

BEYOND CHINATOWN:

Chinese Men and Indigenous Women in Early British Columbia

JEAN BARMAN*

THE CHINESE PRESENCE in early British Columbia is still largely equated with Chinatowns, where men, who made up almost all arrivals, led their personal lives separate from the larger society, and family life was limited mostly to a small handful of merchants with Chinese wives.¹ Attention to men beyond Chinatown allows for a

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¹ See Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Wing Chung Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-80: The Pursuit of Identity and Power* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); and Timothy J. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011). Less exclusively focused are Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); Patricia E. Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003); and Patricia E. Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007). Earlier in time, see James Morton, *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1974); Edgar Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982); Anthony B. Chan, *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver: New Star, 1983); Peter S. Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002). Chinatowns have also been a principal literary device, notably in Wayson Choy, *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* (Toronto: Viking, 1999); and Denise Chong, *The Concubine's Children* (Toronto: Penguin, 1995). Chinatowns are also the stuff of memoir, notably Sing Lim, *West Coast Chinese Boy* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1991); Joanna Claire Wong, *Wong Family Feast: Our Recipes and Memories* (Vancouver: Privately printed, 2007); and Larry Wong, *Dim Sum Stories: A Chinatown Childhood* (Vancouver: Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies, University of British Columbia, and Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia, 2011). Chinatowns have been interrogated directly, as with David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988); Ying-ying Chen, "In the Colonies of Tang: Historical Archaeology of Chinese Communities in the North Cariboo District, British Columbia, 1860s-1940s" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2001); and Paul Yee, *Chinatown: An Illustrated History of the Chinese Communities*

more nuanced approach, one in which some men were less constrained by tradition and more likely to make their own way in their personal as well as in their work lives.

A close examination of multiple sources reveals a very different pattern of intimacy among some Chinese living in the BC hinterland than their countrymen in Chinatowns. Taking such persons into account, one in six Chinese men who, through the end of the nineteenth century, engaged in intimacy leading to family formation did so not with a Chinese woman but with a local indigenous woman. While some such encounters have been noted, they have not been gathered together or interrogated.² The thirty relationships introduced here speak to Chinese men's initiative and resourcefulness in early British Columbia and Canada, alongside that of the indigenous women in their lives.

of Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2005). On specific Chinatowns, see Paul Yee, *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1988, rev. 2006); David Chuenyan Lai, *The Forbidden City within Victoria* (Victoria: Orca, 1991); Patrick A. Dunae, John S. Lutz, Donald J. Lafreniere, and Jason A. Gilliland, "Making the Inscrutable, Scrutable: Race and Space in Victoria's Chinatown, 1891," *BC Studies* 169 (2011): 51-80, reprinted as "Race and Space in Victoria's Chinatown, 1891," in Richard Mackie and Graeme Wynn, eds., *Home Truths: Highlights from BC History* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 2012), 206-39; Jim Wolf and Patricia Owen, *Yi Fao, Speaking through Memory: A History of New Westminster's Chinese Community, 1858-1980* (Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 2008); Philip C.P. Low, *Memories of Cumberland Chinatown* (Victoria: Privately published, 1993); Colleen Leung, *Letters from Home* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2001); and Chad Reimer, *Chilliwack's Chinatowns: A History* (Vancouver: Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies, University of British Columbia, and Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, 2011). Exemplary of the earlier, almost exclusive, focus on Chinatown are *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (Ottawa: The Commission, 1885), whose testimony came almost wholly from white residents of Victoria with lesser numbers from New Westminster and Nanaimo, all of whom were influenced by their cities' Chinatowns (see list on li-ii); Hilda Glynn-Ward's polemic *The Writing on the Wall* (Vancouver: Sun Publishing Co., 1921); and the materials prepared for a 1923 survey of the Chinese and Japanese presence along the American and Canadian Pacific coasts, for which the BC portion was limited to Vancouver's Chinatown. See Survey of Race Relations Records, 1924-1927, 38 manuscript boxes, Hoover Institution Archives, available online at <http://collections.stanford.edu/srr/bin/page?forward=home>.

² In order of publication, Naomi Miller, "The Lum and Ban Quan Families," *BC Historical News* 21, 2 (1988): 19-20; Lily Chow, *Sojourners in the North* (Prince George: Caitlin, 1996), 108-11; Hilary Kathleen Blair, "Settling Seabird Island: Land, Resources, and Ownership on a British Columbia Indian Reserve" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1999), 39-43, 68, 72, 74, 93-94, 105, 120-23, 126; Lily Chow, *Chasing Their Dreams: Chinese Settlement in the Northwest Region of British Columbia* (Prince George: Caitlin, 2000), 4-5; Dexter Friesen, "Canada's Other Newcomers: Aboriginal Interactions with People from the Pacific" (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2006), 82-84; Eleanor Yuen, "Are You Who You Think You Are? A Study of Chinese Canadian Name Forms," available at https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/handle/2429/12575/Chinese_Canadian_name_forms.pdf?sequence=1; and John Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 152, 246n30, drawing, with permission, on my research notes.

Not without reason Chinese men have most often been thought of in the context of Chinatowns modelled on familiar ways. Unwanted by a dominant society cheered to have them out of sight, they considered themselves away from home only for the short or medium term, with little need to break away from tradition. Most arrivals came from the Pearl River delta, a densely populated rice-growing area of Guangdong Province in south China not far from the British colony of Hong Kong. A shortage of land gave priority to increased productivity. Irrigation and fertilization required capital, provided by young men who went abroad to work and send money home. The social structure was based on the extended family, which meant that men could leave China secure in the knowledge that their families, including their wives if they were married, would be cared for until their return, in anticipation of death, if not earlier.³ Initially, most went to southeast Asia, but increasingly the west coast of North America beckoned, initially California with its gold rush beginning in 1848, and then British Columbia with its counterpart a decade later.⁴

The first wave of four thousand or more Chinese arrived in British Columbia in search of gold from 1858 onwards, a second wave originated with upwards to fifteen thousand men hired in the early 1880s to construct the BC portion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway, and a third wave came for various reasons. A census taken on the eve of the British colony of British Columbia's joining Canada in 1871 enumerated fifteen hundred Chinese, comprising one in seven of the non-indigenous population.⁵ The nine thousand British Columbians born in China in 1891 accounted for one in eight, the fifteen thousand in 1901 for one in ten.⁶ Only towards the end of the nineteenth century did some Chinese cross the Rockies. In 1891, 98 percent of the Canadian total of persons born in China lived in British Columbia, down to 86 percent by 1901.⁷

³ Testimony in *Report* (1885), 161; and *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1902), 8, 33-34, 37, 236.

⁴ Among other sources, Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁵ There were 8,500 "whites" and 450 blacks. "Report of the Population of British Columbia ... 1870," in *British Columbia Chronicle*, ed. G.P.C. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg (Vancouver: Discovery Press, 1977), 2:404.

⁶ According to the Canadian census there were 8,910 Chinese among 70,870 non-indigenous British Columbians in 1891, and 14,576 among 149,708 in 1901. While the number of British Columbians born in China would expand by over a third to 21,500 in 1921, the proportion of non-indigenous British Columbians fell to one in twenty-five due to the mass immigration that characterized Canada as a whole in the early twentieth century.

⁷ The Canadian totals of persons born in China were 9,129 in 1891 and 17,043 in 1901. The proportion living in British Columbia would fall to just under 60 percent by 1921. On the topic generally,

TABLE 1
Chinese in British Columbia, 1885

	MEN	"MARRIED LADIES"	"PROSTITUTES"	17 AND UNDER	TOTAL	% CHINESE BY REGION
Victoria	1,559	41	34	133	1,767	16.9
Other Vancouver Island	925	8	4	32	969	9.2
New Westminster	1,577	4	7	92	1,680	16.0
Railway construction	3,510	0	0	0	3,510	33.5
Other Mainland	2,528	6	27	5	2,556	24.4
Totals	10,099	59	72	262	10,482	

Source: *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence* (Ottawa: The Commission, 1885), 363-65.

Chinese British Columbians long continued to be almost wholly men, not unexpectedly so given the circumstances of their migration. The fifty-three Chinese women present in 1871 made up 3 percent of the total number. An 1885 count located 59 "married ladies," two-thirds of them living in the provincial capital of Victoria, and 72 "prostitutes," together accounting for just over 1 percent of the total (Table 1).⁸ As of 1902, Victoria housed 92 wives, the rapidly growing rail terminus of Vancouver 27 wives, being 3 and 1 percent, respectively, of the totals.⁹ Even though fewer than 10 percent of the 3,000 men living in Victoria at the turn of the century were merchants, two-thirds of the city's 92 Chinese wives were so partnered, as were two-thirds of the 27 in Vancouver.¹⁰ Inferring from these figures, the total number of Chinese wives in British Columbia by the turn of the century was likely somewhere around 150.

see, among other sources, Wickberg, *From China to Canada*; Chan, *Gold Mountain*; Roy, *White Man's Province*; Roy, *Oriental Question*; and Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship*.

⁸ *Report* (1885), 363-65.

⁹ *Report* (1902), 12-13, 22. The precise numbers of men were 3,187 and 2,053. Chinese women would be enumerated separately in the federal census in 1911, when the 415 women comprised 2 percent of the almost 20,000 British Columbians born in China, approaching 4 percent a decade later.

¹⁰ *Report* (1902), 12-13. On merchants, see Timothy J. Stanley, "Chinamen, Wherever We Go": Chinese Nationalism and Guangdong Merchants in British Columbia, 1871-1911," *Canadian Historical Review* 77, 4 (1996): 475-504; Paul Yee, "Business Devices from Two Worlds: The Chinese in Early Vancouver," *BC Studies* 62 (1984): 44-67; Paul Yee, "A Chinese Business in Early Vancouver," *BC Studies* 69/70 (1986): 70-96; and Frances Hern, *Yip Sang and the First Chinese Canadians* (Victoria: Heritage House, 2011).

TABLE 2
British Columbians born in China, 1901

CENSUS REGION	TOTAL NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION	CHINA BORN	% OF TOTAL POPULATION	% CHINESE BY REGION
Greater Victoria	23,355	2,915	12.5	20.0
Other Vancouver Island	21,429	2,558	11.9	17.5
Vancouver and North Coast	33,109	2,803	8.5	19.2
New Westminster and Fraser Valley	20,592	2,556	12.4	17.5
Fraser Canyon, Cariboo, Kootenays	51,223	3,744	7.3	25.7
Totals	149,708	14,576	9.7	

Source: Census Canada, 1901.

The more the Chinese population increased, the more attitudes towards it hardened.¹¹ The basis for doing so lay in the broad acceptance, in Britain and beyond, of fundamental differences between persons based on physical features. A perversion of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, argued that human beings, as distinguished by skin tones and other outward characteristics, were biologically arranged in a hierarchy. Persons perceiving themselves as "white" not unexpectedly put themselves at the top, their superiority seemingly confirmed by the Industrial Revolution and colonizing exploits. The consequence was that Chinese men were disparaged even as they were wanted. The economic conditions whence they came made them willing to submit, at least outwardly, to their circumstances so long as employment was to be had – this being, in good part, jobs their white counterparts considered to be beneath their dignity to perform. Gold mining and rail construction were complemented by coal mining, market gardening or farming, resource-sector jobs, and the seasonal industry of salmon canning. Others worked as laundrymen, tailors, cooks, and household servants known as houseboys, or ran small stores and restaurants.

¹¹ For a contrary, sympathetic white child's perspective, see John Norris, *Wo Lee Stories* (New Denver, BC: Twa Corbies, 1997), 5-17, 111-21, esp. 118 on the sole time the family's Chinese neighbour was allowed into their living room.

This ethos encouraged and legitimized legal as well as informal discrimination. In 1874 and 1885, the right to vote in British Columbia and Canada, respectively, was removed from persons who were Chinese by origin or descent, which meant that they could not enter the professions of law, medicine, pharmacy, or accountancy; seek government employment; take up government land; or enjoy other privileges linked to the franchise. Canadian prime minister John A. Macdonald defended these actions on the grounds that the Chinese had “no British instincts or British feelings or aspirations, and therefore ought not to have a vote.”¹² Also in 1885, a fifty-dollar head tax was imposed on new arrivals from China, being doubled in 1900 and raised three years later to five hundred dollars. In 1923, the federal government prohibited Chinese immigration altogether. The franchise would be returned only in 1947, the same year the immigration ban was repealed, although it would take another two decades for Canadian immigration policy to become non-discriminatory.

For all these reasons Chinatowns exercised enormous appeal. There men formed family, clan, and home district associations and political societies, which provided both social services and venues for such familiar leisure activities as gambling and opium smoking. The largest were in Victoria on Vancouver Island and New Westminster on the Mainland, being entryways to the goldfields, and, from the mid-1880s, in Vancouver.¹³ A number of smaller counterparts were similarly self-sustaining, although it was also the case that any conglomeration of Chinese men, however informal, was liable to be so labelled.¹⁴ As well as giving protection, Chinatowns served to isolate men from other ways of life, even when, as with some of them, their jobs took them further afield.¹⁵

Chinatowns did not, however, represent the entirety of Chinese migrants’ experiences in early British Columbia. Some had to rely much more on their own resources. Principal among these were the many men who mined for gold long years after most whites had departed. The 1870 census indicated that, whereas the majority of the eighty-five hundred whites lived on Vancouver Island, over three-quarters of the fifteen hundred Chinese were on the Mainland. Excluding railway workers, a quarter or more continued to reside on the Mainland wherever the search

¹² John A. Macdonald, House of Commons, 1885, quoted in Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 41.

¹³ As of 1885, Victoria housed 1,767 Chinese and New Westminster 1,680, in 1902 Victoria housed 3,263 and Vancouver 2,080. See *Report* (1885), 363-65; *Report* (1902), 12-13.

¹⁴ Particularly useful in this respect is Lai, *Chinatowns*, 34-51.

¹⁵ This point is well made in Dunae et al., “Making the Inscrutable.”

for gold extended itself (Table 1 and Table 2).¹⁶ Early on, a fellow miner praised Chinese tenacity:

This much-enduring and industrious race are generally to be found in little clusters, at work upon diggings deserted by the whites ... and will, doubtless, at the end of the year, by means of their frugality, save more than their white brother is likely to, in spite of his higher gains ... It is the fashion on the Pacific Coast to abuse and ill-treat the Chinaman in every possible way; and I really must tell my friends ... they are hard-working, sober, and law-abiding – three scarce qualities among people in their station.¹⁷

No aspect of everyday life better illustrates the distinctiveness of Chinese men in early British Columbia than do pathways to intimacy. An alternative to arriving with a wife in tow, as did some merchants who came north from California, was to get one from home. The process was difficult, expensive, and time-consuming. Not only did most men first have to repay the cost of their transportation even as they were fulfilling their obligation to remit money back home, their wages were often less than half those paid to whites in the same job, all of which delayed their ability to send, or have sent, a wife from China. While men who had left wives behind might return from time to time for conjugal visits, most such women never made it to Canada for lack of resources, obligations in China, or immigration restrictions.¹⁸ Other men turned to Chinese

¹⁶ Eventually the search extended virtually everywhere, given, as a technical report put it sometime later, “gold is very generally distributed over the entire area of the Province of British Columbia.” See John B. Galloway, *Placer-Mining in British Columbia* (Victoria: British Columbia Department of Mines, 1931), 10. On early gold finds in respect to the presence of Chinese miners, see Chow, *Sojourners in the North*; and Chen, “In the Colonies of Tang,” 143–55.

¹⁷ R. Byron Johnson, *Very Far West Indeed* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, & Searle, 1872), 76–78.

¹⁸ Most general accounts ignore Chinese women altogether, with the possible exception of merchants’ wives, or treat them summarily in passing. Among exceptions are Tamara Adilman, “A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia, 1858–1950,” in Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women’s Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 53–78; and Yuen-Fong Woon, “Between South China and British Columbia: Life Trajectories of Chinese Women,” *BC Studies* 156/57 (2007–08): 83–107; also Chan, *Gold Mountain*, passim; Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 58–70; and the earlier autobiographies in *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1992), 17–45. For more recent vignettes of family life, see Brandy Liën Worrall, ed., *Finding Memories, Tracing Routes: Chinese Canadian Family Stories* (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia, 2006); and Brandy Liën Worrall, ed., *Eating Stories: A Chinese Canadian and Aboriginal Potluck* (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia, 2007). For examples of Chinese men’s unions with Chinese women outside of the major Chinatowns, see Marie Elliott, *Gold and Grand Dreams: Cariboo East in the Early Years* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubert, 2000), 113–15, also 84–85, 110;

prostitutes, whose presence in early British Columbia (Table 1) reflected the larger society, which, as a consequence of the gold rush and earlier the fur trade, also contained more non-indigenous adult men than women.¹⁹

Whereas the overwhelming majority of Chinese men equated intimacy with Chinese women, a minority were less inhibited, sometimes partnering with an indigenous woman in what might become a long-term stable relationship. For indigenous women, who, going back to the earliest years of contact, came from a long tradition of being flexible and adapting to changing circumstances, such activity was not unusual.²⁰ For Chinese men, such relationships might appear unexpected, given the general assumption of the day that “Indians and Chinese” did not, as asserted in 1885, mix “a great deal.”²¹ In line with this perspective, it is still the case that almost all scholarly and popular publications and graduate theses on early Chinese migration to British Columbia, and also to the United States and Australia (both of which were driven by similar economic circumstances), take for granted that Chinese men only engaged in intimacy with Chinese women.²² Such an approach

Chow, *Sojourners in the North*, 46; W.M. Hong, *And So That's How It Happened: Recollections of Stanley-Barkerville, 1900-1975* (Barkerville, BC: Privately printed, 1978), 11-13; and Lily Hoy Price, *I Am Full Moon: Stories of a Ninth Daughter* (Victoria: Brindle and Glass, 2009).

¹⁹ On Chinese prostitution, see Renisa Mawani, *Colonial Proximities: Crossracial Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871-1921* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 105-20; Chan, *Gold Mountain*, 80-84; Chen, “In the Colonies of Tang,” 329-33; Woon, “Between South China and British Columbia,” 89-92; ongoing accounts in the *Victoria Colonist* newspaper, online at <http://www.britishcolonist.ca/>. For comparisons, see Albert Dudley Gardner, “Two Paths One Destiny: A Comparison of Chinese Households and Communities in Alberta, British Columbia, Montana, and Wyoming, 1848-1910,” (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2000), 187-95, 218, and passim; and Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). On British Columbia generally, during these years and subsequently, see Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

²⁰ On British Columbia, see Jean Barman, “Indigenous Women and Feminism on the Cusp of Contact,” in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, ed. Cheryl Suzack, Jeanne Perreault, Shari Huhndorf, and Jean Barman (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 92-108; Jean Barman, “Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria: Engendering Transgressive Sexuality during the Gold Rush,” in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, ed. Myra Rutherdale and Katie Pickles (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 205-27; and Jean Barman, “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900,” *BC Studies* 115/16 (1997-98): 237-66, reprinted in Mary Ann Irwin and James F. Brooks, ed., *Women and Gender in the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 210-35.

²¹ T.R. McInnis [sic, McInnes], *Report* (1885), xxvi. See also Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 48-78; and Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*.

²² Undertaken in December 2012, the search encompassed all potentially relevant books held in the University of British Columbia Library, articles accessible through the America History and Life and comparable databases, and graduate theses and dissertations available through Proquest and similar sites. Among the partial non-BC materials located were Sue

is short-sighted, if for no other reason than that, in numerous areas of emigration during these same years (including Malaysia, the Philippines, the Hawaiian Islands, the West Indies, and Cuba), Chinese men, as also explained in 1885, “intermarried with the native races.”²³ One of the very few contemporaries to acknowledge Chinese-indigenous unions in early British Columbia was an Englishman resident since 1859 whose construction of pack trails and surveying took him into the hinterland. In 1879, Edgar Dewdney explained to a federal committee on Chinese labour and immigration how “a good many [Chinese men] live with Indian women,” relationships of which, in the absence of Christian marriage, he disapproved.²⁴

Thirty relationships between Chinese men and indigenous women can be glimpsed in early British Columbia in censuses, vital statistics, school and church records, contemporary accounts, family stories, and in the research of such scholars as Lily Chow and Naomi Miller (Table 3). While the number is not large in itself, it is considerable when compared with the likely five times as many Chinese men, or about 150, who, up to the turn of the century, partnered with a Chinese woman. In other words, one in six Chinese men who, in early British Columbia, engaged in intimacy leading to family formation did so with an indigenous woman. The proportion is almost certainly higher, given the ambiguity and disregard surrounding newcomer-indigenous relationships more generally, the dismissive attitudes towards both Chinese and indigenous British Columbians, most unions’ location in the hinterland, low English literacy levels among Chinese men and indigenous women making for few first-hand accounts, and the common use of shortened names for Chinese men making it difficult to track single individuals through time.²⁵

Fawn Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 140; Daniel Liestman, “Horizontal Inter-Ethnic Relations: Chinese and American Indians in the Nineteenth-Century American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 30, 3 (1999): 347–48, which cites other items; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 316n52; and notably, Gardner, “Two Paths One Destiny,” 281–83, for an intriguing Alberta instance; and Ruth Kretzler Billhimer, “Pawns of Fate: Chinese/Paiute Intercultural Marriages, 1860–1920, Walker River Reservation, Schurz, Nevada” (MA thesis, University of Nevada, 1998).

²³ *Report* (1902), 235. See also *Report* (1885), cxiii, cxxix. According to the Chinese consul in British Columbia in 1885, “in Cuba, fully seventy-five per cent have married native women” (*Report* [1885], 41).

²⁴ Edgar Dewdney in “First Report of Select Committee on Chinese Labour and Immigration,” in *Journals of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada* 13, app. 4 (1879), 48. On Dewdney’s basis of understanding, see E. Brian Titley, “Edgar Dewdney,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*.

²⁵ Renisa Mawani notes several early court cases concerning Chinese men selling liquor to indigenous peoples, who were legally prohibited from having such access, but she does not

TABLE 3

Summary of relationships between Chinese men and indigenous women in nineteenth-century British Columbia

MAN'S NAME	BORN	BC LOCATION	OCCUPATION	BEG. YR
Ah Chin	1848	Lytton	Farmer	1878
Ah Ching	1830	Yale	Farmer	1881
Ah Ching	—	Yale	Railway worker	1880s
Ah Choong	1833	Victoria	Not given	1865
Ah Chu	1850	Princeton	Miner	1901
Ah Chung/ Ah Chin Yun	1842	Lytton	Farmer	1879
Ah Lean	1841	Osoyoos	Miner	1881
Ah Lem	1834	Osoyoos	Miner	1877
Ah Louis	—	Yale	Cook	1879
Ah Lum	1843	Omineca	Miner	1880s
Ah Lum/ Chin Lum Kee	1835	Rock Creek	Storekeeper	1870
Ah Sing	1856	Yale	Labourer	1877
Ah Wee Kong On	1840	Lytton	Storekeeper	1872
Ah Yuen	—	Seabird Island	Farmer	1874
Bow Dung	1829	New Westminster	Baker	1870
Charley Chung	1844	Hope	Rancher	1879
Chi Chum	1830	Cache Creek	Teamster	1866
Chong Sing	1868	Clinton	Cook	1898
Chow Ah Lock	1850	Omineca	Miner	1899
Chu Jaw	1839	Osoyoos	Miner	1876
Chung Moon	—	Rock Creek	Miner/farmer	1871
Ku Tong	1842	Hope	Baker	1889
Lee Lee	1863	Princeton	Laundryman	1901
Louis Sing	1864	Nicola Valley	Houseboy	1896
Nuy Wah	1841	New Westminster	Restaurant keeper	1875
Yaow/Yow	1850	Port Essington	Contractor	1888
Unnamed	—	Chilliwack	Not given	1892
Unnamed	—	Chehalis	Restaurant keeper	1883
Unnamed	—	Tashme	Rancher	1880s
Unnamed	—	Yale	Houseboy	1895

WOMAN'S NAME	ORIGIN	BORN	PRINCIPAL SOURCES
Mary	Indigenous	1861	1881 census
Kitty	Indigenous	1820	1864 land record/1881 census/stories
Unnamed	Hope	—	Recollection
Mary Seminoo	Cowichan	1848	1865 marriage
Lupel	Similkameen	1850	1901 census
Lucy	Indigenous	1862	1881/1891 censuses
Ah On	Indigenous	1862	1881 census
Mary	Indigenous	1861	1881 census
Annie Quyanak	Boston Bar	—	1879 marriage
Esther Joseph/ Nos Oep	Gitxsan	—	1901 Indian census/Lily Chow
Lucy/Squeetle- wood	Stó:lo	1854	1891 census/stories/Naomi Miller
Annie	Indigenous	1851	1891 census
Unnamed	Indigenous	—	1880 school record/1881 census
Lucy Aleck	Popkum	—	1890s school records/Hilary Blair
Sarah Anne	Indigenous	1858	1881 census
Susan Qo- swquslet	Hope	1865	1880 marriage
Mary	Indigenous	1845	1881/1891 censuses
Gusta Qualt	Chilcotin	1878	1898 marriage
Josephine Alexander	Carrier	—	Lily Chow
Susanne	Indigenous	1859	1881 census
Emily	Rock Creek	—	Written recollection
Susan	Indigenous	1865	1891 census
Julie	Similkameen	1885	1901 census
Alice Shí shiatko	Lytton	1872	1896 marriage
Mary	Indigenous	1851	1881 census
Alice	Indigenous	1869	1891 school record/1901 census
Unnamed	Skowkale	—	1895 missionary account
Unnamed	Indigenous	—	1885 recollection
Unnamed	Indigenous	—	Oral recollection
Unnamed	Indigenous	—	1896 missionary account

Snippets here and there speak to physical attraction, which, if it did not in most instances result in intimacy, might in other circumstances have done so. The family tells a story about leading Vancouver entrepreneur Wing Sang. Employed in the early 1880s as a bookkeeper on rail construction, he made regular stops “in Yale for apple pie served by a young Native girl.” On one such occasion he was informed that he was just in time for the announcement of an engagement. “Afraid that his love of apple pie served by a pretty young woman had given the wrong impression, he made a hasty departure. It wasn’t that he didn’t want a wife – he did – but he wanted a Chinese wife with Chinese values.”²⁶ A local history recalls Hong Hing, who, like so many others, was born in Canton, the English name for today’s Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province.²⁷ From about 1916 a merchant in Chemainus on Vancouver Island, Hong Hing was “known to make a ‘Nelson’s Eye’ [a wink] at pretty Indian maidens who frequented his premises. His attention to the Indian ladies filled his store with sweaters, toques and sox, of which he made a specialty, with elaborate displays.”²⁸

While cause and effect in Chinese men’s unions cannot be demonstrated, it is highly suggestive that, whereas virtually all of the men living proximate to or in an organized Chinatown appear to have restricted themselves to Chinese women, not all those at a distance did so. The thirty glimpses examined here contain three possible exceptions. In 1865, in a Methodist ceremony in Victoria, thirty-two-year-old Ah Choong, born in Hong Kong, wed a seventeen-year-old Cowichan woman named Mary Seminoo, both then living in the city.²⁹ The other two unions

extend the contact into the personal relationships that might have ensued. See Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*, 121–25, 152–62. Although individually enumerated in the early Canadian censuses, difficulties in communication and also disinterest meant Chinese names were routinely simplified, occupations identical for pages on end, and ages rounded off to a convenient 0 or 5. Many of the men brought in to work on the railway were simply called Ah, which was not a surname, but rather an informal prefix, much like the English-language suffix that turns “John” into “Johnny.” More generally, “Ah” was routinely put before some small part of the actual name. See Census Canada information for 1881, 1891, and 1901, available online at various sites. On aspects of naming, see Yuen, “Are You Who You Think You Are?” Two important initiatives intended to counter these limitations are the Vancouver Public Library’s Chinese-Canadian Genealogy website at <http://www.vpl.ca/ccg/Basics.html> and head tax and other records and information available online through Archives Canada.

²⁶ Hern, *Yip Sang*, 16–17.

²⁷ Of the six of thirty unions described here where men’s origins were noted, principally in marriage records, five were Canton.

²⁸ Ning Chang, “The Life Style of Hong Hing,” in *Memories of the Chemainus Valley*, comp. Lillian Gustafson (Victoria: Chemainus Valley Historical Society, 1978), 293. For a rare vignette of everyday Chinese-indigenous sociability, see Lim, *West Coast Chinese Boy*, 5–8.

²⁹ Pre-Confederation Marriage Records, 1858–1872, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), GR-3044.

survive in the form of 1881 census entries from the New Westminster area. Fifty-two-year-old baker Bow Dung lived with twenty-five-year-old Sarah Anne, their son Fat Ah, aged nine, who was attending school, and two-year-old daughter Mun Gaw; forty-year-old restaurant keeper Nuy Wah lived with thirty-year-old Mary and their daughters Iow Sun aged five and Ah Win aged one. The 1881 census does not include origins, but, given the women's ages and births in British Columbia, it is almost certain they were indigenous.

Many of the Chinese men partnering with indigenous women in early British Columbia were gold miners. Typical was Chin Lum Kee, known as Ah Lum, of whom a variety of sources, ranging from census records to interviews with daughter Lillian Martha Ban Quan and daughter-in-law Beryl Lum to extensive research by historian Naomi Miller, make it possible to know quite a lot.³⁰ According to Lillian, Ah Lum was born in Canton, "got off the boat at San Francisco," and walked north to the original heart of the gold rush in the Fraser Valley, where he ran a store servicing miners and carried the mail. In about 1870 the twenty-five-year-old partnered with sixteen-year-old Squeetlewood, known as Lucy, recalled as belonging "to a tribe of Indians at Chilliwack" in the eastern Fraser Valley, thus being Stó:lo. Sometime after gold strikes at Rock Creek in the southern interior, the couple started packing in goods and then opened a store to supply settlers and miners with "groceries, hardware saddles whatnot, anything for horses." Back to Lillian: "There was about a hundred Chinese placer miners on the sluice boxes at Rock Creek, and white people ... It was very nice and quiet." That was not all Ah Lum did to support his seven children, who were born at two-year intervals. "In 1886 my father was the first guy to cook for the Mounties at Fort McLeod [in southern Alberta]. I don't know how he got that job. He was home in Rock Creek and they must have called him to cook." A placer miner visiting Rock Creek in 1892 recalled: "Quite a number of Chinamen were strung out along the creek washing gold. Dick Ah Lum also had a store nearby, and kept numerous chickens, ducks and geese. He was married to an Indian woman, and their eldest children were about grown up."³¹

³⁰ Interview with Lillian Martha Ban Quan by Imbert Orchard, 5 November 1964, BCA, T0822; interview with daughter-in-law Beryl Lum by Imbert Orchard, 1 November 1964, BCA, T0898; Miller, "The Lum and Ban Quan Families," 19-20; and letter from Naomi Miller, 17 November 1991, in author's possession.

³¹ Harry D. Barnes, "Reminiscences of the Okanagan and Boundary Districts, 1891-1900," *Okanagan History* 13 (1949): 97.

Sometime after daughter Lillian settled in the Kootenays with her miner husband Chu Ban Quan, who had travelled from Canton to San Francisco in 1868 and mined his way north, her parents followed her there. The couple moved to booming Cranbrook, where they opened a grocery store, then on to Fort Steele, where they ran a butcher shop. Then, as Lillian put it, Ah Lum's Chineseness caught up with him: "He got old and he quit. Father left for China in 1911, went home to die." According to Naomi Miller, before he did so Ah Lum burned his shop records to signify he forgave his debtors in anticipation of his death. His versatile widow, who lived another four decades, raised sheep and chickens and took in washing.

Even such a long-lived union as that of Ah Lum and Lucy was not without its tensions and contradictions. His partnering decision was pragmatic, being expeditious and inexpensive compared to the acquisition of a woman from China, but all of these factors did not necessarily make it right from his perspective. Indicative of Ah Lum's ambivalence the family did not associate with Lucy's family: "We just go by Chilliwack. We don't know who mother's relatives are. We don't see no Indians around. We don't mix with them." Another descendent explained, in old age, how they were never to admit to either their Chinese or their indigenous descent.³² It was also the case that, in everyday life, the family accommodated to their circumstances: "Mother was a very nice lady, she talked to us in her language and father talked to us in Chinese."³³

Very importantly, Ah Lum's and Lucy's offspring were sufficiently comfortable with their upbringing to make their lives across a spectrum of possibilities. Lillian slid into a traditional union: "You know how the Chinese are, they marry young ... They picked a husband for you. I was in grade 8 ... My marriage was arranged. He was 45 and I was 16." While one sister married a Chinese man who had a market garden near Fort Steele, another opted for the American who was the local blacksmith. Learning packing skills from their parents, all three sons became expert with horses and worked as guides. One felt comfortable partnering with an indigenous woman, a second apparently did not marry, and a third opted for a white woman. Having taken his father home to die, son George was meant to return with a wife from China. He did not do so, instead marrying a young Englishwoman he met while he and his brother were in charge of pony and trail rides at a major hotel at

³² Naomi Miller named "Lucy" in print as Lucy Williams, "daughter of the packer at Hope," which, she later explained privately, was because the family did not like to admit to its indigenous background (letter, 17 November 1991).

³³ Interview with Lillian Martha Ban Quan by Imbert Orchard, 5 November 1964, BCA.

Lake Louise in the Rockies, where she worked. From her perspective, interviewed in old age, it was a match made in heaven, for “I loved the western life.” As for their seven children, “they are nurses and teachers and everything.”³⁴

The gold mining enclave of Rock Creek nurtured at least one other Chinese-indigenous union. Chung Moon and “Emily an Indian woman” from Rock Creek had a daughter named Ah Lan who was born in 1872. In attempting, at age forty, to get a copy of her birth certificate from the provincial government, Ah Lan provided considerable information about her family and herself.³⁵ Chung Moon had, according to his daughter, been a “gold miner and farmer.” When Ah Lan was ten, her mother had died. Five years later, in about 1887, she and her father moved to New Westminster for a year and then to Victoria. Two years later Ah Lan married “according to Chinese custom” Leng Tung Hai, who had arrived in British Columbia in about 1873, worked in a sawmill, and then had a market garden. His daughter settled, Chung Moon returned to China, where he died a year later.

Fifty kilometres west of Rock Creek lies Osoyoos. There, as of 1881, three Chinese miners were living with indigenous women in a Chinese-run hotel or boarding house that also contained some thirty unattached Chinese miners. Forty-year-old Ah Lean was partnered with nineteen-year-old Ah On, who, despite her name, was described as indigenous. Ah Lem, aged forty-seven, and Mary, aged twenty, were the parents of three-year-old Pauline; forty-two-year-old Chu Jaw and twenty-two-year-old Susanne were the parents of Agatha aged four and Julia aged two. As were most Chinese men, all three were enumerated as Buddhists. The women were not unexpectedly, given that missionaries were early arrivals into the region, put down as Catholics. The unions gave such men, along with their children, access to indigenous worlds as well as to the Chinese milieu in which, as of 1881, they lived in the everyday. Very possibly in order to visit them, in the last decade of the nineteenth century an indigenous child from across the border in the United States recalled “one trip that my parents seldom failed to make each year was ... to S’oo-yoos Lake, British Columbia, in the country

³⁴ Interviews with Lillian Martha Ban Quan and Beryl Lum by Imbert Orchard, 1 and 5 November 1964, BCA.

³⁵ File attached to British Columbia, Division of Vital Statistics, Birth registrations, BCA, GR 2965, 72-09-038396.

of the Upper Okanagan.” As to the reason: “Some Chinese men had settled” there “to placer mine for gold and had taken native wives.”³⁶

While women’s indigenous identities are often not given in the census or elsewhere, the majority were almost certainly local, which would have encouraged sociability. Among them were two literate Chinese men who arrived in Canada in 1881, which suggests they came as railway labourers. By 1901, they were both living about a hundred kilometres west of Osoyoos at Princeton, where they had each partnered with local Similkameen women. Thirty-eight-year-old Lee Lee, a Buddhist, was running a laundry with sixteen-year-old Catholic Julie, while placer miner Ah Chu, also a Buddhist, was living with a Catholic woman named Lupel. Indicative of the broad brush strokes sometimes accorded such persons in the census, Ah Chu and Lupel were both recorded as born in 1850.

Not only did such men acquire a new entryway to sociability along with intimacy leading to family life, but they also got a helpmate who was useful in everyday life, particularly to men like Lee Lee who were providing services. Two hundred kilometres northwest of Princeton at Cache Creek, Chi Chum lived with an “Indian” woman named Mary and their children: Nancy Fa, born 1867; Soot Fa, born 1871; and Chon Win, born 1877. In both 1881 and 1891, Chi Chum was a teamster who drove oxen, and Mary, fifteen years his junior, undoubtedly assisted him in managing the numerous boarders the couple took in. Storyteller Annie York, a Yale woman of mixed indigenous and non-indigenous descent born in 1904, related a similar account passed down from her mother: “Somewhere around Tashme [near Hope] that Chinaman had a ranch and all the Indians stopped there and stayed overnight. And the same on the way back. And the Chinaman had a half-Indian daughter. I don’t remember her name. My mother said she was a pretty girl. The Chinaman lived with an Indian woman. He raised pigs for the miners, smoked them.”³⁷

Such families’ everyday comfort with each other is attested to by a young English adventurer who trekked across southern British Columbia in the mid-1880s. Morley Roberts, in his *The Western Avernus*, published shortly thereafter, recounts his travels along the Fraser River to Chehalis:

Then to Harrison River, bright and clear and blue, a Fraser tributary,
and dinner at a Chinaman’s restaurant, where we had a plentiful

³⁶ Jay Miller, ed., *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 20.

³⁷ Annie York, in Andrea Laforet, “Folk History in a Small Canadian Community” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1974), 297.

and well-cooked meal served by the owner himself, who spoke good English to us, Chinese to his pig-tailed compatriots, and fluent Chinook [Pacific Northwest trading jargon] to his Indian wife, who held in her arms a curious child with the characteristics of both Indian and Chinaman stamped unmistakably upon it. The father admired it immensely, and was, it seemed, very fond of his wife, who, for her part, was stolid and undemonstrative, as most pure-bred Indians are.”³⁸

This modestly flattering description stands out, given that, in the view of critics, Roberts’s “discussions of native people and the Chinese are blinkered by racism.”³⁹

Chinese men partnered with indigenous women who lived near the gold rush’s origins were the most likely to find themselves subject to outsider scrutiny.⁴⁰ In 1876, the school board at Hope in the eastern Fraser Valley was livid over “Chinaman houses” occupied by Chinese men and “their squaws” on land sought for a new building.⁴¹ At Lytton, a hundred miles to the north, the public school and a nearby Chinese-indigenous family comfortably coexisted. Its new teacher was so valued that, in the fall of 1880, parents sent her a letter of appreciation together with a seventy-five-dollar collection, including five dollars from Ah Wee Kong On.⁴² The 1881 census described him as a storekeeper born in China in about 1840, the father of eight-year-old Ah Kow. The boy’s mother may be the woman named in the Indian reserve census of the Lytton area four years earlier as In-than-ta-oss’s daughter “married to a Chinaman.”⁴³

Two other couples were also in the Hope-Lytton area in 1881. Thirty-five-year-old Lytton farmer Ah Chin and his twenty-year-old “Indian” wife Mary were the parents of two-year-old Ten Fee. Ah Chin was Buddhist, Mary and their son were Anglican. A twenty-year-old Anglican “Indian” woman named Lucy and a year-old girl named Hydah were living in the same household as was Lytton farmer Ah Chung, a forty-year-old Buddhist, and two Chinese labourers possibly in his

³⁸ Morley Roberts, *The Western Avernus* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1896, orig. 1887), 156.

³⁹ Jeremy Mouat, “Morley Roberts in the Western Avernus,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 93 (2002-03): 31, 36n44.

⁴⁰ See Jiwu Wang, “*His Dominion*” and the “*Yellow Peril*”: *Protestant Missions to Chinese Immigrants to Canada, 1859-1967* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006).

⁴¹ J.A. Bowes to John Jessop, 10 September 1876, in BC Superintendent of Education, Inward Correspondence, BCA, GR 1445.

⁴² Commendation to A[delaide] Bailey, teacher at Lytton, 27 December 1881 [sic, 1880], in BC Superintendent of Education, Inward Correspondence, BCA, GR 1445.

⁴³ Indian Reserve census, 1877, as compiled on Royal BC Museum and Okanagan University College Living Landscapes website at <http://royal.okanagan.bc.ca/census/ind 1877>.

employ. A decade later, Lucy, now described as twenty-eight, was living with forty-eight-year-old farmer Ah Chin Yun, almost certainly the Ah Chung of a decade earlier and now also an Anglican. Unlike Lucy, he was literate. Testifying to the solidity of some Chinese-indigenous unions, their children, as of 1891, were Susan aged ten, son Ko Kee aged seven, and Jenny and son Coke An, both aged five.

Schools were not the only outside entity impinging on Chinese-indigenous unions. While aimed principally at indigenous peoples, the long-lived missionary presence, going back in time to the earliest years of the gold rush, caught some Chinese men in its wake. One goal was their conversion from Buddhism to Christianity, as with Lytton farmer Ah Chung, who, by 1891, had become Anglican like his wife Lucy. The other goal was Christian marriage, encouraged by the presence of St. John's Anglican Church at Yale in the Fraser Canyon, where, in 1879, Yale cook Ah Louis wed Annie Quyanak from nearby Boston Bar. Describing himself as a farmer's son born in Canton, he signed the marriage document in Chinese with a sure, literate hand. A year later, thirty-six-year-old Hope rancher Charley Chung, a labourer's son born in Canton who similarly signed the church register in Chinese, wed fourteen-year-old Susan Qoswquslet, daughter of a local chief.⁴⁴ Whoever was meant, at about this time the Anglican bishop proudly described in his memoir how he "married an Indian girl to a Chinaman" at Yale.⁴⁵ In similar fashion, in 1895, the Anglican order whose sisters ran All Hallows School at Yale rejoiced over the "marriage of one of the newly-made Christians [being indigenous people baptized as adults] to a Christian Chinaman, who was in domestic service at the Mission House."⁴⁶ The 1891 census recorded thirty-six-year-old Buddhist labourer Ah Sing living at Yale with forty-year-old indigenous Annie along with thirteen-year-old Jimmy and nine-year-old Emma, who, like their mother, were described as Anglican.

Visiting periodically from his base in New Westminster, the Anglican bishop not only encouraged conversions and married one or more Chinese-indigenous couples but also made use of their services. Annie York told of how, when the bishop first arrived at Yale in 1879, he was

⁴⁴ "St. Johns, Yale, Register of baptisms, marriages, and burials, August 28, 1859-April 24, 1895," Anglican Archives, Vancouver School of Theology, University of British Columbia.

⁴⁵ Herbert H. Gowen, *Church Work in British Columbia* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), 17.

⁴⁶ *East and West*, Winter 1896, 428. On the school, see Jean Barman, "Separate and Unequal: Indian and White Girls at All Hallows School, 1884-1920," in *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, 2nd ed., ed. Jean Barman and Mona Gleason (Calgary: Detselig, 2003), 283-302.

looked after by a Chinese man who lived nearby with his indigenous wife. Ah Ching “housed and fed him.”⁴⁷ Her cousin, born in 1911, described being taken care of as a child by an elderly Chinese railway labourer, also named Ah Ching, who hailed from north of Hope.⁴⁸ When he fell seriously ill, Ah Ching cooked a “blue jay” for him, which he recalled as the toughest thing he ever ate.⁴⁹ Indicative of the caution necessary in dealing with multiple sources, another or possibly the same Chinese man named Ah Ching appears as a farmer along with his wife, indigenous Kitty, in the 1881 census. Ah Ching and Kitty were already aged fifty and sixty, respectively. Going back even further, in 1861 a Chinese man named Ah Ching pre-empted from the government 160 acres (65 hectares) near Yale; by the time he acquired the land outright in 1871, he had constructed a house with a cellar, put in a 1.4 hectare garden, and planted two hundred and fifty apple trees.⁵⁰ This Ah Ching was not alone in taking up land. More than half a dozen similarly enterprising Chinese men, who had arrived with the gold rush, did so prior to Chinese people’s being legally precluded from acquiring land through pre-emption.⁵¹

The Methodists were not far behind the Catholics and Anglicans in chasing souls. Enumerated at Hope in 1891 were forty-nine-year-old Methodist baker Ku Tong; twenty-six-year-old Methodist Susan, who was indigenous; and their year-old son Ah Tong. Five years later, in a Methodist ceremony, Louis Sing from Canton, a thirty-two-year-old Methodist houseboy employed in the Nicola Valley a hundred and forty kilometres to the northeast, wed Anglican Alice Shī shiátko, aged twenty-four and probably a Lytton woman.⁵² It is unclear under whose religious auspices, if any, two years later thirty-year-old Chong Sing, a cook at 150 Mile House near the long-established mining town of

⁴⁷ Annie York, in Andrea Laforet and Annie York, *Spuzzum: Fraser Canyon Histories, 1808-1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 126.

⁴⁸ Annie York, Richard Daly, and Chris Arnett, *They Write Their Dream on the Rock Forever: Rock Writings of the Stein River Valley of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993), 30.

⁴⁹ Arthur Urquhart, in Laforet and York, *Spuzzum*, 126.

⁵⁰ F.W. Laing, *Colonial Farm Settlers on the Mainland of British Columbia 1858-1871* (Victoria: Privately printed, 1939), 227.

⁵¹ According to Laing, *Colonial Farm Settlers*, Kim Sing and Ah Wah pre-empted from the government 50 and 37 acres (20 and 15 hectares), respectively, near Lytton in 1867 (239); Ah Ky 160 acres (65 hectares) near Lillooet in 1867 (242); Ah Gin 160 acres (65 hectares) near Alkali Lake in 1867 (282); Ah Chee and Ah Kye 10 and 160 acres (4 and 65 hectares), respectively, near Lillooet in 1868 (242); Long Tie 320 acres (130 hectares) near Lillooet in 1872 (266); and Nam Sing 160 acres (65 hectares) near Lillooet in 1876 (281).

⁵² British Columbia, Division of Vital Statistics, Marriage registrations, BCA, GR 2962, no. 96-09-169150.

Williams Lake, wed twenty-year-old Gusta Qualt, a Chilcotin woman.⁵³ Other services were sometimes sought. A Methodist minister described an 1895 visit to Chilliwack to a “Chinaman’s whose little boy died this a.m. as result of scalding ... I spoke as well as I could to the mother (Indian) & all & prayed with them. On the wall there was a Buddhist shrine. There were 3 Chinese present. Got back after dark.” Even though in his next day’s entry he grumbled over the failure of his efforts at conversion, he clearly had not given up: “Buried half-breed (Chinese-Indian) boy at Skowkale. Heathen Indian & Chinese & Xtian sermon.”⁵⁴

If courted by missionaries, Chinese men were also reminded from time to time that they and the indigenous women in their lives were not wanted. As narrated by Hilary Blair, in about 1874 a man known as Ah Yuen built a house on Seabird Island, located in the Fraser River between Chilliwack and Hope, established a garden, partnered with a local Popkum woman named Lucy Aleck, and began a family that would number five.⁵⁵ Ah Yuen’s troubles began when, in 1879, apparently oblivious to his presence, the federal Department of Indian Affairs reserved the fertile island for seven named indigenous groups, including Popkums. Six years later the chief of one of the other groups persuaded government officials to evict Yuen, who was soon back supported by his Popkum father-in-law to claim the landholding by virtue of having annually paid taxes on it.⁵⁶ In 1891, by which time the property comprised nine cleared hectares, three houses, and 220 mature fruit trees, Ah Yuen was killed while blasting stumps. Two years later, the Department of Indian Affairs ruled, in line with federal policy, that, by virtue of marrying a non-indigenous man, Lucy Aleck had lost her Indian status and, thereby, her right to remain on what was now a reserve. However, as a special consideration, she was allowed to do so as long as she did not remarry.

For all of the whims of federal policy, the widowed Lucy raised Ah Yuen’s and her children as indigenous. In 1894 she enrolled ten-year-old Frederick at the newly opened Coqualeetza Industrial School for Indian Boys in nearby Chilliwack, whose records described his father as a

⁵³ British Columbia Division of Vital Statistics, Marriage registrations, BCA, GR 2962, no. 98-09-175273.

⁵⁴ 6 and 27 June 1895 entries in Ebenezer Robson, *Diary*, BCA, H/D/R57.

⁵⁵ The family’s story is recounted in Blair, “Settling Seabird Island,” 1, 27, 39-41, 104, 120-26. The seven indigenous groups to which Seabird was allocated were the “Popkum, Skawits, Ohamil, Ska-wāh-look, Hope, Union Bar, and Yale” (1).

⁵⁶ This point is made in Friesen, “Canada’s Other Newcomers,” 83, based on Department of Indian Affairs files.

“Chinaman” now dead.⁵⁷ Frederick remained there seven years, playing in the school band and being taught farming, which he thereafter pursued back on Seabird Island. In a list of Seabird’s dozen family heads, compiled during the hearings of the 1914 Royal Commission on Indian Affairs, Fred Yuen was described as a Popkum having a wife and two children, a house, and six hectares under cultivation with another two cleared, being the second largest holding on the island.⁵⁸ In neither its meetings with Seabird residents nor in its meetings with the local Indian agent did the commission make any reference to Fred Yuen’s being of Chinese descent. Yet a list compiled four years later, which included among Seabird’s then twenty-five family heads Fred and his brother Henry, both described as Popkums, indicates that they had settled there in 1879, clearly on the property their Chinese father had claimed.⁵⁹

Relationships in the far corners of British Columbia may have more proceeded on their own terms with less outside interference than those in areas longer settled by newcomers. In April 1891, provincial education authorities requested a “list of the white and half-caste children living within the bounds of the Port Essington School District with a statement of their ages.” Included among those still too young to go to school but expected to do so in due course were Sam Yow aged two and Baby Yow aged three months, both given as “Mother Indian, Father Chinaman.”⁶⁰ The 1901 census of this north coast community described fifty-one-year-old Yaow as coming to Canada in 1873, naturalizing as a British subject in 1890, and living with a thirty-two-year-old “Indian” named Alice and their four children – Sam (twelve), Joe (nine), Mary (eight), and George (four). Yaow was Buddhist, the others Methodist. The three oldest children were attending school, the two oldest speaking Chinese, “Indian,” and English as their first languages.

Yaow described himself in the census as a “contractor” earning eighty dollars by working just three months in the past year. In other words, he had charge of recruiting other Chinese to work in one of Port Essington’s three seasonal salmon canneries making cans, butchering fish, and soldering, cooking, and packing the filled cans. As explained at about

⁵⁷ Coqualeetza school register, United Church Archives, Vancouver School of Theology, University of British Columbia.

⁵⁸ Meeting with the Seabird Indian Band, 23 November 1914, in *Evidence Submitted to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in the Province of British Columbia: Lytton Agency* (Victoria: The Commission, 1913–16), 16–18.

⁵⁹ “Residents of Seabird Island – 12 December 1918,” compiled by the Indian agent, in Blair, “Settling Seabird Island,” 122.

⁶⁰ D. Jennings to S.D. Pope, 13 April 1891, in BC Superintendent of Education, Inward Correspondence, BSA, GR 1445.

this point in time: “The contracts are made with boss Chinamen who hire their own help in their own way ... The contractor makes an advance of \$30 to \$40 to each Chinaman at the opening of the season to induce him to come. The contractor furnishes the provisions, where chiefly his profits are made. At the end of each month what he has supplied is made up and charged *pro rata* to the men in his employ. At the end of the season, if the run is short, the contractor may lose money on his contract.”⁶¹ Even though Yaow’s income fluctuated over the years, he had sufficient status for both his children to be pre-enrolled and to attend the local public school.

The 1901 census also included an Anglican household headed by Nos Oep Ah Lum, who described herself as a Gitxsan woman and the mother of Peter, Tony, and Thomas Ah Lum, who were Gitxsan and Chinese with Gitxsan as their first language. Because the family was enumerated in the Indian component of the federal census, no ages were given. This information is consistent with historian Lily Chow’s story of Ah Lum, an Omineca gold miner born in 1843 who came to Canada in 1858, partnered with a Gitxsan woman whose English name was Esther Joseph, and very profitably interspersed winter trapping with summer mining.⁶²

Shortly after their mother Esther’s death in about 1910, when the youngest child Gwen was nine, Ah Lum determined to return home to China. He wanted to take Thomas and Gwen along, but the two children did not want to go and so stayed behind to be raised by Esther’s sister. The circumstance created its own tensions. Gwen’s daughter Charlotte Sullivan, a Gitxsan hereditary chief, explained how the children perforce learned to value their double inheritance: “My mother did not have a very pleasant life in the native community. She was often looked down [upon] because she had mixed blood in her veins. Regardless, she was a very strong woman and held her head up high.” For his part, Ah Lum did not want his children to forget him. As well as leaving behind a small faded photograph of a round-faced man with a bald head, he wrote regularly from China: “Whenever my mother and uncles received a letter from their dad, they were excited and eager to know what he wrote. But they could not read Chinese characters, so they usually took the letter to grandpa’s Chinese friends in Hazelton or in Smithers who would translate the letter for them.”

Lily Chow has also written about Chow Ah Lock, who arrived in British Columbia in the 1860s aged seventeen and mined for a dozen

⁶¹ *Report*, 1902: 135.

⁶² Chow, *Chasing Their Dreams*, 4-5; also, conversations with Chow.

years before heading to the Omineca in the province's far northwest corner, where he both ran a pack train transporting goods and continued to mine so successfully that he would eventually have a lake, creek, and mining site named after him.⁶³ Chow Ah Lock settled down with a local indigenous woman named Josephine Alexander. They had a son named David who was born in 1900 and to whom his father gave the Chinese name of Chow Sai Yoke, Chow being his own proper surname.

In another indication of the ways in which relationships worked themselves out in the everyday, Chow Ah Lock's son grew up speaking both his father's southern Guangdong dialect of Taishanese and his mother's Gitksan. According to Chow Ah Lock's and Josephine's granddaughter Julie Alexander, who, when she shared her family's story with Lily Chow, still yearned for the Chinese food he used to make for them: "Both my grandparents worked very hard in the early days. My grandmother attended to the horses and worked in her own garden. In the summer she went to the bush to look for wild berries and cabbages. In winter, both of my grandparents trapped animals for fur on their trap line." One of the stories told about Chow Ah Lock has him travelling to Vancouver in 1913 loaded with gold dust and nuggets, with the intention of being naturalized as a British subject. However, upon seeing streetcars, electric lights, and motor cars for the first time, he hastened back to his wife and son. In 1937, several years after Josephine's death, Chow Ah Lock, like numerous of his contemporaries, returned to China so that he could be buried in his homeland. It may have been Chow Ah Lock's and, earlier, Ah Lum's example that caused half a dozen or more Chinese men in the Omineca to similarly partner with local indigenous women in the first years of the twentieth century.⁶⁴

Not only did many more unions similar to those described here almost certainly exist in early British Columbia, but they also continued to do so throughout the twentieth century and into the present day, with all of the stresses, as well as the satisfaction, that earlier accompanied them.⁶⁵ A son born in 1943 to a well-established Chinese farmer in the

⁶³ Chow, *Chasing Their Dreams*, 4; Chow, *Sojourners*, 108-10; conversations with Chow.

⁶⁴ Chow, *Sojourners*, 110.

⁶⁵ As examples, the marriages, in 1915 and 1916 in the Catholic church in Fort St. James, of, respectively, fifty-five-year-old Buddhist cook Ah Ye born in Hong Kong and twenty-year-old Catholic and Carrier Eugenie Sansgelau, and of twenty-seven-year-old Catholic cook Chen Tie known as Charles and twenty-one-year old Catholic and Carrier Celestine, recorded in British Columbia, Division of Vital Statistics, Marriage registrations, BCA, GR 2962, no. 15-09-158937 and 16-09-179358. For more recent unions, see the documentary produced by Karin Lee and others, *Cedar and Bamboo* (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia, 2010); and Dorothy Christian, "Articulating the Silence: Filmmaker Dorothy Christian Breaks the Secrecy between Native-Chinese Relations," *ricepaper* 9, 3 (2004): 22-31.

southern interior – a man who had been unable to bring his wife over from China – recalled that, when he was a child, his father repeatedly admonished him to pay no attention to his indigenous mother who was “just around” and who was, from the perspective of others, a household servant.⁶⁶ A descendant of a Chinese restaurant owner from the gold rush era reflected on how various people she knew, “if you [went] back a couple of generations,” were of Chinese descent: “but I also remember dad saying that you could have a Chinese for a good friend but you don’t marry them.”⁶⁷ Recollections are sometimes fragmentary, as with a self-termed “British Columbia half breed logger” in the Fraser Valley who described the woman he married in 1924 as “a Harrison River [Chehalis] Indian except there is just a little Chinese in her some where back a piece.”⁶⁸

However many Chinese-indigenous unions there were by the end of the nineteenth century, those about which we can know something testify to Chinese men’s and indigenous women’s enterprise and determination. Chung Moon, the two Ah Lums, the almost certainly two Ah Chings, and the others did not cease to be Chinese by virtue of so partnering, nor did the women in their lives become any less indigenous. But, at the same time, men were not stultified by the single partnering option of a Chinese woman, which, for most of them, would have been unobtainable. The alternative of an indigenous woman was both expedient and practical. It took most men some time to consider the possibility. They were in their mid-thirties or forties by the time they did so, a decade and a half to two decades older than the indigenous women with whom they partnered, who were very much of a child-bearing age. Ah Lum and Lucy at Rock Creek had seven children together, Ah Yuen and Lucy Aleck on Seabird Island had five, Ah Lum and Esther Joseph in the Omineca had at least four, and Yaow and Alice at Port Essington had four. While most relationships survive only as snapshots in time, they nonetheless speak to family stability. Morley Roberts’s vignette of his Chehalis meal describes the satisfaction couples took in each other and in their offspring.

Chinese men who partnered with indigenous women gained, alongside intimacy and family life, an entryway into the place with which they had cast their lot, more so than would have been the case had they restricted their sociability to a Chinatown. Opportunities were used, as with Ah Ching’s taking up land in those early years before the Chinese were

⁶⁶ Personal communication.

⁶⁷ Personal communication.

⁶⁸ Henry Pennier, *Chiefly Indian: The Warm and Witty Story of a British Columbia Half Breed Logger* (West Vancouver: Graydonald, 1972), 12.

legally prohibited from doing so. Ah Lum and Lucy took advantage of the gold discoveries at Rock Creek to pack in goods and open a general store that serviced whites alongside Chinese and indigenous people, as almost certainly did Lee Lee's and Julie's Princeton laundry. The Port Essington school board enumerated Chinese-indigenous offspring as a matter of course, and a Lytton teacher welcomed a Chinese father's contribution to a collection in her honour. Chinese-indigenous couples appear to have been accommodated by their white neighbours, including missionaries.⁶⁹ They were not, as with Ah Yuen and Lucy Aleck on Seabird Island, to be cowed.

It was at the same time not necessarily easy to live at the intersection of two strong and self-contained ways of being. While the three Osoyoos families enumerated in 1881 appear to have fraternized with indigenous counterparts across the border, Ah Lum of Rock Creek did his best to prevent his children from having contact with their mother's family, even as she taught them her language alongside the Chinese they learned from their father. Neither forgot who they were and whence they came. For all of the longevity of their unions, four of the Chinese men about whom most is known turned inward with gathering age. Ah Lum and Lucy had been together over four decades at the time that he, in his daughter's words, "went home to die." The three widowers acted similarly at the cost of leaving children behind: Ah Lum's Omineca namesake after over half a century away, Chow Ah Lock in the Omineca even longer, and Chung Moon of Rock Creek two decades or more.

Offspring of Chinese-indigenous unions variously made their way as adults. Chung Moon and Ah Lem at Rock Creek had no compunction arranging their daughters Ah Lan's and Lillian's marriages to Chinese men. Yet one of Lillian's sisters opted for an American blacksmith, her brother for an Englishwoman after conveniently not returning with a Chinese wife after taking his father home to die. In the other direction, despite the fact that her Chinese descent was held against her, Ah Lum's and Esther Joseph's daughter at Omineca was a Gitksan hereditary chief.

Comprising a likely one in six of the total number of unions in which Chinese men are recorded as having been engaged in early British Columbia, these relationships encourage us to rethink the Chinese presence. None of the accounts is complete, yet together they tell a new story. Some men living beyond Chinatown acted differently than

⁶⁹ Of the fifteen women whose religious affiliations are in the records, five were Catholic, five were Anglican, one was an Anglican convert from Catholicism, and four were Methodist. Three of the men described themselves as Methodist, two as Anglican, and twelve as Buddhist, as likely were the other men.

their urban counterparts. They took a chance, as did the women in their lives. From the perspective of the British Columbia mainstream, such families did not exist – an attitude that served them well. It is, in other words, precisely because the unions are so difficult to retrieve historically that they may have endured as well as they did.

Whatever the topic that snares our interest, we need to be open to possibilities, in this case to an alternative so obvious that it should not have slipped from view. The two groups – Chinese men and indigenous women – were both outsiders to the dominant society, meaning that their lives went largely unrecorded so long as they were lived out of view. Be they in Chinatowns or in the hinterland, Chinese men were, for the most part, unseen outside of the workplace. It was assumed that they were single, which most of them were, and, if otherwise, it did not much matter. But it does matter as soon as we consider Chinese men and indigenous women of the past on a par with ourselves, whose lives are worthy of interrogation, rather than as objects beyond our gaze and understanding. What is evident from these glimpses is that some Chinese men were not nearly so uniform in their behaviour as has generally been thought. Men were no less Chinese and indigenous women no less indigenous by virtue of taking the future into their own hands. Living beyond the constraints and the pressure towards conformity that existed in Chinatowns, some Chinese men alongside the indigenous women in their lives struck out on their own in this new place called British Columbia.