

BEYOND BEING OTHERS: *Chinese Canadians as National History*

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EVEN THOUGH CHINESE have influenced Canada's society since the 1850s, much of their history has been erased. Over time, conscious acts of memory-making and oblivion obscured the past. The Chinese Canadian case provides a classic example of history's role in the nation-making process, the creation of an "imagined community."² Before the late twentieth century, most historians saw Canada as a European settler nation, so they did not deeply inquire into Chinese Canadian perspectives.³ After Canada became more multicultural, historical memory changed. Many scholars explored how white race prejudice shaped a past era of anti-Asian exclusion (1880s to 1940s). Fewer scholars delved into what Chinese Canadians actually thought and did; further, these few focused mainly on Chinese as a separate and distinctive group.⁴ In cities and towns, diverse Canadians met each other daily, but

¹ All Chinese language translations are by the author. Support from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Maryland, College Park is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks to Troy S. Goodfellow, Andrea Goldman, Saverio Giovacchini, Robyn Muncy, and the two anonymous reviewers. This article was first delivered at the Refracting Pacific Canada Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2007.

² On "imagined communities" and nation building, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006). See also Timothy J. Stanley, "'Chinamen, Wherever We Go': Chinese Nationalism and Guangdong Merchants in British Columbia, 1871-1911," *Canadian Historical Review* 77(4) (December 1996): 501-02.

³ For example, see older histories such as Edgar McInnis, *Canada: A Social and Political History* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964); Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: McMillan, 1971); and Eric Nicol, *Vancouver* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1970).

⁴ W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Patricia E. Roy's trilogy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-1941* (Vancouver: UBC Press,

a more fully integrated history has yet to be written.⁵ This article uses Chinese-language evidence to put Chinese Canadians back into their own history. In doing so, it begins to suggest a long forgotten alternative “imagined community” of diverse, mobile, and global Canadians.

Chinese-language evidence from British Columbia reveals how Chinese sojourners in Canada, a group presumed to be alien, were deeply immersed in the give-and-take of Canadian politics. Between 1885 and 1947, Chinese organized a large-scale evasion of anti-Chinese immigration laws: the Chinese Head Tax (1885–1924) and the Chinese Immigration Act (1923–47).⁶ A good many Chinese Canadians also slipped into the United States in defiance of the US Chinese Exclusion Act (1882–1943). These laws were intended to quell Chinese traditions of free movement between Canada, China, and the United States.⁷ With the help of European–Canadian political allies, however, Chinese Canadians’ transnational way of life continued. Though illegal entry and exit has attracted little interest from Canadian scholars,⁸ it runs throughout the nation’s history as a shadowy counterpart of legal settlement.⁹ The impact of illegal immigration also lasted well beyond

2003); and *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941–67* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Li Donghai, *Jianada Huaqiao Shi* (Taipei: Zhonghua Dadian, 1967); Harry Con, Ronald J. Con, Graham Johnson, Edgar Wickberg, William E. Willmott, and Edgar Wickberg, eds., *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982); Anthony Chan, *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983); Denise Helly, *Les Chinois à Montréal, 1877–1951* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1987); Paul Yee, *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of Chinese in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1988); Peter S. Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Wing Chung Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945–80: The Pursuit of Identity and Power* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); Huang Kunzhang and Wu Jinping, *Huaqiao, Huaren Shi* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2001).

⁵ Robert Harney, “Ethnicity and Neighbourhoods,” in *If One Were to Write a History*, ed. Pierre Anctil and Bruno Ramirez (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1991), 92–117.

⁶ Following convention in the field, dates are given starting with the passage of the legislation and ending with the conclusion of its active enactment. The Chinese Head Tax charged Chinese immigrant labourers an entry fee of \$50, which, by 1904, had risen to \$500. The Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 barred the entry of all Chinese starting in July 1924, which accounts for overlap in dates.

⁷ Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, 61, 155–56, and *The Oriental Question*, 55–75; Erika Lee, “Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion along the U.S. Borders with Canada and Mexico, 1882–1924,” *Journal of American History* 89 (1): 2002, 54–86; Norman Buchignani and Doreen Indra, “Vanishing Acts: Illegal Immigration in Canada as a Sometime Social Issue,” in *Illegal Immigration in America: A Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines and Karen E. Rosenblum (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 422.

⁸ James D. Cameron, “Canada’s Struggle with Illegal Entry on Its West Coast: The Case of Fred Yoshy and Japanese Migrants before the Second World War,” *BC Studies* 146 (Summer 2005): 37–62.

⁹ See Buchignani and Indra, “Vanishing Acts,” 415–43 for a historical overview of the significance of illegal immigration.

border crossings. During the Second World War, Chinese Canadians, including many illegal immigrants, also played an active role in bringing Canada's age of anti-Asian exclusion to an end. The popular image of the Second World War as a moment of unity and racial epiphany leaves out struggles of racial minorities to have their voices heard and their particular concerns addressed.¹⁰ Historians have seen the broader social environment as the main actor, whereas Chinese appear in the story as "powerless" petitioners lobbying for change.¹¹ Chinese-language sources portray Chinese Canadians as more active political agents. During the war, over five thousand Chinese Canadian war workers in British Columbia organized illegal strikes, forcing the question of race discrimination onto the political agenda. The first example of this – illegal immigration – allows us to explore new research directions related to the history of exclusion; the second example – wartime protest – offers us new ways of thinking about the process of inclusion. Together, illegal immigration and wartime protest suggest a wider history of interaction and influence than scholars have usually presumed.

During the early twentieth century, Chinese Canadians were Canada's largest non-European ethnic group aside from First Nations peoples. At the time, most British and French Canadians believed the Chinese to be an alien race.¹² Even as late as 1941, Canada's population was 98 percent European, 80 percent of whom reported British or French ancestry.¹³ British Columbia, where most Asians lived, stood out as an exception. Nearly one-tenth of its people were non-white, and 5 percent were Asian Canadians.¹⁴ However, Asians in British Columbia had no formal access to political power as the province disenfranchised all Asian Canadians. As targets of racism and innovators of resistance, Chinese Canadians pioneered political patterns that other groups followed.

Since racism sharply limited Chinese Canadians' formal political options, their resistance to exclusion often took indirect forms. However,

¹⁰ Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship*, 148–85; Chan, *Gold Mountain*, 145–47; Li, *The Chinese in Canada*, 90–91; Yee, *Saltwater City*, 105. On the popular image of Canada's Second World War as the "good war," see Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 3–4.

¹¹ Li, *The Chinese in Canada*, 91; on "powerless politics," see Chan, *Gold Mountain*, 145–47.

¹² Roy notes national anti-Chinese sentiment in *A White Man's Province*, 62–63. Her discussion of popular views of Chinese as "inassimilable" (Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 26–54) echoes many wider themes in anti-Chinese thought circulating throughout the Canadian, American, and British worlds. Beliefs that Chinese were alien also existed in Quebec, as discussed in Helly, *Les Chinois à Montréal*, 137–52.

¹³ Canada Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Eighth Census of Canada 1941* (Ottawa: Canada Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1946), 3:128–29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:164–65.

historians have focused most on Chinese Canadians' direct responses to discrimination. They have studied English-language petitions, legal cases, and lobbying as part of the struggle to create a more inclusive Canadian citizenship.¹⁵ While valuable, the format of these communications is dictated by the context of the petition. Further, Chinese responses within Eurocentric settings only tell part of the story. Before 1947, Chinese in British Columbia were a disenfranchised and partly illegal immigrant community. They were least influential when they directly challenged mainstream power. Scholars' emphasis on racial exclusion has thus led to a second erasure: the belief that Chinese Canadian history is so estranged from the rest of Canada that it is a separate, specialized topic.¹⁶

Chinese Canadians' migratory culture also created conceptual challenges to their integration into nationally bounded histories of Canada. Crossing back and forth across the Pacific, and between Canada and the United States, they acted as what scholars term a "transnational" people.¹⁷ One approach to restoring Chinese to national history, therefore, refutes their past image as "sojourners." These scholars argue that white racism, not Chinese intent, blocked settlement in Canada.¹⁸ However, this is only part of the story. China historians also have shown quite conclusively that most early Chinese who came to Canada were actually "sojourners," though some changed their plans.¹⁹ National

¹⁵ Roy's trilogy (*A White Man's Province, The Oriental Question, The Triumph of Citizenship*); Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada* (Toronto: Osgoode Society and University of Toronto Press, 1999). Timothy J. Stanley, "Bringing Anti-Racism into Historical Explanation: The Victoria Chinese Students' Strike of 1922-3 Revisited," *Canadian Historical Association Journal* 13 (2002): 141-65. Timothy J. Stanley, "White Supremacy, Chinese Schooling, and School Segregation in Victoria: The Case of the Chinese Students' Strike, 1922-1923," *Historical Studies in Education* 2: 2 (1990): 287-305.

¹⁶ The literature's focus on majority policies towards Asian minorities, and the latter's reaction, arose only partly from the linguistic challenges of dealing with Asian-language evidence. Language barriers alone cannot explain why Chinese Canadians were not conceptually integrated into Canadian history. In 1982, Con et al.'s *From China to Canada* was the first national history of Chinese Canadians that displayed extensive research into Chinese-language sources. From a research standpoint, it was arguably one of the finest, most ground-breaking research projects on the topic. Over twenty-five years later, few scholars have built on its insights.

¹⁷ From an emigrant perspective, Chinese Canadian transnationalism appeared similar to Chinese Americans' transnationalism as described in Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), albeit with a US-Canada dimension. Also, transnationalism was not unique to Chinese. Many Europeans also cherished their ties to the old country and kept their future options after coming to Canada.

¹⁸ Anthony Chan, "'Orientalism' and Image Making: The Sojourner in Canadian History," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 9, 3 (1981): 37-46. Stanley, "Chinamen, Wherever We Go."

¹⁹ Con et al., *From China to Canada*, 5-7; and discussion of the *qiaokan*, emigrant magazines, in Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 124-55.

histories have regarded these sojourners as economic tools and settlers thwarted by prejudice, but, as immigration historian Donna Gabaccia writes, they are “nowhere men” with regard to conceptions of the nation’s community.²⁰

National history has focused on immigrant settlers, but mobile sojourners also influenced Canada’s past. Migration suffused early Chinese Canadian communities. Chinese often felt a deep sense of personal connectedness to more than one nation, whether by kith and kin or by the imagined ties of culture and memory.²¹ National discourse on both sides of the Pacific imagined them as permanent foreigners,²² but Chinese Canadians felt rooted in complex ways. The majority of early Chinese came from China as sojourners, temporary migrants who worked abroad for many years, often decades. Eventually, most Chinese left Canada for the United States or China. Chinese observers estimated departure rates involved from half to over two-thirds of arrivals.²³ Whether settler or sojourner, most Chinese Canadians sent remittances to relatives in China.²⁴ Chinese in Canada also had close ties to the United States – ties made tighter by illegal Chinese emigration to that country.²⁵ Even Chinese Canadian-born children saw life as something that involved moving across borders.²⁶ By the early twentieth century, generations of Chinese Canadians had experienced China, Canada, and the United States as a single field of opportunity. They cherished

²⁰ See, for example, Peter Waite, “Between Three Oceans: The Challenges of a Continental Destiny,” in *The Illustrated History of Canada*, ed. Craig Brown (Toronto: Key Porter, 2002), 363, 393; Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad, with Veronica Strong-Boag, eds., *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, vol. 2, *1867 to Present* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman, 1993). On conceptual issues with American parallels, see Donna R. Gabaccia, “Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History,” *Journal of American History* 86:3 (December 1999): 115–34.

²¹ *Daban Gongbao*, 1914–1945.

²² Chan, “‘Orientalism’ and Image Making,” 37–46.

²³ Liang Qichao, *Xin Dalu Youji* (Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1967), 233. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 33-146, vol. 1-6, Commission to Investigate Alleged Chinese Frauds and Opium Smuggling on the Pacific Coast Fonds (hereafter RCCF [Royal Commission on Chinese Frauds]), vol. 1, 6–7, 1910; *Vancouver World*, 16–17 January 1911; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 19 December 1910; Foon Sien Wong, “The Chinese,” in *Strangers Entertained: A History of Ethnic Groups in British Columbia*, ed. John Norris (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1971), 209–19.

²⁴ Con et al., *From China to Canada*, 6.

²⁵ *Daban Gongbao* regularly reported on news from Chinese-American communities (1914–45).

²⁶ Stanford University, Hoover Institution Archives, Survey of Race Relations (hereafter SRR), box 24, item 24-20, “Visit the Lam Family,” item 24-21, 1924, “Visit Miss Hellaby, Anglican Missionary,” 1924. On the SRR as a Canadian source, see Lisa R. Mar, “From Diaspora to North American Civil Rights: Chinese Canadian Ideas, Identities, and Brokers in Vancouver, British Columbia, 1924–1960” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2002), 102–20. See also Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

movement across borders as a way of life and believed it to be their right.²⁷ Chinese saw that Canada's many other sojourners from Europe and Asia behaved similarly.²⁸ Neither anti-Chinese laws nor repeated acts of racial violence would drive them out.

This article's main evidence comes from two Chinese-language newspapers from 1914 to 1945, *Dahan Gongbao* (the *Chinese Times*) of Vancouver and fragments of *Xin Minguo Bao* (the *New Republic*) of Victoria.²⁹ In 1924, *Dahan Gongbao* claimed a circulation of four thousand; *Xin Minguo Bao* was probably comparable. Both papers circulated throughout British Columbia and Canada.³⁰ No Canadian Chinese-language newspapers have been preserved for the pre-1914 period. My references to that time rely on surviving Chinese-language documents such as memoirs and letters in order to interpret English-language testimony. Chinese-language sources matter because they constituted a public sphere that was also private because it was largely inaccessible to Canada's authorities and other non-Chinese. Feeling safe, Chinese spoke most freely among themselves, creating a remarkable documentary record of how a transnational migrant community, and illegal immigrants, helped shape Canada's history.³¹

NEGOTIATING BORDERS

Chinese had lived in British Columbia since the time of the 1858 gold rush,³² so they saw their own history in pioneering terms. Li Donghai recalled that, during his childhood in Guangdong, China, he had met

²⁷ *Dahan Gongbao*, 16 June 1924.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1943.

²⁹ *Dahan Gongbao* is the only Chinese-language Canadian newspaper published before the 1950s to survive in a nearly complete run. I also consulted a large collection of clippings from *Xin Minguo Bao* contained in the Foon Sien Wong Papers at UBC's Rare Books and Special Collections. Wong was a community leader, journalist, translator, and editor of *Xin Minguo Bao*. *Xin Minguo Bao* was an organ of China's Nationalist Party, the *Guomindang*. A global Chinese emigrant fraternal association, the Chinese Freemasons (the Chee Kung Tong), published *Dahan Gongbao*. It had no relation to the English Freemasons. Both newspapers published considerable Canadian content.

³⁰ SRR, box 24, item 24-6, "Interview with Lum Hing, translator for the *Chinese Times*," 1924. Lum's estimate of four thousand copies for *Dahan Gongbao* and his discussion of the paper's markets came at a time when three Chinese-language newspapers – *Dahan Gongbao*, *Xin Minguo Bao*, and *Jianada Chenbao* – were in competition in British Columbia. *Xin Minguo Bao* probably had comparable circulation numbers to *Dahan Gongbao*.

³¹ This article presents brief, very abridged examples drawn from my larger book manuscript about Chinese-language views of early Chinese Canadians' political interactions with and influences upon their neighbours.

³² Con et al., *From China to Canada*, 13-20.

many retired Chinese Canadian workers who recounted bitter stories about building Canada's transcontinental railway and about Canadians' ingratitude.³³ On both sides of the Pacific, Chinese cast their role in Canadian history as conquerors of the wilderness. The British had been unable to develop Canada, so Chinese had opened up the country. Through their hard work, Chinese had earned a place in Canada, and they felt entitled to keep it.³⁴

Canada's imposition of anti-Chinese immigration laws between 1885 and 1947 incited universal opposition among Chinese Canadians. From their ancestral villages in Guangdong's countryside to North America's corridors of power, Chinese organized resistance to their exclusion. They mobilized resources in Canada, China, Hong Kong, and the United States, creating political influence by drawing together all the linkages between their Pacific world and Canada. Their popular resistance would interact with the Canadian state's first steps towards immigration control, and this had a lasting impact on its institutional culture.³⁵

At the time, Canada's immigration system was particularly designed to slow Chinese movement across borders. Canada's Chinese Head Tax (1885-1924) attempted to curtail the entry of Chinese labourers.³⁶ It was the nation's first immigration restriction: henceforth, colour would become a criterion for legal entry into Canada. Most Chinese immigrants already borrowed money in order to come to Canada. They did not want to incur additional debt by paying Canada's head tax, which, by 1904, had risen to five hundred dollars, a sum greater than most Chinese Canadian workers' annual wages.³⁷ Enforcing the Chinese head tax also required Canada to set up an extensive new immigration control system. This closely resembled the American system of protracted Chinese detention and interrogation, which had been set up in 1882.³⁸ This Chinese immigration control system set precedents that later affected

³³ UBC Archives and Special Collections, Chinese Canadian Research Collection (CCRC), box 25, file 54; Li Donghai, *Jianada Huaqiao Shi*, trans. by Ma Sen, no.

³⁴ *Dahan Gongbao*, 16 June 1924.

³⁵ Neither Canada's Chinese immigration system nor Chinese Canadian resistance has yet been studied in great depth. However, parallel scholarship on the similar American system provides convincing arguments for the interplay between Chinese resistance and the development of exclusionary policies. See Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 55-89; Estelle T. Lau, *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

³⁶ Con et. al., *From China to Canada*, 55-57.

³⁷ Michael Williams, "Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta *Qiaoxiang*," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 2 (2004): 257-82; Liang, *Xin Dalu Youji*, 228-29.

³⁸ See note 33.

other Asian immigrants. Though Canada regulated immigration from other Asian countries through legal methods different from those used by the United States,³⁹ officials in both countries employed the same institutional processes.

At Canada's borders, Chinese prospects depended on officials who wielded absolute power over their futures and who had little accountability.⁴⁰ Many Chinese Canadians, both immigrants and Canadian-born, had unpleasant memories of being detained as they arrived by sea or rail.⁴¹ As passenger ships from China landed at Vancouver's port, immigration guards separated Chinese from the joyous crowd of disembarking passengers and led them to a nearby Canadian immigration detention building.⁴² There they languished in jail cells for days, weeks, or months while officials questioned them about their identity and background. The detailed questioning could ensnare both the honest and the dishonest. Ultimately, this extended examination determined whether a particular Chinese would be allowed to enter Canada. To ensure that the Chinese head tax was paid, officials had to investigate whether the identity claims of Chinese Canadians were true. They also documented each person's story to compare with those of future Chinese arrivals. The result was a Kafkaesque system of questioning that created great anxiety for the legitimate and illegitimate alike. Immi-

³⁹ Canada restricted Japanese through a 1907 agreement with Japan, while barring East Indians through a "continuous journey" regulation that "required all immigrants to have purchased tickets to Canada from their source country, which could not be done in India." See Buchignani and Indra, "Vanishing Acts," 420-21. Canada's restriction policies regarding Chinese and East Indians differed from US methods, while restrictions on Japanese were similar. However, Canada's legal context gave Asians dissatisfied with the entry process much less latitude for subsequent court appeals than the US legal context. Christian Fritz notes that individual Chinese Americans on the West Coast often challenged entry decisions in court; in contrast Kay Anderson found that Canadian immigration officials shaped anti-Chinese restrictions to avoid court appeals. Fritz, "A Nineteenth Century 'Habeas Corpus Mill': The Chinese Before the Federal Courts of California," in *Chinese Immigrants and American Law*, ed. Charles McClain (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 55-80; Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 136-7.)

⁴⁰ Canada's courts did not appear to be hospitable to individual Chinese appeals of immigration officials' judgments; because of this, there is apparently no history of legal resistance comparable to that found in the much studied legal exploits of Chinese Americans.

⁴¹ Con et al., *From China to Canada*, 157; Philip C.P. Low, *Memories of Cumberland Chinatown* (Vancouver: P.C.P. Low, 1993), 91-92. For a description of similar detention experience in Victoria, see David Lai, "A 'Prison' for Chinese Immigrants," *Asianadian* 2, 4 (1980): 16-18.

⁴² From at least 1890 to 1914-15, Canada's government processed arriving Chinese in an immigration building at the foot of Burrard Street, near Pier A and Pier B. This building was sometimes referred to as the "detention shed," a term used for earlier buildings that held Chinese arrivals in San Francisco (before Angel Island opened in 1910) and in Seattle. Later, entering Chinese were held at an immigration building on the waterfront at the foot of Thurlow Street that was built in 1914-15. Canada's immigration department used this building until 1975. Megan Schlase, Archivist, City of Vancouver Archives, e-mail to author, 15 January 2008.

grants could expect to be questioned about minute details of their home towns, families, friends, and associates in China, in Canada, and in the United States. Officials also searched their luggage, scrutinizing any letters or contact information that they possessed. They also examined their possessions for clues to their character and deported any Chinese deemed undesirable.⁴³ As a result, many Chinese turned to acquiring false papers and bribing immigration officials in their attempt to find a more secure path through Canada's bureaucratic maze.⁴⁴

Chinese Canadians felt that only community-wide evasion could mitigate the damaging impact of the Chinese head tax system. Chinese Americans had already probed a similar US control system and found it porous.⁴⁵ Chinese Canadians organized a parallel system of illegal immigration, whereby local emigration agents in Guangdong's Pearl River Delta worked with partners in Hong Kong, Canada, and the United States to secure illegal entry into Canada.⁴⁶ By 1911, witnesses from China and Canada suggested that 80 percent to 90 percent of Vancouver Chinese had ties to illegal immigration. Chinese bribed immigration officials, shared each other's entry documents, presented false documents, or simply slipped ashore at remote ports. Many Chinese in Canada also arranged to be smuggled into the United States.⁴⁷ Chinese Canadian illegal immigration was so successful that, later, when Canada curtailed the entry of Japanese and East Indians, these two Asian groups adopted similar strategies.⁴⁸

⁴³ LAC, RG 33-146, vol. 1, Royal Commission to Investigate Alleged Chinese Frauds and Opium Smuggling on the Pacific Coast Fonds (RCCF); "Chinese Merchants Attempting to Enter Canada." UBC Rare Books and Special Collections, Chung Collection, box 33, "Minutes of Inquiries Regarding Chinese Merchants Attempting to Enter Canada on the *Empress of China*" (hereafter MIRC), vol. 2, 643-818, 953-57. Choy, *Memories*, 91-92. *Dahan Gongbao*, 18 May 1942.

⁴⁴ "Bureaucratic maze" is the phrasing used by Harney in "The Commerce of Migration," in Anctil and Ramirez, *If One Were to Write a History*, 19-36.

⁴⁵ See Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* for a detailed discussion of the U.S. system.

⁴⁶ Williams, "Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta Qiaoxiang"; Erika Lee, "Enforcing the Borders," 54-86.

⁴⁷ Liang, *Xin Dalu Youji*, 233; RCCF, vol. 1, 6-7 (1910); *Vancouver World*, 16-17 January 1911; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 19 December 1910; Roy, *A White Man's Province*, 235-36; *Vancouver World*, *Vancouver Daily Province*, 17 January 1911; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 31 January 1911.

⁴⁸ Accounts of Japanese and East Indian illegal immigration to Canada indicate that they resembled patterns first established by Chinese. Cameron, "Canada's Struggle with Illegal Entry"; Kazuo Ito, *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America*, trans. Shinichiro Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard (Seattle: Japanese Community Services, 1973) 12, 55-88, 331; Archana B. Verma, *The Making of Little Punjab in Canada* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002), 208, 209, 210, 212-14.

Large-scale illegal immigration required some community support. Despite the overall unpopularity of Chinese immigration, a significant minority of Canadians aided or tolerated the illegal entry of Chinese into Canada. The general lack of strict enforcement of anti-Chinese immigration laws revealed that the public was of two minds about immigration. On the one hand, most Canadians agreed that Chinese could never be the equals of Europeans and were, therefore, not welcome in large numbers; on the other hand, Chinese Canadians found many allies. For example, in 1910 and 1911, a Royal Commission investigating Chinese immigration frauds at the Port of Vancouver heard much testimony regarding how port officials aided illegal Chinese immigrants. For three years there were complaints that officials were taking bribes, but no action was forthcoming.⁴⁹ The public inquiry resulted in the firing of Chinese immigration interpreter Yip On (Ye En) in 1911,⁵⁰ but complicit white officials stayed on the job. Shortly afterwards, illegal Chinese immigration resumed at Vancouver's port.⁵¹ In 1910, Tom Chue Thom, a new Chinese immigration interpreter in Nanaimo, decided to strictly enforce the law. Outraged members of the city's Chinese community appealed to their Canadian political allies and engineered Thom's removal after only two months.⁵² Historical testimony also notes that many illegal immigrants had the support of their non-Chinese foremen, co-workers, employers, and business partners.⁵³ Scholars should not view this era as simply a time of extreme racial hatred; there were also moments of sympathy, cooperation, and alliance.

The extent of illegal immigration reflected a great gap between the political rhetoric of anti-Asian exclusion and its everyday practice. At the time, immigration restriction was not the general norm in Canada, and, consequently, illegal Chinese immigrants found covert political support. For example, even as the leaders of Vancouver's Liberal Party loudly denounced the evils of Asian immigration in 1907, party leaders negotiated with Chinatown leaders to organize illegal immigration. Correspondence between Chinese interpreter David Lew (*Liao Hongxiang*)

⁴⁹ RCCF, vols. 1-7, 1910-11; MIRC, box 33, vol. 7, 3462-65 (1911); MIRC, vol. 2, 640 (1911).

⁵⁰ *Report of Mr. Justice Murphy, Royal Commissioner Appointed to Investigate Alleged Chinese Frauds and Opium Smuggling on the Pacific Coast, 1910-11* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1913), 42-46.

⁵¹ Roy, *A White Man's Province*, 235-36; Bennett McCardle, "The Records of Chinese Immigration at the National Archives of Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 19:3 1987 163-71; *Dahan Gongbao*, 26 August 1914.

⁵² MIRC, box 33, vol. 7, 3094-95 (1911).

⁵³ *Vancouver World*, 23 December 1910. *Dahan Gongbao* did not report any interest among employers of Chinese in ferreting out illegal immigration.

and Chinese merchant Lee Sai Fan⁵⁴ (*Li Shiqian*) show negotiations with Vancouver Liberal Party leaders, businessman Robert Kelley, and MP Robert Macpherson to exempt Chinese from the head tax. The scheme involved a depot in Hong Kong, the bribing of officials, and false papers arranged in Ottawa. The Liberal Party partners accepted a deposit before mounting anti-Asian sentiments prompted them to pause.⁵⁵ One month later, Vancouver erupted into two nights of white rioting directed at Chinese, Japanese, and East Indians. The violence did not drive out Chinese Canadians, nor did the violence associated with the six other anti-Chinese riots between the 1870s and the 1920s.⁵⁶ After Vancouver's 1907 anti-Asian riot, European allies stood firm in continuing their secret support for illegal Chinese immigration. In 1910 and 1911, the Royal Commission on Chinese Frauds found that the immigration process was greased by the cash of Chinese immigrants.⁵⁷ From the start, the profits of illegal immigration undermined Canada's institution of immigration controls. Chinese kept coming until their numbers and economic power provoked a national backlash, culminating in government action.⁵⁸

Most scholars have believed that in 1924, Canada's new regulations effectively ended Chinese immigration.⁵⁹ Between 1924 and 1947, the federal Parliament banned all Chinese immigration. Vancouver's Chinese-language press, however, reported no overall decrease in the Chinese population. Illegal immigration continued, albeit at a slower pace because of the higher costs. The Great Depression and the Second

⁵⁴ Lee Sai Fan was also known as Lee Kee.

⁵⁵ British Columbia Archives, David C. Lew Fonds, Letters, David Lew to Lee Kee, 4 August 1907, and David Lew to Lee Kee, 27 June 1907; Timothy J. Stanley, "David Lew," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, 1921 to 1930*, ed. Ramsay Cook and Réal Bélanger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 595-97. Kelley and Macpherson are referred to by surname, but their subsequent involvement in the 1910-11 scandal over illegal Chinese immigration makes this identification nearly certain. See MIRC, vol. 2, 738-39, 929, and vol. 4, 1316 (1911).

⁵⁶ There were at least two anti-Chinese riots in Vancouver, British Columbia; three in Ontario; one in Calgary; and one in Halifax. See Con et al., *From China to Canada*, 63, 85; Lisa R. Mar, "The Tale of Lin Tee: Madness, Family Violence and Lindsay's Anti-Chinese Riot of 1919," in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant Women, Minority Women and the Racialized Other*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Frances Swyripa, and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 108-29; Judy Margaret Curtis Torrance, *Public Violence in Canada, 1867-1982* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 31; UBC Archives and Special Collections, Chinese Canadian Research Collection, box 4, "Chinese Times Chronological Research Index (1914-1931)."

⁵⁷ *Report of Mr. Justice Murphy*, 42-46.

⁵⁸ Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 55-78.

⁵⁹ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 140; Patricia E. Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 77. Con et al. viewed the Chinese Canadian population that as "static or declining" after 1924. Given low numbers of Chinese Canadian births, maintaining a static sized Chinese population would have required illegal immigration. (*From China to Canada*, 148-150, 170).

World War also curtailed entries. Still, British Columbia's Chinese population grew. By 1944, *Daban Gongbao* reported that China's consulate had counted 30,000 Chinese in British Columbia, many more than the 18,619 Canada's census had found in 1941. Since the census counted only 34,287 Chinese in all of Canada, illegal immigrants probably accounted for a good portion of this discrepancy.⁶⁰ Much about Canada's history of illegal Chinese immigration remains to be studied; neither government records nor Chinese community sources have been fully explored. Still, the nation's first border control policy appeared to have emerged partly from interactions between Chinese Canadians, their neighbours, and the Canadian state.

After the Chinese, other Asian and European sojourner groups also established cross-border communities that defied Canada's emerging immigration laws. These included Japanese and East Indians as well as European immigrant contract workers. Canada barred foreign contract workers with the Alien Labour Act of 1897, an act that Parliament revised and strengthened in 1905.⁶¹ As with the Chinese, other groups' mobility across borders did not preclude commitments to Canada. However, few scholars have explored how sojourners made themselves "agents of change" in this country.⁶² A more integrated history of Canada's past depends on bridging these ethnic divides, especially with regard to the greatly underutilized Asian-language sources in British Columbia.

REDEFINING RIGHTS

Illegal Chinese immigrants continued their furtive existence until a Second World War crisis provoked them to public protest. In 1943, new tax regulations effectively levied higher income taxes on illegal Chinese

⁶⁰ *Daban Gongbao*, 15 August 1944; Con et al., *From China to Canada*, 301; *Eighth Census of Canada*, 4:534, 524, 164, 130. China's consulate probably had the more accurate count because of its many dealings with Chinese Canadians who had family members in China. After 1924, when the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923, took effect, costs of emigrating from China to Canada exclusive of transportation rose from the \$500 head tax costs for legal immigration to between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for the false papers and bribes needed for illegal immigration. Lee Bick (*Li Biru*), interviewed by Evelyn Huang with Lawrence Jeffery, *Chinese Canadians: Voices from a Community* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992), 25.

⁶¹ Buchignani and Indra, "Vanishing Acts," 420-21. Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the American West, 1880-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 90.

⁶² See, for example, Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, which discusses the United States and Canada. See also Robert F. Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 4, 4 (1979): 56-84.

immigrants as well as on many other Chinese Canadians.⁶³ To force cancellation of the regulations, over five thousand Chinese workers in Greater Vancouver organized illegal strikes. Risking arrest, Chinese workers demanded equal “rights” in the face of taxation inequities. In 1943-44, their movement spread across British Columbia,⁶⁴ interacting with wider national struggles over redefining the “rights” of Canadians. Particularly, the call of Chinese workers for “taxpayer rights” to equality was made in the language of minority rights. Popularized by the labour movement and its affiliated political parties, these global-local politics challenged Canada to adjust its British imperial identity.⁶⁵ During the Second World War, this nascent “rights” culture created openings for both minorities and workers to push for a more egalitarian vision of Canadian identity.

Much about immigrants’ views of this process of change remains to be explored, as do their roles in making it happen.⁶⁶ Canada’s wartime turn towards human rights politics was especially important to Chinese Canadians. In 1947, Chinese won the right to vote in British Columbia. That year, Canada’s federal government also repealed the Chinese Immigration Act, permitting Chinese Canadians to legally sponsor the entry of foreign wives and minor children.⁶⁷ Generally, scholars have explained these changes as being the product of settlement, which was accelerated by war. Fewer Chinese immigrants and more Canadian-born Chinese set the stage for acceptance. The Second World War, then, transformed Canada into a unified nation. China’s status as a “gallant ally” and the common Canadian war effort inspired the citizenry to

⁶³ *Daban Gongbao*, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13 July 1943; LAC, RG 25-6-2, vol. 2883, file 2168-40, “Application of Income Tax Act to Persons of Chinese Race Resident in Canada,” 1941-42.

⁶⁴ *Daban Gongbao*, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 19, 20 July 1943; 2, 5, 30 August 1943; 2 September 1943; *Vancouver News Herald*, 20 July 1943.

⁶⁵ Ross Lambertson, *Repression and Resistance: Canadian Human Rights Activists, 1930-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3-15, 68-142; Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and University of Toronto Press, 1999); James W. St.G. Walker, *Race, Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997); Ross Lambertson, “The Black, Brown, White and Red Blues: The Beating of Clarence Clemons,” *Canadian Historical Review* 85, 4 (2004): 755-57.

⁶⁶ Few detailed studies have been done on Chinese Canadians and the process of change during the Second World War, but see Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship*, 148-85; Mar, “From Diaspora to North American Civil Rights”; Judy Maxwell, “A Cause Worth Fighting For: Chinese Canadians Debate Their Participation in the Second World War” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005); Carol F. Lee, “The Road to Enfranchisement: Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 30 (Summer 1976): 44-76.

⁶⁷ Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship*, 162-70, 172-73.

transcend race prejudice.⁶⁸ Collectively, cases such as that exemplified by the Chinese contributed towards a new, more inclusive, Canadian citizenship.⁶⁹

Following the English sources, most scholars claimed that mainstream attitudes towards Chinese changed without major protest. They credit Chinese Canadian settlers for helping to solidify these gains. The lobbying of Canadian-born Chinese and their willingness to serve in the military cemented their community's wartime progress.⁷⁰ While much of this story is correct, it is not complete. It downplays Chinese Canadian workers' roles as agents of change. Since Canada excluded Chinese Canadians from military service until late in 1944, most Chinese experienced the war as workers. The Chinese workers' movement revealed the enduring political power of transnational ties shared by Chinese settlers and sojourners alike. In 1941, at least three-quarters of Chinese workers in British Columbia were foreign-born citizens of China.⁷¹ However, the Chinese workers' movement is largely unknown within historical scholarship.⁷² So much subsequent memory-making has focused on progress towards a new Canadian citizenship that the mass protests of Chinese Canadians against tax regulations that affected their transnational families have been forgotten.

Chinese-language documents from the time show a gradual, difficult, and conflicted process of change. Foon Sien Wong (*Huang Wenfu*), a Chinese Canadian leader who, in the English press, lauded Canada's war for democracy, in the Chinese press criticized race prejudice. In

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-85; *The Oriental Problem*, 77, 239; Con et al., *From China to Canada*, 148-56, 198-201; Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 170-75.

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 173.

⁷⁰ Carol F. Lee, "The Road to Enfranchisement," 44-76; Maxwell, "A Cause Worth Fighting For."

⁷¹ *Eighth Census of Canada*, 164-534. The census did undercount Chinese Canadians in British Columbia by one-third. Given illegal immigration, it is quite possible that the percentage of Chinese citizens was higher than what is shown in the official figure.

⁷² Roy and Anderson very briefly mention the threat of a Chinese strike on 7 July 1943 with regard to Vancouver's war industries. They believe that this threat was immediately successful, with the result that no strike or protest movement occurred. They misidentified pensions as one cause of this potential strike. According to *Daban Gongbao*, the strike did happen, and because the Chinese did not win, a longer-term protest movement developed. The errors came from the faulty translation of one of Roy's and Anderson's sources – a partial English index of *Daban Gongbao* created in the 1970s to research *From China to Canada*. Further, different sources had different viewpoints. *Daban Gongbao* also reported that, in Vancouver's English-language press, the Chinese consul denied that any illegal "proposed strike" had happened, though in the Chinese-language press, the consul and Chinese community recognized that the strike had indeed happened. See Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship*, 152; Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 172; *Daban Gongbao* July 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 19 July 1943; 2, 5 August 1943; UBC Special Collections, Chinese Canadian Research Collection, box 5, folder 5-8, "Chinese Times – Index (1936-1958)," 13-14.

Xin Minguo Bao, he wrote that the Atlantic Charter, the Allied nations' statement of democratic ideals, had not been intended to apply to Asians and blacks. The Allied war effort would have been stronger had it incorporated the full power of Asian and African peoples.⁷³ Historians have often taken wartime rhetoric at face value. However, wartime censorship as well as lack of interest and knowledge affected the content of English newspapers.⁷⁴ The Chinese press, more free of the censor's watch, reported a mood of uncertainty among Chinese rather than a triumphant march to citizenship.⁷⁵

The Chinese workers' movement began on 7 July 1943, when over five thousand Chinese Canadian war industry workers walked off the job, "desolating" local shingle mills and disrupting shipyard production.⁷⁶ The strikers demanded the right to income tax deductions for their dependents in China.⁷⁷ Since the spring of 1943, Canada's tax office had treated many Chinese workers as though they had no families.⁷⁸ Given high wartime income taxes, this made a major difference in their paycheques. Before the policy change, a Chinese shipyard worker had \$2.35 withheld from his paycheque for taxes, but afterward \$11 was withheld, leaving him "very little."⁷⁹ For Chinese who supported family members in China, the change created a dire financial crisis. In 1943, Chinatown newspapers reported that Japan's invasion of their home province of Guangdong had caused widespread starvation.⁸⁰ Chinese desperately wanted to save their families, and many believed that sending money to relatives in China was literally a matter of life and death.⁸¹ They turned to radical action to assert their rights as workers and taxpayers.

Politically difficult documentation problems lay at the heart of the dispute. *Dahan Gongbao*, Chinese consulate archives, and Canadian tax office records outline the background. Since 1941, when rising wages first

⁷³ Foon Sien Wong, "Riqian zhan shi zhi guan zhi," *Xin Minguo Bao*, ca. 1941-42, "Nations at War" Scrapbook, box 1, Wong Papers, UBC Special Collections.

⁷⁴ Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 14-18.

⁷⁵ *Dahan Gongbao*, 1939-45.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 July, 30 August, 2 September 1943.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1943.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Vancouver News Herald*, 20 July 1943, Vancouver City Archives, newsclipping, "Plan Parley on Tax Claims," 21 July 1943.

⁸⁰ *Dahan Gongbao*, 29 June 1943.

⁸¹ Granted, remittances had great difficulty reaching occupied China, but *Dahan Gongbao's* daily advertisements for this service in 1943-44 indicated a continuing demand. To Chinese Canadians, even the slightest hope that they could save their loved ones made attempts to send as much remittance as possible an urgent concern.

started to bring tens of thousands of Chinese workers under the aegis of income tax, Chinese had sought tax deductions for their dependents in China. In 1942, they won that right.⁸² However, in 1943, Canadian tax officials cracked down on perceived fraud among foreign sojourners who claimed to support dependents outside Canada.⁸³ They rejected most Chinese workers' claims as unverifiable. Their employers then withheld much higher taxes from their paycheques. When Chinese workers appealed, tax officials demanded their immigration paper numbers and official receipts of their remittances as proofs. Canadian tax officials promised to refund any erroneous withholdings after reviewing the documentation of each Chinese case. However, Chinese Canadians had never been a well-documented people. Further, even Chinese breadwinners who submitted documents could expect to pay much higher taxes for five or six months before their appeals were processed.⁸⁴ The low wages of Chinese Canadian workers made higher taxation a hardship. Roy Mah (*Ma Guo Guan*), a union organizer, recalled in 1943 that Chinese labourers earned less than half of white workers' wages. For example, Chinese lumber workers earned twenty-five to forty cents per hour, while white workers earned seventy-five cents to a dollar per hour.⁸⁵ After China's diplomats had failed to bring effective tax equity,⁸⁶ Chinese workers, the most "bitterly" affected taxpayers, sought the help of the Canadian labour movement.⁸⁷

Chinese Canadian workers first tried to reverse the tax policy by working within the Canadian shipyard and lumber workers' unions to which they belonged. At the time, unions were struggling for full recognition and collective bargaining rights.⁸⁸ Greater Vancouver's labour movement debated the Chinese tax problem for several months,⁸⁹ and white opinion was split. The *Vancouver News Herald* portrayed Chinese income tax problems sympathetically, describing a Chinese father's

⁸² "Application of Income Tax Act to Persons of Chinese Race Resident in Canada," 1941-42. LAC, MG 10-c2 Chinese (Nationalist) Consular Records, vol. 3, file 11, "Correspondence: Chinese Consulate General Ottawa," Bing-Shuey Lee to Hong Lee, 29 July 1942, Li Chao to Gene Mah, 20 July 1942.

⁸³ *Daban Gongbao*, 10, 12, 13 July 1943; *Vancouver News Herald*, 20 July 1943.

⁸⁴ *Daban Gongbao*, 13 July 1943.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 July 1943; Anniversaries 2007, "Remembering Roy Mah," 14 July 2007, reprinted from the *Allied Worker*, the IWA Newsletter, August 2003, http://anniversaries07.ca/news/2007_07_or_archive.html (viewed 15 February 2008).

⁸⁶ "Application of Income Tax Act to Persons of Chinese Race Resident in Canada," 1941-42.

⁸⁷ *Daban Gongbao*, 10, 19 July 1943; *Vancouver News Herald*, 20 July 1943.

⁸⁸ Gregory S. Kealey, "The Canadian State's Attempts to Manage Class Conflict," in *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995) 433-36.

⁸⁹ *Vancouver News Herald*, 20 July 1943.

struggles to get his deductions for his wife and children in China. It also printed union criticisms of Ottawa's "ineptitude."⁹⁰ However, English papers also printed readers' gripes that, due to fraud, Chinese paid "no tax."⁹¹ The Chinese reputation for illegal immigration created scepticism regarding their claims to be supporting family members in China.⁹² Further, a few cases of Chinese tax fraud had occurred, though *Daban Gongbao* believed the vast majority of claims were legitimate.⁹³ Many Canadians also felt that people in China could live on a pittance compared to what Canadian families could live on; this being the case, a higher rate of Chinese Canadian taxation was thought to be a fair sacrifice.⁹⁴ The income tax question thus created a political dilemma for Chinese workers and their Canadian unions.

In their wartime rhetoric, British Columbia's industrial unions proclaimed the racial solidarity of workers. They welcomed Asians as union members under the rubric of "equal pay for equal work." Before the late 1930s, most mainstream union locals would not accept Asian members, so the growing Chinese presence in integrated locals was a sign of progress.⁹⁵ However, the weakness of unions in an era before the existence of strong collective bargaining laws meant that racial equality was not always a priority.⁹⁶

The Chinese workers' protest erupted in the midst of Canadian union drives for recognition. In June 1943, Nigel Morgan, head of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) in British Columbia, testified to the National War Labour Board that his union had nine thousand to ten thousand members. Over one tenth of IWA members were Chinese, fifteen hundred workers. The IWA was negotiating at "29 different operations" in British Columbia. However, the union had won only one contract due to "employers' refusal to sign."⁹⁷ The limited power of the unions made it difficult for them to risk their own political

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Wong Papers, "Nations at War" Scrapbook, contain a number of news clippings of letters to the editor regarding the income tax issue, including the following: *Vancouver Sun*, Letter to Editor from "Two Loggers," n.d., ca. July/August 1944.

⁹² *Daban Gongbao*, 13 July 1943.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ The anti-Chinese movement in Canada often saw Chinese Canadians as "unfair" economic competition because of their willingness to work long hours at low wages. See Roy, *A White Man's Province* and *The Oriental Question*.

⁹⁵ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 172.

⁹⁶ Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 58-62.

⁹⁷ Stephen Gray, "Woodworkers and Legitimacy: The IWA in Canada, 1937-1957" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 1989), 122. Gray cited *National War Labour Board Proceedings* no. 11, 10-11 June 1943, 1012, 1007-10. *Daban Gongbao*, 6 July 1943.

capital for an unpopular matter. Wartime opinion polls reported that most Canadians believed that strikes during the war were “unpatriotic” and “selfish.”⁹⁸ Finally, the Chinese forced the issue by announcing their intention to hold an illegal strike. They would embarrass the unions, their employers, and the Canadian government unless their demands were met. They wanted tax deductions for dependent family members because every other ethnic group received them. The threat to disrupt war production resulted in a conflict that appeared to be resolved in a single day.⁹⁹

As Chinese Canadian strikers flexed their economic power, they won new access to political influence. The strike announcement prompted immediate action from employers, unions, the Chinese consul, Vancouver’s mayor, and a local MP. Within one day, the Vancouver tax office quickly agreed to rescind the restriction on deductions. Ottawa, however, disallowed the Vancouver settlement.¹⁰⁰ It reiterated that Chinese could deduct their dependents but that the government required proof of their existence.¹⁰¹ *Daban Gongbao* called it a victory for all sojourners in Canada but a defeat for the Chinese. Many illegal immigrants had not declared their real families to Canadian authorities. They prepared to rush to the immigration office to confess their true status in the hope of saving their families, but they feared criminal charges. Many other Chinese had no documentation of their remittances that Canada’s government would accept. A good number could not read either Chinese or English. Many immigrants had sent money to their dependents through Chinese merchants, brothers, and friends rather than through the official Foreign Exchange Control Board (FECB) system.¹⁰² In *Daban Gongbao*, strike organizer Jin She wrote that the government should see that these cases “had virtuous reasons” on their side. Officials should “think of the people’s difficulties” and only then measure their intent.¹⁰³ Still, Canadian officials felt that allowing deductions without the requisite legal proofs invited fraud.¹⁰⁴ Negotiations stalled, so Chinese workers escalated their protests over the tax issue.

For seven months, Chinese workers in British Columbia protested against the income-tax regulations, joining the wider patterns of labour

⁹⁸ Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 61.

⁹⁹ *Daban Gongbao*, 6, 8 July 1943.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 July 1943.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 10, 12, 13, 19 July 1943.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 10, 12, 13 July 1943.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1943.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* See also discussion of proof question in “Application of Income Tax Act to Persons of Chinese Race Resident in Canada,” 1941-1942.

militancy during the war.¹⁰⁵ They engaged in wildcat protest, one of many sudden sharp job actions that jolted Canada's war effort throughout 1943.¹⁰⁶ Chinese shingle mill workers across British Columbia protested against income tax with illegal strikes, shutting down two mills and "drastically reducing efficiency" throughout the industry. They also demanded equal pay with white workers.¹⁰⁷ Further, Chinese workers forced Greater Vancouver's shipyards into a tax strike. The shipyards defied Ottawa, refusing to enforce the new deduction regulations. They returned to withholding income taxes from Chinese Canadian paycheques at lower rates that applied to workers who supported dependents. Against the tax office's written orders, shipyards collected income taxes as if Chinese workers' families in China had been recognized.¹⁰⁸ Besides employers, the woodworkers and the shipyard unions also lobbied on behalf of Chinese Canadians.¹⁰⁹ Before the war, Chinese Canadian workers had little access to mainstream political power, but their protest movement made them into independent actors. Throughout the dispute, Chinese workers directly negotiated with unions, employers, the tax office, and China's consulate.¹¹⁰ The Chinese strikers, wrote Jin She, experimented with a new strategy for achieving fairness for all of North America.¹¹¹ Their strikes most closely resembled similar protests by minority workers in the United States,¹¹² who shared a joint union movement with Canada. In any case, the efforts of Chinese workers to steer the rising power of their industrial unions resulted in their tax protest combining with the protests of increasingly potent allies.

By the end of February 1944, after Canada had passed comprehensive collective bargaining regulations,¹¹³ the Chinese workers celebrated progress on the income tax deduction issue.¹¹⁴ Through their protest,

¹⁰⁵ Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 61.

¹⁰⁶ Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," in Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History*, 376-78.

¹⁰⁷ *Daban Gongbao*, 15 July, 5 August 1943. *Daban Gongbao* did not report the outcome of the equal pay demand, so it probably did not succeed.

¹⁰⁸ *Daban Gongbao*, 26 October 1943.

¹⁰⁹ *Vancouver News Herald*, 20 July 1943; Vancouver City Archives, newsclipping, 21 July 1943, "Plan Parley on Tax Claims."

¹¹⁰ *Daban Gongbao*, 7, 8, 13, 15, 19, 20 July 1943; 2 August, 30 September 1942; 23 and 26 October 1943; 17 December 1943; 28 February 1944; 1 March 1944.

¹¹¹ *Daban Gongbao*, 13 July 1943.

¹¹² In the United States, most racial strikes over economic issues concerned wages and work conditions. There is no record of comparable tax protests. See, for example, Charles D. Chamberlain, *Victory at Home: Manpower and Race in the American South during World War II* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 107-08.

¹¹³ Peter Stuart McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 41-42.

¹¹⁴ *Daban Gongbao*, 1 March 1944.

Chinese sojourners had joined Canada's union movement to achieve that most desired goal of labour – a family wage. After this victory, the union movement embraced the Chinese protest organization as a formal part of the labour community.¹¹⁵ The IWA also hired its first paid Chinese organizer, Roy Mah of Vancouver.¹¹⁶ The Chinese workers' tax protest garnered support from East Indian workers,¹¹⁷ who also saw the principle of deductions for family members as a priority. Many East Indian workers also sojourned in Canada, remitting funds to their families in the Punjab;¹¹⁸ but their smaller numbers gave them less leverage for race-based protest on the job.¹¹⁹ To date, labour studies of conditions during the Second World War have not delved deeply into race relations; further research into diverse workers' interactions may reveal a more nuanced tale of "rights revolution" origins.¹²⁰

Sojourner activism matters because most histories of Canada focus on permanent settlers; however, during the 1940s, the vast majority of Chinese Canadians were immigrant workers.¹²¹ Transnational workers – a group that included non-citizens, the naturalized, and the Canadian-born – formed the largest cohort of Chinese to contribute to wartime struggles for racial equality.¹²² In retrospect, historians have often focused on more acceptable settler-oriented forms of struggle, such as debates over whether Chinese Canadian citizens should serve in the military or whether they should obtain voting rights.¹²³ By showing their mettle as workers, however, Chinese immigrants demonstrated their commitment to labour principles. They helped turn labour groups, who had historically opposed Asian immigration, into allies.¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 March 1944.

¹¹⁶ Vancouver City Archives, newsclipping, 14 April 1944, "Chinese Named Union Organizer."

¹¹⁷ *Dahan Gongbao*, 12 April 1944.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1943.

¹¹⁹ *The Eighth Census of Canada*, 3:164, counted East Indians under the rubric of "Asians other than Chinese and Japanese," a group that contained only 1,757 persons.

¹²⁰ For a general argument about the "Rights Revolution" as a global and Canadian event, see Michael Igantieff, *The Rights Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2007).

¹²¹ *Census of Canada, 1941* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1946), 4:176-77, 293, 422-23; 7:1018-33.

¹²² In Canada's census, the age profile of the Chinese immigrant population dominated the twenty-five-years-and-older categories, whereas Canadian citizens dominated the under-twenty-five categories. The working-age population thus would have been comprised of both generations. See *Eighth Census of Canada*, 3:164, 534.

¹²³ Yee, *Saltwater City*, 99-105; Maxwell, "A Cause Worth Fighting For"; Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship*, 148-85; Mar, "From Diaspora to North American Civil Rights," 212-54.

¹²⁴ *Dahan Gongbao*, 12 April 1944; 1, 2 May 1944. Vancouver City Archives, newsclipping, 14 April 1944, "Chinese Named Union Organizer."

It is possible to draw a direct line between the involvement of Chinese Canadian workers in these early coalitions and the labour movement's postwar campaigns for human rights in British Columbia.¹²⁵ Indeed, the rising political power of unions in 1943-44 has often been seen as a defining moment in Canadian labour history.¹²⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Chinese-language sources show that Chinese Canadians did not merely react to white dominance: they initiated as well as adapted. Illegal immigration suggests that a disenfranchised group could mitigate even the most direct processes of exclusion. The ensuing process of evasion and detection also influenced wider policy developments. The persistence of illegal immigration had enormous consequences for Chinese Canadians. During the Second World War, changes in tax policy forced Chinese workers, whether legal or illegal, to confront the problems of their relatively undocumented existence. The successful public stand of the Chinese marked a new epoch in their relations with their neighbours. Through mobilizing as an ethnic bloc within the labour movement, Chinese workers strove to expand Canadian rights politics. The ability of Chinese Canadians to garner support also suggested growing sympathy for a redefined national identity that covered all Canadian residents, even those with transnational ties.¹²⁷ By the mid-1940s, many British Columbians saw sojourners and illegal immigrants as deserving parts of the national polity. They regarded them as members of their communities, suggesting a more multicultural and global-local Canadian history than scholars have presumed.

As we pass the hundredth anniversary of Vancouver's 1907 anti-Asian riot, it seems important to reflect on reasons for putting Asian Canadians back into their own history through the use of Asian-language sources. In recent decades, many Chinese Canadians, myself included, have felt that it is important to write history that would contribute to Chinese efforts to be recognized as Canadians. Even though a great number of Canada's Asian and European immigrants were sojourners, scholars

¹²⁵ As Ross Lambertson has noted, the labour union movement would become one of the main actors in Canada's postwar movement for minority human rights. See Lambertson, *Repression and Resistance: Canadian Human Rights Activists, 1930-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

¹²⁶ Kealey, "The Canadian State's Attempts to Manage Class Conflict," 434.

¹²⁷ "Transnational ties" refers to international lives traditionally thought to contradict domestic Canadian settlement (i.e., family life across one or more nations beyond Canada, the British Empire, and the United States).

know little about their political integration.¹²⁸ Chinese language evidence suggests a more inclusive story. Chinese Canadians believed that their history had broader implications. They saw that, like themselves, Japanese and East Indians resisted exclusion by turning to illegal immigration. Chinese workers termed their wartime labour struggle a victory for all sojourners who supported their families.¹²⁹ The history of Chinese in Canada can only be properly understood if scholars explore interactions as much as they do exclusions. Above all, the settler story of Canada as a nation of immigrants coincided with the emergence of a second, unofficial sense of Canada as an “imagined community” based on the mingling of global migrants at the juncture of Pacific, American, and British worlds.

¹²⁸ Studies of the political incorporation of sojourners into Canada have focused on European emigrants, especially their homeland politics, their left/right ties, and disputes over the padrone system. See Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Donald Avery, *Dangerous Foreigners: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979); Peck, *Reinventing Free Labour*; Harney, “A Case Study of Padronism.”

¹²⁹ *Daban Gongbao*, 10 July 1943.