

# INTRODUCTION

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JOHN PRICE AND CHRISTINE O'BONSAWIN

**T**HIS SPECIAL ISSUE originated with papers presented at the annual *BC Studies* conference held at Vancouver Island University in May 2017. The conference theme that year was “(Un)Settling British Columbia,” and it aimed to acknowledge and confront the legacies of colonialism, to disturb traditional perspectives on the province, and to re-examine its economic, social, and political systems. Scholars, community researchers, and activists affiliated with the project Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity, and the Transpacific (ACVI – <http://vi-asiancanadians.ca>) participated as the conference theme overlapped in many ways with ACVI’s focus on documenting and (re)conceptualizing Asian Canadian histories on Vancouver Island.

Funded by a four-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant, the ACVI project partnered with small museums on Vancouver Island and adjacent islands to collect stories and archival materials related to Asian Canadian (including Japanese, Chinese, and South Asian Canadians) and Indigenous peoples on the islands. It also drew attention to allies who, in standing up for the rights of the marginalized, were harbingers of Canada’s multicultural future.

John Price at the University of Victoria headed the project, and initial research associates included Imogene Lim (Vancouver Island University) and Rita Kaur Dhamoon, Tusa Shea, and Christine O’Bonsawin (the last three also at the University of Victoria). Partner museums over the course of the project have included Cowichan Valley Museum and Archives, Kaatza Station Museum and Archives, Cumberland Museum and Archives, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Alberni Valley Museum, Nanaimo Museum, Nanaimo Community Archives, the Museum at Campbell River, Salt Spring Archives and Library, Sidney Museum and Archives, Esquimalt Municipal Archives, Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre, U’mista Cultural Centre, and the Japanese Garden Society on Saltspring Island. Vancouver Island University also contributed

substantially to the project. With their assistance and the work of Steven Davies, Kyla Fitzgerald, Connie Graham, Wenjuan Lu, Owen Mar, Sonia Manak, Jennifer Seidel, Tad Suzuki, Jeff Tanaka, Macayla Yan, Brian Smallshaw, Faith Takashita, and Jillian Valpy, the ACVI project visited many communities, gathered documents, conducted interviews, and worked collaboratively with our partners to unearth stories long forgotten or marginalized.

The ACVI project also convened workshops in Nanaimo (Snuneymuxw territory), Victoria (Lekwungen territories), and Saltspring Island (W̱SÁNEĆ [Saanich] and Quw'utsun' [Cowichan] territories) that brought together First Nations and Asian Canadians to share stories and perspectives from the past and present. ACVI also partnered with UVIC Faculty of Humanities to appoint Dr. Nicholas XEMFOLTW Claxton as a visiting Indigenous scholar and advisor to the ACVI project.

The collection of essays in this special issue follows on the heels of an earlier ACVI production, a travelling exhibit, *150 Years and Counting: Fighting for Justice on the Coast*. A collaborative effort by the ACVI team, the ten-panel exhibit and an accompanying booklet by the same title focus on the stories of resistance to colonialism in the province, highlighting Indigenous and Asian Canadian stories of courage in the face of racism. Over the course of a year, the exhibit was shown in locations all over Vancouver Island. It was amplified in 2018 with three additional panels highlighting the stories of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation (MMFN) with whom ACVI had been partnering since its inception. A delegation of over twenty people attended the 2018 Summerfest at Yuquot, hosted by the Land of Maquinna Cultural Society and the MMFN. The delegation was a tripartite effort that included ACVI as well as the Asian Canadian and Asian Migration (ACAM) Program from UBC, and the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia.

The research contributions in this special issue reflect the ongoing work of ACVI. They also emulate the theme of our *BC Studies* cover art, *Flight through the Four Winds*, by Master Carver Sanford Williams. As represented through the work of Williams, Yuquot (or Friendly Cove) is a sacred site – it reflects the natural wonder where the mountains greet the Pacific tides, creating a space emblematic of much of the Pacific coast. It was here that the Mowachaht thrived, just as the eagle soared through and with the four winds that so often buffet this precious intersection of land and ocean. It was here that Europeans came and tried to claim the coast as their own – as it turns out, an ill wind that created great

storms for the Mowachaht/Muchalaht and other Indigenous peoples on the Pacific. For too long, however, the dominant perception was that Europeans appeared to be the only wind that approached these shores. As we illustrate in this special issue, that was far from the case – not only were other winds and people arriving, from the Pacific and Asia, but the eagle itself soared with these winds, travelling across the Pacific to arrive in places such as Hawai'i and the Pacific's western edge.

This special issue tries to capture the diverse winds that came and went from Yuquot as well as other areas on the islands, all the while keeping a keen eye on Sanford's Indigenous eagle, which continued to soar through the storms that accompanied colonization. Accordingly, this special issue opens with an examination of Comekela's story as well as Yuquot's role as a strategic depot in the Pacific. In this article, John Price focuses on Mowachaht/Muchalaht, Hawaiian, and Chinese oceanic travels, exposing how we can revise and thus rewrite (and rereight) our histories. As Price demonstrates, a rereading of the history allows us to conceive of a different transpacific history, one that rejects the centrality of Europeans and one that connects Indigenous peoples of North America and the Pacific Islands with Asia. Zhongping Chen's article on Vancouver Island and the transpacific Chinese diaspora reveals how Vancouver Island helped connect dispersed Chinese communities through interlocking merchant companies, community organizations, and political associations in a transpacific context. Chen brings transnational and diasporic perspectives to the history of Vancouver Island by establishing the Island's important historical role as a transpacific portal and anchor for the Chinese diaspora, which evolved on local and global planes between 1788 and 1918.

Neilesh Bose examines the work and life of Taranath Das (1884–1958), who was a politically active South Asian migrant in Canada in the early twentieth century. As Bose reports, Das was one of the first politically active migrants at this time to link the struggles of South Asians in Canada, specifically in British Columbia, to the broader efforts of Indian nationalists globally. Bose underscores how Das's anti-colonial work during his time in Victoria and Vancouver (1907–1914) contributed to the burgeoning networks of South Asian anti-colonial resistance to the British Empire in the Pacific Northwest and thus operated alongside that of noteworthy Indian revolutionary groups and individuals of his time. In his article on Victoria City Council's decision to remove the John A. Macdonald statue, Timothy J. Stanley takes on the matter of collective remembering, questioning the commemoration of problematic

and controversial colonial historical figures such as Macdonald. Stanley considers this decision and the process that ensued as a larger effort to remake collective remembering, recognizing that Canada was constructed on the territories of Indigenous peoples, and further arguing that such remaking serves as an act of reconciliation consistent with what is set out in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (2015). Finally, John Price and Nicholas XEMFOLTW Claxton present a thought-provoking article on Indigenous sovereignty in British Columbia, particularly as it relates to concepts of land-holding and governance expressed in the SENĆOŦEN language of the WSÁNEĆ people and the Mowachat-Muchalalt (Nuu-chah-nulth) concept *habuuti*. In doing so, Price and Claxton ultimately disavow the regional and international authority of the Doctrine of Discovery and the Treaty of Oregon, arguing that First Nations sovereignty in British Columbia remains intact and that the lands of the province remain theirs, legally and historically.

The special issue includes a passionate, even courageous, reflection offered by Margarita James, a Stlatlumnh, Lílwat, Visayan (Filipina) woman and member of MMFN, who shares stories of family, lived experience, and her connections to territories and communities on both sides of the Pacific, many of which she has called home at various points in her life. Following her story is a section of community-based research focusing on histories from the Japanese Canadian communities on the islands. The pieces by Masako Fukawa, Beth Boyce, and Brian Smallshaw point to the enduring challenges that individuals and communities faced as well as to their tremendous contributions over the years. In its own way, each piece highlights specific dynamics – lifting the veil of silence that has endured over the Nikkei community in Nanaimo; analyzing the important contributions of the Murakami women of Saltspring Island (the first piece in an academic journal to do so); and the unique tale of the Matsunaga family of Campbell River who were perhaps the only fisher family able to reclaim their boat, the *Soyokaze*, which had been seized and unjustly sold at the time of the great uprooting of 1942–49. These pieces take on a particular significance in light of the National Association of Japanese Canadians’ decision to demand redress from the BC government. The association met with Minister Lisa Beare in November 2019, at which time it submitted its report, *Recommendations for Redressing Historical Wrongs against Japanese Canadians in BC*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of Japanese Canadians, BC Redress Steering Committee, *Recommendations for Redressing Historical Wrongs against Japanese Canadians in BC: Community*

We lift our hands to the many people who made this special issue possible. First, to the countless community members who joined us at various ACVI-sponsored events throughout the years. Thank you/Wliwni for sharing with us your personal and familial histories, many of whom recounted stories of resistance, survival, perseverance, and resurgence. Thank you/Wliwni to the contributors to this special issue. In many regards, this special issue deviates from traditional scholarly collections as it endeavours to place front and centre the voices, worldviews, histories, and experiences of community-based and community-focused researchers. We are grateful to our contributors for their commitment to the project and their patience throughout the process. Finally, in acknowledging unwavering commitment and patience, we are particularly indebted to Paige Raibmon and Leanne Coughlin of *BC Studies*, who were there every step of the way, shepherding us through the complex processes of peer review, editing, and production of this special issue. Thank you/Wliwni to you both for your guidance, leadership, and steadfast support for this special issue.

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*Consultations Report* (Winnipeg: National Association of Japanese Canadians, 2019), [http://najc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NAJC\\_BC\\_Redress\\_report\\_only20191031.1421.pdf](http://najc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NAJC_BC_Redress_report_only20191031.1421.pdf).