The Forgotten Ties
Relationships between First Nations People and Early Chinese Immigrants in British Columbia, Canada (1858 ~ 1947)

By

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Outlines

• Arrivals of the Chinese in British Columbia (B.C)
• Migration of the Chinese and their contacts with the First Nations People in BC
• Relationships developed with the First Nations People
  - friendship
  - work partners/teammates
  - Intermarriage (benefits and challenges)
• Regulations that affected the relationships
• Conclusion
• References
• Acknowledgements
• Special Notes
Arrivals of the Chinese British Columbia

1. Around 458 A.D. – The journey of Hui Shen (慧深) and his 40 disciples
Arrivals and contacts – continued

2. In 1788 John Meares brought 79 Chinese artisans from Guangdong to Nootka Sound

   - Meares’ Ships were seized by the Spanish at Nootka in 1789. The Chinese fled to the interior and came in contact with the Salish First Nations

3. In 1858 hundreds of Chinese gold miners and prospectors from California arrived and joined the gold stampede at the Fraser River. Chinese people continued to immigrate from US, Hong Kong and Guangdong during the gold rush periods between 1858 and 1898. The First Nations guided the Chinese to various gold fields

4. Between 1880 - 1885 Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) employed about 17,000 Chinese labourers in the railway construction. The CPR work force consisted of Chinese, First Nations, Kanaka, Black and White people.
Map of British Columbia showing different regions to which the early Chinese had migrated - by Lily Chow

1788 Nootka Sound
1858 Thompson/Fraser
1862 Cariboo
1863 East Kootenay
1863 Big Bend - Columbia
1869 Omineca
1869 Atlin
1873 Cassiar (~458 A.D.)
1885 Peace River
1885 Granite Creek
1885 Similkameen
1898 Atlin
Relationships between these two ethnic groups

1. Friendship

- The American miners alleged the Chinese miners for supplying arms and ammunitions to the First Nations at the advent of the Canyon War *
- Paul Joseph York, a First Nations man in Spuzzum who worked in the CPR Construction claimed that many Chinese labourers were his friends**
- In the Omineca, the First Nations taught the Chinese miners the skill of trapping animals (1904)***
- The well-known Chong family who owned and operated the Chong Wah Grocery Store (1930 ~1990+) was/is good friend of the Haugen family, First Nations in Lytton****

* Victoria Gazette, September 1, 1858, p 3
**Laforet’s interview with - Annie York and Arthur Urquhart, Spuzzum
*** Sojourners in the North, 1996 p. 102
**** Personal interview with the late Rita Haugen & David Chong
Illustration of friendship - C. D. Hoy & Josephine Alexander

Courtesy: Barkerville Historic Town Library & Archives
P 1972 Barkerville Photograph Collection
Acc #1990.3.640 (C.D. Hoy Collection)
Photographer: C. D. Hoy
2. Work partners:

- Four Chinese miners and a Native miner stayed in a cabin at McCrea’s Bar and worked on the same bar as partners in 1862*
- From 1879 onward Chinese men and Aboriginal women worked in the canneries in the Skeena region**
- During the CPR Construction (1880-1885) both the First Nations and Chinese labourers worked together in laying tracks***
- Both ethnic groups were engaged in freight/wagon trains business
- Both ethnic groups worked in hop farms in Langley, Chilliwack, Kamloops and other areas.

*British Colonist, 12 March 1862, p.3
**Chasing Their Dreams, 2000, p.20-37
***The Last Spike: The Great Railway, 1971; In the Sea of Sterile Mountains, 1974
Power of the First People
Tribute to the First Nations & Early Chinese
Art pieces by David Cheung

Courtesy: Rocky Railway High, Toronto
Horse Carriages in line in front of St, Saviour’s Church, Barkerville, 1919. GEE COON was riding on horse back
Chinese & First Nations on horseback: L-R: Look Sing George Baker, Unknown, Kong Sing, Marvin Baker ca~1920s.
### 3. Common-Law and Intermarriage

- List found in the interior of BC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Union</th>
<th>Name of Chinese man</th>
<th>Name of First Nations woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>~1890</td>
<td>Ah Lock</td>
<td>Josephine Alexander (Carrier)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ late 1890</td>
<td>An Lum</td>
<td>Ester Joseph (Gitsan – Hazelton)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ 1900</td>
<td>Ah Ching</td>
<td>Daughter of Chief Pelek (Spuzzum)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Aug 1902</td>
<td>Ah Si</td>
<td>Marie Suzbemni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1904</td>
<td>Ah Gee</td>
<td>Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nov 1908</td>
<td>Ah Thing</td>
<td>Marie (Babine Lake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ 1915</td>
<td>Ah Yee</td>
<td>Eugenie Sangalan (Stuart Lake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Nov 1916</td>
<td>Charles Chew Tie</td>
<td>Clestine (Pinchi Lake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Lee Wing</td>
<td>Eileen D. Wesley (Port Essington)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Descendants of these couples had been interviewed
3. Common-Law and Intermarriage – cont/

Harry Lowe and Lucy Black were married in Lytton but the date of their union was unknown. Their first child, Alice was born in 1937. John Black is the son of this couple.

Courtesy: The late Mrs. Rita Haugen, Lytton
The house where Harry Lowe, Lucy Black and their family once lived in Lytton

Photographer: Lily Chow,
Notes:

• The intermarriage of Ah Lock and Josephine Alexander, and that of Ah Lum and Ester Joseph were lasting. Both men only returned to Guangdong after the death of their First Nations wives.

• The marriage between Ah Ching and the daughter of Chief Pelek of Spuzzum remained until they passed on. Ah Ching had integrated so well in the First Nations community that he was considered as a citizen of Spuzzum. After his death he was buried in the First Nations cemetery in Spuzzum*

• But the marriage between Lee Wing and Eileen Wesley ended in divorce

* Interview of Annie York, a First Nations Elder of Spuzzum by Andrea Laforet.
Benefits of these relationships

- **Friendship and teamwork** - Created opportunities for both ethnic groups
  - to share and learn about one another cultures and languages*
  - to exchange practical skills such as using herbs as food and medicine**, hunting and fishing, survival strategies in wilderness and cooking*** etc

- **In intermarriage:**
  - The First Nations women provided a home, intimacy and love to the Chinese single men
  - Both men and women established families – almost all the marriages produced children
  - Descendants of happy marriages appreciate cultures of both nations, thence root searching!

*Ah Ching in Spuzzum spoke Sto:lo
** The Chinese residents in Spuzzum taught the First Nation how to mix nettles with bacon and rice, and eat them as meals, as well as how to use wild ginger for medicine that relieved cough and cold.
*** *David Alexander had acquired Chinese cooking skills from his father, Chow Ah Lock. His cooking skills were fondly remembered and envied by many of his second cousins.
Challenges in Intermarriage

• Attitudes/Values

- Generally communities of both groups accepted plurality of wives
  E.g.: Chief Pelek had seven wives, Yip Sang, the well known merchant had five wives.

- Most Native tribes did not hold marriage bond to be indissoluble but traditional
  Chinese perceived marriage especially the union with the first wife (原配) as a lifetime commitment, therefore, many in the Chinese community would interpret the union of their fellowmen with Native women as abandoning the first wife and children at home, an inconsiderate and irresponsible behaviour.

- Chinese held fast on selecting Chinese girls to be their wives; at least, the first wife or yuan pei (原配) had to be a Chinese woman.

- Traditional Cantonese teachings: “you may teach others to beat (discipline) their children but NEVER encourage men to leave their wives!” To many old timers taking a foreign wife was an indication of abandoning the wives at home., as many of them were not unmarried men!
Challenges – cont/-

• Differences in life-styles between the First Nations women and the Chinese men
  - Chinese men such as miners, workers in pack trains etc., usually worked far away from home, and hung out with their peers in the Chinese community after they returned from work. (to find out news from home villages and to receive and send letters home etc)

• The effects of Legislations:
  - The Indian Act - The Indian Act (1876-1985), Section 12 (1)(b) in the Act essentially states that...
    ‘When an Indian woman married a non-status man, even if she was born with status would lose it, unable to regain it even if she subsequently was divorced or widowed. Along with her status, the woman lost her band membership and with it, her property, inheritance, residency, burial, medical, educational and voting rights on the reserve.’ (Silman, Enough is enough… 1987)

The sacrifices of the First Nations women who married a non-Native were enormous!

• The Family Unification Act in 1948 (amended in 1952) allowed the single men to bring their wives and children under 18 of age to Canada. Many left their First Nations wives when their families arrived.

When the couple of intermarriage failed to overcome challenges and could not ignore the perceptions of the people around them, these factors might cause the marriage break down.
Consequences of a broken marriage:

- Emotional and psychological scars on the couple that took years to heal.
- The First Nations women would suffer greatly, as they had already lost their rights and privileges in their reserves by marrying Chinese man.
- Single parents, usually the moms, were left to raise their off-springs.
- Aunts and uncles might be left to take care and raise these children in their reserves/communities.
- Whether these children were raised in the First Nations reserves or Chinese homes many of them were looked down and abused in these communities.
- A few men took the children back to China but the children were not appreciated by their Chinese wives. Many of these children had experienced abused and despised.
- Some descendants felt the loss of identity, a few even were ashamed of their roots.
- Many descendants didn’t know and understand the Chinese languages and culture. They had no Chinese elders to tell them the Chinese customs and traditions, and stories related to the Chinese history and culture. Whereas, story-telling is an important channel through which the First Nations people share and pass their cultures and history to their descendants.
Regulations that affect the relationships between these two ethnic groups:

1. Retailing and consumption of liquor
   - In 1900 the Liquor License Act required liquor retailers to pay licensing fees for selling liquor but they would be consulted in determining the payments for licensing fees. Section 44 of this Act, however, stated that ‘Mongolians and Indians are not consulted about the granting of licenses, and they are not counted as inhabitants in determining the amount of the fee to be paid by the applicants [for licenses]’
   - But selling liquor was one of the easy money making ventures in the early days. Even though members of these two ethnic groups had difficulties in obtaining license for retailing liquor, they joined the trade especially in trafficking ‘illegally’ that created competitions among them.*
   - Journalists reported that some liquor sold by the Chinese had caused insanity and deaths to a few First Nations people**. These incidents created distrust among the First Nations members towards the Chinese and generated discords among them.

* British Colonist, 27 August 1875 p. 3; 27 May 1877 p. 3; Victoria Gazette 10 August 1585 p. 2
** British Colonist, 1882, September 23, p. 3
Regulations… cont/-

2. Water Right – Chinese immigrants could apply water right for mining, gardening and other usage directly from Gold Commissioners or local authority whereas the First Nations had to apply theirs from Indian Affairs Office administrated by the Federal Government.

Samples of water-right records from GR 252 vol. 12 file 1, vol. 13 file 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Applicants</th>
<th>Effective dates</th>
<th>Water usage &amp; sources</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Government agents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheng Fook &amp; Co</td>
<td>17 May 1861</td>
<td>Mining – Spuzzum Creek to Ricking Flat</td>
<td>8 shillings per month</td>
<td>M. Landers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah Ying &amp; co</td>
<td>28 August 1861</td>
<td>Mining – Fraser River to Bamboo Bar</td>
<td>4 shillings per month</td>
<td>L. M. Landers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah Lee</td>
<td>22 June 1874</td>
<td>Mining – Emory Creek to Emory Bar</td>
<td>$2.00 per month</td>
<td>M. Lengur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shu Fong</td>
<td>3 September 1874</td>
<td>Mining – Creek to American Bar</td>
<td>$2.00 per month</td>
<td>M. Lengur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah Hing</td>
<td>18 April 1883</td>
<td>Mining - Siska Flat to sand bar near Lytton</td>
<td>$3.00 per month</td>
<td>Frederick Hussy,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. The waiting period for getting approval to use water had created anxiety and frustration among the First Nations people. The fact that Chinese could get water usage faster had generated a sense of unfairness among the First Nations people who, at times, directed their anger and resentment towards those ‘privileged’ Chinese immigrants.

First Nations people who lived in arid land as shown in the picture were, indeed, in need of water to make a living.
Regulations…cont/..

- Land Pre-emptions

• During James Douglas’ governorship the Aboriginal people were given the right to pre-empt vacant crown lands, thus no one was allowed to pre-empt land that was any part of Native settlements or used by the Native people. But some Chinese had pre-empted lands from the Gold Commissioner Henry Ball in Lytton, lands apparently belonged to the Nlaka’pamux. Whether Ball had overlooked the regulations or not no one could tell. But the pre-emption had created discords between the First Nations people and the Chinese who occupied the land.

• Another case of this kind of discords was noted by the late Annie York. She stated that some Chinese miners bought a piece of land on Indian Reserve where the Spuzzum Creek meets the Fraser River, a place being referred to as ‘the point’ by the Aboriginals. “Some crooks sold them [Chinese] the land at ‘the point’,” said Annie York. “The Chinese didn’t understand that was a piece of Indian land and put a ditch there for mining. The Indians didn’t like it, so they started fighting with the Chinamen.”
Regulations... cont/-

- 3. Land Pre-emption – Below is a list of Crown lands pre-empted by the Chinese immigrants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Locality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31, May 1862</td>
<td>Ah Yung</td>
<td>Plot for gardening situated on the Bench above the corner of the Wagon Road near Lytton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10, Mar 1863</td>
<td>Ah Song</td>
<td>Two acres opposite Court House in Lytton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30, Apr 1863</td>
<td>Four Chinamen</td>
<td>Five acres situated behind Big Bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, May 1863</td>
<td>Ah Lchut</td>
<td>Five acres near China Flat for gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23, Oct 1863</td>
<td>Ah Soup</td>
<td>Five acres at the mouth of the Thompson River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19, May 1864</td>
<td>Ah Sot</td>
<td>Five acres at the bend of the Fraser for making hay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23, May 1864</td>
<td>Wai Chong</td>
<td>Five acres for a garden on Spring Flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19, Sept 1864</td>
<td>Kum Sing</td>
<td>Five acres situated two miles below the sawmill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19, Oct 1864</td>
<td>Ah Kum</td>
<td>Five acres for a garden at New Brunswick Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14, Nov 1864</td>
<td>Man Kung</td>
<td>Five acres on the Fraser between Yankee Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25, Jan 1865</td>
<td>Ah Fook</td>
<td>Three acres on China Flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30, Jan 1865</td>
<td>Shin Ho</td>
<td>Five acres on Mooron Bar at the Fraser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18, Mar 1865</td>
<td>Fok Ick</td>
<td>Five acres between Dallas Creek and the Fraser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22, Mar 1865</td>
<td>Ing Tong</td>
<td>Five acres between Dallas Creek and the Fraser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** This list is not exhaustive; only contains some Chinese miners and other residents who pre-empted the lands for gardening from the Gold Commissioner’s office.

• Source: Mining, trading and garden records, Lytton, GR 833
Conclusion

• The Fraser and Cariboo gold rushes opened doors for businesses and industries that created jobs for the First Nations and all immigrants including the Chinese. These events plus the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway accelerated the economic growth in BC. Unfortunately, the Chinese and the First Nations were culturally repressed and alienated by the mainstream and all levels of governments. They were disenfranchised as early as 1872. Thrown together by legislations and circumstances, it was natural for these two ethnic groups to turn to each other, thus giving them opportunities to establish their relationships.

• After the enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1923, and followed by the Great Depression (1929~1935), however, many Chinese in the interior migrated to big cities to find jobs, and to seek protection in the Chinese communities. Those who remained in the interior lived out their days, thus their relationships gradually thinned out and became little known particularly to the younger generations and new immigrants.

• Therefore, this paper is an attempt to bring awareness of the almost forgotten relationships between the two ethnic groups. Their relationships are an integral part of our Canadian history, yet they have been neglected. It is time to seek and reach out, research and record, and reconcile and recognize the relationships.
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Thank you for attending this session

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