Participation of Chinese Pioneers in British Columbia Salmon Canneries 1880s to 1920s

華裔先民參與卑詩省沙文漁業的早期歷史

Prepared by Rudy M. T. Chiang

蔣汶德撰稿

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Abstract

Salmon canning in British Columbia could not have functioned without Chinese labourers

- Canning was labour intensive
- Labour Supply was scarce
- Salmon discarded due to spoilage

This study examines

- The economic contribution of Chinese workers;
- The business case of Chinese Contract System; &
- The human dimension of Chinese cannery pioneers, their name, their deeds, & their economic contribution to Canada.
1870s: Infancy of Salmon Canning in B.C.

- **1870** – Two new canneries on the Fraser River
  - Annieville, (1870) by Alexander Loggie & Co.
  - Sapperton, (1870) by Stamp & Co.
- **By 1879** – Additional Fraser River canneries
  - New Westminster, (1873) by Lane, Pike & Nelson
  - Deas Island, (1875) by B.C. Canning Co. Ltd.
  - Lion Island, (1876) by Ewen & Co.
  - Brownsville, (1878) by English & Co.
  - Delta, (1878) by Delta Canning Co.
  - Haigh’s, (1879) by Benjamin Haigh & Co.
Annieville Cannery, ca 1905, Gunderson Slough
-Courtesy of Delta Museum & Archives Society
1980-52-171, Ken Young Collection
Salmon Canneries Along the Fraser River, 1870-1909

1892 to 1898
No. of Canneries
Increased 5 folds in 6 years
From 7 to 33

1902
BC Packers
Average Pack Value of $1.6 million

4 Year Cycles: 1889, 1893, 1897, 1901, 1905, 1909, 1913

1885 Head Tax $50

1900 H Tax $100

1903 H Tax $500
### Canadian Census 1881

**City of New Westminster**

The Provincial Capital

**Royal City**

Where Salmon Canning Started in B.C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1881 Census</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD 187 B</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>3,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD 187 A</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>1,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,543</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 1 in 10 residents of the Royal City was Chinese Prior to the Arrival of CPR recruits in 1882
### Canadian Census 1881
#### City of New Westminster
##### Chinese Fishermen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1881 Census</th>
<th>Fishermen</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Chinese Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD 187 B</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD 187 A</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>118</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 64% of the Fishermen in New Westminster was Chinese.
- All 76 of them lived in the North side of the Royal City.
Who were these 76 Chinese Fishermen?

- **Average age 30.5; Range: 15 to 46; Mode @ 35 years**
- **50% were married, only 1 has family with him**
- **They lived in 4 households**

1) **Kai Gum, age 40**, living with wife Ah Chong (age 38) & daughters Tai Gum (age 20) and Ah Yong (age 3)

2) **Chun Joy, age 30**, living in House No. 244 of Wah Nuy, next door to Won Ling Sing (Cumyou’s father, House No. 243)

3) **32 Chinese Fishermen** living in the boarding house of Ah Kee

4) **Foreman Lee Coy (李衢)** & **42 Chinese Fishers** living in House No. 265 headed by Wou Don
Canadian Census 1881
City of New Westminster
Labour Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1881 Census</th>
<th>Labourers</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD 187 B</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD 187 A</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 65% of the Labour Force was Chinese
- Most of them lived in the South side of the City (Where canneries were located)
City of New Westminster, North & South

Though only 11% of the Population
Chinese Pioneers
Made up
64% of the local Fishermen
&
65% of the Labour Force
In New Westminster

- There were 9 operating canneries on the Fraser in 1881
- Chinese Pioneers were the Major Economic Driver
  of the Salmon Canning Industry in the Royal City
Population of 295
- First Nations numbered 142 (48%), Chinese at 101 (34%)

Occupation
- 21 Fishermen, 6 were First Nations (29%)
- 107 Labourers, 101 were Chinese (94%)

They worked for 3 Canneries
- Nass (Est. 1881), 27 Chinese, total crew of 36 (75%)
- Aberdeen (Est. 1878), 32 Chinese, total crew of 40 (80%)
- Inverness (Est. 1876), 42 Chinese, total crew of 50 (84%)
## Canadian Census 1881

**North Coast of Mainland**

**Estimate**

236 Workers Produced 29,260 Cases in 1881

Per Capita Output of 124 Cases per Worker-Season

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catch Area</th>
<th>Salmon Pack (48 lb Case)</th>
<th>No. of Workers (Estimate)</th>
<th>Cases/worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nass River</td>
<td>7,700</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skeena River</td>
<td>21,560</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season Total</td>
<td><strong>29,260</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Canadian Census 1881
North Coast of Mainland

1881 Pack Valued at $146,885
$5.029/case x 29,260 cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases/worker-season</th>
<th>Full Workdays/Season</th>
<th>Cases/worker-day</th>
<th>Month/Season</th>
<th>Pay @ $32/month</th>
<th>Total Pay for 236 Workers</th>
<th>% of Pack Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$65</td>
<td>$15,340</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$96</td>
<td>$22,656</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paid $65 to $96/season
The 236 Workers received only 10%-15% of Pack Value
1881 North Coast Salmon Pack
Wage Disparity

The Canadian Preserved Fish Sector
(Mainly Atlantic Salted Cod, Herring, & Squid)
- Paid Labour: 26% of the Pack Value

The North Coast Canned Salmon Sector
Paid Labour: only 13% of the Pack Value on average

Chinese & First Nations Workers
were paid half the national average
for their Skilled Labour Input
# Canadian Census 1881

## Labour Cost Analysis: Fish Sector

### Statistics Canada 1881 Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Breakdown</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>$</th>
<th>$/Worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material (Salted Cod)</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>1,128,062</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>707,462</td>
<td>$83.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overhead/Profit</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>850,337</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**

100%  
2,685,861  
8,453 Workers

### 1881 North Coast Salmon Pack, 236 Labourers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker-Season</th>
<th>@ $32/m</th>
<th>Wages</th>
<th>Pack Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour, 2 months</td>
<td>$65</td>
<td>$15,340</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour, 3 months</td>
<td>$96</td>
<td>$22,656</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon Pack</td>
<td>29,260</td>
<td>$147,149</td>
<td>Ave Wage @ 13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wealth Creation

The 1904 Canned Salmon Pack
465,894 cases at $5.40/case

Added $2.5 million to the B.C. Economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1904 Canned Salmon Production</th>
<th>Value Added Input: Per Capita Contribution</th>
<th>Contract Price @ $0.50/case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisher</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>503,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>1,763,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>251,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Added</td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,519,554</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At 70% per capita input
the Chinese & First Nations crew
contributed $1.7 million to the B.C. Economy
Challenge of Salmon Canning

- Salmon runs: highly variable (cycle years of 2, 4, or 5)
- Production planning: difficult (volume/time/supply)
- Remote Locations: high transport cost
- Labour supply: inadequate in remote areas
- Short season: skilled labour difficult to retain
- Time: a race against spoilage
- Quality: swell cans (botulism) a major cost factor
- High Capital cost: idle capacity

High Risk Venture

- Risk Management Critical
Chinese Contract System
Business Case Analysis
Michael Doyle Notes

1904 Nass Harbour Contract

- Contractor to prepare for 12,000 cases
- Company only to guaranteed 8,000 cases of talls at $0.50/case, &
- 1,000 ovals to be put up by day labour

- For the price of 8,000 cases company was insured for
  A 50% overage of 4,000 cases at No Cost
Chinese Contract System

Business Case Analysis

1904 Nass Harbour Contract

For $4,000

Company Downloaded to Contractor

☐ the Risk of
  I. Fish Variables
  II. Labour Variables

☐ the Cost of
  I. Production Planning & Management
  II. Quality Control & Verification

III. Standby Labour for 4,000 additional cases
Human Faces of Chinese Cannery Pioneers

Kwong On Wo Company 廣安和 in New Westminster

- Supplier of goods and services to the Chinese community
- Agent for Onderdonk & the Chinese recruits in 1880s

Yip Sang 葉永生,字春田, 1845-1927

- Left San Francisco for B.C. in 1881
- 1882, Kwong On Wo agent for Onderdonk’s Chinese crew
- 1886 Established Wing Sang Co. in Vancouver
- Started his own cannery contracts
- Ticket agent for Canadian Pacific Steamships Co.
Human Faces of Chinese Cannery Pioneers

Lam Tung (aka Lam Tong) 林棠 (?)

- Native of Singapore
- 5 ft. 4½ tall, pork marked, gold upper front tooth
- Arrived in Victoria on steamship in 1885
- Started the New Westminster Cannery in 1896
- Cannery absorbed by B.C. Packers in 1902

Lee Yine & Lee Poon Kai

Kwong Man Tai Company

- 1901 Kwong Man Tai purchased Colonial Cannery (1897), absorbed by B.C. Packers after one season
Human Faces of Chinese Cannery Pioneers

Lee Coy 李長衢, 字祐樞 1855-1927

- Native of Sartuey Village 沙堆, Sun Woy County 新會縣
- Landed in Victoria in 1876, at age 22
- 5 ft. 7 tall, very stout, face pitted with small pox
- 1881 Census: “foreman”, living among 42 Chinese fishers in New West North
- 1891 Census: merchant Lee Coy, age 36, & his 20 year old wife were lodging in a 2 story bungalow of Kwan Ah Loy, with 5 other residents in New West South
- 1904 earned $2,400 bonus for “breaking the unions”
- 1904 managed 12 cannery contracts
Lee Coy 李長衢, 字祐樞 1855-1927

- Lee Coy was the contractor for Gulf of Georgia Cannery
- Which produced swell cans in 1905
- 800 cases had to be destroyed (~ $4,000 lost)
- 1906 Lee Coy bought the Gulf of Georgia Cannery
- Kept operation until ~1909
- Lee Coy celebrated his 70th birthday, February 1926
- Passed away on October 22, 1927, age 72
- Mrs. Lee Coy passed away at age 60, on Sept. 2, 1931
- Both were laid to rest at the Mountain View Cemetery
Notice To Apprehend

To Whom It may Concern:

Please take Notice that Lee Wan of Sunwoy County, Sar Duey Village, age 30 plus, requested last winter to stay at my store [in Ladner] on credit for room and board. He promised to repay his debt with the cash advance for working at the Cloverleaf Cannery this season. Considering that he is a fellow Lee, I consented to his request. Lee Wan has negated on his promise and left for Vancouver, leaving an unpaid debt of $46.35 for food. Should any contractor hire him, please hold back the money he owes and have it returned to me at the Wo Yeun Store.

Lee Wan shall be apprehended until the debt is paid.

This dated May, 1921                                            Lee Coy
SIX MONTH PRISON TERM

The Chinese Times, May 8, 1919

Lu Yeun was sentenced to a 6-month prison term for defrauding hundreds of dollars of cannery pay advances from Lee and other contractors. After serving his 6 month prison term, Lu Yeun must repay the money he owed. Failure to do so will result in charges against him for delinquent debts.
More Pay Advance Defrauds

The Chinese Times, April 17, 1924

Wong Goon Yin age 30’s, of Sun Woy Sartuey, and Wong Ban age 20’s, of Toisan Namhung, the son of Wong Bo Sai, both defrauded on advance paid to them for working at my shop. They skipped boarding on the day of sailing and disappeared. Contractors should take note and not be deceived by them again. To prevent future defaults, employers should retain the Head Tax Certificate of all workers.

March 19, 1924 Lum Tak Gee
More Defrauds

The Chinese Times, Aug. 3, 1929

Mah Wing Tun (馬榮騰) was out of pocket for $300 because his trusted recruiter, Yen Dick Gong (甄廬光) took off with the advance, refunded by 3 workers who had a change of mind.

Mah offered a reward of $50 for information leading to the apprehension of Yen.

August 3, 1929    Mah Wing Tun
Chung Nye, 蔣奈, 字經可, ca. 1867-1928

• Chung Nye, age 16, left Moy Kwok Village 梅閣鄉, Sun Woy County 新會縣 for the Gold Mountains.
• He received an advance of 12 silver dollars, which he left with his widowed mother to take care of the family.
• He and his friend landed in Victoria in April 1882. The time of arrival coincided with the 2,000 men Onderdonk recruited from China to lay tracks along Fraser Canyons for the Canadian Pacific Railroad Co. (CPR).
• Chung Nye probably settled in New Westminster around 1886. By 1888-89 he was recruiting cannery workers.
• He was credited for bringing his family clan to B.C.
• In 1906 Nye Canning Co. started operation in New West. It lasted only one season. Was Chung Nye the operator?
• Chung Nye’s story will be featured in the next presentation.
Charlie Chang Suey, 1873-1946
曾瑞, 字毓和, 號雲峯

- Charlie Suey was a major recruiter of skilled workers for Northern canneries in the 1920s
- He challenged fellow Sun Woy contractors to donate $5 for every 10,000 cases of their pack to the Kong Chow Association (雲高華埠岡州總會館) building fund
- He donated $202.50 for his 1924 pack of 405,000 cases
- He served as director of the Kong Chow Association
- Charlie Suey celebrated his 71st birthday, March 1943
- He passed away at age 74, on December 12, 1946.
### Cannery Contractors Pledged $325.50

**Kong Chow Benevolent Association Building Fund**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contractor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlie Chang Suey</td>
<td>曾瑞</td>
<td>340,000</td>
<td>170.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>32.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chong Mae</td>
<td>蔣美</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung Sat</td>
<td>蔣述,字國多</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chong Yaw</td>
<td>蔣有,蔣寬有,字容可</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lew Lung &amp; Lee Chong Hang</td>
<td>廖龍, 李祥亨</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woo Sai Ding</td>
<td>胡世定</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>65.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woo Won Kam</td>
<td>胡允襟</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The pledge accounted for 37% of the 1924 pack of 1,745,313 cases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>651,000</td>
<td><strong>325.50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chong Dot, 蔣炳達, 字安鰲, 1892-1965

- Chong Dot landed in Vancouver at age 19, on May 15, 1910
- $500 H. Tax exempted, son of merchant Suey Ho Chong
- Chong Dot continued the B.C. Packers contract at Imperial Plant after his elder brother Chong Yat retired
- He donated $20 to the Vancouver Chinese Public School (雲埠華僑公立學校) in 1933
- To honour the returning Chinese Canadian Volunteer Troop, Dot raised $106 at the Imperial Plant in Sept. 1951
- Chong Dot & wife Lin Tai Lim (林蓮娣) donated $10,000 to the Mount Saint Joseph Hospital (聖約瑟院醫) for beds & furnishings in 1956.
- Chong Dot passed away at age 73, on December 23, 1965
  Mrs. Chong passed away 3 year later on December 16, 1968. Both were laid to rest at Forrest Lawn Cemetery
Chong Tee Poy, Woy Hor, 1889-1968
蔣池沛, 字會可

- Chong Tee Poy was a long time resident of New West
- He would head north to Port Edward each season
- He made generous loads to friends on the promise of repayment from cannery advances
- Born June 23, 1889, Tee Poy passed away on December 20, 1968, age 79.
- His grandson Melvin Chong (蔣盤炎) worked with him in Prince Rupert during the 1950s.
- Melvin Chong became charge hand for the Tulloch Western Fisheries on Commissioner Street and later the Seafood Products Cannery in Port Hardy.
Chung Sat (aka Deung Soot) 1882-1961
蔣述, 字國多

- Deung Soot came to Vancouver at age 14, on April 29, 1896.
- He paid the $50 Head Tax. His career spanned the Fraser, Burrard Inlet, and North Coast canneries.
- He donated $10 to the Kong Chow building fund with his pack of 20,000 cases in 1924.
- He was a member of the Chinese Reform Party.
- Chung Sat passed away in Prince Rupert on July 2, 1961.
- His son Harold Chong (蔣俊豪) lead the Chinese crew at the Cassiar Cannery until his retirement in late 1970s.
- Willie Chong (蔣俊偉), the 3rd son, volunteered for the Canadian Army and served in Burma during World War II.
- Willie was a successful salmon and shrimp fisherman.
Danny Chung 蔣章霖

* Danny Chung enjoyed long associations with the Nelson brothers. His contract with the Port Edward Cannery in 1959 was the last signed in B.C.
* Danny continued to lead the Chinese crew at Port Edward until his retirement.
* Danny & his father On Shun (蔣北強,字安順) were career contractors.
* His younger brother Wayne Horne Chong (蔣榮漢) retired from the Home Plant of Canadian Fishing Company at the foot of Gore Ave in Vancouver.
Free Congee Servings

1916
Cruel Treatments

The Chinese Times, Nov. 12, 1918

At the Cumshewa Cannery, the Chinese crew was badly treated by a Caucasian named Sergie. At season’s end, Sergie left on the same boat with the Chinese. Sergie denied them of any meals, starving them the entire journey, over the course of several days. Other Chinese and Caucasians were feed. The crew vowed never to return again, and warned others to stay away from the Cumshewa Cannery.
Lue Mong (aka Lue Shon How), 1880-1954
劉望,字崇厚

- Lue Shon How of Moy Kwok Village, was a hard working and frugal cannery man. He felt ill and passed away in 1954, at age 75.
- His entire family was perished when the Japanese invaded his village. He wanted to return home after the War but was held back by the chaos at home.
- Mr. Lue left his estate to charity, shared among the Kong Chow Association, the Lung Kong Association, & the hospital.
- Kong Chow Association acknowledged the receipt of $350 from his estate on December 10, 1954.
- Mr. Lue 刘 was an exemplary Canadian.
The Facts

1881 New Westminster

- 1 in 10 Residents of the Royal City was Chinese
- 64% of the salmon fleet was Chinese
- 65% of the Labour Force was Chinese
- Chinese Pioneers were the Major Economic Driver of the Salmon Canning Industry in B.C.

North Coast of B.C.

- 94% of Out of town cannery labour was Chinese
- Chinese & First Nations workers were paid 13% of pack value, only half the national average
Conclusion

The 1904 Salmon Pack

- 465,894 cases at an average price of $5.40/case
- added $2,519,554 to the B.C. economy

Labour was a Scarce Resource

- At 70% “Per Capita Input” the Chinese & First Nations crew contributed $1.7 million to the B.C. Economy
- They Received $232,947 only 9% of the Pack Value
Chinese Contract System
Business Case Analysis

“Pyramid Scheme”

Unpredictable Production Demand Must be bridged by Standby Labour Supplied at Contractor’s Expense

Company
Downloaded
Production Risk
Without paying for
Risk Premium of Production Over-run
Lue Mong 劉望,字崇厚 Remembered 1880-1954
Acknowledgement

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- The Chinese Head Tax
- Census of 1881 and 1891
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- The Chinese Times
  by UBC Asian Library & Multicultural Canada
- Vital Statistics
  by B.C. Archives
- Fish Production Statistics for 1881
  By Statistics Canada