

# JAPANESE CANADIANS AND THE RACIALIZATION OF LABOUR IN THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SAWMILL INDUSTRY\*

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THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SAWMILL INDUSTRY, from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century until its full development in the early twentieth century, relied upon substantial numbers of cheap Asian labourers. From the 1890s, workers from Japan joined Chinese immigrants, formerly indentured to railway construction, in providing not only the labour itself but also the means to control wage rates and working conditions by splitting the workforce along racial lines. This paper examines this process of 'racialization,' focusing on the experience of Japanese-Canadian sawmill workers.

Our analysis begins from the premise that 'race' is a social construction, historically variable and geographically specific. 'Races' are made, not given; they are a product of racism, not biology.<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny the existence of a range of subtle physical differences among human beings. The racist fallacy is to assert that human beings can be divided naturally into discrete 'races' according to phenotypical criteria and to assume that these physical distinctions are inexorably associated with particular social distinctions, such as aggression or docility. The task, then, is to describe the process of 'racialization,' a process which is "structurally determined, politically organized and

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<sup>1</sup> See Peter Jackson, "The idea of 'race' and the geography of racism," in Peter Jackson ed., *Race and Racism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), 3-21; Audrey Kobayashi, "Multiculturalism: representing a Canadian institution," in James S. Duncan and David Ley eds. *Representing Cultural Geography* (forthcoming).

ideologically inflected . . . within relations of domination and subordination."<sup>2</sup> Our understanding of this process draws heavily on the theory of racialization advanced by the sociologist, Robert Miles.<sup>3</sup>

Miles defines racialization in terms of the role of labour migration in capitalist societies. He takes the example of post-war Britain, desperately short of unskilled manual labour, where workers were imported from the 'New Commonwealth' to fill specific vacancies in the transport, health-care, and textile industries.<sup>4</sup> These groups, he argues, did not enter a neutral political and ideological environment; they were already 'racialized' by three centuries of colonialism which gave them citizenship while denying them equal rights in most other respects. Their employment in menial jobs at rates of pay that white workers found unacceptable was legitimized by reference to a reservoir of already existing images and stereotypes: they were regarded as incapable of intellectual labour; unable to accept responsibility; and physically adapted to manual labour, either through their alleged dexterity or brute strength. Nineteenth-century theories of scientific racism often supported these views.<sup>5</sup> Present-day racism is not simply a carry-over from the nineteenth century; it is constantly made and re-made. As Sivanandan argues:

Racism does not stay still; it changes shape, size, contours, purpose, function — with changes in the economy, the social structure, the system and, above all, the challenges, the resistances to that system.<sup>6</sup>

This paper takes a similar approach, aiming to trace the racialization of labour in the sawmills of British Columbia in the early years of this century.<sup>7</sup> Before proceeding to the case study, however, some additional comments on the theory of racialization are in order.

<sup>2</sup> M. Green and B. Carter, "‘Races’ and ‘race-makers’: the politics of racialisation," *Sage Race Relations Abstracts* 13(2) (1988): 4-30.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Miles, *Racism and Labour Migration* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); idem., *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Peach uses the phrase 'replacement population' to describe the process whereby immigrant labour was attracted "to those regions which, despite demand for labour, . . . failed to attract sufficient white population." See Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain: A Social Geography* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1968), 62.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> A. Sivanandan, "Challenging racism: strategies for the '80s," *Race and Class* 25 (1983): 1-11. The quotation is from page 2.

<sup>7</sup> Much of the present paper is based on archival research (by Kobayashi) in the Special Collections of the UBC Library, funded by Secretary of State, Multiculturalism Directorate. Parallel research in Britain is being undertaken (by Jackson) into the racialization of labour in the Bradford textile industry, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. See Peter Jackson, "The racialization of labour in post-war Bradford," *Journal of Historical Geography* (in press).

RACIALIZATION

For some authors, the concept of racialization applies only to the process through which social issues like immigration, policing or crime take on a 'racial' connotation.<sup>8</sup> Others have identified a racialization of politics in relation to housing and residential segregation.<sup>9</sup> But it is also possible to see these specific events as part of a wider process whereby particular groups are racialized through their incorporation within the labour force.<sup>10</sup> By 'racialization,' Miles refers to the way in which certain of the migrant's phenotypical and cultural characteristics are attributed with political and ideological significance as a means of justifying a negative, hostile reaction.<sup>11</sup> Racialization therefore contributes to and legitimates the exploitation of racialized labour.

The perspective we take here is broader than that employed by Miles, exploring the social and cultural construction of difference; the way in which certain characteristics are identified and given meaning; and the consequences that flow from such identifications. In our case study, for example, only certain of the migrants' characteristics were invested with social significance in the racialization process. For example, few contemporary observers showed any interest in the fact that Japanese Canadians were highly organized according to regional background in Japan as well as along class and religious lines, and even official reports referred to East Indian immigrants as 'Hindus' although the majority were in fact Sikh.<sup>12</sup>

Racialization is a complex and contradictory process. In the case we are to consider here, different phases of the process involve different interest groups, sometimes in open conflict, sometimes sharing tactics while in conflict over ends, sometimes in complete collusion, according to the prevailing political and economic circumstances. During the period under consideration, both organized labour and mill

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (London, Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Susan J. Smith, *The Politics of 'Race' and Residence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> A similar argument can be made about the 'naturalization' of gender under patriarchal conditions, where socially constructed (gender) distinctions are reduced to biological distinctions of sex. (For an elaboration of this point, see R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour*, 150.

<sup>12</sup> On the geographical origins of Japanese Canadians, see Audrey Kobayashi, *Regional Backgrounds of Japanese Immigrants and the Development of Japanese Canadian Community* (Albatross Discussion Paper No. 1, Department of Geography, McGill University, 1986). On the 'Hindus,' see H. Johnston, *The East Indians in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984).

owners and managers had an interest in the subordination of Japanese-Canadian labour, one group intent on reducing competition from 'foreign' labour, the other on reducing the total wage bill. Only rarely did the labour unions seek common cause with Japanese Canadians in the push for higher wages and better conditions of work for all. Similarly, we aim to show that state intervention (in the form of immigration restrictions, bi-lateral 'agreements,' the extension of the franchise and so on) sometimes leads public opinion while at other times it appears to be driven by popular sentiment (accessed here through journals like *Westward Ho!* and *Maclean's*).

Despite these complexities, the underlying questions are (perhaps deceptively) simple: why did certain groups come to be concentrated in certain industries? What exactly do we mean by 'cheap labour'? And how does the recruitment process actually work?<sup>13</sup> Can we explain the development of a racialized and segmented labour market simply in terms of the timing of different migration streams, when vacancies in different industries occurred, or do other processes also have to be taken into account (such as the effects of previous racializations and gender divisions of labour)? We also explore the capacity of racialized labour to resist its exploitation and the forces that reduce the capacity for effective resistance.

Before turning to our case study it is necessary to consider the political and ideological context within which Japanese-Canadian labour was employed. To a large extent, their reception was dependent on the racialization of Chinese immigrants who immediately preceded them as workers in the primary industries of late-nineteenth century British Columbia. The two groups were sometimes indistinguishable to contemporary observers who often treated them in parallel as comprising the "Oriental threat" or "Yellow peril."

#### CHINESE CANADIANS AND THE CONTEXT OF JAPANESE IMMIGRATION TO B.C.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the demand for unskilled labour in B.C. greatly outstripped supply. Between 1881 and 1884, some 15,000 Chinese Canadians (referred to favourably in local

<sup>13</sup> Duffield begins his study of iron foundry workers in the British West Midlands with a similarly simple question: how and why did the industry become characterized by relatively large concentrations of Indian workers? His study of their 'hidden history' rapidly leads him to more complex and interesting questions concerning the mechanisation of skill, the role of trade unions and the politics of deindustrialization. Mark Duffield, *Black Radicalism and the Politics of De-industrialisation* (Aldershot, Avebury, 1988).

newspapers at the time as the “industrious Chinese”) were indentured to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. Their experiences comprise a crucial context for the subsequent introduction of Japanese-Canadian labour. After the railway reached Vancouver in 1886, workers began to be released to work in other sectors of the economy, such as farming, fishing, logging, or the sawmill and canning industries. Competition for jobs increased with the onset of a severe recession in the mid-1890s, and popular agitation against Chinese Canadians began to grow. As early as 1878, the Workingman’s Protective Association was founded in Victoria, seeking

the mutual protection of the working class of B.C. against the great influx of Chinese; to use all legitimate means for the suppression of their immigration; to assist each other in the obtaining of employment; and to devise means for the amelioration of the condition of the working class of this Province in general.<sup>14</sup>

That same year, the provincial legislature moved to disenfranchise Chinese Canadians as a group.<sup>15</sup>

Pressure for immigration restriction grew, culminating in the Royal Commission on *Chinese Immigration* in 1885. The Commission concluded that competition from Chinese Canadians was not a threat to white skilled labour or agricultural settlers; they were only in competition with other groups of transitory, migrant labour.<sup>16</sup> Many employers spoke highly of Chinese-Canadian labour, which was considered industrious, dependable, docile, sober and, above all, cheap in relation to the employers’ perceptions of militant, organized, unionized and strike-prone white labour.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese-Canadian labourers had been used as strike-breakers in the Dunsmuir mines, leading white working class organizations to support the calls for exclusion. In their evidence to the 1885 Royal Commission, the Knights of Labour claimed that “Chinese labour is

<sup>14</sup> P. A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: a Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver, B.C. Federation of Labour/Boag Foundation, 1967), 9.

<sup>15</sup> C. F. Lee, “The road to enfranchisement: Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia”, *BC Studies* 30 (1976): 44-76. Japanese Canadians were similarly disenfranchised in 1895: Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1989), xvi.

<sup>16</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (Ottawa, King’s Printer, Sessional Paper No. 54a, 1885), lxxi-lxxii.

<sup>17</sup> There were seventy-six strikes in Vancouver between 1901 and 1914; see R. A. J. McDonald, “Working class Vancouver, 1886-1914: urbanism and class in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 69-70 (1986): 33-69.

. . . of a low, degraded, and servile type . . . dangerous competitors in the labour market."<sup>18</sup> The process of racialization can be seen to have drawn on a variety of assertions about 'natural' difference and a common stock of national stereotypes. To quote just one example, the "docile servility" of Chinese Canadian labour was explained to the Royal Commission as "the *natural outcome* of centuries of grinding poverty and humble submission to a most oppressive system of government."<sup>19</sup>

The Commission resulted in the imposition of a \$50 head tax on Chinese-Canadian labour, raised to \$100 in 1901 and raised again to \$500 in 1902.<sup>20</sup> Significantly, the 1902 Royal Commission (see below) extended its remit to immigrants from China *and Japan*. The arguments that were presented to the Commission about Chinese Canadians also generally encompassed those arriving from Japan. Again, to quote just one example, 'the Chinese' were said to be

a community within a community, separate and apart, a foreign substance within, but not part of, our body politic . . . a people that will not assimilate or become an integral part of our race and nation. . . .<sup>21</sup>

They were "a menace to health," "a servile class," "unfit for citizenship." Moreover:

All that has been said . . . with reference to the Chinese applies with equal, if not greater force, to the Japanese.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Gillian Creese, "Class, ethnicity and conflict: the case of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, 1880-1923," in R. Warburton and D. Coburn eds. *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 55-85. The quotation is from page 69, emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (1885), 156 (emphasis added). Despite this reputation for 'docility,' Chinese Canadians were involved in a number of strikes, in Victoria in 1877 and at a local cannery works in 1881. Similarly, Japanese Canadians were involved in strikes in several B.C. industries. Details are recorded of Japanese-Canadian strikes in the fishing industry in 1893, 1900, 1901 and 1904, and in the sawmills in 1919, 1920, and 1925. See Creese, "Class, ethnicity and conflict;" R. Knight and M. Koizumi, *A Man of Our Times: The Life History of a Japanese-Canadian Fisherman* (Vancouver, New Star Books, 1976), 55-56. In January 1903, there were 100 Japanese Canadians on strike at the New Westminster sawmill; Japanese Canadians were also "extremely active" in labour conflicts in the lumber industry during World War I: Creese, "Class, ethnicity and conflict," 77.

<sup>20</sup> Edgar Wickberg et al., *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> *Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (1902), 277.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 277-78.

Despite this disparagement, both Chinese and Japanese immigrants were fundamental to the growth of the B.C. sawmill industry, the origins of which are subject to a certain amount of speculation. John Meares, the British sea-captain who established a settlement at Nootka in 1789, is reputed to have used about thirty Chinese labourers to mill timber and build and repair ships. Apart from isolated instances of this kind, the earliest sawmill in British Columbia is generally taken to have been built at Sooke on Vancouver Island in 1853.<sup>23</sup> The Hastings Sawmill was established as "Stamp's Mill" in 1866 by Captain Edward Stamp and, together with the mill built by 'Sue' Moody at Moodyville, formed the basis of a thriving Pacific lumber trade.

Hastings Mill played a key role in the racialization of Chinese and Japanese labour. Until 1886, the majority of the workforce was native or Chinese Canadian. In that year an influx occurred of white workers formerly employed in railway construction. According to a contemporary account by W. G. Gallagher, these workers initiated a strike in April 1886, having been refused a reduction in working hours.<sup>24</sup> The strike occurred some ten days before Vancouver's first civic election, in which R. H. Alexander, the mill manager, was a mayoral candidate. In an attempt to break the strike, Alexander employed "a few extra Indians and Chinamen," remarking: "*Canadians are only North American Chinamen anyway.*"<sup>25</sup> According to the same account, Alexander's mill sent fifty or sixty 'Chinamen' to vote in the election. They were chased out of town by a hostile crowd and Alexander was subsequently defeated by the loggers' candidate, Malcolm McLean.<sup>26</sup> From the earliest period, then, the pattern of racist violence, combined with civic and political harassment, was well established.

#### JAPANESE-CANADIAN IMMIGRATION TO B.C.

While the general pattern of Japanese emigration must be understood within the context of agrarian conditions in Meiji-period Japan, in British Columbia Japanese immigration became a 'solution' to the

<sup>23</sup> D. E. Anderson, *The Growth of Organized Labour in the Lumbering Industry of British Columbia* (unpublished B.A. essay, University of British Columbia, 1957), 25.

<sup>24</sup> J. S. Matthews, *Early Vancouver* (Vancouver, Brock Webber, 1932, Volume 1), 145-46.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 146 (emphasis added).

<sup>26</sup> The term 'North American Chinaman' subsequently entered the local vocabulary, referring to a person who attempted to cadge drinks, taking advantage of the Canadian custom of never buying a drink for oneself without also including at least one other individual: *ibid.*, 164 (interview with S. F. Tolmie, Premier of British Columbia). This, and the preceding anecdote, suggest how racialized notions are constructed within the realm of public knowledge.

problem of providing cheap labour in the rapidly growing primary industries.<sup>27</sup> Writing in the *Daily News-Advertiser* in February 1890, Vancouver alderman James Fox (himself a labour contractor) confirms the demand for cheap labour:

We have an extensive province without a population. Shall it remain in its primeval state . . . , with its forests of wealth rotting, with its vast treasures of riches lying hid, with its pastoral lands arid wastes, with its waters stinking with fish undevoured?<sup>28</sup>

Japanese immigration provided a possible solution to the problem.

Although the first known Japanese immigrant, Nagano Manzo, arrived in 1877, labour migration in substantial numbers occurred only after 1885, once a ban on emigration from Japan was lifted.<sup>29</sup> Between 1890 and 1930, some 40,000 Japanese migrated to Canada, and the number of Japanese Canadians working in the primary industries rose to about 7,000.<sup>30</sup> Many came via Hawaii, to which they had originally been recruited as contract labourers by government and private contract companies (*imin gaisha*).<sup>31</sup> By 1890, there were some sixty to seventy Japanese Canadians working in Vancouver sawmills, increas-

<sup>27</sup> On conditions in Meiji-period Japan, see Audrey Kobayashi, *Emigration from Kaideima, Japan, 1885-1950: an Analysis of Community and Landscape Change* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983); available from University Microfilms International (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver," 46.

<sup>29</sup> On early Japanese immigration see Ken Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976). See also Kobayashi, *Emigration from Kaideima*.

<sup>30</sup> During this period, over 30,000 exit permits were issued for Canada (Japan, Gaimusho [Department of External Affairs], *Kaigai Ryoken Kafubyo* [record of the issue of foreign travel permits], original records in Gaikoshiryokan [External Affairs Archives], Tokyo). In addition, an undetermined number entered the country from the United States or, more importantly, from Hawaii. The majority of 14,000 passed through British Columbia from Hawaii to the United States before 1901: C. H. Young, H. R. Y. Reid and W. A. Carrothers, *The Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1938). In addition, the majority of the 11,000 who entered between 1906 and March 1908 had originated in Hawaii. This group remained in Canada, having been barred from entry to the United States, but would not have been included in the figure cited above. The total number of Japanese immigrants who actually lived in Canada is therefore somewhat more than 40,000. With a relatively high rate of eventual return to Japan, and accounting for natural increase, the population stabilized at about 20,000 after World War I, growing to 23,000 by World War II. These figures are examined in more detail in Audrey Kobayashi, *Vancouver Interlude: The Story of Emigration from Kaideima, Japan* (forthcoming). It is difficult to estimate from these figures the number of individuals actually employed in British Columbia, because of under-reporting of women in the workforce. The male workforce, however, remained at about 7,000 from 1908 to World War II.

<sup>31</sup> A. T. Moriyama, *Imingaiha: Japanese Emigration Companies and Hawaii, 1894-1908* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1985).



ing to around 460 throughout the province in 1901.<sup>32</sup> According to the 1901 Canadian census, there were 4,597 Japanese Canadians in B.C., 97 per cent of the total Japanese-Canadian population and around 2.6 per cent of the total population of B.C. By 1911 the number had risen to 8,587 (an increase of 87 per cent), the concentration within B.C. had fallen to around 95 per cent, and the Japanese-Canadian share of the total B.C. population had fallen to around 2.2 per cent. Japanese immigration to Canada reached a peak of almost 7,000 in 1908 before the "Gentleman's Agreement" between the Canadian and Japanese governments came into effect, limiting the number of Japanese-Canadian immigrants to 400 per year.<sup>33</sup> This is the period when, some academic commentators have noted, ". . . an unprecedented tide of Oriental immigrants suddenly flooded into the province."<sup>34</sup> Contemporary newspapers referred to the same process in even more extravagant language as an "Asiatic deluge."<sup>35</sup>

By the time of the Royal Commission of 1902 (see below), there were about 500 Japanese Canadians employed in British Columbia sawmills (see table 1). According to these data, Japanese Canadians comprised almost a quarter of the total workforce and nearly twice as many as the Chinese Canadians employed in the industry.<sup>36</sup> In 1911, the Hastings Sawmill<sup>37</sup> and the Canadian Western Lumber plant at Fraser Mills each employed over 200 Japanese Canadians. By 1917, the number of Japanese Canadians employed in all the mills in the Greater Vancouver area had risen to around 700.<sup>38</sup> The actual number

<sup>32</sup> Canadian Japanese Association, *The Japanese Contribution to Canada: a Summary of the Role Played by the Japanese in the Development of the Canadian Commonwealth* (Vancouver, Canadian Japanese Association, 1940, mimeograph), 13.

<sup>33</sup> The agreement restricted immigration to 400 per year, excluding returning immigrants and their immediate families, students, merchants and diplomats, and agricultural and domestic workers, making it clear that this restriction was aimed at industrial labour, without affecting the supply of labour in the most menial positions.

<sup>34</sup> W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 55.

<sup>35</sup> *Victoria Colonist* 2 May 1900.

<sup>36</sup> Japanese Canadians comprised about 22 per cent of the approximately 1,000 employees in the seven largest sawmills in the Vancouver area in 1901. Concentration of Japanese Canadians in the larger mills was partly a result of their being excluded from most of the smaller mills on Crown timber lands through measures such as the Crown Timber Act of 1913: R. Knight and M. Koizumi, *A Man of Our Times: The Life-history of a Japanese-Canadian Fisherman* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1976), 109-10.

<sup>37</sup> The mill was officially named the B.C. Mills Timber and Trading Company, after its purchase from the Hastings Sawmill Company in 1889. It continued to be known locally as the "Hastings Mill" until it was turned over to the Vancouver Harbour Commissioner in 1925.

<sup>38</sup> R. Sumida, *The Japanese in British Columbia* (unpublished dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1935); G. Yamashita, *A History of the Occupations of the Japanese in British Columbia* (unpublished dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1942).

TABLE I  
*Employment in B.C. sawmills, 1902*

MILL	WHITE	CHINESE	JAPANESE
Chemainus Mill	58	56	58
Chemainus Mill (in camp)	128	19	30
Hastings Mill	164	0	93
Hastings Mill (in camp)	245	10	0
Royal City Mills	180	57	29
Moodiesville Sawmill Co.	60	10	40
Sayward Mills	30-40	60-70	0
Munsie Mills	10	17	0
Haslam Mills	39	13	0
N. Pacific Lumber Co.	45	0	46
Robertson & Hackett	80	0	20
Royal City Mills, Van.	90	11	60
Brunette Mill	168	10	78
Shields Mill	30	3	9
Yale Mill Co.	200	3-4	0
Hillyer's Mill	40	0	0
Buchanan's Mill	10-50	0	0

Source: *Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (1902), 360.

who worked in the mills, however, was far greater, as seasonality of employment and poor working conditions encouraged a very rapid turnover.<sup>39</sup> There was hardly a male immigrant who did not work in the sawmills at some point shortly after immigrating.<sup>40</sup> The total flow of workers through the mills, therefore, was several thousands.

Most Japanese Canadians were recruited to the mills through 'bosses' who played a kind of broker's role. The first such sawmill 'boss' was Takezo (surname unknown), known locally as 'Take-jiisan,' or 'Uncle Take,' who was employed at the Hastings Mill in the mid-1880s.<sup>41</sup> He arranged employment at the mill for several other Japanese Canadians, and supplied them with rudimentary room and board on one of the floating scows that made up a significant portion of the housing in Vancouver at that time. The system grew much

<sup>39</sup> The immigrants, both male and female, altered seasonally between work in the lumber and fishing industries.

<sup>40</sup> Nakayama, Jinshiro, *Kanada no Hoko* [The Treasure of Canada], (Tokyo: Nakayama, 1921), 936.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

more complex during the 1890s, when a number of individuals expanded the rude collection of huts that had grown up around the Hastings Mill to establish businesses that encompassed boarding-house, labour contract, and retail sales functions, as well as providing a range of personal services such as money-lending, translation, and processing of immigration papers. The first Japanese-Canadian land-owner, Ishikawa Katsuzo (who purchased land at 236 Powell Street during the early 1890s) was, not coincidentally, the first 'boss' to arrange employment at Hastings Mill on a large scale.<sup>42</sup> By the time Yamada Suteya assumed the position of 'boss' in the mill in 1899, he was placed in charge of more than 200 workers, the dominant language within the mill was Japanese, and employee records were maintained in Japanese. Within this system, a paternalistic approach on the part of the mill was mutually reinforced by the system of patronage around which the Japanese employment methods were structured, and the mill came to occupy an important place in Japanese-Canadian life beyond its immediate function of job provision. In an interview, Uchida Kinuko, wife of one of the Hastings bosses during the 1890s, claims that all Japanese [Canadians] should be very grateful to the Hastings Mill, and especially to its manager, Mr. Alexander, who supported Japanese Canadians, while recognizing their "superior" qualities compared to other non-white workers.<sup>43</sup> The Hastings Mill came to be known as "tasuke-gaisha," the 'helping company.' The racialization process was thus strengthened by collusion between the mill-owners and the Japanese-Canadian workers against other groups.<sup>44</sup>

Several consequences follow from this process of labour recruitment. It is likely to have contributed to the pattern of community development based on "place-specific social ties" in which Japanese Canadians in different B.C. industries (notably fishing and sawmilling) emigrated from different prefectures within Japan, leading to the re-creation of those village communities within the new Canadian context.<sup>45</sup> The consequences for labour relations are harder to predict: on the one hand, the system of recruitment is likely to have increased the level of solidarity among workers since they would often have been

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-46.

<sup>44</sup> It was around this nucleus of boarding-houses and commercial services attached to the Hastings Sawmill that the so-called 'Little Tokyo' grew to encompass an area of ten city blocks, housing several thousand people, many of them in crowded boarding-houses above commercial establishments. See Audrey Kobayashi, *Memories of our Past: A Brief History and Walking Guide to Powell Street* (Vancouver: NRC Publishing, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> See Kobayashi, *Emigration from Kaideima: Regional Backgrounds of Japanese Immigrants*.

recruited from the same prefecture or village; on the other hand, the level of activism is likely to have been reduced by the group's dependence on the goodwill of the boss, whose position as broker depended on maintaining an uneasy balance between relatively divided loyalties.<sup>46</sup> A survey of conditions in the sawmills in 1917 indicates that those who worked under a 'boss' (fourteen mills in the Vancouver area) enjoyed more consistent wages and, in some cases, a higher degree of organization of limited benefits such as housing.<sup>47</sup> The conditions of those who worked without a boss (ten mills in the Vancouver area) were less consistent in both wages and hours of work.

One other factor that should not be ignored is the imbalanced sex structure of the Japanese-, as well as the Chinese-Canadian, communities. The imbalance was greatest for Chinese Canadians, with sex ratios (nationally) of 27,898 males for every 1,000 females in 1911, declining to 15,348 in 1921.<sup>48</sup> The Japanese-Canadian community never attained these spectacular levels but was still markedly imbalanced, with sex ratios of 5,018:1,000 in 1911 and 1,967:1,000 in 1921. Apart from noting the support which these conditions gave to contemporary stereotypes of the moral degeneracy of Japanese and Chinese Canadians and the prevalence of prostitution among these communities, one can only speculate on the consequences for contemporary gender relations.<sup>49</sup> In the case of Japanese-Canadian women, however, the conditions imposed by immigration regulations, discussed below, meant that mainly women from the poorer families emigrated (while wives of merchants and diplomats remained with the family in Japan), and women were encouraged to work in the most menial jobs as domestics, agricultural workers, and cannery line workers.<sup>50</sup> Such

<sup>46</sup> Throughout the Fraser Mills strike the Japanese-Canadian boss was held responsible for the poor conditions of all workers, by Japanese Canadians because he imposed poor working conditions upon them, and by white workers because Japanese Canadians were used as a weapon against them. The strike demands called for his immediate dismissal.

<sup>47</sup> Nakayama, 837-951.

<sup>48</sup> W. Peter Ward, "Class and race in the social structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939," *BC Studies* 45 (1980): 31-32.

<sup>49</sup> The different sex balance of the two communities may account for certain differences in their racialization. With a greater female population, Japanese Canadians were more likely to become settled in Canada than the more transient Chinese population. As a result Japanese Canadians were regarded as the more serious, potentially permanent, economic threat; see Roy, *A White Man's Province*, xii. The 'picture bride' system also evolved as a novel attempt to help restore the sex balance of the Japanese-Canadian community. For details, see Young, Reid and Carrothers, *The Japanese Canadians*; Kobayashi, *Vancouver Interlude*.

<sup>50</sup> There is photographic evidence of women working in sawmills, in what appears to be sorting or cleaning logs. Because menial work was eschewed within the Japanese patriarchal system, such work is denied in all written accounts, and no statistics have been found to document the

women were most often married to the men who worked in the sawmills.

#### STATE INTERVENTION AND POPULAR REACTION, 1902-1908

The imposition of a Chinese Head Tax in 1886 initiated a racialized discourse during which the B.C. legislature reacted to popular demand (especially from organized labour) by legislating exclusionary measures, and the federal government, bound after 1894 to the treaties signed between Japan and Britain, disallowed discriminatory measures against Japanese immigrants.<sup>51</sup> Although Japanese immigrants were included by default in some of the disallowed legislation, the head tax mainly discouraged Chinese immigration. 'Competition' between the two groups was significantly reduced, therefore, while Japanese Canadians became firmly established in the sawmills during the period of rapid growth from 1900 to 1907.

Despite Laurier's unwillingness to do anything that might imperil Canada's good relations with Japan, the strength of public opinion had reached an intensity by 1900 that was hard to ignore. The Liberal government doubled the Chinese entry tax to \$100 and set up a Royal Commission which reported in 1902, buying further time while offering the appearance of taking positive action.<sup>52</sup> Unlike the previous Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration in 1884, this report gave separate treatment to Chinese and Japanese Canadians, reflecting the increase in immigration to British Columbia from Japan since the turn of the century. The report included a wealth of statistical material on the various industries that employed Chinese and Japanese Canadian labour, as well as comparative material on the situation in the United States. But it is probably most interesting for its record of contemporary attitudes towards what a later observer was to call "the creeping paralysis of Oriental competition."<sup>53</sup>

The Royal Commission heard evidence on the operation of twelve companies, organized to promote emigration from Japan, six of which

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extent of female participation. Women's work in logging camps is acknowledged; here they did the cooking, cleaning, and laundering for large camps that were otherwise made up entirely of men: Kobayashi, *Emigration from Kaideima; Vancouver Interlude*.

<sup>51</sup> For a review of legal measures see Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was*; Roy, *A White Man's Province*. It was argued that stringent measures against Japanese immigrants, such as those against Chinese immigrants, would cause diplomatic difficulties and imperil trade relations.

<sup>52</sup> Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> T. MacInnes, *Oriental Occupation of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Sun Publishing, 1927), 46.

had agents in the U.S. and Canada. "Certain persons in Japan," the Commission learned, "make it their business to furnish intending emigrants with information" or, in other cases, with money, clothing or other practical assistance.<sup>54</sup> The Commission asked various officials for their opinion of the Japanese Canadians who had so far arrived in B.C. Comparisons with Chinese immigrants were particularly frequent, and it was generally agreed that Japanese Canadians were likely to prove the keener competition.<sup>55</sup> For example, William Harrington Ellis (Provincial Immigration Officer, Vancouver Island) responded as follows:

I consider Japanese cleanly in habits, industrious and intelligent. I believe them more dangerous competitors in the business of the country than the Chinese. They adopt European dress and food and conform as much as possible to the customs of the country.<sup>56</sup>

Despite this apparent willingness to conform to 'European' patterns of dress and behaviour, the possibility of 'assimilation' was still denied them. The same speaker continued:

I do not consider them desirable as citizens from the fact that they do not or cannot assimilate with the white races. . . . Their advantage is altogether from the standpoint of capital.<sup>57</sup>

The Royal Commission heard evidence from people of all classes about the alleged 'unassimilability' of Japanese Canadians. "My principal objection to them," asserted a Vancouver sawmill worker, "is that they do not assimilate, cannot assimilate, with our race, and that our country should be for men [*sic*] of our own race, instead of being overrun by an alien race."<sup>58</sup> Fears were also expressed about differential birth rates, economic penetration and illegal immigration, but the most common theme to which those giving evidence returned time and again was the question of 'assimilation'.

There were only occasional dissenting voices, mainly in comparison with Chinese Canadians. Thus, Clive Phillips Wolley (formerly Executive Sanitary Officer for British Columbia) stated his preference for the Japanese Canadian because he [*sic*] seemed ". . . to be willing

<sup>54</sup> *Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (1902), 331-36.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, ("How Japanese are Regarded"), 374ff.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 107.

to live more or less the white man's life. . . . He is more like our own people in assimilating to our manners and customs and modes of living." He concluded, patronisingly: "They are harmless little chaps."<sup>59</sup>

Evidence was also recorded about the unusually high birth rates of Japanese Canadians in relation to the rest of the population and about overcrowding and occupancy rates. James Wilson (Sanitary Inspector for the City of Victoria) reported some exceptional figures: "I have seen forty-five of them in one room in one night," but he concluded that there was not a 'Japanese town' in the same sense that there existed a 'Chinatown,' only a concentration in three or four boarding-houses, some of which were reputed to contain as many as forty straw mattresses.<sup>60</sup>

The Japanese-Canadian population may have avoided the worst kind of stereotyping associated with the existence of 'Chinatown.'<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, the emergence of Powell Street neighbourhood around the Hastings Mill, and of similar but smaller residential clusters around the mills on the south shore of False Creek, becomes significant when one considers the effects of urban segregation on 'racial' attitudes.<sup>62</sup> For example, McDonald has argued that

by segregating Vancouver's Asian population physically, politically and economically, racism reduced social anxiety by removing from the mainstream of Vancouver's life the city's most clearly recognizable foreign element.<sup>63</sup>

Such segregation also presumably played a role in restricting the level of Japanese-Canadian resistance to their discriminatory treatment, a point to which we will return in due course.

<sup>59</sup> *Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (1902), 338.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>61</sup> Kay Anderson, "The idea of Chinatown: the power of place and institutional practice in the making of a racial category," *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 77 (1987), 588.

<sup>62</sup> An article in *BC Magazine* on "Picturesque Vancouver" in April 1911 describes "the Japanese Quarter" on Powell Street. While most of the article simply recounts the author's feelings about "what is wrong with the Japanese character," there are a few interesting observations on the 'Quarter' itself: "For half a mile of its length the men of the cold bosom have printed their pleasant-sounding names on the shop windows of Powell street, in English, and in their own symbols, but they have not printed the marks of their individuality upon it, as the Chinese have on Pender street . . . [T]hey are here to make money, as much as they can. Money is at the back of every Japanese motive": *ibid.*, 311-12. On the politics of segregation, see Smith, *The politics of 'race'*; on Powell Street and False Creek, see Audrey Kobayashi, ed. "Focus: Asian migration to Canada," *The Canadian Geographer* 32(4), (1988): 351-62, and Kobayashi, *Memoirs of Our Past*.

<sup>63</sup> McDonald, "Working class Vancouver," 67.

If the state set the context for the arrival of Japanese-Canadian labour through the imposition of exclusionary immigration restrictions and related policies, their reception in Canada was also greatly affected by the climate of popular opinion as reflected in popular journals such as *Westward Ho!* and *Maclean's*.<sup>64</sup> In a series of editorials throughout 1907, for example, *Westward Ho!* advanced a virulently nativist and xenophobic position. There would be no disagreement, the editor wrote in August 1907, about the importance of maintaining British Columbia — and indeed the whole of Canada — as “a white man’s country.” Lamenting the importation of “5000 Japs” that year, the editor noted the government’s reluctance to impose the same restrictions on Japanese immigration that it felt able to impose on the less powerful and economically less significant Chinese. The magazine did, however, oppose the formation of the Asiatic Exclusion League in its October 1907 issue, employing the self-righteous argument that “justice and fair play” have always characterized British-born people<sup>65</sup>; such tolerance should now be extended to “the stranger at our gates.”<sup>66</sup> By March 1908, however, *Westward Ho!* had returned to its earlier theme of “the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race,” making derogatory references to “the Yellow Peril” in an article on “the Asiatic Question.”

In a somewhat later article (on “The Oriental Threat”), *Maclean's* magazine gave voice to the popular belief that Japanese-Canadian ‘penetration’ of the Canadian economy (in this case, fruit farming) was part of a carefully organized plan. Exaggerated fears of Japanese expansionism are all too clearly revealed in the militaristic metaphors employed:

With the Japanese, penetration appeared to be ordered and controlled as though from some central source. It has all the earmarks of the efficiency which characterizes Japanese expansion everywhere. It is orderly, consistent and continuous, planned in a manner possible only with a homogeneous, aggressive, organized and imperially-minded people. . . . An orderly advance is now in progress, carrying a Japanese

<sup>64</sup> *Westward Ho!* was renamed *Man to Man* in 1910 and became *BC Magazine* in 1911; its hostility towards Japanese Canadians remained largely unchanged.

<sup>65</sup> The Asiatic Exclusion League was founded in 1907 and disbanded the following year. At its height it attracted over 2,000 members, with more than \$5,000 in donations and membership fees: Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 56. On the limited truth of the British claim to “justice and fair play” towards ‘foreigners,’ see Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>66</sup> The phrase is an adaptation of the title of J. S. Woodsworth’s book *Strangers Within Our Gates: Coming Canadians*, 1909 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).



population along the Fraser Valley on both sides of the River and into the one-time socially exclusive Okanagan.<sup>67</sup>

Other magazine features strayed from the xenophobic to the outright racist. In an article on "Immigration — its advantages and disadvantages," *B.C. Magazine* argued that, "with regard to economy, safety and true prosperity," the quality of immigrants was more important than mere quantity:

To be entirely candid, what British Columbia needs now, and for always, is an Anglo-Saxon population in overwhelming preponderance, with the admixture of a moderate number of the best individuals of certain other races which can and have and do assimilate with the Anglo-Saxon race.<sup>68</sup>

From this premise, its conclusion regarding 'Orientals' was inescapable, especially against the acid test of whether they were ready "to bear arms against any foe of the British Empire":

. . . we do not want the Chinaman. Apart from his immorality, filth, disease-breeding peculiarities, and ingrown prejudices against Caucasianism, he will not fight. . . . Therefore a bas the Chinaman.<sup>69</sup>

A slightly different argument was applied to "the Jap," whose commitment to Canada was considered a merely temporary expedient:

The Jap will fight, but only for Japan. His fanaticism in that respect is primitive, fierce and effective. He is a dangerous antagonist, but not by any means unbeatable. We do not want him in British Columbia because he is a mere sojourner, a destroyer as to natural resources, an Ishmaelite in the country, and a hearty despiser of the Anglo-Saxon, as the Anglo-Saxon is of him. A thousand generations would not convert him into a fighting unit for the British Empire. Therefore, a bas the Jap.<sup>70</sup>

Provincial calls for tighter immigration restrictions were repeatedly thwarted by Ottawa until the federal government was finally provoked

<sup>67</sup> 1 May 1933: 54.

<sup>68</sup> October 1912: 725.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 725-26.

to act when rioting broke out in Vancouver in 1907.<sup>71</sup> Immigration from Japan had reached record levels, and popular antipathy towards Japanese Canadians led to violence on the streets in September 1907.<sup>72</sup> After an investigation by W. L. Mackenzie King,<sup>73</sup> the federal government awarded compensation to Japanese-Canadian victims of the riot, but immediately imposed further restrictions on immigration. In response to the report, Laurier sent his Minister of Labour, Rodolphe Lemieux, to Tokyo to negotiate stricter enforcement of Japanese emigration controls.<sup>74</sup> In the report of his *Mission to Japan on the Subject of the Influx of Oriental Labourers into the Province of British Columbia* in 1908, Lemieux wrote that

British Columbians object to a vast alien Colony, exclusive, inscrutable, unassimilative, with fewer wants and a lower standard of living than themselves, maintaining intact their peculiar customs and characteristics, ideals of home and family life, with neither the wish nor the capacity to amalgamate, which gradually by the mere pressure of numbers may undermine the very foundations of *their province*.<sup>75</sup>

Politicians from other parties were also pressing for stricter exclusionary legislation. Robert Borden, leader of the federal Conservative Party, argued the case in strikingly 'racial' terms:

<sup>71</sup> Popular opinion had reached fever pitch following a series of newspaper articles which reported the threatened "invasion" of 50,000 "little brown men" to work on the western end of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (*Vancouver Daily Province* 1 February 1907). A Japanese contractor was said to have been engaged by the railway to bring over a "horde of coolies"; there would be "No Chance for White Man on New Railroad." The *Daily Province* went on to report that "the sentiment of Vancouver is practically unanimous on the question of the exclusion of the Japanese in particular and Asiatics in general" (9 September 1907). Even after the riot, it continued to stir up local feeling with reports on the "thousands of Japs" who had secured permits and will soon be on the way (16 September 1907). In fact, Saori Gotoh, representing the Tokyo Imin Gaisha [Tokyo Immigration Company], signed a contract with the Grand Trunk Railway to provide 5,000 workers. Despite pressure from the railway company, he was able to provide just over 2,000. See Nakayama, *Kanada no Hoko*, 862-65; original correspondence detailing the transactions is held in Tokyo at the Gaiko Shiriyokan [Foreign Affairs Archives].

<sup>72</sup> Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was*, 63-87; Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 53-76; Roy, *A White Man's Province*, 185-226; H. Sugimoto, *Japanese Immigration, the Vancouver Riots and Canadian Diplomacy* (unpublished dissertation, University of Washington, 1966).

<sup>73</sup> W. L. Mackenzie King, *Report of the Royal Commission on Oriental Immigration Appointed to Inquire into Methods by which Oriental Labourers have been Induced to Come to Canada* (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1908); *Report on the Losses Sustained by the Japanese Population in Vancouver, B.C., on the Occasion of the Riots in that City in September 1907* (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1908).

<sup>74</sup> M. Iino, "Japan's reaction to the Vancouver riot," *BC Studies* 79 (1983-84): 28-47.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 75, emphasis added.

British Columbia must remain a British and Canadian province, inhabited and dominated by men [*sic*] in whose veins runs the blood of those great pioneering races which built up and developed not only western, but Eastern Canada.<sup>76</sup>

“Orientals,” Borden argued, were “formidable competitors in the field of labour”; because they belonged to “a civilization developed through the centuries, along lines totally and radically divergent from ours,” there was, he felt “a well nigh impassable gulf between the two.”<sup>77</sup>

The resulting “Gentlemen’s Agreement,” known officially as the Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement, was inevitable. In addition, in 1908, immigration to Canada was restricted to those who arrived by ‘continuous journey’ and with tickets purchased in the home country. This measure effectively blocked emigration from India (from which there were no licensed steamer routes), as well as further Japanese immigration via Hawaii. The Governor-General, Earl Grey, who believed in “the inevitable tussle between the White and Yellow races,” felt that such an arrangement was “essential to the development of trade relations between Canada and Japan.”<sup>78</sup>

The interests of capital and the state were not always so closely in accord. Immigration restriction threatened to cut off the supply of cheap, unskilled, racialized labour and to strengthen the bargaining position of the labour unions (who continued to exclude Asian Canadians). The extent to which racialization benefited sawmill employers can be seen from an examination of wage rates in the industry, drawing again on evidence presented to the 1902 Royal Commission.

#### WAGE RATES

Even when their employers admitted that Japanese-Canadian labour was as efficient as ‘white’ labour, they invariably paid them less. Employers openly admitted the existence of such differentials. Robert Charles Ferguson (manager of the Royal City Mills in Vancouver) gave the following evidence to the Royal Commission in 1902:

We employ 150 men, of whom 60 are Japanese. Over half the Japanese are paid 90 cents a day. Three Japanese have charge of saws. They are satisfactory. We get as much done as if run by a white man. We pay a

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in M. A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), 351-52.

Japanese sawyer \$1.25 a day. We pay white labour of the same class (sawyers) \$2.25. . . . White men could not live on the same wages we pay Chinese and Japanese.<sup>79</sup>

TABLE 2  
*Differential wage rates in B.C. sawmills, 1902*

MILL	WHITE	CHINESE	JAPANESE
Chemainus	\$2 unskilled \$2.25+ skilled	\$1-1.25	\$1-1.25
Hastings Mill	\$40-50/month \$2.25-2.50/day	—	\$0.90-1.25
Royal City Mills	\$1.75-2.50 unskilled \$2.50-3.50 skilled	—	\$0.90-1.00 for common labour; sawyers \$1.25-1.50
Brunette Sawmill Co.	\$35-100/month	\$0.90	\$0.95-1.25 (average \$1)
Royal City Planing Mills	\$35-125/month, \$1.75-3.40/day for skilled labour	\$0.85-1.35 (average \$1)	\$0.85-1.40 (average \$1)

Source: *Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (1902), 365.

The Royal City Planing Mills at New Westminster employed 29 Japanese Canadians out of a total of 266 men. The local manager, Robert Jardine, gave similar evidence, although he argued that wage differentials were less significant than labour shortages in encouraging the employment of Japanese-Canadian labour:

The Japanese came in in 1897; prior to that Chinese were used. In 1897 we had a number of white men employed that filled the positions now held by Japanese, and they left and went fishing and we were compelled to get whatever labour we could . . . . It is not because of the difference in wages, but the difficulty in getting men, that we employ Japanese . . . . We pay white labourers \$1.50 to \$1.75; skilled \$2.50 to \$3.85; two boys 18 years old \$1 a day. We pay the Japanese \$1 a day, and three \$1.25.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (1902): 361.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

Other mills reported similar differentials (table 2). In other contexts, 'cheap foreign labour' comprises a racialized population accepting jobs at rates of pay that local workers find unacceptable but where everyone employed in those jobs is paid at the same rate.<sup>81</sup> In the present case, however, racialization permitted employers to pay different groups of workers different rates of pay *for the same work*. In both cases, racialization has the effect of depressing wage rates within a particular industry. But the second case is likely to lead to greater conflict among different groups of workers because it threatens to replace non-racialized workers with a racialized workforce that is competing on allegedly 'unfair' terms.

#### UNION ACTIVISM

The period in question is often regarded as a formative one in the development of working class political activism in British Columbia, a province that has earned itself a militant or radical reputation within Canada.<sup>82</sup> Some 15 per cent of Vancouver's workforce was unionized in 1912, excluding virtually all 'Asian' labour, seasonal migrants and women. As Gillian Creese argues, it was a time of radical trade unionism coupled with virulent racism towards 'Oriental' labour.<sup>83</sup> The period in question has therefore given rise to a sometimes heated debate about class and 'race' relations and the relative merits of cultural-psychological versus political-economic explanations.<sup>84</sup> Ward argues that

racism in British Columbia was fundamentally a problem in the social psychology of race relations. To me, economic strains . . . ultimately were subordinate to psychological tensions as the central locus of racial animosity;

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Ralph Fevre, *Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination* (Aldershot: Gower, 1984).

<sup>82</sup> A. R. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: the Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); McDonald, "Working class Vancouver"; R. Warburton and D. Coburn eds. *Workers, Capital, and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988).

<sup>83</sup> Gillian Creese, "Class, ethnicity and conflict: the case of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, 1880-1923," in R. Warburton and D. Coburn eds. *Workers, Capital and the State*: 55-85; see also "Exclusion or solidarity? Vancouver workers confront the 'Oriental problem,'" *BC Studies* 80 (1988-9): 24-51.

<sup>84</sup> W. Peter Ward, "Class and race in the social structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939," *BC Studies* 45 (1980): 17-35; R. Warburton, "Race and class in British Columbia: a comment," *BC Studies* 49 (1981): 70-85.

and that

historically, the major divisions in provincial society have been those of race.<sup>85</sup>

Warburton, however, criticizes Ward for dealing only with class *consciousness* (and from an idealist perspective), rather than with the 'objective' dimensions of class *relations* (from a materialist perspective). He also accuses Ward of having dealt with 'race' and 'class' as though they were quite independent of each other.<sup>86</sup> This point is taken up by Creese, who focuses on the role that 'race' played in specific episodes of class formation.<sup>87</sup> She shows how an "ethnically segmented working class" emerged from the combined effects of (state) immigration policies and (capitalist) employment practices in which 'Asian' labour (to use her phrase) was assigned an inferior political status as temporary immigrants ("non-settlers"), a position that was felt to be justified by popular (racist) assumptions about the impossibility of 'Asian' assimilation. This process was facilitated by the unions which sought to protect their (class) interests within the confines of a single (racially-exclusive) group.<sup>88</sup> Even where there were attempts to unionize Japanese-Canadian labour, there was no suggestion that they might join the same unions as the white working class; separate 'racially'-specific unions were the order of the day.<sup>89</sup>

The formation of the Japanese Camp and Mill Workers' Union is instructive in this regard. Around 200 Japanese-Canadian workers at the Swanson Bay mill near Ocean Falls went on strike in 1919, demanding equal pay with white workers.<sup>90</sup> The strike involved shingle sawyers and packers in every mill in the province and led to the formation of a Labour Union (*Nihonjin Rodo Kumiai*). The union included Japanese Canadians (all men) from a variety of industries including loggers, papermillers, fishers, laundry workers, and general labourers. It was this

<sup>85</sup> Ward, *White Canada Forever*, ix; "Class and race," 35.

<sup>86</sup> Warburton, "Race and class," 82.

<sup>87</sup> Creese, "Class, ethnicity and conflict."

<sup>88</sup> A strike at the Cumberland Coal Mines in 1903 in which mine workers demanded equal wages for 'Asian' workers has been described as "one of the few acts of friendship shown the Japanese in British Columbia industrial history: P. McLoughlin, *The Japanese and the Labour Movement of British Columbia* (unpublished B.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1951). Only the One Big Union movement, in a short-lived moment of solidarity in 1919, sought to include Japanese Canadians on equal terms, recognizing "no aliens but the capitalists": Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 78; D. J. Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: the Rise and Fall of the One Big Union Movement* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978).

<sup>89</sup> Anderson, *The Growth of Organized Labour*.

<sup>90</sup> McLoughlin, *The Japanese and the Labour Movement*, 142.

organization which formed the basis of the "(Japanese) Camp and Mill Workers' Union." The union had 1,600 members and, in 1924, began publishing a daily newspaper, the *Daily People (Minsbu)*. The Camp and Mill Workers' Union was admitted to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council in 1926, but there was never any discussion of integration of its members with white sawmill workers.<sup>91</sup>

## RESISTANCE

Resistance takes many forms ranging from active rebellion to almost imperceptible changes in consciousness. As a result, historical evidence of resistance is not always easy to discover. One simple indicator is the formation of Japanese-Canadian self-help societies, such as the Japanese Benevolent Society (1900) and the Canadian Japanese Association (1909). The latter had a membership of 2,000 people paying an annual fee of \$3.00 and was affiliated with thirty-two other associations. According to one observer,

its main object has been to maintain high moral and law-abiding habits among the Japanese and to defend the Japanese against undue discrimination. It also maintains among the Japanese their pride of race and state and hence tends to keep alive in Canada, a strong sense of Japanese nationalism.<sup>92</sup>

As a result, there was some tension between the CJA's position and other Japanese-Canadians (especially unionists) who wanted to be regarded as "completely Canadian."<sup>93</sup>

The racialization process is by no means a simple, one-way attribution, but a complex process involving complicity and negotiation. The fact that many Japanese Canadians left the sawmill industry as soon as they were able, often setting up as self-employed farmers and fishermen, is a further indication of a very simple strategy of resistance,

<sup>91</sup> Knight and Koizumi, *A Man of Our Times*. This development may have had something to do with the fact that the first serious co-operation between white and non-white unions came about in 1931, during the Fraser Mills strike. There, workers' demands included calls to end discrimination between white and 'Asian' workers, abolition of the contract labour system for 'Asian' workers, and the provision of new housing for 'Asian' workers to replace "the present unsanitary quarters where Oriental workers are compelled to live" (see Papers, Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, Special Collections, UBC, Boxes 10-11). The Minutes also record four Japanese Canadians as members of the strike committee.

<sup>92</sup> C. J. Woodsworth, *Canada and the Orient: A Study in International Relations* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1941), 146.

<sup>93</sup> McLoughlin, *The Japanese and the Labour Movement*, 33.

abandoning a racialized and exploitative employment niche as soon as other alternatives became available. But, in general, active opposition to racialization seems to have been relatively muted. This fact is not surprising, perhaps, since Japanese Canadians were denied even the most basic rights of citizenship, including the right to vote, until the 1940s,<sup>94</sup> and they had a limited power base from which to mount opposition.

Despite the provisions of the 1923 Immigration Act (which Roy describes as “essentially a Chinese exclusion act”) it was still being argued in the provincial legislature in 1924 that “the Oriental menace is a grave one,” threatening “the very life of the Anglo-Saxons on the Pacific coast.”<sup>95</sup> But whereas twenty years ago “only the workman felt the pinch, . . . today all industries are affected.”<sup>96</sup> Japanese Canadians, it was said,

have invaded the sawmills, the fishing industry, farming, and almost every walk of life. Their energy and ability make their presence a very serious economic problem.<sup>97</sup>

They also faced a tightening of immigration restrictions in the 1920s, through a further reduction in the numbers permitted under the ‘Gentleman’s Agreement.’ Little had apparently changed, although arguments about ‘unfair’ competition for labour were now more common than arguments about the impossibility of ‘assimilation.’ Exclusionary sentiment grew as economic conditions worsened. In December 1924, the Legislative Assembly commissioned a *Report on Oriental Activities within the Province* which noted that

considerable unemployment always exists in British Columbia, partly due to the fact that large numbers of Orientals are filling situations in our industrial and commercial life which could be filled by our white citizens.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> The B.C. legislature had, begrudgingly, extended the right to vote to eighty surviving Japanese Canadian war veterans in 1931: Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 140. The right to vote in federal elections was not extended to Japanese Canadians until 1949. Japanese Canadians were, of course, to suffer even greater deprivations during World War II when several thousand were involuntarily ‘evacuated’ from their homes on the West Coast and incarcerated in camps in the interior: Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was*; A. G. Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: the Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1981).

<sup>95</sup> Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, 266.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in F. W. Howay, *British Columbia: The Making of a Province* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1928), 264.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>98</sup> *Report on Oriental Activities within the Province* (Victoria, British Columbia, 1927).



The report looked into the question of whether Chinese and Japanese Canadians should be prevented from owning, selling, leasing, or renting land in order to reduce the level of competition. The attempt, therefore, to go beyond the difficult conditions of sawmill work by entering more independent industries was not without continued opposition.

According to data provided by the Bureau of Provincial Life, over 11,300 "Orientals" were employed in industries in B.C. But it also noted that "while the proportion employed in the lumbering industry generally has been reduced to 20 per cent, there are between 30 and 40 per cent employed in saw and planing mills and close to 50 per cent in shingle mills." Having debated the report, the House then reaffirmed its complete opposition "to the further influx of Orientals into this Province."<sup>99</sup> The process of racialization had produced a remarkably entrenched division of labour, restricting the opportunities available to the racialized workforce, and depressing the wages of an entire industry.

## CONCLUSION

Might it then be argued that white workers were justified in their reaction to Japanese Canadians because of the effects of racialized labour in depressing their wages? This argument has received some recent support in the academic literature from Patricia Roy.<sup>100</sup> There are several aspects to this analysis where we would wish to differ. Roy constantly refers to the 'competition' between 'white' and 'Asian' labour with only occasional references to the effects of racism in structuring that 'competition' along very unequal lines. But her whole analysis remains wedded to very conventional definitions of 'race.' Ignoring recent arguments about the social construction of 'race,' she defines the concept "in a narrow sense, referring only to skin colour and other immutable physical characteristics."<sup>101</sup> Her discussion of the relative importance of 'race hatred' and (economically motivated) 'fear of competition' therefore misses the central question of *how economic competition came to be structured along 'racial' lines*. It is here that the

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 3-4. Serious opposition to the unequal treatment of 'Orientals' had to wait until the founding of the CCF in 1932. Liberal Party campaign material made the most of this: "A vote for any CCF candidate is a vote to give the Chinaman and Japanese the same voting right that you have! A vote for a Liberal candidate is a vote against oriental enfranchisement": Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 109. 'Oriental' wage differentials were not eliminated until after World War II (ibid., 153).

<sup>100</sup> Roy, *A White Man's Province*.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., viii.

racialization thesis has most to offer. In order for the process of 'competition' to have taken place in the way it did, a racialization of labour was necessary to legitimate the existence of differential wage rates for different groups of workers. This is not to imply that capital and labour *deliberately* employed the idea of 'race' in order to exploit or exclude Japanese immigrants. But a notion of 'natural' difference, structured along racial (or gender) lines, is a prerequisite. Racism works ideologically in much more subtle ways, drawing upon common sense definitions and unexamined premises. Academic analysis should not fall into the same trap. An alternative approach, outlined in this paper, is to apply the theory of 'racialization' to this neglected area of B.C. history.