

"ACTIVE VOICES":

A Third Generation of Studies of the Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia

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About twenty years ago, in a review article, I suggested that accounts of the East Asian minority in British Columbia fell into two generations.¹ The first included anti-Asian propaganda pieces and sympathetic first-hand observations by social scientists. By 1970, a second generation of books began to appear, as scholars gained access to archival sources. W. Peter Ward, in *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* – the centrepiece of that earlier review essay – was among the first to exploit them.² Another was Ann Gomer Sunahara, whose influential *The Politics of Racism* helped Nisei (second-generation Japanese) and Sansei (third-generation) understand their past and provided data for the redress campaign.³ Yet, this second generation of studies was, like its predecessor, what Keibo Oiwa in *Stone*

Voices calls “history in passive voice” – a history in which a people, instead of being the main actors and thinkers, were the objects of other people’s action and thought” (15).

By 1980, a third generation of books was emerging. The “active voices” of Chinese- and Japanese-Canadians told their own history in English language monographs, memoirs, oral histories, and anthologies. As the editors of *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* wrote in 1979, “we learned little about our ancestors ... Moving upward meant leaving what communities we had and assimilating into the liberal white middle class” (viii).⁴ Serendipitously, the passage of time encouraged older immigrants to share memories, new immigrants wanted to learn about their adopted homes, and multiculturalism programs subsidized publications. Collectively, these works provide glimpses into the rather different Chinese and Japanese communities within British Columbia, demonstrate that neither was homogeneous, reveal pride in ancestry, show the varying responses of individuals to racism and discrimination, and suggest that racism may have been more evident in larger communities than in smaller ones.

¹ Patricia E. Roy, “‘White Canada Forever’: Two Generations of Studies,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 11 (1979): 97–109.

² My work is also part of that tradition.

³ Several second-generation works are theoretically based. A sophisticated study that examines “Chinatown from a western perspective rather than as an extension of an innate ‘Chineseness’” is Kay Anderson’s *Vancouver’s Chinatown* (for extended comments see my review in *Canadian Historical Review* 74 [1993]: 150–51). Theory also guides a short survey, *The Chinese in Canada*, by American-educated sociologist Peter S. Li, who describes “the oppression, the survival, and the triumph of the Chinese in Canada” (ix).

⁴ The editors also sought to develop an Asian Canadian literature. So many East Asians have now expressed themselves in fiction that this literature deserves a separate essay.

CHINESE

The first major English language study "to present a view of Chinese-Canadian history from what is at least in part a Chinese perspective" (2) was *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*, published in 1982. It concentrates on organizations rather than individuals. In *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, David Chuenyan Lai examines the built environment of Chinatowns and shows their changing natures, demography, and social, cultural, and economic institutions. Lai's *The Forbidden City within Victoria* is a first-class tour of Victoria's Chinatown. Contrasting its "myths with its realities" (xi), he offers glimpses of what life in Chinatown must have been like.⁵

Individuals, as subjects, appeared when Anthony B. Chan, a third-generation Chinese Canadian, produced a "Chinese Canadian insider's view of Canadian history" (8) in *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World*. Racism and its consequences are themes of this sketch of the story of Chinese in Canada from the gold rush of 1858 to the controversial "W-5" television program on Asians in Canadian universities in 1979. Vignettes from his own family's history underscore Chan's argument that, even when it was chiefly male, British Columbia's Chinese population always included families.

In *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver*, Paul Yee, another third-generation

⁵ With Pamela Madoff, Lai has co-authored a complementary work on the ceremonial gate at the entrance to Chinatown, *Building and Rebuilding Harmony: The Gateway to Victoria's Chinatown* (Victoria: Canadian Western Geographical Series 32, 1997).

Chinese Canadian, also discusses family life. Amidst an abundance of superb photographs, Yee makes brief, perceptive comments about their "different ambitions and different connections to China" and common "determination to survive" (73) as Vancouver's Chinese formed "a community of communities" (166). Pre-war Canadian-born Chinese, he notes, were "a generation caught between two worlds. On one side there was Chinese school, China, and the second-class status of the Chinese in Canada. On the other, there was Canada with its promises of British justice and fair play" (103).

For some Chinese-Canadians, the pull was mainly to China. Denise Chong's best-selling *The Concubine's Children* draws on recollections of family and friends to tell of what seems to be an atypical family. The concubine May-ying worked as a waitress and occasional prostitute from the 1920s to the 1940s to support, in China, her husband, two of their Canadian-born daughters, and his first wife and their son. The relationship between the divided families is a central theme,⁶ but the heroine is Hing, the third Canadian-born daughter, who, despite an unusual childhood and rare ventures outside the Chinatowns of Vancouver and Nanaimo, persevered in her studies,

⁶ Perhaps her family's continuing trans-Pacific links were not that unusual. Fred Wah's grandfather, a native of China who married a Scots-Irish woman in Saskatchewan, sent two of his Canadian-born children, including Fred Wah's father, to be raised in China by their stepmother (Fred Wah, *Diamond Grill* [Edmonton: NeWest, 1996]). The "indignation" in Swift Current caused by the grandparents' marriage in 1907 was reported in the Vancouver press (*Vancouver Semi-Weekly World*, 6 December 1907).

married another Chinese Canadian, and raised a very Canadian middle-class family.

Denise Chong told of her ancestors; a few Chinese Canadians have published their own memoirs of childhood and youth. Despite its slimness and the author's delightful drawings, *The West Coast Boy* by Sing Lim (b. 1915) is not a children's book. Rather, it is a poignant memoir of boyhood in Vancouver's Chinatown – its shops, characters, and ceremonial occasions – and summer work on a Lulu Island farm. Because parents wanted children "to be proud of being Chinese," he attended Chinese language classes (11).⁷ At public school, White classmates taunted Chinese children, but friendly teachers encouraged Sing Lim's artistic talents.

Philip Low, "the first native Cumberlander of Chinese descent to have graduated from Cumberland high school" (2-3), was also grateful to dedicated public school teachers. In *Memories of Cumberland* Low proudly recalls life in its self-contained Chinatown from his birth in 1912 until his departure in 1933. He mentions racial prejudice but cites no direct personal examples. His links with the Occidental part of this coal-mining community, however, were limited to the Protestant Sunday School, the public school, and, in the 1930s, the annual Victoria Day parade.

A third Chinese-Canadian autobiography is ... *And So ... That's How It Happened: Recollections of Stanley-Barkerville, 1900-1975*.⁸ Born in

Stanley in 1901, W.M. (Bill) Hong worked at a variety of jobs before becoming an entrepreneur running a grocery store, cafe, and a hydraulic mine. Apart from an introductory autobiographical essay, the book is mainly about the mines. Both Chinese and White names appear but racial distinctions are rarely noted, and some of the many photographs accompanying the text show groups with Chinese and non-Chinese side by side. Perhaps in small, isolated communities race was not very important.

Yet, other Chinese Canadians in smaller communities were sometimes made conscious of their identities. In what he calls a "biotext," an introspective autobiography thinly disguised as fiction, the poet Fred Wah, who inherited blond hair and blue eyes from a Scots-Irish grandmother and a Swedish mother, muses on his "racially transpicuous" status (136). He remembers a Grade 4 classmate "out loud ... and with her eyes too, real daggers, a painful spike," calling him "a Chink" (39). Yet, when his high-school buddies referred to new Chinese immigrants as "Chinks and geeks," Wah was "a little embarrassed," didn't "talk much with the Chinese kids," and was "white enough to get away with it" (136).

Oral history has also recaptured the Chinese-Canadian past. An editor of *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* commented, "It's not simply a matter of being born here as a Canadian. The experiences of aunts, uncles, grandparents were passed on to us as well. That's why we really need to know what happened when they were growing up" (231). A few of the 130 interviewees had BC links. Some

⁷ The best-selling novel, Wayson Choy, *The Jade Peony* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995), also relates a Chinese boy's experiences in Vancouver.

⁸ The book was edited by Gary and Eileen Seale, who based it on transcriptions of tape recordings made by Hong and the

work of an earlier editor and researcher, J.R. Hamby.

claimed to be unaware "of racial or sexual discrimination," but the editors found "issues around sexism and racism are obvious threads in all the stories" (13). Discrimination appears, for example, in the denial of a teaching appointment to a graduate of the Victoria Normal School in the 1920s and the requirement that a Chinese born in Nanaimo in 1919 attend a school for "Others." Another, born in Port Alberni in 1952, told of "real racial fights in junior high, being called a 'Chink' or 'Chinaman'" (93). Yet, a woman born in Vancouver in 1947 admitted that "the Chinese are as racist as any other group because they call whites 'gui lo,' meaning old ghost or devil" (81). Another BC native complained in the late 1960s that "people from Hong Kong ... were prejudiced against Canadian-born [Chinese] – even more so than whites" (95).

Differences between Canadian-born and Hong Kong-born Chinese also appear in *Chinese Canadians: Voices from a Community*. Its editor, Evelyn Huang, a Hong Kong immigrant, sought "the voice of individual experience," but her interviews with twenty-three successful business or professional Chinese Canadians were quite structured. As for recent wealthy Hong Kong immigrants, Bob Lee, a real estate entrepreneur born in Vancouver in 1933, asserted, "It's a two-way street. It's up to the people who are coming here not to overdo it, and I think it's up to us as Canadians to slowly understand what is happening" (51).

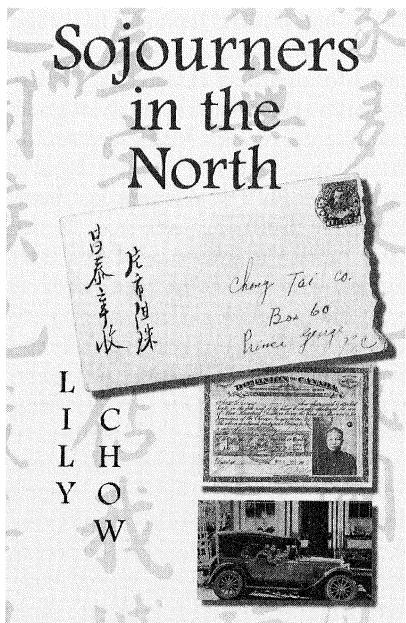
The few BC "voices" represented in *Chinese Canadians* reveal the decline of Vancouver's Chinatown as a residential area. Dock Yip, born in 1906, said Chinatown was so much a ghetto that, despite attending public schools and Osgoode Hall, he still

speaks English with an accent. Interviewees born after 1930 grew up in mainly White neighborhoods, to the detriment of their Chinese language skills. Older interviewees remember prejudice. Roy Mah, an Albertan who moved to Victoria in his teens and served in the Canadian army in the Second World War, blamed the prejudice of an earlier era⁹ on the "large concentration of a particular ethnic group like the Chinese in BC," which "aroused fear in the local population ... [who] ... viewed us as a threat to their economic security" (76).¹⁰ In Nanaimo's Chinatown in the 1920s Jean Lumb was "scared of white people, scared they would harm us, ... so we stayed in our ghettos and played with our own people and spoke our own language" (32). Time and location could change that. Der Hoy-Yin recalled that in the 1950s Chinese in Prince Rupert worked to maintain their Chinese heritage and had a Chinese school but were too few to create a Chinese enclave and developed excellent relations with Caucasians.

As described by Lily Chow, a native of Malaysia, the Chinese community in Prince George had a similar experience. The first half of *Sojourners in the North* retraces familiar stories of Chinese in the nineteenth-century Fraser River, Cariboo, and Omineca gold rushes but shows that a few Chinese and their families (some the

⁹ Mah is mentioned in Marjorie Wong, *The Dragon and The Maple Leaf: Chinese Canadians in World War II* (London, ON: Pirie, 1994). This study of Chinese deals with their military careers and says little directly about British Columbia.

¹⁰ Adrienne Clarkson remarked, "All the overseas Chinese knew what Vancouver meant ... My father being a very intelligent person realized that what they had done to the Japanese during the war was only part of a larger racism towards Orientals" (174).



progeny of marriages with First Nations women) remained long after the gold rush had passed. A Chinese presence continued in Prince George, where Chow describes how "Chinese Canadians practice their customs and carry out their traditions in the absence of a Chinatown" (8). After reaching a peak of about 600 in 1920, the Chinese population of Prince George rapidly declined and, apart from several fraternal and political organizations, left few traces of its culture. Using mainly oral evidence, Chow shows how migration from elsewhere in Canada and overseas increased the Chinese population beginning in the mid-1940s. She rues repeated failures to maintain a Chinese language school and difficulties in sustaining interest in the Consolidated Benevolent Association but optimistically suggests Interior Chinese Canadians can "find means and facilities to maintain their Chinese customs and traditions" (230).

JAPANESE

Limited post-war immigration from Japan reduced opportunities for conflict between Issei (first-generation immigrants) and their Canadian-born descendants and more recent immigrants from Japan. The pre-war gentlemen's agreements severely reduced but did not completely halt immigration, and many Japanese could form families. However, Japanese in British Columbia faced many of the same legal and practical disabilities as the Chinese. Most significantly, their community was uprooted and dispersed during and after the Second World War.

Ken Adachi's *The Enemy That Never Was* remains the definitive general history of Japanese in Canada, but *Nikkei Legacy: The Story of Japanese Canadians from Settlement to Today* by Toyo Takata is a good introduction. Takata, a native of Victoria, wrote short essays on individual pioneers, settlement in particular communities, and, especially, aspects of the evacuation and resettlement. With telling anecdotes and abundant photographs, Takata makes Nikkei (a collective term for people of Japanese origin living outside Japan) come alive. Some Nisei blamed "racial isolation," as in Vancouver's Little Tokyo, for "discrimination and harassment" (51). Almost from the city's beginnings, Japanese families in Prince Rupert "dispersed throughout the town" to avoid an appearance of ghetto and enjoyed "good relations with the public at large" (88).

Good relations are also evident in *Powell Street Monogatari*, in which A. Katsuyoshi Morita remembers life in Greenwood after the evacuation. He admires "the people of these small towns, who have, like the wild cherry that blooms in the cold, tenaciously overcome many obstacles and live

peaceful lives" (63). A similar upbeat tone appears in *Issei: Stories of Japanese Canadian Pioneers*, edited and collected in the early 1980s by Gordon Nakayama, an Issei and an Anglican priest. These thirty-nine brief biographies (often written by relatives) and autobiographies show a history apart from the war. Many Issei started in menial jobs, had false starts, endured hardship, and, with hard-work, became successful farmers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. Prejudice appears mainly as occupational restrictions and economic jealousies on the part of White labour. The war is mentioned, often almost incidentally, and with little bitterness.

That lack of bitterness surprised Shin-Issei (post-1949 immigrants) scholars.¹¹ Because many Nisei and

¹¹ Japanese scholars have long been interested in emigrants to Canada. Most of their extensive publications are in Japanese. An exception is a collection of essays by a group of researchers associated with the Study Committee of Christianity and Social Problems at the Institute for the Study of Humanities and Social Sciences, Doshisha University. The volume's title suggests it relates only to church history, but only three essays do: "Immigrant Churches in 'Multicultural' Canada: The Case of Japanese and Chinese Churches" by Madio Morikawa examines relations between different generations of immigrants; "The Canadian Methodist Church and the Japanese, 1890-1917" by Ryo Yoshida analyses the *Christian Guardian* to compare Methodist attitudes towards Japanese and European immigrants, respectively; and a third deals with leadership within the Japanese United Church. Other essays consider conflict in the 1920s between the consulate in Vancouver and the Japanese Labor Union; the Japanese Medical Clinic in Vancouver, 1932-1942; the Vancouver Japanese Language School; and interprefectural differences among emigrants, 1890-1925. An essay in Japanese deals with "Community Formation of the Japanese Farm at Haney." See "The Japanese Canadian Community and Their Christian

Sansei had limited Japanese language skills, new immigrants were well situated to interview elderly Issei, some of whom spoke little English. A good example is Tomoko Makabe, a sociologist, whose book *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada* has been translated from the Japanese. In the early 1980s she interviewed five Issei women who had come to Canada at least sixty years earlier as picture brides.¹² If these interviewees are representative, being a picture bride guaranteed hard work, near poverty from low wages, a sense of obligation to assist family members in Japan, and probably transiency as they escaped unsatisfactory husbands or followed them from job to job. Makabe seems angry that these women "closed their eyes to injustice and wrongs" (14). Some denied discrimination; others noted it but said kind things about individual White employers or missionaries. They showed little bitterness over their wartime uprooting. Such magnanimity may have resulted from their adoption of Christianity before the war; possibly it was the passage of time.¹³

Churches: Their History and Present Condition," *The Study of Christianity and Social Problems* 11 (July 1982).

¹² Four settled in British Columbia. The fifth married the cook at the E.P. Ranch in Alberta and is not discussed here.

¹³ Another "picture bride" was Mary Kiyohsi Kiyooka, who emigrated to Canada in 1916. She spent approximately three years in Victoria, but most of her memoirs, as recorded by her son, the late artist Roy Kiyooka, deal with her life in Saskatchewan and Alberta. There, before the war, she mixed easily with White neighbours, but tension after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war and especially after Pearl Harbor meant former friends avoided her and her husband lost his job at a Calgary hotel. She recalled the "bitter pill" of being registered as an "enemy alien" despite holding a Canadian passport, and of being "deprived of both freedom and livelihood" although, unlike

Keibo Oiwa, editor of *Stone Voices: Wartime Writings of Japanese Canadian Issei*, attributed such "silence" to the "self-censorship" (16) that persisted until the success of the redress movement. Generosity of spirit does not seem to have been a gender issue. The sole woman among the four diarists and memorialists in *Stone Voices* was just as bitter as the man who wondered, years later, "what the essential difference was between Canada's white supremacist attitude and Hitler's policy against the Jews?" (193). In *Behind the Barbed Wire Fence: A Japanese Man's Account of His Internment in Canada*, Takeo Ujo Nakano recalls his loneliness, uncertainty, and the unfair "contrast between the free and the constrained" while interned at Angler, Ontario, for refusing separation from his wife and daughter (77).

Few Nisei have published diaries or memoirs, but Catherine Lang, a *bakujin* (White) journalist, interviewed members of eight families who left Chemainus, British Columbia, in 1942 as young adults and eventually settled in Ontario. The stories in *O-bon in Chimunesu* are poignant and frank – possibly interviewees were more open with a sympathetic outsider than they might have been with another Japanese-Canadian.¹⁴ Lang's decision to create dialogue and details makes the stories very readable but reduces their value as historical documents. The almost formulaic coverage of events – emigration of the parents, school, work, marriage, reaction to Pearl Harbor, evacuation experiences, and activities

coastal Japanese, her family was not "shoved into Relocation Camps" (137). See Roy Koyooka, *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*, edited by Daphne Marlatt (Edmonton: NeWest, 1997).

¹⁴ I am indebted for this insight to Midge Ayukawa.



after resettlement – suggest she may have shaped the memories offered here. Yet, collectively, the stories challenge some stereotypes of the Nisei. In the Depression, for example, contributing to the family's income was more important than pursuing education.

Nisei, of course, have been interested in their own history, as the general studies by Adachi and Takata demonstrate. Others have written on more specialized topics. Roy Ito used contemporary documents, including letters from the front during the First World War and interviews with veterans of the Second World War, to present a vivid account of Japanese-Canadian soldiers in *We Went To War: The Story of the Japanese Canadians Who Served During the First and Second World Wars*. Its underlying theme, the Nisei search for civil rights, also emerges in the only published contemporary Nisei account of the war years. From December 1941 to May 1942, Muriel Kitagawa wrote many letters from Vancouver to her

brother Wes, a medical student in Toronto. During the war and after she contributed articles to Nikkei newspapers and drafted sections of an autobiography. Roy Miki, a Sansei, collected and edited her writings, wrote an extended introduction on Kitagawa and her times, and published the results as *This Is My Own*.¹⁵ "Racism," she wrote in 1945, "is slush, mixed with dirt and refuse, abhorred of men. Slush always melts in the sun and goes down the sewer" (204). Her greatest personal outrage arose from the forced sale of property, including her Vancouver home, in 1943. In time, she reflected, reparations would mean more "than the return of lost property," they would be "the outward symbol acknowledging the loss of our rights" (229).

The successful redress campaign in the 1980s generated several retrospective studies. Although a profusion of photographs and sidebars suggest it is a coffee-table book, *Justice in Our Time* by Roy Miki and Cassandra Kobayashi, two Sansei who were active in the National Association of Japanese Canadians' redress campaign, celebrates the settlement. After sketching the "mass uprooting," the "confiscation and sale of properties," and early attempts to seek compensation, it describes the redress movement and its ups and downs. Recognizing its complexity, they suggest "there will no doubt be other accounts written" (158).

Miki and Kobayashi were quite right. A year later, in *Bittersweet Passage*, Maryka Omatsu, a Sansei lawyer born after the war, gave her view of the campaign – "the seminal event in my life" – in which she was an activist (9). For her generation, "assimilation demanded a denial of our

¹⁵ Joy Kogawa's novel, *Obasan* (Toronto: Lester, Orpen and Dennys, 1981), draws extensively on Kitagawa's writings.

ethnicity" (94). The first step in the campaign, which was influenced by the successful movement in the United States, was to bring together the "shikataga-nai," who were resigned to their fate and opposed individual compensation, and those who sought it. Her book starts triumphantly with celebrations surrounding the success of redress but concludes pensively that perhaps the campaign was the Japanese-Canadian "community's last flicker before our total assimilation" (171).

Part of the redress settlement was the establishment of the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation. Some of its funds have subsidized the publication of histories of Japanese-Canadians. *Justice in Our Time* is one such example; another is Terry Watada, *Bukkyo Tozen: A History of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Canada, 1905–1995*, which commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the Toronto Buddhist Church and the ninetieth anniversary of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Canada and briefly mentions divisions between Shin-Issei and the pre-war immigrants and their descendants.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Serendipity explains many of these books. Would we have the concubine's story if her granddaughter were not a curious and talented writer? Would we know about the Chemainus Nisei if a journalist had not been assigned to report on the city's murals? Could we read Muriel Kitagawa's private thoughts if her brother had not kept her letters?

¹⁶ Although its main goal is to test hypotheses about contemporary minority churches, Mark Mullins's *Religious Minorities in Canada: A Sociological Study of the Japanese Experience* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1989), includes historical material on the Buddhist Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada.

Would we have memories of Chinese women if some Toronto feminists had not been interested in their history?

Despite the eclectic and anecdotal nature of the material, some generalizations can be made. Apart from occasional remembrances of Chinese and Japanese children playing together, conflicts between their ancestral lands gave them separate histories. *Inalienable Rice* is unique in putting Chinese and Japanese views between the same covers.

Neither community was homogeneous. Although limited post-war immigration meant that conflict between different generations of immigrants from Japan was almost non-existent, massive immigration caused tension among the Chinese. Class consciousness appeared in both communities. In the small Chinatown of Nanaimo the concubine's daughter played with all children, but in the "larger, class-conscious" Chinatown of Vancouver, few mothers let their offspring play with the child of such a mother (121). For Japanese, a family's financial status could determine if a child was a suitable marriage partner.

For both Chinese and Japanese marriage could cause conflict between old-country and Canadian ways. Muriel Kitagawa observed in the 1930s that Nisei "wanted our parents to change their stubborn clinging to the old ways, of leaving it to the matchmaker to pick a mate in a purely arbitrary fashion" (225). *O-Bon in Chimenesu* has examples of both arranged marriages and love matches. That was also true among Chinese. Jean Lumb, born in Nanaimo in 1919, accepted a man chosen by her mother as her husband; a woman born in Merritt in 1908 and her friends "wanted to further our education and choose our own husbands."¹⁷

¹⁷ Women's Book Committee, *Jin Guo*, 165.

Collectively, the books offer information on the Canadian ties, or lack of them, of pre-war Chinese and Japanese. Some, such as the concubine, "saw China as home and Canada as but a temporary exile" (60) but could not return to their native land. Others, like the concubine's husband, made extended and repeated visits. At least one Japanese couple, "caught between cultures,"¹⁸ returned home permanently; others made visits or sent children to Japan for their education. In wartime, Nisei such as Ito and Kitagawa were determined to be Canadian, but some Issei remained loyal to Japan. The war had a lesser impact on Chinese; the defining moment in their history was the exclusionary Immigration Act of 1923.

Everyday experiences of racism abound, ranging from schoolyard taunts to difficulties in getting rental accommodation, even in the 1960s. Those who mused on its causes commonly attributed racism to economic competition. A picture bride suggested the Japanese "worked too hard. That was the trouble. They got in the way of the whites."¹⁹ Yet, not all remembered discrimination. Some chose to forget it. Philp Low wrote, "I am proud to be a Chinese-Canadian, and despite the previous injustice and the wrongful denial of my rights as a natural-born ... I love my country - Canada" (66).

Painful memories may explain why a generation of Japanese-Canadians "forgot" the war. Maryka Omatsu learned of the uprooting of Japanese-Canadians from a high-school textbook. She suggests her parents' generation was "too busy trying to put food on the table to worry about lofty ideals or cultural genocide" and knew "the 'lesson of the bamboo': bend with the

¹⁸ Lang, *O-Bon in Chimenesu*, 258.

¹⁹ Makabe, *Picture Brides*, 7.

wind and you will not be broken" (68). Their unwillingness to criticize authority, she argues, "simply reflected the ever-present community nightmare of a resurgence of racism" (95). Similarly, in 1946, Kitagawa observed that "some would rather forget the unpleasant idea of the evacuation, and remember only that many have a better material life," but, she admonished, "freedom lies not in three square meals a day, not in a pay envelope, freedom lies in the integrity of one's innermost self" (215).

This third generation of studies, the "active voice," complements the second with its insiders' views of Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia. The

story is still incomplete. It lacks recollections of Chinese men consigned to "married bachelorhood"; it needs more first-hand accounts of growing up Nisei or Chinese; it would benefit from analyses of class, gender, and generation relations and of being "caught" between two cultures. Let us hope these tantalizing memories of Chinese and Japanese life are but initial installments towards a better understanding of British Columbia's history and its varied peoples. And let them remind descendants of other immigrants that we still know relatively little about their families and their everyday lives in this province.

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