

Finding the Ideal Nesting Place

*Chinese Encounters with Indigenous and Euro-Canadian Peoples
in British Columbia, 1858-1947*

by

Jonathan Zi En Chan

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Since the conclusion of the First Opium War (1842) when the ports of China were forced open by the British, adventurous Chinese emigrants traded their dismal prospects at home for British Columbia—a foreign land of opportunities that was also Indigenous territory. This thesis examines the cultural, economic, and ethnic interactions between the Chinese, their Indigenous hosts, and their Euro-Canadian neighbours in British Columbia from 1858 to 1947. White society employed Chinese labour to develop the infrastructure and economy of British Columbia, but the Chinese were then excluded from the new society for which they had toiled. To create a white British Columbia, the state implemented assimilation policies to control Indigenous populations, but claimed that the Chinese were unable to assimilate and sought to exclude them completely. Euro-Canadian society used stereotypes such as opium abuse, lack of hygiene, immorality, and wage undercutting to justify exclusionary policies against the Chinese and to reinforce ideas of their unassimilability. These stereotypes also served as justification for the legal harassment of Chinese livelihoods through legislation that targeted specific classes of Chinese businesses in various locales. This thesis argues that despite ongoing discriminatory policies, the Chinese showed agency in resisting exclusion and economic marginalization. In some cases, the Chinese formed even formed partnerships with Indigenous peoples and gained support from parts of Euro-Canadian society to challenge the policies that were designed to exclude them.

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Introduction

良禽擇木而棲

“Birds choose good timber to build their nests upon.”

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Qing China was on a slippery, downward economic and military slope. The prosperity created by Qing Emperors Kang Xi (康熙), Yong Zheng (雍正), and Qian Long (乾隆)¹ in the eighteenth-century had lulled subsequent emperors into believing Qing China was an unparalleled global superpower.² However, these three emperors did not put forth an earnest effort to stop the importation of opium by Western trading companies, which had been taking place for at least a century. Emperor Dao Guang (道光) finally attempted to put an end to British opium imports when Queen Victoria sent a punitive expedition in 1842 ending in a humiliating defeat for China. With this defeat, ports were forced to open for Western powers for the sake of commerce and China entered a period where it was subjected to “semi-colonial” rule. Meanwhile, in what is present-day Canada, in 1849, the British established the Colony of Vancouver Island and, by 1858, the Colony of British Columbia on the Northwest Coast of the North American continent. Those who felt China offered little prospects for their livelihood took their chance to seek their fortunes abroad. People from southern China, mainly the Guang Dong province, began leaving the country to travel to foreign lands in search of fortunes and economic opportunities. These Chinese men first went to Honolulu and San Francisco and eventually arrived in British Columbia to participate in the 1858 Fraser River gold rush. These adventurous Chinese emigrants traded their dismal prospects at home where

¹ In this thesis, Chinese names are anglicized using Mandarin pinyin (pronunciation) or Cantonese pronunciation. Titles of emperors and names traditionally anglicized as one word are separated into as many words as it would appear in the Chinese language.

² In Chinese historiography, the reign of these three consecutive emperors is known as the “golden era” of the Qing dynasty.

imperialist invaders encroached upon their homeland for a foreign land of opportunities, a place that was also under the same discriminating imperialists.

The initial wave of Chinese migrants to British Columbia did not intend to stay in these foreign lands for a prolonged period and they were very aware of the latest political developments in China. For example, the sojourners knew of Sun Yat Sen's (孫逸仙)³ revolutionary movement in the early 1910s to liberate China from the incapable Qing dynasty and reclaim China for the people. Sun's efforts to rally Chinese support brought him to Vancouver to obtain donations for his movement. Over time, the Chinese immigrants found British Columbia a good place to establish their home away from ancestral home, just as the Chinese proverb, *birds choose good timber to build their nests upon*, tell us. However, the Chinese were not the only birds looking to build a new nest. English-speaking white settlers from America, Great Britain, and eastern Canada also found British Columbia to be a choice location for their economic pursuits. These settlers were not entering *terra nullius* (empty land), but the homeland of many Indigenous nations. When they entered southwestern coastal British Columbia, they were entering the territories of Coast Salish nations, including x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), Tsleil-Waututh (Burrard First Nation), on the mainland in what has come to be known as the City of Vancouver. This led to a “contact zone” being formed in British Columbia between Indigenous peoples, Asian, European, and other non-Indigenous settlers. Literary theorist Mary Louise Pratt defines the term contact zone as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly

³ Sun Yat Sen, the prolific revolutionary and founding father of modern China, was a figure that many contemporary Chinese, even those who were abroad, paid close attention. His given name is Min (文) and Yat Sen is his stylized name. English scholarship often transcribed his name as Sun Yat Sen. Surprisingly, in Chinese scholarship, his name is not only rendered as Sun Min but more commonly as Sun Zhong Shan (孫中山). “Zhong Shan” is the kanji for his Japanese name, Nakayama, a name that Sun Min took up while exiled in Japan.

asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.”⁴ The British elite viewed Indigenous peoples, the Chinese, and other non-whites settlers as obstacles to their imperialistic agenda to create a white British Columbia.⁵

There is a common perception in Canada that the country was built upon the justice and strength of British-Canadian law, which has come to be known as the “peacekeeper myth.” Historian Paulette Regan, in her research on the Indian residential school system, reveals that the peacekeeper myth is a central tenet of white settler identity:

It reinforces the popular belief that the settling of Canada was relatively peaceful because our ancestors, unlike their more violently disposed American counterparts, made treaties rather than war with Native peoples, brought law and order to the frontier, and created well-intention (if ultimately misguided) policies designed to solve the Indian problem by civilizing and saving people seen as savages.⁶

From the eyes of the non-European “other,” British policies were never perceived as good and trustworthy. For example, the promises made by the “Great Mother” (Queen Victoria) when the Numbered Treaties were negotiated on the Canadian Prairies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were rarely honoured in full. Similarly, the Chinese in British Columbia were also subjected to discriminatory laws that were rationalized through racial stereotypes despite the image of fair Canadian justice. As Emperor Dao Guang, the eighth emperor of the Qing dynasty,

⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, “Art of the Contact Zone,” in *From Ways of Reading*, 5th edition, eds. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrofsky (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999).

⁵ Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978).

⁶ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 14.

aptly described the policies pursued by the British towards those that stood in their path to hegemony: “The British are mercurial and inconsistent.”⁷

This thesis presents the immigrant Chinese experiences in British Columbia entering both a British colony and Indigenous territory. The British implemented assimilation policies to control Indigenous populations; but towards the Chinese, they claimed that the Chinese were unable to assimilate into white society and sought to exclude them through exclusionary policies. However, I argue that despite the discrimination the Chinese experienced, they actively resisted legislation that restricted their livelihood through protest and litigation, and in some cases they formed partnerships with Indigenous peoples or gained support from some parts of white society, including women. Past historiography tends to focus on Chinese-white or Indigenous-white relationships but few historians have examined the interactions of all three groups together. In relation to Chinese-Canadian history, historians have emphasized on discriminatory and exclusionary policies directed towards the Chinese.⁸ Peter Ward examines how ideas of race were used to justify exclusionary policies towards Chinese, Japanese, and South Asians and to ensure a “white Canada forever.” Others have revealed Asian resistance to such policies through litigation or human rights activism.⁹ Kay Anderson wrote extensively on the formation of

⁷ Hu Li Zhong and Dai An Gang, *History of the Late Qing Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 2004), 27. This volume is part of a series edited by Li Guo Zhang and Zhao Chang Ping called *Twenty Five Histories New Edition*.

⁸ The following works address racial exclusionary policies and the Chinese presence in North America: Ward, *White Canada Forever*; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989); Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); and Jin Tan and Patricia Roy, *The Chinese in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1985).

⁹ James W. St. G. Walker, *“Race,” Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Studies* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).

Vancouver's Chinatown with the perspective that the geography of Chinatown was created in response to continuous exclusionary policies by white British Columbia. Other scholars have examined the formation of intimate social and economic relationships. For example, sociologists Alicja Muszynski and Renisa Mawani wrote about the establishment of social hierarchies and labour organization in the cannery operations of the Fraser River.¹⁰ In one of the few scholarly works that focus on Chinese-Indigenous relationships, historian Jean Barman suggests, through oral histories and archival research of census records, that Chinese-Indigenous marriages brought the Chinese and Indigenous communities closer together.¹¹

My research draws extensively from both Chinese and English newspapers to hear the voices of both groups on their reactions to policy and other major events. The *Chinese Times* was a Chinese newspaper founded in Vancouver in 1914. Its digitized records are available from 1915 to 1992. The paper was written in traditional Chinese and catered to the Cantonese speakers who migrated from southern China. It provided news coverage on China, the world, Canada, and Vancouver. I have translated many excerpts from the newspaper to present Chinese reactions to discriminatory policies that were proposed or implemented against them.¹² I also examined the reports of two royal commissions—the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, 1885 and the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration into British Columbia, 1902—

¹⁰ Alicja Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); and Renisa Mawani, *Colonial Proximities: Crossracial Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871-1921* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009).

¹¹ In Vancouver, there is a growing interest in researching Chinese-Indigenous relationships. For example, see Jean Barman, "Beyond Chinatown: Chinese Men and Indigenous Women in Early British Columbia," *BC Studies*, No 177, (Spring 2013), which examines Chinese-Indigenous marriages; Alejandro Yoshiza (director), *All Our Father's Relations* (Vancouver: 2016) documents the journey of Larry Grant (of Chinese and x^wməθk^wəyəm decent) and his siblings in search of their Chinese ancestry; and Alexandra Pleshakov, "'We Do Not Talk About Our History Here': The Department of Indian Affairs, Musqueam-Settler Relations and Memory in A Vancouver Neighbourhood," (Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2010) examines the DIA involvement of Chinese-x^wməθk^wəyəm land leases.

¹² The *Chinese Times* newspapers have been digitized and catalogued by Simon Fraser University at <http://chinesetimes.lib.sfu.ca/>.

established to gather evidence for restricting Chinese immigration to Canada. Both reports interviewed members of white settler society from a range of social positions to obtain their opinions on the Chinese immigration question. The commissioners interviewed a range of individuals, including farmers, business owners, and members of parliament. The 1902 commission report included a small section in which the Chinese expressed their own views on immigration. I drew upon the commission reports to establish the sentiment of white society on Asian immigration and also Chinese experiences of immigrating to British Columbia. Finally, records from the Department of Indian Affairs provide insight on the relationship between Chinese market gardeners, who leased lands on the Musqueam Reserve outside of Vancouver, and their x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) hosts.

The thesis is a preliminary attempt to bridge the gap in the historiography of British Columbia racial discourse. The objective of this thesis is to investigate the emergence of Chinese settlement in British Columbia and their resistance to racial stereotypes, economic restriction, and ethnic segregation in the midst of Indigenous traditional territory. It is important to understand how both the Chinese and their Indigenous hosts were deeply affected by the imperialistic agenda to create a white British Columbia. Both groups were forced into their ethnic enclaves and were subjected to various racial categories applied to them. Also, both groups were ceaselessly harassed by laws that would restrict and disrupt their livelihoods. For example, Indigenous groups saw their hunting and fishing rights restricted by law, while the Chinese would be unable to hire white women to work in their restaurants because of “morality” issues.

Chapter 1 reinvestigates the question of Chinese assimilability into settler society. At the core of the issue, Canadian settlers wanted the province for themselves. Indigenous peoples and

the Chinese, who arrived not too much later than the European settlers themselves, were seen as obstacles to the grand plan. To remove the first obstacle, British-Canadian policy and treaty makers rationalized that Indigenous people did not own the land because there were no signs of cultivation or “civilization.” In relation to the Chinese, British-Canadians claimed that they were unable to assimilate into Western society because of their supposed innate inferiority according to popular belief in Social Darwinism. The two Royal Commissions, in 1895 and 1902, provided evidence to reinforce the idea that Chinese immigrants were a threat to Canadian society, that they should not be allowed to assimilate to mainstream society, and that they did not deserve a place in Canada.

Starting in the late 1880s, English-speaking Canadians became very involved with the social purity movement that was a key component to creating a white Canada. The social purity movement focused on people’s personal hygiene as an outward expression of their moral purity. Inquisitorial inspections on hygiene standards were commonplace in that era that could have severe repercussions for those who failed the test. The Chinese failed both the physical hygiene and the moral purity “tests” for their supposed lack of cleanliness and opium abuse.

Chapter 2 focuses on how opium-abuse and uncleanness became racial stereotypes that were used to reinforce the idea the Chinese were unable to assimilate into Canadian society. “Eye witness testimony” of foreigners living in China for an extended period contributed to negative representations of the Chinese. Historian Immanuel Hsü argues that the British deliberately imported or allowed opium to be smuggled into China to balance their trade deficit. The Chinese immigrating into British Columbia were marred by the opium-abuser stereotype because there were many opium users in China. Another stereotype imposed on Chinese immigrants was substandard hygiene. Canadian historiography reveals that in general anyone

who was living in the labouring classes had poor standards for cleanliness; and thus, the housing of European and Chinese labourers often failed health inspections. Ultimately, both stereotypes of the Chinese were reinforced as justification for laws that would harass their daily lives. However, the Chinese community did not want such negative stereotypes to stain the reputation of the community. For example, they formed anti-opium leagues to lobby the Canadian government for legislation to end the opium traffic and they lobbied the City of Vancouver for scheduled street cleaning in Chinatown.

A key tenet of the social purity movement was that white women would produce white babies that would settle British Columbia and ensure a white province. Chapter 3 studies the infamous laws that prohibited Chinese restaurateurs and laundry operators from hiring white women out of “moral” concerns. The stereotype of Chinese immorality and their ability to corrupt white women was the main target of these laws. “White slavery” also diminished the agency of white women by victimizing them as sexually innocent and naïve to the wiles of “corrupting” Chinese men. The goal of these discriminating laws was to segregate white women and Chinese men. Laws of this nature were proposed in most provinces, especially after prolific incidents such as the 1924 murder of Janet Smith in Vancouver, in which a Chinese “houseboy” came under suspicion. Throughout the 1910s, Ambassador Yang Shu Wen, with the support of the Chinese Benevolent Association, traveled across the country to protest proposals and implementations of these laws.

Chinese participation in the British Columbia labour economy was another major source of conflict between Chinese and white workers. Chapter 4 examines the undercutting Chinese worker, a new stereotype emphasized by white society. When given a choice and wages being equal between Chinese and Canadian labourers, there seems to be no reason why a company

would rather hire a Chinese worker over a Canadian one. There were several reasons why Chinese labourers undercut wages of their white counterparts: they needed to find work quickly to support themselves and their families, and pay off the debt incurred from transportation fare to Canada and head tax upon entry; and companies were always seeking to reduce their expenditure on wages by hiring marginalized groups. As a result, white labourers could not compete against Chinese labourers and they vilified the Chinese by saying they undercut fair wages. This undercutting stereotype exposed the hypocrisy of white society. British colonizers first introduced capitalism into China; and then in their own colony, they refused to compete within the new economic system.

However, the Chinese did not meet hostility in all of their commercial dealings. In some cases, the Chinese were able to form relations of goodwill with both Indigenous peoples and white women of Vancouver. When Chinese market gardeners, who grew produce for Vancouver markets and households, were targeted by discriminatory laws both the Musqueam community and women rallied in support. These incidents show that commerce can build bridges towards amiable relationships. Had it not been that dominant Canadian society was dead set against the Indigenous and Chinese sharing a place with them in new society, British Columbia could have been the place to foster true multiculturalism where Indigenous, Chinese, and Euro-Canadian people could coexist in harmony.

Chapter 1

打完齋唔要和尚

“Kick out the monk after the funeral rites are done.”

There is an appropriate Chinese proverb that applies to the sentiment of the Canadian government: “Kick out the (Buddhist) monk after the funeral rites are done.” The monk wanted to do good by performing the funeral rites out of his own volition despite the abuse and mistreatment he received afterwards. After the end of the First Opium War in 1842, the British forced open the doors into China and many labourers from the province of Guang Dong left for foreign lands in search of better opportunities. White society employed Chinese labour to develop the infrastructure and economy of British Columbia, but once the colony was ready for settlement, the Chinese were not given a place in the new society despite their contributions. This is an interesting dilemma—on one hand, the Chinese were participants of colonization that dispossessed Indigenous lands; and on the other, they were also subjects of discrimination and dispossession. Throughout this colonization project, whites raised the question of the assimilability of the Chinese and Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples, who called these lands their home for many millennia, were deemed able to assimilate, but the Chinese who arrived roughly at the same time as white settlers were considered unable to. The ultimate agenda of the English-speaking settlers was to create a “white British Columbia” for their own exclusive habitation. To realize that goal, the colonial government developed an Indian reserve policy with the idea that Indigenous people would gradually assimilate into Victorian society with Christian values. On the other hand, the Chinese were met with exclusionary policies and segregated from areas of white settlement because it was felt they were incapable of assimilating to Christian society.

Arrival of the Chinese and Creating White British Columbia

Chinese emigrants left their home country after the British ended the isolation of the Middle Kingdom (China) at the conclusion of the First Opium War. The lack of arable land to sustain subsistence farming pushed the southern Chinese to foreign lands in search of better prospects. Some arrived in California, known to the Chinese as “Gold Mountain (金山),” to participate in the gold rush. Others opted to travel to Hawaii, or “Fragrant Sandalwood Hills (檀香山),” to work in the sugar plantations. Following the conclusion of the California gold rush and the discovery of the precious metal in the Fraser River valley in 1858, many Chinese migrated northwards into British Columbia to participate in the gold rush there.

In Stó:lō territory, up the Fraser River from Vancouver, the Stó:lō found it increasingly difficult to access their traditional resource gathering sites with the presence of the miners. Chinese miners were also complicit of causing damages. Stó:lō Elder Harold Wells recounts a story his grandmother once told him about the Chinese miners who left a twelve-foot deep quarry near their home.¹³ No doubt, white miners and subsequent settlement caused dispossession of Indigenous lands, but Chinese presence during the gold rush also disrupted Indigenous livelihoods and caused damages to their homes and territory. After the gold rush, British Columbia remained a contact zone, a place of uneven power struggle and cultural clashes for Chinese labourers, white settlers, and Indigenous peoples. The railway built by Chinese labour brought in even more white settlers into the lands of the Indigenous communities who lived here for millennia.¹⁴

¹³ Stó:lō Heritage Trust, *You are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History*, edited by Keith Thor Carlson (Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1996), 62.

¹⁴ For more information, see Daniel Marshall, *Claiming the Land: British Columbia and the Making of New El Dorado* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2018). Historian Daniel Marshall argues that the Fraser River gold rush served as a catalyst to the founding of British Columbia as a colony and renewed British, Canadian, and American interest in building transcontinental rail links to the Pacific Ocean.

Most Chinese men, who initially came to North America in the 1840s and 1850s, did so without the intent of permanently settling in this new place. They found labour-intensive jobs that were more lucrative than opportunities in China, and many were able to remit their salary to their families back at home. Most married men did not bring their wives or families, and in the United States, they were not allowed to. California did not permit women to immigrate together with their partners because policy makers viewed Chinese men as temporary contract workers, who would eventually leave the country.¹⁵ On the other hand, the State of Hawaii encouraged Chinese labourers to bring their wives as a means of social control. Women were seen as pacifiers to male labourers. Plantation owners felt it was problematic to deal with male labourers who were without companionship.

At the same time, colonization started in the territories to the North. Vancouver Island was made a colony in 1849 and James Douglas was named the governor. Mainland British Columbia became a colony later in 1858. In other parts of Canada, the British government entered into treaties with various Indigenous nations and assigned them reserves to be incubators for assimilation that separated them from the “vices” of settler society. The colony’s first governor, James Douglas also believed it was necessary to set Indigenous people on a path of assimilation and he began the colonization process by negotiating treaties with the local Indigenous nations on Vancouver Island. However, Douglas eventually stopped treaty making on the mainland and set aside small Indian reserves at places where people lived or fished.¹⁶ Historian Cole Harris argues that Douglas eventually stopped buying land from Indigenous people because he felt the agreements came with an exorbitant cost, one that the British colonial office was less willing to pay as time went on. Instead, colonial officials began setting apart

¹⁵ Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 39.

¹⁶ Stó:lō Heritage Trust, *You are Asked to Witness*, 66.

Indian reserves and allowed Indigenous people to pre-empt land, the process where an individual was able to reserve up to 160 acres of Crown land and gain full possession by providing evidence of “improvements.” Douglas believed that the pre-emption process would induce Indigenous people to take up agricultural pursuits and walk down the path to “civilization.”¹⁷ Under the direction of Joseph Trutch, the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, many of Douglas’ policies were reversed to facilitate white settlement. By the 1830s, he revoked the ability for Indigenous people to pre-empt land and reduced reserves to 10-20 acres per nuclear family.¹⁸

Land policy was only one component of the state’s assimilation agenda. To assimilate into colonial society, one must adopt Victorian cultural norms and become virtuous Christians. The presence of missionaries facilitated the education of culture and religion to the inhabitants of reserves. In addition, the 1876 *Indian Act* was designed to further regulate the cultural behaviour of Indigenous peoples for the sake of assimilation and disruption of their own self-governance. The Act dictated the formation of Indian bands and it determined who was considered “status” Indian under the law. It placed bans on cultural activities, such the potlatch on the Northwest Coast and the Sun Dance in the Prairies, and this criminalization of cultural practices greatly restricted the social, economic, and governance operations of Indigenous communities. For example, the potlatch was a ceremonial system integrated into the fabric of society including the passing down of ancestral names, transfer of property, and redistribution of wealth. Missionaries

¹⁷ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002) 32-3.

¹⁸ Anne Elizabeth Seymour, “Natives and Reserve Establishment in Nineteenth Century British Columbia,” (Master’s Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1981), 18.

proposed such bans to prevent their new converts from “backsliding” away from Victorian Christian social norms.¹⁹

Indigenous peoples were deemed to be a vanishing, dying race, by the white settlers. Despite the various regulations placed upon their livelihoods, settler society viewed their Indigenous counterparts as capable of assimilating into their own society. The *Indian Act* and the reserve system were vehicles to realize that goal. Successful Indigenous assimilation was a critical objective in the creation of white British Columbia. It was also way to remove Indigenous rights to land. However, there was another obstacle to that goal—the incoming Chinese.

Chinese sojourners who stayed in British Columbia following the Fraser River gold rush found their livelihood through a wide range of occupations. In the 1870s, the Chinese worked in various industries such as fish processing in canneries, mining, and in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) that was completed in 1885. All of these endeavours had intense labour requirements, which provided Chinese and Indigenous peoples with wage labour opportunities. The demand for labour during the construction of CPR alongside anti-Chinese sentiments led to intense debates in the Canadian Parliament. Opponents of Chinese labour, such as William Smithe, Premier of British Columbia, claimed that the Chinese workers were pathogen carriers and opium users, and therefore a threat to the wellbeing of Canadian society. In his proposed *Act to Prevent the Immigration of Chinese*, Premier Smithe claimed that the Chinese “are governed by pestilential habits.”²⁰ And in a subsequent letter, he wrote “The

¹⁹ Douglas Cole, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

²⁰ British Columbia, “Correspondence in connection with the mission of Hon. W. Smithe to Ottawa relating to Chinese immigration and other questions,” Sessional Papers, 1885, quoted in Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 51.

Chinese are alien in sentiment and habits. They do not become settlers in any sense of that word...The use of opium has extended throughout the Province to the demoralization of the native races.”²¹ Smithe used opium as a convenient racial marker to justify discrimination against the Chinese and proposed the implementation of a fifty-dollar head tax on all incoming Chinese immigrants.

Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald remained steadfast in his intention to employ 15,000 Chinese workers on the railway in order to accelerate his nation-building agenda regardless of what opponents against Chinese labour had to say about the “corrupting” influence of the Chinese residing in British Columbia.²² When the CPR was completed in 1885, many Chinese workers found themselves jobless. Those who remained in Canada began settling down in various regions throughout the country and many decided to settle in the Vancouver area. Since the Canadian government got what it wanted—the completion of the cross country railway—it now sought to legislate against the “yellow peril” by *kicking out the monk after the funeral rites are done*.

Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, 1885

The Chinese began to settle in Vancouver’s Chinatown and created a safe haven against the everyday discrimination from their neighbours of European descent. At the same time, the Chinese ethnic enclave was taking shape, hostility towards the Chinese continued to escalate, leading to the first of two royal commissions about the immigration of Asians and the imposition of the head tax.

²¹ Correspondence between William Smithe to the Canadian Parliament, 1885, quoted Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 51.

²² Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 54-5.

By 1884, 114 Chinese people had already settled near Pender Street, which became the core of Vancouver's Chinatown. With little capital on hand, the first businesses were laundry houses and grocers, industries in which the Chinese dominated. Three notable businesses in the region operated by Chinese included a laundry house called Wah Chong located on Water Street, a wash-house and general store by the name of Gin Tei Hing, and Goon Ling Dang, a grocery on Dupont Street. The small Chinese community opted to live on a few intersecting streets to create a close-knit community away from white settlers. Won Alexander Cum Yow testified to the 1902 Royal Commission, reflecting on years of experience living in Vancouver:

The Chinese who are here usually congregate in one part of the city. The chief reason for this is for companionship. Besides the Chinese know that the white people have had no friendly feelings towards them for a number of years.²³

Other Chinese men lived in wooden lodgings near Granville around False Creek on Hastings, Dupont, and Carrall Streets.²⁴ As the CPR railway neared completion, this community was soon joined by construction workers displaced from their jobs. Also in 1884, British Columbia enacted *An Act to Prevent Chinese from Acquiring Crown Lands* prohibiting the Chinese from pre-empting lands at the low cost that was available to white settlers. For the Chinese community, this meant they had to lease lands to engage in market gardening or other agricultural pursuits.

While some Chinese owned businesses, others engaged in a wide variety of occupations to eke out a living. These ranged from railway construction, land clearing, coal mining, placer mining, lode mining, shingle manufacturing, domestic service, tailoring, and other unskilled labour, as well as work in the fishing and lumber industries.²⁵ The Chinese dominated in many of

²³ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1902), 235.

²⁴ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 64.

²⁵ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), v-viii.

these industries including the labour-intensive fish canning industry and market gardening, as well as the laundry business, due to the low capital investment required for start-up.

White labourers soon became hostile towards Chinese immigrants because of the competition for work. Historian Peter Ward argues that the loss of prosperity combined with increasing economic success of Asian immigrants in the years following the gold rush amplified racist sentiments that were taken to the public forum after British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871.²⁶ The completion of the CPR left many Chinese labourers jobless and in direct competition with white labourers. Since the British Columbia government had no authority to restrict or exclude Chinese immigration, Ottawa was often lobbied by various anti-Chinese labour groups and the “problem” of Chinese immigration became a hotly debated topic in Parliament. In order to alleviate the tension and respond to white demands, the government of Canada in 1885 issued the first Royal Commission to investigate the issue of Chinese immigration.

The Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration of 1885 was tasked to investigate “the advisability of passing a law to prohibit the incoming of Chinese into British Columbia or Canada” in view of social and trade relations between BC, Canada, and China with attention to “moral considerations which arise out of the residence and contact of the white people with Chinese.”²⁷ The Commission was framed as an exclusionary exercise with the results seemingly predetermined. The Commission findings comprised of two reports separately investigated by Commissioners J.A. Chapleau and J.H. Gray, minutes of evidence taken in San Francisco,

²⁶ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 30.

²⁷ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence* (Ottawa: The Commissioner, 1885), viii.

British Columbia, and Portland, and appendices with additional information surrounding the immigration question.

Commissioner Chapleau visited San Francisco and interviewed the American elite and labourers for their opinions on Chinese immigration. The Americans admitted that Chinese labour was indispensable to the development of the country, especially in rail building. In his testimony, Frederick Low, former Governor of California, said: “Up to the present Chinese labour had been of great advantage to the State, looking at it in dollars and cents.” Chapleau suggested that,

If it can be shown that wages are lowered not by a healthy and fair competition between fellow citizens, but between the citizens of the State and aliens whose standard of comfort is below what the ordinary decencies of life require, who have thrown aside every weight which could impede them in the race of competition, then a case would be made out for the consideration for the Government.²⁸

Chapleau highlighted public anxiety about the undercutting practices of Chinese labourers, a theme that will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 4. His comments also underscore the assumption that the Chinese had lower standards of living, which became a naturalized aspect of the Chinese character in public discourse.

In his report, Chapleau included various travelogues and testimonies from Western visitors to China to provide further evidence about the supposed nature of the Chinese people. He provided the following assessment of the Chinese in their home country based on the “testimony” of an eyewitness traveler.

Mr. Crowley declares they are “a nation of thieves,” and many witnesses affirm that they have no respect for truth. One witness swears he has known them openly to practice revolting crimes. That unmentionable offences, infanticide, the sale of female children, cruelty, idolatry, gross superstition, and low and degrading customs prevail is sworn by several witnesses.²⁹

²⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.A. Chapleau], xxvi.

²⁹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.A. Chapleau], xxix.

Chapleau wasted no effort in vilifying the Chinese to make his point that Chinese immigration was not suitable in Canada. On a fundamental level, the question being asked by the first Royal Commission was about the assimilability of the Chinese into Canadian society. Commissioner Chapleau concluded that the Chinese were unable to become Canadian citizens:

No such fusion can take place between them as takes place between the Irish, German, French, etc. The yellow and white or the black and white will not mix, and the antagonism of race is always intensified if one of two peoples has oppressed the other, or regarded it with social scorn.³⁰

Chapleau gathered evidence to prove that, while Chinese labour was beneficial, it was impossible for them with their “immoral” disposition, to assimilate with Canadian society. For Chapleau, the Chinese had no place in Canada.

On the other hand, J.H. Gray interviewed elites in Canada, including members of parliament and senators, who overall provided better appraisals about the character of Chinese immigrants. Commissioner Gray concluded that,

If personal prejudice and feeling be eliminated from this evidence, it is impossible not to admit that as a laboring class the preponderance is not against the Chinese. They are stated to be honest in their dealings, industrious, sober, peaceable and law abiding, frugal and cleanly, and when doing well to live well, consuming the same articles and goods as do the white laborers, thereby equally contributing with them to the revenue.³¹

Gray’s findings were more sympathetic to the Chinese than those of Chapleau. He was one of the few officials in the Canadian government who openly acknowledged that the British and Canadian states were responsible for creating and reproducing many negative stereotypes associated with the Chinese. Yet, despite his evaluation of Chinese character to be much higher

³⁰ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1885)*, [J.A. Chapleau], xcix.

³¹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1885)*, [J.H. Gray], xlix.

than Chapleau, he was still a man of his times and saw things through the Victorian lens.³² He applauded Western superiority in this report saying,

How derogatory to the French, English and American races in Canada to assert that the presence of a few labouring ignorant Chinese will cause the Canadian people to abandon the religion of their fathers, the morals, education and higher Christian civilization of their institutions, to adopt the idol worship and debasing morals and habits of the heathen.³³

The Commission was like putting Chinese immigration on trial. If Chapleau was the prosecutor against immigration, Gray was the defendant. The foremost question about whether there should be a restriction placed on immigration into British Columbia was really about the ability of the Chinese to assimilate into Canadian society. Both Commissioners Gray and Chapleau believed that a poll tax would be “sound policy” to regulate Chinese immigration. On July 2, 1885, the House of Commons approved a head tax of \$50 to every person of Chinese origin immigrating to Canada with the exception of diplomats, tourists, merchants, and students.³⁴ As historian Henry Yu explains, “It was an attempt to basically discriminate against the Chinese” and “to alter the flow of migrants to the new Canada to be weighted towards European and in particular British migrants.”³⁵

Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 1902 and the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923

Chinese immigration from the United States and southern China continued to increase after the first Royal Commission despite the head tax, and tensions remained high in the British

³² Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.H. Gray], lvi.

³³ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.H. Gray], xciv.

³⁴ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 57-8.

³⁵ Henry Yu quoted in Matthew McRae, “The Chinese Head Tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act,” accessed 8 October, 2019, <https://humanrights.ca/story/the-chinese-head-tax-and-the-chinese-exclusion-act>.

Columbia labour market due to fears that Chinese labourers would undercut wages and take jobs from white labourers. These tensions occasionally manifested into outbreaks of racial violence that persisted into the early decades of the twentieth century. As early as 1867, white labourers working for the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company threatened violence if the company continued to hire Chinese labour in the coal mines. In January 1886, when Chinese workers paid at the usual (and lower) Chinese wages were tasked to clear stumps in Vancouver's West End, a mob of unemployed white workers stormed the Chinese camp, resulting in many injured Chinese. The most well-known example of racial violence occurred in 1907, when whites stormed Vancouver's Chinatown resulting in extensive damage to Chinese businesses. Racial tensions in the labour market was the main catalyst of the riot. White labourers continued to feel threatened by the Asian competition and accused the Asians of "taking their jobs." This racial tension started from the moment the Chinese and white labourers worked side-by-side in the labour market. Legislation became an avenue to protect white workers from Chinese competition. In 1878, the legislature of British Columbia placed a clause in all public works contracts requiring contractors to exclude Chinese workers from their labour force while engaging in government projects.³⁶ Similar legislation was passed in 1902, and again, in 1921 to reaffirm these restrictions.³⁷ Anti-Chinese sentiment with respect to the labour issue was present for as long as the Chinese workers themselves were present in British Columbia.

British Columbia relinquished the power to control immigration when they joined Confederation and it came under federal jurisdiction, but it did not stop the provincial legislature from placing whatever restrictions they could upon Chinese economic activities in the province. In the meantime, British Columbia lobbied Ottawa for some form of immigration control. Under

³⁶ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 64.

³⁷ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 113.

the pressure of relentless petitions and using the Chinese labour issue as a means to gain political ascendancy, the Canadian government passed legislation to diminish the rights of Chinese residents. Seeing that the fifty dollar head tax was unable to stem the tide of Chinese immigration, a second Royal Commission was proposed to reinvestigate the question of Asian immigration.

The format for the Royal Commission of 1902 was different compared to its 1885 counterpart. The three commissioners worked together to investigate various issues including the British Columbian economy. They conducted an industry-by-industry study and interviewed various representatives from business owners to labourers for their opinions on the state of their industries due to the influx of Chinese immigrants. The Commission's report was much more comprehensive than the one in 1885 and covered almost every occupation in which Chinese labourers participated. At the same time, the Commission gathered evidence on more value-ridden topics such as hygiene and morality.

Similar to Chapleau's report in 1885, the 1902 report was a reflection of what the public wanted to hear. Given the agitated state of white British Columbians, the commission was teleological in that its intention was to restrict immigration. The investigation depended on questions that compelled answers the commissioners wanted to obtain, such as: "Do you think the presence of the orientals in the Province places any impediment in the way of those lands being settled?"³⁸ "Are you in favour of any restriction on the Chinese coming in?"³⁹ As a result, the commissioners concluded, "Of the witnesses called less than half a score were in favour of unrestricted immigration. Of the rest, a few took the view that the tax now imposed

³⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1902)*, 59.

³⁹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1902)*, 122.

was...sufficient, but the general consensus of opinion was in favour of higher restriction, or total exclusion.”⁴⁰

The Royal Commission of 1902 sought even more severe restrictions on Chinese immigration. Various people from different social statuses agreed that the head tax should be increased to \$500.⁴¹ On the other hand, the Chinese interviewed claimed that people would stop immigrating if the head tax was even raised to \$200.⁴² In the end, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier succumbed to public pressure and implemented the recommendation increasing the head tax to \$500. The objective of the commission was not to find out whether the presence of Chinese and Japanese immigration was beneficial to the development of the Canadian economy and society, but to provide justification to legally restrict and exclude Asian immigration to placate people in British Columbia and Canada. The Canadian government used the power of the law to diminish the rights of the Chinese in Canada.

By 1923, the Mackenzie King government finally resorted to the infamous Chinese Immigration Act because the \$500 head tax had not prevented immigration from China. In February 1923, King negotiated a “gentlemen’s agreement” with the Chinese government to limit immigration to certain groups of people. Under this new act, only Chinese merchants possessing at least \$2,500, university students, and government officials were allowed entry into Canada.⁴³

The effects of the Chinese Immigration Act was immediately felt. The *Chinese Times* protested against the law that forbade wives and children from entering Canada, “[It is] the most unfair and violates international law. With the establishment of this Act, I beg to ask the just men

⁴⁰ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 240.

⁴¹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 221.

⁴² Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 239.

⁴³ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 139.

and women of the civilized world, what do you have to say about these Canadian laws?”⁴⁴

Exclusion stunted the growth of the Chinese population in Canada, and to make matters worse, 5,000 Chinese repatriated to their homeland.⁴⁵ During the inter-war years, those who stayed did their best to resist policies and by-laws designed to harass and restrict their livelihood. The idea that the Canadian government used the power of law to harass the lives of the Chinese will be further explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

Question of Assimilation

The inability of any non-European person to assimilate into the Anglo-Saxon society of British Columbia was a tenet of Victorian culture, even though there were people of the time who would dispute the claim. For the most part, the belief was that Asians did not mix well with the majority of white Canada. Ideas about race were deeply rooted in the scientific racism of Social Darwinism. To the British people, this meant: Anglo-Saxon people were superior to all other Europeans, northerners were superior to southerners, Protestants to Catholics, Christians to heathens, and light complexions to dark ones.⁴⁶ Historian Kay Anderson cites an interesting case of a marriage between a white man and a Chinese woman that addresses the legalization of identity. In 1887, Mr. Moore returned to Canada with his wife and children and found that he had to pay the head tax for his family. However, he successfully argued that the tax should be waived because “according to the revised act of 1887 such women and children were no longer officially ‘Chinese.’”⁴⁷ In this case, Chinese ethnicity was traced through patrilineage. This bears striking

⁴⁴ “The Rebuttal of Mr. Huang Song Mao on the Act,” *Chinese Times*, 3 July, 1923, 3.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 146-7.

⁴⁶ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 110.

⁴⁷ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 58.

resemblance to the *Indian Act*, which legislated that an Indigenous woman who married a non-status man would lose her Indian status. This incident highlights an important observation—that race was legally determined through the patriarchy of the white male. Even though cases where the state imposed a legal definition of Chinese people’s racial identity were rare. Social and public discourses continued to racialize the Chinese in ways that made them seem unable to assimilate.

Both commissions vilified the Chinese presence in Canada and cited Chinese “vices” as one of the obstacles to adopting European values. The Canadian public viewed gambling, opium-smoking, and prostitution as the dark trinity of Chinese immorality. However, Dr. Justice Gray proposed a view contrary to public opinion suggesting that any opium-smoking or prostitution by the Chinese did not pose a threat to the country when compared to whiskey drinking and prostitution by “whites and Indians.” In his 1885 Royal Commission report, Gray stated,

In a country where whiskey drinking prevails to an unlimited extent and where white and Indian prostitutes can be found and are known to exist in unknown numbers, it seems a contradiction to assume a dread of the white population becoming demoralized from the presence of seventy Chinese prostitutes, in a population of 10,550 Chinese people living in accordance with the customs of their own country and a practice of opium smoking among their own people, infinitesimally small when compared with the practice of whiskey drinking among the whites...⁴⁸

Even the more biased J.A. Chapleau noted that the corrupting effect of Chinese bad morals was “grossly exaggerated.”⁴⁹ If the 1885 commissioners concluded that the Chinese threat to Canadian was baseless and exaggerated, why was there still so much testimony on Chinese bad morals and what was the point of including such derogatory responses in the reports? The

⁴⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.H. Gray], lx.

⁴⁹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.A. Chapleau], cxxx.

Canadian government reinforced the stereotypes on the public perception of white Canadians to justify exclusionary policies against the Chinese.

When Canadian society of the late nineteenth century thought of morality, they did so from the point of view that acceptance of Christianity led to good morals. This was a key requirement for assimilation of a non-white person. At the time, it was part of federal policy to use Christianity as a vehicle to assimilate Indigenous people into Christian citizenship. While many clergy saw Christianized Indigenous people as evidence of assimilation and progress towards civilization, not all clergy believed that Christianized Chinese people were beneficial to Canada. When interviewed by the commissioners in 1901, Reverend W. Leslie Clay of the Presbyterian Church in Victoria, claimed, “I would not consider even Chinese Christians in large numbers desirable. The ground I take is that they seem impossible of assimilation with us.”⁵⁰ He also believed that the Chinese presence was “very detrimental” to Canada. Before investigating the causes of why the Chinese were deemed to be “impossible of assimilation,” I will briefly examine and compare the effects of Christianization on Chinese and Indigenous communities.

Indigenous people adopted aspects of Christianity that made sense to their own cultural and spiritual understandings. Some of them took the path of syncretism and incorporated aspects of their Indigenous religious traditions into Christian worship.⁵¹ However, in some cases, converts to Christianity were treated with disdain by Indigenous traditionalists and were cut off from community support. Even after Christianity was well entrenched within a community and there was no longer stigma with the adoption of the faith, being a devout Christian could bar some individuals, and perhaps their family, from cultural activities that were deemed

⁵⁰ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 24-5.

⁵¹ Susan Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

inappropriate by the Church, such as potlatching on the Northwest Coast or sun dances on the Prairies. An example of this can be seen in Leslie Robertson's *Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las*. In the early twentieth century, Kwakwaka'wakw leader Jane Constance Cook refused to participate in the potlatch system because she saw it as supporting inequality; and as a result, she suffered challenges to her identity from being unable to transfer names and other cultural prerogatives.⁵² We can see similar tensions within the Chinese community. Reverend Clay claimed to know Chinese "who have been cast off by their friends and looked down upon by their neighbours, because of their having adopted Christian modes of thought and living."⁵³ To both the Indigenous and Chinese communities, the acceptance to the call of God could potentially come with a steep price of segregation, one that even Christian teachings warned.⁵⁴ On the other hand, some converts took the path of syncretism and adopted Christian customs into their original spirituality.

Euro-Canadian settlers believed that Indigenous peoples were capable of assimilation and the Chinese were not. Culture is a social construct that often brings pride to those who belong to the culture. Cultural pride can be an outward sign of solidarity with those who belong to that culture. As such, for both Indigenous and Chinese peoples, it is only natural to resist the efforts of assimilation given the long histories of their own culture. White settlers also believed that long traditions made Indigenous and Chinese people obstinate in their way of thinking and incapable of change. Scholar Edward Said argues that the West constructed the East as inferior, unchanging, and incapable of growth.⁵⁵ Returning to the question of Chinese assimilability,

⁵² Leslie A. Robertson and Kwagu'l Gixsam Clan, *Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), 244

⁵³ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 23.

⁵⁴ Matthew 10:21-22 (NRSV). "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name."

⁵⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

historian Peter Ward claims that the formation of Chinatown was cited as evidence to resist assimilation.⁵⁶ Chinese missionary Tom Chue Thom stated in the Royal Commission of 1902 that if the Chinese were allowed to assimilate that there would be no antagonism between the Canadians and the Chinese.⁵⁷ However, the key remains that the Chinese be *allowed* to assimilate.

Finding the Ideal Nesting Place

A common belief held by Euro-Canadians was that the Chinese did not come to settle.⁵⁸ It is true that the first Chinese immigrants most likely did not consider the possibility of settling in Canada. They were simply looking for opportunities to strike a fortune and return home to live comfortably. Much of the allure of coming to California during the gold rush was for opportunities of adventure and wealth. As the Chinese proverb goes, “Birds choose good timber to build their nests upon.”⁵⁹ When the Canadian Pacific Railway came to completion in 1885, the immigrants began to consider settling in this foreign land with better opportunities compared to “home.” At this juncture, one ponders whether the Canadian settlers simply pretended that the Chinese had no intention to settle as further justification to take all the land for themselves. This manner of justification was similar in sentiment to the Western rationalization that the Indigenous people did not own the territories because their land was not cultivated. Canadians took pride in the strength and justice of British law through treaty-making to gain just settlement to Indigenous lands, a kind of thinking relating to the peacekeeping myth.⁶⁰ While few treaties

⁵⁶ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 23.

⁵⁷ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 33.

⁵⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 46.

⁵⁹ The full proverb is as follows: “Birds choose good timber to build their nests upon, excellent subjects choose their masters to serve.”

⁶⁰ Paulette Regan describes the peacekeeping myth as the view Canadians adopted, as they took possession of western hinterlands through treaty making. Canadians, armed with the British system of government would not

were negotiated in British Columbia, the State believed that it had fairly with the Indigenous peoples in establishing Indian reserves. At the same time, they employed social exclusion and segregation to rationalize the Chinese immigrants would not need land in British Columbia. After all, they were on their way out. The *Act to Prevent Chinese from Acquiring Crown Lands* of 1884 was a result of the aforementioned mindset. However, for those who stayed, society found means to make their existence in British Columbia miserable.

Social hostility to force away the Chinese worked to some extent. In 1902, Won Alexander Cum Yow testified that a large number of the Chinese immigrants were married with family in China and would consider bringing their families to settle if it was not for the hostility directed towards them.⁶¹ Ming Lee, a laundryman, echoed this sentiment saying, “If there were no tax on the wives and children I think Chinamen would bring their wives and families to this country. I would certainly bring my wife.”⁶² As a result, only the wealthiest of the Chinese were able to bring their families for a reunion. Most Chinese simply remitted the money they earned back to their families and visited them occasionally.

The Chinese created a strong community to look out for each other because of white hostility. No rational being would want to associate with others who were always hostile to you for a prolonged period of time. Compounded with the effect that the dominant language was English, it was not difficult to reason why the Chinese would huddle together in the confines of Chinatown. The construction of Chinatown was to build mental and physical boundaries between Chinese territory and Canadian and it further reinforced the idea that the Chinese were not

resort to conquest like their American neighbours when dealing with Indigenous peoples. Treaties became a “peaceful” means of removing the “Indian obstacle” and North West Mounted Police were depicted as peacekeepers. For more details, see *Unsettling the Settler Within*.

⁶¹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 236.

⁶² Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 176.

capable of assimilating.⁶³ This situation became a paradox and a vicious cycle. First, the Euro-Canadians believed (or convinced themselves) that the Chinese were not going to settle in British Columbia. When the opposite was true, the settlers claimed that the Chinese were unable to assimilate into their society and became hostile to the immigrants in an effort to force them out. The Chinese endured the hostility in their own ethnic enclaves, which further reinforced the conviction that they were inassimilable, giving cause for even more state methods of segregation.

While the Chinese were trying to find their own place within British Columbian society, so too were European settlers arriving from the eastern parts of the Dominion and Europe. The final concern brought forth by the Royal Commissions of 1885 and 1902 was that the presence of the Asian immigrant workforce inhibited Euro-Canadian immigration into British Columbia. Settlers from eastern Canada and Europe did not want to compete with Chinese labour that had saturated the labour market.⁶⁴ Reverend Rowe testified to the 1902 Commission that Chinese immigration “has a tendency to deter white immigration. They depress wages, which tends to lower the standard of living. They reduce the ability of others to purchase.”⁶⁵ Others hoped to make a living through agriculture. It was very arduous work to prepare a parcel of land to the point where it became profitable in agriculture. Land must first be cleared, and if the owner was a small-scale farmer, hiring Chinese help to do the backbreaking work was out of the question. In the meantime, white settlers relied on side jobs to make a living until their land became profitable. The dismal prospects of being employed in British Columbia scared away many settlers from immigrating to the province. Even if a farmer was willing to compete in waged labour market with the Chinese at wages that were already undercut, the entire family must also

⁶³ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 30.

⁶⁴ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1885)*, JH Gray, xv.

⁶⁵ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1902)*, 26.

be willing to endure a temporary drop in the standard of living. An excerpt from the 1902 Commission report summarizes the aforementioned sentiments,

I know many people have been deterred from coming here through the presence of Chinese. At many of our meetings resolutions have been passed addressed to the Dominion and the Provincial Governments asking to restrict this and promote the class which we most desire. Many of our members are Old Country people and from Eastern Canada,—not of a low class. We feel persuaded it would be immensely in the interest of the country to offer this desirable class inducements to come, either from Eastern Canada or from the Old Country... A person going on some of our lands cannot make a living and they find the outside callings filled with Oriental labour, and they cannot get work to help them out till they get started.⁶⁶

With an outlook such as this, it is understandable why the Asian presence inhibited Euro-Canadian immigration into the province. It was always a concern of the nation builders, who were in high positions of society, that not enough white people were able to settle British Columbia. And if the Chinese presence was one of the obstacles to that objective, then it must be swiftly dealt with.

Conclusion

Canadian society in the latter half of the nineteenth century had few positive impressions of the Chinese. Social Darwinism took hold as the dominant ideology in European minds; most believed that the Chinese were an inferior race. At the core of the issue, the Chinese were simply seen as unable to assimilate into Canadian society. Assimilation had a double meaning in this context. Firstly, the Chinese were deemed unable to adopt Anglo-Saxon values because of their supposedly persistent practices of gambling, opium-abuse, and prostitution. Secondly, Social Darwinism dictated that any child born between a white and a Chinese person was biologically inferior. Stereotypes reinforced the racial boundaries and perpetuated the idea that the Chinese

⁶⁶ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 46.

could not assimilate. The Euro-Canadians stressed to Indigenous communities that good morals and civilization came from the acceptance of Christianity. Yet, Chinese immigrants that accepted the new faith often did so at the expense of losing community support and found themselves trapped between two worlds: they were not accepted by the Chinese or Euro-Canadian communities.

On closer reflection, perhaps there was a more sinister reason why the Chinese were deemed inassimilable. If land can be taken from the Indigenous people with the rationalization that the land they owned was not cultivated, then Canadians can certainly justify that the Chinese were not here to settle and are unable to assimilate; therefore, remove the threat of Chinese competition by leaving them no space to settle. When the immigrants decided to settle in their own ethnic enclaves, they continued to draw boundaries segregating “us” and “them.” Stereotypes were useful as justification to harass the Chinese in their economic lives.

Kick out the monk after the funeral rites are done. Colonialism dispossessed Indigenous people of their traditional territory. After the Chinese labourers built the CPR and helped develop the economy of British Columbia through participation in a range of industries, they were not given a place in the society they helped to create. Both peoples were discarded once they have lost their “usefulness.”

The next chapter will investigate the effects that the stereotypes of opium-abusers and uncleanness had on the development of Chinatown from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

Chapter 2

東亞病夫

“Sick Man of East Asia”

The phrase “sick man of East Asia” evolved from another phrase “sick man of Europe,” which was used by the British to describe the state of affairs in the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War. The phrase was re-coined to “sick man of East Asia” by the vanguards of the progressive faction of the late Qing dynasty, such as Liang Qi Chao (梁啟超). This self-deprecating phrase reminded the Chinese that this was how the Western world viewed them—a sick man lying in bed incapable of fending off the invasion of Western powers—and to rouse the Chinese into restoring the reputation of China on the international stage. However, in the eyes of the British, this phrase may have a more literal meaning.

At the turn of the century, English Canada was undergoing a “social purity” movement. As components to building a “good” and “clean” nation, personal hygiene was seen as an outward sign of inward purity—a person also had good moral discipline. The obsession with cleanliness being tied to morality also had racial implications. Being clean or “white” (in the skin tone sense) also marked moral superiority. The Chinese immigrants, in the eyes of the social reformers, failed all of the above criteria. Not only were most of their abodes found by health inspectors to be unhygienic and cultivating contagious disease, they were also considered opium users with a disposition towards immorality. Historian Marianne Valverde neatly summarizes how social reformers viewed immigrants, including the Chinese,

Moral reformers had a significant impact on immigration policies, both directly by lobbying for such innovations as the medical/moral inspection of all

immigrants and indirectly by creating a climate of opinion in which certain groups were perceived as morally undesirable.⁶⁷

This chapter investigates how opium smoking and lack of hygiene became two of the most prominent stereotypes used against the Chinese to justify their undesirability in British Columbia. They became further evidence to the inability of the Chinese to assimilate.

The stench, when one goes from the open air into a dope joint, as they are termed in the slang, is terrible, and only a man with a pure conscience and the gastronomic apparatus of a detective is able to stand it at first. But gradually the air begins to brighten before one's eyes and the opium mist is penetrated and one recognizes the position.

The hardest of all the sensations on the beginner's stomach is the gurgle of the liquid, whatever it is, that fills the lower part of the pipe of a tobacco smoker. It gives you the shudders to think about it afterwards, for the sound is terrible — like a stream of water being operated by suction over a rattle of bones, with a stench thrown in.

Having survived the horrors of the first introduction, the novice is shown the whole performance, usually termed 'hitting the pipe.' A new man will expire into unconsciousness long before he has finished the first dose, while an old hand at the game will take three or four of the little opium pills that he has so deftly rolled before he is overcome and sinks into that state of coma which comprises all the slumber that some Chinese get from one year's end to another...

A pipe will last from five to ten minutes, according to the ability of the smoker, and then the operator rolls up another pill and smokes that, and follows with another — if his animation is sufficient to carry him safely through the operation for the third time. This is, roughly, the operation that was witnessed half a dozen times by the commissioners on their recent trip...⁶⁸

This description of a Vancouver opium den was printed in a Vancouver newspaper in 1901. The reporter recounted, with vivid detail, the preparation and partaking of opium by a Chinese smoker, who was portrayed as one who would endure anything to indulge in the narcotic. Opium was not a foreign substance in parts of Europe; in England, it was known to be

⁶⁷ Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 32.

⁶⁸ "It gives you the shudders": A 1901 visit to a Chinatown opium den," *The Province*, 16 March, 2017, <https://theprovince.com/news/local-news/it-gives-you-the-shudders-a-1901-visit-to-a-chinatown-opium-den>

used to treat nervous disorders and for recreational use. However, there was a sense of fascination and anxiety about opium smoking that gripped British Columbians. Whether it was to satisfy their curiosity, to laud their own moral superiority, or to reinforce the idea that the Chinese were generally base opium-abusers, exposés on opium dens continued to come off the press as articles or books, such as Emily Murphy's *The Black Candle*, which presents an alarmist view of Chinese and opium use.⁶⁹



Figure 2.1: The “Foreign Mission Field” in Vancouver, October 10, 1908, *Saturday Sunset Magazine*.

⁶⁹ Emily Murphy, *The Black Candle* (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013). This is a reprint of the 1922 book.

Opium in China

To understand why opium addiction became a popular narrative about the Chinese in British Columbia, one must survey the history of opium use in China. Opium was introduced into China from Turkey and Arabia for medicinal purposes as early as the late seventh century. It was widely employed as a painkiller and depressant. Recreational use of opium was rumoured to have originated in the 1620s in Taiwan and was introduced to Fu Jian and Guang Dong regions a century and a half later.⁷⁰ Without a powerful navy to restrain opium smuggling by Western companies, the trend of smoking opium spread from the aristocracy to the peasantry. Observing the adverse effects on the Chinese people, in 1729 Emperor Yong Zheng issued an edict prohibiting the sale and use of opium, but to limited effect. It was estimated by statesmen Lin Ze Xu (林則徐) that at the onset of the First Opium War, it was entirely possible that at least one out of ten people smoked opium, roughly translating to four million smokers in China by 1839.⁷¹

The British government shifted the commercial policy from mercantilism to free trade in the 1830s. By 1834, the East India Company lost its monopoly to trade and negotiations were carried out by British officials instead of company staff. Trade with China shifted from the domain of the company and became a matter of national policy. Lord Palmerston, who served as the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, instructed officials sent to China to act cordially and not to provoke military action.⁷² For years, Britain would have suffered a massive trade deficit had it not been for opium sales. Opium poppies were grown in three locations and were imported into China: the variant *gong ban tu* came from Bangladesh, “white hide” was from Western India and

⁷⁰ Immanuel Chung-Yueh Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2001), 165. This work is the Chinese translated version based on the 6th edition of *The Rise of Modern China* by Hsü.

⁷¹ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 169.

⁷² Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 172.

“golden flower” from Turkey.⁷³ In 1836, 18 million dollars of opium was sold to China, surpassing sales of tea and raw silk. Chinese historian Immanuel Hsü notes that by 1838 the Duke of Wellington proclaimed that the British Parliament did not have any misgivings regarding the export of opium and proposed that the endeavour should be promoted and protected.⁷⁴

At the same time in China, policies by the Emperors Yong Zheng and Jia Qing (嘉慶) remained ineffectual at stemming the spread of recreational opium use. By 1836, Emperor Dao Guang invited proposals to stem the tide of opium imports. In one proposal, an official suggested tariffs on opium, that opium be traded for goods but not silver, and to prohibit officials and aristocrats from smoking but still allowing the peasantry to indulge in the drug. Another proposal called for all smokers to quit within one year or face the death penalty. The Emperor was still indecisive over which approach to take until Lin Ze Xu spoke up, stating “if the abuse of opium were to continue, in a matter of decades China would not have the means to defend against an invasion, nor the silver to pay the soldiers.”⁷⁵ This grim forecast jolted Emperor Dao Guang into action.

Lin Ze Xu acted swiftly by first confiscating pipes and drugs within his jurisdiction of Hu Bei and Hu Nan. His success led him to be named the imperial envoy to end opium trade in Guang Zhou. By 1838, he arrested 1,600 violators to the imperial decree and confiscated 42,741 pipes and 17,437 kilograms of opium. Lin fully understood the power of the British and wanted to avoid confrontation at all costs.⁷⁶ He even wrote an ardent letter addressed to Queen Victoria requesting the monarch prohibit the export of the narcotic to China: “If another country were to

⁷³ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 166.

⁷⁴ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 170. Tea and silk accounted for 17 million dollars of sales.

⁷⁵ Hu and Dai, *History of the Late Qing Dynasty*, 26-7.

⁷⁶ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 176-7.

sell opium to England and enticed her people to consume; as the monarch, you would be infuriated...Your majesty, you would not want this to happen to your people, and yet you do it unto others.”⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the eloquent letter which highlighted the hypocrisy of the British government was stopped at British customs and was never delivered to the Queen.

The British traders ignored Lin Ze Xu’s final deadline to turn out the opium stores, leading to the barricading of the British trade office and the suspension of the Sino-British trade. Chief Superintendent Charles Elliot played a brilliant diplomatic manoeuvre by claiming the opium being confiscated was the property of Her Majesty the Queen and promptly handed over the drugs to Lin. In doing so, the British now had a *casus belli* to declare war on the loss of the “Queen’s property” and insisted the Chinese pay for the damages.⁷⁸ Thus, the First Opium War began. George Elliot,⁷⁹ rear-admiral and commander-in-chief of East Indies and China Station, blockaded the city of Ning Bo and positioned his fleet menacingly at the mouth of *Bai He* (modern-day Chao Bai New River), which threatened the safety of the capital, Bei Jing, and he sent a messenger to Emperor Dao Guang to make demands.⁸⁰ There was a brief ceasefire before the resumption of hostilities. While the Emperor may have had delusions of being able to defeat the British navy, his officials and their adversaries knew the war would end with a British victory. The war concluded on August 29, 1842 with the Treaty of Nanking and the following terms: China to pay an indemnity of 21 million silver dollars; abolish trade monopolies within China; open Guang Zhou, Xia Men, Fu Zhou, Ning Bo, and Shang Hai as ports of trade; cession of Hong Kong; ministerial relations form with equal standing, and the establishment of tariffs. Hsü states that it is with much irony that the war that started because of opium did not even

⁷⁷ Correspondence from Lin Ze Xu to Queen Victoria, 1839, quoted in Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 177.

⁷⁸ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 179.

⁷⁹ George Elliot and Charles Elliot were cousins.

⁸⁰ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 182.

mention opium in the treaty terms.⁸¹ The legalization of opium imports was negotiated in another treaty.

The Opium War was the culmination of the failed struggle by the Qing dynasty government to stop the import of the narcotic by the British. If Lin Ze Xu's estimate on the number of smokers in China was accurate, there would have been many Chinese men and women smoking opium as a part of their lifestyle. Following this, it is likely that many Chinese immigrants to British Columbia brought this practice with them. However, these Chinese immigrants were often discriminated against because of their recreational opium usage. Dependence on the drug became a dominant stereotype about the Chinese.



Figure 2.2: Burning of Opium at Hu Men (虎門銷菸), Anonymous.⁸²

⁸¹ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 186.

⁸² Lin Ze Xu dug a massive ditch near Hu Men, a defensive stronghold that guards the river to Guang Zhou, and threw the confiscated opium into the ditch. Before burning it, he covered the opium with salt and burning charcoal, which was continuously churned by the workers to incinerate the mixture.

Opium in British Columbia

Canadian historians, including Kay Anderson and Peter Ward, argue that in the early years of British Columbia, opium use by Chinese cemented into a racial stereotype.⁸³ To gain more understanding of what the white Canadian public thought of opium, the 1902 commissioners asked, “What was the difference between getting drunk on whiskey and getting drunk on opium?” One reply was that “one was a Christian habit, and the other was a heathen vice.”⁸⁴ Even if there were very few people smoking opium, white settler society perceived it to be widespread and closely associated to the Chinese character.

However, most European-Canadian settlers failed to realize that the British had a hand in promoting the use of opium through their imports of the drug into China. One of the 1885 commissioners publicly acknowledged the state’s responsibility for the damage opium had done in China and that the British were avid opium users. Dr. John Hamilton Gray reported:

Apart from the historical fact, that our country within the last thirty years forced the use of opium upon the Chinese, burned their towns, demolished their fortifications, and slaughtered their people, to compel them to admit it into China, against the wish of its government and its inhabitants, as an article of trade and consumption...the startling fact meets us that it was in use among the British people themselves long before the advent of the Chinese into British Columbia, or as working classes either into Americas or Great Britain, and it was and is used in immense quantities among the European nations where a Chinaman never was seen.⁸⁵

In another instance, *The Daily Canadian* published an article with similar sentiments. It said,

The government of China has been aroused to the crying evils caused by this drug, which was wickedly forced upon the Chinese, for selfish reasons, by the British government, at the point of cannon, a crime that will always be pointed to as an indelible stain on the escutcheon of a nation that preceded America in

⁸³ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 101; and Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 10.

⁸⁴ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1885)*, [J.H. Gray], lx.

⁸⁵ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1885)*, [J.H. Gray], lvi.

freeing her black slaves, and is today the most active in sending missionaries to foreign lands.⁸⁶

Unfortunately, the views of a few individuals were not enough to change the prevailing idea that Chinese abused opium.

How prevalent was opium smoking in Canada? A Chinese man born in British Columbia, Won Alexander Cum Yow, testified in the Royal Commission of 1902 that “a certain number indulge in opium smoking, but only a small percentage of the whole. The habit is induced by companionship with those who use it.”⁸⁷ Between the years 1894 and 1900, there were only 10 convictions of Chinese criminals in Vancouver, and none had to do with opium usage.⁸⁸ This means that either the Chinese were, as many speculated, very good at hiding the drug via “secret trap doors,” or the number of people who used the narcotic was grossly exaggerated.⁸⁹ It also suggests that the Canadian government turned a blind eye on opium imports and use.

In July 1908, William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Deputy-Minister of Labour, was tasked to investigate the extent of opium usage in British Columbia. He found that the opium business was worth an annual revenue of \$600,000 to \$650,000 and that the clientele was not purely Chinese people, but white men and women also indulged in the narcotic. In his report, he included the case of a white woman caught smoking opium who was sentenced to a six-month prison sentence. He also showed that many Chinese were against opium smoking and formed anti-opium leagues to advocate for swift government action to end its traffic. Peter Hing, the Secretary of the Anti-Opium League wrote to Mackenzie King saying,

⁸⁶ “Praise of the Opium Habit,” *The Daily Canadian*, 12 September, 1907, 3. This article cites physician Sir William Moore’s claims that opium in moderation was healthy and that opium smoking was no different from smoking tobacco or drinking alcohol.

⁸⁷ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 236.

⁸⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 20.

⁸⁹ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 89 and 99.

Opium is a social evil in this world... Anti-opium leagues are being formed among the Chinese in British Columbia, with the object of trying to check the use of opium voluntarily, but we desire to have the co-operation of the Canadian Government.⁹⁰

Many members of the Chinese community offered their full cooperation. King's investigation resulted in the *Opium Act of 1908*, which was the first drug prohibition in Canada.⁹¹ English newspapers commented on the lateness of the action. *The Nicola Herald* editorial claimed, "A law of this kind should of have been enacted years ago. Wherever two or three Chinese shacks are gathered together an opium den is in the midst."⁹² This was an obstinate perception of settler society—that all it took was a small gathering of Chinese residents and the opium traffic would flourish.

In Vancouver, the *Opium Act* targeted opium dealers who were entirely Chinese but not its users, some of whom were white. Any person convicted of possession of crude opium and its preparation into powder was fined between \$50 and \$1000 and received up to a maximum three-year prison term. It is questionable if the 1908 Act provided deterrence against trafficking. For the Chinese, the minimum fine was cheaper than the head tax, which at the time would have been \$500. In 1922, Canada amended the *Opium and Narcotics Drug Act* to increase the maximum sentence for possession to seven years and deportation of any aliens convicted of possession or trafficking. This later law, however, was largely in response to "white slavery," the fear that white girls were being lured into opium parties.⁹³ On the other hand, the implementation of heavier punishments for narcotics came late and were enacted after Britain ended opium

⁹⁰ W.L. Mackenzie King, *The Need for the Suppression of the Opium Traffic in Canada* (Ottawa: Order of Parliament, 1908), 4.

⁹¹ Dan Malleck, *When Good Drugs Go Bad: Opium, Medicine, and the Origins of Canada's Drug Laws* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016).

⁹² "Bill Against Opium," *The Nicola Herald*, 16 July, 1908, 1.

⁹³ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 123.

imports into China. As part of the Ten Year Agreement starting in 1907, Britain reduced imports of opium into China until 1917, when Britain suspended all opium imports into China. Until that point, English Canadian newspapers routinely reported on drug raids in Vancouver's Chinatown to perpetuate the Chinese stereotype of opium abuse.

The police force raided opium dens to “vindicate white people’s assumptions about the moral laxity of the Chinese.”⁹⁴ For example, *The Prince Rupert Optimist* reported in detail on one such raid on a restaurant that had hidden opium operations.

Saturday night was a police raid on Chinatown. The large restaurant, store and chop suey house owned by the King Tai company, was suspected by Chief McCarvell of being used as an opium smokers’ resort, and on Saturday between nine and ten p.m. the Chief along with Constable McArthur and Mansell made a raid on the premises to verify the suspicion if possible.

As a result of the raid the police court this morning was thronged with Orientals, and two of them were charged, Chin Yen with selling opium, and Mah Jim with keeping an opium joint. Pleas of not guilty were entered and the cases stand adjourned till Wednesday by mutual agreement between prosecution and defence.

An interesting haul of opium smoking appliances was found in the house by the police and seized. There is an opium pipe, glass lamp, several tiny brass retorts for cooking the dope, a playing card on which the stuff has been spread for use, [several] brass cases of high grade opium, and any amount of residue left after smoking. No one was found actually smoking among the inmates of the house.

Chief McCarvell and his officers had a difficult job to undertake as the wily Oriental is swift to conceal the traces of his doings but by taking separate sections of the house the three officers secured the evidences that there has been opium smoking on the premises. It remains now to be proved whether the Chinese at present released on \$100 bail can be incriminated.⁹⁵

The author highlights how the Chinese were sneaky and swift at hiding the traces of their crime.

According to this view, the Chinese were not only immoral but they are good at hiding it as well.

⁹⁴ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 101.

⁹⁵ “Police Raid on Our Chinatown,” *The Prince Rupert Optimist*, 23 January, 1911, 1.

Opium was one of the major stereotypes imposed on the Chinese residents in British Columbia. Another was filthiness. English Canada was obsessed with creating a pure, white nation. Outward cleanliness was linked to an inward moral purity. The previous section elucidated upon one of the immoralities—opium smoking—that white society believed all Chinese partook in. This section investigates how uncleanliness also became a racial stereotype that served as evidence of how the Chinese were incapable of assimilating into white society, especially with the rising dominance of the germ theory of disease.

Germ theory—the idea that pathogens were the main causes of disease—became widely accepted in Europe by the second half of the nineteenth century. Sanitation was seen as the chief means of keeping pathogens and diseases at bay. As a result, Canadians had an obsession with physical hygiene—a clean people built a clean nation. Concern about the supposed lack of Chinese sanitation in Chinatowns was plentiful during the testimonies of the Royal Commissions of 1885 and 1902. Commissioner Chapleau described Chicago’s Chinatown “abominable to sight and smell.”⁹⁶ The 1902 commission report described Chinese quarters in Vancouver as “vile, and one could hardly pass through the quarter without holding one’s nose.” The report luridly described the state of sanitation of Chinese labourer housing based on the class of residents: “First class” boarding houses had cramped stairwells, rooms crowded with multiple bunks, and rooms void of light and ventilation. Common labourers lived in one-story buildings constructed with “rough lumber,” rooms had more bunks and no blankets, and the pathways were uneven and muddy.⁹⁷ Regarding human waste management, Dr. Roderick Fraser stated that water closets that were clogged were “not attended to as they should be,” elaborating “if a closet inhabited by white people gets clogged up, they will have it remedied; but the Chinese... if he can use the

⁹⁶ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.A. Chapleau], lxxxii.

⁹⁷ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 14-5.

yard, or let the closet overflow, he is likely to do so.”⁹⁸ Lack of hygiene quickly developed into another powerful racial stereotype imposed on the Chinese. Historical evidence about the lack of hygiene, even though it is from colonial sources, cannot be disputed. However, was filthiness a function of race or poverty? Anglo-Canadians and other European immigrants also lived in housing with poor standards of hygiene. Medical health officers inspecting Chinese housing were looking for instances of poor sanitation standards and each case became further evidence that formed and affirmed racial stereotypes.

Was it just in Chinatown that sanitation was in such a bad state? Health historian Margaret Andrews argues that it took over two decades of the City’s effort to change the state of sanitation in Vancouver as a whole. In the early years of development, residents often responded to calls of nature by using outdoor public spaces. Andrews cites a 1896 complaint from a clothier that his storefront was used as a public urinal because the conditions of the hotels were much worse. Many residences were “smelly” and had “pools of stagnant water” and “offensive wells.”⁹⁹ Garbage was dumped in places where people didn’t live.¹⁰⁰ A public incinerator was built in 1891, but because the city charged a fee for waste disposal, many residents simply carried on with their old ways of leaving garbage on their property or dumping it into the harbour or vacant lots.¹⁰¹ To combat the sanitation situation, Vancouver’s City Council began installing public urinals and water closets by 1898, which were cleaned once a week as per city

⁹⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 16.

⁹⁹ Margaret W. Andrews, “Sanitary Conveniences and the Retreat of the Frontier: Vancouver, 1886-1926,” *BC Studies*, No. 87, (Autumn 1990): 6.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret W. Andrews, “Medical Services in Vancouver, 1886-1920: A Study in the Interplay of Attitudes, Medical Knowledge, and Administrative Structures” (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1979), 31.

¹⁰¹ Andrews, “Medical Services in Vancouver”, 34-5.

regulation.¹⁰² By 1912, the majority of Vancouver was connected to plumbing except only a few “homeowners who were unwilling... to pay for the new facilities.”¹⁰³

Contrary to the belief of Euro-Canadians of the late nineteenth century, the Chinese were not as unreceptive to rising standards of hygiene. The *Chinese Times* newspaper routinely posted health and sanitation inspections to give the residents of Chinatown ample time to prepare adequately for inspections. In a particular instance, the Chinese Consul Lin Shih Yuan issued an announcement in the *Chinese Times* as follows,

Special officials will come to the East Asian quarters for inspection. If the Chinese quarter is unclean, there will be an intervention by the officials, which will cause damage to our good name. Therefore, I am notifying all of our Chinese brethren to conduct a cleaning of stores and lodgings within a few days. Once that is done, use Chloride of lime to banish foul odours and kill bacteria. Do not save on this tiny expense and give the inspectors an excuse to cause additional problems.¹⁰⁴

The Consul’s recommendation to use of chloride of lime, which was a part of the acceptable cleaning standard of the time, highlights the invasiveness of these health inspections. The inspector had the right to enter any Chinese business or home. If he found something not to standard he could use it as “an excuse to cause additional problems,” including the worst case scenario having the building demolished. Lin aimed to alleviate harassment by health inspectors. At the same time, Vancouver began the movement for public washrooms, leading merchants of Chinatown requested that the City wash Dupont Street with water twice a day in the summer and repair the back alleys.¹⁰⁵ In 1906, Lim Dat Co. applied for a license for street-cleaning operations.¹⁰⁶ The Chinese community was not oblivious to the need for sanitation as Canadians

¹⁰² Andrews, “Sanitary Conveniences,” 6.

¹⁰³ Andrews, “Medical Services in Vancouver”, 38-9.

¹⁰⁴ “Notice from Consul Lin,” *Chinese Times*, 4 March 1915, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 88.

tended to believe, but most initiatives were led by the wealthy merchants of the community and not the labourers.

Standards of sanitation relate to income and circumstance and not one's "race." At the end of the nineteenth century, the living conditions of the labouring class was prone to overcrowding and led to health issues in many major Canadian cities. Historian Bettina Bradbury shows that the housing of working-class wards in Montreal was densely packed: "Rapid settlement, poor construction, and population growth stretched housing and inadequate sanitary systems beyond what they could bear, exacerbating health problems that pre-dated industrial expansion."¹⁰⁷ Bradbury paints a lurid picture of 1890s streets in Montreal.

Cows grazed in backyards and green spaces and on street verges. Pigs scrounged in courtyards and alleys, and poultry could be heard and seen throughout the city...Distinctive smells of industrial pollution mingled with the older city smells, the stink of decaying animal carcasses, the smell of animal and human excrement, and the dank odour of oozing, decomposing drains.¹⁰⁸

In Vancouver, working-class housing was also in poor state. As Margaret Andrews explains, "The poor, often immigrants from Europe or Asia, continued to live in crowded and dilapidated buildings, in cellars lacking daylight or outside air, and in lodging houses which, while comparatively spacious, were often also poorly ventilated, and often lacked adequate fire escape or toilet facilities."¹⁰⁹ Race did not matter when it came to hygiene. European immigrants across the country were found to be living in squalid and overcrowded residences. Sanitation was something that came with wealth. It is easy to observe that as the hygiene movement began to take hold in Vancouver in the 1890s, those who quickly embraced the new standard were those

¹⁰⁷ Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 72. Mortality statistics in Montreal were to 70 per 1000 in the 1870s and were much higher than Quebec City.

¹⁰⁸ Bradbury, *Working Families*, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Andrews, "Medical Services in Vancouver," 33-4.

with dispensable income. With infrastructures, such as plumbing and other washroom facilities paid by the owners of establishments, those with less money were often resistant to the implementation of new standards.

Yet, the idea that the Chinese were less hygienic became a specific “problem” justifying state intervention. Filthiness was reinforced as a racial category because Chinese labourers were also likely less concerned with new Western standards given their predicament—ridden with debt and many with dependents in China. As a result, squalor remained visible in Chinatown and gave the City of Vancouver justification in their crusade of sanitation against the Chinese. In general, both Royal Commissions directed towards Chinese exclusion acknowledged that the Chinese were cleanly people.¹¹⁰ However, by retaining uncleanness as a stereotype, it gave health inspectors ample opportunities to harass the unwanted “other” in their daily lives, especially in the economic sphere.

The laundry industry was a prime target of local city by-laws and provincial legislation. With the emergence of the germ theory of disease, people believed that any carrier of “pathogens” could lead to their own infection and those around them. This mindset meant that Chinese laundry businesses that had substantial white clientele were the hardest hit by regulations. In 1900, City Health Inspector Robert Marrion insisted on compulsory smallpox vaccinations for Chinese workers in laundry businesses. Since the Chinese dominated the laundry industry in Vancouver, it comes as no surprise that white Canadians using their services were afraid of being infected by diseases given the “filthy (and possibly sick) man of East Asia” stereotype. As a result, Marrion insisted that the Chinese business owners were singled out for smallpox vaccinations. Following complaints by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, the

¹¹⁰ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.H. Gray], xxxvi.

laundries were subjected to by-laws that required employees who lodged at the workplace to have up-to-date housing and sanitation and they were not allowed to work on Sundays.¹¹¹ In the 1910s, Vancouver City Council attempted to have all employers provide toilets to their employees, but to no avail. They passed a by-law in 1908 to force laundries, which were mostly operated by Chinese, to provide “at least two water closets and two urinals for male employees and three water closets for female employees.”¹¹² Since plumbing and connection to the city’s sewage system were paid out of pocket by owners, this policy no doubt increased the burdens of the small Chinese entrepreneurs.

The stereotypes of filth and disease were never far apart. With the majority of Chinese immigrants in the poor labouring class residing in overcrowded, unhygienic, and poorly ventilated rooms, Canadian society feared that these clusters of labourers would become spawning pits of epidemics. Medical professionals of the time made their concerns heard in the Royal Commissions. A peculiar phenomenon was noted by Dr. Roderick Fraser, Medical Health Officer of Victoria, who claimed that “if the Chinese had a case of smallpox in the house his first action would be to conceal it, and he would not take any precautions to prevent the spread of the disease.”¹¹³ Clearly, it is doubtful that Chinese labourers would do nothing about their health given the stakes that they accepted when they first came to Canada, but if Western doctors believed that they were not consulted when a Chinese person had a disease, how were illnesses dealt with?

The research of Margaret Andrews sheds some light on the observations of Dr. Fraser. She cites some prices for the cost of medical services in 1918: \$2.50 for doctor’s consultation,

¹¹¹ Paul Yee, “Chinese Business in Vancouver, 1886-1914,” (Master’s Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1983), 34.

¹¹² Andrews, “Sanitary Conveniences,” 14.

¹¹³ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 17.

\$1.50 per day for a public-ward bed in a hospital, \$4.00 - \$5.00 per day for a nurse. In one instance, a janitor who was injured by an electric fan in 1913 had to pay a considerable medical bill of \$40.00.¹¹⁴ This reveals that Western medical services were not accessible to the working class; and therefore, it is not surprising that Chinese labourers would find other means to tend to their illnesses than to attempt foreign medical treatments at exorbitant costs. In addition, Andrews notes there was another social practice that could induce the hiding of disease. Newspapers had a tendency to “report on the health of ordinary citizens.” With these two observations, it seems reasonable that Chinese labourers would avoid seeking Western medical attention because of its expense and risk that their ill health would be made public—in turn fueling already prevalent stereotypes.

It is hard to believe that there would be a Chinese enclave anywhere in the world, even in the early twentieth century, which would not have a physician present in the community. Indeed, the *Chinese Times* often posted proclamations of gratitude from patients for treatments received. In one example, a patient with venereal disease sought the aid of both Chinese and Western doctors but to no avail. He was then recommended to visit another Chinese doctor Lin Bi Chen, who managed to treat his ailment.¹¹⁵ It is entirely possible that Chinese patients visited Chinese physicians instead of Western ones. Canadian society simply did not have any confidence in Chinese medicine altogether; but at the same time, Chinese patients did not have confidence in Western medicine. The presence of Chinese physicians in the community allowed patients the choice to seek the advice of trusted medical professionals within their communities and language, instead of Western ones. The lack of a doctor’s visit for an accounted case of smallpox did not necessarily mean that the Chinese patients concealed their illness. It could have

¹¹⁴ Andrews, “Medical Services in Vancouver,” 24.

¹¹⁵ “Mr. Lin Bi Chen is a Good Doctor,” *Chinese Times*, 5-18 January 1915, 2.

been that they chose not to seek Western treatments. Nevertheless, Chinese immigrants were seen to be potential disease carriers that brought down the property value of neighbourhoods with their presence. Canadian society sought to use “gentlemen’s agreements” to ensure that when selling their property, it would not fall into the hands of a Chinese owner to maintain racial segregation through geography and avoid “contamination.”¹¹⁶

Conclusion

To the late nineteenth-century Canadian society, filth and disease were two major threats towards building a “clean,” “white” Canada. The preoccupation of cleanliness was part of a larger “social purity” movement that was part of an even larger nation-building project. Settler society wanted to create a place for white people with clean bodies and pure hearts. As a result, hygiene and morality became intertwined. The Chinese residents in British Columbia were undesirable because of their supposed indulgence in opium, which was marked as an inner moral problem. Their filthiness was marked as an outward hygiene problem with the possibility to cause epidemics. Both of these stereotypes were employed by white society to justify the undesirability of Chinese residents.

It is true that the recreational use of opium existed in China for at least a century prior to the First Opium War, but the British government turned a blind eye to the smuggling activities conducted by the East India Company. When British commercial policy shifted from mercantilism to free trade in the 1830s, the British parliament endorsed opium trade to China. The fight against opium in China was half-hearted at best and the first earnest effort ended in a war that led to the legalization of opium imports to China. In retrospect, for a country that

¹¹⁶ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 127.

flaunted the righteousness of its laws and commitment to Christian values of temperance and sobriety, how could Britain allow such dangerous substances to be exported? Lin Ze Xu's undelivered letter to Queen Victoria exposed the hypocrisy and inconsistency of British policy. For comparison, if white society saw both Indigenous and Chinese peoples as inferior to them, why did the state legislate that it was illegal to sell alcohol to Indigenous peoples in the 1876 Indian Act, but not legislate opium prohibitions from the Chinese until 1922? Opium-abuse was developed into a racial stereotype that was used as evidence of the undesirability of Chinese immigrants on Canadian soil because of their unassimilability. The stereotype was further used as justification to impose discriminatory restrictions upon the immigrants because of their threat to the moral health of white British Columbia. However, much of settler society failed to realize that this stereotype was created by their own British-Canadian government and should bear at least partial responsibility to the outcome.

With the growing acceptance of the germ theory of disease, settler society became obsessed with hygiene as the first defence to ward off maladies. Settler society found Chinese labourers lacking the new standards of hygiene. Repeated state interventions and inspections only reinforced these ideas that the Chinese were "unclean." At the time, hygiene could only be pursued by those with disposable income. The Vancouver City Council tore down the residences of poor immigrant labourers for failing to reach acceptable sanitary standards. The research of Bradbury and Andrews affirms that squalor in labourer housing was common all over Canada regardless of the race of the inhabitant. Yet, despite the pursuit for moral purity by white Canadians, the relentless inspection of Chinese lodgings and their subsequent removal when

hygiene was found to be substandard was an example of a well-known Christian teaching: “Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”¹¹⁷

Canadian society saw the inability of the Chinese to adopt hygienic standards to their satisfaction as a direct refusal to adopt their value systems that were closely connected Christian values, which provided further evidence to the unassimilability of the Chinese. After all, settlers were embarking on a quest for nation-building through building white Christian citizens with clean hands and hearts. This gave reason for health inspection officials to ceaselessly harass the Chinese quarters to the point where the Chinese Consul stepped in to strongly recommend that people in Chinatown cleaned up before the inspectors arrived. The Consul’s intervention was a prime example of resistance to Euro-Canadian discrimination. Tired of constantly being portrayed as filthy drug addicts, the Chinese community rallied together to debunk the stereotypes. They created anti-opium leagues to push out opium trafficking from their communities and lobbied the Canadian government to legislate stronger regulations against opium trafficking. The merchants’ 1908 request to the City of Vancouver to wash the streets of Chinatown and the Consul’s warning in the *Chinese Times* to the Chinese residents were both initiatives to dispel representations of Chinese “uncleanliness.”

Both the opium-abusing and unhygienic stereotypes would have implications on the economic well-being of the Chinese community in Vancouver’s Chinatown. The next chapter, however, will investigate another dimension of the “social purity” movement—the so-called problem of Chinese morals and fears of white slavery.

¹¹⁷ Matthew 7:3 (NRSV)

Chapter 3

男女授受不親

“When giving or receiving (objects), men and women should not come into physical contact.”

On July 26, 1924, police were called to a crime scene at a house in Shaughnessy Heights, an elite neighbourhood in Vancouver. There they found 22-year-old Scottish nanny, Janet Smith, dead in the laundry room with a bullet wound to her head and a gun near her hand. Smith had been employed by Frederick and Doreen Baker since January 1923 where she worked in the home alongside Wong Foon Sing, the Chinese “houseboy.” Wong had left his wife at home in Hong Kong and travelled to British Columbia to search for better economic opportunities. At the crime scene, Police Constable James Green declared that Smith had committed suicide, despite evidence to suggest the contrary. Friends of Janet Smith claimed that she lived in constant fear of the presence of Wong in the home and they sought the help of the United Council of Scottish Societies to investigate the true cause of Janet’s death. Fears of “white slavery,” the idea that white girls and women were helpless and sexually innocent, and therefore especially prone to the corrupting influences of Chinese men, were brought to the forefront of white society in British Columbia. In response to Janet Smith’s death, the Province proposed the Janet Smith Bill to protect white women from working in the same spaces with Chinese men. The threat of “white slavery” was never far from the minds of settler society, nor was this the first instance that legislation was proposed to segregate Chinese men from working with white women.

The proverb *“When giving or receiving (objects), men and women should not come into physical contact”* comes from a dialogue between Chun Yu Kun (淳于髡) and Chinese sage Mencius was widely accepted as part of Chinese etiquette and Confucian thought. The principle

is that unmarried or non-blood related men and women should not be intimate. In the dialogue, Chun Yu asked Mencius, “Is it proper etiquette to avoid physical contact when a man and a woman are transferring objects?” Mencius replied in the affirmative. Chun Yu pressed the issue, asking, “If my sister-in-law is drowning, should I extend a helping hand?” Mencius replied, “If my sister-in-law is drowning and I am not helping, I am a scoundrel... To extend my hand to my sister-in-law is proper.” Mencius’ reply shows the proper spirit of the teaching that principles should not be so rigid that they result in people being heartless. In this context, etiquette (*li*) refers strictly to proper decorum and protocol. From the point of view of Chinese *li*, the Canadian government took the lessons of the proverb proverb to the extreme by legislating gender segregation between Chinese men and white women.

Beginning in the 1910s, a series of provincial laws were proposed to prohibit Chinese business owners from employing white women. Legislators often cited “morality” and the “corrupting” influence of Chinese vices as the reason for the segregation between Chinese men and white women. However, the government’s main goal was to ensure racial purity and create a white British Columbia. As we have seen, the Chinese were deemed unable to assimilate into mainstream Canadian society, which also led to social anxiety and legal prohibition around the intermingling of Chinese men with white women. This chapter investigates the effects of regulations on the residents of Vancouver’s Chinatown, considering the intersections of gender and race constructs throughout the development of British Columbia.

Fears of White Slavery

Along with the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, other humiliating legislation the Chinese suffered were the bans on Chinese business owners employing white women in their

operations. These laws varied in scope: some were province-wide, some were only city-wide, and some affected specific businesses, but not others. The central concern of this type of legislation, which was proposed in many provinces across Canada with Chinese residents, was anxiety over inter-ethnic mingling and “white slavery,” the condition where white women were supposedly forced into prostitution. White slavery portrayed white women as helpless and sexually innocent, the victims of devious and drug-abusing Chinese men.¹¹⁸ In this decade, various provinces, including Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, attempted, some successfully, to make laws restricting Chinese businesses from employing white women.

By 1911, the Chinese community in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan comprised of over 250 mostly male residents. The community largely kept to itself and was preoccupied with raising funds to support the Republican movement in China spearheaded by Sun Yat Sen.¹¹⁹ In March 1912, the provincial government passed *An Act to Prevent the Employment of Female Labour in Certain Capacities*, targeting businesses owned by Chinese and Japanese. The regulation against the Japanese was quickly dropped because Japanese Consul Y.A. Hori protested the Act on the grounds it violated an earlier treaty between Britain and Japan, but it remained for Chinese entrepreneurs.¹²⁰ In 1912, restaurateur Quong Wing¹²¹ hired two white women and was fined \$5.00 under the Act. In 1919, the law was amended to also include the restriction that white women could not lodge overnight in Chinese businesses. Quong’s case was at the centre of legal debate about discriminatory laws preventing Chinese from employing white women.

¹¹⁸ Rosanne Amosovs Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces: White Waitresses Policed in Vancouver’s Chinatown Cafes” (Master’s Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2010), 8.

¹¹⁹ James W. St. G. Walker, “Race,” *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Studies* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 54. Sun Yat Sen visited various Chinese communities around the world to raise funds for the revolution to overthrow the Qing dynasty and establish a republic in China.

¹²⁰ Walker, “Race,” *Rights and the Law*, 52.

¹²¹ Quong Wing 黃榮. His name would have been rendered as Wong Wing in modern pinyin. For the rest of this thesis, he will be referred to as Quong Wing to be consistent with the court case. However, English rendering of Chinese and Indigenous names were not very consistent in the early twentieth century.

Quong Wing v. The King was important not because of the fine to one individual, but for the implications it had on the entire Chinese community in Saskatchewan. The Chinese Benevolent Association raised \$1,175 for Quong's legal fees and to challenge Canada's judicial system on whether it was constitutional to impose laws based on ethnicity.¹²² The Supreme Court ruling came on February 12, 1914. Three of the justices saw the Act as justified for the "protection of white women and girls" and "not aimed at any class of Chinamen." Justice John Idington was the only one to claim, "Its evident purpose is to curtail or restrict the rights of Chinamen."¹²³ Quong Wing was ultimately denied the opportunity to appeal to the Privy Council in England and the case set a legal precedent for provinces that sought to impose similar legislation.

The Supreme Court ruling gave other provinces a window of opportunity to impose similar laws in their jurisdictions. For the next few years, Yang Shu Wen, the Chinese Ambassador to Canada, spent countless hours travelling across the country to lobby mayors, police chiefs, and premiers against discriminatory regulations directed towards the Chinese. His travels defending the honour of Chinese Canadians were chronicled by Vancouver's *Chinese Times*. The paper recounted Ambassador Yang's November 1916 visit to the Minister of Justice to protest the imminent passing of the law that banned Chinese from working in factories with white women in Toronto.

Yesterday, Ambassador Yang Shu Wen went to Toronto to lobby the Minister of Justice to protest the draconian treatment towards the Chinese and how it went against the Canadian Constitution. The Minister asked if the Chinese could remain chaste towards the white girls. The ambassador replied, regarding the affairs of men and women, the Chinese men are many times more chaste than white men. He bade the Minister check the statistics for rape cases if he does not believe. The Ambassador continues by stating that the Canadian government levies a \$500 head tax just so the Chinese can enter Canada to seek employment.

¹²² Walker, "Race," *Rights and the Law*, 100.

¹²³ Walker, "Race," *Rights and the Law*, 102.

On inspection in white factories, there is not a single one without women working. Prohibiting Chinese from working with white women is the same as leaving all the Chinese without a place of employment.¹²⁴

During this visit, the Ambassador aptly pointed out the effects the Toronto regulation would have on Chinese workers, barring them from any factory employment at all. Yang questioned the Minister on the fairness of levying such a heavy head tax for the Chinese to work in Canada, but then effectively legislate them from finding gainful employment. In an issue from earlier that month, the paper had also protested the severity of the law, comparing the Toronto law to the Saskatchewan Act.¹²⁵ In April 1917, the Ambassador met with officials in Manitoba and requested to have the ban against Chinese businesses employing white women lifted. Yang reasoned that the label “Chinese”—that they were legally discriminated against—was far too humiliating to the Chinese community. Upon his investigation, the number of white women employed in Chinese restaurants in Winnipeg numbered twenty and the Ambassador argued that to create a law for only twenty women was overkill. The mayor and police chief agreed to cancel the law and the success of Ambassador Yang was celebrated by both the Chinese and Japanese communities.¹²⁶ The success of Yang was short-lived, however. In less than a year, Manitoba again imposed laws to shut down any Chinese restaurants located in remote towns that did not offer lodgings. The Province felt that cheaper Chinese cuisine “stole” business from Western hotels. Yang Shu Wen headed to Winnipeg to protest the new legislation.¹²⁷ Despite the success, in less than a year a new law banning Chinese-owned restaurants without accompanying lodgings in remote towns was already being proposed by the Province of Manitoba.

¹²⁴ “Strict Laws Against Chinese Workers May Not Go Through,” *Chinese Times*, 28 November, 1916, 3.

¹²⁵ “Toronto Bans Chinese and White Girls Working Together,” *Chinese Times*, 6 November, 1916, 3.

¹²⁶ “Synopsis of Ambassador Yang’s Negotiations Regarding the Employment of White Girls in Manitoba,” *Chinese Times*, 9 April, 1917, 3; and 10 April, 1917, 3.

¹²⁷ “Proposal to Ban Chinese Restaurants,” *Chinese Times*, 9 February 1918, 3; and “Synopsis from Ambassador Yang Regarding Chinese Restaurants,” *Chinese Times*, 22 February 1918, 3.

The restrictive legislation in Saskatchewan and Manitoba were meant to harass Chinese business owners. Clearly, the Saskatchewan Act was “not to protect white females but to deprive Chinese of their livelihood” because the Chinese restaurants could not employ Chinese women for the work as waitresses, a gendered occupation, because few could immigrate to Canada. This was the conclusion drawn by Canadian judge Walter Tarnopolsky. He argued that these gender bans harmed Chinese businesses since they were unable to find other women to be waitresses. Historian James Walker reminds us that the intention of the government was not in economics alone, but was driven by racism. Otherwise, the government would have come up with more economically prohibitive legislation against the Chinese.¹²⁸

The laws that banned Chinese businesses from hiring white women did not stem from purely economic reasons, but economic damage was a welcomed bonus. In Manitoba, whether it was the gender ban or the 1918 ban of Chinese restaurants in remote towns unless lodgings were available, the economic effect on Chinese business owners was small. The bans affected few businesses because, as Walker suggests, they were not sweeping laws that pushed out Chinese from the laundry and restaurant industries. Despite the fact that the majority of white Canadians wanted to see the Chinese pack up and leave, a portion of them still wanted to be fair to the “Asian other.” Laws that restricted Chinese activity with a large scope were deemed “unfair” and likely to provoked larger protest from the Chinese community. However, laws with smaller scope stood a better chance to pass. Therefore, the motive of legislators was not to shut out Chinese activity entirely because it would damage the image of legal fairness, but simply to hinder and harass Chinese business owners through the power of law.

¹²⁸ Walker, “Race,” *Rights and the Law*, 118.

The Janet Smith Bill

The spectre of discriminatory laws segregating Chinese employers and female white labourers and the anxiety over “white slavery” was never far in Vancouver. If anything, fears of white slavery were especially intense because of the concentration of opium dens there. In April 1919, British Columbia proposed a law prohibiting the employment of white women in Chinese businesses. Ambassador Yang Shu Wen again opposed the proposed law, highlighting the fact that the law would only affect five white women in Vancouver.¹²⁹ Proposals for this type of restrictive legislation continued to appear from time to time but became at the centre of a heated public debate following the murder of Janet Smith.

Janet Smith was found dead under suspicious circumstances in July 1924. While the police said it was a suicide, Janet’s friends raised suspicions of her death claiming she felt threatened by the presence of Wong Foon Sing, the Chinese domestic staff employed by the Bakers. Wong soon became the prime suspect, as he was the only person in the house at the time of Smith’s death. Victor Odlum, the editor of the *Vancouver Star*, published numerous sensational stories about how Wong Foon Sing killed Janet Smith.¹³⁰ Odlum himself advocated that, “no young and pretty girl should be left alone and unprotected in a house with a Chinaman” and that Asian assimilation was “biologically a failure,” a sentiment that highlights the rhetoric that the Chinese were unable to culturally and biologically assimilate into Canadian society.¹³¹

¹²⁹ “Ambassador Yang Protests Against Two Laws,” *Chinese Times*, 30 April 1919, 3.

¹³⁰ Scott Kerwin, “The Janet Smith Bill of 1924 and the Language of Race and Nation in British Columbia,” *BC Studies*, No. 121 (Spring 1999), 88. For more details about Odlum’s stories see “Nurse’s Death Puzzles,” *Vancouver Star*, 28 July 1924, 1; “City Scots to Probe Death of Nurse,” *Vancouver Star*, 29 July 1924, 1; and “Witnesses Tell of Janet Smith’s Fear of Chinese Servant,” *Vancouver Star*, 6 September 1924, 1. The last article included an account from Janet’s friends claiming Wong had made improper advances.

¹³¹ Victor W. Odlum, “Was Investigation Suppressed?” *Vancouver Star*, 5 August 1924, 5; and “Canada and Japan: The Only Way,” *Vancouver Star*, 19 December, 1924, 4, quoted in Kerwin, “The Janet Smith Bill,” 88-9.

The Janet Smith case led to a new round of efforts to limit Asian employment based on restricting encounters between Asian men and white women. Jessica Victoria Stratton, committee leader for the United Council of Scottish Societies, pushed for legislation to prevent white women from working alongside Asian men in private homes where opportunities for intimacy were high.¹³² Yet many female domestic workers in British Columbia worried the bill would “protect them out of a job since their employers would opt for the cheaper, more ‘efficient’ Asian servant.”¹³³ After months of political wrangling in the provincial legislature, the Bill was not passed. An editorial from *Vancouver Province* revealed the reason: “It is our duty to be fair to them (the Chinese) [and] the Janet Smith bill is not fair.”¹³⁴ Yet the proposed Janet Smith Bill was not the last time a law was proposed to prevent white women from working for Chinese employers. In the end, the Janet Smith bill was deemed too unfair to the Chinese and summarily dropped.

Inner Workings of Chinese Cafes

The cafes of Vancouver’s Chinatown were spaces of inter-ethnic, gendered encounters. For Chinese men who took on menial jobs in the service industry, such as domestic servants in white homes, cafes were places to gather together and exchange stories and news, socialize with waitresses (as they seldom had contact with the opposite sex), and for once, be served instead of serving others. On the other hand, at least a third of the white waitresses in Chinatown had dependents and worked to support their families.¹³⁵ For the chance to earn more tips, some

¹³² Kerwin, “The Janet Smith Bill,” 90.

¹³³ Kerwin, “The Janet Smith Bill,” 96.

¹³⁴ “Playing Politics,” *Vancouver Province*, 29 November, 1924, 6, quoted in Kerwin, “The Janet Smith Bill,” 97.

¹³⁵ “Chinese Slayer of Waitress in Café Insane?” *Vancouver Sun*, 21 December 1931, 18, quoted in Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces,” 29-30.

waitresses played along when their patrons called them “sweethearts.”¹³⁶ In some cases, these relationship went further than roleplaying and socializing. Chinese patrons sometimes took the waitresses out on dates or gifted them with presents of clothes and makeup.¹³⁷ For some, the cafes offered spaces of social interaction and intimacy.

In another instance, there was evidence of sexual violence. In a letter from Police Chief W. W. Foster to Mayor Telford, Foster recounted the testimony of a white woman being lured into prostitution.

The first day I was at this cafe, Chinamen made suggestions for me to go to their rooms offering sums of money as high as \$10 or \$15. I only went on one occasion and this Chinaman brought a bottle of White Horse Whisky to the Café. He persuaded me to drink and I got drunk. I don't remember what took place but I woke up in this Chinaman's room in a bed with him. I knew from my condition that he had had sexual intercourse with me. He gave me \$25 and a few days afterwards he gave me \$35 and told me to buy myself clothes.¹³⁸

So long as there was at least one known case of sexual violence directed towards white women or evidence of prostitution in Chinese cafes, white society would readily blanket all the cafes as sites of sexual transgression. White women, even though they did an honest and respectable job in the cafés, were branded as prostitutes.¹³⁹ In another letter to the Mayor, Foster writes,

Investigation revealed that it was the practice of Chinese to contact the girls in the cafes, and, in cases where the girls were already loose, make arrangements for the girls to come to their quarters after working hours, where immorality took place.¹⁴⁰

Regardless of the virtue of the woman in question, the cost of working in a Chinese restaurant was to be branded as a prostitute. Furthermore, to the reformer minded white society, “the fact

¹³⁶ Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces,” 31.

¹³⁷ Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces,” 33.

¹³⁸ W.W. Foster to Mayor Telford, April 28, 1939 “White Girls in Chinese Restaurants,” Series 483, 33-F-3, File 11, Vancouver City Archives, quoted in Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces,” 20.

¹³⁹ Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces,” 12.

¹⁴⁰ Michaela Freund, “The Politics of Naming: Constructing Prostitutes and Regulating Women in Vancouver, 1934-1945” (Master's Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995), 16.

that Chinese men drove white women into prostitution meant that white middle-class men had lost control over both (the Chinese and the white women)” and “such acts...needed to be penalized.”¹⁴¹ The unsavoury labels, both to the Chinese and the women, were merely the first of the punishment. The categorizations were also used to justify larger social discrimination.

With the supposed morality of white women under threat of being eroded by Chinese “prostitution,” white society was also haunted by the 1931 murder of Mary Shaw, a waitress in Vancouver’s Chinatown who was killed by her fanatic admirer, Lee Dick, when she rejected his advances. Lee committed suicide after the murder. Once again, laws to ban Chinese employment of white women was proposed. This time, the City of Vancouver successfully passed a law to ban white women from working for Chinese businesses. In September 1937, the licenses of the Hong Kong Café owned by Charlie Ting, the president of the Chinese Benevolent Association, and other restaurants were cancelled for employing white women. While the Chinese protested the ban, so did, to the surprise of many, white waitresses. On September 25, thirty waitresses put their respectability on display and paraded to City Hall to demand the return of their jobs. However, their protests brought them no success, especially from City Council. An interview with Kay Martin, one of the waitresses who worked in a Chinese restaurant, by the *Vancouver Sun* provides valuable insights into the social and economic pressures resulting from racial segregation in Chinatown. Martin claimed,

They treat us swell. We work eight hours each day, seven days a week and are paid good wages. There is never any trouble with the [Chinese] boss... I would much prefer working for a Chinese employer than for some other nationalities.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Freund, “The Politics of Naming,” 17.

¹⁴² “City Cancels Café Licenses of 3 Chinese,” *Vancouver Sun*, 16 September 1937, 2 quoted in Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces,” 46.

In their jobs, the waitresses experienced good working conditions. For example, the Royal Café gave mothers special “consideration” with flexible shifts.¹⁴³ The *Chinese Times* recorded that waitresses’ demands that City Hall reinstate their jobs were ignored.

Yesterday afternoon, fifteen women representing the thirty waitresses forcefully dismissed from Chinese cafes went to the City Hall to request aid from the mayor. The mayor was unable to receive them. After thirty minutes, the girls departed to visit the relief committee. According to the white women, even though they have been dismissed, the Chinese employers continue to supply their employees with food.¹⁴⁴

The Chinese employers continued to provide food to the waitresses to tide them over as they searched for new employment after they were denied relief from the government.

Over the decades, the state proposed several rounds of discriminatory laws. Each time, the number of women affected was not as large as contemporary society suggested but was grossly exaggerated. The 1937 ban on Chinese restaurants in Vancouver’s Chinatown even provoked the protest of the waitresses themselves, who needed jobs for their own financial stability. In addition to monetary gains, perhaps these waitresses were challenging the idea of female respectability or maternal feminism, which they found stifling. In this way, Chinese cafes became a focal point for the negotiation of social, intimate, and monetary needs in an intercultural setting.

¹⁴³ Sia, “Making and Defending Intimate Spaces,” 46.

¹⁴⁴ “Dismissed White Waitresses Request for Aid,” *Chinese Times*, 25 September, 1937, 3.

窈窕淑女、君子好逑 - *A gentleman desires a fair maiden*¹⁴⁵

The epigraph originates from an ancient collection of poetry, dating as far back as 31 centuries ago, known in the West as the *Classic of Poetry*. The quoted phrase spoke of how a Chinese gentleman desired a wife and it captured an important aspect of heterosexual relationships. In China, a man grows to maturity when he establishes his own family and household.¹⁴⁶ Many Chinese men of this era came to British Columbia alone and without a family. This was especially true after the implementation of the head tax in 1885. The Chinese labourers could hardly pay off the passage and the head tax for themselves let alone save enough money to bring their family to British Columbia. This begs the question, what were the single Chinese labourers in British Columbia to do about matters of relationships given the importance of family in Chinese culture? They had few choices. Some returned to China, got married, returned to Canada and remitted money home and visited their families from time to time. Others married in British Columbia.

Historian Jean Barman has followed the stories of male Chinese immigrants and their relationships with Indigenous women and highlights several key observations. First, most Chinese men, especially those who lived in the vicinity of Chinatowns, wanted a “Chinese wife with Chinese values,” and those who resided further from Chinese settlements were less inhibited by notions of Chinese tradition.¹⁴⁷ Mixed unions generally occurred in the hinterlands away from the prying eyes of the settler social elite and usually allowed both sides resources that

¹⁴⁵ The English translation of the epigraph does not allow for the full meaning of the phrase. The words 窈窕 (*yao tiao*) in modern Chinese refers to bodily beauty. However, the original meaning implied virtue as well. In the discourse about moral reform from the 1880s to the mid-1920s, it was important to the author to point out that the ancient Chinese criteria of finding a perfect bride was not much different from the moral standards of the Victorian era. To some extent, the Chinese men who came over to British Columbia still adhered closely to this guideline.

¹⁴⁶ Get married and establish a family – 成家立室. Often times, male children were exhorted by the parents using this saying to perform their “duty” to extend the family line.

¹⁴⁷ Barman, “Beyond Chinatown,” 50.

were previously unavailable to each of them.¹⁴⁸ Barman also found that the first generation of Chinese arrivals, even those who married Indigenous women, wanted to return home to China for retirement. There is a Chinese saying: “Visitor dying in a foreign country (客死異鄉).” To die in such a fashion was considered a very bad death to be avoided.

White society was divided on the issue of Chinese-Indigenous marriages. In 1879, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories Edgar Dewdney reported to a committee on Chinese immigration that “a good many (Chinese men) live with Indian women” of which he “disapproved” of because the union was forged outside the confines of Christian marriage.¹⁴⁹ In another instance, an Anglican bishop happily married an Indigenous woman to a Chinese man.¹⁵⁰ Regardless of how white society reacted, Chinese-Indigenous marriages indicate a space where non-white intercultural relationships existed.

Conclusion

The creation of a white British Columbia was the highest priority for Canadian society. Settler society was always anxious about the possibility of “white slavery” and many provinces and cities enacted polices of racial segregation to prevent white women from working too closely with Chinese men. The *Saskatchewan Act* to ban white women from Chinese employment set a precedent for other provinces. In response, the Chinese community banded together to fight back against discrimination of this kind—through litigation if necessary. Quong Wing, with the support of the Chinese Benevolent Association, made a heroic attempt to challenge the constitutionality of the *Saskatchewan Act*. However, the Supreme Court of Canada sidestepped

¹⁴⁸ Barman, “Beyond Chinatown,” 40.

¹⁴⁹ Barman, “Beyond Chinatown,” 47.

¹⁵⁰ Barman, “Beyond Chinatown,” 56.

the issue by ruling that it was a matter of morality and not of race. For the rest of the decade, Ambassador Yang Shu Wen endeavoured a herculean effort to defend the honour of Chinese Canadians in fighting all manners of legislation that would harass their livelihood. Every decade since the 1910s, Vancouver tried to propose laws to prevent white women from working for Chinese employers and ultimately succeeded in 1937. However, this time not only the Chinese restaurant owners protested, but they were joined white waitresses. The waitresses wanted to protect their livelihood, defended their reputation, and challenged the idea of respectability foisted upon them by the white upper-middle class. At the heart of all these legislations was the idea that the Chinese could not assimilate into white society.

Regardless of the efforts by governments to segregate the Chinese from white women, it was already very difficult for Chinese labourers to find wives in British Columbia. For the Chinese who did not prioritize Chinese traditions in searching for a companion, some partnered with Indigenous women as their wives. These unions allowed both the husband and wife access to resources previously unavailable to each of them. On the other hand, some clergy welcomed Chinese-Indigenous marriages so long as the couple was joined under a Christian marriage.

The next chapter will investigate the effects of stereotypes on the economy of British Columbia. In particular, the tensions between Chinese and white labourers over wages and the economic harassment on Chinese market gardeners by the Vancouver City Council.

Chapter 4

信是搖錢樹，禮是聚寶盆。

“Integrity is a tree that grows money, sincerity is a bowl that collects treasures.”

The words 信 (*xin*) and 禮 (*li*) have double meaning, especially from the context of Confucianism. *Xin* translated at face value means trust; but more often than not, it implies the integrity and ethical behaviour that generates trustworthiness in an individual. *Li*, likewise, when translated at face value means etiquette. However, from a Confucian context, it refers to the sincerity and respect to others which forms the foundation of an etiquette that is not hollow. Thus, the enticement of wealth is a double-edged sword; while it certainly can facilitate cooperation, it can also incite competition and animosity.

Cooperation, competition and animosity reflects the situation of Chinese immigrants in British Columbia after the Fraser River gold rush of 1858. Since the Chinese took up residence in British Columbia, their presence provoked hostilities from the competition in the labour market. Eventually, white labourers used everything at their disposal to remove their chief antagonists. A principal tenet of the capitalist market is that it naturally adjusts for the increased supply of labour and assigns wages for work accordingly. However, because European settlers felt they should not have to compete fairly with “inferior” Chinese labourers, they drew on the stereotype that the Chinese were “undercutting” their wages to justify restrictive legislation that would prioritize and protect white jobs. Commentators of the Canadian labour market in the late nineteenth century argued that such regulations on Chinese exclusion and labour were justified by an “unfair” advantage derived from their supposedly lower standards of living. But these policies were a double standard that prevented European settlers from competing fairly in the capitalistic economy that they aimed to spread across the world.

Hostility was not always directed at the Chinese for their tenure in British Columbia. Sometimes, the Chinese were able to create amicable relations with both the European settlers and Indigenous communities. As one such example, Chinese market gardeners leased land from the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) community, whose reserve was on the outskirts of Vancouver, and the two groups formed mutually beneficial partnerships that lasted well into the twentieth century. The farmers peddled produce from these lands to white homemakers and such good customer service won non-Chinese support when they were harassed by legislation from the City of Vancouver. This chapter looks at both the history of antagonism in wage labour between the Chinese with white workers, and also the history of cooperation between the Chinese, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous peoples in Vancouver.

搵食艱難 – *Finding a Bite to Eat is Difficult*

The Chinese came to British Columbia to escape dire economic conditions in China. This section elaborates on the social and labour conditions the Chinese sojourners since their arrival in North America.

Poor economic prospects in China was a major push factor of Chinese emigration in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which was made possible by ending the isolation of Qing-dynasty China and connecting the country to the global markets through the treaties that concluded the Opium War. The rapid growth of the Chinese population and a much smaller expansion of arable land meant that by the 1850s, subsistence farming was increasingly difficult. According to estimates by various scholars, the average farmer held 25.73 acres in 1753, but only 12.4 acres by the 1830s.¹⁵¹ After factoring in taxation, it was not possible for a farmer to

¹⁵¹ Hsü, *History of Modern China, Vol. 1*, 224.

eke out a subsistence living let alone support their families. As a result, many farmers sold their farms to landlords creating an upward surge of land prices. With these dim prospects before them, many adventurous Chinese men left the country via the ports that had been recently opened for Western powers, to seek their fortunes abroad.

In the 1840s, the first group of Chinese migrants arrived in Hawaii to work as labourers on plantations and in California to participate in the California gold rush. In Chinese communities, California came to be known as “Gold Mountain” and Hawaii was called “Fragrant Sandalwood Hills.”¹⁵² Despite the moniker, California meant more than just the gold; it represented opportunities that could not be found at home. In addition to gold mining, the Chinese also sought out contract employment wherever they could. Thus, Americans formed new perceptions on the issue of Chinese labour: the government saw the Chinese simply as contract workers, but working-class Americans saw the Chinese as competition to jobs.¹⁵³ Wherever the Chinese workers went, they were antagonized by local white labourers for “stealing” their jobs.

When the California gold rush was over, some Chinese labourers moved northwards to the Fraser River gold rush. But the end of the gold rush did not mean an end Chinese immigration into British Columbia. Cheap labour was desperately needed for the development of British Columbia which prompted new labour arrangements, and these arrangements would be applied to future labour contracts between British Columbian company and Chinese labour recruiters.¹⁵⁴ A Chinese contractor known as the “boss” gathered a group of Chinese labourers, who entered into a debt agreement. The boss would pay for the labourer’s passage and head tax

¹⁵² Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 31.

¹⁵³ Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 32.

¹⁵⁴ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 34.

in return for a few years of indentured labour. Afterwards, the contractor found a British Columbia firm willing to hire the labourers for a contracted period. In turn, industries paid the “boss,” who later distributed the payment to each worker as their salary. This arrangement guaranteed employers would have labourers for their work and the Chinese immigrant employment. The contractors brought a healthy supply of cheap labour into British Columbia, but in doing so earned the enmity of white labourers for introducing strong competition for their jobs.

A major source of contention between Chinese and white settlers was due to frictions in the labour force. The willingness of the Chinese to work for less than the expected family wage that white workers demanded, became a critical point of conflict between the two groups. Government policies that aimed to restrict Chinese immigration were implemented due to protests from the Canadian labour force and the findings of the two Royal Commissions on labour competition, which concluded that Chinese labourers with lower wages “stole” jobs from white labourers and undercut family wages. White labourers argued if they accepted Chinese wages just to take a job, they were unable to support their families. Undercutting eventually became entrenched as a racial stereotype. There were several factors that contributed to the labour friction between the Chinese and white labourers and led the notion of Chinese undercutting dominating debates about work: the arrangement of Chinese labour, the desire for firms to reduce their bottom line, the unwillingness for Euro-Canadians to compete in a newly connected global market, and racist sentiments that justified the Chinese could live on less and deserved less wages.

When the Chinese arrived in British Columbia it was necessary to find work immediately. Due to the debt arrangements between the Chinese contractors and labourers, it

was imperative for both parties to find work quickly to meet their respective objectives: for the labourer, it was to work off their debt; and for the boss, it was to turn a profit from the contract. To ensure faster employment, contractors entered into agreements with companies where wages for the Chinese labourers were lower than their white counterparts. This was the only means to guarantee jobs for the labourers. Many labour-intensive industries, such as the canneries along the Fraser River in south and the Nass River in northern British Columbia, employed and enjoyed such an arrangement.

To better understand the wage expenditures to industries, we should also consider how Euro-Canadian labourers calculated their expected wages. In *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia*, Alicja Muszynski argues that European men bargained for a “family wage.” It was believed that men were responsible for the production of the entire family and therefore labour conducted by women and children should only be valued at a fraction of what a man made.¹⁵⁵ If women and children did become employed, their income was treated only as supplementary to that of the male head of the household. This mentality was shaped by Christian beliefs and Victorian social and gender norms.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, some employers were still willing to pay the “family wage.” With that line of thought, hiring managers deemed Chinese who came alone or had family in a foreign land to be “unworthy” of the family wage. And, for those whose families remained in China, family wages would have been seen as money that would leave domestic circulation, thus damaging the Canadian economy. Therefore, whether it was because of economic pressures or social norms, it would be very difficult for Chinese labourers to obtain work without having to undercut the wages of their white counterparts.

¹⁵⁵ Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour*, 30. See also Dianne Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

While some employers were willing to pay the family wage, others were not so inclined. A white labourer in the cigar manufacturing industry in the United States provided testimony for the Royal Commission of 1885, lamenting that a manager would not hire him because he was married. The manager told him, “The Chinamen is not married, and he can work very cheap. If you will introduce me to unmarried men, I will pay them enough to live comfortably...I am not responsible for other men’s children and cannot support them.”¹⁵⁶ This incident reveals two interesting observations: labourer still expected “family wages” and firms were unwilling to pay “family wages” when they could recruit an alternate and cheaper source of labour. Many companies were willing to hire Chinese workers to improve their bottom line and some Euro-Canadian labourers were slow to accept the reality that the higher wages they demanded, did not come with a comparative economic advantage for companies.

This “undercutting” issue highlights the double standards Canadian labourers held towards free-market capitalism that Western powers imposed on China in the first half of the nineteenth century. The final factor that contributed to labour frictions was the unpreparedness and unwillingness of Euro-Canadians to compete in a newly connected global market, which they had a hand in creating; and instead, they sought to use the power of law to protect their livelihood against a so-called inferior race. In an interview for the Royal Commission in 1902, Reverend Elliot S. Rowe summarizes the racist attitude of settler society: “I think it is humiliating to have to say that our system of civilization is such that we cannot stand the competition of an inferior race, but we have to take conditions as they exist and to work to ameliorate or improve those conditions.”¹⁵⁷ Throughout the 1902 commission, there were many complaints from white labourers of various industries claiming they could not compete with

¹⁵⁶ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1885)*, [J.A. Chapleau], xcii-xciii.

¹⁵⁷ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1902)*, 25.

Asian labourers. Joseph Shaw, a market gardener from England, lamented, “I cannot compete with them (the Chinese) at all. I cannot make a reasonable living and clothe my seven children.”¹⁵⁸ Most Chinese labourers had left their families behind and had to remit money home every year. Even though they were also supporting their families, the Chinese workers were paid less. From another perspective, Chinese lives were seen to be “cheaper” because they were willing to have a lower standard of living when compared to their white counterparts. This was evident J.A. Chapleau’s 1885 report, which claims that the Chinese were “aliens whose standard of comfort is below what the ordinary decencies of life require.”¹⁵⁹ This racist remark thinly veils the idea that the Chinese workers were almost subhuman who took “advantage” of their lower standard of living, to secure jobs by accepting lower wages. The question remains was it impossible the white labourers to compete against Chinese workers?

For the sake of comparison, let us use the 1870s wage data from coal mining because both white and immigrant labourers worked side by side in this industry. Chinese miners, who were not allowed to work underground, received \$1.25 per day at the New Vancouver Coal Company. The minimum a white miner received was \$2.60 per day.¹⁶⁰ This example was on the extreme side of wage disparity between white and Chinese workers and compounded with the fact that underground work, which paid better, was already reserved for whites due to safety reasons. In another comparison, a Chinese farmhand was paid \$18 to \$20 a month but had to look for boarding, while a white farmhand was paid \$20 a month but had boarding provided for him.¹⁶¹ The question of competitiveness was influenced by how tightly the head of the family and the expected earner of “family wages” held onto the paradigm of the family wage. To make

¹⁵⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 67.

¹⁵⁹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1885), [J.A. Chapleau], viii.

¹⁶⁰ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 72.

¹⁶¹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 76.

ends meet, many Euro-Canadian worker families supplemented their income with the contributions of their wives and working-age children. As a result, many factories hired women and children because lower wage costs improved their bottom line. On the other hand, those who clung to the family wage concept, like market gardener Joseph Shaw, saw it impossible to maintain the same standard of living on his wages alone. Labour concerns of “family wage” earners could be racialized, when the law was employed to protect their own livelihoods at the expense of Chinese workers. In the end, Chinese workers had to accept lower wages and experienced discrimination for doing what they had to do to make a living for themselves and their families.

Were there pre-existing notions on the Chinese living standards that affected their wages or did the initial act of “undercutting” cement into a racial stereotype? Focusing on the racialization of labour in the fish canneries, Alicja Muszynski argues that pre-existing racial distinctions that marked the Chinese as inferior were used to justify paying the non-European “other” less.¹⁶² Sociologist Renisa Mawani adds that racial distinctions used to categorize labour were developed in the contact zone of Indigenous, Asian, and European interactions.¹⁶³ While both perspectives highlight the role of race in wage determination, from a microeconomic standpoint, there is no reason to pay someone more for their labour if they were at one point willing to work for less. Fundamentally, both economic and social factors reinforce the undercutting racial category. The issue of undercutting and competitiveness was one that was affected by the social sentiments on race and values of the dominant society that ultimately becomes another force in the market in addition to the simple supply and demand of labour in British Columbia.

¹⁶² Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour*, 103.

¹⁶³ Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*, 40 and 45.

Intersections with Indigenous Peoples

Chinese and Indigenous people worked side-by-side in many of the labour-intensive jobs available, including several major industries: agriculture, fishing, mining, and to a lesser extent in forestry and railway construction.¹⁶⁴ The most heated competition occurred in the fish canneries, where social hierarchies affected wages. Within the cannery industry, Japanese and Indigenous men fished, Chinese men butchered and prepared the fish, Indigenous women maintained fishing equipment and nets, and Indigenous women and children packaged the finished product. With the 1900 and 1903 head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants, their reduced presence in canneries created openings taken up by Indigenous women.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 provided an even greater window of opportunity for the Indigenous women in the industry. On the other hand, today there are many renewed stories of cooperation among Indigenous and Chinese communities. Bill Chu, the founder of Canadians for Reconciliation Society, recounts a heartwarming story where an injured Chinese railway worker, who was left to die by the railroad, was picked up by Indigenous people, taken into their home, and nursed to health.¹⁶⁶ Presently, in Vancouver many public history projects celebrate Indigenous-Chinese relationships. The documentary films *Cedar and Bamboo* and *All Our Father's Relations* present the voices of those who have Indigenous and Chinese ancestry and explore the histories of shared experiences and alliances.¹⁶⁷ Historian Henry Yu summarizes the

¹⁶⁴ Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia 1858-1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996), v. The intersection compares Knight's list of occupations Indigenous people have engaged in against the comprehensive list of occupations the Chinese engaged in presented in the Royal Commission of 1902.

¹⁶⁵ Robertson and Kwagu'l Gixsam Clan, *Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las*, 267.

¹⁶⁶ Meg Mittelstedt, "Touring BC's 'Hidden' History Shared by Chinese and Indigenous People," *The Tyee*, 13 October 2014, <https://thetyee.ca/News/2014/10/13/Shared-Chinese-Indigenous-History/>

¹⁶⁷ Diana Leung, Kamala Todd, dir., *Cedar and Bamboo* (2010; Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io19r8vQQQ8>; and Alejandro Yoshizawa, dir., *All Our Father's Relations* (2016; Vancouver), DVD.

importance of this research saying, they are an “important part of a collective, collaborative project for those sets of people whose stories have often been silenced or ignored, so that they could speak and hear each other’s stories.”¹⁶⁸ These public histories suggest that Chinese interaction in the British Columbia economy was not always marked with friction.

Symbiosis: Market Gardening with xʷməθkʷəy̓əm

Chinese immigrants took up market gardening as a way to make a living on this foreign shore. Market gardens were small scale farms that sold produce directly to the clients. As early as 1870, Chinese farmers engaged in market gardening to supply various products to the nearby cities of Victoria, Vancouver, and New Westminster.¹⁶⁹ Chinese market gardeners in the vicinity of Vancouver leased lands from white settlers, and some leased directly from xʷməθkʷəy̓əm families on the Musqueam Reserve No. 2, located just on the outskirts of the City of Vancouver. During the McKenna-McBride Commission in 1913, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm leader “Chief Johnnie” testified that the Chinese had been on the reserve since 1908. They were invited by the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm so that the young men of the community could learn the “art of agriculture” from the Chinese tenants, who would leave after that objective was achieved.¹⁷⁰ By 1910s, the Department of Indian Affairs recorded lease contracts between Chinese lessees and the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm community as early as the 1910s.

¹⁶⁸ Henry Yu, “Nurturing Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal, and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver,” in *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation Through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*, ed. Ashok Mathur, Jonath Dewar, Mike DeDagné (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011), 307.

¹⁶⁹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 65.

¹⁷⁰ Royal Commission on Indian Affairs, New Westminster Agency Testimony, Meeting on Musqueam I. R., 63. <http://gsdl.ubcic.bc.ca/cgi-bin/library.cgi?site=localhost&a=p&p=about&c=newwestm&l=en&w=utf-8>



Figure 4.1: Sketch of Chinese farms on Musqueam Reserve No.2, 1950.¹⁷¹



Figure 3.2: Farmhouse, Chinese Market Gardens, Musqueam IR 2
Credit: Wayne Point¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Chinese Canadian Stories, “Map of Chinese Farms on Musqueam, c1950,” uploaded 9 February 2012, video, 0:21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngoV9rDvu0M>

¹⁷² Wayne Point, “Farmhouse, Chinese Market Gardens, Musqueam IR2,” Historical Places Canada (Parks Canada), accessed 14 October 2019, <https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/image-image.aspx?id=21261#i2/>.

In the early twentieth century, x^wməθk^wəyəm had a diverse multi-income source economy. They were predominantly fishers and hunters but also worked in forestry, long shoring, and women sold woven cedar bark baskets door-to-door. The community wanted to open their reserve land for lease and the Chinese approached them to lease the land. This became a benefit to both parties: the Chinese farmers accessed land for their market gardening endeavours and, initially, x^wməθk^wəyəm families received rent directly from the leases outside of the department's management of their lands. For the x^wməθk^wəyəm, it was an additional source of income that came with the added benefit of forming a lasting relationship of cooperation with the Chinese. In *Makúk*, historian John Lutz argues that Indigenous people of British Columbia employed a multi-mode income-generating system or “moditional” economy, a combination of “traditional” and “modern” economic pursuits. This way of life allowed Indigenous people to adapt to the rapidly changing economic conditions without losing their own cultural identity or time for cultural endeavours.¹⁷³ By 1917, eighteen leases were made with the Chinese covering over 72 of the 300 acres of the Musqueam reserve. By 1942, the amount of land rented by the Chinese expanded to 126 acres, almost half the area of the reserve. The Chinese lessees predominantly grew Western vegetables such as celery and cabbage, as well as Chinese *bai cai* (or commonly anglicized as bok choy), *su cai* (a variant of celery cabbage), and *gai lan* that they peddled around Vancouver, but some also raised pigs as well.¹⁷⁴

By the early 1910s, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) realized that the market gardeners were leasing land directly from x^wməθk^wəyəm individuals and they sought to regulate

¹⁷³ John Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 23.

¹⁷⁴ Cheryl Rossi, “Musqueam: Chinese Garden on Musqueam Land Brought Cultures Together,” *Vancouver Courier*, September 26, 2013. <https://www.vancourier.com/community/vancouver-special/musqueam/musqueam-chinese-garden-on-musqueam-land-brought-cultures-together-1.639772>

and formalize these transactions under the leasing and surrender provisions of the *Indian Act*. Initially, the DIA claimed that x^wməθk^wəyəm individuals and families had no right to independently lease the land nor the Chinese the right to become tenants and demanded the Chinese vacate the premises. This was because part of the provisions of the *Indian Act* did not allow for leasing on reserves without a vote of release or surrender to the Crown. This vote required a majority of the male band members over the age of 21 in the presence of a Crown representative. Despite many warnings from the Indian Agent to vacate the reserve, the Chinese lessees stayed put. Eventually, the Department relented as they had no real way to force the Chinese off and the rent that had been generated from the tenancy supported x^wməθk^wəyəm families and Elders from falling into destitution. Indian Agent Peter Byrne reported,

At the same time if the Department sees its way clear to consent to the leasing of portions of this land, so the Chinaman, in the proper manner. I feel that it would be in the best interest of the Indians and also the Reserve, for the reason that the Indians who first permitted the Chinaman to occupy the land are old and destitute, (some blind), and quite incapable of doing any work, hence the land will grow up in weeds and brush if some steps are not taken to keep it in a state of cultivation.¹⁷⁵

With the typical paternalistic attitude, the Department demanded, under the Indian Act, that rent be paid to them so the money could be managed properly. The DIA regulated leases usually contained several key clauses:

- Premises must be kept clean and free from the storage of intoxicating substances.
- Tenants have the freedom to use any firewood on the premise and to establish any necessary structures.
- Rent was to be paid in April and in October. April was designated as the start of the lease.
- If the land was not in a cultivatable state, the first years of the rent were waived in favour of the efforts required to clear the land.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Byrne to Assistant Deputy and Secretary, 6 January, 1917, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

While the partnership between the Chinese and x^wməθk^wəy^əm was amiable for the most part, it was not without instances of friction and conflict. In February 1923, Seymour Grant, who previously leased six acres to Chow Kong, wanted to take the land back and employ Chinese labourers instead. To achieve that objective, Grant placed charges against Chow Kong that the Department investigated and concluded that they were not warranted.¹⁷⁶ In the end, Grant renewed Chow's lease the following month and Indian Agent C. C. Perry submitted the lease signed by both parties to the Department. Chow Kong leased six acres for another year from Grant at \$25 per acre, payable semi-annually.¹⁷⁷

In January 1940, Wong Kong Yam, a lessee on the Musqueam reserve who operated a piggery, routinely discovered his pigs shot or stabbed. Despite efforts of the constable to solve the mystery, pigs continued to be lost. By October, Wong decided to cancel his lease and another Chinese man took over the permit.¹⁷⁸ Indian Agent Perry commented in a letter to the Department that no one appeared to benefit from the tenant vacating; and as Wong claims he had no enemies Canadian, Indigenous, or Chinese.

In the summer of 1941, the City of Vancouver issued notices to the Chinese tenants on the Musqueam reserve to pay property taxes. Indian Agent F.C.J. Ball informed the Department that the Chinese were taking the city to court and he had been called to witness.¹⁷⁹ Sensing imminent trouble, the x^wməθk^wəy^əm petitioned the Department in support of the farmers:

We the undersigned being members of Musqueam Band hereby respectfully protest on the following

1. We consider that we do not want our Reservation to be included into the City limits of Vancouver.
 - a. We are Wards of the Dominion government.

¹⁷⁶ C.C. Perry to the Secretary, 13 February 1923, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁷⁷ C.C. Perry to the Secretary, 21 March 1923, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁷⁸ Agent's Report on Vancouver Agency for January 1940, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC; and F.C.J. Ball to the Secretary, 4 October 1940, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁷⁹ F.C.J. Ball to Harold W. McGill, 5 June 1941, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

- b. The Department of Indian Affairs is our guardian and we rely upon them for protection, not the City of Vancouver.
 - c. Our said Reservation is vested in the crown of His Majesty the King.
2. We consider that we do not want the Chinese who are renting and living on our Reserve to pay any taxation to the City of Vancouver. If there was any tax to be paid by the said Chinese, it should come to Musqueam Band for the benefit of our Reserve. But as stated above in respectfully we do not want them to pay no tax what ever.¹⁸⁰

The x^wməθk^wəyəm petition was a response to the threat that, if taxed, the Chinese tenants would terminate their leases and leave the reserve. In addition, they also voiced grievances about the reserve being incorporated into the municipal jurisdiction noting that it was under federal jurisdiction as per the Indian Act and the First Nations-Crown relationship. x^wməθk^wəyəm honoured the relationship they had with the Chinese tenants and would do their best to protect their mutual benefit.

The City demanded taxes, yet it provided no services to the reserve, which, under the Indian Act, was considered Crown land held in trust for the Musqueam Indian Band. In a letter from to the Department, Indian Agent Ball voiced the protests of the tenants.

The City of Vancouver has no sewage, lights, roads, water or any other facilities on or through the Reserve, and the roads have been built by the Chinese at considerable expense as they are all plank roads. The Chinese ask for what are they being taxed.¹⁸¹

The taxation issue quickly became entangled with a long-delayed public works projects for the Musqueam reserve. Construction on a new water line was immediately halted while negotiations took place as government departments debated who was responsible for the payment of the waterworks.¹⁸² As early as 1915, there was official documentation of the x^wməθk^wəyəm

¹⁸⁰ Leaders of Musqueam to Department of Indian Affairs, 1 May 1942, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁸¹ F.C.J. Ball to the Secretary, 4 May 1942, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁸² Director of Department of Mines and Resources to Major D.M. MacKay, 6 June 1942, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

requesting the Department for clean water supply and plumbing on Reserve No. 2 because of contamination from sewage due to rapid property development in the vicinity.¹⁸³

The Department recognized that the City's tax levying on the Chinese tenants by the Vancouver City Council threatened the economic cooperative relationship. J.C. Caldwell, Chief Reserves and Trusts, wrote,

As you are aware, we have been receiving for years very substantial rentals from Chinese tenants of reclaimed lands in the Musqueam Reserve and it would now appear that the City of Vancouver is taxing these tenants to such an extent as to force them to vacate. If such abandonment occurs, it will indeed be a very serious matter for the Musqueam Indians who to a great extent have been dependent upon these rentals for their support.¹⁸⁴

This issue eventually drew the attention of Major D.M. Mackay, Indian Commissioner for British Columbia, who held talks with the Vancouver City Council.

In the end, the City Council and MacKay agreed that in return for running water and fire protection to be extended to the reserve, the Department would collect taxes from non-Indigenous residents.¹⁸⁵ In a further effort to cut costs, the Department also wanted construction of the waterworks to occur while x^wməθk^wəyəm community members were at home to “help.”¹⁸⁶ Ultimately, the public services that should have been available on the reserve were used as a bargaining chip by the City of Vancouver to coerce the Department to pressure Chinese tenants to pay taxes. The Chinese stayed connected to the x^wməθk^wəyəm despite the new tax being imposed on them. It appears that the Chinese stayed on the reserve until the 1960s when Indian Affairs arranged a lease for x^wməθk^wəyəm land to build the Shaughnessy golf course.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Susan Roy, “The History of qiqéyt,” (confidential research report, Musqueam Treaty Lands and Resources, 2008), 95.

¹⁸⁴ J.C. Caldwell to Mr. Allan, 13 May, 1942, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁸⁵ Jas. L. Armstrong to D.M. MacKay, 19 October, 1942, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁸⁶ D.M. MacKay to the Secretary, 31 December, 1942, RG10, file 987/32-4-4, LAC.

¹⁸⁷ Rossi, “Musqueam: Chinese Garden.”

Local Regulations

The success of the Chinese market gardeners in British Columbia drew the envy of their Euro-Canadian counterparts. Allegations against “questionable practises,” such as using human waste as fertilizer in Chinese market gardening were plenty in the many interviews during the Royal Commission of 1902.¹⁸⁸ Dr. Robert McKenchnie, Health Officer of Nanaimo, testified,

In an empty stable I discovered a dozen more presenting the same appearance, and from the fact of the urine being saved in ‘Chinatown’ and a stock of it found on a vegetable farm, I concluded that popular report was true and that this liquid was used. If typhoid fever existed in ‘Chinatown’ it is a fact that baccilla is excreted by the kidneys and using it on green vegetables would carry the disease; even if it were used on the soil it might be dangerous. I don’t know of a case of typhoid amongst them. They do not report their cases.¹⁸⁹

The use of urine as a fertilizer was a practice that was brought over from China and it is a practice continued today in some farming operations. Historian Catherine Kyle asserts using human waste as a fertilizer “has been a central aspect of both urban waste management and urban agricultural practices in China for many centuries.”¹⁹⁰ However, the testimony of Dr. McKenchnie once again connects the white public perception of the Chinese as “filthy.” and their capacity to start epidemics, and avoid—in this case typhoid—Western medical detection; and thus, become a threat to the public health of white society.

Settler farmers raised many concerns against the success of Chinese market gardeners that were vocally represented in the Royal Commission of 1902. Firstly, the Chinese undercut the produce prices of white farmers. Secondly, Chinese cooks employed by wealthy households often refused to buy produce from white farmers.¹⁹¹ Finally, if settler farmers wanted to compete

¹⁸⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1902)*, 67.

¹⁸⁹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1902)*, 69.

¹⁹⁰ Nathan McClitock, “Why Farm the City? Theorizing Urban Agriculture through a Lens of Metabolic Rift,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2010): 191-207, quoted in Catherine Kyle, “Chinese and Japanese Market Gardening in the North and Central Okanagan Valley, British Columbia,” in *BC Studies*, No. 200 (Winter 2018): 242-272.

¹⁹¹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission (1902)*, 67.

with the Chinese farmers by also selling door-to-door, they were afraid of the embarrassment from copying the methods of their competitor when running into them at the doors.¹⁹²

Chinese market gardeners were often subjected to by-laws designed to stifle their success under the pressure of non-Asian local growers. In 1894, the City of Vancouver implemented a by-law that restricted hours of door-to-door vegetable peddling to the same as store hours. Later, in 1915, the City imposed a \$50 pedlar license fee (paid in bi-annual instalments) on Chinese pedlars. *Chinese Times*, a local Chinese newspaper, emphasized the difficulty of sustaining a livelihood as a pedlar,

The officials in the City Council bear their biases (toward us) in every industry and made every attempt to regulate Chinese labourers in order to end their livelihoods. To the pedlars of produce and seafood, there are many regulations. Their attempts to impose harsh regulations have been too many to remember. This newspaper, on thinking of the wellbeing our Chinese brethren have many times warned them not to come to Canada... Every day, a pedlar pushes his cart to North Vancouver seeking to sell. But recent stocking prices are high and sales are few, and sometimes this led one to take out loans. The difficulty is unbearable! Now Vancouver City Council imposed a new by-law: Chinese pedlars must now pay a licensing fee of \$50 semi-annually. Otherwise, they faced deportation. This by-law was imposed not even three months and \$25 was already paid. Not much later, the second payment must be submitted. This City Council is still thinking of new license and registration fees. For the sake of a quart of food on the table, we have reached the rope's end. Yet, harsh by-laws are still being imposed. There is a head tax when you enter the country. Afterwards, there are all sorts of impositions on Chinese pedlars. How is there still a road to livelihood?¹⁹³

The editorial vividly described the challenges Chinese pedlars faced in 1915, especially after the licensing fee was introduced. In January, the Chinese market gardeners were prepared to fight the legislation and raise funds for litigation to counter the imminent by-laws. The *Chinese Times* reported,

¹⁹² Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 64.

¹⁹³ "Woe to the Our Pedlars in the Country," *Chinese Times*, 26 May, 1915, 3. The vocabulary for license did not exist in Chinese and the newspaper used Chinese words to sound out the English pronunciation of license. The Chinese words spoken in Cantonese were *lie zen*.

Upon hearing about someone at the City Council suggesting restrictions on pedlars last year, this paper has since reiterated warnings of imminent danger by translating newspapers and writing editorials until the pen goes bald and the tongue is parched. Now market gardeners and fish pedlars have united together to establish a plan, recruited experts, and raised funds in preparation to counter the regulations. All the reporter can do is be of encouragement and hope your endeavours start and end well. Please don't be a *tiger head with a snake tail*. We must withstand the adversities in order to see the results we wanted. We must listen to the coordination of experts and do not say rash things. Recall the incident with the laundries. Now the east (referring to a regulation imposed on Chinese laundries in Toronto) is anxious, we cannot have the west (referring to themselves in Vancouver) suffer the same fate.¹⁹⁴

This was not the end of discriminatory regulations against Chinese pedlars. By 1918, the City Council decided to levy a \$10 license to all Chinese retailers and the licensing fees for peddling was doubled to \$100. The pedlar licensing fee returned to \$50 after the vigorous protest by Chinese Consul Koliang Yih and Ambassador Yang.¹⁹⁵ The Chinese pedlars also distributed circulars to the households of their clients rallying for support in addition to hiring a lawyer for litigation. The *Chinese Times* once again chronicled the trials the pedlars underwent,

Mr. F.M. MacLeod, the lawyer representing Chinese produce pedlars with regards to the issue of licensing fees, has submitted to the City Council a petition containing the signatures of five hundred households and requested re-evaluation of the by-law. According to MacLeod, if City Council is adamant in levying \$50 for the licensing fee, the pedlars will abandon the trade. Thus, he requested the fee to be reduced to \$15 per year instead of the current \$50 a year.¹⁹⁶

By 1920, over 5,000 white women signed the petition and submitted it to the council.¹⁹⁷ The December 3, 1919 issue of the *Chinese Times* recounted a meeting held by a woman's group,

Yesterday, a meeting by the women's group mentioned the issue of Chinese produce pedlars. A speaker was noted to say, "Chinese have entered Canada by paying \$500 in order to make a living. This present regulation is extremely unfair. Furthermore, the revenues from produce sales are very small. To levy such fees, it

¹⁹⁴ "Market Gardeners Rally Together," *Chinese Times*, 21 January 1915, 3. Tiger head with a snake tail - 虎頭蛇尾. The saying means to start and end all endeavours well. One should not start a task with the impressiveness of a tiger and end the job slinking away like a snake.

¹⁹⁵ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 118-9.

¹⁹⁶ "Reporting on the Issue of Reducing Licensing Fee," *Chinese Times*, 20 December, 1919, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 119.

makes business difficult to sustain and is no surprise the Chinese would abandon the trade.” When the speech ended, the members were in agreement. One member in the crowd suggested that a public market place be opened because the Chinese are currently not selling door-to-door. This led to a lively debate. The sentiment was a public market was not a bad idea, but with the amount of housework, it is difficult to leave the house for purchases. It is far more convenient for them to come to our door.¹⁹⁸

This excerpt shows that the women preferred that produce be sold at their doors and they supported the peddlers because door-to-door sales saved them valuable time. In an era where white women were expected to maintain the domestic sphere and live up to the standard of respectability, having one less thing to worry about was definitely appreciated.

Conclusion

Ever since their arrival, the Chinese were plagued by various negative stereotypes that shaped their experiences and justified exploitative policies and practices. Mainstream white society marked the Chinese as filthy, immoral, and with low standards of living. However, the white labourers who worked alongside the Chinese acknowledged them as diligent, frugal, and sober. It was with the latter reputation that the Chinese were able to remain in a job market that was persistently hostile towards them.

The stereotype of the Chinese worker that undercuts white labourer wages came about because of market forces that were later racialized into a stereotype. Friction between the two groups of workers stems from three major factors. First, in order for the Chinese worker to gain passage and entry into British Columbia, they had to sign a debt contract with a “boss” who sold their labour to firms across the ocean. Second, companies were always looking for ways to improve their profits. Many factories employed women, children, and Chinese men just to reduce

¹⁹⁸ “Women’s Group Discuss the Issue of Produce Pedlars,” *Chinese Times*, 3 December, 1919, 3.

their expenditures. As a result, many white labourers, who still held onto the idea of the “family wage,” found themselves unable to compete with the Chinese who were willing to work for lower wages. I believe the paradigm of expecting the “family wage” blindsided some white labourers and eroded their conviction to fully compete in the labour market. As a result, these settlers resorted to lobbying both the provincial and federal governments to grant them an unfair advantage on the free market through restrictions on the non-European other. At the end of the day, the Social Darwinist conviction of the “survival of the fittest” did not have to apply to “superior” settlers, which presumably meant the Euro-Canadian society would have thrived, but their privilege came from racialized discrimination. Settlers ignored free-market principles that they promoted in Asia and Christian principles of equality did not apply to the foreign aliens. In 1902 Reverend Rowe critiqued the problems of the capitalist society, saying, “Our economic system is wrong and you cannot hope to remedy that at short notice.”¹⁹⁹ The labour issue was not resolved until after the Great Depression. At that time, the Trades and Labour Congress recognized that the source of conflict between Asians and Canadians “was caused by the competitive position into which Orientals had been forced and that legalized discrimination ultimately militated against the interests of all workers.”²⁰⁰

The x^wməθk^wəyəm-Chinese alliance shows that the Chinese were not always targets of hostility and beneficial commerce could create lasting partnerships. This symbiotic relationship could have lasted as long as seven decades with instances where x^wməθk^wəyəm rallied to protect not only their own interests but those of their Chinese tenants. The white women of Vancouver, who benefited from the convenience offered by the door-to-door sales of groceries, also pledged their support to the Chinese pedlars. History would have been very different, if members of

¹⁹⁹ Privy Council Office, *Report of the Royal Commission* (1902), 25.

²⁰⁰ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 151-2.

Canadian society were willing to tolerate the non-European “other,” even if it was for the sake of mutual prosperity.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

On July 18, 1936, in celebration for the Golden Jubilee of Vancouver, the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA) performed an elaborate parade. A traditional dancing lion, accompanied by drummers and music, acrobats, martial artists and musicians, marched down the parade route while onlookers cheered and applauded.²⁰¹ Months prior, the City of Vancouver had accepted the CBA's proposal to transform a part of Chinatown into a miniature version of China. Pagodas were built and "oriental motifs" were displayed as part of the Chinese village theme. The merchants capitalized on Western expectations for an exotic Chinese image.²⁰² Vancouver's Chinatown attracted visitors as the miniature version of China that had been tailored to Euro-Canadian consumption. In other words, the CBA sold "Chineseness" as a commodity. A similar move was made by the Indigenous neighbours of Chinatown and for many years. In 1938, the x^wməθk^wəyəm performed their indigeneity for Vancouver's Folk Festival and again next year for the royal visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth. Dressing up in traditional regalia and performing dances were ways that Indigenous people played along to capitalize on the gains by selling their "Indianness" and challenging prevailing perceptions of Indigenous people.²⁰³ At the same time, selling culture could have the side effect entrench existing stereotypes, but it was still

²⁰¹ "Chinese Benevolent Association Parade Festivities," *Chinese Times*, 20 July, 1936, 3.

²⁰² Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 156.

²⁰³ Susan Roy, "Performing Musqueam Culture and History at British Columbia's 1966 Centennial Celebrations," in *BC Studies*, No. 135 (Autumn 2002): 55-90. In relation to Indigenous performance, also see Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 16; Susan Neylan, "'HERE COMES THE BAND!': Cultural Collaboration, Connective Traditions, and Aboriginal Brass Bands on British Columbia's North Coast, 1875-1964," in *BC Studies*, No. 152 (Winter 2006): 35-66; and Alan Downey, *The Creator's Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2018).

a means to build a bridge of understanding among ethnic groups while making some money for their efforts.

While the participation in the jubilee celebrations did gain temporary goodwill from the City of Vancouver, the status of Chinese residing in British Columbia did not change. Chinese residents in Canada were still denied the franchise. As the Pacific theatre of World War II intensified, the Chinese gained some sympathy from the Canadian public but they also had to resort to wearing pins of Chinese flags to differentiate themselves from the Japanese who were feared by Canadians. Even though the Chinese did not have the right to vote, the community was relentless at demonstrating their loyalty to Canada's cause in the war and established the Victory Loan in 1941 and the Chinese War Relief Fund in 1943. Over 600 Chinese-Canadians volunteered in the armed forces. As the war progressed, antagonism towards the Chinese eroded from their continuing contributions towards the Canadian war effort. Following the war, the atrocities of Hitler made it unfavourable for any country to propose discriminatory policies. The Chinese were finally granted the franchise in 1947.

Starting from the Fraser River gold rush in 1858 to the end of the Second World War, the root cause that created friction in the contact zone of British Columbia among Indigenous, Chinese, and Euro-Canadian settlers was Western imperialism. At all costs, Canada wanted to create a white British Columbia and would use any reasoning to justify their actions. In relation to Indigenous peoples who had lived on these lands for thousands of years, the government enacted policies directed towards assimilation and they failed to recognize Indigenous rights to land and resources. White settlers convinced themselves that Indigenous people did not own the land because the land was not cultivated nor exhibited signs of "civilization" according to Western standards. On the other hand, Chinese sojourners originally came to Canada for quick

profits as they had planned to return home to China. Over time, this sentiment began to shift and the sojourners wanted to stay. However, white settlers also saw them as an obstacle to the creation of white British Columbia and they were deemed unable to assimilate to Christian-Canadian citizenship.

The “Chinese cannot assimilate myth” was reinforced through the power of negative stereotypes developed by the Western world. Prominent stereotypes about Chinese discussed in this thesis include “opium-abuse,” “uncleanliness,” and “immorality.” These stereotypes were formed by the Western world through biased travelogues and “eye-witness accounts” and were used as evidence the state, especially in the Royal Commissions of 1885 and 1902, to perpetuate the sentiment that the Chinese were an inferior race that was not capable of assimilating and should not settle in Canada.

Negative representation gave the power to justify relentless harassment to Chinese and Indigenous communities through legislation. Both groups saw their freedom, and for Indigenous nations their sovereignty challenged. With the exception of the Chinese head tax and the Chinese Immigration Act, it was difficult for the white Canadian public to rally support for any discriminatory laws with a wide sweeping scope because the public took pride in the supposed justness of their laws. As a result, most of the discriminatory legislation directed towards the Chinese was small scale and meant to harass Chinese residents and businesses. Furthermore, the presence of Chinese in the economy of British Columbia created friction. The white labourers thought of their Chinese counterparts as their arch-nemesis and would try to remove them at all costs, including, through the use of exclusionary legislation.

It is easy to focus on the negative experiences of Chinese encounters in British Columbia when reading the historical narrative. However, this discounts the continuous efforts of the

Chinese community to resist discrimination and to dispel the images imposed by Euro-Canadian society through stereotypes. Against the three stereotypes of opium-abuse, filthiness, and immorality, the Chinese resisted discrimination through protest, lobbying, and litigation. For example, the Chinese created anti-opium leagues and lobbied the Canadian government to impose stricter regulations on opium traffic to remove the opium-abuser stereotype from their community. The same was done to challenge the stereotype of “filthiness.” In one instance, Chinese merchants requested the City of Vancouver to clean the streets of Chinatown. In another, the Chinese Consul issued a notice to the residents of Chinatown with instructions to use chloride of lime to clean their homes and businesses so that health inspectors could not harass them for failing the Euro-Canadian standards of hygiene. White society also proposed and implemented many laws, on the grounds of “morality,” to segregate Chinese men and white women from working together. In response, Quong Wing litigated against the constitutionality of the *Saskatchewan Act* and Ambassador Yang Shu Wen travelled across the country to defend the honour of the Chinese community and protest against the unfairness of the laws. Lastly, commerce does not have to create friction, but can also foster cooperation. We saw examples of these relationships when the Chinese market gardeners developed ties with the x^wməθk^wəyəm community and gained the support of white women in Vancouver.

These examples highlight the fact that the Chinese were actively creating a space for themselves in British Columbia. With all possible legal means at their disposal, they protected their livelihoods from constant harassment by the Euro-Canadian “other.” There were many exceptions of defiance, resistance, and cooperation in the Chinese encounters with Indigenous and Euro-Canadians in British Columbia from 1858 to 1947.

Epilogue

One critical problem in the period raised in this thesis was one of “assimilation.” After the multiculturalism movement of the 1970s and 1980s, many historians have asked the question, “What is Canadian identity?” As an immigrant raised in this country, I was allowed, for the most part, to retain my cultural background and do everything I would do as a Chinese person so long as I did not violate any Canadian laws and statues. One could find the various Chinese enclaves around the Greater Toronto Area entrenched in North York, Markham, Scarborough, and Brampton. Theoretically, if I were a new immigrant, I could live in those communities and get by in daily life without using a single word of English.

This leads to the question: “What does assimilation mean today?” While every resident in Canada is expected to accept and abide by the values outlined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as part of the “Canadian values,” one is not expected to adopt anglophone or francophone culture. This is especially true if one resides in an ethnic enclave or any area with high density of people of their ethnicity. In a sense, one aspect of Canadian freedom can be seen as the freedom to *not* culturally assimilate and Canada has come a long way into accepting (or tolerating) the presence of foreign cultures into its own cultural fabric.

While immigrants do not have to assimilate culturally, are they still expected to subscribe to the Canadian nation-building narrative? By this, I am referring to the history that begins from the fur trade in New France to the expansion of the state westward through the construction of the railway and the negotiation of treaties made by British-Canadians with Indigenous nations to claim the “wilderness.” Many immigrants accept this narrative as the “orthodox” version of Canadian history. For immigrant children, it is easy to understand why that is the case because

this version of Canadian history is taught in schools. I scarcely remember any mention of Indigenous groups in elementary school history, which began from the fur trade and ended at Confederation, and the mandatory Grade 10 history course “Canada and the War,” completely sidelined Indigenous presence. In the book, *Canadians and Their Pasts*, historians surveyed various people across Canada, including Indigenous communities and immigrants, on their involvement with Canadian history. Their study reveals that 36% of recent Asian immigrant respondents were “very interested” in Canada’s past, which rose to 43% for Asian immigrants who had settled in Canada for a long time. For comparison, 29% of recent European immigrants were interested in Canadian history, rising to 44% if they have been in Canada for a prolonged period of time.²⁰⁴ This does not explain the lack of awareness for the historical presence and importance of Indigenous communities among the older generation of immigrants.

Those who are required to take the citizenship exam have studied from the official guide book *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*. The guide spends a single page introducing the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and, in relation to the colonization of Indigenous lands and communities, admits only to the atrocities of the residential schools, which the government apologized for in 2008. Then, a second page is dedicated to Indigenous-European relations at the onset of the fur trade. As a result, new Canadian citizens have little awareness of the presence of Indigenous groups in Canada’s past or of their continuing rights and sovereignty.

In a sense, by immigrating into a new country, one does not only accept the “social contract” of adopting the country’s value system, but also the responsibility for the ongoing social issues and engaged citizenry. It is crucial for immigrants of all ethnicities to understand

²⁰⁴ Margaret Conrad, Kadriye Ercikan, Gerald Friesen, Jocelyn Létourneau, Delphin Muise, David Northrup, and Peter Seixas, *Canadians and Their Pasts by the Pasts Collective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 134.

the history of relationships and connections between precursors from their community and Indigenous communities. If immigrants are truly interested in history as the survey by Conrad et al. have concluded, then a good place to begin would be to understand the presence of those who graciously shared their land with us and hosted our arrivals.

Through education, the peacemaker myth can be dispelled by refuting the justice of British-Canadian law directed towards Indigenous peoples, Chinese, and other marginalized communities. As Albert Einstein once said, “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.”

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