of a new type’ requires thinking about our education in new ways. It means moving beyond the mission of a traditional academic department, where students are viewed as consumers with little power over the content of their education. It means upholding the right to a college education for all at a time when that right is being attacked on many fronts. It means finding ways to redirect resources from universities to help transform our communities through support of grassroots movements” (2). In the context of this special issue, the “unfinished tasks” enumerated in Omatsu’s address serve as a salient reminder of the many *educational* projects that remain “unfinished” when we imagine the possible future work of Asian Canadian studies.

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