

**EATING VERSUS SELLING AUTHENTICITY: NEGOTIATING TORONTO'S
VIETNAMESE CULINARY LANDSCAPE**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Despite the popularity of Vietnamese cuisine in Toronto, there is limited understanding of how this culinary cuisine is socially constructed through its consumption and production. This thesis research examines the production of Toronto's Vietnamese culinary landscape with the aim of unpacking the discursive power relations between consumers' and purveyors' construction of authenticity through the processes of racialization. It also highlights the identities created through racialized consumption and production practices, and how such identity constructions are constitutive of Vietnamese culinary culture. To this aim, consumers were surveyed and in-depth interviews were conducted with owners and managers. Results from the fieldwork process demonstrated that both consumers and producers construct authenticity and images of Vietnamese culture for their own benefits but had different, and sometimes confounding, understandings of how such constructions are interpreted and practiced.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It was a few years ago when I came across *Cheap Eats Toronto* (CETO). Adorned with a cover picture that is a montage of plastic forks, chopsticks, and spoons, *Cheap Eats* brands itself as the antithesis to haute cuisine guides, an alternative guidebook to hidden gems, giving the inside scoop on the city's best cheap restaurants. I began setting the stage for this thesis long before starting the research process, by asking the question: why are Vietnamese restaurants, which are often considered ethnic, almost always considered "cheap eats"?

For a student, the CETO website, and then subsequent guidebook, was *the* eating out directory for budget dining in the city. Cheap eats meant meals that were under \$15 including taxes and a beverage, and generally meant making trade-offs between budget, cleanliness, quality, and style (Clark 2006). While CETO kept my friends and I from further extending our debt (and kept our waistlines growing), it was abundantly clear that "ethnic" restaurants made up the bulk of recommendations by the "foodies with opinions" that contributed to the cheap eats guide.

At around the same time, I came across a local production that showcased "ethnic" restaurants in Toronto. Under the *Street Eats* moniker, two hosts took viewers to Mexico (episode 108), Persia (episode 306), Vietnam (episode 101), and many more faraway destinations by visiting local restaurants and grocery stores. The show is no longer in production, but the food adventuring each episode took is ever so pervasive on food blogs

and forums giving guidelines that keep eaters safe from the scary stuff, while egging adventurers on at the same time.

Host walking on the street with Vietnamese and Chinese business signs in the background: Yes I'm a rookie when it comes to Vietnamese food. And if you're like me, ordering food can be a little intimidating but here's Catherine with some tips on what to order.

Catherine Jheon sitting by a cash register inside a closed restaurant: What to order given you've got over 200 items on the menu. Let's decide on the main, you've got the pho, the noodle soup, and bun, vermicelli. These one bowl noodle meals are huge; choose one not both because that would be like ordering steak with a side of roast chicken. I generally stay away from the word "special" on the menu because you could end up with things like tripe and liver and that can be a bit scary. For pho I'm going to go with number 1, rare beef noodle soup. I like that it's number 1 because the further you venture away from that number the more exotic the menu gets. For vermicelli I would recommend grilled pork with spring rolls. This is a great choice, Vietnamese grilled pork is delicious and a must if you eat pork. Now, for drinks this is where you can get a little adventurous. Vietnamese restaurants have great slow-drip coffee and exotic fruit shakes like sour sop, jack fruit, and avocado. And you know what, if you don't like it you can leave it behind because it's less

conspicuous than leaving an entire meal untouched. If you've placed your order and the waiter doesn't giggle or gawk at your choices you've done well, so enjoy!

Even though these ordering tips were given by a young Asian woman, it was clear by the way she spoke English that mainstream consumers would trust her insider knowledge for the outsider consumer because she is seen as both Other and mainstream. Transcending the "exotic" and "normal", this young woman teaches mainstream consumers how to be safe in the scary world of Vietnamese restaurant menus.

This episode of *Street Eats* goes on to show eaters how to order a Vietnamese sandwich where "the best part of it is that it's a buck!", and how to shop for the best fish sauce in a Chinatown supermarket. These guides are more than showing folks the "multicultural-ness" of metropolitan Toronto. Their contents demonstrate how Vietnamese restaurants make a strong case study to further our understanding of the discursive social constructions of identity, consumer culture, and the changing strategies restaurateurs deploy in a market with shifting ideas on what eating means.

A study of the food geography of Vietnamese restaurants can unpack how people negotiate their identities through the acts of producing and consuming food. Consumers' identities are constitutive of their everyday activities, while ethnic restaurant owners' must grapple between consumer expectations of Vietnamese restaurants and their own practices of cultural identity. Unravelling ethnic restaurant entrepreneurial strategies will reveal the ways producers conceptualize Vietnamese culinary culture. Similarly, analysing consumer attitudes, beliefs, and opinions will expose how eating habits inform consumer identities

that are constitutive of the Vietnamese restaurant landscape. Understanding the discursive relationship between producers and consumers will bring up shared commonalities and misunderstandings with the construction of authenticity in everyday life. My research on Vietnamese culinary culture will demonstrate how identities are interconnected with the socially constructed idea of authenticity.

1.1 THESIS GOALS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My thesis has two main objectives. The first is to address the discursive relationship between those who produce and those who consume ethnicized foods, revealing the many ways in which food is situated by cultural boundaries, and the ways in which food transcends these boundaries. Second, I examine the strategies Vietnamese restaurateurs use to negotiate their own cultural identity and how that identity connects to mainstream notions and popular geographies of racialized Others. Overall, I want to reveal the complex dialectical processes that are constitutive of Toronto's culinary landscape by addressing the following questions:

1. What is the dialectic relationship between producers and consumers that is constitutive of Vietnamese culinary culture in Toronto?
2. How is Vietnamese cuisine negotiated as "Vietnamese" within the context of ethnic restaurants? What is purveyors' power, compared to consumers' power, to conceptualize Vietnamese cuisine?

As a past entrepreneur in Toronto, it had seemed to me that self-employment has increased in the light of recent global economic turbulence. Most of the start-ups that are talked about now are digital ventures, or high-tech productions of gadgetry, while the brick and mortar business is seen as a phenomenon of our past, even though most consumers interact with such establishments daily. But the making of place, and thus geography, is still critical when engaging with entrepreneurship. Case studies on small Canadian businesses have been under-represented in geography, with most research conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States. These works provide a theoretical framework that my study can engage with, but there is little in the way of relating Toronto's unique social and cultural landscape to them, and even less so for Vietnamese culinary entrepreneurs. Academic research is still playing catch-up to unpack the tangles of these geographically contingent socio-cultural practices of food production. As such, there is a need for a research to pursue the geography of the entrepreneurial practices that underlie the power dynamics that differentiate food and the persons whose identities are implicated by such foods.

1.2 TORONTO'S VIETNAMESE RESTAURANTS

Vietnamese restaurants opened in Toronto even before the first major wave of refugees arrived in Canada. Unlikely to be very numerous in the city at the time, digital archives of Toronto Star articles show short reviews for the Viet Nam Cafe in 1972 (Ross 1972) and the Saigon Village in 1978 (Cameron 1978). These two restaurants were owned by Vietnamese immigrants who had previously lived and studied in Europe, as explained by the articles' authors. All the while, newspaper headlines and articles detail the aftermath of

the Vietnam War and miserable conditions of the refugee camps located throughout Southeast Asia (Pfeifer 1999). The Vietnamese people, if not Vietnamese cuisine, were brought to mainstream attention, and in 1987, the *Toronto Star* ran a feature food article with a “Glossary for those who don’t know ‘Bo’ from ‘Pho’.” By the early 1990s Vietnamese cuisine was getting discovered by mainstream consumers, and “Vietnamese restaurants [were] springing up all over the city” (Kingsmill 1987). While there were indeed a few Vietnamese restaurants established in Toronto prior to the Vietnam War, there are now a couple hundred in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)¹.

Vietnamese food is no stranger to Toronto in 2011. In 2004, food editor for the *Toronto Star*, Jennifer Bain, had already come to conclude that “everyone already has a favourite pho place” (2004), suggesting that this Vietnamese dish is so commonplace that it is no longer something foreign, but rather normal. This is further emphasized by the “Vietnamese” or “Vietnamese Restaurant” or “Pho” categories in the various “Best of Toronto” lists that are published by Toronto-centric publications, such as *Now Magazine*, *BlogTo*, and the new *GridTO* (formerly, *Eye Weekly Magazine*). The perceived “normalness” of Vietnamese food in Toronto suggests that views on Vietnamese restaurants’ quality, style, and authenticity are multiply-inhabited, but largely homogenous.

In North American cities ethnic foods are often marketed by tourism boards to be situated in their respective ethnic areas or enclaves, such as Chinese food in Chinatown, or Indian food in Little India. Like neat tiles in a mosaic, each “culture” adds to the overall

¹ While there is no official count, and no other documented count published that I was able to find, this is an approximate based on the restaurants listed as “Vietnamese” on the Urban Spoon Toronto online restaurant directory, retrieved January 2011.

picture of a seemingly pluralist society, but also clearly contained within boundaries. Even though the Vietnamese community in Canada is growing (Lindsay 2001) and 30%² live in Toronto there is no officially identified enclave or “Little Saigon” shopping area in Toronto. Rather, the Vietnamese culinary experience is often conceived as a branch of “Asian” culinary culture, often bundled together with “Thai” cuisine as “South-East Asian” or “Pan Asian” due to some restaurants’ extensive menus that include “Thai” and “Chinese” dishes. Vietnamese restaurants in the GTA show spatial clustering in the east end, Chinatown, uptown and downtown areas of Toronto, but these clusters do not necessarily correlate with Vietnamese residential patterns (see Figure 1.1). The Vietnamese restaurant landscape in Toronto is negotiated across and within cultural boundaries, and does not spatially follow an enclave model in which Vietnamese businesses are concentrated in dense inner-city neighbourhoods where Vietnamese people comprise a majority.

Vietnamese cuisine in North America has never been documented like that of Chinese or Japanese cuisine. The history of Vietnamese restaurants in Toronto is only about four decades old, which, in comparison to Chinese restaurants in North America, is considerably shorter. Despite this shorter history, Vietnamese culinary culture in Toronto provides geographical insight into how Vietnamese-ness is constructed and imagined.

² This does not include those who live in the surrounding area (i.e. City of Mississauga)

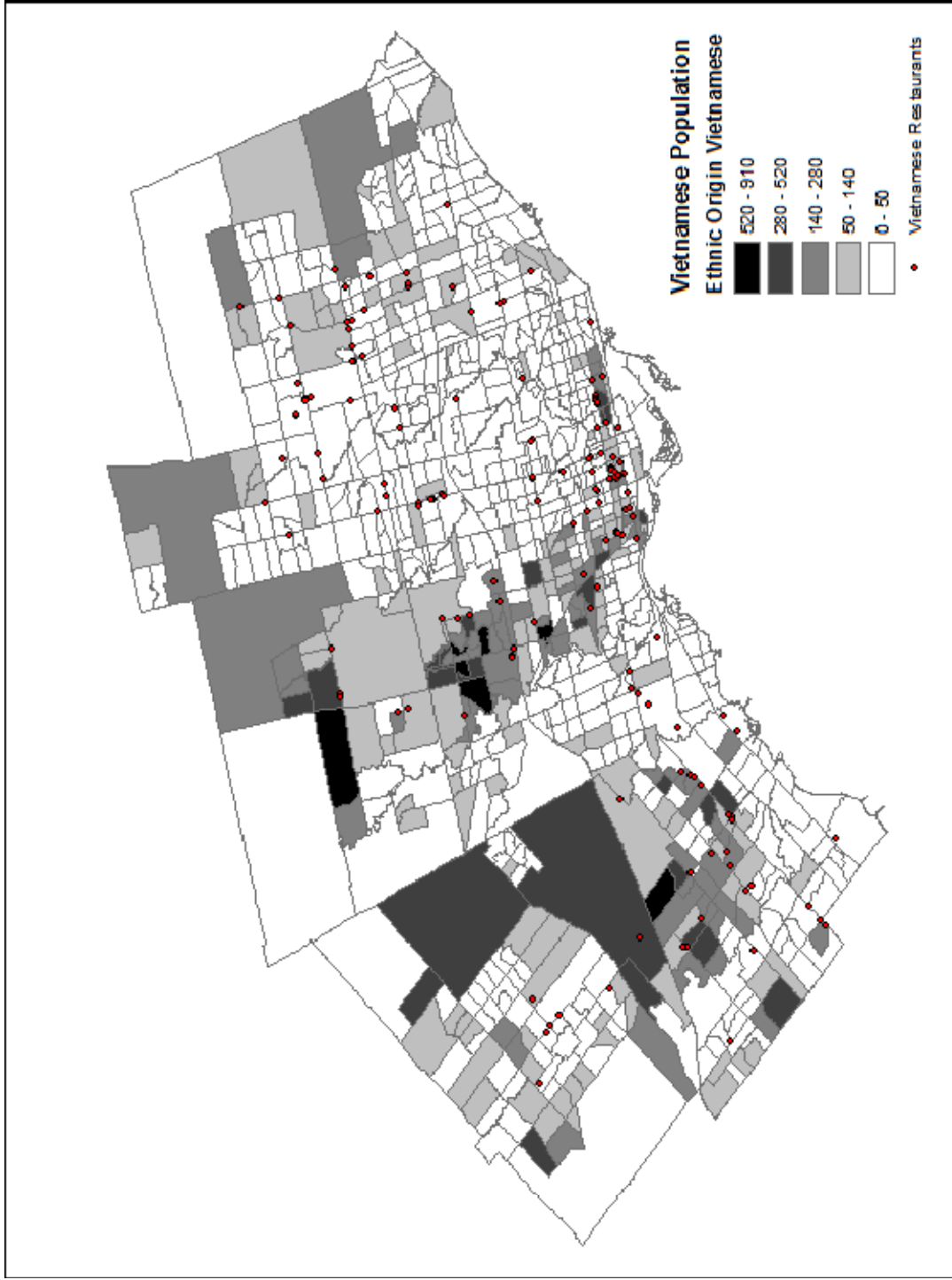


Figure 1.1: Restaurant Locations and Vietnamese Population – Greater Toronto Area
 Statistics Canada Census Data 2006 & Urbanspoon.com

1.3 TORONTO'S VIETNAMESE ETHNIC COMMUNITY

The vast majority of Toronto's Vietnamese community is made up of the people who fled Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975, and were accepted into Canada as refugees in the late 1970s. While many refugees were dispersed throughout Canada, most eventually moved to the major metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. In Toronto, Vietnamese people settled in several key neighbourhoods, notably Toronto's west-end, and Chinatown East, although between 1991–1997 these areas of concentration have been stagnant (Pfeifer 1999, 153). Pfeifer's extensive study of Vietnamese adaptation in Toronto revealed that Vietnamese men and women were over-represented in the secondary industries of manufacturing (assembly and repair), and had low rates of self-employment based on 1991 census data (1999, 274).

Given the loss of many manufacturing jobs in Ontario since then, the rate of self-employment for Vietnamese immigrants in Toronto has remained steady for females and has increased for males in a comparison between Pfeifer's study of the 1991 Census and more recent figures from the 2001 Census (Statistics Canada 2006). While it is hard to determine how many of the self-employed Vietnamese immigrants in Toronto own and operate Vietnamese restaurants, these data do suggest that in comparison to the overall population, the rate of Vietnamese self-employment in Toronto is quite low for both males and females (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Self-Employment, Males and Females, 15 Years and Over – Toronto CMA
 Statistics Canada Census 2001, 1991

	2001		1991	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Vietnamese	5.1%	4.2%	5.3%	3.9%
Overall Population	7.9%	14.3%	5.5%	12.1%

Low rates of self-employment have likely to do with many factors, with lack of facility in English being a roadblock particularly for the older generation of Vietnamese in Toronto who have lived in Canada for two decades or more. Bagwell’s (2005) case study of small and medium Vietnamese businesses in London, UK, suggested that even after fifteen to twenty years in the United Kingdom, many Vietnamese business owners still identified poor English skills as a barrier to operating their business. They are often dependent on their children to take care of their business’ paperwork. Furthermore, English fluency has been identified as a key variable influencing the socioeconomic directions of Vietnamese in North America; the Vietnamese community in Toronto possessed less facility in English when compared to other visible minority groups (Pfeifer 1999). The Vietnamese community’s poorer English skills are certainly a determining factor for their lower rates of self-employment in Toronto.

There have been limited studies on the Vietnamese population in Canada, and while *“Community”, Adaptation, and the Vietnamese in Toronto* by Mark Pfeifer provides considerable insight about the group at large, there is no study that examines specifically Vietnamese self-employment in Toronto. My thesis attempts to add valuable knowledge in this area, with a specific look at owners of Vietnamese restaurants.

1.4 MOTIVATIONS FOR FOOD GEOGRAPHY

The easiest and most convenient way to sample “ethnic cultures” is by frequenting “ethnic” restaurants, found in vast numbers in North American cities like Toronto. For “food adventurers”, eating experiences in ethnic restaurants are collected as “cultural capital” that can be “bank[ed] and invest[ed] later in a social situation in which it is important to raise your stature” (Heldke 2003, 16). Such a “food adventurer” may browse restaurant reviews and trawl food blogs to find destinations to sample for themselves the exoticness of the Other. Armed with expectations of what their destinations should be the “food adventurer” ventures forth. Restaurant proprietors, on the other hand, are often left to (re)produce, or rather stage, these imaginaries of the ethnic Other through décor, menu, presentation, food, and so forth, in order to meet consumers’ expectations of “authenticity”. As such, the cultural landscape of Vietnamese restaurants is geographically significant to the construction of Vietnamese culinary culture, and how authenticity and identities are created in the discourse between the consumer, producer, and all others socially connected.

There is something particularly alluring about food, the way it evokes all the possible senses—seeing colours and textures, smelling intoxicating flavours, touching the foods with the hands and mouth, the sounds of cooking, and of course taste—is “one of the reasons why food is a key vehicle for defining, bonding, and mediating people’s experiences of cultural Otherness” (Cook et al. 2010, 109). Through these sensory experiences, one can delineate between what consumers are used to, and how purveyors are different. In this way, Vietnamese food becomes essentialized and commodified “stuff” that can be easily

packaged and sold to, yes, the “white mainstream”, but also to people who do not identify with mainstream culture. The “sexy summer rolls” at the “zensational” Spring Rolls restaurant chain in Toronto is such an example of the commodification of *goi cuon* to evoke the sexiness (read: exoticness) of an imagined Asian culture. The practices of eating are employed by consumers, to socially interact with the Other but also to culturally differentiate from them.

While I do not intend to downplay the significance of hooks’ boldly titled article *Eating the Other* (hooks 1992), the dichotomous argument of cultural commodification whereby the white mainstream eats the Other is often “assume[d], and then set out to explain and illustrate, fundamental differences between a white ‘mainstream’ and a black ‘ethnic other’” (Cook and Harrison 2003, 299). Purveyors also confer meaning by way of their business activities, and consumers do not exist as one homogenous group set aside from the construction of class and the process of racialization. Taking Cook et al. (2006; 2006; 2008) to my pen, and hooks (1992) as inspiration for pushing convention, I attempt to provide transparency in my writing so readers may make their own (unexpected) connections between their own lives and the lives of others. As such, my research on the construction of Vietnamese culinary culture through participatory observation and interviews with restaurant operators, complemented with quantitative surveying of consumers, is pertinent to understanding the nuances of eating difference from the perspective of both the producer and the consumer.

Food, like other commodities, is both mundane and fascinating. On one hand, commodities are just “stuff”, to be produced and consumed, but on the other hand,

commodities—through their exchange—are mediated through markets, prices, competition, and people’s exercise of geographical knowledge. Thus, having a simple bowl of pho in Toronto is associated with various identities, inhabiting many times and spaces that mutually constitute each other. In this sense, food as a research focus engages with both researchers and their audience in an intimate way.

With recent focus on food cultures, much of the discipline in the geography of food is increasingly cross-disciplinary. Food geography is an ever-evolving area of geography particularly open to interdisciplinary study, where borders between disciplines are neither strict nor distinct. Those who study food geography are various and draw from sociology, cultural studies, economics, political science, and so on. In this conduct, food geography provokes and engages in fostering new ontologies and new methods of research. It is these endless possibilities, and the willingness of scholars in this field to encourage a wider audience to this field of study that I admire. In particular, the *Geographies of Food* series in *Progress in Human Geography*, where Cook et al. (2010; 2008; 2006), brought together people from various disciplines, fields, and backgrounds to discuss “what ‘food studies’ are” as an open question on an online blog. It is my hope that this thesis holds up to Cook et al.’s suggestive narrative to be:

widely accessible, leave things open to interpretation, give ... readers
(and other audiences) some sense-making to do, so they can get more
involved, put more of themselves into the picture. (2006, 662)

The researcher also plays an active role in conferring meaning to foods. Given researchers' own everyday interactions with food, researchers cannot stand in a fully objective position. The process of commodification takes on many forms and phenomena involving a wide range of people and things in various places. Nevertheless there are no defined ways to stipulate what turns a non-commodity into a commodity (Castree 2004). Rather it is important to point out that commodification is continually defined, redefined, and contested. Castree suggests that the researcher too plays an active role in defining and giving meaning to objects and things:

worldly objects do not, of course, go around with definitions of what they 'really are' imprinted upon them. Instead, researchers play an active role in the definition process, abstracting out what they deem to be key facets within or between phenomena and assigning these facets a name. (2004, 25)

In this vein "things" have a "social life", as Appadurai (1986a) suggests, where they interact with multiply complicated facets of life. We, as both researcher and audience, must be cognizant of our roles in food cultures as well.

Food geography has the potential to engage with audiences from different fields of study, but also with the larger non-research public. My study of Vietnamese culinary culture traces the interactions of people, ideas, and things by taking account of place. I draw upon existing research on commodity culture, ethnic entrepreneurship, race, and authenticity to

underpin the theoretical framework of this paper. But most of all, I look to the papers by Crang et al. as motivation to pen a paper that will encourage people to put themselves in Vietnamese culinary culture, to engage with the research findings of this paper (and countless others) in their own lives.

1.5 CHAPTERS OUTLINE

Chapter 2 is a literature survey of the works that provide a framework for my research. The overarching thread of the framework is the notion of cultural identity, and the ways it is linked with food geography, notions of authenticity and the way these notions construct difference. In addition, I review key ideas on ethnic entrepreneurship that arose from the research process. The existing literature on ethnic business location strategies, the role of family in small ethnic businesses, and the ethnic business landscape, are reviewed and critiqued. Chapter 3 explains the fieldwork process of the questionnaire, interviews, and observations conducted. It also includes a discussion of the limitations, ethics, and my positionality and its associated reflexivity on the process. Chapter 4 and 5 discusses the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research conducted. Findings from the observation portion of the fieldwork process complement the analysis of the interviews with restaurateurs and consumer questionnaire results. The final chapter concludes the thesis by highlighting the major findings on the interconnectedness of entrepreneurial strategies, cultural identity, and food geography. I also discuss some of the “what ifs” that came about throughout the research process, and areas for possible future research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 OVERVIEW

The approach that I have taken to food geography draws from the literature on commodity cultures and ethnic entrepreneurial activities. A commodity culture approach, rather than a linear commodity chain approach to food geography, provides a lens for a multidimensional, multifaceted, study of things, people, and ideas (Crang, Dwyer, and Jackson 2003; Cook et al. 2007). A focus on ethnic entrepreneurialism gives insight into the ways small business strategies contribute to commodity cultures. Both approaches are interconnected with the process of racialization and the construction of authenticity.

A food geography approach offers a fruitful—pun *intended*—lens through which to view the movement of people, ideas, things, and capital, without fixing narrowly on specific peoples or groups. The study of food geography provokes the researcher to question the culmination of foods' many interconnected ideas, "circuits," and movements—foods' bigger picture. It is necessary to take such a viewpoint to connect consumption practices to the constitutive geographies of ethnic restaurant entrepreneurship, because the production of restaurant landscapes are not simply conferred to producers, but democratized to all sorts of consumers.

The existing literature on ethnic businesses is useful as a foundation to understand how independent and family-run ethnic restaurants became part of consumption landscapes. Even though there are studies on purveyors of hot sauces (Cook and Harrison 2003) and curry sauces (Jackson 2002), they involve large international food companies with transnational breadth. Cultural studies are frequently inclined to focus squarely on

consumption, and as a result, often overlook the ways production practices are constitutive of food geographies. Nevertheless, ethnic producers, through their entrepreneurial activities, negotiate their cultural and commercial identities, which are part and parcel of consumption geographies. The existing work on ethnic entrepreneurship will provide a starting point to bridge the gap between geographies of food cultures and ethnic restaurant strategies; my fieldwork will attempt to fill these gaps and add to existing research on Toronto's Vietnamese community.

The process of racialization and the construction of authenticity are interconnected in both the consumption and production of ethnic foods. A short review of the literature on race highlights the activities that create and emphasize differences in order to categorize people and things in the world. This chapter also covers the ideas of authenticity, and some of the ways it is constructed, interpreted, and deployed in selling and eating ethnic foods. "Authenticity" is a social construction that connects consumers and producers in uneven ways, and thus, critical to understanding the geographies of Vietnamese culinary culture. Moreover, the social relationships that connect people to food, and food to people, ultimately underlie the balances of power that are unequal, often unsteady, and tied to consumers' yearning for authenticity.

2.2 COMMODITY CULTURES—CONSUMING THE WORLD ON A PLATE

A commodity cultures study of geography emphasises the materiality of culture and the ways things are interconnected with people and ideas in everyday life. In the last two decades geography's "cultural turn" initiated a shift in attention from production to

consumption studies emphasizing a social constructionist view of the world (Jackson 2010). This particular fascination with the social construction of consumption opened avenues for increased research on food geography as everyday life activities are seen to socially construct what is dominant, popular, and marketable. Food is a fundamental thread of life that nearly everyone interacts with every day; as such, food geography is uniquely intimate to all people. Nevertheless, Jackson (2000) asserts that this cultural turn in geography placed “too much emphasis on cultural codes, symbolic meanings, and modes of representations,” and that the presumption of a clear relation between representations and meanings is difficult to sustain (Crouch 2000). Perhaps studies of consumption are too reflexive and self-indulging for the researcher to go restaurant sampling.

Despite consumption’s seeming superficiality, eating is an identity producing activity, and its study can reveal much about the issues in our contemporary world. Such practices serve as “vehicles through which ideological expectations about these very identities are circulated, enforced, and transgressed” (LeBesco and Naccarato 2008, 1). Consumption practices, such as shopping, cooking, and eating—often considered “cultural” activities—reflect one’s tastes. Such tastes are a markers of class distinction (Bourdieu 1984, 173) used to negotiate identity and discursively produce lifestyles. In this vein, consuming activities are foundational to realizing people’s negotiation of identities, and people’s relationships with things and each other. Commodity culture research can then be understood not as tasteless indulgence, but rather about people’s interaction with things and ideas that produces varied, and often uneven, landscapes. Furthermore, assertions by Crang and Malbon (1996) that consumption is a crucial problematic in our contemporary

world and that consumption's constitutive geographies are necessary to better understand consumers not as passive spectators but active agents, strengthens my decision for this consumption-related study.

Geographies of consumption have filled the gaps that many economic and cultural geographers have overlooked in the past, in particular, research on everyday consumption, such as shopping, eating-out, advertising, and media (Jackson and Thrift 1995). Cultural goods, like foods, are commodified through the construction, negotiation, and contestation of difference across geography (Cook, Crang, and Thorpe 1998). Studies of commodity cultures, however, often treat commodification "as a dirty word", connoting that commodified cultural goods are ultimately devalued (Jackson 1999). Nonetheless, consumers' relationships with material goods are multiply complex, and even more so when one consumes from another's culture. A commodity culture perspective is foundational to understanding the ways quotidian consumption practices confer value and meaning upon commodities.

The literature on geographies of commodity cultures underpins my theoretical framework to trace and analyze the social processes that produce differentiated meanings of Vietnamese cuisine. Research on commodity cultures stem from early in geography's cultural turn, in which human geography "had been dominated theoretically by various strands of Marxist political economy" (Jackson and Thrift 1995). During this period, geographies of commodities sought to unveil commodity fetishism. Most of the research on commodity geography focused on revealing the "truth" of the commodity, such as its origins, the spatiality of its system of provision, and so forth to expose a commodity's value.

Critiquing this form of research in a pivotal paper that explored foods of *The world on a plate* (Cook and Crang 1996), geographers were urged to “work with the fetish rather than attempt to reach behind it” (1996, 131). That is to say, in order to understand what the “Vietnamese fetish” is all about, it is far more productive to explore how fetishism is produced and consumed on the surface, rather than to unveil the “real” materiality—in the Marxist fashion—of it. In this sense, unpacking the processes and relationships that enable the marketing and selling of specific foods, such as “beef noodle soup”, as “Vietnamese” enables us to “work with the fetish”.

Consumers project ideas of cultural biographies and geographies onto foods and the people that they relate specific foods to. Consumers, additionally, are “far from being ignorant about the origins of foods [they] actually have wide-ranging, if socially differentiated knowledges” (Cook, Crang, and Thorpe 1998, 164). The trouble with our multi-faceted knowledges is that it weds certain foods to specific peoples *from* a specific nation even though identities “are no longer clearly wedded to particular nation states” (Crang, Dwyer, and Jackson 2003). Cook and Crang suggest that the food that we eat should be examined “not only as a placed cultural artefact but also as dis-placed, inhabiting many times and spaces which, far from being neatly bounded, bleed into and indeed mutually constitute each other” (1996, 132). Geographies of commodity culture are, therefore, constitutive of our (as consumers) interpretations, formations, and exclusions of geographic knowledges.

In Western societies, having a breadth of cultural food knowledges has often been considered a signifier of growing tolerance and acceptance of other cultures by the

dominant class (Peterson and Kern 1996). It would seem that eating a wide variety of ethnic cuisines might suggest many genuine cultural exchanges are taking place; a move towards social equity. The dominant class, however, does not actually embrace all cultural forms, but consumes across ethnic cuisines because “a veneer of knowledge about all things, permitting cultural awareness and a capacity to comment, may be personally reassuring in networks where self-respect is associated with recognition of cultural items” (Warde, Martens, and Olsen 1999, 123). Such folks have been coined as “cultural omnivores” (Peterson 1992). Cultural omnivores generally are well educated and relatively privileged consumers who have the cultural and economic capital to engage in a wide variety of cultures to distinguish their superiority. Socio-economically privileged consumers enforce social distinctions and simultaneously re-enforce their status in social situations by using experiential knowledges of interacting with the Other while eating at ethnic restaurants.

Producers and consumers discursively produce and sustain their identities through the connected acts of cooking, serving, and eating food. Commodity cultures bring together geographies of consumption *with* those of production, transcending the duality of consumption/production by acknowledging the circulation of culture and ideas. Notwithstanding popular adages suggesting “the consumer is King (or Queen)”, the social processes involved in *producing* food are also constitutive of food culture. By tracing and analyzing biographies and geographies of food and fashion producers, Crang, Dwyer, and Jackson (2003), demonstrates transnational space to be multi-dimensional and multiply-inhabited where the ability to commodify things is uneven and dissimilar across producers. By unpacking commodity cultures we may transcend the dichotomy between consumption

and production to reveal where, and amongst whom, the power to commodify cultural difference is unequal (Jackson 1999).

Commodity cultures' emphasis on "culture", however, often seems to imply only consumption, leaving production at the wayside. While such may be the case when framed as "consumption geographies", it is rarely the case that consumption and production are on two different sides of the same coin, rather even in consumption focused studies, there is always a subtext of production. Whether "production" is directly mentioned in the sense of economic production, or hinted at in the sense of a product's "social life", cultural geographies of consumption *implies* that of production even in the face of the consumption-production duality for they are processes in tandem. Without considering the complexities of processes of production, the wide-ranging meanings that can be attached to the commodification of difference will merely be grazed upon (Jackson 1998), leaving possibilities for equitable social relations on the proverbial table. As such, a cultural study of the immigrant restaurateur producer-consumer discourse is useful in highlighting issues about inequality and power, particularly as ethnic entrepreneurs are often relegated to basic service businesses or commercializing an aspect of ethnicity in which they are perceived to embody.

2.3 ETHNIC ENTREPRENEURS

There are many stereotypes about certain ethnicities being naturally inclined to entrepreneurship, and especially entrepreneurship in specific niches; taking taxi cabs or depositing dry cleaning, one can see how such stereotypes occur. Despite such stereotypes,

entrepreneurship is not an intrinsically cultural occurrence, but rather arises from labour opportunities, or lack thereof (Hiebert 2002). Many new immigrants are disqualified from mainstream jobs due to unrecognized credentials obtained in other countries, discrimination from mainstream firms, and language barriers. While not all people of colour are immigrants, they are still racialized and face discrimination in labour markets, albeit not in the same way immigrants may experience. Nevertheless, entrepreneurship is an option that racialized people attempt in order to escape unemployment, underemployment, and poor working conditions to increase income and ultimately improve quality of life.

Specific ethnic entrepreneur groups in both Canada and the US were found to be in specific niches in comparison to mainstream entrepreneurs who were in a broader range of industry (Razin and Langlois 1996; Light and Razin 1998). Ethnic entrepreneurs were found to be concentrated mainly in “low-status traditional retail and service activities such as eating and drinking places, service to dwellings (cleaning and maintenance)” (Light and Razin 1998, 345) and so on. Racialized groups are channelled into secondary positions in the labour market, and some of these positions can be transformed into opportunities for self-employment via skill building and market knowledge, thus creating new jobs in the same niche. Such a process has been conceptualized as “ethnic facilitation”, and often continues as a cycle creating an ethnic niche industry where some co-ethnic employees eventually become entrepreneurs themselves (Hiebert 2002). Vietnamese-Canadian entrepreneurs and employees, from Hiebert’s (2002) study, were found to specialize in a few specific professional occupations, food and beverage trades, and manufacturing. Yet this finding does not suggest how Vietnamese-Canadian entrepreneurs started in the food and

beverage trades in the first place, and what social and cultural processes encouraged this particular niche.

The food industry, particularly in the restaurant sector, is relatively easy for ethnic immigrant entrepreneurs to enter. Marked by low barrier to entry, but high competition, restaurants of all types are frequently opening and closing in cities. While requiring significantly less capital investments in comparison to manufacturing, and less “legitimate” cultural capital in comparison to professional services, opening an ethnic restaurant is accessible to immigrants willing to take the risk. Ethnic entrepreneurs, however, are channelled into the restaurant business, not solely by intent, but by social processes. The social scribing that marks ethnicity on differentiated and excluded Others further constrains ethnic entrepreneurs to use their culture for economic benefit (Light 1974), resulting in restaurants related to owners’ inscribed “ethnicity”. Having social ties to family and co-ethnics may help alleviate financial and labour limitations, but such relationships also further perpetuate “ethnic culture” in the enterprises.

Ethnic social capital has been highlighted in a number of studies as an “advantage” for ethnic entrepreneurs in certain niche industries. There are varying studies highlighting the compensatory advantages of entrepreneurship for certain ethnic groups. Light and Bonancich (1988) and Raijman and Tienda (2003) provide examples showing income advantages for Korean entrepreneurs in major American cities. Korean entrepreneurs in both these studies demonstrate that social ties with co-ethnics in the business world and financial assistance from family are positively related to a high rate of entrepreneurship. In this sense, the success of ethnic entrepreneurs is suggestive of social capital that is not

generally available to the mainstream (Coleman 1988), but to “ethnics” specifically. Drawing from such studies, certain “ethnicities” are essentialized as entrepreneurial and often as enterprises that tie together business pursuits with family function.

2.3.1 ETHNIC BUSINESSES AND THE SOCIAL CAPITAL OF THE FAMILY

Many ethnic businesses tend to be small businesses that are family-run, and ethnic restaurants are no exception. Professional ethnic businesses, like accounting firms or computer servicing agents, tend to be collaborations between business partners, while non-professional services like Chinese take-out restaurants (Song 1995; Song 1999), and Korean dry cleaners (Park 1997) are family-run with spouses and children working in the shops. For ethnic businesses with limited economic capital to hire workers, “the family is an institution that embodies an important form of social capital that immigrants draw on in their pursuit of economic advancement” (Sanders and Nee 1996). Family members contribute to these ethnic businesses with their labour and commitment as they hold a greater stake in the success of the business. The commitment and involvement of family, however, continually changes as stakes and priorities evolve over the life of the operations.

With greater stakes for success early in the business lifecycle, family members, particularly children, are often persuaded by guilt to work in the business. Miri Song’s (1999) work on children’s labour in Chinese take-out restaurants in the UK highlighted that “family work contracts” between children and parents are rarely discussed, but the expectation that children *should* help out was pervasive across the many families and young people she interviewed. With children growing up and increasingly pursuing higher

education or careers outside the family restaurant business (Song 1999; Parker 1994), the landscape of ethnic restaurants in the West will continue to change. Ethnic restaurants with children who have come of age working in the family business sit at a pivotal point for operational change. Changes in ethnic restaurant management styles from children-reliant “family businesses” to next generation “business ventures”, however, will not remove the racialization of “ethnic” restaurants and their owners.

2.3.2 ETHNIC COMMERCIAL AREAS IN TRANSITION

Research on ethnic entrepreneurs is often neatly compartmentalised by ethnic groups and pays very little attention to the subtler relationships that other forms of ethnic identity play in shaping the business landscape of ethnic commercial areas. In Toronto’s Chinatown West, the interactions of what may seem like a homogenous group are intricately tied to their sub-ethnic and historical identities. While cooperation between ethnic businesses is facilitated by social networks between owners and membership in ethnic business associations, Sino-Vietnamese³ small business owners are frequently left out due to their sub-ethnic racialized differences, such as initial refugee status, and dialect (Phan and Luk 2008). Sub-ethnicity can be conceptualized by national identity, language, class, or other distinctions that differentiate groups (Molohon, Paton, and Lambert 1979). The movement of people with varying “ethnic” identities in and out of “ethnic” places continually changes the landscape of producers despite any official “Chinatown” designations.

³ Sino-Vietnamese are those who identify as Chinese but lived in Vietnam prior to taking refuge in the West after the fall of Saigon.

The business and cultural landscapes of Chinatowns are continually shifting. Documented by Aguilar-San Juan (2005), Boston's Chinatown, with a growing nearby Vietnamese neighbourhood, saw cooperation and tension that gave rise to shifts in identity place-making. In Los Angeles, the changing geography of Chinese settlement (Li 1998; Li 2009), from traditional downtown enclaves, Chinatowns, to ethnoburbs where one ethnic group does not necessarily comprise the majority, reflects increasing socio-economic status and transnational interconnections of Chinese immigrants. Li's studies demonstrate that recent immigrants' socio-economic affluence is dramatically reshaping the geography of ethnic commerce and ultimately reshaping how ethnic areas are perceived. In a similar vein, new ideas of cultural identity across generations can also constitute the transition of "ethnic" business landscapes. Despite the varied and indeed dynamic geographies of Chinatowns, we live in a "wholly racialized world" (Delaney 2002) where both "ethnic" and "mainstream" restaurant geographies are considered as such through racialized discourses.

Ethnic entrepreneurial strategies have been studied from many angles, but it is rare to find studies that consider processes of racialization as constitutive of such strategies. In today's market where "ethnic" cuisines are favoured by mainstream consumers, the practice of selling culture has become more conspicuous and developed (Lu and Fine 1995). Such practices manifest as entrepreneurial strategies for economic benefit with direct links to owners' quality of life, but they also are at risk of re-inscribing racialized differences upon the owners themselves. Restaurant owners use strategies that are developed and deployed by their interpretations of the ways cuisines and people are racialized as "ethnic" to sell and market their foods and dining experiences.

2.4 RACE

If “Vietnamese-ness”, like what Aiwha Ong suggests about “Chineseness” is

no longer, if it ever was, a property or essence of a person calculated by that person’s having more or fewer “Chinese” values or norms, but instead can be understood only in terms of the multiplicity of ways in which “being Chinese” is an inscribed relation of person and groups to forces and process associated with global capitalism and its modernities.

(1997, 3–4)

Then, in light of a “wholly racialized world”, how is “ethnicity” construed?

Race is a social construction. It is not biologically determined, but is socially constructed by ascribing labels to people based on biological and cultural qualities. For example, skin colour, manner of civility, and level of intelligence are used to label groups of people by race. Miles “employs the concept of racialization to refer to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities” (Miles 1989, 75 from Barot and Bird 2001), suggesting that race is produced by social processes that categorize the Other by corporal characteristics. As such, it is the social practices of racism that constructs race.

Geographies, as they are constitutive of social processes, are also racialized. The world, as we understand it, is premised upon histories of Western conquest of the Other. As Europeans charted the unknown, they mapped their discoveries as “barbaric lands” in contrast to their own “civilized” ways. Said suggests in his influential book, *Orientalism*, that Europe’s socially constructed histories of the world imposed imagined geographies of the “Orient”:

It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries. (Said 1979, 57)

Said further argues that histories and geographies are produced and reproduced with deliberate omissions and impositions that mark the Other as inferior to the West. Race, therefore, is not reflected in the landscape; rather, spatialities are constitutive of the processes that makes race (Delaney 2002).

In a similar vein, “the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualization” (hooks 1992, 31). As such, consumption practices that label and sort cultural differences into “ethnicities” suggest that commodity cultures and its mutually constitutive geographies are racialized. While we may

feel distanced from the geo-history that Said refers to, there is no part of our world today—full of things, people, and ideas—that is not in some way racialized.

By unravelling the practices of racialization in the minutiae of everyday life, we can understand the production of power and inequality in an intimate way. The intimate act of eating is how hooks' aptly titled chapter *Eating the Other* delves into the power dynamics of racialized commodification. hooks (1992) contends that within commodity cultures, Western cultures eat metaphorically racialized Others as spice to flavour bland mainstream culture. Even though she frames commodification in a world of essentialized and distinct cultures, there is an unquestioned essentialism in white culture that produces the racialized "Other" as a contrast to white culture (Cook et al 2008). The privilege to unquestionably racialize is not out of the ordinary, but disturbingly *very* ordinary.

In a short *Toronto Life* magazine review for a Vietnamese restaurant, where the author describes dishes as "a little Canadianized", but the "contrasting sweet, sour, salty, and spicy... are the reasons we love Southeast Asian food" (Anon. 2010) is one of many instances where "Canadian" (read: white) is privileged as mainstream and the Other is, by comparison, spicy and exotic. Such writings are not exceptions, but rather as everyday as white bread is to white culture. The ordinariness of everyday racism, however, is not a reason to ignore it, but rather consider how mundane acts, like eating, may produce inequality.

A culturally omnivorous appetite for "ethnic" cuisine is the type of eating that poignantly makes a case connecting race with food. Ethnic restaurants are places, where consumer and producers conduct activities that create spatial-racial meanings. Such

activities interact in tethered dances tangling together numerous meanings that negotiate the value of foods, dining experiences, and, concomitantly, the people who produce them. To understand how the tangles of racialized meanings sort into neat “ethnic” labels, I now turn to the concept of authenticity.

2.5 MOST FAMOUS AUTHENTIC VIETNAMESE CUISINE

Unpacking the notions of authenticity reveals the processes and power relations that permeate from the commodification of differences that inscribe “ethnicity”. First, authenticity is a malleable idea that is material to our environment. Even though it is an invented notion, the ways people apply the idea to our environment is significant because of the extent of its use. Second, the idea of authenticity is often concerned with beliefs in the level of cultural purity. Third, even in light of cultural “hybridity”, such forms are considered authentic only if the cultural mixing is a “natural” occurrence. Authenticity, as it relates to “ethnic” culinary culture, is produced in relation to many racialized ideas, peoples, and things.

Appadurai suggests succinctly that authenticity is “the degree to which something is more or less what it *ought* to be” (Appadurai 1986b, 25). Authenticity, however, is not axiomatic because it is not a “natural essence” of being, but rather a constructed ideal from various practices that express various (usually aesthetic) beliefs of what something *ought* to be. Our imagination of what/who something/someone ought to be is continually reconstructed by the social interactions people have with each other, the environment, things, and symbols in the course of everyday life. In the case of “ethnic” culinary culture,

“authenticity is not an objective criterion but is socially constructed and linked to expectations” (Lu and Fine 1995, 535) of the qualities and aesthetics in which the “ethnic” groups should be. Ethnic restaurant culinary experiences are doubly judged through people’s aesthetic tastes, and through the assumptions and expectations we have about its “realness”.

There are no cuisines that can claim cultural purity, as all culinary cultures have in some way been influenced by another culinary culture. Such is true of noodles from China being “borrowed” to make “Italian” pasta, or the technique of crepe making for *banh xeo* adopted by the Vietnamese from the French. While generally it is recognized that social and cultural processes exceed nation-state boundaries (Hannerz 1992), many cuisines are still clearly demarcated by national boundaries, such as “Chinese”, “Vietnamese”, “Thai”, and so forth. Authenticity, in this sense, cannot be considered an objective quality, but rather subjectively based on Western discourse of commodity culture where elisions and alterations of histories are tolerated and produced as everyday knowledge. In this vein, the qualities we attribute to “ethnic” foods do not materialize in a vacuum but are produced by the dialectic relationship between consumers and producers. Cultural purity, then, does not stem from “natural” occurrence, but is socially produced from people’s racialized notions of the Other.

An “ethnic” restaurant’s authenticity is therefore not a summary of all its culturally pure elements, but rather of *how* we have come to believe of its “realness”. Lu and Fine’s study of Chinese restaurants in a small southern city in the United States, suggests that it is “necessary for [ethnic] restaurant[s] to construct both the meaning of authentic food and a

market niche, in the process of creating an image of their cultural traditions for their customers, as they create images of their customers” (1995, 539). Similarly, owners of American Thai restaurants tend to reflect mainstream American views of what constitutes authentic Thai (Germann Molz 2004). Since authenticity is determined by sets of expectations, from multiple parties, the idea of “cultural purity” is neither fixed nor unchanging—and certainly not an objective attribute.

Nevertheless, the “hybridity” of Vietnamese cuisine does not suggest its lack of authenticity. Vietnamese people, having adapted to colonial oppression, mixed many elements of French foods and cooking preparations with indigenous ones. This process, as Heldke (2003) posits, is often seen as a “natural occurrence” and its authenticity legitimate *because* of the coercion from a colonial power, while other forms of mixing difference do not make sense to the mainstream consumer, like that of Indian-Italian cuisine, which has no distinct historical mixing, but rather a present-day mixing concocted in North America. Other forms of mixing where commonly found Western ingredients substitute difficult-to-source “exotic” ingredients are similarly suitable as it involves integration with Western culture. Such expectations for appropriate forms of culinary hybridity demonstrate that the extensiveness of such beliefs is how coercion and assimilation is considered legitimate. The notion that hybrid cuisines can be authentic *because* of coercive and assimilative processes suggests that there is an unbalanced power relationship between ethnic restaurateurs and consumers.

Mainstream consumers’ judgement of ethnic culinary authenticity is an expression and reinforcement of his or her own identity: their knowledge of Others; their tolerance

and sophistication for many cultures; and white culture. Not all consumers of Vietnamese culture are part of the white mainstream, and while they are also eaters of Vietnamese cuisine

there are important differences between, say, the acquisitiveness of a white adventure eater... and that of a Korean adventurer... that do not allow the two instances to be conflated into a single phenomenon.

(Heldke 2003, xxii)

The adventure eater that Heldke writes about is not just the hyper-obsessive foodie, but everyday consumers who are privileged to eat *because* the foods are different from what they usually eat. In North American cities like Toronto, the consumer does not have to travel far to experience culinary adventures and assert their right to “eat the Other” as ethnic restaurants abound.

Restaurant owners prepare foods, decorate their restaurants, offer menus, and employ servers in a manner that reflect and (re)construct consumer expectations of authentic “ethnic” experiences. Owners also take into consideration consumers’ taste preference for exotic experiences that are not *too* exotic and construed as unsafe. In this sense, the authenticity of an “ethnic” restaurant is negotiated within a framework that Dean MacCannell asserts as a “staged authenticity” (1976). Restaurants “stage” their authenticity through the menu, ingredients, and décor into easily consumable experiences. The customer in turn judges the restaurants’ authenticity based on comparisons to their

social experiences of Vietnamese culture, through media depictions, their own travel experiences, and also experiences from the very Vietnamese restaurants they frequent. Restaurants' "ethnic" labels are therefore created by producers, consumers, and various intermediaries who, with different vested interests in its authenticity, are part of "continually interacting processes in a 'cultural circuit' where products both reflect and transform consumers' behaviours" (Zukin and Maguire 2004, 178).

"Cultural intermediaries" (Bourdieu 1984), such as journalists, food critics, and foodie celebrities, are important cultural information brokers that reinforce dominant views of ethnic culinary culture. Like the kitschy Chinese restaurants that Lu and Fine discuss, Vietnamese restaurants in Toronto are described with a similar taxonomy of kitschy-ness emphasising the obscurity of the restaurants. *Toronto Life* reviews describe the "Mickey and Minnie Mouse plaques decorat[ing] the walls" and the "beatifically smiling effigy of a scarlet cow" (Anon. 2003) to paint the setting of a Chinatown Vietnamese restaurant. These "kitschy" places are considered to be more genuinely ethnic (Halter 2002), in the sense that true ethnic restaurateurs do not share the same aesthetic tastes as mainstream consumers. The kitsch of the restaurants and the grittiness that is often described about Chinatown (Anderson 1987), is used by cultural brokers to enforce popular notions of authentic Vietnamese restaurant experiences and concomitantly re-enforce mainstream culture as "normal". Restaurant critics broker between consumers and purveyors, rationalizing mainstream aesthetic judgements and choices (Zukin 2004) by reinforcing the beliefs of consumers.

Consumers' reflexivity on Vietnamese restaurants within the urban restaurant landscape is constitutive of all the meanings and ideas that converge to become what they consider "authentically" Vietnamese. Characteristics like kitschy decor, and religious alters in the restaurants' front of the house, are not acts of purposeful staging, but qualities that have been associated with an authentic restaurant through the judgement customers make of these qualities. Additionally, "diners also decide when to apply this [authenticity] measuring stick, and they judge their own level of expertise in deciding whether or not their experience is authentic" (Germann Molz 2004, 62). Consumers' drive for authenticity, therefore, underlie the strategies restaurant owners use to grow their businesses and acquire financial success.

Unpacking the idea of authenticity demonstrates that the geography of restaurant culture is not simple; it is rather contentious. The use of authenticity as a descriptor of what "Vietnamese" cuisine ought to be racializes the producers of the cuisine, the so-called co-ethnic consumers, and the cuisine itself. Consumers' ability to measure a cuisine's authenticity by "cultural purity" and appropriate "hybridity" shows the power and extent of race in culinary culture. The spatialization of restaurants, then, is a racialized social construction that is extensively underpinned by notions of authenticity. For entrepreneurs, authenticity becomes their bread and butter; authenticity is a web of strategies deployed to sell easily digestible ideas that consumers, have essentialized as "real" experiences. The resulting uneven landscape of restaurant culture is, therefore, spatialized by consumer desires for authenticity. Authenticity becomes a crutch that is sought to stabilize the

unsteadiness between “our experiences of space and our sense of self that is so much a part of modern mentalities” (Zukin 2010, 220). Inevitably we are all in the thick of it.

2.6 TOGETHER MAKING VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT CULTURE

Analysing commodity cultures will demonstrate the many ways our social practices give meaning to our world. Consumption practices and tastes are often over-emphasized to make sense of culture, while everyday production practices are overlooked because they are associated with economics—the supposed opposite of culture. Jackson (1999; 2002), on the other hand suggests commodity cultures should take into account “commerce” and its activities to better understand the power imbalances of commodifying difference. Such an approach to understanding “ethnic” restaurant landscapes means the social construction of race must be considered in conjunction with the notion of authenticity. Restaurant culture is created by both consumption and production practices that interpret and (re)construct authenticity and race.

The construction of authenticity suggests that consumers’ knowledge of food geographies are far from being limited; rather, consumers pick and choose which knowledges they want to ignore and which they want to illuminate by the choices they make when they eat and buy food. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with consumers’ selective knowledges, the trouble is the ways such knowledges are used to racialize people by inscribing qualities, which are born out of highlighting difference, to people and things. Such inscribed qualities are legitimized as “real” by making them “authentic”. Consumer and ethnic entrepreneurs are both implicit in constructing

authenticity, but in uneven ways that racialize the entrepreneurs, not because they *are* ethnic, but because in a “wholly racialized world” they are the ones *considered* “ethnic”. The socially uneven ethnic restaurant landscape is constitutive of the practices of both ethnic entrepreneurs and consumers who interpret, create, and deploy authenticity in different ways and for different reasons.

Despite hearty coverage of commodity cultures and ethnic entrepreneurship using case studies ranging from food to fashion, the literature is rather limited on understanding ethnic producers’ consumer-oriented strategies that are part and parcel of our everyday geographies. A notable example is Jackson’s (2002) research analysing the different ways food brands Patak’s and Sharwood’s use entrepreneurial biographies and geographies to make competing claims to their products’ authenticity. Another example is the exploration of the interconnectedness of transnational identity and the strategies Caribbean brands use to make “authentic” foods by Cook and Harrison (2003). Nevertheless, these works do not demonstrate the discursive relationship between consumers and producers in which commercial strategies used to reproduce authenticity are created from.

There is a large gap to be bridged between the “commerce” and “culture” of ethnic restaurants in Toronto. Research on ethnic entrepreneurship highlights some of the location strategies owners used when establishing their businesses, and the cultural and industrial identities these strategies represent. Even though the majority of papers about ethnic business locations are scant on addressing ethnic entrepreneurship’s constitutive geographies, they do show that ethnic businesses do not fit neatly into the “enclave model”, but are rather differentiated. Family-business strategies have only been lightly

touched on and do not say much about the various identities of family-run ethnic businesses. In order to understand the geographic extent of authenticity, it is necessary to use an ethnographic approach to identify the ways consumers racialize ethnic foods and the entrepreneurs who serve it up. I now turn to my case study on the consumers and producers of Toronto's Vietnamese restaurants.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork process was both qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative aspect used convenience surveying to find trends and patterns occurring in Toronto's restaurant culture. The qualitative aspect used semi-structure interviews with restaurant owners and managers, and participatory observations consisted of the bulk of my fieldwork in terms of time involved in collecting, transcribing, and analyzing the data.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines and illustrates the procedures used to collect and analyse data to address my research questions. Justification for the methods chosen, including limitations for the study are provided for full transparency of the research design. The core of my data collection centres on two key data collection methods: online questionnaire surveying, and in-person interviewing. I also used observations to establish context both before and after questionnaire collection and in-person interviews. For each method, a thorough discussion of the issues involved with participant recruitment, data collection, and observation site selection is provided. These procedures were used to conduct an empirical study on the interconnectedness of immigrant entrepreneurialism, food geographies, and identity within the context of Vietnamese restaurant culture in Toronto.

The design of this research provides a way of assessing and interpreting the social geography as experienced by the social agents themselves. Many compelling excerpts of individual's life stories were told to me throughout my research. Although I only elucidate parts of these stories to address my research questions and thesis objectives, each and every story is significant to social life. In geographical research, these procedures are

effective in uncovering power relations, racialization, and agency in food geography. Notwithstanding, I also reflect on the ethical issues and power relations resulting from my own positionality as a researcher.

3.2 QUESTIONNAIRES

Online questionnaires were used to gather information on the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of people living Toronto. This methodological choice provides a snapshot of relevant social trends within a geographically dispersed urban area in a cost effective and efficient manner. Having the questionnaires online allowed for easy distribution through various media and gatekeepers, but this practicality is not without limitations that are material to the study.

Using *Survey Monkey*, commercial online software, maximized the questionnaire's distribution and minimized resources necessary to program various styles of questions for online interaction with respondents. *Survey Monkey* allowed for the flexibility of directing respondents to specific sections of the survey based on questions already answered. I used this feature to allow respondents to quickly skip an entire section of questions if they answered "No" to "Have you eaten Vietnamese food?" Additionally, *Survey Monkey* provided a secure place to store and collect data.

Fifty poster adverts were posted during July 2010 at a number of Vietnamese restaurants in various areas in Toronto, and also on nearby community centre poster boards within the vicinity of the restaurants. Unfortunately, less than ten respondents had

completed the questionnaire two months after the placement of the poster adverts. No further poster adverts were put up afterwards.

Email messages were sent electronically to various gatekeepers of listservs, friends, and family to recruit participants. To obtain respondents that would be representative of the demographic make-up of Toronto, gatekeepers were chosen from various social, cultural, and occupational fields. Additionally, electronic messages were posted on the Toronto section of the online classified service *Craigslist*, and the Ontario section of the online food interest forum, *Chowhound*. All email and classified messages had a brief introduction of the project and an embedded link that directed potential respondents to the questionnaire that was hosted by the *Survey Monkey* online software. The target audience for these messages were any resident of Toronto over the age of eighteen, with an attempt to collect responses from individuals from various socioeconomic positions, education levels, and age. As tokens of appreciation small prizes (totalling, \$105 CAD) were given to three randomly drawn participants that opted in to the draw (see Appendix One).

The questionnaire was divided into five sections, with each section designed with closed questions for ease of data processing and analyzing, as well as a couple of open-ended questions to gather original opinions and beliefs from respondents. The first section gathered basic demographic information, such as age, gender association, ethnic and cultural origins of ancestors, and so forth. The second section was concerned with eating out behaviours, including their choice of foods. Respondents who had answered “Yes” to “Have you eaten Vietnamese food?” also answered questions regarding their consumption behaviours specific to Vietnamese cuisine. The third section asked respondents for their

opinions on Vietnamese foods and restaurants, regardless if respondents had eaten Vietnamese food before. I did not limit this section only to respondents who have only eaten Vietnamese food because these respondent's opinions are part and parcel of the discourse on Vietnamese culinary culture in Toronto. The fourth section is a short section gathering respondents' opinions towards Vietnamese-run businesses in general, and immigrant entrepreneurship. Finally, the fifth section simply allows for respondents to opt into the random draw for prizes. The majority of questions were closed questions, including attribute information, category list, ranking, and scaling type questions. The majority of open-ended questions probed for further explanation to a few of the closed questions; there were only two stand-alone open-ended questions in the entire questionnaire. This design allowed respondents to complete the questionnaire in 15 minutes or less, with 96% of all participants who started the questionnaire actually completing it.

In total 132 completed questionnaires were collected. The questionnaire was online for three months, with the first two months only receiving less than ten responses.

3.3 INTERVIEWS

Interviews conducted with restaurant owners and operators were a significant part of the fieldwork process. Although other methods were possible to obtain data from restaurant owners, interviews allowed for an in-depth investigation of the motivations in restaurant owners' decisions, attitudes, and opinions. A semi-structured interview format, allowed me to inquire in detail about participants' responses, which other qualitative

methods could not provide. Given the hectic working day of a restaurateur, individual in-person interviews provided flexibility in schedule accommodation. The varying opinions and experiences collected during the interviews provided valuable insight to the issues that were consistent, and those that differed.

The majority of the semi-structured interviews were conducted from September 2010 to October 2010, with one interview conducted in July 2010. A total of ten interviews were conducted. Participants were restaurant operators or managers and eight of the ten identified themselves as a member of the family who owns the restaurant in which they were working. The other two participants owned their respective restaurants in business partnerships with non-family members. All interviewees were provided a letter of information and consent form prior to the interview.

Initially, I attempted to recruit participants by going to restaurants in person on two separate occasions in July during the late afternoon. Most operators and managers were still busy with customers between 2 and 4 PM on both Monday and Wednesday and were not interested in even briefly learning about my research. One manager referred me to contact his mother, who established the restaurant. This resulted in the first and only interview conducted in July. During September, I started to recruit participants over the telephone. I identified a list of 40 restaurants that were described by various online restaurant guides as “Vietnamese” restaurants or “Asian” restaurant with Vietnamese words in the restaurant name, and called each restaurant at least once. By calling the restaurant phone numbers from 3:15 to 4:15 on weekdays, I was able to recruit nine participants for the interviews. Many of the restaurant operators and managers I contacted

declined because they were not comfortable with their English or stated they were too busy to schedule time for the interview. On two occasions, I was referred to another family member involved in the family restaurant who was willing to participate.

The interviews were semi-structured and used the aid of an interview guide. In anticipation that the respondents would speak English as a second language and with varying level of proficiency, questions were worded carefully to ensure they were clear, direct, and easily understood. A translator was not used, but many participants used Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Mandarin for keywords they could not substitute in English. With my varying proficiency in all three of these languages, I was able to translate the words and phrases the participants used. In one interview, the participant wanted some of the questions asked in Cantonese after I asked them in English, which I was able to oblige after a few moments of quick translation; Cantonese is one of the languages I speak with my own family members. Some participants wanted me to rephrase my questions or repeat them. Overall, most of the questions in the interview guide were easily understood by the participants, while a few required a slight rewording.

All interviews started with introductory questions that focused on their business and entrepreneurial experiences with regards to owning and operating restaurants. The second part of the interview focused on reflections of their immigrant experiences and how it has affected the way their businesses are run. After realizing that most Vietnamese restaurants are family owned and operated, I incorporated questions in regards to family help and succession planning in the businesses where appropriate.

With the permission of the participants, I audio recorded and then transcribed the interviews. In cases where participants did not want to be audio recorded, I took careful notes to capture as accurately as possible the participant's words, tone, and gestures. Although no transcriptions are perfect in capturing our interaction with absolute precision, and the account of events is controlled by the researcher, I made a concerted effort to produce transcripts that represent the participants' dialogue as accurately as possible.

All interviews were conducted at the participant's restaurant, except one that was conducted at a nearby coffee shop. All interviews took place during the day, either before or after lunch hours. Prior to each interview observational notes were taken on the attributes of the sites and the social interactions that were occurring at the time. These observational notes in conjunction with the other observational notes taken during other occasions at various restaurants complemented and contextualized the questionnaire and interview parts of the fieldwork process.

3.4 OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH

In addition to the interview and questionnaire methods, I used observational research as a complementary method in the fieldwork process. Observations were gathered prior to and after conducting the questionnaire and interviews. I visited 15 different restaurants across the Greater Toronto Area, visiting some restaurants twice. The times of day and day of the week in which I visited these restaurants varied, as I purposefully wanted to see if the dining experience and atmosphere varied temporally.

During these site visits, as a consumer, I observed the cultural landscapes of these establishments. My observations included a focus on decor, atmosphere, music, noise level, food, place settings, staff and staff interactions, and other customers. On some of these visits I would have one dining partner, while at other times I would dine alone. Although I would have preferred to take notes while at the table, it seemed out of place as most restaurants did not have single diners and those that I observed rarely did other activities, such as reading or writing. In order to remember key observations, I typed them into my smartphone as other patrons were also evidently using their own mobile devices. Furthermore, I chose not to disclose my position as researcher to the other patrons, staff, or owners as I did not want to purposefully differentiate myself from other patrons.

I grouped the restaurants I visited by media popular, and not media popular. The media popular restaurants were often discussed on online blogs and forums (*blogTO*, *Chowhound*), and reviewed in *Toronto Life*, *Now Toronto*, and *GridTO*, while the restaurants unpopular with media were ones that did not receive reviews by media publications, and were seldom mentioned in *blogTO* and *Chowhound*.

3.5 LIMITATIONS AND ETHICS

Social research cannot take place in a vacuum where the researcher exists as an agent merely looking in. The social processes that take place between the researcher and the researched are entangled by power relations, societal expectations, and individual positionalities. The first part of this section is my researcher's reflection on the reflexivity of

the fieldwork process, and the implications my own positionality may have on the research process and results. In the latter part of this section I will discuss the limitations of the research design as well as the procedures taken to address ethical issues.

Prior to conducting the interviews I recognized that I would be recognized as both an insider and an outsider to the participants. I was lucky to be an insider—or at least *enough* of one—which allowed me to easily establish rapport with many of the restaurant owners and operators, but I believe that I was also seen as an outsider, which inhibits the participants' level of openness with me. In many ways, my Chinese-Vietnamese ethnic origin was both limiting and encouraging. During one of the interviews, I introduced myself and the owner was immediately pleased that I was a Vietnamese student and so “successful” in school, but then just as immediately questioned my proficiency in Vietnamese. I politely replied that I grew up speaking Cantonese and remain quite proficient. The participant expressed her concerns of today's youth losing their ability to speak their *own* language and English, and further spoke of the cross-border advantages linguistic abilities would have in the present and future. She was open to speaking with me, but due to my limited knowledge of Vietnamese, she was not able to express fully her opinions and beliefs, and I was not able fully to interpret them. Nevertheless, all participants perceived that I had inherent understanding—albeit at different capacities—because of my Chinese-Vietnamese background. There is no formulaic calculation to determine one's capacity as being an outsider or insider, because everyone's characteristics overlap on many facets, such as gender, race, socio-economic attributes, etc. My

relationships with each and every participant are in constant flux between outsider and insider.

The majority of the restaurant owners were gracious to lend their time for the interviews because of the academic nature of the research. In two interviews, the owners seemed to have a secondary motive—that in exchange for their time, I would promote their restaurants to my friends and family and bring along new customers. Although it would not be a difficult task for me to lend a hand to help increase their sales, I faced an ethical gray-area. Would this be considered a form of “buying” my data? As a compromise I promised them some summarized data from the questionnaire, which I would provide all interview participants as a token of appreciation anyway. Nevertheless, the few respondents who had clear business motivations for participating in my research still were valuable contributors to the research.

My positionality as a university educated young woman pursuing a graduate degree played a significant role in shaping the power relations and cultural dynamics during all my interactions with the participants. In particular, my youth, or rather youthful *appearance*, set against a backdrop of Chinese-Vietnamese social-cultural norms made it necessary for me to nod in polite agreement. I seldom chose to challenge or further investigate responses promptly, but instead recomposed my probing “whys” or “how comes” into questions that suggested I needed further explanation to understand. Furthermore, many restaurant owners were careful when asked to describe some of their customers—“Canadian” as reference to white customers. In some cases, when I asked questions seeking opinions,

some participants would precede or follow their response with “I’m not sure if that is the right answer.”

As I cannot address any comparisons to the scenarios if I existed as another person with a different positionality; it is pertinent that power relations, social expectations, and positionality be addressed in order to account for the ethical issues and limitations in the fieldwork process.

CHAPTER FOUR: UNDERSTANDING CONSUMERS' HUNGER FOR AUTHENTICITY QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter unpacks the ways consumers conceptualize Vietnamese-ness by highlighting the key findings from the questionnaires complemented with data from the observations component of the fieldwork. The questionnaires were a useful aspect of the fieldwork process to obtain empirical information about the behaviours, attitudes, and opinions of people living in Toronto. The purpose for gathering this dataset was to provide insight into relevant social attitudes and opinions that informed consumer trends on eating Vietnamese cuisine in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. The results from the questionnaire were analyzed to highlight the qualities consumers attribute to Vietnamese-ness. Consumption behaviours and attitudes were also analyzed across basic demographic information to identify eating practices that construct authenticity.

4.1 GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The participants in the questionnaire were largely single dwellers, young and highly educated individuals living in Toronto proper. Of the 132 participants who completed the survey, 59% of the respondents identified as female, 39% identified as male, and 2% left the answer blank as they were not obligated to answer the question on gender. The average age of the respondents was 31.4 years old, and median age was 28. The youngest participant was 18 years old (anyone who answered the survey that was under the age of 18 was removed), and the oldest was 68 years old at the time the survey was conducted.

Approximately 80% of respondents completed post-secondary education. Nearly half the participants had completed an undergraduate degree, and one quarter had completed a post-graduate degree. In comparison to Toronto overall, a larger proportion of questionnaire respondents have attained a bachelor degree or higher; 37.4% for Toronto overall, compared to nearly 72% of respondents. 40% of the participants had one person living in their household (either living by themselves or sharing accommodations with a roommate), which is consistent with the lifestyle of young, single, urban dwellers. Overall, the dataset obtained from the questionnaire represents the behaviours, attitudes, and opinions of highly educated young Torontonians.

Despite the survey topic of Vietnamese restaurant culture, few respondents identified with a Vietnamese heritage. 85 of the 132 (64%) participants were born in Canada, while 47 (32%) were not. The cultural origins of the participants varied, but 33% of the participants identified as having Chinese ancestry (a handful also identified another cultural/ethnic ancestry in addition to Chinese). Another 33% of the participants were White⁴. Two of the participants identified as Chinese and Vietnamese, and only six people identified as Vietnamese. Of those who identified as having Vietnamese ancestry, six out of eight were born in Canada. The questionnaire results suggest that the dataset reflects the attitudes and opinions of people not within the Vietnamese community.

⁴ These respondents identified ethnic or cultural origins as Canadian, Western European, or Anglo-Saxon

Figure 4.1: Respondent General Demographics

Age Summary		Identify As		Born in Canada	
Min Age	18	Female	59%	Yes	64%
Max Age	68	Male	39%	No	36%
Average Age	31.4				
Median Age	28				
Employment Status		Household Income		Number of People in Household	
Student	12%	100,000 +	26%	1	40%
Employed FT	64%	75,000 – 99,000	17%	2	20%
Employed PT	6%	50,000 – 74,900	22%	3	16%
Retired	4%	25,000 – 49,000	17%	4	17%
Unemployed	13%	Less than 25,000	14%	5 +	7%
Education Level					
Some High School	5%				
High School Diploma	4%				
Some College	2%				
Completed College	9%				
Some University	8%				
Undergraduate Degree	47%				
Post Graduate Degree	25%				

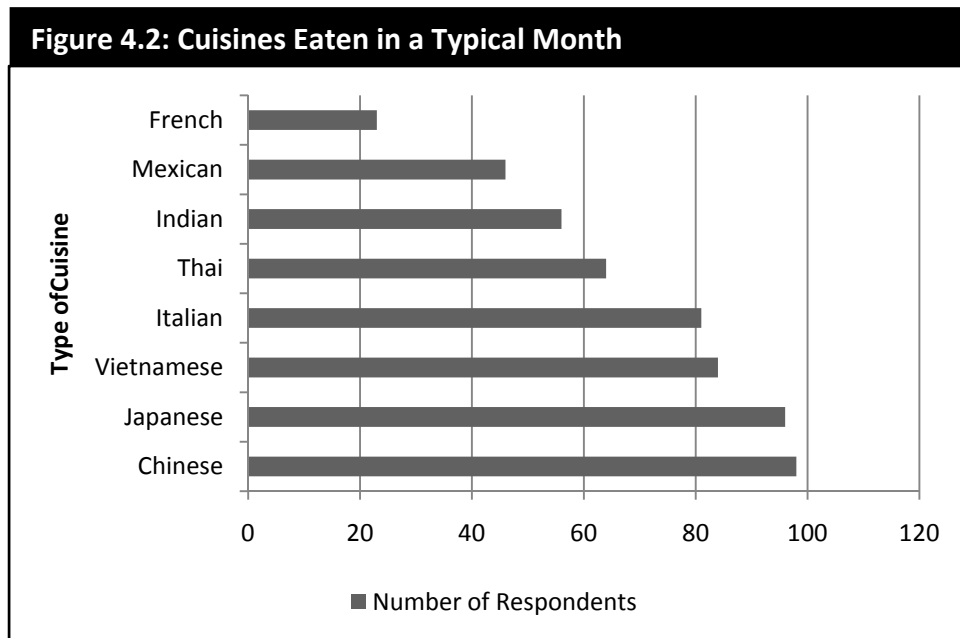
4.2 EATING HABITS

Restaurant choices are made with a combination of different information from different sources and people. When choosing a restaurant, it was unexpected that less than half the participants would choose a restaurant recommended by food critics in a magazine or newspaper. Results from Tanaka’s (2008) research on Japanese restaurants in Toronto showed that most consumers consulted restaurant reviews when choosing a restaurant. Nevertheless, this does not discount media’s influence on dining out behaviours, but rather suggests that proliferation of personal and amateur food blogs that review restaurants may be a substitute for traditional newspaper and magazine reviews. Given that dining out is a

social activity, it is not surprising that the top two criteria for choosing a restaurant are from previous positive experience and from a recommendation by someone they know. Most respondents choose restaurants based on a combination of the options presented in the survey (see Appendix One). Similarly, respondents who would usually choose an ethnic restaurant when deciding where to eat, also consider convenience, cost, time, professional and personal recommendations, and previous experience. People make dining decisions with many considerations, but the vast majority of people do so based on social relationships.

All participants surveyed eat a wide variety of ethnic foods that are not always consistent with their cultural backgrounds. In a typical month, Chinese and Japanese cuisines were the top two choices among the other options of Indian, Vietnamese, Thai, Italian, French, and Mexican cuisines (Figure 4.2). Vietnamese cuisine was the third highest rated cuisines, with 84 (64%) participants eating it in a typical month and 89% of participants having tried it at least once in their life. Only eight respondents, however, identified with Vietnamese ancestry. In comparison, 33% of participants identified with a Chinese ancestry, while only one person identified as having Japanese ancestry. The high consumption of Japanese food among a small population of Japanese background is consistent with Tanaka's (2008) research on Japanese restaurant culture in Toronto. Overall, the dataset shows that a wide range of cuisines are consumed in a typical month by the Toronto-residing participants. These data suggest that Vietnamese culinary culture constitute Vietnamese people in addition to people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Most consumers surveyed expressed culturally omnivorous (Warde, Martens, and Olsen 1999; Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal 2007) eating habits by indicating the different ethnic foods they eat in a typical month. 110 respondents out of 132, eat three or more ethnic cuisines in a typical month (Table 4.1), and of these respondents, 40 also indicated one or more cuisines in the open-response “Other” option. One respondent, who does not eat ethnic foods often still stated, “I eat all of the above plus Korean, Caribbean etc. but nothing as frequently as once a month,” to demonstrate her familiarity with a wide variety of ethnic cuisines. The two most common cuisines stated in the “Other” option are Western and Korean⁵ foods, mentioned 16 and 10 times, respectively. Respondents’ eating habits demonstrate uneven culturally omnivorous consumption practices that overwhelmingly favour some ethnic cuisines more than others.



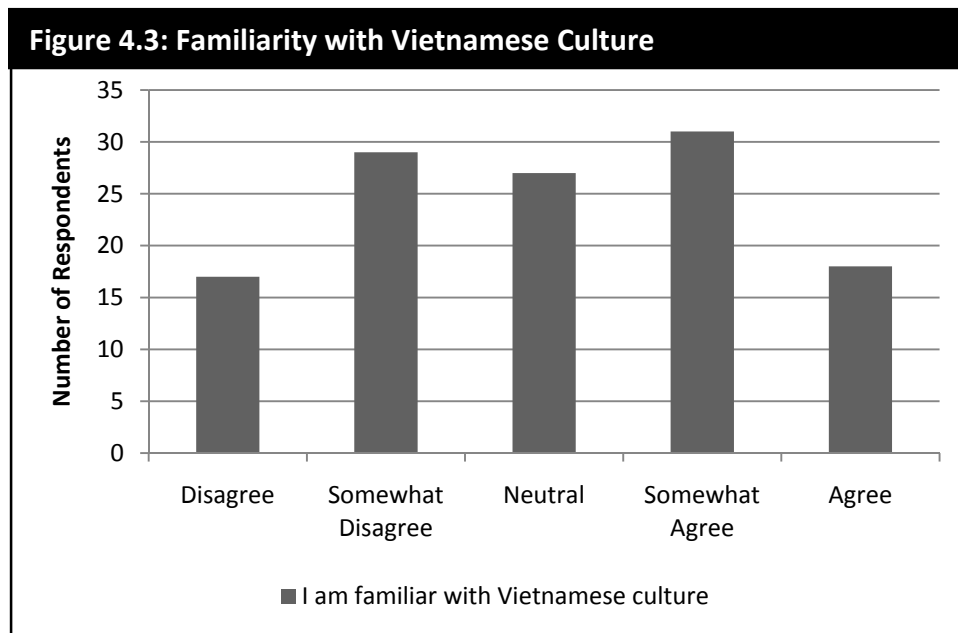
⁵Interestingly, only one person identified Korean heritage, which further indicates that most people consume foods from a wide range of cultural cuisines.

Table 4.1: Number of Cuisines Eaten in a Typical Month

Number of Cuisines Chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total N
Number of Respondents	4	2	16	30	29	18	18	10	5	132

Consumers use their culturally omnivorous eating habits and their experiences with ethnic cuisines to assert their identities as “cultured” urban individuals. Throughout the survey, participants used open-response questions as opportunities to distinguish themselves through their acquired tastes (Bourdieu 1984) for Vietnamese cuisine. “My family are trailer park types who think if it’s not burgers and fries its foreign and likely too spicy and weird and those people at worms”, was a reason given for not eating at a Vietnamese restaurant with family. Similarly, another participant emphasized her urban acquired tastes by sharing her favourite dish by its Vietnamese name, “Nem nuong cuon”, and later stating, “My parents/siblings are from the suburbs and generally do not enjoy eating many Asian or other ethnic foods.” The way that respondents reinforce their own urban status to describe other people’s distaste for Vietnamese cuisine demonstrates that consumers’ tastes for ethnic foods are mutually constitutive of geography and social class distinction.

People’s culturally omnivorous eating habits are social practices that use experiences of interacting with the Other as a method to enforce social class difference. Eating foods of the Other is a way for well-educated urbanites to bank such practices as cultural capital and markers of social distinction to demonstrate their cosmopolitan identities even though many cannot claim they are especially familiar with Vietnamese culture (Figure 4.3). The high education attainment, and culturally omnivorous eating habits of questionnaire participants is consistent with Warde, Martens, and Olsen’s (1999) findings that suggest better educated people are more involved with eating at ethnic restaurants. By eating a variety of ethnic foods and acquiring a taste for them, consumers simultaneously enforce social distinctions and negotiate their superior status.



4.3 VIETNAMESE CULINARY CULTURE: SPICY, CHEAP, AND UNSOPHISTICATED

Responses from the survey indicated that there are many qualities participants associate with Vietnamese cuisine, and Vietnamese restaurant culture. Analysis of the open-ended responses from the questionnaire showed that Vietnamese cuisine is most often considered flavourful (mix of spice and fresh herbs), and Vietnamese restaurant dining experiences are considered cheap and unsophisticated. The qualities respondents associated with Vietnamese restaurant and cuisine are consistent with messages from restaurant reviews and food television shows. Moreover, the consistency across responses suggests that the qualities consumers conceptualize Vietnamese-ness with are spicy, unsophisticated, and cheap.

For the most part, people think that Vietnamese food tastes good due to a combination of flavours, particularly spiciness. “I usually eat ‘Bun’, and I love the lightness of the noodles and the salad elements, combined with the meat and “heavier” parts. The flavours are a perfect combination! Oh, and can't forget about the hot sauce! I love spice!” portrays the most common qualities respondents used to describe Vietnamese cuisine. The hot sauce that is referred to is iconic to Vietnamese restaurants; it is at every table and is always in a bright red bottle. It is up to the customer to control the spice to their palettes, “[s]ince I do enjoy hot spicy flavours also, I like knowing I can tailor the meal to the level of spiciness I desire at that sitting.” Consumers emphasize that Vietnamese cuisine ought to be spicy—but more specifically, at the spice level they choose.

Authenticity was ranked as the most important criteria by 40% of respondents, whereas “atmosphere/look and feel” was considered the least important overall. This is particularly interesting since inappropriateness of atmosphere was also one of the most suggested reasons for not going to a Vietnamese restaurant. One 25-year-old male respondent succinctly expressed: “most Vietnamese restaurants (at least the best ones!) seem to lack the atmosphere that you would want for a special celebration.” Such responses suggests that people are willing to give up atmosphere for authenticity when choosing a Vietnamese restaurant, and for the most part these atmospheres are perceived to be very casual and simple. Moreover, the lack of sophistication also gives the restaurants a cachet of “authenticity”. The belief that authentic Vietnamese restaurants are simple and unsophisticated is reinforced in mainstream magazines, such as this description from one of *Toronto Life’s* reviews, “[Pho Hung’s] bright and utilitarian dining room receives a steady stream of hungry visitors, drawn by the promise of Vietnamese broth and exceptional prices” (2006). In conjunction with exemplifying Vietnamese restaurants’ lack of sophistication, consumers have also created Vietnamese restaurants as cheap places.

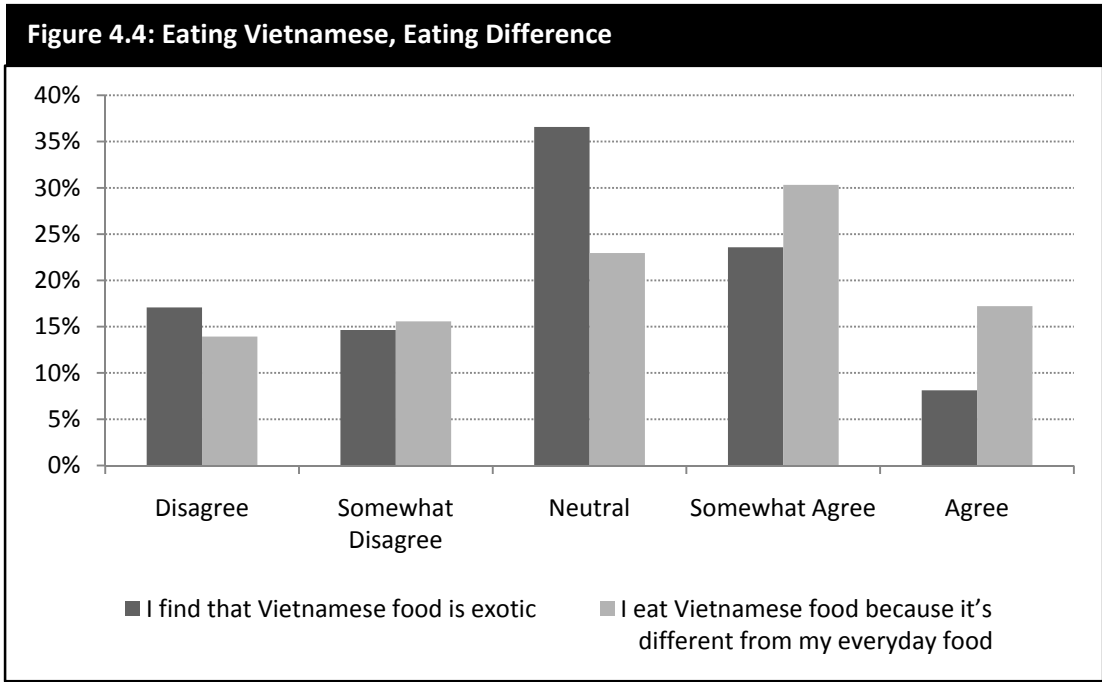
Considering the numerous Vietnamese restaurants recommended in *Cheap Eats*, and other similarly positioned reviews in Toronto lifestyle magazines and newspapers, it is not surprising that respondents have similar attitudes toward Vietnamese food. The “exceptional prices” respondents paid for a meal at a Vietnamese restaurant were mostly in the range of \$5 to \$9.99, and most would not pay more than what they typically pay. Despite bargain prices and the generally high socio-economic status of the sample group, attitudes of consumers suggest they are not necessarily willing to pay more for Vietnamese

cuisine (Table 4.2). The notions of cheapness and lack of sophistication are constitutive to the social production of Vietnamese culinary culture. The belief that the best Vietnamese restaurants are cheap and unsophisticated re-circulates an image of a “hole in the wall” restaurant, a place that only a person who is familiar with the Other would know about.

Table 4.2: Attitudes About Vietnamese Food Prices
Excludes respondents who rarely eat Vietnamese food

<i>Amount Typically Paid for a Vietnamese Meal</i>	<i>I would pay more than what I usually pay for Vietnamese food</i>					<i>Average Rating</i>
	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	
Less than 5 dollars		1				2.0
5-9.99 dollars	10	19	18	13	5	2.8
10-14.99 dollars	5	8	14	11	5	3.1
15-29.99 dollars	1	2	2	1		2.5

Vietnamese culinary culture is negotiated through consumption practices that are premised on notions of difference in relation to dominant notions of normalness. When people eat Vietnamese food it is a matter of consuming something different from their everyday diet. While exoticness would be an obvious descriptor for Vietnamese cuisine, respondents were divided with mostly neutral rating to the question “I find that Vietnamese food is exotic”. Survey results suggests that eating Vietnamese cuisine and going to Vietnamese restaurants are not arbitrary actions, but is a practice that re-enforce qualities associated with normalness (Figure 4.4). By continually and consistently inscribing the qualities of spicy, cheap, and unsophisticated to Vietnamese restaurant experiences, the criteria for Vietnamese-ness only exists in relation to dominant ideas of normal.



4.4 PHO SOMETHING

Consumers identify Vietnamese restaurants with the popular beef noodle soup dish, *pho*. When asked to state their favourite Vietnamese restaurant in Toronto, respondents provided a list of restaurants that was not particularly extensive, rather a number of key restaurants came up with Pho Hung mentioned the most. Pho Hung has three locations, with their oldest location, at just over a quarter century old, is in Chinatown. It is listed by *Zagat Toronto* as a best buy, in *Cheap Eats Toronto* it is where you can get an “irresponsible amount” of pho inexpensively. The second and third favourite restaurants, similarly, with multiple locations across the city have a greater brand presence, and thus it is not surprising that these restaurants were the top favourites. Of all the restaurants stated, most of the names included the word “pho”. Over 10% of respondents, however, couldn’t recall the

name of their favourite restaurant, but described its location. *Pho* has become a criterion for Vietnamese-ness as it has become iconic with Vietnamese restaurants.

Restaurants with names like “Bamboo”, “Ginger”, and “Sprout”, on the other hand, were rarely given much mention. The owners’ daughter of Bamboo suggested these restaurant names attracted mostly non-Vietnamese customers, in comparison to “other Vietnamese restaurants [that] are Pho Saigon, or Pho Bo, or Pho something” where Vietnamese customers eat. “Pho” makes restaurants seem more Vietnamese even though non-Vietnamese customers have difficulty remembering restaurants with Vietnamese names, unless the restaurant in question has been firmly established in the market. Consumer’s pick of their favourite Vietnamese restaurant seems to indicate that they attribute the use of “pho” as a moniker to mean that there is Vietnamese-ness being served up with each visit.

4.5 IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS: PURVEYORS OF AUTHENTICITY

Consumers’ belief of a hardworking “ethnic” entrepreneur is also served up alongside each meal to create the authentic Vietnamese restaurant. The latter part of the questionnaire sought to collect respondents’ beliefs, attitudes, and opinions on immigrant entrepreneurship. Overall, questionnaire results show that most consumers believe Vietnamese restaurants are run and owned by Vietnamese immigrants, and that these owners are hardworking people. The open-ended question, “what does immigrant entrepreneurship mean to you”, received many responses similar to “immigrants who open businesses.” Apart from these uninspired answers, responses overall were divided in two

camps: 1) cultural entrepreneurs who “offer ‘good value’ or ‘something positive’ through their ethnic background”; and 2) immigrants who start basic businesses because they are unable to get good mainstream occupations.

The belief that ethnic entrepreneurs are hardworking purveyors that are best suited to commodify their cultural background is one of the many ways they are racialized and systematically discriminated. When consumers associate the qualities of spiciness, cheapness, and unsophisticated as Vietnamese-ness, they consequently ascribe such qualities to purveyors, whom they believe are Vietnamese. By assigning such qualities to Vietnamese-ness, consumers racialize the entrepreneurs. The racialized ethnic entrepreneur character is yet another re-circulated and constructed idea that is part of the construction of Vietnamese culinary authenticity.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The analysis of the questionnaire results explored the various ways consumers conceptualize Vietnamese-ness in relation to their knowledges and experiences with Vietnamese restaurants. Vietnamese-ness for consumers is a quality that they use to judge authenticity. This chapter has unpacked authenticity as a convergence of socially constructed qualities that consumers believe is what Vietnamese-ness *is* or ought to be. Culturally omnivorous eating habits, along with experiences of Vietnamese-ness is banked by consumers as cultural capital to elevate and sustain their status as sophisticated individuals. People with high socio-economic status (by way of education attainment and income) enforce social class distinctions with eating practices that move fluidly across

cultural cuisines. They rely on interacting with the Other, upon whom they have inscribed differences, to articulate their superior tastes. The importance consumers attribute to authenticity suggests that some things, ideas, and people are more authentically “Vietnamese” than others — and it is “authenticity” that consumers yearn for. Authenticity, for the consumer, is purveyed by ethnic entrepreneurs who sell consumer-invented qualities of Vietnamese-ness (spicy, cheap, unsophisticated, foreign) as “... spice, [and] seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is otherwise mainstream white culture” (hooks 1992). Ethnic entrepreneurs, therefore, are racialized by consumers’ desire to eat authentic Vietnamese-ness as a way to sustain and enforce their identities as widely knowledgeable “cultured” people.

CHAPTER FIVE: ETHNIC ENTREPRENEUR STRATEGIES: INTERVIEWS WITH OWNERS & MANAGERS

Interview transcripts were coded with two overall themes looking at one, authenticity, and, two, entrepreneurship. I further included sub-themes of menu design, ingredient use, and dining room decor that illustrate MacCannell’s concept of “staged authenticity”. The “staged authenticity” model is used in other studies of “ethnic” restaurants: Chinese: Lu and Fine(1995); Thai: Germann Molz (2004); Japanese: Tanaka (2008) to unpack the construction of authenticity. The following strategies were identified and coded: pricing; location; and children’s involvement in the business’ continuity. From the final coding process, the following specific restaurant strategies emerged as key areas of discussion:

- Location Strategies: Chinatown versus Main(stream) Streets
- New Generation Managers: Operating Restaurants and Practising Cultural Identity
- Pricing Strategies: Contending with Cheap

Main Themes	Related Sub-Themes
Making location choices based on intended customer groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locating restaurant for Canadian customers in mainstream neighbourhoods from the beginning • Locating restaurant for co-ethnic customers at the beginning vs. later expansions in mainstream neighbourhoods • Expanding customer base from only co-ethnic customers
Parent and children dynamics surrounding children working in family restaurants in the present and future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent's teaching Vietnamese culture to children via restaurant work due to concerns with children's loss of cultural identity • Parents' hopes for children's future careers • Children’s role as managers and managerial changes
Owners dealing with cheapness by changing decor, menu, and prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pan-Asian menu implementation • Pricing with customer expectations

In the first section, a brief background of the Vietnamese restaurateurs interviewed details the commonalities of their career histories and motivations. The remainder of the chapter discusses the interview analysis, which focuses on the execution, rationale, and outcomes for the abovementioned three strategies as well as on the tactics owners use to “stage authenticity”. The analysis is complemented with contextual information gathered from the observations portion of the fieldwork process. The chapter concludes by bringing together the shared commonalities and misunderstandings between producers’ and consumers’ conceptualization of Vietnamese culinary culture.

5.1 VIETNAMESE RESTAURATEURS

For all of the entrepreneurs I spoke with, restaurant ownership was realized through years and years of savings attained often from working labour-intensive jobs after arriving in Canada. Many of the owners I spoke with recalled the long hours they and other family members worked in the early years of their restaurants. Most owners hired family members for reliability, but they also hired family members because they wanted to give jobs to unemployed or underemployed relatives,

We don’t start by assuming outside people are untrustworthy, but at the same time we rather give the job to family or someone we know. If they needed a job we would give it to them because we would be helping them out.

Eventually, family employees became managers as the businesses grew into multi-location restaurants across the Greater Toronto Area. Owners who purchased an existing restaurant similarly saved for many years to acquire enough capital to become owners. For all the entrepreneurs, it was the pursuit of ownership and a better life for themselves and their families that drove their ambitions. In light of their success most owners attribute their growing businesses to hard work and the support of their families.

Family-member managers are critical to the operation of Vietnamese restaurants that have expanded over the years. Often groomed and trained to work in the restaurant from the restaurants' early years, many of the responsibilities for the day-to-day operation of the restaurants are in the hands of these managers, even in scenarios where family members do not get along. Business partnerships with "outside" people were uncommon for owners with Vietnamese heritage, but the two owners with Chinese heritage sought formal business partnerships when opening their Vietnamese restaurants. It was not uncommon for owners to enter into partnerships after the success of their initial location as a growth strategy. While there may be a "mom and pop" vibe to most Vietnamese restaurants most operate with ownership structures that blend non-family financial partners with family-member restaurant managers.

Toronto's multi-location Vietnamese restaurants were established in the late '80s to early '90s by entrepreneurs that arrived in Canada as part of the initial wave of Vietnamese refugees. This group of entrepreneurs had a significant amount of help from family

members⁶ during the early years of operation, but sought partnerships with non-family business people to grow into multi-location enterprises. As a group of first-to-market restaurants, these restaurants added more locations to further establish their names in the GTA in the face of growing competition. In contrast, the single-location restaurants are not as well-established and are owned by more recent immigrants. These newer restaurants did not all rely on family help and not all of them are family-oriented businesses. From interviews with owners and managers, I found that assistance from family and length of time in Canada are the main indicators for the size and longevity of the businesses.

Nevertheless, it is through sweat equity that these owners and managers have escaped the menial labour jobs that they were relegated to when they arrived in Canada—it is through this same hard work that consumers in Toronto can “discover Vietnam”. Yet, it is this idea of discovering a faraway place here that complicates the ways owners negotiate their cultural identity alongside notions of authenticity. Owners and managers create and execute strategies through their interpretations of authenticity, and produce a restaurant landscape that is palatable to consumers, which may be at odds with their cultural identity. The following sections analyze and discuss the operational strategies Vietnamese restaurants use and the ways such strategies are part and parcel of constructing authenticity within Toronto’s restaurant landscape.

⁶One older owner had help from children and their spouses, while other owners, who are younger in comparison, had help from siblings and their spouses. Extended family members such as cousins are often hired as staff and not given managerial roles.

5.2 PRICING STRATEGIES: CONTENDING WITH CHEAP

Vietnamese cuisine in Toronto is synonymous with “cheap”. Vietnamese restaurants are often reviewed but unrated by guidebooks simply because their prices are not high enough. In the *Cheap Eats* guidebook Vietnamese restaurants are touted as places to get a plentiful amount of food inexpensively. Most dishes, ranging from appetizers to entrees, on Vietnamese menus are less than ten dollars; a few exceptions are shared dishes or those that include a large amount of seafood. While there are a handful of Vietnamese restaurants in the GTA that have pricier seafood dominant menus, they are not considered “typical” Vietnamese eateries. Nearly all consumers surveyed paid less than fifteen dollars, with most consumers paying between five and ten dollars for a meal. Since the typical Vietnamese *pho* restaurant in Toronto is considered inexpensive, Vietnamese cuisine, generally, is “cheap eats”.

Owners have raised menu prices, but most are hesitant to increase dishes by more than one dollar without having a strategy that is palatable to customers. They are anxious about customer apprehensions to paying more and consequently reduced patronage. Their hesitations are however not unfounded as most survey respondents would not pay more than the amount they usually pay for Vietnamese food. Some owners have exercised strategies to increase menu prices by introducing “non-Vietnamese” dishes in expanded pan-Asian menus, while others only make small increments that are consistent with similarly located competitors. The former strategy suggests that some “Asian” cuisines are valued more than others. The pricing strategies purveyors execute are informed by owners’

intentions to encourage consumers to better appreciate Vietnamese cuisine with their wallets.

5.2.1 PAN-ASIAN PRICES

The menus at Vietnamese restaurants are not always representative of purveyors' cultural identities and heritage; rather, they are part of a larger strategy to increase prices and cultural value of Vietnamese cuisine. One manager explains how her family's business uses the "Thai" menu as part of an overall pricing strategy:

I think with Thai food, it's at a higher price point, so people are used to paying. ... But it's not with Vietnamese food even though the ingredients are the same, and that's always been the case with Toronto... people were used to that, so we use it strategically [in our menu] to increase our prices. [W]hat it is, is getting Caucasians or non-Asians used to paying more, to accept that Vietnamese food is as good.

This tactic suggests that owners believe consumers' tastes are imbued with cultural power to produce and police which "Asian" cuisine is "cheap" and which is not. Overall, owners that serve a pan-Asian menu believe they can price dishes higher when compared to an only-Vietnamese menu. The rationale for the pan-Asian pricing strategy produces a racialized mapping of people in which some are more culturally valuable than others, but none is more valuable than the White mainstream consumer.

The pan-Asian menu pricing strategy demonstrates that everyday food politics are racialized. Vietnamese restaurants can easily serve up Thai and Chinese food with little hindrance to its legitimacy because purveyors are racialized as “Asian”. While owners claim that moving to pan-Asian menus has increased the price point of all their dishes, one manager admits that “we do get people who come in just for Thai, and I don’t think it’s good, it’s just that I just wasn’t as comfortable with it at the beginning, but now I’ve accepted it.” The pan-Asian menu pricing strategy has little to do with pricing; rather, owner’s execution of such a strategy and acceptance of its outcomes reifies the image of a single Asian identity.

Restaurants that have not shifted to a pan-Asian menu still serve a few stereotypical “Thai” dishes. Tracing the narratives for “Thai” food in the interviews, I found that almost unanimously, owners and managers stated that dishes such as Pad Thai and mango salad give customers more choice.

For example, you have a group with four people, and three people like Vietnamese food, but one people ask us ‘oh do you have the Thai food’, if we want to keep the four people, that why we serve like that. Yeah. We ask, what the Thai food you want. Salad, like mango salad, we do, we try that. Try, try, try, now, they love that.

The narrative above suggests that owners are willing to move in the direction of a pan-Asian menu for the sake of business. Owners often maintain that Thai, Chinese, and Vietnamese

food stem from the same basket of ingredients and share similar flavour profiles, “Thai and Chinese food are similar to Vietnamese, you know. But the Thai food is more spicy, that’s all.” By justifying a pan-Asian menu based on the idea that Thai, Chinese, and Vietnamese cuisines are almost the same, owners are actively contributing to the racialized construction of a single “Asian” identity.

5.2.2 THE PRICE OF DECOR

Decor for many Vietnamese restaurants is generally limited, with most owners in favour of practicality. While restaurants do undergo renovations to “keep up with styles”, it is uncommon that owners opt for overt exotic displays. After opening and closing many “cheap” Vietnamese restaurants, one entrepreneur gave up the colourful murals depicting palm trees and lotus ponds to open a new restaurant with upscale decor and higher prices.

I don’t want to do cheap Vietnamese food. Cause to me, Vietnamese food has the value. The cuisine is good, and if you want to do good Vietnamese food you have to invest labour, time, and brain, right. I try [to sell non-cheap Vietnamese food], but it hasn’t worked.

In resistance to the continually circulated idea that Vietnamese food *should* be cheap, this owner wants consumers to appreciate with their wallets the efforts that are put into making Vietnamese food. To represent the quality of the cuisine, owners part ways with the utilitarian furniture and exotic murals for “style”.

Despite changes and upgrades to decor, restaurant owners are hesitant about raising menu prices by too much for fear of losing customers. While owners want to make more money, they continue to re-circulate the idea of cheapness themselves:

When you're talking about Asian, cheap Asian food, you're talking about Ginger or... Green Mango, because they know more what they pay. They think like that, they know what they spend there. They look at my restaurant they don't know how much they'll spend here, how much it'll add up to spend in here. That concern prevents them from getting in the door.

Simply changing decor does not result in changing the attitudes people have about Vietnamese restaurant culture. By reiterating "Asian" food as cheap, owners counteract their pricing strategies and produce a racialized "Asian" identity with the quality of "cheap". The assumptions producers make about their customer's attitudes towards "fancy" Vietnamese restaurants re-inscribes "cheap" as the quality it should have.

5.2.3 PRICING STRATEGY OUTCOMES

The ways owners attempt to raise menu prices results in so much more than increased sales. Owners' use of upscale aesthetics to represent the high quality of their dishes, and to justify a higher than typical price point, is inconsistent with their attitudes about Vietnamese cuisine. They highlight their competitor's "cheapness", and justify their

business troubles by suggesting that consumers do not want non-cheap Vietnamese food, and consequently keep prices low. Such practices and attitudes only reinforce the idea that “authentic” Vietnamese food is cheap, and do nothing to actually change consumers’ attitudes about menu prices.

On the other hand, owners claim that the pan-Asian menu strategy has been effective at increasing menu prices. Lumping together Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai cuisines into one palatable pan-Asian menu, owners have been able to price Vietnamese dishes higher than their competitors—an indication that their strategy has been a success. The pan-Asian menu, however, is not just a smorgasbord of dishes, but a racialized commodification of culinary heritages. By serving “Asian” food, owners are actively marrying purveyors to a single identity of an “Asian Other” for the sake of business. The pricing strategies that owners create and deploy, despite their best intentions, end up constructing a racialized “Asian” identity instead.

5.3 NEW GENERATION MANAGERS: OPERATING RESTAURANTS AND PRACTISING CULTURAL IDENTITY

A new generation is a common theme that occurred when speaking with managers and owners of the oldest restaurants. Growing up in the West, “nothing is more universal as an expression of ethnicity, or more accessible, than food. For many, eating ethnic dishes may be the only way that they manifest their cultural backgrounds” (Halter 2002, 106). Unlike the mainstream customers that some of the restaurants have chosen to focus on, the earlier established restaurants in Chinatown, are more interested in appealing to the “new”

or “young” generations—that is, the next generation of their very first customers. “In the future our kids can enjoy our food and still remember where we come from. That’s why I decide to open Vietnamese pho in 1989,” expressed one owner. For some owners running a Vietnamese restaurant is not simply a business or career, but also a way to remind their children of their heritage and to maintain their cultural identity.

Restaurant managers expressed concerns about young Vietnamese people, like their own children, losing their culture, through their limited knowledge of the Vietnamese language. As one manager speaks about teaching her children the value of hard work, she inquired about my language facilities and emphasized the importance of language for the “new generation”:

Yeah, so, that’s why when they’re 16, maybe they work part time, they can learn more, and they learn Vietnamese, now the kids because they’re born here, just talking English, like you. This is important you know, when you know lots and lots of language, and it’s better for you. So I tell them to come here, and learn Vietnamese.

The restaurant, for her, is an expression of Vietnamese identity that she hopes the next generation of her family will continue. While she speaks of the importance of learning Vietnamese, the language, she is also evoking the importance of practising Vietnamese, the cultural identity, through language. Certainly for her, being a multiple linguist is important, but it is more important for her English-speaking children to practice Vietnamese identity.

During one of my visits to her family's restaurant, it dawned on me why she insisted the young generation learn many languages as a few of the restaurant servers were not speaking Vietnamese to each other, but rather, Mandarin and Cantonese. The earliest Vietnamese restaurants are commercial endeavours that also serve a more intimate purpose for owners and their family to sustain their cultural identity.

Restaurant owners as parents, as managers, and as entrepreneurs fulfill many roles in practising cultural identity. In one role they are working to give their children a better future while trying to nurture a sense of cultural roots, in another role they are working to sell a palatable cultural experience that is often inconsistent with their cultural identities. Owners use their restaurants to teach their children Vietnamese culture, but recalling their pan-Asian menu pricing activities, their restaurants represent a palatable and westernized form of "Asian" culture. Analyzing the ways "new generation" managers negotiates between continuing the family business and their own ambitions to execute business plans will demonstrate the contention owners have with different interpretations of cultural identity.

The family-run Vietnamese restaurants have divergent views on children's roles for business continuity. All owners want their children to acquire mainstream "experience"—social and cultural capital—by attending university and pursuing corporate or professional careers. Some owners believe their progeny will want to continue the family restaurant business stating that "I try to let my kids do the business—to... the next generation... so they grow up, and my kids will do very well in the future", even though the "next generation" manager's narrative suggested that "family guilt" solidified her decision to

return to the family business from a career in corporate finance. Such intergenerational tensions resonate with Song's (1999) study of Chinese family restaurants. The Vietnamese restaurant landscape, in part, is created by tenuous inter-generational relationships that manifest from the divergent ways the two generations negotiate their cultural identities.

5.3.1 ENGLISH-SPEAKING SERVICE

Owners who have begun transitioning their restaurant management to their children have given much leeway for the direction of the business. For one owner, the vast majority of the day-to-day operations and long term projects are already managed by her university-educated children. As such, the restaurants reflect the decisions and identities of her children. Renovations managed by the owner's children resulted in dining atmospheres geared towards younger customers, the "new generation". The hiring of English-speaking servers was also a part of the new managers' initiatives to better communicate and understand customers' needs, the owner explained. Whereas the owner preferred to communicate with customers and staff in Chinese and Vietnamese her children manage the restaurants mostly in English. The decision to operate in English, however, is both a method to evoke a "safe" experience for mainstream consumers to easily make contact with the Other, and a representation of the next generation owners' cultural identities.

In conjunction with English-speaking servers, the way in which customers order their meals has changed as owners' children take upon more restaurant responsibilities. Most restaurants leave order forms with the menus and customers are required to write down, check off, or circle the numbers that correspond to the dishes they want. Under the

directive of the new generation managers, servers take down customer orders and special requests and on occasion recommend dishes. The owner explained that now “I have to ask [the servers] to go ask the customer, if they like the food, ‘is everything ok’”, but she continues to chat with long-time regular customers in Vietnamese and Chinese. Overall, the owner and managers believe that verbally taking customer’ orders and using English to communicate with servers and customers has been good for business, particularly for growing their mainstream Canadian customer-base.

Restaurant owners are making use of their children’s education and workplace experiences, and particularly their English proficiencies, to tap into mainstream “Canadian” tastes for Vietnamese cuisine. While the family has been considered an important form of social capital for ethnic entrepreneurs (Sanders and Nee 1996), hiring Western-educated children demonstrates a similar but distinct form of social capital that is shaping the Vietnamese restaurant landscape. When owners opened their restaurants in the early 1980s their customers were “mostly Vietnamese people, and now, with word-by-mouth, a lot of Canadian, white people. They like our Vietnamese food now.” With new generation managers hiring English-speaking servers and changing the way customers order their meals, Vietnamese restaurant owners become less and less involved in the day-to-day operations of their businesses. Even though owners value their children’s contribution to the family business, new generation managers’ business ideas must be acceptable to the vast majority of consumers.

5.3.2 NEW GENERATION BUSINESS IDEAS

The contention one new generation manager has with her family about pursuing a different style of Vietnamese restaurant demonstrates the disconnection between operators' cultural identities and the "ethnicity" that restaurants portray. Practising traditional cultural identity is at odds with business aspirations because production and consumption work in tandem to construct Vietnamese culinary culture. As such, owners are not the only "owners" of Vietnamese culture and thus do not want to execute strategies that disrupt the ongoing construction of authenticity. As new generation managers become more involved with the family business, they struggle between their vision and their parents' satisfaction with the status quo. A forward-looking approach to the entrepreneurial aspirations of a new generation manager reveals the trouble between deploying invented notions of authentic Vietnamese and practising cultural identity through restaurant operation activities.

A new generation manager shares her idea for the future of her family's business and her hesitations about its success when considering the existing popular discourse on Vietnamese food. While consumers most commonly consider *pho* and *bun* dishes to be Vietnamese food, as these are the same dishes that are displayed most prominently on menus, and recommended most often by servers and reviewers, there are other dishes that she wants to focus on.

I have told my family I want to focus on really homemade, small, small, restaurant that's considered high-end and cater to umm... the mass

audience, like the mass market, but also be more homey and home-style. I feel the shift is going back to your you know, your youth, right. Everyone wants mac 'n cheese right, so with being the first generation here you make your own money and you want some [foods] from back home, you don't want to make it, but just want to go out for it. I've started to make stuff like the things I had at home when I young, things that my grandmother used to make, like the *thit kho*, the pork and the egg marinated...you just start craving things like that and you don't even realize. That's what sticks out in my head. Yea, it's stuff like that—I don't know if that would be mainstream.

Grappling with market trends and a mainstream audience, she is keen on practising an idea of tradition through the foods served. The home that she speaks of is not a distant Vietnam, but rather a distant many years growing up in Toronto. By wanting to bring traditional “home” foods to the restaurant, she negotiates Vietnamese-ness that spans generations and space, and yet she is undoubtedly vigilant about mainstream palatability. Even though the concept is about traditional Vietnamese cuisine, it is clear that she does not believe mainstream Canadian customers will find such foods palatable—as it may be *too* Other than what is currently served at Vietnamese restaurants.

Thit kho is pork belly and hard-boiled eggs stewed for a number of hours with soy sauce, caramelized sugar, and whole peppercorns. The use of pork belly with the fat and skin intact, and the brown colour of soy sauce is a stark contrast to the “spicy and fresh”

quality customers have attributed to Vietnamese cuisine. It is no wonder that a manager who believes Canadian customers like *bun* because they are fresh dishes would be hesitant about serving her grandmother's *thit kho*. Like all the other owners and managers I spoke with, this new generation manager negotiates her identity by navigating the roles she plays—daughter and new generation restaurant manager—which are in conflict with each other. Even though owners want their children to practice Vietnamese cultural identity by working at and managing the restaurants, the idea of serving *thit kho* comes with much hesitation in light of customer expectations.

The new business idea brought forth by this one new generation manager cannot speak to all young Vietnamese people broadly, but it does suggest that practising cultural identities are intertwined and at odds with restaurant business strategies. Another new generation manager negotiates her identity through food in a more direct fashion. While her family's restaurant caters heavily to "Caucasian" customers, she prefers to eat at restaurants where "mostly Vietnamese people [are] eating", and asserts that "Thai food is more tasty for 'non-Vietnamese' people, because it's sweeter and more like what they're used to." As such, the promotional lunch specials at her restaurant only include dishes from the Thai menu and not from the Vietnamese menu. By cropping and editing the dishes on their menus, owners and managers construct an authentic Vietnamese experience that balances the idea of an "Asian Other" with palatable forms of difference.

5.3.3 FAMILY-BUSINESS CONTINUITY STRATEGIES OUTCOMES

The strategies and ideas that have emerged from new generation manager's contribution to family-run Vietnamese restaurants demonstrates that Vietnamese culinary culture is produced by owners' and managers' interpretation of consumers' ideas of authenticity. Employing English-speaking servers, but expected to practice a Vietnamese cultural identity, new generation managers' negotiation of their identities are at odds with operation strategies. New managers are compelled to cater to mainstream tastes even though they actively believe that their restaurants do not represent the Vietnamese culinary culture they align themselves with. Despite the intentions new generation managers have to portray a Vietnamese culinary culture that resonates with their identity, their active reproduction of a palatable form of Vietnamese-ness instead suggests that the Vietnamese culinary landscape is shaped by multi-generations of managers that, over the course of the business' tenure, actively fashion their restaurants to target the mainstream Canadian market.

5.4 LOCATION STRATEGIES: CHINATOWN VERSUS MAIN(STREAM) STREETS

Ethnic entrepreneurial ventures are often considered to be part of enclave economies with close ties to co-ethnic customers and suppliers, and a respective "ethnic community". The trouble with the "enclave model" for ethnic businesses is that it does not account for entrepreneurs that target customers that are not part of the "ethnic community". Drawing from Light and Razin's research (1998) on the "interaction" of location and ethnicity and the propensities of groups to concentrate in specific niches in

specific cities, suggests that place is necessary to ethnic entrepreneurial pursuits. The customer-centric orientation of the restaurant business suggests that its geography is constitutive of consumers. The financial success of a Vietnamese restaurant, therefore, is contingent on the socio-cultural geography of its location.

The spatiality of ethnic business locations, and thus their strategies, is not consistent across ethnic groups or industries. Some ethnic entrepreneurs strategically locate their businesses in enclaves that have an already existing ethnic consumer market and available ethnic labour supply, such as Korean businesses in Los Angeles (Lee 1995). Other ethnic entrepreneurs demonstrate more spatially dispersed patterns of business outside existing enclaves for certain sectors. And even still, some ethnic groups, such as the Iranian business owners in Los Angeles (Light et al. 1994), despite having a high rate of self-employment, do not have spatial ethnic business clusters. Such varied patterns for ethnic businesses suggest that the “ethnic enclave” model co-exists with other forms of spatial strategies (Li 1998; Li 2009). Rather than focusing on the “ethnic” of ethnic business, an approach that considers business’ cultural and industrial identities in determining spatial outcomes of ethnic businesses is preferable.

Zhou’s study of Chinese professional service providers in Los Angeles found that “the spatial organization of ethnic firms reflects the interaction between ethnic entrepreneurs’ cultural and industrial identities” (1998, 248). Like any business owners, Vietnamese restaurateurs highly regard the adage “location, location, location” to represent the business’ identity. Restaurant owners made location choices based primarily on their intended target consumer, while ancillary reasons include proximity to other Vietnamese

restaurants, projected amount of foot traffic, propinquity to ethnic grocery suppliers, and cost of rent in relation to the business' budget. Vietnamese restaurants, like other service-oriented enterprises, sometimes strategically locate for purposes of recognition and integration with the mainstream (Zhou 1998). The Vietnamese restaurateurs in Toronto locate and fashion their restaurants based on the business identity they want to portray to consumers.

5.4.1 CHINATOWN

In Chinatown, where one would not find the “North American Chinese” menu, there are a “large number of restaurants serving fabulous Chinese food...from all parts of China, including Cantonese, Szechwan, Hunan, and northern China”, according to the City of Toronto’s⁷ description of the area. As Anderson’s (1987) research in Vancouver shows, Chinatowns reflect a mainstream concept of ethnicity that codifies the Other through difference. In Chinatown, street signs are in both Chinese and English, store signs are often in Chinese, Vietnamese, and English, and even mainstream banks include Chinese in their signage. Street stalls selling assorted “exotic” fruits and vegetables, further give the vibe of Otherness. Furthermore, Vietnamese restaurants in Chinatown are often portrayed as kitschy and gritty places for a delicious meal but an unsophisticated experience, which is interpreted and re-produced as characteristics that mark authentic Vietnamese restaurant experiences. Vietnamese restaurants located in Chinatown are perceived as authentic as a result of the way the neighbourhood is Othered.

⁷<http://www.toronto.ca/bia/chinatown.htm>, accessed March 10, 2011.

The early restaurants, located in Toronto's Chinatown West, were expressly targeting a Vietnamese and Chinese consumer, particularly the group of migrants who arrived as refugees following the end of the Vietnam War in the late 1970s. During the 1980s, many Vietnamese people ran their day-to-day errands, such as grocery shopping and buying other cultural products, in Chinatown even if they didn't live in the vicinity. In a number of interviews, restaurant owners and managers inquired about my family's arrival to Canada, and suggested that their first customers were people much like my parents and their families: "you can ask your mom, and ask around the young people, most people will know [our restaurant]". Chinatown, therefore, was an ideal location for the Vietnamese restaurants that opened in the 1980s. Even though the Chinatown restaurants remain in close proximity to their initial locations⁸, the owners have seen changes to their customer-base over the years.

Chinatown Vietnamese restaurant owners still describe their customers as mostly Chinese and Vietnamese, even though mainstream Canadians are also frequent customers. About ten to fifteen years ago owners started to notice increasingly more mainstream Canadian customers, and "now, *Canadian*, lots and lots of *Canadians* come here" [emphasis mine]. Owners credit the rise of mainstream Canadian customers to White consumers "finding out" about their good tasting dishes and subsequent circulation of the idea that Vietnamese food is tasty. Mainstream Canadian discovery of Vietnamese cuisine is likely driven by consumers' attitude about Toronto's diversity in dining. Chinatown is a culinary destination where folks can visit as "tourists" for "intentional, exploratory participation in

⁸ All the restaurant owners I interviewed in Chinatown have relocated their restaurants within a block of their original location

the foodways of an Other” (Long 2004, 26), and Vietnamese restaurants in Chinatown are part of culturally omnivorous tourists’ itineraries.

Owners who opened their restaurants in Chinatown had not intended to cater to mainstream Canadians. They chose Chinatown in order to be in proximity to ethnic grocery suppliers, and co-ethnic customers who frequented Chinatown to shop for everyday cultural products. Vietnamese restaurants’ Chinatown locations, however, facilitated the “discovery” of Vietnamese cuisine by mainstream Canadians. With more Vietnamese restaurants opening in Chinatown in response to growing demands by co-ethnic and mainstream consumers, existing owners believed that the location became too competitive to establish additional locations. Most of the Vietnamese restaurants in Chinatown are within a block of each other, if not across the street or right next door. As such, owners leveraged mainstream consumers’ taste for Vietnamese food by opening new restaurant locations in “non-ethnic” neighbourhoods.

5.4.2 MAIN(STREAM) STREETS

Unlike Chinatown where there is a dense concentration of Vietnamese restaurants, main streets are considered good locations because “there aren’t very many Vietnamese restaurants in the neighbourhood.” Owners of Chinatown restaurants that became popular with mainstream consumers established additional locations in mainstream neighbourhoods to grow their businesses. Mainstream neighbourhoods or main streets, in this sense, are places in Toronto where national and international brands also locate their shops—locales where enterprises such as Starbucks, and Shoppers Drug Mart operate

stores. Vietnamese restaurateurs' strategy to establish restaurants at main street addresses suggests their confidence in mainstream Canadians' continuing taste for Vietnamese cuisine.

The geography of Vietnamese restaurants' main street locations, with numerous "ethnic" restaurants, is reminiscent of Cook and Crang's (1996) description of London high streets where consumers can eat the *World on a Plate*. Main street Vietnamese restaurants are located by high-rise condominium—residential choice of urban upwardly mobile Canadians. By locating in mainstream neighbourhoods Vietnamese restaurant owners are bringing together the image of an "Asian Other" to that of a safe and familiar consumer locale. Owners open Vietnamese restaurants in mainstream neighbourhoods to satisfy consumers desire to eat foods different, but not *too* different, from their everyday meals without travelling to unfamiliar areas of the city, such as Chinatown.

Owners' choices of mainstream locations suggest that Vietnamese restaurant owners seek mainstream recognition. By operating alongside national and international brands, owners are conveying to consumers their commercial identity as a restaurant *for* "traditional Canadians".

Because I start at this location here, I would like to serve mostly the traditional Canadian, in that case I need to know what they enjoy, what type of food and how spicy they can handle. So it's different than Chinese restaurant, [and] little bit different than Vietnamese restaurant.

Location strategies are determined by the type of customers restaurateurs want to sell their foods to. Owners actively choose main street addresses, and adjust the level of literal and cultural “spice” accordingly, to differentiate their restaurants from others that compete for the patronage of co-ethnic customers.

5.4.3 OUTCOMES OF LOCATION STRATEGIES

Vietnamese restaurant owners identified business growth in the mainstream Canadian market as a way to contend with growing competition in Chinatown. Even though some owners initially intended to cater to the tastes of migrants from Vietnam, a larger market of mainstream consumers with tastes for eating difference enticed many owners to establish restaurants in mainstream neighbourhoods. Pho Hung, the most mentioned favourite restaurant from the consumer questionnaire, has a Chinatown location that represents their cultural identity and a second location on Bloor Street, in the mainstream Yorkville neighbourhood, represents their business identity as catering to mainstream consumers. By maintaining an “original” Chinatown location, and additionally operating a main street location, restaurant owners strategically construct authenticity by blending the notion of a “culturally pure” Asian Other with Western palatability under one commercial moniker. On the other hand, purveyors with only main street locations cannot use affiliation with an enclave location to produce Vietnamese-ness, but they employ methods to “stage authenticity”.

5.5 STRATEGIES TO STAGE AUTHENTICITY

Staged authenticity, as MacCannell (1976) introduced, is the ways owners of experiential places, such as restaurants, make everyday activities, such as eating, into experiences of something more. A Vietnamese restaurant, in this sense, is a concocted staging of Vietnamese-ness. According to MacCannell's (1976) framework, a culinary tourist seeking authenticity from a restaurant is never truly experiencing authenticity as they are being fooled by the techniques of staging. Nevertheless, owners create menus, ingredients, and decor to generate a sense of authenticity by highlighting features to explicitly evoke Otherness. Such methods of staging authenticity differentiate the experience of eating Vietnamese from everyday eating.

5.5.1 DECOR

Some Vietnamese restaurants utilize their interiors to stage authenticity; particularly when their target consumers are non-Vietnamese folks. Restaurant owners incorporate bamboo-like panels, Buddha statues in spirit alters, and displays of tropical fruits to project an image of an exotic Asian destination. One owner sought to "improve" the dining room of an acquired Vietnamese restaurant by creating light shades from pointed straw hats. By using stereotypical symbols of Asian-ness, purveyors create an atmosphere that engenders an experience that reflects consumer's perception of Vietnamese-ness. The decor restaurants use does not necessarily reflect Vietnamese culture, but this may be inconsequential because most consumers surveyed do not claim to be very familiar with the

culture. As such, props that convey an image of tropical East Asia is used to stage authenticity.

Some aspects of restaurant decor are overtly props, while the spirit alters, which are placed close to the cash register, seem to be more for the purveyors than for the patrons. The spirit alters with offerings of fresh fruit, incense, and small cups of tea indicate that they are usually replenished by owners.

My mom is really superstitious. We have these Buddhist religious rituals every month, and sometimes she goes to the restaurant early and throws rice in the corners of the restaurant. We also have a salt rock by the register, and old Chinese coins in the register. They're supposed to bring good luck to the business.

The spirit alters are not quite "on stage", but rather are closer to the supposedly more authentic back region because they are not necessarily on display for customers (Germann Molz 2004). Some decorations are not for the benefit of customers, but they, nonetheless, can be part of a restaurant's authenticity.

5.5.2 INGREDIENTS & MENUS

Beyond decor, representations of food are used to stage authenticity in Vietnamese restaurants. Menus are designed to portray just enough Otherness to satisfy their customer's desire for authenticity, but not so much as to seem unsafe or overly foreign.

Similarly, ingredients are carefully selected to give customers a taste of literal and metaphorical “spice”. Owners selectively curate ingredients and dishes that would indicate Vietnamese-ness but not scare away mainstream customers, particularly if such customers are their chosen target market.

The chilli pepper is a symbol of authentic Vietnamese cooking, as it is used in menus to indicate spice levels. The chilli pepper can also be found in small bowls placed on dining tables for—perhaps, daring— customers to add extra heat to their meals. Most dishes listed in Vietnamese menus, however, are or can be served mild without chillies, and usually it is up to the customer to add spice from the different types of chilli sauces available on their table.

... [T]his is Canada right! If I make it too traditional maybe they don't like it. Because there put a lot of herbs and some kinds of spicy in there right, so there's some really strong flavours in there, that's why I make it a bit fusion reduce a little bit of the risk.

In this way, restaurant owners can use chillies to create authenticity and still serve foods that are palatable to mainstream Canadians. Owners' practice of selectively choosing dishes and ingredients that would appeal to mainstream consumers is critical to the establishment's financial success and positive customer reception of the restaurant.

On the other hand, ingredients that may scare off Westerners are omitted. The plate of garnishes that accompany *pho* frequently does not include the herb *ngò gai*, which has a

strong cilantro flavour. The herb, known as “fish mint” or *diếp cá*, is also rarely used in Vietnamese restaurant cooking, but often sold in Vietnamese grocers. These herbs, along with other ingredients such as pork blood jelly, are considered by owners as unpalatable to mainstream Canadian customers. Even though from the owners’ perspectives, the omitted ingredients reflect Vietnamese-ness, owners believe that serving such foods to mainstream Canadians is too “risky” for business.

In addition to ingredients served and *not* served, Vietnamese restaurant menus portray the Otherness of Vietnamese cuisine and simultaneously provide a safe experience to consume Otherness. The easiest approach to authenticity on menus is the use of the native language, in this case Vietnamese. The extent to which Vietnamese is used on the menus varies by restaurants’ location and owner’s judgement of their customers. Chinatown restaurants list all menu items in Vietnamese and Chinese, with English explanation of the dishes’ ingredients and garnishes; however, one restaurant’s take-out version of their menu is English-only, suggesting that take-out customers and sit-down customers may not be the same. Main street Vietnamese restaurants are more likely to use Vietnamese keywords rather than the full Vietnamese name of the dish—for example, words like *pho*, and *bun*, followed by descriptive phrases “beef noodle soup” or “with grilled chicken” in English. Authenticity is evoked by the use of Vietnamese in a way that is easily understood by consumers.

Menus are also used to reinforce the notion of “exoticness” by highlighting the Vietnamese-ness of certain ingredients and dishes. *Pho* “specials” that are described with ingredients like tendon, tripe, and rare beef always appear at the very top or bottom of

menus for emphasis and to highlight difference between other *pho* options that include “ordinary” ingredients, such as chicken and cooked sirloin. Such “special” *pho* dishes are sometimes named after the restaurant to indicate that such dishes should be ordered for the restaurant’s most authentic eating experience. For mainstream Canadians owners like to recommend,

the vermicelli, because it’s light, a lot of Caucasians are a bit more health conscious so something light that doesn’t weigh you down, and it’s not over-filling, and that usually works out. And <laugh> there’s always the *pho* too.

It is no surprise then, that most survey respondents stated *pho* and *bun* as their favourite Vietnamese dishes. As a result, such dishes are also the ones that are pictured in most the menu indicating that there is an understanding between producers and consumers on what Vietnamese food is.

In addition to making recommendations, owners include photographs of dishes to manage consumer expectations of the way their meal will look like when it is served. Photographs demonstrate to mainstream customers that Vietnamese food is *different* than their everyday meals but has all the familiarity of typical “Asian” foods (i.e. spring rolls, and noodles). Pictures and descriptions of exotic ingredients emphasize authenticity through difference, particularly as consumers reported that they eat Vietnamese food *because* it is different from their usual meals. Owners stage authenticity using menu design tactics to

simultaneously demonstrate Vietnamese food as exotic but made palatable to Canadian tongues.

5.5.3 OUTCOMES OF STAGING AUTHENTICITY STRATEGIES

Owners' use of decor, menu design, and ingredients selection are purposeful acts that construct *and* stage authenticity. They are aware that they are representing their own interpretations of mainstream Canadian conception of Vietnamese-ness. As they "stage" authenticity, they also actively construct it because in order to create the stage they must make sense of what consumers expect from a Vietnamese eating experience. In this vein, the authenticity of Vietnamese restaurants is negotiated between producers and consumers (Lu and Fine 1995). Authenticity, therefore, is not an accurate or "true" depiction of Vietnamese culture, but rather a Western image of what Vietnamese-ness *is* or ought to be.

The image of what Vietnamese-ness ought to be is a package of ideas and symbols that stereotypes the "Asian Other". Authenticity is a social invention taking into account aesthetic differences that are continually displayed and re-interpreted in a circular fashion between producers and consumers. All owners deploy authenticity by determining Vietnamese-ness from the consumers' viewpoint even when it is not the same way they conceive of Vietnamese-ness. The authenticity of Vietnamese cuisine is effectively a circulation of a combination of racialized stereotypes of the "Asian Other" and stereotypical symbols of Vietnamese-ness.

5.6 CONSUMERS AND PRODUCERS AT A COMMON DINING TABLE

Producers and consumers meet at a common dining table in their conceptions of Vietnamese culinary culture, but producers continue to metaphorically bend over backwards to serve consumers' expectations. Both groups underscore authenticity and Vietnamese-ness as qualities for successful Vietnamese restaurants, even though they make use of such social constructions for different benefits. Even as both groups conceptualize Vietnamese culinary culture with authenticity and Vietnamese-ness, there are also misunderstandings between the two groups on their interpretations of these attributes. Nevertheless, the stories from both groups are equally important to their discursive relationship, and consequently to the production of Toronto's Vietnamese restaurant landscape.

Consumers and producers both create Vietnamese-ness and authenticity, but for different benefits. Producers execute strategies that reinforce consumers' ideal of what Vietnamese-ness is or should be for the sake of making profits and growing their businesses. By executing strategies based on rationalized assumptions of consumers' expectations of Vietnamese-ness, the Vietnamese restaurant landscape is often at odds with the ways producers practice their own cultural identity. On the other hand, consumers eat Vietnamese cuisine in order to use their knowledge and experiences of Vietnamese-ness as cultural capital to reinforce their widely "cultured" identities. An example is consumers' expectation of "authentic" Vietnamese food to be light, fresh, and spicy (i.e. *bun*) that is reciprocated by producers' emphasis of such dishes in their menus, despite producers conceptualizing Vietnamese-ness with other dishes, such as *thit kho*. Producers and

consumers, therefore, have a mutual understanding of Vietnamese-ness and authenticity that is centered on consumers' tastes and expectations.

Ideas and expectations are also often misunderstood and lost in translation between producers and consumers. Producers' use of pan-Asian menus and decor upgrades to expunge the cheap eats perception of Vietnamese cuisine demonstrates that they realize the consumer value of eating across various ethnic cultures, but they also reflect, by contrast, cheapness upon the Vietnamese restaurants that do not echo a similar aesthetic. Consumers, therefore, continue to associate cheapness with Vietnamese-ness to (re)construct authenticity. Consumers' attitudes and opinions of pan-Asian restaurants, however, are beyond the scope of this study; research on pan-Asian consumption practices is necessary to further understand the Vietnamese restaurant landscape.

The discursive relationship between consumers and producers demonstrates that the Vietnamese restaurant landscape is a social construction premised on cultural exchanges that seek to create a place *for* consumer to reinforce their culturally omnivorous identity and status by interacting with an "Asian Other". There is no opportunity for genuine cultural exchanges between consumers and producers, rather, their exchanges continue to re(produce) consumer expectations of Vietnamese-ness and authenticity. It is ironic, then, that owners prescribe to their children restaurant work as a way to practice a Vietnamese cultural identity. The Vietnamese-ness that is continually practiced in Vietnamese restaurants is a package of racialized ideas and stereotypical symbols that diminishes the possibility of producers and consumers sitting at a common table to participate in genuine cultural exchanges.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Studies on consumption, from food to fashion, allow us to understand the uneven power relations in our social engagements with people and things. Academic researchers have centred their commentaries of “ethnic” food geographies around international brands of “Indian” cooking dressings, “Caribbean” chilli sauces in the United Kingdom, and American “Thai” restaurants, for example. Few studies focus on food cultures in Canada, and none specifically addresses the geography of Vietnamese culinary culture. I designed this study to examine the cultural geography of this popular cuisine as a discursive story of consumers and producers with empirical data from consumer questionnaires and interviews with purveyors. The construction of Vietnamese culinary culture was unpacked to demonstrate the explicit issues of Othering and racialization through eating and selling. My research contributes to the understanding that Vietnamese food culture is unevenly constructed by both consumers and producers through the circulation of invented cultural qualities.

To say that Vietnamese restaurant owners and managers are only racialized by all-dominant mainstream consumers is too simple and dualistic. Culturally omnivorous consumers indeed are “eating the Other” to attain experiential knowledge that is used to distinguish their sophistication for different cultures. Indeed, such cultural omnivores conceptualize Vietnamese-ness and authenticity through racialized practices that mark differences upon the Other. The results of my research, however, show that *both* consumers and producers confer numerous complex meanings through their dining and commercial activities, respectively. Vietnamese restaurant purveyors reify the image of an

Asian identity and culture by emphasizing *consumer-expected* stereotypical notions of authentic Vietnamese-ness not only for the sake of business success, but also for a myriad of intimate family-oriented reasons inter-related to their commercial fruitions. Often, restaurateurs are ambivalent about their entrepreneurial activities because in many ways such activities contradict their own sense of cultural identity. Consumers are keen to demonstrate their acquired tastes for Vietnamese cuisine even though many do not believe they are very familiar with Vietnamese culture. Both consumers and producers, therefore, invent Vietnamese-ness and authenticity through racialized practices for their own benefit, but it is the producers who believe they must feed consumers racialized expectations because their restaurants are connected to their livelihood.

Without empirical data from questionnaires and interviews I would not have been able to tease out the complexities of “ethnic” culinary culture. For example, intergenerational relationships and family continuity strategies are intertwined with customer expectations of Vietnamese-ness and identity politics of both parents and children. I hope to have provided a possible way to work through entrepreneurial strategies of Vietnamese restaurants to more fully understand the power relationship between consumers and producers of Vietnamese culinary culture in Toronto and, as Crang contends, give “readers (and other audiences) some sense-making to do, so they can get more involved, put more of themselves into the picture” (2006, 662).

Such an ethnographic approach, however, is not without limitations. First, my positionality as an educated student and consumer with a Chinese and Vietnamese background connects my own politics to this thesis in a very personal way. Second, the use

of convenience sampling for the questionnaires yielded a group of mostly young and highly educated respondents that does not reflect fully the demographics of Toronto, but rather a relatively well-off subset. Third, despite my Vietnamese and Chinese background, many interviewees saw me as an “outsider” due to my level of education and relatively young age, leaving for the possibility that many things were left unsaid. I do not denounce my own power and politics in the research and writing process of this thesis, but I believe it is important for the audience to be considerate of my *and* their own positionalities in their reading and interpretations as they put themselves into the picture.

Even as this project has generated important findings connecting issues of race, consumption, production, and place, it has stirred up many more questions. While the focus of this research is centred on Vietnamese culinary culture, I cannot neglect the times consumers and purveyors mentioned “Asian” or “pan-Asian” cuisine. What if I asked consumers about such cuisines as well? How would it have changed the reported discursive relationship between customers and purveyors? And where does *kim chi banh mi*⁹ fit in? Most owners and managers connect the success of their restaurants to their families and the well-being of their children, however, I chose to only interview owners or managers, but most children were too young to be managers and only worked at the restaurants occasionally. How would their stories compare to their parents? Further research could give a hearty attempt at answering or challenging such questions, but for now it is just food for thought.

⁹ A new restaurant in Toronto, named Banh Mi Boys Sandwich Shop, is serving *banh mi* with a myriad of new ingredients, such as *kim chi*, and duck *confit*

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APPENDIX ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTED TO CONSUMERS

Toronto's Food Culture and Entrepreneurship – The Vietnamese Restaurant Landscape

My name is Nancy Huynh and I am an MA candidate at Queen's University department of Geography. My research project explores food culture and entrepreneurialism in Toronto. The following online questionnaire is significant to my research, and I am looking for people who would be willing to take 5-10 minutes to contribute to the research. All responses are important contributions to my academic research and I appreciate the time and effort you have taken in completing the questionnaire. As a token of appreciation, you may choose at the end of the questionnaire to opt into a draw for the following prizes:

- \$55 to Chapters-Indigo
- \$30 to Starbucks
- \$20 to Tim Horton's

There are no known risks in participation. Your decision to complete and submit answers to this questionnaire will be interpreted as an indication of your consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time by closing your browser window. You may skip questions that you find objectionable (do not want to answer). Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data and no personal or restaurant names or locations will ever be published in research articles or presentations. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and university policies. If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at nhuynh@gmail.com or the General Research Ethics Board at Chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Section One

In this section I'm interested in gathering some basic geographic and socio-economic data about you. This information is confidential and will be only used for the purposes of this academic study.

1. Where did you find out about this survey? [radio buttons]
 - a. Online posting (e.g., Craigslist)
 - b. Email
 - c. At a restaurant: Specify Name of Restaurant [text box]
 - d. Other: Please Specify [text box]
2. In what part of the GTA do you live in? (North York, Brampton, etc)
 - a. [text box]

3. What is your postal code?
 - a. [text box]

4. In what year were you born?
 - a. [text box]

5. You identify as: [radio buttons]
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

6. What are the ethnic or cultural origins of your ancestors?
 - a. [text area box]

7. Were you born in Canada? [radio buttons]
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

8. If No to question 7, what is your country of birth?
 - a. [text box]

9. If No to question 7, what year did you immigrate to Canada?
 - a. [text box]

10. Are you presently [radio buttons]
 - a. Employed Full-Time
 - b. Employed Part-Time
 - c. Employed (unpaid)
 - d. Unemployed
 - e. Student
 - f. Retired

11. How many people are in your household?
(If living by yourself or with roommates, state 1)
 - a. [drop down, ascending, 1-10]

12. What is your total **Household** income from all sources [drop down]
 - a. Less than 25,000
 - b. 25,000 - 49,999
 - c. 50,000 – 74,999
 - d. 75,000 – 99,999
 - e. 100,000 or more

13. What is your education level? [drop down]
- a. Some High school
 - b. Completed High school
 - c. Some college
 - d. Completed College
 - e. Some University
 - f. Completed University
 - g. Post Graduate Degree (i.e. Masters, PhD, MBA)
-

Section Two

In this section, I am interested in learning about your eating out behaviours.

1. When choosing a restaurant to eat at, I tend to choose (check all that apply): [check boxes]
- a. The most convenient
 - b. An ethnic restaurant
 - c. Something quick and inexpensive
 - d. A restaurant recommended by someone you know
 - e. A restaurant recommended by food critics in a magazine or newspaper
 - f. Somewhere where I have had a previous positive experience
 - g. Other: Please Specify [text box]
2. How often do you eat out for **dinner**? [drop down]
- a. Less than once a month
 - b. Once or twice a month
 - c. Once or twice a week
 - d. 3 -4 times a week
 - e. Daily
3. How often do you eat out for **lunch**? [drop down]
- a. Less than once a month
 - b. Once or twice a month
 - c. Once or twice a week
 - d. 3 -4 times a week
 - e. Daily
4. In a typical month, I will eat the following foods (check all that apply): [check box]
- a. Chinese
 - b. Japanese
 - c. Indian

- d. Vietnamese
 - e. Thai
 - f. Italian
 - g. French
 - h. Mexican
 - i. Other: Specify As Many as You'd like [text box]
5. Have you eaten Vietnamese food? [radio buttons]
- a. Yes
 - b. No
6. If No to Question 5, skip to **Section 3** [hyperlink to section 3]
7. If Yes to Question 5:
- a. How often do you eat Vietnamese food? [drop down]
 - i. More than twice a week
 - ii. Once or twice a week
 - iii. Once or twice a month
 - iv. Less than once a month
 - v. About once a year or less
8. Where have you eaten Vietnamese food? [check boxes]
Check all that apply
- a. At home
 - b. At a Vietnamese restaurant
 - c. At a Pan Asian restaurant (?)¹⁰[Hover over (?) to explain]
 - d. At a Fusion restaurant
 - e. Other: Please Specify [text box]
9. Where do you **usually** eat Vietnamese food? [check boxes]
Check all that apply
- a. At home
 - b. At a Vietnamese restaurant
 - c. At a Pan Asian restaurant (?) [Hover over (?) to explain]
 - d. At a Fusion restaurant
 - e. Other: Please Specify
10. You usually eat Vietnamese food: [radio buttons]
- a. As a breakfast meal
 - b. As a lunch meal

¹⁰ A Pan Asian restaurant is a restaurant that offers a variety of Asian cuisines (i.e. Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian) on the same menu

- c. As a dinner meal
- d. As a snack during the day
- e. As a snack during the evening/night

11. Who do you usually eat Vietnamese food with? [check boxes]

Check all that apply:

- a. Family
- b. Friends
- c. Colleagues/Co-Workers
- d. Just myself

12. What is your favourite Vietnamese restaurant? [text box]

13. Have you cooked Vietnamese food? [drop down]

- a. Yes, Often
- b. Yes, Sometimes
- c. Yes, Once or Twice
- d. Never

Section Three

In this section I'm interested in knowing what your attitudes are towards Vietnamese food and restaurants, **even if you may not have eaten Vietnamese food before.**

1. Do you think Vietnamese food tastes good? [radio buttons]

- a. Yes
- b. No

i. Please explain your answer to Question 1 [text area box]

2. When eating at a Vietnamese restaurant, on average how much did each meal cost per person? [radio buttons]

- a. N/A. Never or Nearly never ate at Vietnamese restaurants
- b. Less than 5 dollars
- c. 5-9.99 dollars
- d. 10-14.99 dollars
- e. 15-29.99 dollars
- f. 20-29.99 dollars
- g. 30 dollars or more

3. Rate the following statements from 1-5 where

1. Disagree; 2. Somewhat Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Somewhat Agree; 5. Agree [radio buttons]

Statement	1. Disagree	2. Somewhat Disagree	3. Neutral	4. Somewhat Agree	5. Agree
I get a good value for what I pay when eating at Vietnamese restaurants					
Restaurant decor matters to me when eating at a Vietnamese restaurant					
I think Vietnamese restaurants have good service					
Vietnamese restaurants are unclean					
I find that Vietnamese food is exotic					
I eat Vietnamese food because it's different from my everyday food					
Vietnamese food is inexpensive					
I would pay more than what I usually pay for Vietnamese food					
It matters to me where I eat					
Toronto has a good diversity of restaurant choices					
Getting good service at a restaurant is important to me					
Atmosphere matters to me when eating out at a Vietnamese restaurant					
I am familiar with					

Vietnamese culture					
I feel that Vietnamese restaurants accurately represent Vietnamese culture					

4. In what context would you **NOT** have Vietnamese food? [check boxes]

Check all that apply.

- a. With someone I don't know well
- b. With someone I have recently met
- c. With close friends
- d. With family
- e. With colleagues or coworkers
- f. Other: Please Specify
- g. None of the above

5. Please explain why you would not have Vietnamese food in the contexts chosen above.

[text area box]

6. In What context would you **NOT** have Vietnamese food? [check boxes]

Check all that apply.

- a. A date with a significant other
- b. A birthday celebration
- c. A business meeting
- d. A meeting with friends
- e. None of the above

7. Please explain why you would not have Vietnamese food in the contexts chosen above.

[text area box]

8. What is your favourite Vietnamese dish and why? [text area box]

Please skip this question if you feel it does not apply to you

Section Four

In this section, I am interested in knowing about attitudes towards Vietnamese-run businesses

1. Rate the following statements from 1-5 where

1. Disagree; 2. Somewhat Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Somewhat Agree; 5. Agree [radio buttons]

Statement	1. Disagree	2.	3.	4.	5. Agree
-----------	-------------	----	----	----	----------

		Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	
Vietnamese business owners are hardworking					
Vietnamese people are generally hardworking					
Vietnamese businesses have good service					
I like the decor in most Vietnamese restaurants I've been to					
Most Vietnamese restaurants are run by Vietnamese immigrants					

2. Please rank the importance of the following when choosing a Vietnamese restaurant from 1-5

1. Most Important ... 5. Least Important [drop down, dynamic remove number from list when previously chosen]

- a. Price [drop down, 1-5]
- b. Location [drop down, 1-5]
- c. Authenticity [drop down, 1-5]
- d. Atmosphere/Look and Feel [drop down, 1-5]
- e. Service [drop down, 1-5]

3. What does 'Immigrant Entrepreneurship' mean to you?

Section Five

Almost done!

1. Are you interested in entering into a draw for the following prizes?

- [insert list of prizes]

- a. Yes
- b. No

If you answered **Yes**, please submit your email address.

Your email address will not be use for any purposes outside of this academic study.

[text box]

Thank You Screen

Thank you for participating in my questionnaire, your contributions will be very helpful to understanding food culture in Toronto. Feel free share this questionnaire with anyone who might be interested.

APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH PURVEYORS

Topic of Discussion: Experiences in starting and operating Vietnamese restaurants in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

Participants Involved: Owners of Vietnamese restaurants in the GTA

Type of Interview: Semi-Structured, Open-ended. Will be chatting on the abovementioned topic, where a number of the questions in this schedule will be asked.

Length of Interview: Approximately 30-45 minutes, with an upper limit of 1 hour.

QUESTIONS

1. How long has this (your) restaurant been in business?
 - a. Did you start the business or did you purchase the business from a previous owner?
2. What is your role in this business?
3. Do you own or operate other businesses than this one?
 - a. What kind of businesses are they?
4. Can you tell me how you started your restaurant business?
 - a. Why did you choose to locate your restaurant here?
 - b. Can you please describe your typical customer?
 - i. Have you thought about attracting other types of customers?
 - c. Can you please describe your customers?
 - d. Why did you decide to open a restaurant business instead of working for another business or company?
 - e. What were your reasons for opening a Vietnamese restaurant?
 - f. What is the best part about owning and operating your business?
5. Do you think it is difficult for immigrants to start businesses in Toronto?
 - a. How did you come to believe (think) that?
 - b. Why do you believe (think) that?
 - c. What do you think would make starting and operating a business easier for immigrants?
6. If you immigrated to Canada now (this year), would you still choose to start a Vietnamese restaurant business?

What do you know now that would have been helpful to know when you first opened your restaurant?

APPENDIX THREE: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Toronto's Food Culture and Entrepreneurship – The Vietnamese Restaurant Landscape

My name is Nancy Huynh and I am an MA candidate at Queen's University in the Department of Geography. My thesis explores Toronto's food culture and entrepreneurship in the restaurant industry. I am particularly interested in Vietnamese cuisine and eating out at Vietnamese restaurants, as a case study. Interviews are a significant part of my research process that will provide insight into how entrepreneurship, food, and geography are connected.

I am seeking individuals that would be willing to contribute to my research by participating in an interview that will take approximately **one hour** to complete.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you find objectionable (do not want to answer) or make you feel uncomfortable. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed by me, the researcher, for accuracy and storage. After the completion of my thesis, all data and materials from your participation will be destroyed according to Queen's University General Ethics Board guidelines. There are no known risks to participation in this study. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and university policies.

You may withdraw from the study at anytime. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all material from your participation up until your decision to withdraw will be destroyed.

All responses are kept strictly confidential and your identity will not be disclosed in any written material resulting from the study. The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at academic and professional conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality.

A summarized report of my research findings will be provided for you at the completion of my study (next summer).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in this study please contact me at 289-339-9726, nancy.huynh@queensu.ca; my supervisor, Dr. Audrey Kobayashi, at 613-533-3035, kobayasi@queensu.ca; or Queen's University General Ethics Board at 613-533-6000, ext. 74025.

After having read the information and details stated on Page 1, I have agreed to participate in an interview to be conducted by Nancy Huynh. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and request any additional information I wanted about this study. All information that I provide will be held in confidence, and I will not be identified by name in the thesis or any summary reports without explicit consent. By supplying my signature below I am confirming that I understand the expectations and requirements being asked of me. I am also confirming that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will keep a copy of this letter and consent form for my records.

Participant Name: _____

I agree to be audio recorded (initials) _____

I DO NOT agree to be audio recorded (initials) _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date

(DD/MM/YYYY): _____

APPENDIX FOUR: RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL

June 22, 2010

Nancy Huynh
Master's Candidate
Department of Geography
Mackintosh-Corry Hall, Room D201
Queen's University

GREB REF#: GGEO-103-10

Title: "Toronto's Food Culture and Entrepreneurship – The Vietnamese Restaurant Landscape"

Dear Nancy:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "**Toronto's Food Culture and Entrepreneurship – The Vietnamese Restaurant Landscape**" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB; of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available on webpage <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> – Adverse Event Report Form). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at <http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> - Research Ethics Change Form. These changes must be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Mrs. Irving will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,



Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Audrey Kobayashi, Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Beverly Mullings, Chair, Unit REB
Joan Knox, Department Administration

JS/II



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