

WAR AND THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF A DOUBLE IDENTITY:
VANCOUVER'S CHINESE COMMUNITY, 1937-1947

by

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Abstract

From feeling neither entirely “Chinese” nor “Canadian,” Vancouver’s Chinese weathered the hard times of racism and economic depression and found themselves embracing a new identity that was *both* “Chinese” and “Canadian” during the deeply intense period of Japan’s invasion of China and later the Second World War. This paper argues that Vancouver’s Chinatown was a transnational community whose existence and vitality were not only predicated upon the strength of its internal organizations but also upon its trans-Pacific linkages and movements. It also argues that wartime social and cultural changes led to the first creation of “Chinese Canadians,” a double identity that had been born long before the official introduction of Canada’s multicultural policy. The two generations of immigrants and Canadian-borns also became welded together during the war, actively supporting China’s and Canada’s war effort. Finally, this essay closes by highlighting the “double-edged” blessing of a double identity under the effects of local and global historical processes, which were mirrored in the wartime stigmatization of Japanese Canadians, the destruction of the Sing Kew Theatre and the postwar dwindling of trans-Pacific ties with the onset of the Cold War and Maoist socialism in China.

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Introduction

On February 18, 1943, Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Soong Mayling) addressed the American Congress during her visit of the United States and Canada, a historic event that marked a high point in China's Resistance War against Japan and its relations with the West. Coined by the press as the "First Lady of China," Madame Chiang called for American aid, appealing to the common goal shared by China and the Western Allies to build a lasting peace in the postwar world. Clad in a dark-coloured *cheongsam*, a modernized Chinese dress, Madame Chiang appeared as a novel character to the West not only because she was the first Chinese woman to address Congress. Americans were amazed by her remarkable ability to articulate, her sharp intelligence and her profound knowledge of Western history and culture. These strikingly "modern" and "westernized" qualities differed from the conventional understanding of "Chineseness" in white society, making her seem almost not entirely "Chinese."¹ Occurring at the height of the Second World War, her whirlwind tour of New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco as well as Ottawa and Montreal, Canada, created a wide sensation.

Across the U.S. and Canada, Chinese communities were exhilarated by Madame Chiang's arrival. In Vancouver, British Columbia, *The Chinese Times (Dahan Gongbao)*, a Chinese-language daily newspaper operated by the Chinese Freemasons, translated and ran a serial of her congressional addresses on the front page for five consecutive days. Amidst the reports of retreats and losses suffered by the Chinese Nationalist government armies that had been filling war bulletins on Pender and Carrall Streets month after month, Madame Chiang's visit must have come as a piece of encouraging news that

¹ *The New York Times*, February 19, 1943 and Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: a trans-Pacific community*, 248-250. See also Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: a social history of Chinese women in San Francisco*.

buoyed up the spirits of many members of the community. By 1943, like every other overseas Chinese community, Vancouver, with Canada's largest Chinese settlement of approximately 7,200 people, had endured five and a half years of deep uncertainty, anxiety and grief since the eruption of the Sino-Japanese War.² Except for the brief periods following the victorious Battle of Taierzhuang in April 1938 and the Allies' declarations of war on Japan in December 1941, Japanese military advances seemed almost unstoppable and the end of war in China was nowhere near in sight.

Aggravating an already bad situation was the cutting off of direct communications between China and North America after the start of the Pacific War in 1941. Vancouver's Chinese were terrified and distressed to find that they lost all contact with family members who were trapped in the embattled homeland. The trans-Pacific flow of letters and remittances that had connected Vancouver's Chinese with faraway families in China was interrupted, leaving many worrying endlessly if their close relatives had the least means to survive or if they were even alive.

As white Canadian racism imposed serious restrictions on the everyday lives of Asian immigrants, the majority of the Chinese had not intended to settle down permanently. They dreamed of acquiring enough wealth in Gold Mountain, to make possible a glorious return to China where they could enjoy a comfortable retirement and provide a better future for their offspring. For that reason, many older, Chinese immigrants feared that if China slipped into oblivion, their sojourning would turn into a no-return migration and their existence "stateless." As for the younger, local-born generation who increasingly felt that they held a rightful place in Canadian society, they had become acutely aware that their collective destiny was tied with the outcome of the

² Edgar Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, Table 7, "Chinese Population of Some Major Cities, 1911-1941," 303

war by the time Japanese armies overran Southeast Asia and threatened the Western Pacific. Many of them who shared trans-Pacific ties, obligations and memories like those of their parents were equally anxious about the fate of China.

After Japan first invaded and occupied Manchuria in North China in 1931, Vancouver's Chinese community had become a site of numerous fundraising activities to "resist Japan and save the nation." After the Japanese launched a full-scale invasion of China in the summer of 1937, many men, women, youth and even children of Vancouver's Chinatown participated tirelessly in support of the Chinese war effort. With activities ranging from tea parties, theatrical performances, tag days, bazaars, lion dances and bond sales, the drive for war relief enlarged in scope after Canada declared war on Japan in the wake of the Pearl Harbour Attack on December 7, 1941. As Vancouver rapidly developed into a major manufacturing centre rolling out enormous quantities of military supplies on the West Coast, there were also records of Chinese working in the war industries.³ In the Chinese community, traditional opera performances and war films became the only two approved kinds of wartime entertainment that helped sustain morale. Gambling, a traditionally popular pastime in Chinatown, was now condemned by its own leaders as wasteful and self-indulgent.⁴

On June 16, 1943, Madame Chiang arrived in Ottawa where she addressed the Canadian Parliament. The warm reception that greeted Madame Chiang in both the U.S. and Canada was a stark contrast to a few decades earlier when unwelcome "Chinamen" or "Orientals" were chased out of mining towns or white neighbourhoods and Chinese women were believed to be either slave girls or prostitutes in many parts of the North American continent. Although Canada's Chinese Exclusion Act remained in effect

³See Chronology, *A Canadian Community: From Generation to Generation*.

⁴ "Chinese Quit Gambling; Extra Cash Goes for War," *The Vancouver Sun*, Aug 17, 1942

throughout the duration of the Second World War and was not repealed until 1947, the American and Canadian fascination with Madame Chiang provided a glimpse of the cultural and social changes that had been set in motion by the war. In Vancouver, Chinese residents rallied for both China and Canada, continually leading the sales of Canadian Victory Bonds for years. Meanwhile, a new identity was conceived. For the first time, Vancouver's Chinese began to present themselves as "Chinese Canadian citizens," rather than "Chinese nationals," demanding the right to vote and joining Canadian military service in keen spirit.⁵ From feeling neither entirely "Chinese" nor "Canadian," Vancouver's Chinese weathered the hard times of racism and economic depression and found themselves embracing a double identity that was *both* "Chinese" and "Canadian."

Prewar: The Making of a Trans-Pacific Community

One day in 1928, having endured a separation for twelve years, Bick Lee reunited with his wife, Gin King Choon, in Vancouver. Natives of Toisan (Taishan), Guangdong, they were married in 1914 after Lee had worked at a few labouring jobs in Victoria, B.C. for two years and decided to sail home to take a wife arranged by a relative. Their first child, a girl, died of illness shortly after birth. By that time, Lee had to return to Canada, leaving Gin to live with her new mother-in-law in the village. Silently, Gin waited for word from her husband that he had enough savings to take her to Gold Mountain. A few years later, another difficulty arose. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 was enacted to replace the head tax of \$500, limiting Chinese immigration to a few strictly defined

⁵"Case for B.C. Chinese," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, October 2, 1940, "Votes for Chinese," "Chinese in Canada," *The Vancouver Sun*, August 15, 1944 and "Chinese-Canadians Ask for Franchise," *The Colonist*, Feb 17, 1945

categories and made the entry of foreign-born Chinese women almost impossible. Although merchants were allowed to bring their families to Canada, the Minister of Immigration granted admissions on an individual-case basis and only for short terms that had to be renewed.⁶

In 1928, an opportunity came for Lee to buy a birth certificate, which would enable his wife to claim the paper identity of the original bearer and be admitted as “Canadian-born.” The seller priced the piece of paper at over CAD\$2000, a large sum that Lee could fortunately afford this time. After working several years as an apprentice for an importing company operated by a fellow Taishanese in Vancouver’s Chinatown, he had started his own trading business, Foo Hung Company, in 1921. Apart from retail and wholesale sales, Foo Hung Company offered unofficial banking services such as cash remittances, saving deposits and the issuance of money orders. A branch was later established in Hong Kong to handle the transfer of goods and remittances. By the latter half of the 1920s, thriving trans-Pacific trade was bringing handsome profits to both branches of Foo Hung Company. Lee’s successful business career in Vancouver’s Chinatown and unfailing loyalty to home in China did more than just allowing him and his wife to defy the exclusion laws and reunite in Canada. It also furnished rare opportunities of community leadership and social advancement. In the early 1930s, Lee was appointed as head of the Vancouver branch of the Chinese Nationalist League (*Kuomintang*) and later head of the headquarters for Canada.

On the Taishanese migrations between China and the United States during the Exclusion period (1882-1943), Madeline Hsu has argued that the Taishanese community in China survived and capitalized on the massive outflow of population by “strategically

⁶ Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada*, 141

adapting traditional practices based on loyalty to family, clan and native place” and by “embracing and even celebrating the achievements and contributions of those who left.”⁷ Overseas Chinese were willing to fulfill the expectations to benefit Taishan, given their strong religious beliefs and native-place sentiments.⁸ She also explains the role played by mechanisms such as “split-household families,” “Gold Mountain firms” (*jinshanzhuang*) and “overseas Chinese magazines” (*qiaokan*) in helping Taishanese Americans cope with the realities of transnationalism. In an edited volume on the Chinese communities in Canada, Edgar Wickberg and his co-authors have underlined the importance of Chinese organizations in helping the community defy the challenges of racism and economic hardships. Through providing mutual support, protection and other necessary services inaccessible to the Chinese, various organizations at different times contributed to the community’s survival and growth.

In the case of the Vancouver Chinese, various types of engagements and flows between China and Canada, mainly conducted through the port of Hong Kong, also formed a major part of the community’s lifeblood. The meaning of outward links here probably weighed more significantly than some areas where Chinese were thinly scattered. The story of Bick Lee was a typical example of the many Chinese immigrants whose existences were bound by a continual series of trans-Pacific movements, memories and entanglements. Through actively cultivating and maintaining a multitude of trans-Pacific ties and activities, Vancouver’s Chinese survived the harsh restrictions that racism and economic depression had inflicted upon everyday life, permitting evolution and growth.

⁷ Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, 2

⁸ Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, 9

Migration initiated the formation of a trans-Pacific community among the Chinese. It started with Chinese people leaving South China, taking passage across the Pacific Ocean and reaching North America. Nevertheless, the binding trans-Pacific ties and engagements being discussed were by no means solely movements of people. Not many Chinese ever made enough money to make more than one trip back to China, if any was made at all. Even fewer could afford to marry or let their families join them in Canada due to the laws of Head Tax (1886-1923) and Exclusion (1923-1947) and the exorbitant price of buying papers to enter illegally. The flow of letters and remittances became the more common form of trans-Pacific movements and connections. So was the consumption of Chinese news and products. The long separation suffered by Bick Lee and Gin King Choon also illustrated that some emotional ties of mutual concern, loyalty and sense of responsibility to one's family were strong enough to connect both sides of the Pacific Ocean for decades.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the demands of keeping trans-Pacific ties had enhanced the need for commercial links between China and Canada, giving rise to a small class of wealthy merchants within Vancouver's Chinese community. Unlike a hand laundry, a green grocery or a restaurant, the success of an import-export business hinged upon the presence of tightly-knit trans-Pacific networks that were capable of drawing capital, labour, goods, business expertise, local knowledge, and even personal connections to benefit the enterprise. A trans-Pacific people and one of the only four immigrant groups allowed entry by Exclusion laws, Chinese merchants in Vancouver were well positioned to exploit an economic niche that was largely underdeveloped and unavailable to private Anglo-Canadian traders who lacked the proper

networks.⁹ Besides, becoming a merchant often appeared as an attractive career to Chinese from Guangdong province, a region embedded in a long tradition of commerce and foreign contact, since it was believed that engaging in trade (*zuo shengyi*) provided the best promises for success and wealth.

Bick Lee and his uncle, Lee Tin Po, who lived in Hong Kong, recognized the benefit and profitability of trans-Pacific trade. Before Bick Lee left for Canada, Lee Tin Po had advised him not to be content with working in restaurants and laundries but always find ways to learn the ropes of import-export business. A year after Foo Hung Company was set up in Vancouver, Lee Tin Po began to operate its branch in Hong Kong, which acted as an intermediary and clearing house for the transfer of goods and remittances. A shareholding record of the branch around 1922 registers 42 names of shareholders. A 1925 order catalogue of Foo Hung Company lists a broad array of Chinese-made products (*guohuo*) brought through Hong Kong including soy sauces, cooking oil, canned fruits and vegetables, dried and preserved foodstuffs, candies, teas, table linens, men's and women's clothing, leather boots, toothbrushes, mah-jong tiles, kitchen utensils, writing brushes and ink, decorative plastic flower baskets, paper lanterns, Chinese herbs and medicines, ceramics, as well as rattan and painted furniture.¹⁰

Up until the 1930s, burgeoning trade between China and Canada brought tremendous wealth to Chinatown import-export businesses. By 1928, Foo Hung Company was grossing HK\$400,000 in sales annually and had become one of the largest food distributors in Vancouver prior to the Second World War.¹¹

⁹ See Paul Yee, *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver*.

¹⁰ Shelly Chan, "Active Voices: A Study of Three Chinese Pioneer Families in Vancouver," 36. The paper is the result of an oral history project concerning three Chinese Canadian families who settled in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. They were the families of Ron Bick Lee, Hok Yat Louie and Rev. Chan Yu Tan.

¹¹ Shelly Chan, "Active Voices," 36

Like many Chinese Christian groups, a number of wealthy merchants formed the most outspoken and proactive segment of the community. They often owned property, provided employment to fellow Chinese and headed organizations, providing leadership and financial contributions to political and social causes. In those days when Chinese people trusted store merchants more than banks, Lee's success and reputation made him a powerful figure and attracted the attention of the KMT, which developed and spread a rhetoric of patriotism that entailed generous rewards for Chinese overseas.

Vancouver's Chinese led a life of constant trans-Pacific movements, activities and obligations, which helped mitigate the privations of poverty, isolation, and ostracism in a hostile environment. Contrary to white assumptions that Vancouver's Chinatown was an inward-turning "ghetto," its inhabitants were a trans-Pacific people whose survival and vitality were predicated upon their outward links and ties. In turn, their actions laid the foundations for a twin identity characterized by constant movements and connections between two worlds and a sense of belonging to more than one place during the period of the Second World War.

Wartime: The Crystallization of a Chinese Canadian Identity

When the first gunshots between Chinese and Japanese troops were fired near Beijing on July 7, 1937, uncertainty already clouded both sides of the Louie family for some time. Almost three years earlier, Hok Yat Louie, the pioneer who had come to Vancouver in the late 1890s from Zhongshan, county of Guangdong province, died of illness on his first home trip in almost four decades. Previously a labourer and a vegetable grower, he established a wholesale company of imported foods, the H. Y. Louie Company, on the edge of Chinatown around 1911. Hoping to fulfill the filial duty of

seeing his aged mother back in Zhongshan, Hok Yat Louie had also contemplated opening a branch while in Hong Kong to strengthen his business networks, a plan that ended abruptly with his death. His son, Tim Louie, succeeded him as head of the company at a time when blatant anti-Asian racism and fierce business competition threatened to eliminate any imprudent Chinese operator. Burdened with the responsibility of supporting ten siblings and his widowed mother, Tim Louie now had a family of twelve mouths to feed, although some of his brothers were old enough to assist in various ways. Born in Vancouver in 1913, Tim Louie was well versed in both Chinese and English. When his father died, he had just returned to Vancouver after finishing three years of Chinese education at Lingnan College. During the Second World War, Tim Louie became the president of the Chinese War Relief Committee, which helped raise funds for China in the white community. His brothers, Ernie and Quan, joined the Canadian military service. To the sorrow of the family, Quan Louie, a flying officer, was killed in air combat duty over Germany in 1945.¹²

Also grappling with times of uncertainty were Gunn Louie and his wife, Sook King Lee. Brought to Vancouver as an adolescent in 1911, Gunn Louie was the only son that H. Y. Louie fathered with his first wife, who never joined them in Canada. In 1920, Sook King Lee came to Vancouver as Gunn Louie's bride. Some time during the 1920s, a serious disagreement took place between the father and son, which resulted in the disinheritance of Gunn Louie. Mother of six children, Sook King Lee had a difficult time eking out a living and often had to knock on H. Y. Louie's door for help. Although he never turned her away, H. Y. Louie found it increasingly difficult to support his son's family as well as his own during the Depression years. Eventually, H. Y. Louie bought.

¹² Shelly Chan, "Active Voices," 47-48

Sook King Lee and her children passage back to his home village in China where they could be supported more cheaply. When the Sino-Japanese War erupted in the summer of 1937, Sook King Lee had settled back in Zhongshan, raising her children and serving her mother-in-law. Little did she know that her family would be forced to join the millions of war refugees who fled their homes to escape the rapid advances of Japanese armies. During the course of the war, Sook King Lee would part from two of her young sons, Alex and Henry, who came back to safety in Canada and later enlisted in the military to fight the Japanese in Asia.

In the late summer of 1937, China braced for an all-out war against Japan, after the formation of a new united front between the Nationalists (KMT) and the Communists (CCP). Following his kidnap by one of his own army commanders in the dramatic incident of Xian on December 12, 1936, Chiang Kai-shek had agreed to abandon the previous policy of exterminating the Communists before fighting the Japanese, which had deeply divided his party. Five days after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Chiang vowed that China was prepared to “throw the last ounce of energy” into “a struggle for national survival.” From then onwards, he would be seen as the national hero spearheading China’s lone struggle.

In Vancouver’s Chinatown, war galvanized a politically fragmented community. After the 1911 revolution that ended the rule of Qing dynasty, ideological rivalry between the KMT and the Chinese Freemasons had been fierce as the latter felt overshadowed by the new Nationalist Party while their earlier sacrifices made to support Sun Yat-sen’s revolution were somehow bypassed and forgotten. Different tongs of family clan and native place contested for leadership in the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA) and

were seldom successful in colluding on any broad issue. Nonetheless, when news of war in China came, it immediately provided all fractions a compelling cause for solidarity.

The Sino-Japanese War also welded together the two generations of Vancouver's Chinese. Much has been written about the cultural rift between the immigrants and the native-borns. In his novel, *The Jade Peony*, Wayson Choy, a Vancouver-born writer, wrote about the generational tensions:

All the Chinatown adults were worried over those of us recently born in Canada, born "neither this nor that," neither Chinese nor Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no* – no brain.¹³

Another Vancouver author of *The Saltwater City*, Paul Yee called the mentality of the new Canadian-born Chinese of the Second World War period as one that was "caught between two worlds." He wrote that since "Canada did not accept them as full citizens, while China was an ocean away," Canadian-born Chinese were trapped "between idealistic dreams and the everyday reality of race relations."¹⁴

Yet, wartime feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and grief amalgamated Vancouver Chinese of all age and background. Although war was thousands of miles away, the concern for China and anti-Japanese sentiments spanned across generational differences in Chinatown. Men, women, youth, and children clamoured for China's final victory and took part in the numerous fundraising drives to back the Chinese war effort. On the individual level, the wartime story of the Louies was marked by a profound sense of an indefinite future, the anguish of separations and the sorrowful loss of a family member. All this helps to suggest that Trans-Pacific obligations, memories and feelings, upon which life in Chinatown was built, did not necessarily break off at the divide of a generation, if a clearcut divide was ever possible. Rather, they could be transmitted from

¹³ Wayson Choy, *The Jade Peony*, 135

¹⁴ Yee, *The Saltwater City*, 99, 64

one generation to another in a family, each time taking a life of its own. For many first-generation and second-generation Vancouver Chinese, the war period of 1937-1945 accentuated the awareness of a trans-Pacific identity. That is not to say that generational tension did not exist. But it did not represent the whole picture.

Slowly, the Chinese struggle against Japan drew sympathy from the larger white community, fuelling the transformation of white attitudes toward the Chinese. The Rape of Nanjing in December 1937 and other “mopping up” operations were widely reported in the West as foreign missionaries and journalists residing in China told eye-witness accounts of Japanese atrocities in horrific detail. When Canada declared war against Germany and entered the Second World War on September 10, 1939, China and Canada appeared to be fighting for the common causes of justice, freedom and democracy. But it was not until the attack of Pearl Harbour and the Dominion Government's declaration of war against Japan in late 1941 that the white Canadian community started to be more concerned with the war in Asia. The Chinese came to be celebrated as a courageous people who confronted the evil forces of “fascism” single-handedly, keeping Japanese armies from battling the West in full force. Such wartime conditions permitted Chinese across Canada, most of them found in Vancouver, to be openly both “Chinese” and “Canadian,” making the fact that someone who was ethnically or culturally Chinese and was also loyal to Canada a source of recognition and pride. It helped intensified the double identity of Vancouver's Chinese community, which was both “Chinese” and “Canadian” in wartime.

“Resisting Japan and Saving the Nation”

When *The Chinese Times* in Vancouver printed in bold characters the news wired through Shanghai about what would be known as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, it was

already July 9, 1937, two days after the actual event had occurred on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.¹⁵ Nobody had any idea yet that it was a scheme orchestrated by the Japanese military to wage a full-fledged war. But Vancouver's Chinese had been prepared to play an active role in the survival of their homeland since the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in September 1931. Relying on the strength and unity of its own members, the community was no stranger to mass meetings, boycotts of Japanese goods and many fundraising activities.¹⁶ The Overseas Chinese Resist Japan and Save the Nation Organization, the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA), the Kuomintang (KMT), and the Chinese Freemasons had all been active and experienced in mobilizing the community. From July 1937 until late 1941, Vancouver's Chinatown would continue to have to rely on its internal mechanisms and trans-Pacific connections to aid war-torn China since Canada and other Western nations remained aloof from the "China War."

As the KMT government grappled with the rising demands of wartime expenditure, an aggressive effort was devoted to get overseas Chinese to contribute money to the war chest. Until then, most of the remittances from overseas Chinese had benefited their own families, clans and the local economies of their native places. In order to persuade them to extend these traditional loyalties toward the embattled nation, the KMT intensified a wartime rhetoric of patriotism toward Nationalist China under Chiang Kai-shek, who was now portrayed as the heroic leader of the national struggle.

The prominent merchant, Bick Lee, had been recruited into the KMT in 1926 and was appointed as head of the executive of the KMT Canadian Headquarters in 1936. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, Bick Lee personally donated the huge sum of Can.\$50,000 to the Chinese government, compared to the grand total of \$55,000 that the

¹⁵*The Chinese Times*, July 9, 1937

¹⁶Wickberg ed., *From China to Canada*, 161

entire Vancouver Chinese community raised for the Chinese National War Fund by the end of the year. Lee's loyalty was rewarded by his 1938 appointment as head of the China Aviation Promotion Association in Vancouver to help raise funds for the purchase of military aircraft. Apparently, Lee's contributions were so important that Chiang Kai-shek sent a hand-written letter of appreciation on July 9, 1939, in which he acknowledged Lee's efforts and urged him to do even more:

Thanks to the courage and tenacity of the nation's people and armies as well as the enthusiastic support of the compatriots overseas, the strength of our military has been ever-increasing while the enemy has suffered one setback after another.... Your love for the ancestral land and your sponsorship of the war effort deserve much praise. I hope that you will keep up your good work. Whenever our overseas compatriots put in a greater effort of support, our soldiers on the front lines fight with a renewed sense of determination.¹⁷

The Vancouver CBA also acted promptly by establishing a fundraising organization with a wide membership. A member's directory of the Overseas Chinese Save the Nation Fundraising Board found in *The Chinese Times* in early September 1937 lists a total of twelve teams adding up to eighty-five members, four executives and four staff persons. A Chinese consul acted as adviser to the Board. Two of the teams were made up of women, seven of the ten women were listed by their husband's names as wives (*furen*). The Board was also joined by three sons and a daughter-in-law from the family of Yip Sang, the well-known pioneer merchant of Vancouver's Chinatown. Bick Lee's name was again found in the membership list.¹⁸ At the same time, the Bond-selling Association was formed in Vancouver, requiring every adult male in the Chinese community to purchase a minimum of Ch.\$50 (about Can.\$16) in Chinese war bonds.¹⁹

Anti-Japanese feelings among Vancouver's Chinese also attained new heights. The CBA urged the complete ceasing of commercial and social contact with the

¹⁷Letter from Jiang Zhongzheng (Chiang Kai-shek), July 9, 1939, the Ron Bick Lee Family fonds.

¹⁸*The Chinese Times*, September 3, 1937

¹⁹Wickberg ed., *From China to Canada*, 190

Japanese. By November 1937, a community-wide boycott of Japanese businesses had been declared. Violators could face fines, the confiscation of property in China, and the publicization of their names in the newspapers.²⁰ In *The Chinese Times*, Japanese people in Asia and North America were indiscriminately described in derogatory terms such as “wo”(“Jap”), “kou” (barbarian), or “zei” (bandit). Japantown, which was located only a few blocks away on Powell Street, became “enemy town” to be avoided contact at all times. Nevertheless, the situation was much more complicated in the nearby neighbourhood of Strathcona where Chinese, Japanese and families of other ethnic backgrounds lived together and their children all went to the same schools.

During the same year that war began in China, the Chinese Tennis Club in Vancouver's Chinatown was inaugurated with 63 members, which later grew to 80 in 1939 and 100 by 1940. The club was initiated by a group of Chinese youth who wanted to “unite the Chinese people in this city; to promote congenial fellowship; to carry on recreational [sic]; to cultivate good sportsmanship, to interpret China to Canadians through the medium of sports.”²¹ The club annuals were printed in both Chinese and English, suggesting that there were members, writers and readers who could read and write in Chinese only, English only, or both. The 1939 inaugural issue opens with the words of Sun Yat-sen, China's great revolutionary leader: “A new era is born, a new challenge is at hand, and we shall accept it.” It must have been a motto chosen to foster a new sense of mission in the difficult times of war and racism as the following vision was also laid out in the foreword:

A torch all aflame has been handed to us, for us to keep bright and burning, through all the ordeals and prejudices that are here in this new era – an era of chaos indeed, and emerge from it a victorious new generation of youths to accept the challenge of Dr. Sun Yat-sen.

²⁰Ibid

²¹Draft Constitution, *The Chinese Tennis Club Annual*, 1940, City of Vancouver Archives.

According to a membership list in 1940, five of H. Y. Louie's sons, Tim, Tong, Bill, Ernest and Quan as well as Bick Lee's eldest child, Vera, were all members of the Chinese Tennis Club.

The annuals of 1939 and 1940 mostly contain members' updates, announcements of upcoming tournaments as well as a few sections of humour on subject matters such as courtship and marriage. They also featured English articles propagating the value of sportsmanship to one's physical and mental development, written by Quene Yip, one of Yip Sang's sons. However, opinions toward the ongoing war in China were also reflected in some of the Chinese articles that carried a more serious moral tone. An article by another member, King Chan, explicates the importance of health in saving China in critical times. To help win the war, young Chinese must engage regularly in physical labour and sports, lead a self-disciplined life and build a healthy body.²² In another piece of writing, the editor disputes the criticism from "those concerned with the present times" that engaging in recreation during moments of national crisis was a waste of time. While the Japanese claimed that it was performing a service to the world by trying to eliminate China, "an obstacle to human progress and the trash of humanity," the editorial says, the Chinese must therefore work even harder to improve and strengthen their physical well-being in order to rid China's humiliating name as the "sick man of East Asia." On one page, there is a quote of Chiang Kai-shek's sayings in large characters, in which he urged all Chinese people to practice sports and hygiene, an important principle of the New Life Movement aimed to reform the body and mind of Chinese citizens.²³

Apart from recreation, Chinese youth in Vancouver played an important role in the numerous fundraising drives to support China's war against Japan. Often, they were

²²*The Chinese Tennis Club Annual*, 1939, City of Vancouver Archives.

²³*The Chinese Tennis Club Annual*, 1940, City of Vancouver Archives.

dancers, singers, musicians, donation solicitors, or other types of volunteers that worked behind the scenes of various fundraisers and benefit parades. During the first “Bowl of Rice Benefit” for Chinese war refugees in 1937, young members of the Ching Won Musical Society gave Chinese music performances on an outdoor stage. In a benefit parade held in 1938, lion dancers from the Chinese Freemasons Athletic Society provided entertainment to attract donations. Some Chinese youth were also donors. In 1938, as many as 100 members of the Chinese Youth Group attended an anti-Japan fundraising dinner at WK Gardens Restaurant on Pender Street.²⁴ When Li Ha-Hing, China's first female pilot to fly solo to North America, visited Vancouver in the spring of 1938, she captured the imagination of many Chinese youth who regarded her as a heroic role model. While in the city, she gave a series of lectures on aviation and encouraged young Chinese to follow her example. Apparently, Li succeeded in inspiring a number of them, enabling the revival of the Chinese Aero Club that had existed briefly in the early 1930s.²⁵

In the white community, the news of defeats and casualties suffered by Chinese armies and civilians invoked some sympathy toward the faraway country, which had been portrayed as a victim brutalized by a powerful and brutal intruder. Chinatown's reactions to the war also drew a great deal of attention from the local newspapers. White reporters were attracted to the Chinese quarter where they interviewed its residents about the war and covered the benefits in elaborate detail. But so far it was mainly white curiosity that spawned such a level of media interest. In an article entitled “War News, Chinese Style” in late July 1937, a group of Vancouver's Chinese reading war bulletins were exoticized as “Orientals” who carried the typical “stolid, unemotional faces,” even

²⁴Captions from the Chinese Canadian Picture Project Catalogue, Vancouver Public Library Special Collections.

²⁵*The Chinese Tennis Annual*, 1939, 22. City of Vancouver Archives.

when bad news were pouring in from the embattled homeland. Opinions on the war were recorded in pidgin English: "Japanese very bad. Chinese ketch in the neck too long. By-um-by we put up a good fight. Now we got too many generals."²⁶

The "Moon Festival" held in conjunction with the "One Bowl of Rice Drive" of September 1939 attracted the most press coverage. The four-day event was organized to help war refugees in China, a purpose that initiated other similar fundraising activities and was only given brief mention. What was found particularly interesting was the "bright Oriental bazaar" that offered many curious sights of "pageantry that was old when early Britons were fighting the Roman invasion" as well as "traditions and customs that were venerable with antiquity before the Christian era." Reporters and visitors were intrigued by the presence of "a six-foot, celestial-blue rice bowl" and as a cash donation was dropped inside, "the great grotesque Chinese lion bobs and bows to the generous giver." Also fascinating was a Chinese opera performance, a parade of Chinese legendary characters, an art exhibition, a "mystic dance" of the Moon Maidens.²⁷ One would be reminded of the enormous white excitement in the Chinatown's exuberant celebrations of Vancouver's Golden Jubilee in 1936, during which the "Chinese Village" put up an exotic carnival. The 1939 Moon Festival was a comparable success, which drew to Chinatown 9000 visitors and a total amount of \$25,000 raised.

Another article in April 1941 describes in meticulous detail a lion dance parade held by the Taishan Ningyang Benevolent Society to raised money for war relief. Firecrackers were lighted and lion dances were given to stores that made contributions. Calling the lion a Chinese "popeye," the reporter expressed his amazement: "A Canadian sun shone, and a few streets away from the Chinese quarter tulips bloomed in Canadian

²⁶"War News, Chinese Style," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, July 31, 1937

²⁷"'Moon Festival' in Aid of Chinese War Refugees Creates Many Colorful Scenes Here," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, September 7, 1939

gardens, but Pender Street was like a corner of China....as the lion from his strange parade wound from doorstep to doorstep begging funds." To white Canadians, the "China war" was certainly far away, but Chinatown, a place that long existed among themselves, seemed even more foreign to their understanding.

Although its fundraising campaigns were able to gain some support in the white community, Vancouver's Chinese also found itself dealing with a Canadian government and industry that seemed indifferent and remotely involved. Many were angered by Canada's shipments of scrap metal to Japan and they staged demonstrations calling for an end to all such exports. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a socialist democratic party and the forerunner of the New Democratic Party (NDP), was the community's only political ally that supported its position. Eventually, fears of riots at demonstration sites drove some shipyard owners to stop supplying scrap metal to Japan.²⁸ Some Chinese also joined white activists in the protests against Canadian trade with Japan, Germany and Italy, the three being described as fascist countries and Canada's "potential enemies in the next war." On a circular distributed to a Vancouver householder by a Chinese vegetable peddler in January 1939, a picture shows a long row of dead Chinese children lying on the ground. A description on the side reads, "Chinese children killed by bombs made of metal supplied by Canadian dealers."²⁹

On September 10, 1939, Canada joined the side of Britain and France in the war against Germany, the first time that Ottawa declared war after gaining autonomy from Britain over foreign policy in 1931.³⁰ In November 1939, a Vancouver-wide war chest drive opened, which the Chinese community contributed \$35,000. When the first

²⁸Wickberg, ed., *From China to Canada*, 189-190

²⁹"Are You in Favour of This?" issued by the Canadian League for Peace and Democracy, Vancouver BC, January 1939, City of Vancouver Archives

³⁰ W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous. *Out of the Shadows*, 15

Victory Bond campaign was launched in 1941, Vancouver's Chinese purchased a total of \$200,000 worth of bonds, with one in every four Chinese subscribing, compared to the general population's average of one in six in B.C. and one in eight in Canada.³¹ Despite the fact that Vancouver's Chinese showed strong support for the Canadian war effort, white interest in the Sino-Japanese War and relief aid was short-lived and sporadic. So far, Canada's war meant the battles fought across the Atlantic Ocean on the European continent. The "China war" was a separate conflict and a distant concern to most Western powers. During most of the period between July 1937 and December 1941, the Chinese community had to rely much on its internal unity and strength to aid war-torn China.

In late September 1941, the Dominion's government accepted a request from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to supply two battalions to help defend Hong Kong against possible Japanese attacks, a decision that would lead to one of the worst disasters that Canadian forces encountered in the Pacific War. Although the British chiefs of staff found Hong Kong unimportant and indefensible in the event of a Japanese invasion, Major-General A.E. Grasett, a Canadian-born, retiring British commander in China, thought that the crown colony could be defended with minor reinforcement. Sharing the common beliefs of the time, Grasett argued that the Japanese army, though powerful enough to overwhelm "third-rate Chinese," would be much inferior to "first-class" forces led by the British. To strengthen the garrison at Hong Kong, he recommended that one or two battalions from Canada be deployed, which would be expected to ward off the attackers quickly and produce "a great moral effect in the whole of the Far East." On November 16, 1941, two regiments of 2,000 soldiers including some

³¹Yee, *Saltwater City*, 99

Chinese from Canada, arrived in Hong Kong, not knowing that they would face the Japanese in just a few weeks.³²

Fighting "Democracy's War"

On December 7, 1941, the western world awakened to the shocking news that Japanese forces had struck Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, crippling part of the American Pacific fleet and forcing Washington's policy of isolationism into an abrupt end. Immediately after the attack, the United States, Britain and Canada declared war against Japan. A few days later, Germany's declaration of war against the US made the three countries full allies against the Axis powers in both the Pacific and European theatres. In Canada, the shock waves of the Pearl Harbour Attack were felt the most profoundly in British Columbia, where the population was thrown into utter disarray and panic. Air-raid precautions were announced as the BC coast was warned about the grave threats of Japanese invasion. Residents of Japanese descent who inhabited and worked in the coastal regions became targets of suspicion that might engage in sabotage and intelligence activities for the Japanese government. Almost immediately, thirty-eight Japanese suspected of subversive intentions were arrested and interned. Some 1,200 fishing boats owned by the Japanese were expropriated.³³ Japanese-operated schools and newspapers were forced to shut down. There were also outbreaks of hostilities and violence against Japanese persons and businesses in the community.³⁴ Even though Ottawa tried to restore calm by saying that the fear of subversion by the general Japanese population was ungrounded, British Columbians had been too absorbed in paranoia to stop a mounting agitation to drive out the Japanese.³⁵

³²Patricia Roy et al, *Mutual Hostages*, 62-63

³³Douglas and Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows*, 267

³⁴*The Chinese Times*, December 9, 1941

³⁵Roy et al, *Mutual Hostages*, 75-84

Meanwhile, the Vancouver Chinese community thought that war in China would take an entirely unexpected course with the Americans being provoked into the escalating conflict. Believing that Japan had committed *hari kari*, a suicidal mistake, many expected that the United States and Britain would avenge by launching a massive counterattack, which would ensure Japan's defeat.³⁶ An editorial in *The Chinese Times* on December 9, 1941 urged the formation of an international fighting force to aid China's anti-Japanese struggle in full force.³⁷ Nevertheless, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had a different set of priorities. According to the grand strategy, the Allies would concentrate on defeating Germany and achieving victory in Europe first. The war in China came second in priority and should not be allowed to strain military resources before Hitler's Germany was completely crushed. Nonetheless, the Roosevelt administration was prepared to substitute troops with substantial financial and moral support. In order to sustain the KMT resistance against Japan, huge American loans poured into the wartime government at Chongqing, a strategy used to buy time before the Allied powers could direct frontal attacks against Japan. The Allies also began to push forward aggressive campaigns of propaganda aimed at elevating Nationalist China to world power status. Chiang Kai-shek was celebrated as one of the world's greatest leaders involved in a heroic fight.³⁸ All of a sudden, China was transformed into a wartime ally of the Western democracies. Like the great powers of the United States and Britain, China under Generalissimo Chiang was fighting "democracy's war."

On December 25, 1941, Canada and Britain suffered from the shock of another unexpected military setback as Hong Kong fell to Japanese control, less than three weeks

³⁶"Chinese View Says Japan has Committed Hari Kari," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, December 8, 1941

³⁷*The Chinese Times*, December 9, 1941

³⁸Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938*, 37-41

after the Pearl Harbour attack. Poorly-equipped and ill-advised on the military situation, the Canadian battalions of 1,973 men and a small defensive force consisted of the British, Indians and Chinese, endured three days of fierce, bloody assault by the Japanese army, resulting in 290 deaths and 493 wounded on the Canadian side.³⁹ To the great distress of Vancouver's Chinese community, the fall of Hong Kong led to the total breakdown of trans-Pacific shipping, trade and communications. A free port under British protection since 1842, Hong Kong had been a site where ships, remittances, goods and migratory peoples passed through freely, which was crucial in building the trans-Pacific existence of the Vancouver Chinese community. Since the Japanese army first penetrated south to capture the Guangzhou city and the surrounding region in October 1938, Hong Kong was also a safe haven where family members of many Vancouver Chinese took refuge to escape the ravages of war. With the complete loss of contact with Hong Kong after 1942, Vancouver's Chinese were plunged into an abyss of disquiet and sadness.

The grim situation in China and SE Asia caused by startling Japanese victories during the first half of 1942 contrasted with a gathering momentum set to alter the lives of the Chinese across Canada and the US. Galvanized by the Pearl Harbour attack and wartime propaganda, white attitudes toward the anti-Japanese war in China were changing from vague sympathy to active engagement. For the past four years, the Vancouver Chinese community had relied on its strength and unity, tapping mainly its own pool of resources to raise money for the war effort. Now it found that the white community was firmly on their side rooting for China's war, which was called by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as "the United Nations' fight." By August 1943, the Chinese War Relief Fund had developed into a nationwide campaign, after Ottawa

³⁹Roy et al, *Mutual Hostages*, 66-70

granted endorsement on the same day that Pearl Harbour was struck. Positive images of Chineseness became widely held. The Chinese were exalted as an honest, industrious, law-abiding and courageous people, even though the peoples from China and Japan had been lumped together by the white population as "Orientals" since their first arrival in the nineteenth century.

In the aftermath of the Pearl Harbour attack, Vancouver's Chinese faced a pressing need to protect themselves in a predominantly white society that could not easily differentiate between a Chinese and a Japanese based on cultural symbols such as language and customs. Being taken as a "Jap" by physical appearance could mean social exclusion and even a target of racist violence. Days after December 7, 1941, following some reported cases that Chinese persons were "mishandled" because they had been mistaken as Japanese, the Vancouver CBA issued 10,000 free lapel buttons that showed a colored Chinese flag and the word "China" to all Chinese, a measure taken not to help themselves distinguish from the Japanese but to ensure that whites would identify Chinese and Japanese persons correctly.⁴⁰ Before the entire Japanese population in British Columbia was forced into internment beginning February 1942, the Chinese community found that openly identifying oneself as "Chinese" was a necessity.

Wartime politics and propaganda to turn China into a strong ally in the Pacific created a dramatic and long-lasting impact on white Canadian views toward the Chinese, the only ethnic group in the country that had been subjected to a general ban on immigration since 1923. Between 1931 and 1941, restrictive exclusion laws and prevailing economic hardships had drastically reduced Canada's Chinese population by a quarter from 46,519 to 34,627 while Vancouver's own shrank 45 per cent from 13,011 to

⁴⁰ "For identification: City Chinese to Wear Lapel Buttons," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, December 12, 1941

7,174 in the same decade.⁴¹ Nonetheless, at a high time of tensions and excitement over the Pacific war, the Chinese were held in high esteem as good and respectful Canadian citizens of Chinese ancestry. In the editorial of *The Vancouver Sun* on December 9, 1941, China was described as “a great Oriental power of the future” fighting “democracy’s war”: “whenever the war may lead, the first credit for Japan’s ultimate defeat goes to China.” It went on to commend “the loyalty of Canada’s Chinese” in pledging their support to the country’s new war effort, which “nobly reflects the indomitable and terrible bravery of China’s own people.”⁴²

Encouraged by the new openness in Canadian society and the prospects of greater equality, many Vancouver Chinese were willing to express their loyalty and live up to the positive impressions of “Chineseness” by supporting Canada’s war with even greater enthusiasm. They subscribed to war stamps and victory bonds, donated food to active service units, responded to appeals for blood donations, worked in war industries, and participated voluntarily in civilian defense.⁴³

Community leaders seized the opportunity to consolidate the new glorified image of the Chinese people and boost the reputation of Chinatown. Born in China and raised in Cumberland, BC and Vancouver, Foon Sien (Wong Mun-po, 1898-1971) was the president of the Toishan Ningyung Benevolent Association during the war and one of the most well-known and longtime spokespersons of the community who frequently dealt with white politicians and reporters to defend and advocate the interests of the Chinese.⁴⁴ In August 1942, he gave the local press a tour of the Chinese quarter and told them that gambling halls were closing down because men were putting their money into the

⁴¹Wickberg ed., *From China to Canada*, 148, 303

⁴²“Chinese Do Their Part,” *The Vancouver Sun*, December 9, 1941

⁴³Yee, *Saltwater City*, 99

⁴⁴Wickberg ed., *From China to Canada*, 199

government's war savings stamp campaigns. Although Chinatown had been considered by white Canadians as a place teeming with gamblers, Foon Sien clarified that gambling was "never conducted on a big scale" but it was only a "poor man's pastime." Declaring that there would be no gambling until the war was over, Foon Sien stressed that "every Chinese resident of Canada is fully in accord with the ideals and principles of Chiang Kai Shek and all their spare cash will go into the war coffers until Japan is chased out of China."⁴⁵

In February 1943, Madame Chiang kai-shek embarked on her tour in the US and Canada to raise relief funds and lobby for greater Allied involvement in the China theatre. After years of violent attrition, war had reached a stalemate in China. The Japanese had captured the major urban centres on the coast but Chiang Kai-shek's strategy of luring the enemy deep into the hinterland to chisel away its might and vigour was also achieving partial success. For the most part, Japan had shifted its attention upon consolidating its new empire in East Asia. By June 1942, its sphere of control encompassed Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, the East Indies, the Philippines, Burma and a string of Pacific Islands stretching to the north of Australia. The European colonial powers had driven out of the scene. The American forces confined its combat activity around the Midway Islands and the South Pacific to thwart further Japanese advances westward and southward.

In Canada, the repercussions of Madame Chiang's visit led to the blossoming of the Chinese War Relief Fund that was originally based in Toronto, Ontario into a full-blown national campaign in August 1943 after its initial registration under the War Charities Act in December 1941. The national objective was \$1,000,000 and

⁴⁵"Chinese Quit Gambling; Extra Cash Goes for War," *The Vancouver Sun*, Aug 17, 1942

contributions were to go directly to Madame Chiang. Across the country, the Fund received the patronage of white politicians, military personnel, schools, church organizations and business communities. The national headquarters printed a pamphlet on Madame Chiang, in which she was exalted as “the greatest living woman” likened to Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale. Another pamphlet, “China, Our Allies and Friends,” propagated a highly glorified image of the Chinese people who were said to bear the moral and cultural resemblance of Canadians:

They're people like us, remember. They make bad slaves but superb soldiers; like Canadians, they do a lot of laughing and a lot of singing; they won't grovel under any man's boot; they believe in individuality and the dignity of man. It's a big country and they're a big people. They're generous to a fault and they are tolerant of the mistakes and meanness and cupidity of smaller people. They are slow to anger and quick to forgive.⁴⁶

In British Columbia, the provincial committee had a fundraising quota of \$100,000. The list of patrons included Lieutenant-Governor W.C. Woodward, the Chinese Consul-General Li Chao and Colonel K. A. McLennan. The Vancouver committee was headed by Charles Poy, president of the Yee Shan Association, and later Tim Louie, president of H. Y. Louie Company. Members of the executive included Charles Kent, the owner of the only garment factory in Chinatown, and Seto More, a longtime employee of the Canadian Pacific Railways and a political activist who had organized a study group in protest of the Chinese exclusion bill in 1923. By late 1943, Both BC and Canada had exceeded their original targets. BC succeeded in raising \$180,000 and the national total stood at \$1,250,000.⁴⁷

In a speech given during a banquet to thank the outpouring of support from white Canadians in 1944, Tim Louie, a second-generation Chinese, spoke about the growing friendship between China and Canada because of “mutual adversity.” Using Russia as an

⁴⁶“China, our Allies and Friends: A Brief Study of the Chinese,” City of Vancouver Archives

⁴⁷ Letter issued by the Vancouver committee of the Chinese War Relief Fund, City of Vancouver Archives, 1944.

example, Louie expressed the vision that “all races united can accomplish anything.”

Vancouver's Chinese had been leading all other groups in the city in their support for the national war loans. Compared to the 1.25 million dollars that Canada raised for China, it was reported that the Vancouver Chinese community had contributed approximately one million dollars to the two Victory Loan campaigns of November 1943 and May 1944.

The 1,500 Chinese who worked in the shipyards had each bought \$100 worth of war bonds.⁴⁸ One hundred Chinese served as Air Raid Patrol wardens to help defend the Chinatown district against possible invasion by the Japanese.⁴⁹

The dramatic turn of the events fomented a new Chinese Canadian identity. Since the Chinese Exclusion Act had gone into effect on July 1, 1923, the Chinese in Canada had rejected the day that marked the founding of the Dominion as “humiliation day.”⁵⁰ Wartime conditions had caused Vancouver's Chinese to develop a strong sense of belonging to Canada. But they did not lose their ties with China and continued to back its resistance against Japan. Because of the war, being a person of Chinese descent in Canada became a desirable and superior attribute to one's character, which helped intensify a double identity that was both “Chinese” and “Canadian.” Pondering on the future in the 1944 banquet, Tim Louie remarked, “We are on a threshold of a great era. Our age, the age of liberty and freedom, is coming to birth.” Indeed, it was during wartime that Vancouver's Chinese would embrace new hopes and renew their demands for equality with other Canadians.

Fighting the War for Equality

⁴⁸“Chinatown All Out for War Loan,” *The Vancouver Sun*, October 21, 1944

⁴⁹“Practising Forefathers' Advice: 'Be Prepared,' Chinese A.R.P. Wardens Ready 'If Japs Ever Come,’” *The Vancouver News-Herald*, July 7, 1943

⁵⁰Wickberg ed., *From China to Canada*, 145

In 1943, the contradictory co-existence of the discriminatory restrictions on Chinese immigration and the wartime pro-Chinese policy finally led to the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act in the United States. Madame Chiang's tour helped provide the decisive momentum for President Roosevelt to introduce the legislation. Nevertheless, political irony failed to exert enough pressure on Canada to lift its own ban. Although it was speculated that Ottawa might act in light of the policy change in the US, the speculation did not materialize. Across the country, Chinese communities expressed an outcry of dismay and bitterness that the humiliating laws were not removed. Q. P. Jack, president of the Vancouver CBA, condemned Ottawa for being a government that "extends the hand of friendship to China and at the same time makes certain the hand remains a closed fist." Although the Chinese were part of the United Nations fighting democracy's war, Jack said, Canada still treated them as lepers.⁵¹

The superficiality of the liberalized attitudes toward the Chinese was best illustrated in a commentary that appeared in *The Vancouver Sun* in early 1943. Entitled "Justice for Our Own Chinese," the article called for the elimination of unfair and unjustified practices levelled against the Chinese in British Columbia. On the subject of Chinese immigration, the author did not favour admitting all who wished to enter but only a small number within a fixed quota, an approach similar to a previous "gentleman's agreement" with Japan. The underlying ideology that the Chinese were a foreign, unassimilable race remained dominant and firm:

Any intelligent Chinese knows that. Asiatic peoples are not assimilated in our population any better than white people are assimilated in Asia. That is a law of nature which our parliaments cannot repeal. Therefore the Chinese cannot reasonably expect us to encourage a large immigration of their countrymen into Canada. It is not merely a question of numbers. It is a question of pride. It is the danger of discrimination.⁵²

⁵¹"Chinese Immigration Ban May be Modified," *The Vancouver Sun*, October 12, 1943, "Dominion's Ban on Chinese Stands," *The Vancouver Sun*, October 15, 1943, "Chinese Condemn Immigration Ban," *The Vancouver Sun*, October 15, 1943

⁵²"Justice for Our Own Chinese," *The Vancouver Sun*, January 12, 1943

Clearly, the passage carried a paternalistic tone that had been used to justify the internment of the Japanese in BC. Like the Japanese who were ordered to leave the coast and live in concentration camps in 1942 because irrational whites might harm them, the Chinese should be kept in minimal numbers so as to protect them from white agitation.

When draft calls were extended to the Chinese in August 1944, Chinatown was embroiled in a fierce debate over the course of action. Although some Chinese in Canada were already serving in the Canadian as well as American forces, politicians in British Columbia had long resisted enlisting the Chinese for fear that they might demand the right to vote after the war. However, the increasing demand for fighting men to serve in Europe and growing pressure from Britain to find Asians to help conduct special operations in the Pacific War reversed the policy. When the Chinese were finally called up for army service, the community was split between two sides: one was “no vote, no fight” and the other was “fight now, vote later.” Ottawa's earlier decision to uphold the exclusion laws despite the community's wartime sacrifices had rendered many of its members in disbelief and disillusionment. Some Chinese youth argued that the Chinese were not recognized as Canadian citizens, why should they fight? Others were convinced that they should rely on themselves and make use of the new opportunity to carry on the struggle for equality. Eventually, a decision was made that they would accept enlistment now and demand the franchise when they returned.⁵³ If the Chinese could help Canada win a war in which they laid down their own lives, they felt, no one could deny their rights again. Tim Louie, president of Vancouver's Chinese War Relief Fund Committee, had two brothers serving in the Canadian forces. Part of the Secret Force 136 trained to do sabotage and reconnaissance work behind Japanese lines, Ernie Louie, aged 27, was

⁵³Yee, *Saltwater City*, 103

parachuted into Malaya on August 1945, ten days before Japan surrendered. Quan Louie was enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Forces in November 1942. He was killed at the age of twenty-four during an air bombing mission in Germany in January 1945.⁵⁴

As early as 1940, new terms began to be used by persons of Chinese descent to claim their rightful status as Canadians by birth or naturalization.⁵⁵ The trend was injected with new strength as members of the group devoted themselves into assisting Canada's war effort and later were also drafted into the military forces. Increasingly, they identified themselves in interviews and letters written to the English-language press as "Chinese-Canadians," "Canadian-Chinese citizens," "second-generation Chinese-Canadian" or "Canadian-born Chinese," rather than "Chinese nationals" or simply "the Chinese."⁵⁶ Stepping across the threshold, they demanded the vote and decried their treatment as second-class citizens. Some Chinese youth believed that fighting for Canada would furnish an opportunity to remove the restrictions on their everyday lives. For instance, there was a chain of White Lunch restaurants in the city that admitted white patrons only. Movie theatres had segregated seatings that required Chinese persons to sit on the side rows. Whites-only neighbourhoods barred Chinese from buying local residences. Because they were not entitled to vote, the Chinese were prohibited from working in professional occupations such as law and pharmacy.⁵⁷ By being ethnically Chinese who were eager to express loyalty to Canada, the Canadian-born Chinese youth were able to turn war into an opportunity to demand equality and better the lot of the Chinese.

Claiming themselves as "Canadians," many Vancouver Chinese continued to be bound by trans-Pacific entanglements and memories that still marked them as "Chinese"

⁵⁴Shelly Chan, "Active Voices," 47-49

⁵⁵"Case for B.C. Chinese," *The Vancouver Daily Province*, October 2, 1940

⁵⁶"Votes for Chinese," "Chinese in Canada," *The Vancouver Sun*, August 15, 1944, "Chinese-Canadians Ask for Franchise," *The Colonist*, Feb 17, 1945

⁵⁷Shelly Chan, "Active Voices," 49

culturally and emotionally, the result of family ties, childhood upbringing and personal experiences. To recall an earlier story, Alex Louie belonged to such a group. After his father, Gunn Louie, was disinherited by grandfather H. Y. Louie, in the 1920s, the family with six young children had been teetering on miserable destitution. In 1933, H. Y. Louie bought the passage for Sook King Lee, Alex's mother, and the children back to Zhongshan, Guangdong province where they could live in the Louies' house and be supported more cheaply than in Canada. When war broke out in July 1937 and rapidly spread to South China, Sook King Lee desperately sold her jewellery to send Alex back to Vancouver shortly before the capture of Guangzhou in 1938. The rest of the family escaped to Hong Kong, after which Sook King Lee was able to send another son, Henry, back to Vancouver in 1939.

Back in Canada, the two brothers soon lost contact with their mother and siblings completely as Hong Kong also fell to Japanese control in late 1941. Both of them joined the Canadian army when draft calls were issued to the Chinese in 1944. After the war ended, Sook King Lee's four children, all of Canadian birth, were repatriated. Because of the Exclusion Act and later immigration regulations that only allowed dependents of Chinese Canadian citizens to enter, Sook King Lee was forced to remain in China despite her children's frantic attempts to appeal their mother's case. But the Communist takeover of China in 1949 soon added tremendous difficulty. China was again isolated by the growing "Red Scare" and communications with the West were severed. Sook King Lee would not be able to reunite with her children in Canada until the late 1950s, almost twenty years after the family first became separated between the two sides of the Pacific Ocean.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Shelly Chan, "Active Voices," 28-30

Conclusion: The Postwar Dwindling of the Double Identity

One early morning in November 1947, a fire raged through Sing Kew Theatre in Vancouver's Shanghai Alley. Within two and a half hours, Chinatown's famous landmark was burnt to ashes and ruins. Established in 1899, the theatre was the venue where Sun Yat-sen came to give public lectures on the revolutionary cause. During the period of 1937-1945, it hosted numerous Beijing and Cantonese opera performances by local troupes as well as overseas ones from Hong Kong and China that had been stranded by the war. Played to Chinese strings, drums and singing voices, acrobatic sword and spear dances, dramatic sweeping of long silk sleeves, and glimmering headdresses and robes depicted scenes from the ancient fables and folklores of heroes, adventure, war and love. Familiar arias conjured up images of one's long-lost home in faraway China. Modern operas about the ongoing war were also performed, which the Chinese soldiers always emerged triumphant at each ending. While gambling wound down significantly during the war years, these theatrical acts provided an important and popular escape to the people of Chinatown. During the nightly performances, the house was often filled with men, women, youth and children who received entertainment and contributed funds to the war effort. Memories of China recalled by the opera were shared, explained and passed on from one generation to the next. After the war, the Sing Kew Theatrical company moved to Toronto and the site was converted to rental rooms and workshops. When the whole building was destroyed in 1947, it symbolized the end of an era when the theatre served as one of most vital trans-Pacific links for Vancouver's Chinese between the homes in Canada and China.⁵⁹

⁵⁹See Wayson Choy, *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood*, 41-56, and Sing Lim, *West Coast Chinese Boy*, 42-47

The war period of 1937-1945 fostered the crystallization of a double identity that was both Chinese and Canadian in the Vancouver Chinese community. When considering migratory peoples, a common belief has been that one must be rooted in one place and derive his or her identity from that rootedness.⁶⁰ This interpretive framework has excluded persons who were the trans-national products of family ties, childhood upbringing and cross-cultural experiences. Trans-Pacific connections, memories and obligations required many Vancouver Chinese to move constantly between the two worlds of China and Canada. This particular aspect placed them outside the dominant ideology that the value of the Chinese presence was evaluated by their degree of assimilation in the larger white community. It also overlooked the intense period of the anti-Japanese war in China and the Second World War during which the community felt belonged to both China and Canada. In fact, the double identity held by the community helped them survive the long years of war and improve their status in Canada.

By 1947, important changes had taken place in the lives of Vancouver's Chinese Canadians. The Chinese Exclusion Act had been repealed after relentless lobbying by the Chinese Canadian war veterans. The right to vote had been restored. Since trans-Pacific shipping resumed after the war, hundreds had gone back to China to visit or to retire. But the postwar changes were only beginning to unfold. As the ideological differences between the US and the Soviet Union resurfaced and deepened, the world was embroiled in a new confrontation between capitalism and communism. The Communist victory in China in 1949 intensified the Cold War. Western opinions of China swung from "a key to world peace" during the Second World War to "a threat to world peace." Chinese Canadian communities were under close scrutiny for spy and sabotage activities. Being

⁶⁰Hsu, *Dreaming of Home, Dreaming of Gold*, 4

ethnically and culturally Chinese meant one had to live a cautious and restricted life because of eroded rights and freedoms.

Meanwhile in China, Communist land reform swept through Guangdong province during the period of 1950-1952. Driven by a party's attempt to eradicate "feudal exploitation," returned overseas Chinese and families who lived on overseas remittances were disgraced and labelled as the "landlords" or "rich peasants." Many were denounced and tortured in "accusation meetings." Their properties were also confiscated. Contact with the West was interrupted. China was once again plunged into isolation. By the early 1950s, many overseas Chinese knew that they would not be able to go back to China for a very long time.

National and global politics in the postwar period contributed to the dwindling of the double identity held by the Vancouver Chinese community. The overshadowing fear of uncertainty exposed the vulnerable and double-edged nature of a trans-Pacific identity. While being a Canadian who was also culturally Chinese had been desirable during the war, it became a danger in places caught up in postwar McCarthyism and Maoist socialism. One should not forget the wartime experience of Japanese Canadians, who were singled out for stigmatization while Chinese Canadians were elevated as the model of all peoples. Both groups found themselves in different situations where they were both valued and condemned for their double identities based on a diverse set of trans-Pacific ties and outlook, which was used as a basis for inclusion and exclusion by the dominant society.

國民政府軍事委員會用牋

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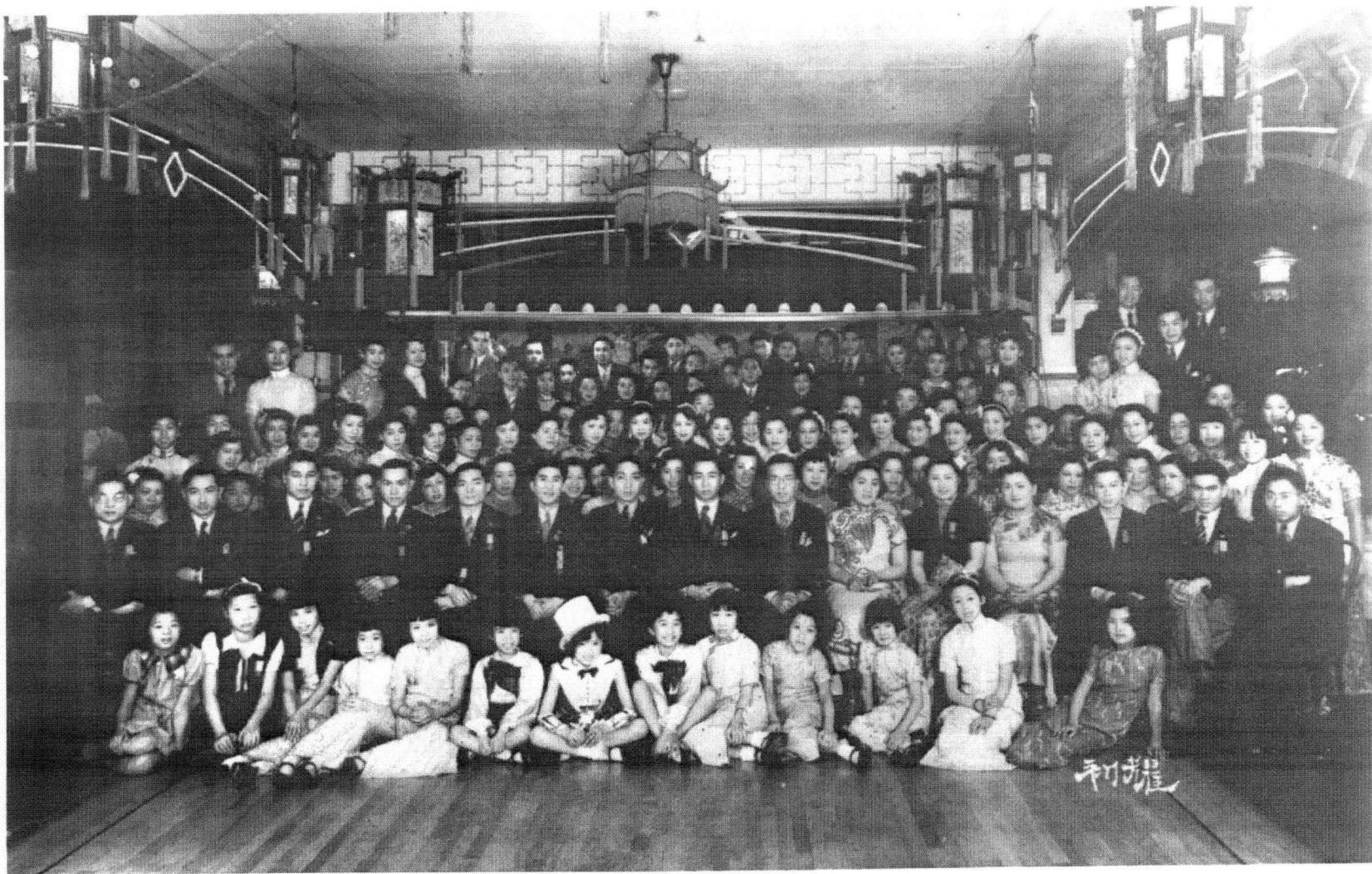


七月九日

A hand-written letter of appreciation from Chiang Kai-shek to Bick Lee recognizing his monetary contribution to the war effort, dated July 9, 1939. (Courtesy of Ron Bick Lee family)



Benefit parade by Vancouver Chinese to aid China's war refugees on Pender Street, 1938. (Vancouver Public Library #50477)



A large group of Vancouver Chinese youth at an anti- Japan fundraising dinner held at the WK Gardens Restaurant in Chinatown. Included in the group seated in the first row are Chan King Shan (seventh from the left) and Q. H. Wong (eighth). (Vancouver Public Library, #48413)



Chinese Canadian women and children holding Union Jacks and Kuomintang flags march in the VJ day celebration parade in Chinatown, Vancouver in August, 1945. Standing on the far right of the stage is Bick Lee. (City of Vancouver Archives CVA 1184-3045)

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