

FORUM: NAMING

It's 2017! Echoes of the Past

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AS AN EMPLOYEE OF A large institution, having a business card seems like a simple everyday matter. It contextualizes status and working relationships; it's who you are.

I would never have thought my business card, unlike my personal identity as Jane Doe citizen, would create questions for me about acceptance. "Citizen" is the part that gets queried as I'm a visible minority. Yes, I hear the common refrain: "Where are you *from*?" When I lived in Greater Vancouver, a response of "Burnaby" wasn't adequate, nor was "Vancouver," "BC," or "Canada." Only after stating my ancestral origin was the questioner satisfied, as though having been treated to a "gotcha!" moment (Tanaka 2013).

My ancestors, like those of many other Canadians, did not come from Europe. My birth certificate attests that I'm Canadian – born in Canada – and my passport affirms my Canadian status. Prior to the Second World War, "born in Canada" did not afford citizenship to one and all. Courtesy of the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923 (Figure 1), certificates belonging to each of my parents, dated 1924, establish that they were not considered citizens. Each of their respective certificates states, "This certificate does not establish legal status in Canada" (Department of Immigration and Colonization, Chinese Immigration Service, Dominion of Canada) (Figure 2). To not register would incur a penalty – that is, "a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding twelve months, or to both" (LAC 1923, 14). Their birth certificates document that they were indeed born in Canada – one near Cumberland, British Columbia, and the other in Vancouver. They were *not* immigrants as understood by today's definition (Statistics Canada 2010), yet their Registration Certificates were signed by a controller of Chinese immigration.

My business card incident may well have evoked a response similar to what I suspect my parents experienced as they became older and began to wonder about what it meant to be catalogued and registered by a controller of Chinese immigration. Who am I?

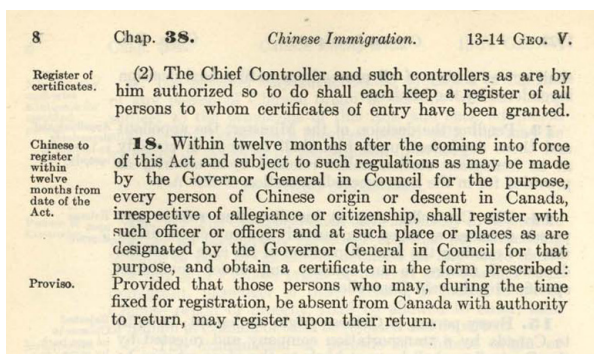


Figure 1. Excerpt of the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923, chap. 38, sec. 18. Source: LAC 1923, 8.

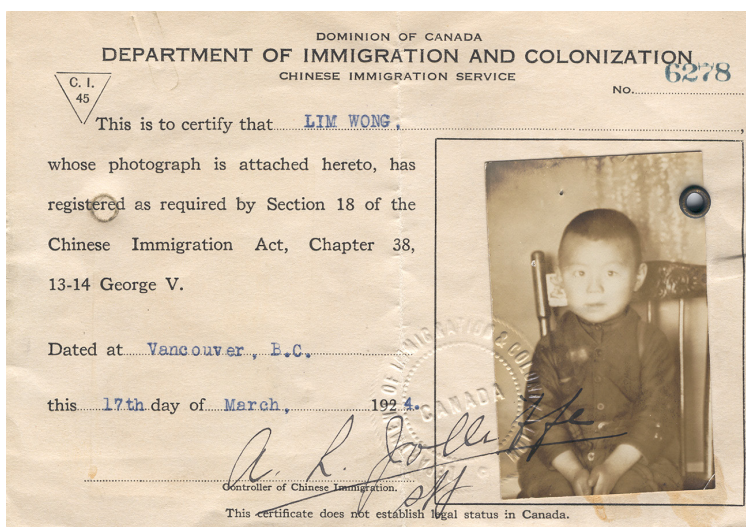


Figure 2. Registration Certificate of my father – a result of the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923.

A submission to have business cards reprinted in late September of 2016 began simply. “The incident” presented itself when a request for clarification arrived in my inbox on 6 October. To my surprise, I learned that Strategic Marketing (SM) vetted business cards and had some questions for me!

We’re not sure we have enough information on this to make an informed decision.

Here are our questions:

- What is being said in the Chinese(?) characters?
- Why are they being included here? We'd just like to understand the rationale [*sic*] behind requesting they be added. (6 October, 8:58 a.m.)

I do have Chinese characters on my business card; they represent my Chinese name just as the English-language alphabet represents my English name. English may be widely spoken in the world, but there are plenty of non-native English speakers who might be known by another name in their respective language. This includes all the Indigenous languages of Canada, whose alphabets look quite different from those used in English. According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), “1,500 million people worldwide speak English, of whom only 375 million are native speakers.” A given name can indicate your cultural identity, whether or not you speak the language associated with it. It is a part of who you are.

Besides questioning SM's involvement, I noted in my reply:

The reason for including my Chinese name in characters is that I meet individuals who are Chinese language speakers and knowing my Chinese name may be easier for them to remember. Also, I am travelling to China representing [institution's name] at an international conference as well as seeking relationships with Chinese institutions for a field school.

The institution prides itself on diversity, yet doesn't recognise that there are other languages in which a name can be written?? (6 October, 9:32 a.m.)

My exchange with the employee who was caught in the middle (6 October, 10:03 a.m.; 8 October, 4:18 p.m.) led to a plea: “Is there any way you can clear up these issues with the SM dept. They are curious about a few issues” (11 October, 10:27 a.m.). Initially, I wrote to SM – both the individual who flagged the “issues” in my printing request and the manager.

The only query that required a response was the fact that my Chinese name is not legible as written. I have since sent John [a pseudonym] other samples of my Chinese name in different font styles. These characters (my Chinese name) are needed once immediately after my English name. As noted, I have had my business card printed at least twice with the information as listed. Your queries suggest that there is some doubt about my professionalism and representation as a [institution's name] faculty member. (11 October, 10:43 a.m.)

In a conversation that I will describe as tense, I was told by the manager that I was “overreacting.” SM was pointing out that my Chinese name had been written three times and that it was not legible. *Really?* As if I would not notice this on being provided the proof? As well, a copy of my “old” business card had been submitted with my request. Ultimately, I did get a business card printed with both my names.

PART OF THE INSTITUTION’S CORE VALUES IS DIVERSITY

Diversity: we value human diversity in all its dimensions and are committed to maintaining learning and working environments which are equitable, diverse and inclusive. (online Vision Statement)

Inclusive? Valuing human diversity? I did not feel “the love” when my name became a topic of discussion that required vetting. As noted, a business card represents who you are. It is insulting to be asked “what is being said” by the Chinese characters: Would I include something that could be interpreted or understood negatively? Am I not an ambassador of the institution?

Who am I? I’m a third-generation Canadian of Chinese ancestry. Courtesy of the government of the day (through the General Register of Chinese Immigration), I know my paternal grandfather arrived in Victoria via San Francisco as a laundryman in 1890. He paid the fifty-dollar head tax (LAC 2015b). In 1910, he returned from China with my grandmother and his son as a merchant (tax exempt), again landing in Victoria (LAC 2013) (Figure 3). During my grandfather’s thirty-plus years in Canada, specifically in British Columbia, he lived, worked, and ultimately died in Cumberland’s Chinatown (*Cumberland Islander* 1924).

GENERAL REGISTER OF											CHINESE IMMIGRATION					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
No.	Name	Sex	Date of Arrival	Age	Prof. or Occ.	Place of Birth	Age	Sex	Age	Prof. or Occ.	Place of Birth	Date of Arrival	Age	Sex	Prof. or Occ.	
57876	Lam Lap Pon	male	1890	3619	115778	Laundryman	male	45	Lam Oak	China	Victoria	1910	14	female	115637	Merchant's wife
57877	Lam Chan She	female	1910	3620	115637	Merchant's wife	female	19	China	China	Victoria	1910	15	male	115778	Merchant's son
57878	Lam Ki Shun	male	1910	3621	115778	Merchant's son	male	10	Lam Oak	China	Victoria	1910	16	female	115637	Merchant's wife

Figure 3. The documentation in the General Register of Chinese Immigration of the arrival of my paternal grandfather (Lam Lap Pon), grandmother (Lam Chan She), and uncle (Lam Ki Shun) in 1910. Source: LAC 2013.

When my parents were registered in 1924 according to government edict, they were children living in a time when provincial and federal legislation continued to be regularly directed at Chinese immigrants and their descendants (see BC NDP 2014). BC politicians, in particular, stood out in voicing their anti-immigrant sentiment. During the discussion on Chinese immigration in the House of Commons, Thomas George McBride (Cariboo, Progressive) stated: “The orientals must know that they are not wanted in British Columbia ... It seems to me that if the good Lord had intended orientals and white people to live in the same country he would not have put the Pacific [O]cean between them. I think the people of the East should remain in their own countries” (Canada 1923, 2326, 2327).

Statements like McBride’s are overtly discriminatory; they originate from a belief in racial hierarchy (or classical social evolution, a.k.a. unilineal evolution). That difference was stated explicitly in the 1902 Royal Commission by one “witness”: Chinese “were a servile class and a servile class was necessary for the higher development of the Anglo-Saxon race” (Canada 1902, 22). As well, the “average” person of the day viewed Chinese as unassimilable: “They show no signs of assimilation with us. They can never be assimilated” (Canada 1902, 23). Normative behaviour (including beliefs and values) was accepted as that of white society.

Although, in 2017, the majority of Canadians associate our country and society with multiculturalism, some continue to ask who is (or should be) Canadian. This has even become a rallying cry for certain politicians (see Kellie Leitch and her Canadian values pitch, Payton 2016). As well, with Trump’s having become president south of the border, the discussion regarding privilege – what it is and who benefits from it – has become more pointed (see Starr 2017).

The issue of the business card, testifies to my personal experience in facing white privilege (see McIntosh 1988; Rothman 2014). Difference associated with language (my Chinese name) raised questions. The fact that I have been employed for twenty-plus years and that my business card has been printed multiple times with the same information did not seem to matter – my name, my personhood, was a potential “problem” requiring clarification. Who else has to explain their name? I suspect no one whose language is based solely on the Roman alphabet.

My parents’ personhood was reduced to a number on their respective 1924 Registration Certificates (Figure 4). In a similar fashion, so was that of my grandparents: in addition to their names, they were identified in the General Register of Chinese Immigration by a number. If an authority

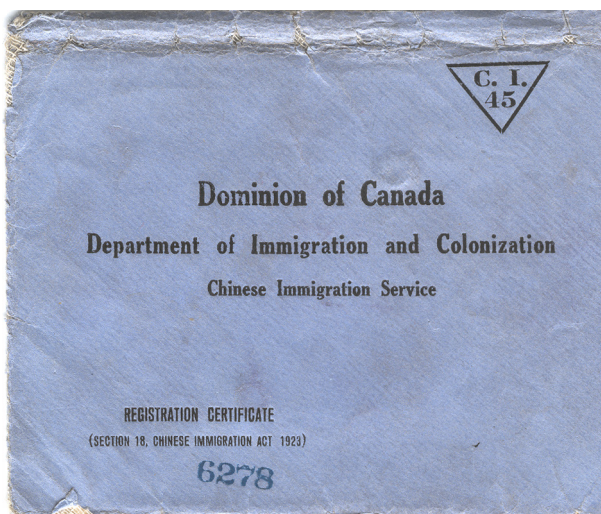


Figure 4. Envelope of my father's Registration Certificate (note the only identification: #6278).

wants to track individuals, numbers are uniquely suited to enable them to do so. You don't need to know whether the spelling is correct or whether you have misidentified an individual who has the same name as five others:¹ you have the individual. I found my maternal grandmother because of the *number* on her stepdaughter's entry certificate (Figure 5), not because of her name. The number was the link to recovering my other family members (Figure 6).

A number diminishes a sense of personhood. A name can say something of your origins, but ultimately it states who you are. I wonder whether Grandfather Lim was present in Victoria during the 1891 Canada Census. Although the census manual states, "The names of living persons, all belonging to each Census family (according to the rules here in before laid down) are to be entered in full" (Canada 1891, 12), you can scroll through pages upon pages representing Johnson Street Ward of Victoria and see nothing more than the word "Chinaman" – sometimes replaced with that of "Chinawoman," "Chinaboy," or "Chinagirl." As

¹ Certain British names, such as John Smith, are common. In the 1901 Census on Vancouver Island, twelve people had that name, and only two were unique, John D. and John L. Five were simply John Smith (Automated Genealogy 2017). If there is a concern and a desire to monitor, then assigning people unique registered numbers makes sense. There are several examples of identifying people through the use of numbers, whether contemporary (e.g., prison registers and Indian Status cards) or earlier (registration of Japanese Canadians and the serial tattooing at Auschwitz).

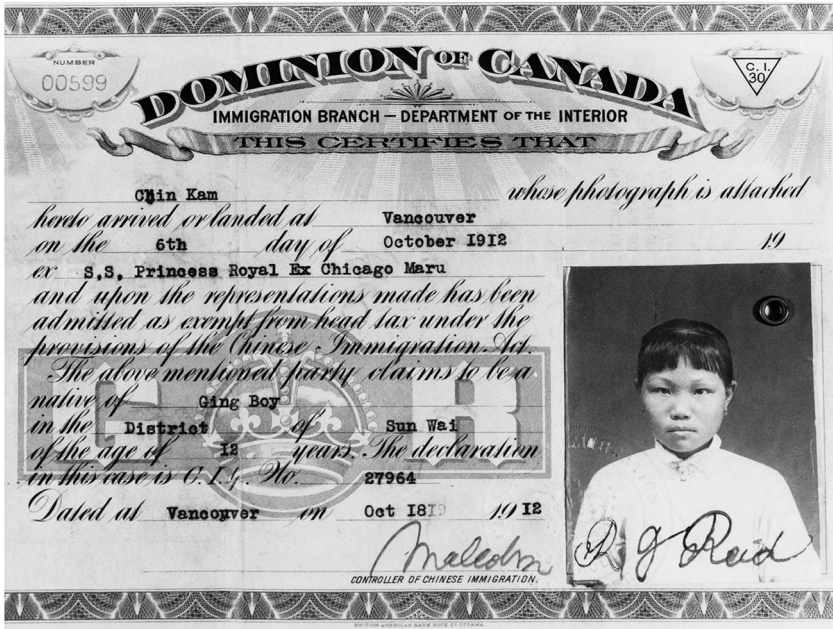


Figure 5. My mother’s half-sister’s entry certificate. It provided traceable numbers and a date. Image courtesy of Stanley Wong.

707001	1912	Jan 20		21(0120) 211001	✓	19				
707002	1912	Hoo Shee (Mrs. Chin) (nee Hoo)	Wife	21(0120) 211002	✓	24	Lin Maru	Hoo Shee		wife Bing Bay
707003	1912	Chin Kwan	Wife	21(0120) 211003	✓	18	Bing Bay	Lin Wei		daughter
707004	1912	Chin Bay		21(0120) 211004	✓	8				

Figure 6. In discovering Chin Kam in the General Register of Chinese Immigration, I realized that my grandmother’s name, Hoo Shee, was listed above her stepdaughter’s. Source: LAC 2015a.

well, if identified as “Japanese” or “Indian,” you were equally nameless² (see Figure 7). For each, I want to know who they are – I want to know their names. “Chinaman” was someone’s father, husband, brother, uncle, or son; his name, his relationships, linked him to a whole network of people in Victoria and beyond.

The lack of names seems more striking, perhaps purposeful, when the enumerator’s duty is stressed: “He must endeavor – 1. Not to omit anything of importance” (Canada 1891, 6). In contrast, Nanaimo’s Middle

² Of the 2,371 individuals listed in the B2 Johnson Street Ward, 67.6 percent were nameless: Chinese 1,542 (65 percent), Japanese 11 (0.5 percent), and “Indian” 49 (2.1 percent) (LAC 1891b). Nineteen additional “Indians” had a first name, such as “Indian woman Lucy,” “Indian woman Annie,” “Indian girl Mary,” “Indian boy Peter,” “Indian James,” or “Indian Charley” (LAC 1891b, 54 and 56).

The image shows two pages of a 1891 census form for Victoria, British Columbia. The top page is numbered 62 and the bottom page is numbered 63. Both pages are titled 'CENSUS OF CANADA, 1891' and 'RECENSEMENT DU CANADA, 1891'. The top page lists individuals with names like 'Chen', 'Chiu', 'Liu', and 'Lin'. The bottom page lists individuals with names like 'Chen', 'Chiu', 'Liu', and 'Lin'. The columns include 'NAME', 'SEX', 'AGE', 'MARRIED', 'PLACE OF BIRTH', 'RELIGION', 'PROFESSION, OCCUPATION or TRADE', 'EDUCATION', 'SPEAKS ENGLISH', 'SPEAKS OTHER LANGUAGE', 'SPEAKS CHINESE', 'SPEAKS JAPANESE', 'SPEAKS HINDI', 'SPEAKS OTHER LANGUAGE', 'SPEAKS CHINESE', 'SPEAKS JAPANESE', 'SPEAKS HINDI', 'SPEAKS OTHER LANGUAGE'. The bottom page has handwritten notes like 'No name' and 'No name' in the name column.

Figure 7. Victoria Census, 1891, Johnson Street Ward. No individual names of non-European descent are identified – top, Chinese, Japanese, and “Indian”; bottom, only Chinese. Source: LAC 1891b, 58 and 63.

Ward identifies page after page of *named* Chinese individuals (see LAC 1891a). Why are these names missing in Victoria? Without a name, you are one among the mass and more easily dismissed, both figuratively and literally – a stranger, an outsider.

To name is to acknowledge personhood. Like many, I have many identities, among them “Canadian,” “British Columbian,” “Vancouver Islander,” “photographer,” “educator,” “friend,” “daughter,” “sister,” “aunt.” Who am I? I am Imogene Lim; I am also 林慕珍.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

One respondent who contributed to this Forum recently withdrew their piece stating to us their fear of political reprisal for themselves and their family. In this small space we wish to remind readers that it is not safe for everyone in British Columbia to publicly write about the politics of naming.

Naming as Theft and Misdirection

GIKINO'AMAAGEWININI

MOST OF US CAN'T remember the precise moment we were named as sometimes we are given names before we even come into existence. (Perhaps there is a cellular memory of this naming event buried somewhere deep within us, but that possibility is beyond the scope of this exploration.) These first names, as they are usually given to us before we can form meaningful words, don't involve any choice on our part. Forces beyond our control determine them. These forces are very often in the form of people, and these people are quite often bonded to us either by biology or by some other sacred arrangement. Either way, our names carry with them a mystery that is typically infused with love and vision. This vision is comprised of one eye on the past and one eye to the future. In a real way, our names are calling out to both the alpha and the omega – to those who walked before and those who are yet to come. They connect us to our relations and root us to a place and time. They both symbolize that connection and *are* that connection, in that the loose rhythm and aural vibration of our names become us.

Imagine a family of six children all given names by their mother and father that connect them directly to their ancestry. Each of these names is specially chosen and in their language. Not too hard to picture. Now imagine these same children being forced by the Indian agent to see the local Anglican minister, who proceeds to rename all the children with arbitrary English names. This is what happened to my dad and all of