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Interstitial Spatiality and Subversive Sustainability: Urban Foraging in Ava Chin's Eating Wildly and Rita Wong's forage

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Abstract

I apply political ecologist Ryan Galt's concept of 'subversive and interstitial food spaces' (Galt et al., 2014, 133) to read Chinese American writer Ava Chin's semi-autobiographical memoir, Eating Wildly (2014), and Chinese Canadian writer Rita Wong's poem collection, forage (2007). Beyond offering a different cultural perspective, I argue that Chin's and Wong's urban foraging narratives can be read as transitioning from being interstitial to subversive in the North American context. I see urban spaces where plants are foraged but not normally considered to be cultivatable as interstitial. Analogously, I regard people situated between cultures or on the margins of dominant spaces due to their race or class as being in an interstitial position. Echoing ancient East Asian and specifically Chinese environmental thinking, which is relational, non-linear, and non-dichotomous, Chin's and Wong's foraging discourses in their poetic, eth(n)ic, and environmental complexities challenge dominant white foraging narratives and provide alternatives to mainstream environmental thinking. Both urban foraging experiences depicted in Eating Wildly and forage thrive from interstitial spatiality, yet they direct us toward subversive and sustainable foodways that promotes food justice and dismantles rural-urban, local-global, human-nature binaries. I will also highlight how the two authors differ in their foraging poetics and politics.

Keywords: *Urban Foraging; Interstice; Subversive; Ava Chin; Rita Wong*

Introduction

In the past two decades, foraging has re-emerged in major cities around the world especially in North America and Europe. The literature on foraging has correspondently witnessed a resurgence with diverse genres on this topic gaining popularity. Besides field guides, cookbooks, and programs on food channels, there are a variety of non-fiction and scholarly works on urban foraging in different disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, geography, ecology, and environmental studies. Foraging began as an urban fad practiced mostly by white middle-class urbanites in the global North (Chou, 2018, 5; McLain et al., 2012, 19). These foraging practices are depicted in non-fiction best-sellers, for example, a series of works by Michael Pollan, his *In Defense of Food* (2008) and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), as well as Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2007), in which mainstream white authors discuss the benefits of urban foraging as providing free nutrient rich and culturally appropriate food.

Chinese American writer Ava Chin's semi-autobiographical memoir, *Eating Wildly: Foraging for Life, Love and the Perfect Meal* (2014), and Chinese Canadian writer Rita Wong's poem collection,

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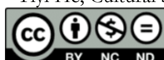

forage (2007), however, challenge mainstream foraging narratives as an 'environmentalist fad of white urban elites' (Chou, 2018, 5). Chin and Wong as third-generation and second-generation Chinese writers address food justice as well as other issues in their texts, and in doing so enrich foraging narratives from an ethnic Chinese perspective. Chin, who was brought up in a rather poor environment by a single mother in a Chinese immigrant family with limited access to healthy food later in life managed to find her own sources of bountiful and nutritious food and healing through foraging for culturally appropriate food. Chin's text promotes food justice by narrating how her semi-autobiographical protagonist, a Chinese American forager, gets free wild edibles as an alternative food source or herbal medicine, achieving both sustanbility and equality through urban foraging. Wong is an environmental activist who advocates against all kinds of chemical or technological pollutants and wastes, especially those affecting food and water. She is also dedicated to promoting allyships between Chinese Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. She even went to jail as a result of her peaceful protest against the Trans-Mountain pipeline expansion across Indigenous lands in British Columbia, Canada. Although Chin and Wong are both professors, their middle-class intellectual position has not hampered their pursuit of food justice. Instead, their position as racialised foragers, who are often situated in a marginalised and interstitial position between cultures, has empowered them to become activists, albeit in different ways.

In this paper, I will borrow the concept 'subversive and interstitial food spaces' (Galt et al., 2014, 133) from political ecologist Ryan Galt to explore foraging poetics and politics in Chin's *Eating Wildly* and Wong's *forage*. According to Galt et al. (2014), the interstitial spaces are "spaces between more commonly acknowledged and observed uses and categories… These spaces are on the *margins* of spaces dedicated to 'conventional,' 'private,' 'authority-sanctioned,' or 'normal' activities," and that 'being interstitial is a result of *marginalisation* processes that push certain practices out of the mainstream' (134; my italics); however, interstices also have a subversive potential to 'undermine the authority and power of established norms, discourses, interests, and institutions—they are intentionally counterhegemonic' (134). My definition and application of the two terms 'interstitial' and 'subversive' mostly correspond with Galt's, but I will explore them further and add my own nuanced understanding in my position as an environmental humanities scholar who was born in China and lives in Canada. I see urban spaces where plants are foraged but not normally considered to be cultivatable as interstitial. Analogously, I regard people situated between cultures or on the margins of dominant spaces due to their race or class as being in an interstitial position. Furthermore, the gaps in Western binary notions like rural-urban, local-global, and human-nonhuman are 'interstices' to be bridged as well. When these kinds of binaries are questioned, the interstitial is transformed and new subversive potentials emerge. Drawing on the concept of 'subversive and interstitial food spaces,' I will show how Chin and Wong discuss urban foraging in a similar way, yet with key differences. Chin clings more to the literal meaning and culinary aspect of foraging, while Wong broadens its definition as a method of processing the world around us. I argue that, beyond offering a different cultural take on foraging, Chin's and Wong's urban foraging narratives can be read as transitioning from being interstitial to subversive in the North American context. Their foraging acts resonate with those of marginalised communities, especially people with Chinese ethnicity, advocating environmental justice and food justice from a racialised, interstitial position. Moreover, foraging from an East Asian perspective as an alternative approach to sustainable

foodways[2] subverts different kinds of Western binaries, such as rural-urban, local-global, and human-nonhuman.

Foraging originally refers to the practice of harvesting or gathering raw biological resources (fungi, plants, and animals) within urban and peri-urban settings, primarily for direct consumption of food or medicine, decoration, crafts, or small-scale sale (Shackleton et al., 2017, 2). Foraging includes domesticated or wild species in private or public, managed or unmanaged space, whether they are from self-reproducing plants or animals, or from those directly cultivated by the harvesters, gatherers, or other people or agencies (Poe et al., 2014, 911; Shackleton et al., 2017, 2). Foraging can also be understood as 'the practice of recuperating discarded goods in varied locations such as sidewalks, streets, or waste receptacles' (Paddeu, 2019, 2). Among the booming urban food movements[3] that aim to promote greening as well as to tackle hunger or malnutrition issues in the cityscape, foraging is a distinguished method that highlights waste reduction instead of waste production or proliferation. Foraging not only provides foragers with free wild and semi-wild products, but there are also noneconomic benefits associated with foraging: acquisition and transmission of ecological knowledge, opportunities for leisure, a sense of spiritual fulfillment and belonging, developing and reaffirming cultural identities, enhancing social ties and community connection, as well as overall physical and mental well-being (McLain et al., 2012, 1).

The concept 'interstice' is particularly useful for understanding the practice of foraging. The word itself derives from Latin 'interstitium,' which means 'to stand between' (*OED*). It is the space or time between things, indicating a rupture or division. Like light filtering through leaves of a tree canopy, or plants growing in decaying logs or sidewalk concrete cracks (Galt et al., 2014, 134), interstices pervade our everyday life but are easily overlooked. Nonetheless, foragers with keen sight are intimately familiar with these interstices. As Chin (2014) claims, '[y]ou can train your eye, research the telltale clues and signs, but nature has a way of surprising you, especially here in the city' (7).

In addition to looking at foraging as an interstitial practice, Chin's and Wong's writing also addresses socio-cultural interstices caused by race or class. These authors, in their concern for environmental and food justice, address the pressing need for conversations highlighting the intersections between race and the environment. At the beginning of each text, both foragers are situated in an interstitial space between 'place' (Buell, 2005, 68; Heise, 2008, 3) and 'placelessness' (Ray, 2013, 25),[4] where a strong tendency to re-merge boundaries or gaps between different cultural identities emerges. White society questions their citizenship rights

[2] Foodways often refers to the intersection of cultural, social and economic practices relating to food conceptualisation, procurement and consumption, etc. In this article, I refer to urban foraging by racialised people such as foragers with Chinese descent as sustainable but uncommon, marginalised foodways.

3 For more details about urban agriculture, including vertical farming, community gardens, skyscraper/rooftop gardens, and gleaning, see Dickson Despommier's *The Vertical Farm: Feeding the World in the 21st Century* (2010), Scott Hamilton Kennedy's documentary *The Garden* (2008), Lauren Mendel's *Eat Up: The Inside Scoop on Rooftop Agriculture* (2013), and French filmmaker Agnès Varda's documentaries, *The Gleaners and I* (I in 2000 and II in 2002).

[4] The concept of 'place' is relevant. I refer to racialised people's common and constant anxiety in their 'place-attachment' (Buell, 2005, 68) or seeking a 'sense of place' (Heise, 2008, 3) as in a precariously interstitial situation. I try not to see 'place' as only fixed, contextualised and concrete, or to refer to 'space' as more abstract and fluid, as neither of them is 'static or bounded' (Ray, 2013, 27). Ray explores both concepts of space and place in her *Ecological Other*. She contends that a distinct separation of the two is problematic as it is dualistic (27). I am in line with Ray, aiming to break all kinds of Western binaries. In Chin's and Wong's texts, the main protagonists struggle in-between cultures as a Chinese American and a Chinese Canadian, respectively. Their uncertainties, uneasiness toward 'places' and yearning to locate a 'place' reveal their interstitial space in the dominant culture and society.

in the country in which they were born because of ethnic affiliations with a nation that they might never have set foot in. However, both semi-autobiographical personae eventually affirm their rootedness in place by foraging wild edibles and culturally appropriate food to guarantee more equal and just access to nutritious and healthy food.

Moreover, Western logocentricism[5] breeds binary thinking (Adamson, 2001, xiii), resulting in 'interstices' between the rural and the urban, the local and the global, as well as humans and nonhumans. Specifically, many low-income racialised communities live in 'urban jungles' that lack supplies of fresh foods. Globalisation has made it possible for marginalised groups to access food that is not grown locally, but not that many of them could actually afford it, especially the culturally appropriate food rich in nutrition. In fact, the negative side of globalisation driven by capitalism and neoliberalism incorporates the local into its global circuits, which has a devastating impact on local foodways. Rather than promoting 'cosmopolitan localism' (Chou, 2018, 15), injustice in global capitalist food regimes has prevented racialised communities from eating in their traditional ways. Furthermore, the human/more-than-human binary gives rise to speciesism and further imposes injustice upon the non-human world. All these 'interstices' are addressed in Chin's and Wong's texts. Both Chin's and Wong's urban foraging narratives have a subversive potential in unsettling the rural-urban, local-global, human-nature divides. Foraging wild edible plants, medicinal herbs or culturally appropriate food in cities subverts misconceptions of urban food deserts, and challenges globalisation, environmental racism, and anthropocentrism.

Ava Chin's ***Eating Wildly***

Ava Chin's narrator, who has the same name as the author, lives in metropolitan New York. In her foraging practice, Ava not only takes pleasure in urban foraging, which enables her to understand her ancestral roots and reconnect with her family, but more importantly, she gains food justice through this foraging practice. As a Chinese American brought up by a single mother and Chinese grandparents in mainstream American culture, Ava recollects in the memoir: '[M]y mother and I acted as if our resources were scarce—there was never enough time or love or money to go around to sustain us. But, in truth, there was plenty all around. We just didn't know where to look' (Chin, 2014, 160). Poverty, food scarcity and her identity as an ethnic minority have all put Ava in an interstitial space. Ava's interstitiality encourages her later in life to get free nutritious food through urban foraging rather than conventional foodways. Ava's foraging experiences echo those of many racialised people who face similar interstitial situations. Low-income, marginalised people often cannot afford to buy nutritious food or organic food in grocery stores. There is a major difference between white urban elites and the racialised poor in why they undertake foraging practices. While some amongst the former might enjoy urban foraging as a neoliberal leisure and entertainment, some amongst the latter depend upon it for daily survival. In addition, foragers with different racial or ethnic backgrounds have their own preferences for specific plants, which may result in divergence in the way these herbs are understood by racial or ethnic minorities and the white majority. Some healing herbs, such as bracken, are considered valuable by Asian gatherers, whereas Euro-American communities regard them as weeds or pests (Poe et al., 2014, 908). Priviledged

[5] It derives from classical Western philosophers such as Socrates and Plato, and has been further developed in modern times especially by French philosopher Descartes. This mainstream Western thinking advocates separating the matter and the spirit, as well as the subject and the object.

white people may therefore look down upon marginalised groups for eating these 'inedible weeds.' As well, in *Eating Wildly*, Chin mentions that lambsquarters is valued by Bangladeshi and Persian people, but is considered to be a noxious weed by many white urban farmers or gardeners in America (Chin, 2014, 5). Moreover, Ava as a Chinese American forager is situated in an interstitial space, like certain trees and plants. For instance, Chin mentions two different types of mulberry tree that grow nationwide in the U.S.: 'the native red mulberry (Morus rubra) and the Chinese white mulberry (Morus alba); the latter were imported from China in the 1800s to support a burgeoning silk industry' (119). Compared with the breed of the native red that is abundant in North America, the Chinese white mulberry was originally situated in an interstitial space, but it eventually hybridized with the local breed and flourished throughout the country. The mulberry tree's evolution resembles those of many first- or second-generation Chinese Americans, who integrate into local communities and transition from being interstitial to subversive.

Ava's foraging is subversive in that it directly interrogates long-established dualistic categorizations such as rural-urban, local-global, and human-nature. Ava's foraging subversively breaks the rural-urban binary, which challenges foraging as a white urban fad (Chou, 2018, 5). The urban domain is often marginalised as being infertile and barren land. However, *Eating Wildly* reveals that nature can be found even within the metropolitan 'urban jungle' of New York. Chin (2014) describes how Ava once learned of motherwort

> *Leonurus cardiaca* from a Chinese doctor in Brooklyn, who recommended it for uterine issues like hormonal imbalances and spot bleeding… I love the idea of mothering plant that could aim my feminine issues and calm my nerves…motherwort was used for menstrual conditions, as a relaxant during menopause, and as a tonic for the heart. Back then, I'd tried the herb in pill form and found it incredibly dry and bitter—I had to drink an entire glass of water to get it down… But here it was alive and thriving in the middle of downtown Boulder [of New York City]. (100)

Chin criticizes the alienation that the capitalist food regime—claimed to be supported by Western science—imposes on people nowadays and estranges them from nature, as it turns a fresh and tasty herb that can be foraged in the urban wild into a pill which is difficult to digest but is easily accessible in cities. In doing so, she refutes the rural/urban dichotomy. Furthermore, through touching on the topic of traditional Chinese medicinal herbs, and highlighting Ava's encounter with the 'motherwort'[6] as a Chinese American, Chin invokes a tension between the herbal knowledge from her Chinese heritage and that of the West.

Chin's urban foraging also unsettles the local-global dichotomy. The global capitalist food regime deeply affects racialised groups and local communities, and leads to food injustice or makes access to their own cultural or heirloom foods difficult. Urban foraging, as subversive foodways for locally attainable, easily accessible, and culturally appropriate foods, has enabled the disenfranchised to strive for justice, love and care, and a better living. Crossing two worlds and cultures, Ava's foraging is rooted not only in Western botanical epistemology but also that of different ethnic groups in America (Chou, 2018, 13), especially Chinese Americans in this context. Moreover, compared with big pharma in the U.S., foraging as well as Chinese traditional medicine practices by Chinese immigrants are no doubt situated in an interstitial

[6] Besides motherwort, Chin also mentions other traditional Chinese medicinal herbs: the wun yee, dong quai, wild chrysanthemum blossoms, etc.

space, but they also provide alternatives to privatized health care and merge the global with the local. Unlike big agribusiness or the global capitalist food regime as a whole, Ava's food practices highlight the importance of urban foraging from an East Asian perspective, which break the local-global binary and demonstrate a way for people to regain local access to healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate wild edibles, promoting 'a cosmopolitan sense of the local environment' (Chou, 2018, 6).

Furthermore, Ava's foraging unsettles the human and non-human dichotomy. In the text, Ava's grandma is compared to the mulberry tree: 'my grandma, my guru. The plant that mothered us all' (Chin, 2014, 138). 'The mulberry is a volunteer—probably from a seed dropped by a bird… A fitting reminder to Ava that new generations thrive from the seeds of foremothers' (152). Chin links her grandma to the mulberry tree and highlights the similarities between the two, how they both spare no effort to nurture and cultivate new generations, be it human or non-human. Through this comparison, Chin intentionally blurs the boundary between humans and more-than-humans. Ava feels that her deceased grandma led her to the mulberry tree, where she harvested plenty of its sweet fruits and reconnected with her deceased grandmother and the land. Thus, foraging becomes a link for Ava to retrace her childhood memory of her grandmother nurturing and protecting her.

Chin also draws a parallel between the silkworms, which feed on the mulberry leaves to produce silk, and her grandma when she describes the labour intensiveness of raising of silkworms to produce raw silk. Her grandma is dedicated to 'cultivate' Ava after she was abandoned by her father. As the famous ancient Chinese poetic line goes, '*春蚕到死丝方尽*' (spring silkworms will not stop making silk until they die), her grandmother, spares no effort in her care for Ava. Her grandma's cultural legacy inspires Ava to continue foraging. Through foraging, Ava not only acquires nutritious food, which is an essential part of her livelihood, but she also gains spiritual fulfillment.

Beside her grandmother's death bed, Ava recalls witnessing a 'faint glimmering of something,' like 'fairy dust' or 'a celestial mass of glittery multihued light' (Chin, 2014, 136) all over her body. This light emerged from the 'Dan tien [*丹田*]—the main energy center of one's *chi*' (136). Ch'i (or *qi*) is an important concept in Chinese indigeous green philosophy Taoism and key to animate beings on Earth according to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). *Qi* can be translated as 'breath,' 'pneuma,' or 'energy' (Miller, 2017, 44). According to James Miller (2017), an environmental humanities scholar on Chinese religion and ecology, there is 'liquid ecology' (43), the essence of which is the flow of *qi* that constitutes life (43). In traditional Chinese way of thinking, there are two distinct but related systems: the first is the physical landscape as a system through which *qi* flows, and the second is the human body; both systems interact with each other, and is thus possible to construct an ecological theory of *qi* (43-65). In TCM practice, each human body is understood to carry a micro-ecosystem within it, which is made of material and substance, and continuously conducts energy exchanges with other beings in nature—the macro-ecosystem—until the day we die, when all energy and materiality returns to its origin with its own natural agency. Though it has not yet been fully recognized by Western science, the Chinese practice of medicine suggests that nature, the external environment can have a healing impact on the internal environment of human bodies, and that humans and nature are one, which challenges the binary between humans and more-than-humans.

Moreover, Ava herself is connected to lambsquarters, a plant that longs for more space and more sun and nutrition to grow, resembling humans in many ways, especially those in a precarious and marginalised state. It can be read as a parallel which captures how the interstitial space in which Ava is situated can be compared to that of this 'free-range weed' (Chin, 2014, 4), as both are easily neglected and often lack due care or attention. Interestingly, in Chinese culture certain plants are endowed with specific characteristics that echo those of human beings. It has been a Chinese tradition to relate certain plants to people with certain qualities. For example, people of virtue resemble the orchid,[7] which is elegant and graceful. Deeply influenced by Chinese philosophy and practice, Chin weaves her foraging stories together through relating certain foraged plants with specific people, i.e., Ava with lambsquarters and her grandma with mulberries as mentioned above. Chin's foraging unsettles the interstice epitomized in all 'forms of racialised environmental burdens' (Chou, 2018, 9), the environmental injustice or environmental racism that is rooted in and perpetuated by Western logocentric dualism, as epitomized in the rural-urban, local-global, human-nature binaries.

Eating Wildly adds a new Chinese perspective to the voluminous literature on foraging; however, there are some limitations in Chin's foraging narrative. For instance, Chin slightly touches on and romanticizes Native American foodways with a nostalgic tone (Chin, 2014, 215; Chou, 2018, 13). Moreover, Chin emphasizes interdependence between humans and non-humans, but, unlike Wong, she overlooks the collaboration between human allies on issues of sustainability and justice. In the U.S., the emphasis is more on solidarity between Native Americans and Black Americans, while solidarity between Native Americans and Asian Americans does not have the same importance or cultural prevalence as solidarity between Asian Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. Wong offers a more political exploration of foraging than Chin in *forage* (2007).

Rita Wong's *forage*

For Wong, foraging is not only a practice of sustainability, but also as foraging politics and poetics (Bates, 2019, 192). Wong's environmental thinking also becomes an ethical and creative way of living, which extends to reading, writing, and other creative or artistic explorations. Wong explores foraging in a broader sense as a way of understanding the world. Wong (2009) defines her understanding of foraging as follows:

> The title of *forage* could refer not only to my coping mechanism as someone who lives amidst capitalist contradictions—what am I doing in a library, on the internet, in the farmer's markets and the community food co-ops for that matter, if not foraging for ways to survive and understand crisis and contradiction—but also a poetics, a way of writing my way through and in the mess. [It is about] the modest, the overlooked, this[which] takes me back to the land, quietly present, a force worthy of gratitude. (25)

In *forage*, Wong is more concerned with environmental harm caused by technological waste—the side effects of technology driven by capitalism. Wong artistically links, for instance, the urban modality of Vancouver with the global chain of transnational technological waste,

[7] '*君子如兰*' (Jun zi ru lan). It is also a traditional practice in China to name people, especially girls, after flowers and trees.

chemical diffusion, and pollution, and how it intersects with immigrant labour exploitation in a Chinese Canadian context. According to literary critic Jennifer Baker (2019), *forage* addresses the poet's anxiety over the 'collective suffering under the structures of late capitalism in the Anthropocene' (210) and the worsening human-nonhuman relationship. Baker further comments that, in doing so, the poem collection aims to generate 'awareness of multispecies entanglements' (191). Wong's approach resists the capitalist and corporate construction of a dualistic consumer-product relation which alienates humans from the natural world.

In one poem 'the girl who ate rice almost every day,' as rice is a staple of Asian cuisine, Wong (2007) writes about a girl who forages for 'slow-cooking' (19) brown rice in urban Vancouver. The whole poem actually resembles an allegory packed into a short tale of survival. It talks about a girl who finds out that local supermarkets are full of poisonous GMO foods and eventually decides to grow her own wild rice in the city sewers. A transition of the girl's positionality from being interstitial to subversive through her rice foraging story is epitomized in the poem.

The girl is called 'Slow,' a choice made by Wong revealing the author's poetics in *forage*, which echoes environmental justice scholar Rob Nixon's concept of 'slow violence' (Nixon, 2011, 2). I think Nixon's term aptly captures the interstitiality of marginalised people because they live in a society where a drastic gap exists between the have and the have-not. Nixon (2011) defines 'slow violence' as 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (2). It is an 'incremental and accretive' (2) violence especially imposed upon the poor, which may appear inconspicuous or even invisible in the first place. Literary critic Guy Beauregard (2019) adopts 'slow violence' to discuss 'transpacific precarities' (572) represented in Wong's *forage* through the shipping of toxic wastes from North America to East Asia and particularly South China. Ecocritic Samantha Walton (2019) also focuses on the role materiality plays when 'migrant and indentured workers [are] exposed to noxious materials and degraded environments' (267) through the lens of 'slow violence.' Though they have not specified the connection between concepts like 'slow violence' and 'interstitiality,' the latter of which is of special concern in this article, both Beauregard's and Walton's analyses reveal how susceptible people at the margins of society are to environmental harm and injustice. For instance, in the rice foraging story, Slow is poisoned by the GMO food sold in supermarkets and is forced to put considerable effort into looking for rice she feels is safe to eat. Being in an interstitial position, she suffers from slow violence as highlighted by Nixon.

Meanwhile, the girl's name also indicates the author's intention to pursue a slow lifestyle as a subversive act against today's fast-paced, capital-driven reality. Literary critic Christian Kim (2009) touches on this point and further elaborates it by commenting on Wong's poetic techniques that 'limber up our thinking' (Zournazi 2002, as cited in Kim, 2009), "letting us access more of our potential at each step... Our degree of freedom at any one time corresponds to how much of our experiential 'depth' we can access towards a next step—how intensely we are living and moving" (Kim, 2009,168). Wong protests against any form of haste or speed in our ways of living and thinking, especially in today's consumerist societies, which are driven by corporate and capitalist mechanisms. Instead, she advocates for a slow lifestyle as subversion to modern consumer culture.

Returning to Wong's rice foraging story, the poem touches on various themes related to corporate control over food and the negative effects of the global capitalist economy, such as corporate biotechnology, species extinction, lack of food security, food justice or food sovereignty. For instance, within the text, Wong includes registered US patents on food products by giant biotechnology companies—such as GMO basmati rice, canola, wheat, and even pigs—to warn readers of potential dangers posed by these products. The GMO food somehow reminds Slow of the healthy, nutritious rice that used to be widely planted by Indigenous Peoples across the land, but are no longer easily available due to loss of land and lack of food sovereignty. Wong specifically contrasts industrialised rice with wild rice grown by First Nations. In the poem, Wong (2007) writes,

> Now that she [Slow] had eaten the beets of no return, and did not have long to live on this earth, she wanted to know what a grain of rice grown on the land where she lived, the land of salish, musqueam, halkomelem speakers, would taste like? [.] how could it grow? she determined to try to grow a small crop hydroponically. (18)

Slow's foraging journey is full of difficulties and risks, for she ate the hybrid beets genetically crossed with cows (Wong, 2007, 16). In this case, both food and human body are tainted by corporate biotechnology. Slow envisions what life free from settler colonial power would be like. She forms an intimate relationship with Indigenous Peoples through engaging with Indigenous food culture. She decides to try to grow wild rice hydroponically as an act of solidarity. By touching on Indigenous food sovereignty—also a form of self-governance, land sovereignty, autonomy from state dependency, and practice of traditional ways of knowing—Wong advocates 'foraging' food justice, especially for racialised people situated in an interstitial position. Eventually, Slow manages to subvert the capitalist oppression imposed upon her. She hydroponically grows a special rice in the city sewers, breaking the rural/urban binary. In the process of cultivating the rice, she seeks cooperation between the human and non-human world by asking the sewer rats for help. The rice lasts 'long after the last beet eaters disappeared from this spinning planet' (19). It survives in this apocalyptic poem, and shows signs of strong fertility and adaptability. It continues to grow as it surges from the interstitial 'sewers and alleys of many a struggling city' (19), bridging the local with the global. This apocalyptic ending of the poem challenges anthropocentrism and unsettles dualistic thinking. Slow's rice foraging develops from being interstitial to subversive, highlighting food security and bringing about food justice for marginalised people, empowering Indigenous Peoples and Asian Canadians in solidarity.

In 'canola queasy,' Wong (2007) condemns capitalist greed again, this time by advocating for the Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser, who fought against the global capitalist company, Monsanto who promotes genetically modified seeds. Genetically engineered canola is the key concern, which turns human 'protein mass' into 'protean mess' (36). Schmeiser was sued by Monsanto for allegedly violating its patent on GMO canola when its seeds blew into Schmeiser's field. Similarly situated in an interstitial position as his conventional crops are among the GMO crops, Schmeiser as an independent farmer showed considerable determination as he sought personal justice and food justice in general. In the marginalia framing the poem, Wong mentions research findings by the Hong Kong-born evolution scientist Mae-Wan Ho, who commented on the potential health threat hidden in genetically engineered canola seeds patented 'herbicide-tolerant transgenic varieties' (36) by Monsanto. By drawing on Schmeiser's case and Ho's research, Wong highlights strong ethics and human

responsibilities that humans should co-exist in harmony with nature instead of trying to dominate nature.

Similarly, in the poem dedicated to the Korean farmer Lee Kyung-Hae, an anti-globalisation activist who fought against liberalised agricultural trade, especially the Korean beef and rice markets, who was martyred during the 2003 WTO meetings in Cancun, Wong calls for 'translocal forms of solidarity' (Tania, 2015, 207). Drawing connections among racialised communities who struggle for food justice, Wong (2007) writes, 'may you be graced by camaraderie with Navdanya, Wild Rice Moon, Hou T'u' (63). Specifically, Wong calls for solidarity with the seed-preservation network in Navdanya, India; Indigenous Peoples, specifically Annishinaabeg activists on Turtle Island as well as the deity 'Spirit of the Earth' in Chinese mythology (Tania, 2015, 207). Through solidarity and struggle, these entities might transit from being interstitial to subversive in their fight against global food chains and markets driven by capitalist imperatives. Indeed, the capitalist system and the state are powerful, but sometimes, interstitial spaces are created to be radically resistant (Galt et al., 2014, 134). By forming allies and working together, marginalised groups have the potential to subvert different kinds of capitalist social relations (Wong, 2007, 63).

In 'sort by day, burn by night,' the poem linked to the cover image of the poem collection, Wong also touches upon the interstitial space that most racialised people occupy and further extends the meaning of foraging. In the poem, Wong addresses e-waste transfer from North American metropolises to a remote village, Guiyu (*贵屿*), in China. The small village was a dumping site for transnational technological wastes and was clearly in an interstitial space between the privileged and the poor. Villagers in *Guiyu* were 'involuntary foragers' of transnational garbage. The short film *Exporting Harm*, which inspired Wong to write this poem, also talks about the damage that transnational e-wastes have caused to the environment and how they eventually return to human bodies.

These harmful practices especially impact marginalised and racialised groups, revealing the interstitial situation workers in the e-waste industry are in, and how they are constantly forced to be in and out of the capitalist realm for maximum exploitation of their labour value. Specifically, the poem can be analysed through 'slow violence' (Nixon, 2011, 2) due to the chronic and incremental violence imposed upon e-waste foragers in developed countries. Chinese American anthropologist Anna Tsing's 'salvage accumulation' (Tsing, 2015, 55) is also relevant, which means industries and commerce 'tak[e] advantage of value produced [by labourers] without capitalist control' (63), and that labour value is 'pericapitalist,' which is simultaneously inside and outside of capitalism rather than completely independent from it (63). Samantha Walton (2019) comments, 'value is being produced through the survival capacities of their bodies and the water and soil ecologies of Guiyu' (287), a typical example of Tsing's salvage accumulation. The workers and labourers themselves 'become victims and objects' (Walton, 2019, 287) of such capitalist processes, which further aggravate their interstitiality.

Counteractively, there is space for subversive resistance and hope, as is revealed in Wong's poetics and politics. In the poem, Wong (2007) asks a series of questions: 'What if your pentium got dumped in guiyu village/your garbage, someone else's cancer?' (47). This striking inquiry targets every individual who possesses a computer, few of whom know what will become of it. Wong asks: 'where do metals come from? where do they return?' She goes on,

'what if you don't live in guiyu village?' (46). Through these thought-provoking questions, Wong makes a subversive gesture, challenging corporate and capitalist evil, and stimulating readers to reflect upon our own consumption behaviours. The subversive transition could be accomplished by way of accumulating and sharing knowledge, forming allyships with other marginalised groups (such as Indigenous Peoples in Wong's text), or breaking dualistic thinking and replacing it with relational understandings (such as breaking the human-nature binary) (Alaimo, 2011; Walton, 2019; Latour, 1996; Zantingh 2013). Ecocritic Stacey Alaimo's 'trans-corporeality,' highlights the entanglement between humans and more-than-humans (23-24) in general, and Walton (2019) points out 'the damage of labour in sickening bodies and degraded environments' (268) epitomized in Wong's poems in particular. Moreover, Bruno Latour's theoretical approach of the ANT (Actor-Network Theory) can also be applied to read 'sort by day, burn by night,' which is to see how human and non-human actors can work together to produce the social (Latour, 1996, 369-381). The ANT studies the interdependence and material networks of things. Ecocritic Matthew Zantingh (2013) further explains, ANT is to 'make materiality and the nonhuman matter by granting them agency, thereby including them in accounts of the social' (627). All of these approaches aim to break the human/non-human dichotomy as a means of subverting interstitiality.

Additionally, Wong loves to play with the concepts of interstice and margin. In the design of poetic forms, Wong sometimes puts quotes, words, photographs, and calligraphies in-between lines or pages, or even on the margins alongside the main body content. Literary critic Petra Fachinger (2017) has touched upon Wong's subversive strategies in *forage*, such as her use of marginalia (8). In *forage*, Wong shows readers how she gathers, collages, and 'forages' through all the materials that she draws inspiration from to create these 'insight(cite)ful' (Bates, 2013, 192) as well as subversive poetic spaces.

An example of Wong's 'foraging' practice in writing can be seen in her poem 'value chain,' the first poem anthologized in this collection, in which Wong (2007) mentions the catching phrase, 'silent spring' (11). The phrase can be interpreted in two ways: it refers to Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring*, which draws attention to the adverse environmental effects caused by the widespread use of pesticides. Moreover, the adjective 'silent' should be critically examined in Chinese North American context, as people with Chinese ethnicity used to be serotyped as timid, obedient, and servile people, who never spoke up for their own rights, and who tended to remain 'silent' in public especially when political issues were involved. A simple phrase like 'silent spring' aptly captures Wong's 'foraging' poetics and politics. In doing so, she is making use of the interstitial space of the text to allow ideas to merge and emerge, transiting what is originally interstitial into subversive.

Conclusion

In *Eating Wildly*, Chin explores foraging from its alimentary perspective, while in *forage*, Wong extends the meaning of foraging, which has more political implications. Despite their differences in dealing with the subject, both Chin's and Wong's urban foraging poetics and politics aim to transition what is initially interstitial to subversive especially for racialised people in North America. As is revealed from Chin's and Wong's writing, 'interstitial spaces' (Galt et al., 2014, 134) can open up room for representations and interpretations of environmental justice and aesthetics. Their foraging acts advocate environmental justice and food justice for marginalised communities, especially people of Chinese ethnicity.

Metaphysically, interstices have a propensity to be filled and bridged. Interstitiality indicates stratification and marginality due to race and class; at the same time, the interstitial space has the potential to become subversive space for the resurgence of cultural knowledge and practices, and reciprocity between species. Analogously, ecocritical discussion in Asian American and Asian Canadian literature has long been placed in the interstices of mainstream ecocritical and social-political discussions. In particular, Chin's and Wong's foraging narratives provide fertile ground for alternative foodways that are deeply influenced by East Asian ecological thinking to thrive, which challenge Western binaries, such as rural-urban, local-global, and human-nature. In a broader sense, Chinese Canadian and Chinese American environmental literature is subversive in that it challenges 'binary thinking, and embrace[s] paradoxical thinking' (Galt et al., 2014, 137).

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