

The Unwelcome Dinner

Hosted by Henry Tsang

Roedde House Museum
Vancouver, BC
February 24, 2017

A Centre A Production

The Unwelcome Dinner commemorates the 130th anniversary of Vancouver's first anti-Chinese riot in Vancouver with a series of speakers and thematic menu that will catalyze conversation about the conditions surrounding the founding of this city to reflect on what has changed since then, and what attitudes and values that exist today that are eerily similar.

In 1887, just a few months after the incorporation of the City of Vancouver, white labourers arrived in Coal Harbour to drive out the Chinese crew brought in to clear the area of what would later become the West End. The mob attacked the workers, drove them away from their camp, then continued on to Chinatown where they looted homes and set fire to buildings. This event was but one of many acts of anti-Asian violence that moved north along the west coast, from San Francisco to Seattle and Tacoma, reflecting a growing sentiment among European workers and settlers who wanted to build a nation that excluded those whose values, religions and even hygiene were considered to be incompatible with their own. This was the time of the White Canada movement, the Asiatic Exclusion League, and the growth of racist legislations targeting those of Chinese, Japanese, Indian descent and indigenous peoples.

Local activist Hayne Wai will talk about the institutional racism that the Chinese have confronted since that time, raising questions about who has the right to call this place home. Hua Foundation Executive Director Kevin Huang will address how historical awareness and cultural traditions relate or conflict with contemporary and youth culture among Chinese Canadians and beyond. Food critic Stephanie Yuen will speak about the development and representation of Chinese cuisine in the city. And local acclaimed chefs Wesley Young and Jacob Deacon Evans have created a thematically-related menu that creates a conversation between the cultures and cuisines that seldom took place during the first century of Vancouver's history.

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Situated in the Roedde House Museum, this event is informed by the building's idealized heritage character that reflects a period of Vancouver's history that is under increasing pressure from real estate development. The Queen Anne revival style home was built six years after the riots in the former forest that the Chinese labourers were later brought back to remove. Gustave Roedde was a German immigrant who was Vancouver's first bookbinder. The family was in some ways typical of the local nouveau middle class, with their Chinese houseboy Hung, but different from the Scottish and English merchants who drank whisky instead of wine, and tea rather than coffee. It was with this cultural difference in mind that the menu and drink list was developed, influenced also by archival menus from the late 1800s in Vancouver.

The Unwelcome Dinner invokes an opportunity to explore the 1887 riot as part Canada's 150th birthday as a country. In this sesquicentennial year, what is being "celebrated"? Is it the long history of actions employing violence and legislation to disenfranchise and exclude peoples in the name of nation-building? Is it the recent Foreign Buyers Tax by the provincial government responding to the hysteria of Mainland Chinese investment capital flooding the Vancouver housing market? Is it the resurgence of racist political rhetoric urging restrictive immigration policies and the curtailing of human rights, this time targeting Muslims as potential terrorists or just simply "incompatible" with "Canadian culture"? What biases or prejudices are normative today that bear an uncanny resemblances to the injustices of the past, will be seen as obviously unjust in the near future?

Bios:

Jacob Deacon-Evans and **Wesley Young** are both Vancouver-born London-trained chefs. Jacob has worked at Bishop's, West, Wildebeest and l'Autre Pied. Wesley has worked at the Four Seasons, Tom Aikens, C, West, Wildebeest and is Executive Chef at PiDGiN.

Kevin Huang is a co-founder and Executive Director of Hua Foundation which supports Chinese-Canadian youth to participate in social and environmental change by connecting our shared values, diverse culture, and heritage.

Henry Tsang is an artist whose practice incorporates a broad spectrum of media to explore how identity is affected by global flows of people, culture and capital. Much of his work has centred on questions of community; how it is defined, who identifies with it, and how it is built. Henry teaches at Emily Carr University of Art & Design.

Hayne Wai is a founding member of the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, a Trustee of the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, and has served on Federal, Provincial, and local boards on anti-racism, multiculturalism, and diversity. He co-authored *Finding Memories, Tracing Routes* and *Eating Stories: A Chinese Canadian and Aboriginal Potluck*.

Stephanie Yuen is a food & travel journalist for English and Chinese publications, CBC Radio and Fairchild Radio, and the author of "East Meets West – Traditional and Contemporary Asian Dishes from Acclaimed Vancouver Restaurants".