

# **The Forgotten Ties**

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

By

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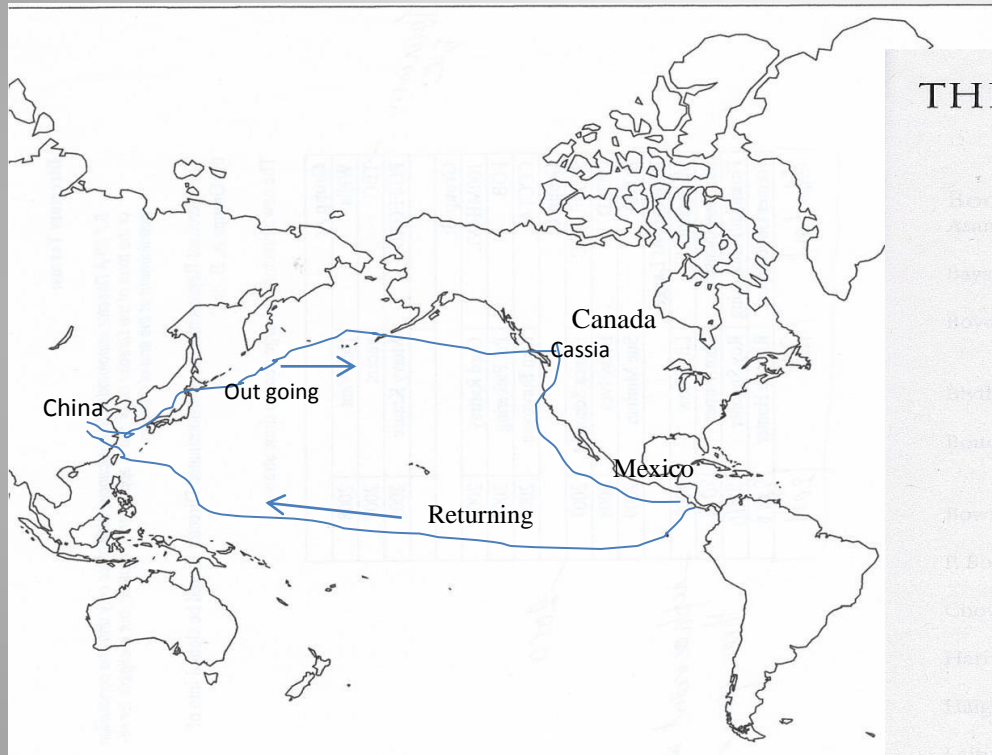
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# Outlines

- 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



Map illustration by Lily Chow

### THE DESCRIPTION OF "FUSANG" IN CHINESE LANGUAGE

扶桑國者，齊永元元年，其國有沙門慧深來至荊州，說云：「扶桑在大漢國東二萬餘里，地在中國之東，其土多扶桑木，故以爲名。扶桑葉似桐，而初生如笋，國人食之，實如梨而赤，績其皮爲布以爲衣，亦以爲綿。作板屋，無城郭。有文字，以扶桑皮爲紙。無兵甲，不攻戰。其國法，有南北獄。若犯輕者入南獄，重罪者入北獄。有赦則赦南獄，不赦北獄。在北獄者，男女相配，生男八歲爲奴，生女九歲爲婢。犯罪之身，至死不出。貴人有罪，國乃大會，坐罪人於坑，對之宴飲，分袂若死別焉。以灰繞之，其一重則一身屏退，二重則及子孫，三重則及七世。名國王爲乙那，貴人第一者爲大對盧，第二者爲小對盧，三者爲納咄沙。國王行有鼓角導從。其衣色隨年改易，甲乙年青，丙丁年赤，戊己年黃，庚辛年白，壬癸年黑。有牛角甚長，以角載物，至勝二十斛。車有馬車、牛車、鹿車。國人養鹿，如中國畜牛。以乳爲酪。有桑梨，經年不壞。多蒲桃。其地無鐵有銅，不貴金銀。市無租估。其婚姻，婿往女家門外作屋，晨夕灑掃，經年而女不悅，即驅之，相悅乃成婚。婚禮大抵與中國同。親喪，七日不食，祖父母喪，五日不食，兄弟伯叔姑姊妹，三日不食。設靈爲神像，朝夕拜奠，不制緣絲。嗣王立，三年不視國事。其俗舊無佛法，宋大明二年，闍婆國嘗有比丘五人游行至其國，流通佛法，經像，教令出家，風俗遂改。」

Source: Liang Shu, p. 808

## **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



# 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

# Relationships – cont/-

## 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



**Courtesy: Quesnel District Museum & Archives,P1958.264.1**

Horse Carriages in line in front of St, Saviour's Church, Barkerville,  
1919. GEE COON was riding on horse back





**Courtesy: Quesnel District Museum & Archives, P 1978.96.1**

**Donor: P. Gook**

**Chinese & First Nations on horseback : L-R: Look Sing George Baker,  
Unknown, Kong Sing, Marvin Baker ca~1920s.**

# Relationships – cont/-

## 3. Common-Law and Intermarriage

- List found in the interior of BC:

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

\* Descendents 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.



Harry Lowe



Lucy Black & John Black

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 1885 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

<u>Name of Applicants</u>	<u>Effective dates</u>	<u>Water usage &amp; sources</u>	<u>Costs</u>	<u>Government agents</u>
Cheng Fook & Co	17 May 1861	Mining – Spuzzum Creek to Ricking Flat	8 shillings per month	M. Landers
Ah Ying & co	28 August 1861	Mining – Fraser River to Bamboo Bar	4 shillings per month	L. M. Landers
Ah Lee	22 June 1874	Mining – Emory Creek to Emory Bar	\$2.00 per month	M. Lengur
Shu Fong	3 September 1874	Mining – Creek to American Bar	\$2.00 per month	M. Lengur
Ah Hing	18 April 1883	Mining - Siska Flat to sand bar near Lytton	\$3.00 per month	Frederick <a href="#">Hussy</a> ,

## **Regulations... cont/-**

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.



Photographer: Lily Chow

**Grassland near Ashcroft**

## **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.

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

- \*\* 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***

***The Forgotten Ties***

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