

Land and Food Systems 350 Proposal Report - Group 13: hua foundation

09/02/2018

Meryn Corkery, Jianru Deng, Jimmy Hu, Joyce Liao, Shi Ye Liu, and Farron Rickerby

We would like to acknowledge that our research and work with the hua foundation will take place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.

Introduction

Since the late 19th century, Chinese immigrants have played a significant role in the province's food system. By the 1920s, an estimated 90% of the fresh produce in B.C. was produced and distributed by Chinese immigrants (Gibb & Wittman, 2013). Chinese-Canadians presently assume this role in the food system as greengrocers, butcher shops and dried goods stores in Chinatown to serve residents and businesses in the Downtown Eastside and Strathcona communities (Ho & Chen, 2017), often at a price that is affordable to individuals with economic hardships (Miewald & Ostry, 2014).



A Chinese greengrocer store on the east end of Georgia Street that has been serving Chinatown for decades. Also seen here is a Chinese medicine store that has been out of business for a year by now, despite its signage remaining.

Historically, it has been difficult for Chinese farmers: unfair taxation, oppressive policies and blatant animosity from their white contemporaries impacted Chinese livelihoods (Ho & Chen, 2017). Nevertheless, Chinese farmers adapted by distributing their produce to non-mainstream avenues, such as roadside farms (Ho & Chen, 2017). The historic operation of the Chinese food system outside the mainstream food system of Vancouver, has led to a “parallel food system¹” today. However, Chinese food producers are often underrepresented in policy making and receive relatively little recognition in the face of potential competition from newly rising businesses, despite their importance to local residents (Gibbs & Wittman, 2013).



A new Starbucks on the corner of Main and Keefer Streets. It stands in contrast with the Cantonese bakeries and dried goods stores across the street, which also tend to cater to lower income visitors.

In our research project, we partner with the hua foundation, a non-profit organization aiming to “create social change by exploring racialized identities and building

¹ Parallel food systems are defined as alternative food systems operating simultaneously but separately from the mainly dominant food system. The historic Chinese food system is regarded as “parallel” to the mainstream Vancouver food system (Gibb & Wittman, 2013).

resilience in communities” (hua foundation, 2018). Many of the hua foundation’s projects promote food and cultural literacy, education, and community engagement. By emphasizing the role of culture in food security efforts, the organization supports marginalized histories, voices, and lived experiences (Ho & Chen, 2017). A significant portion of their projects target youth, seniors, and communities affected by the Asian diaspora. Their ongoing projects include a seasonal choi guide, cooking workshops, small business partnerships, and supporting the *Chinatown Today* publication (hua foundation, 2018).

Recently, the hua foundation’s *Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report* highlighted the realities of food asset fragmentation along socioeconomic and cultural lines in Chinatown (Ho & Chen, 2017). The exclusion by omission of cultural food assets² in municipal policies as important retail businesses contributed to a 50% loss of fresh food stores in Chinatown between 2009 and 2016. During this time frame, 33 new food service retailers were established, but in comparison to the former, traditional Cantonese retailers, these new food retailers tend to cater higher income individuals and differ in terms of cultural specificity and/or orientation (Ho & Chen, 2017).

The goal of our research project is to investigate current examples of social cohesion between Chinatown food assets. In the long term, this will provide insight on the connectedness of the Chinatown food system and increase understanding of parallel food systems and their manifestation in the business landscape of Chinatown.

Significance

Scholars have acknowledged the multiplicity of food systems that have been created alongside the mainstream local food movement, such as the Chinese distribution system in Chinatown (Gibb & Wittman, 2013). While these parallel systems are simultaneously at

² Cultural food assets are defined as services and facilities that provide access to food growing, preparing, sharing and learning, with an emphasis on cultural preservation and communication. Within the context of Chinatown this includes Chinese dry goods stores, Cantonese bakeries, greengrocers, etc. which work as supporters to a cultural food distribution system (Ho & Chen, 2017).

work, there are few points of intentional connection and collaboration between them (Gibb & Wittman, 2013). There have also been studies conducted on the fragmentation of businesses within Chinatown, such as the *Retail Gentrification Mapping Report* released by the Carnegie Community Action Group (CCAG, 2017), yet there is scant research on how businesses in the area cooperate with one another. Acknowledging the current dynamic nature of Chinatown's food assets, *there is an apparent opportunity to foster partnerships within the neighborhood's various food suppliers to facilitate points of connection between parallel food systems*. By focusing on how community partnerships are currently addressed and how they can be further strengthened, we will highlight how cultural food assets in Chinatown can support one another to create a healthier, more resilient³ food network.

Our aim is to investigate the partnerships between food assets present in the neighborhood as a proxy for resiliency. This is will build off of municipal policies such as the Downtown Eastside Plan (2014) with policies that "... foster business-to-business networking..." through initiatives that support "local funding innovations, local procurement and measures to achieve competitive advantages over other neighbourhoods".

With an asset-based community development approach, we see community members as the experts of their neighborhoods who have unique skills to contribute (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). We value community relationships, and see their value in building social-cohesion and vibrancy. Lastly we acknowledge that our work as outside researchers from an academic institution serves community members in their processes of development by engaging in active listening and dialogue (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Objectives

The objective of our project is to identify the new business owners who have connected with existing distributors and green grocers within the Chinatown food system.

³ Our definition of resiliency comes from the City of Vancouver, where resiliency "ensures [...] residents, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses [...] Vancouver may experience" (City of Vancouver, 2016). Chronic stresses include "day-to-day, cyclical issues like unaffordable housing, crime, [...] and social inequity" (City of Vancouver, 2016).

In the end, a well-organized and practical framework of business cohesion should be presented, followed with resources given to new business. Based on the analysis of results in interviews, effective approaches and identified challenges will increase the social cohesion between new and existing businesses in Chinatown.

The objectives of our project include:

- 1) Identify 5 new businesses who have connected with existing distributors and green grocers within Chinatown
- 2) Through interviews, investigate opportunities and challenges to forming business connections
- 3) Create resource list for new businesses
- 4) Determine potential areas for further research in social cohesion and resiliency within Chinatown

Research questions

- What are existing social and professional connections between food assets in Chinatown?
- How can these connections be strengthened?
- What are the major barriers for creating connections between food assets/businesses in Chinatown?

Methods

In order to achieve our project objectives, we will interview new restaurant⁴ owners in Chinatown. We will consult with our community partner Kevin Huang, executive director of the hua foundation to receive input on potential new and old restaurant owners to interview. Our interviews will focus on how restaurants select their distributors and if there have been attempts to work with long-standing distributors, while remaining mindful of the sensitive subject of gentrification. In order to increase response rate, we will also

⁴ New restaurants are defined as having opened for business after 2009, as highlighted in the *Chinatown Food Security Report* (Ho & Chen, 2017).

offer the option to participate over the phone or by email. After the interviews, we will reorganize useful information and draw conclusions, then provide recommendations regarding next steps. Through these interviews we hope to identify potential gaps and resources that would be useful for new businesses in order to increase social cohesion between businesses.

There are ethical considerations with conducting interviews; to address these we will require voluntary participation and permission from interviewees to use information relevant to our research. Private information will not be released to the public.

Outcomes

The outcome of our project will be a resource (in pamphlet or infographic form) for new businesses in Chinatown, based upon the needs identified through interviews. We will create a map of connections between businesses and distributors, highlighting the interactions between parallel food systems - the mainstream Vancouver Food System and the food system dominant in Chinatown. The final product will be delivered during the last session of LFS 350 on Monday, March 26th.

A long term objective is the creation of a resilient food strategy in Chinatown by looking at the importance of social ties.

Budget: Not applicable

References

Carnegie Action Community Group. (2017, February). We are too poor to afford anything: Retail Gentrification Mapping Report. Retrieved February 2, 2018, from <http://www.carnegieaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CED-REPORT-PRINT.pdf>

City of Vancouver. (2016, December 01). Resilient City. Retrieved February 02, 2018, from <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/resilient-city.aspx>

City of Vancouver.(2013). What feeds us. Retrieved from February 06, 2018, from <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/vancouver-food-strategy-final.PDF>

- Gibb, N., & Wittman, H. (2013). *Parallel alternatives: Chinese-Canadian Farmers and the Metro Vancouver Local Food Movement*. *Local Environment*, 18(1), 1-19
- Ho, A., & Chen, A. (2017). *Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report*. Retrieved from hua foundation website: <http://www.huafoundation.org/foodreport/>
- hua foundation. (n.d.). Our Mission, Vision, and Values. Retrieved January 26, 2018, from <http://www.huafoundation.org/our-mission-story/>
- Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, 13(5), 474–486.
- Miewald, C., & Ostry, A. (2014). A Warm Meal and a Bed: Intersections of Housing and Food Security in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. *Housing Studies*, 29(6), 709–729.
- Rocha, C., & Liberato, R. S. (2013). Food sovereignty for cultural food security: The case of an indigenous community in brazil. *Food, Culture & Society*, 16(4), 589-602