

Book Reviews

Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World, by Anthony B. Chan. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983. Pp. 224, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$14.95; paper, \$7.95.

From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada, by Harry Con, Ronald J. Con, Graham Johnson, Edgar Wickberg and William E. Willmott. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 1982. Pp. 271, glossary, appendix, bibliography, index. Paper, \$9.95.

A few years ago the late Maurice Freedman essayed what he called a Chinese phase in social anthropology, a reference to the growing number of social scientific works on overseas Chinese that had appeared after 1949, when the mainland of China became unavailable for on-the-spot investigations. The spate of such studies has continued into the present era, when China is once more open to ethnographic observers (in part, anyway — *vide* the unfortunate fate of Stephen W. Mosher, whose work, protested by Peking authorities and just published as *Broken Earth: The Rural Chinese* by Random House in the U.S.A., cost him his PhD from a China-sensitive anthropology department at Stanford University). Overseas Chinese are found nearly everywhere, on each of the continents and most of the islands of the terrestrial globe. Since the late 1950s their presence in North America has been the occasion for the diffusion of the Chinese phase to Canada and the United States. The present two books are quite different instances of the form and style that that phase has assumed on the eastern side of the Pacific.

The study of Chinese in North America has been informed by both the national ideologies and social scientific perspectives that prevail in Canada and the United States. Thus, in the earlier works on Chinese in the U.S.A. — most notably those of Rose Hum Lee, S. W. Kung and Betty

Lee Sung — the central thrust was toward an uncritical acceptance of the benefits of complete and unreserved assimilation, perceived as the prerequisite to social acceptance, civil rights and economic advancement. In Canada, where ideological requirements favoured a mosaic rather than a melting pot, the Chinese were usually perceived as too different for their own or the country's good. Later studies in the U.S.A. — most notably those taking their point of departure from the application of the ethno-cultural pluralist thesis to the Chinese in the works of Stanford M. Lyman — subjected the much vaunted assimilationist thesis to severe criticism, pointed to the functions of the ethnic institutions and the circumscribed Chinese community, and treated the social processes attendant upon immigration settlement, occupational placement, language, education and mobility as well as the effects of prejudice and discrimination as features of a comprehensive situation worthy of dispassionate attention. In the same period — i.e., in the two decades since 1960, the year Rose Hum Lee's *The Chinese in the United States of America* was published and one year before Lyman's *The Structure of Chinese Society in the United States* was accepted as a doctoral dissertation at Berkeley — a rising ethnic consciousness spread over the U.S.A. and Canada, finding expression on college and university campuses in student protests about the colour-culture blindness of the curriculum and activation in assertively nativistic ethnic studies programs. Among the latter, those developing Asian-American and Asian-Canadian studies flourished in the academic landscape of the Pacific Coast.

Ironically, the rise of Asian-American and Asian-Canadian studies has diluted the Chinese phase that Freedman had so appreciated. In seeking alliances with U.S.- and Canadian-born Japanese, Koreans, Thais, Vietnamese, Cambodians and various Pacific Islands peoples, the rising ethnic consciousness in fact fostered an ethnogenesis. The overseas Asians bid fair to replace or supererogate the overseas representatives or descendants of the distinctive nations and peoples of the western Pacific Rim and Oceania. It is a remarkable but much overlooked fact that the ethno-cultural claims of overseas Asians are confined to the American continent, to Canada and the United States, and that the idea of confraternity among Asians has no noticeable locus in the Far East. A Cantonese husband absent from his village used to discover that he was "Chinese" by going overseas, as Clarence Glick's study of the sojourners in Hawaii tells us; a Chinese-Canadian (or American) discovers that he or she is an "Asian-Canadian (or American)" today by going to college.

The two books under discussion here belong to the two aspects of the

middle period of the Chinese phase, i.e., that period before overseas Asian identity threatened to swamp particular ethno-national background. Anthony Chan's *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World* is a spirited polemic assaulting the assimilationist ethic, critically probing the implications of a sojourner orientation for Canadian Chinese studies, exposing the mercantile despotism of the Chinatown economy, and emphasizing the present-day struggles for women's, workers' and community rights and recognition among Chinese Canadians. Much of the book is taken up with an encapsulated history of Chinese immigration to Canada, of the legal restrictions on Chinese entrance, of the rise and spread of merchant power in Chinatowns across Canada, and — in the most interesting and original part of the research — of the protests lodged by various Chinese Canadian student, worker, women's and other groups against imposed community development and in favour of communicative honesty about Chinatown conditions. The exciting narrative of the struggle to obtain a nationally televised version of their story concludes his book and speaks loudly to the recognized significance of hi-tech media at this moment in the Chinese phase.

Edward Wickberg's edition of *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* is altogether different from that by Chan. Wickberg has convened a team of five scholars, each expert in a particular aspect of Canada's Chinese immigration situation. Working both jointly and separately, this group has assembled what must be regarded as the most comprehensive published work on the subject to date. Its 271 pages include maps and tables, and a glossary, appendix with more tables, and index are supplied after the text. The emphasis is on Chinese social and community organization and how the various clans, *Landsmannschaften*, secret societies, commercial associations and the umbrella Chinatown-wide organization originated, developed, adapted to the Canadian situation, and responded to the laws, customs, limitations, deprivations and discrimination that constituted the vicissitude of Chinese life in Canada. Wickberg and his colleagues detail an organizational and communal history that speaks to the marginal status of the erstwhile sojourners from Canton and their descendants. However, like Chan, they too recognize that a new Chinese is emerging in Canada. Partly facilitated by the relaxation in immigration restrictions in 1962, partly inspired by the new spirit of group (and of Asian) consciousness, these Chinese will add new dimensions, organizations and strategies to the old Chinatown forms. Indeed, they might break away from the latter altogether and create a new kind of community in Canada.

The two books are welcome additions to the continuing and changing Chinese phase in social science and history. They both add to our knowledge. But more important, they add to our consciousness. No reader can come away from these works uninformed or uninspired. The North American continent was not a true gold mountain to the Chinese who named it such. But the golden people who settled along the eastern Pacific and moved inland have given it their own ethno-cultural richness despite its lack of a generous spirit or warm welcome.

New School for Social Research

STANFORD M. LYMAN

Waterfowl on a Pacific Estuary. A Natural History of Man and Waterfowl on the Lower Fraser River, by Barry Leach. British Columbia Provincial Museum Special Publication No. 5. Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1982. Pp. 211, \$7.00.

Barry Leach is well known to scholars in the field of German history for his *German Strategy Against Russia 1939-1941* (Oxford, 1973) and his more popular *German General Staff* (New York, 1973), but in B.C. we have also known him for years for his talks on television and the radio, his letters to and articles in the newspapers about ecological questions and his leadership of the Institute of Environmental Studies at Douglas College. He has published a number of articles on ecology and ornithology, one of them in this journal in 1979. The fruition of these concerns is in the volume under review, which reveals that Leach's talents extend to delightful line drawings and two pages of sensitive verse.

In a first part Leach establishes the abundance of waterfowl in this area from early records, accounts for the creation of the marshes, explains the patterns of migration of the Fraser Waterfowl, describes the sequences of glaciation and their effects, tells of the native peoples and their modes of hunting, introduces the white man and recounts his early experiences of the wilderness, and summarizes the environmental changes that resulted in "The Decline of the Waterfowl."

Part Two is composed of eight chapters about "The Waterfowl": one on swans, four on geese (Snow Geese; Canada Geese; Brant; three other rarer kinds), a second on the dabbling ducks (Shoveller, Widgeon, Mallard, Pintail), another on the Wood Duck, and a final chapter on the diving ducks (Scoters, Scaups, Goldeneyes, Bufflehead, Oldsquaw, Harle-

quin, Ruddy Duck, Mergansers, etc.). There is much lore here familiar to ornithologists from other books about the characteristics of these birds, but also piquant and unusual detail or observation as well as description that situates them in the Vancouver region, whether in migration, nesting or resident.

The third part contains chapters about "Places and Projects"; that is, capsule histories of the establishment of sanctuaries by devoted conservationists, with the reluctant consent of governments, at Reifel Island, the Serpentine Fen, Mud Bay and Pitt Meadow, with revealing description of their characteristics and wild residents. A fifth chapter recounts how various groups have propagated waterfowl, some of them previously not indigenous, in a number of these areas.

The final part is composed of chapters on "Loss and Pollution of Habitat" (urban sprawl, sewage, insecticides, lead shot), "Disease and Predators" (cables, power lines, vehicles, predatory mammals), "Human Disturbance" (powerboats, aircraft, hunters). The conclusion, "Thoughts about the Future," argues that we have few and too small sanctuaries and refuges, and that they "are neither staffed nor operated to meet the recreational or educational needs of the wider public." Leach hopes to make his readers aware of the shocking decline of numbers of waterfowl on the Lower Fraser since the nineteenth century; of the disturbing effects of the human presence on the birds, especially through hunting and machines; of the way waterfowl management agencies have acted on behalf of hunters more than the recreational observer of waterfowl; of the lack of funds for maintenance of reserves and the relatively slight interest of the public.

There is something here for almost everyone, whether advanced ornithologist or beginner, hunter or not, historian or connoisseur of local rambles. It is a charming book, very readable, expressing well the delights and emotions of the author in contact with the environment he describes and captures in his own fine drawings, informative about a great range of factual matters, natural historical and human historical, many of which everyone may easily experience in this region, not just near this particular Pacific estuary. There is an excellent bibliography and index, and an end map showing the places mentioned in the book.

The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers Union, by Elaine Bernard. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982. Pp. vi, 249. Cloth, \$14.95; paper, \$7.95.

Information, according to the futurist, John Kettle, may soon supplant manufacturing and even human services as a source of employment in Canada. Kettle will not find much comfort in Elaine Bernard's history of telephone unionism in British Columbia. On her evidence, fibre optics and silicon chips have helped BC Tel ensure that the only people it will have to deal with are its customers.

People who want to know what technology can do to the workplace will find many hints and little comfort from Bernard's book. British Columbia's highly profitable and American-owned telephone system has been a leader in technology — if only because BC Tel's main advantage to its owners is as a market for new hardware. The company has also kept pace with the industry's changing styles in personnel management. BC Tel has taken turns being paternalistic, nasty and nice. Its union, to no one's surprise, has followed management's mood.

As befits British Columbia's militant tradition, unions came early to the telephone industry. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers won its first recognition strike for craft workers in 1902. It survived a savage employer counter-offensive and even extended a somewhat condescending hand to the company's women operators. What killed the IBEW at BC Tel was not its militancy during the 1919 General Strike (when the operators were the last to give in) but a shrewd "kill with kindness" campaign by the company in the twenties. Persuaded that the employer was a better friend than the union, BC Tel workers abandoned the IBEW only to face the Depression with nothing better than a clutch of toothless "employee associations."

Like many Canadian workers, BC Tel employees rediscovered unions during World War II. The old associations of traffic, clerical and craft workers were transformed first into a feeble and highly decentralized Federation of Telephone Workers and then, through tough experience, into the present-day Telecommunications Workers. In the interim, provincial particularism, internal rivalries and company "guidance" helped the union fight off raids and postponed affiliation with the rest of the national and provincial labour movement until the sixties.

That decade also ended BC Tel's peaceful era of labour relations. Bernard records the opinion of older workers that the main catalyst was a change of ownership to the GTE Corporation. It was also true that a

new guard of more militant members in a decade of rising expectations was ready to tangle with GTE's abrasive management style.

Most important, telephone companies across the continent had abandoned paternalism in favour of replacing workers by machines. The change from manual to automatic switchboards, launched in earnest after 1945, had begun the pattern by displacing thousands of operators. By now, every job in the industry, from billing clerk to cable-splicer, has been transformed by technique or technology. Remaining workers have found their jobs routinized and subjected to humiliating electronic supervision.

As a union, the Telecommunications Workers has faced changes and challenges which might have torn a weaker organization in a less labour-oriented province to shreds. Some of the struggles are familiar. BC Tel was not the only company to insist on exclusive management of a pension fund wholly contributed by employees. Other problems are unique to the industry. BC Tel training programs, for example, are deliberately structured to make it difficult for employees to take hard-earned skills elsewhere. As a result, workers displaced by change had an impossible time marketing their expertise. Elimination of jobs has made strike action increasingly difficult. Job action through the TWU has ranged from rotating strikes and flying pickets to the nationally publicized occupation of company premises in 1980. Unfortunately, as Bernard underlines, courts, media and public opinion have shown little sympathy for victims of technological change and less patience in understanding the complexity of their problems.

Elaine Bernard's book is badly needed. Generalizing about unions in Canada is like flying so high that not only trees but the woods disappear. We need more studies of individual unions and their industries. Of course the TWU is an anomaly among unions — provincially based but federally regulated, a mixture of blue and white collars, men and women — but the truth is that each union has its own anomalies. Only after many more books like Bernard's will we be able to make sensible generalizations.

As a graduate student, Bernard seems to have skipped the lectures on turgid style and Marxist categories. As a result, her book is lively, sympathetic and readable. Although her research apparently has not extended to company archives, her book is not a polemic against BC Tel. Bernard has an enviable gift for making both communications technology and bargaining issues clear to outsiders. This is a book that can be read for pleasure as well as profit.

DESMOND MORTON

Bennett II: The Decline and Stumbling of Social Credit Government in British Columbia, 1979-83, by Stan Persky. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983. Pp. 272.

As this review is being written, the B.C. legislature is once more in turmoil. Verbal abuse, temporary expulsion and filibuster mark its proceedings and convey to the outsider a sense of pandemonium. Stan Persky's most recent account of Bill Bennett and his Social Credit government suggests that this is the way of the political world in British Columbia; for *Bennett II*, a sequel to *Son of Socred* published in 1979, depicts the cut and thrust of government and opposition from the late 1970s until the eve of the most recent general election, although, unfortunately, it does not include the results of that contest or the tumultuous events thereafter.

Contrary to constitutional usage, Persky insists on calling this period Bennett's "second term," a misnomer not altogether inappropriate to the episodic atmosphere of provincial politics he describes. By his own admission the book is "a popular account," based largely on the mass media for its sources. This does not mean it is without substance, only that it lacks scholarly pretension, as is superficially evident in the absence of footnotes but genuinely regrettable in its failure to analyze the multitude of facts presented or to explore the larger issues of provincial politics implicit in the quixotic actions of the Bennett government.

Persky disdains to label either the politics of his account as soap opera. But features of that particular form of drama are much in evidence: the non-development of character, the repetition of events (like the Bourbons, no one seems to learn anything from experience), a huge cast of players (memorable only for the alliteration of their surnames — in the "dirty tricks" chapter on Socred attempts at managing the news, there are Keen and Kelly, Kempf and Campbell, Meyers and Mitchell, Lenko and Levi), a penchant for actions outrageous and irresponsible (in both the constitutional and non-constitutional senses) and a love of turgid but predictable prose. As well, Persky's own command of metaphor, simile and easy adjective too often echoes the political world he attacks — for its crassness, demagoguery, partisanism and bad faith — and impedes more than it informs his commentary.

Despite unremitting criticism of Social Credit in power, *Bennett II* is not a partisan diatribe. It examines and condemns the government according to its own ends (for example, BCRIC — the British Columbia Resources Investment Corporation, the Japanese coal deal to develop

northeastern B.C., Pier B.C.) and means (for example, the redistribution fiddles, the restraint sham, the media manipulation). The condemnation rests on two counts: the Socreds' political as well as administrative mismanagement of public affairs and their sponsorship of policies whose costs and benefits were inequitably distributed. The first criterion should (but Persky recognizes does not) especially humble Social Crediters, since it was of their own device: Social Credit claimed a special ability at running businesses efficiently, a talent they proclaimed the "socialists" conspicuously lacked. The second, which the NDP opposition and just about everyone who had not taken an oath of office shared, criticized the government's free-wheeling approach to policy decisions, devoid of perspective or planning but open to special interest manipulation. If ever there was a genuine desire on the part of the Socreds to introduce an element of people's capitalism (disregarding for the time being what that animal might look like if found), then limited vision, administrative ineptitude and a wealth of political cronyism discouraged its realization.

These are hard judgments, and their tireless repetition (about the only breather is a few kind words on Bennett's role in the final months of the constitutional discussions) has the literary effect of overkill. Eventually the reader comes to wonder if the record can really be this bad. Assuming the facts do not lie, is there any exit from the chicanery that passes for politics here? There is, but Persky does not take it, preferring instead to cite one more fact, one more piece of evidence of Social Credit's disqualification for public office.

Persky takes the politicians more seriously than they take themselves; he applies standards of conduct that do not apply, or that must be applied to a lower order of behaviour, in B.C. politics or in provincial politics generally. Because the author never looks ahead or back or around, there is no way of telling how typical or unrepresentative of provincial governments Social Credit is in British Columbia. Provincial terrain everywhere offers shallow soil for constitutional government to take root or to flourish. In the western provinces in particular the legislatures have not customarily been the forum in which political debate or decision occur. Rather it has been in the farmer's organizations or on the radio or the modern "hot-line," where politics is discussed and in the consultations with special interest groups where priorities are determined. If this moving of debate and decision out of the legislatures, and carrying it to the people or to interested "publics" constitutes demagoguery, then it is demagoguery not confined to British Columbia.

This would be a better book, though admittedly a different one too, if the author had opted for more analysis and fewer details. Consider, for example, his praise for the press corps whose "tasks . . . could not be better performed by anyone else, not even the official opposition." What tasks? How were they different from those of the official opposition? And why, for that matter, is the official opposition so muted throughout the book? What is the relationship of the Vancouver press (which is the only one mentioned) to the rest of the province?

Or, more generally, how is political opinion formed or transformed in the province? Very little is said here about politics outside the klieg lights of metropolitan British Columbia. There appears to have been only one by-election in the whole period under review (there is no index by which to check, nor tables to determine the length or dates of sessions) and that contest Social Credit won. In light of the indictment the author has compiled, how is the victory to be explained?

The administrative mores of Social Credit dismally fall short of the model Persky applies to gauge political conduct. Cabinet's overruling of the Land Commission, thereby allowing agricultural land to be used for industrial or commercial but always profitable and suspected partisan purposes, is roundly condemned. The cry of one minister about "what is so wrong with elected people having the last say," is noted but not discussed, nor is another minister's charge that the NDP "think they invented democracy." And yet, much of the book's argument would seem to confirm that in fact there are two versions of democracy abroad in British Columbia: the one the moribund model of responsible government which Persky laments, the other the direct, at times even extra-legislative, rule that Social Credit provides and which the electorate sustains.

The strength of *Bennett II* is that it describes the peculiar features of this province's politics; its weakness is that it fails to explain them.

University of Saskatchewan

DAVID E. SMITH

The Klondike Quest. A Photographic Essay, 1897-1899, written and edited by Pierre Berton. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983. Pp. 240, illus. \$50.00.

Historians and other academics have greeted Pierre Berton's forays into their domains with decidedly mixed opinions. His aim is at the mass market and his method is to tell a story well; neither of these is a hall-

mark of academic writing. In many ways an evangelist of Canadian nationalism, Berton has succeeded in bringing an awareness of the Canadian past to a far greater audience than even our most renowned historians. The present book, however, is quite unlike his recent histories of the CPR and the War of 1812.

The Klondike Quest is like a published version of one of Berton's old television series, "My Canada," since it relies heavily on visual material and is accompanied by a brief text which tells the story with an eye to the drama of the event. The jacket blurb states that the text has been written from a different point of view than his earlier *Klondike*, but it seems simply to be an eviscerated version. The story proceeds from the viewpoint of the average gold seeker, following him from his home in Vancouver or Seattle in 1897, up the coast of Skagway, across both the Chilkoot and White Passes and down the Yukon River to Dawson in the spring of 1898. There follow a few chapters on Dawson and the creeks in their heyday. Presumably the intent is to showcase the photographs and to use the words simply to give them a context. One must not, therefore, quibble over the text, which reads wonderfully easily and does its job.

The photographs are the point of the book, and on their merits it must be judged. There are two points to consider: how well suited are the photographs chosen to tell the story; and, does the presentation support the photographs? The book uses over 200 photographs of more than 10,000 found in archives and libraries. The number alone intimidates yet substantiates the degree to which the Gold Rush seized contemporary attention.

The photographs are generally well chosen, but in the last few chapters on Dawson and the gold creeks there is a disproportionate space devoted to the dance halls, saloons and prostitutes and too little to a more balanced view of Dawson society. The double-page spread of Front Street (pages 190-91) reveals a forest of signs advertising restaurants, laundries, dentists, trading stores, tailors, jewellers, coffee shops, a newspaper and only one saloon and one theatre, yet the accompanying caption stresses "new theatres, saloons, and gaming houses springing up like mushrooms." Are we to believe that all these tradespeople and shopkeepers spent their nights in the saloons and theatres amidst glitter and debauchery? There are plenty of photographs available which reveal a more sedate side to Dawson; one or two would have given a more balanced presentation.

The photographs lack explanatory captions indicating place and date. Instead there are occasional narrative captions which refer to some of

the photographs and repeat what has appeared already in the each chapter's textual introduction. The failure to credit the photographers who are responsible for this book is an inexcusable omission. E. A. Hegg, Larss & Duclos, Asahel Curtis, M. H. Craig and Frank LaRoche, to name a few, deserve greater attention than they have received here. This is surprising, given Mr. Berton's insistence on the rights of authors.

The book offers little help to others who might want to do further research. Only the barest indication of where the photos come from is given, yet many institutions request that credit be given also to the photographer and that the picture's identifying number be included to speed future requests and to aid other researchers.

Another serious deficiency is Frank Newfeld's design. The majority of the photographs are well reproduced, but there are two major faults. No fewer than fifty-six of the photos are run across the gutter of the page. This is a device beloved of designers and despised by all who want to see the photographs clearly. Secondly, someone appears to have discovered the wealth of detail to be found in a photograph, and this epiphany has been incorporated into the design of the book by enlarging details of photos. This can be a useful and interesting tool which takes advantage of a major strength of photography, but it is overdone here and for no obvious reason. Nine photos are accompanied by enlargements of portions of them which extend to two pages. The result is huge grain, no detail and flat, muddy tones. Without exception they are an expensive, pointless waste of space. It is probably no fault of the designer, but there are far too many other photographs which are reproduced too large or could have been replaced by better quality images. Heavy grain and flat tones are even more obvious when they appear with the many other superbly reproduced photos printed from original negatives.

In short, this is an interesting book, well worth looking at and studying in spite of its deficiencies. The photographs have a directness of impact that is seldom approached by narrative. Still, at fifty dollars it is definitely not a book to buy. It is just not worth the money!