

## Introduction

One of the joys of teaching is that students remind one to ask basic questions. Some years ago I was explaining the federal powers of reservation and disallowance to an introductory Canadian history class. To give the subject some relevance to a British Columbia audience, I used as examples the various acts that the legislature passed in the first decade of the twentieth century as it attempted to halt Asian immigration. After explaining that provincial legislators eventually realized the limits of their powers over immigration, I mentioned that in 1923 Parliament had passed a Chinese exclusionary law. An alert student asked the obvious question: Why, after having rejected British Columbia's efforts to stop Chinese immigration, had Ottawa capitulated? I suggested a few generalities by way of explanation and the student seemed satisfied. I, however, was not and so revisited the handful of secondary sources for a fuller answer. They added nothing to my knowledge but did pique my interest. Shortly thereafter, Susan Mann invited me to present a paper on some aspect of the 1920s to the Western Canadian Studies Conference that she was organizing at the University of Calgary. As a young and naive historian, I was sure that a little work in the National Archives and some digging into the Mackenzie King papers would provide me with the answer and a paper. The paper, "The 'Oriental Menace' to British Columbia,"<sup>1</sup> was well received but I was not convinced that I had the whole story and so the research continued.

Since then, I have published one volume of this study, *A White Man's Province*,<sup>2</sup> a number of articles, and a preliminary overview, "British Columbia's Fear of Asians." In that essay, which dealt with the first half of the twentieth century, I argued that the hostility of white British Columbians toward Asians "was rooted in fear of Asian superiority," concern about a province in its formative years being "swamped" by an influx of Asians, and the fact that "Asians provided sufficient, effective competition in the fishing grounds, in the fields, in the market place, in the classroom, and on the battlefield to warrant deep fears about the ability of white British Columbians to maintain their dominant position in the province."<sup>3</sup>

That is the origin of this, the second volume of a trilogy on the response of white British Columbians, especially their politicians, to the immigration of the Chinese and the Japanese. The first volume covered the story from the arrival of the first Chinese settlers in 1858 to the eve of the First World War. The third will cover the years from the outbreak of the Pacific war on 7 December 1941 to the 1960s when Canada ended racial discrimination as a principal feature of its immigration laws.

By then, British Columbia had repealed its discriminatory laws and Asians could become full Canadian citizens.

Now that the research is complete – or as complete as historical research can ever be – it is time to modify some earlier observations with particular reference to the years between 1914 and 1941. The overall arguments hold, but it is clearer that concerns about Asians “swamping” British Columbia declined without disappearing, that agitation was episodic and was largely confined to a limited number of economic interests, that anti-Asian agitation shifted from a focus on both the Chinese and the Japanese to one that was almost exclusively anti-Japanese, and that the issue evolved from being almost exclusively a British Columbia matter to one of national concern.

This volume starts with the outbreak of one war and ends with the beginning of another. During the intervening twenty-seven years British Columbia grew and consolidated itself as a settled white society. Yet, its white residents continued to use “the other” as part of their self-definitions. In 1911, the province had just under 400,000 residents, of whom almost 8 percent were of Asian origin. By 1941, the total population had doubled to slightly over 800,000 and the Asian portion had fallen to about 5 percent. Throughout the period, the percentage of British ancestry hovered around the 70 percent mark but the number of home-made British Columbians increased. In 1911, only 17 percent of the non-Aboriginal population was provincially born; by 1941, that figure had more than doubled to 37 percent.<sup>4</sup> Among the leading anti-Asian agitators were a few native British Columbians, some migrants from elsewhere in Canada, mainly Ontario, and several of Scottish<sup>5</sup> or English birth. Like Asians, the Aboriginals lacked the franchise but when they came into contact with Asians, mainly Japanese fishermen, their views were similar to those of their white counterparts.

British Columbians also consolidated their “white man’s province” through the virtual end of Asian immigration. Thus, there was less reason for them to fear being “swamped” by Asian immigrants but old fears reappeared at times of large real or perceived immigration. The end of the First World War and the resumption of normal trans-Pacific travel saw an influx of Chinese and Japanese. It seemed even larger as many Chinese, having “registered-out” under provisions of the Chinese Immigration Act, returned after going home during the war or the prewar depression. Unfortunately, their arrival coincided with the winding down of war-related industries, serious economic dislocation, the return of war veterans, and anticipation of the 1921 federal election. In response to a well-organized national campaign, discussed in Chapter 3, the federal government passed an exclusionary Chinese Immigration Act in 1923. With that, anti-Chinese agitation sharply declined. Renegotiations of the gentlemen’s agreement by which Japan restricted emigration to Canada reduced Japanese immigration to a trickle but Japanophobes extrapolated from their high birth rate a fear that Japanese might still swamp white

British Columbia. That fear was reinforced by rumours of extensive illegal Japanese immigration in the late 1930s.

Many other basic arguments against Asians remained but less was heard of “cheap labour.” By 1914, through custom and legislation or “institutional racism,”<sup>6</sup> white British Columbians had largely circumscribed Asian economic activities as they consolidated their “white man’s province.” That development, and organized labour’s own internal divisions, contributed to its relative lack of interest in the Asian question. Politicians, however, continued their efforts to curtail Asian competition in lumbering, the fisheries, agriculture, and small business, with mixed results. Post-war efforts to enforce a 1902 law denying employment to Asians on certain timber lands led to complicated court cases but did little to reduce the number of Asians in the industry. The 1926 Male Minimum Wage Act made up for this. Earlier, after intense lobbying by British Columbia MPs, especially by A.W. Neill (Independent, Comox-Alberni), the federal government had introduced a licensing policy designed to eliminate the Japanese from the fisheries. Until the affected Japanese won a legal battle in 1929, the policy went far toward accomplishing its goal. As the Japanese left the fishery, they increasingly moved into other industries, chiefly agriculture and small business, which required relatively little capital and where there were few constitutional ways of limiting them. Chinese, of course, already had a foothold in agriculture and small business. This trend added to complaints of Asians merely being pushed from one industry to another. Some farmers lobbied for legislation similar to the alien land laws of some American states but such laws would be unconstitutional in Canada. Organized white retail merchants successfully lobbied for exclusionary Chinese immigration legislation, but attempts to regulate the retail trade and to prevent the employment of white women by Asian restaurateurs had limited effects. Appeals to patronize white merchants were not very effective since Asian grocers, restaurateurs, cleaners, and launderers often offered better service and prices than did their white competitors.

The attitudes of white British Columbians toward Asians did not fall along neat lines of economic interest. The major industrialists A.D. McRae and H.R. MacMillan were as hostile to Asians as were some of their white employees. Fish canners were of several minds about the Japanese. They relied on them as efficient fishermen but, worried about their dominating the industry, accepted Ottawa’s decision to reduce the number of Japanese fishermen in 1923 provided that it was done gradually. Union leaders did not agree on the place of Asians in the workplace or in the union movement. Although Japanese and white fishermen occasionally co-operated in seeking better deals from the canners, Alicja Muszynski, a sociologist, observes that racism divided “groups of workers against one another, thus retarding the formation of class consciousness that would unify labourers in their relations with employers.”<sup>7</sup> Discussions of efforts to restrict Asian competition appear in several chapters but principally in Chapter 4 of this volume.

By 1914, less was being heard about Asian threats to public health because the Japanese never had a reputation for uncleanliness and the Chinese had tidied up Chinatowns. Allegations of Asians corrupting white morality reappeared during the campaign for a new narcotic drug act in 1923, when municipal politicians tried to score points by halting Chinese gamblers, and when they and provincial legislators sought to “protect” white women from Asian employers. Although concerns about morality were only episodic, the notion of inassimilability survived, for example, in the concern of Attorney General A.M. Manson about “ethnological differences” and the fears of racial intermixing expressed by C.F. Davie, MLA (Conservative, Cowichan-Newcastle). This notion is examined in Chapter 2 and appears in almost every other chapter as it reinforced arguments for a variety of restrictions on Asians.

In the first volume, I argued that “the Asian question was always political.”<sup>8</sup> It remained a politicians’ issue but was seldom partisan. Federally and provincially, the two major parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, agreed on the need to halt Asian immigration and to limit Asian activities. Their only disagreement was over which party had done the most (or the least) while in office to restrict Asians and which was more likely to adopt stronger anti-Asian measures. In Ottawa, British Columbia’s MPs set aside party differences to campaign for anti-Asian measures, particularly immigration restrictions and a stiffer Opium and Narcotic Drug Act and some, notably Neill and Thomas Reid (Liberal, New Westminster), paid special attention to the fisheries, a matter of particular interest to their constituents.

Alicja Muszynski found British Columbia’s racist legacy especially instructive given the state’s role “in perpetuating a racist consciousness.”<sup>9</sup> Because only they could legislate, politicians retained a major role in the story, but whether they merely reacted to public opinion or led it depended on circumstances. In the 1921 federal election, politicians responded to popular concerns about unemployment and apparently high immigration. In 1935, when the upstart Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party challenged Liberals and Conservatives, the traditional parties led the agitation in appealing to old prejudices by claiming that the CCF would enfranchise Asians. Similarly, in 1937-38, as explained in Chapter 7, very few British Columbians paid much attention to eastern Canadian rumours of Japanese espionage on the west coast until MacGregor Macintosh, MLA (Conservative, the Islands) exploited rumours of illegal Japanese immigration and espionage to launch a campaign to remove all Japanese. In Vancouver, Alderman Halford Wilson used the situation to strengthen his campaign against Asian competition in small business. Because almost every legislator, provincial or federal, favoured checking Asian immigration and economic competition, the anti-Asian organizations that appeared from time to time had brief lifespans because they were redundant.

As in the past, the intensity of anti-Asian agitation fluctuated over time. Journalist Bruce Hutchison wrote in 1938 that “when you look back over the history of the Oriental here you see that public interest in it rises and falls in waves. For a

while British Columbia will be acutely aware of its Orientals. There will be viewing with alarm in the Legislature, resolutions from public bodies, impassioned speeches. Then British Columbia seems to walk away and forget about the whole thing.<sup>10</sup> Hutchison's observations are easily illustrated. During the First World War, as described in Chapter 1, and especially in the early 1930s, as outlined in Chapter 5, anti-Asian agitation virtually disappeared. In the first case, Premier Richard McBride deliberately ended it. During the remainder of the war and again in the early years of the Depression of the 1930s, British Columbians were preoccupied with other problems. In contrast, agitation peaked at certain times as in 1921 and again between 1937 and 1941 as Japan followed an aggressive course in Asia. So vigorous was the latter agitation, especially in Vancouver, that even the federal censor could not completely silence Alderman Wilson and his allies.

Given the nature of the province, regional variations also developed. Antipathy to Asians was widespread but particular regions focused on matters of local concern such as agriculture in the Okanagan and Fraser Valleys; fishing, especially on the west coast of Vancouver Island; and the retail trade in Vancouver and Victoria. The reasons for opposing Asians were variations on the realistic worry of economic competition as well as a constructed concern: the challenge that Asians posed to the white race. Municipal politicians in Vancouver, Victoria, and some smaller centres, for example, linked the alleged corruption of Chinatowns to calls for the reform of police departments. Where there were few Asians, as in the northern interior and in the Kootenays (vigorous opposition in the heyday of the mining industry had discouraged their presence), little was said about Asians, but Kootenay residents reacted very much like other British Columbians when they heard rumours that Asians might move into their region. Only occasionally, as at Prince Rupert where the Japanese were prominent in the fishing industry or in parts of the Fraser Valley where Japanese and white berry growers co-operated, did Asians and whites work out a *modus vivendi*.

Though few British Columbians could instantly distinguish visually between the Chinese and the Japanese, long before 1914 they had noted some differences and that trend continued. The Chinese population of British Columbia was overwhelmingly male. This imbalance in the distribution of the sexes created images of immorality among the Chinese and concerns about the protection of white women, the illegal drug traffic, and gambling.<sup>11</sup> The passage of laws in the early 1920s that were designed to halt the illegal use of narcotic drugs and to protect women and girls against working in compromising situations defused much agitation over these alleged corrupting influences. The fading of interest in the "drug evil" after the passage of the Chinese Immigration Act suggests that Sinophobes exploited interest in illegal drugs to secure support for an exclusionary immigration law. The passage of that immigration act also shows that China had little diplomatic clout. Although the consul interceded, he failed to halt the passage of the immigration law and had only limited success in solving the segregated school dispute in Victoria.

In contrast, the Japanese were backed by a powerful nation. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance expired in 1921 but Japan's roles at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and as a permanent member of the Council of the League of Nations showed that it was a major power. Even as the British Empire became the British Commonwealth, Canada and its courts remained conscious of international considerations in dealing with Japan. Thus, Canada restricted Japanese immigration by negotiation, not statute, and even in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as shown in Chapter 6, it moved cautiously in imposing export embargoes. Increasingly, British Columbians perceived the Japanese to be the greatest challenge to "a white man's province." John Nelson, a Vancouver journalist, captured this when he wrote that the Japanese were "not disposed to accept a secondary position to the whites, either socially or commercially, and they press with much vigor for political recognition."<sup>12</sup> In addition, many Japanese immigrants were women in their childbearing years. Thus, the population of Canadian-born Japanese, the Nisei, grew rapidly. In the early 1930s a number of British Columbians recognized that these young people, as Canadians by birth and education, deserved certain privileges of citizenship. That talk of toleration is examined in Chapter 5. Alas, before the Nisei got any concessions, as explained in Chapter 6, Japan's expansionist policies in Asia stimulated rumours of extensive illegal immigration and raised fears of Japan's military ambitions. This led to suspicions of the loyalties of all Japanese residents of Canada as described in Chapter 7 and ended the nascent sympathy for the Nisei who had been seeking the franchise. The Sino-Japanese war did engender some sympathy for China and the Chinese but the citizenship concerns of the small Canadian-born Chinese population got lost in the shuffle.

Even though about 95 percent of the Japanese in Canada resided in British Columbia and mainly on the coast, as the province's share of Canada's Chinese population fell from 70.5 percent in 1911 to 53.8 percent in 1941,<sup>13</sup> complaints about Asians increasingly resonated nationally. As historian James Walker points out, "ideology of race" infected views on both sides of the Rockies.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, if other Canadians had not agreed, it is unlikely that the federal government would have ended Chinese immigration or reduced the number of fishing licences issued to Japanese residents. Because their views were so widely shared, British Columbians found that their demand for a "white man's province" became a less useful "common rallying cry"<sup>15</sup> by which they could distinguish themselves from other Canadians or by which their politicians could "fight Ottawa." Moreover, its premiers had learned the constitutional limits of provincial powers.

In exhibiting antipathies to Asians, Canadians were not unique in the Western world. In the nineteenth century, British Columbia drew on the Australian colonies for ideas to check Asian immigration but by 1901 Australia had built its "great white wall" and so ceased to provide new examples. The United States, however, provided plenty of ammunition. References to the "Negro problem" appeared occasionally but more relevant were claims that British Columbia could be "overrun"

by the Japanese as had supposedly happened in California and Hawaii. Many farmers and some urban businessmen wanted legislation similar to the alien laws of several western states, which denied immigrants the right to buy land. British Columbians followed the controversy over Japanese exclusionary legislation in the United States in 1924 but heeded warnings that a law that seriously offended Japan might lead to a worse fate than the entry of a few hundred Japanese under the revised gentlemen's agreement. From time to time editors cautioned that discriminatory treatment of the Chinese or Japanese could impede trade prospects but such importunings had little effect on those who wanted a "white man's province."

In the first volume, I argued that the Asian question evolved from being primarily an economic one with racial overtones to one that was mainly racial with economic underpinnings. This trend away to an emphasis on race continued after 1914 in large part because so many Asian economic activities had been checked. But, as H.L. Keenleyside shrewdly observed in his 1938 report on alleged illegal immigration, "a prejudice may be just as important as an economic fact but it is much more difficult to evaluate."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it is often impossible to disentangle motives within the rhetoric around the issue. For example, it is evident that retail merchants were primarily concerned about direct economic competition from Asians but their largely successful campaign for Asian exclusion appealed to racial prejudice because they knew that their campaign would not get very far if they focused only on their own needs. Racial prejudice or "racism" was often rampant in British Columbia and echoed throughout Canada. Seldom, if ever, did it have a single biological, social, or economic cause; rather it was based on combinations of these factors, whose relative weight varied according both to the individual or group affected and to the time in which the antipathy was expressed.



What is "racism"? First, a comment on "race" is necessary. As demonstrated by the quotation marks, a library of books and articles, and a variety of definitions, "race," like its cognates "racism" and "racialization," is a problematic term. My argument in the first volume, that "race" was more than just skin colour, still has merit.<sup>17</sup> To bring the analysis up to date, it is helpful to look at some recent literature, especially since internationally the understanding of the idea of "race" in the interwar years was "in a state of flux"<sup>18</sup> as it moved from a biological interpretation to one of social construction. It is also useful to try to comprehend how British Columbians at the time might have viewed the concepts, if they thought about them in the abstract at all.

British Columbians would have had little trouble with the observation of one of the foremost students of race and racism, the British sociologist Robert Miles, that the "biological conception of 'race'" was "an important presence in 'common sense'"<sup>19</sup> and would have readily understood the modern description of Asians as

a “visible minority.” Miles’s statement, that the “biological conception of ‘race’” has been “discredited scientifically,” however, would have been “news” to them as it would be to most people in the Western world before the Second World War. Some British Columbians were aware of recent thinking that “race” was socially constructed but their most likely source of “scientific” information was Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (1920). Stoddard warned that the “yellow” and “brown” races could easily overwhelm the superior white race. People influenced by this notion spoke of “ethnological differences.” To white British Columbians it was “common sense” that there were different races, though they were not confident that whites could retain their hegemony. With the benefit of hindsight, it is evident that white British Columbians entertained “socially constructed” ideas of race. Among the best illustrations of the mutability of their ideas about “race” are the gradual move from discussions of the “Oriental” or “Asiatic” question to specific references to the Chinese and the Japanese and the emergence of divergent attitudes toward them.

Definitions of “racism” vary but modern scholars agree it is socially constructed. In a British Columbia context, Muszynski defines it as “a social construction rooted in complex and specific sets of social, cultural, economic, and political relations and patriarchal consciousness” and adds that it “also informs the ideology that categorizes groups of people by the colour of their skin.”<sup>20</sup> The American social theorist David Theo Goldberg calls it “the irrational (or prejudicial) belief in or practice of differentiating population groups on the basis of their typical phenomenal characteristics, and the hierarchical ordering of the racial groups so distinguished as superior or inferior.”<sup>21</sup> Following either definition, it is easy to accuse British Columbians of the time of being “racist.” They would not have appreciated the suggestion that their beliefs were irrational. In the first place, they considered that their concerns about Asians were very real; in the second, in their rankings, Asians sometimes came out on top! They feared Asians as potential superiors who might gain a numerical advantage through immigration, or in the case of the Japanese, through a high birth rate and a militarily ambitious ancestral land. Moreover, in daily encounters, they saw the Japanese as very effective economic and academic competitors. As some rhetoric surrounding Chinese gambling, drug use, and the employment of white women suggests, white British Columbians were also unsure of young whites’ ability to withstand challenges to their morality. In this last sense, the claim of Michel Foucault that racism is part of a “state’s ‘indispensable’ defense of society against itself” has some resonance.<sup>22</sup> In sum, to white British Columbians, Asians were different and unless their immigration and activities were checked, they were also a danger to the idea of “a white man’s province.”

British Columbians were, of course, unaware of the term “racialization,” which only came into common use after 1977 when the British scholar Michael Banton used it to refer to the “social process” by which people developed “a mode of categorization” to organize their “perceptions of the population of the world.”<sup>23</sup> In

the British Columbia context, Audrey Kobayashi and Peter Jackson, though noting that racialization is a “complex and contradictory process,” use the concept to argue persuasively that in the sawmill industry “the process of racialization had produced a remarkably entrenched division of labour” that depressed the wages of all. They contend that in *A White Man’s Province*, I fail to take account of “*how economic competition came to be structured along ‘racial’ lines.*”<sup>24</sup> It is a “chicken or egg” question. Did white workers object to Asian competition because Asians were “cheap labour,” or were Asians “cheap labour” because they were racialized Asians? Kobayashi and Jackson stop their study just short of the introduction of the Male Minimum Wage Act, a “racialized” action that eliminated the “cheap labour” claim in the sawmills. The act did not completely remove Asians from that work but it may have contributed to a brief waning of hostility toward the Japanese.

Although racialization “does not denote a precise action,”<sup>25</sup> as other scholars have argued, many of its attributes were also in the imprecise notion that British Columbians called “inassimilability”<sup>26</sup> – a notion that they used as the basis of their arguments for restrictions on Asian immigration and activities. In its simplest form, “inassimilability” meant that the “races” could not and should not mix. British Columbia racists, like their counterparts elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> often used such claims to justify proposed restrictions on Asians, such as segregated classrooms and denying them access to the land. Mention of “inassimilability” faded somewhat in the early 1930s but later reappeared. Whether the apparent toleration for Asians described in Chapter 5 was a cause or an effect of the declining concern about “inassimilability” is unclear. Paradoxically, Nisei efforts to assimilate by seeking the franchise revived old agitation. The Native Sons of British Columbia claimed that giving voting rights to the Nisei would lead to the enfranchisement of all Asians in the province and that, in turn, the Orientals, “once our servants” and “now our competitors in industrial occupations and commercial and economic spheres,” would become “our masters.”<sup>28</sup>



In the 1980s, British Columbia scholars joined the debate about whether “race” or “class” is more important in shaping a society. Internationally, Benedict Anderson, for example, argued that racism derives from class whereas Michel Foucault saw the reverse.<sup>29</sup> Drawing on research that dealt mainly with “race,” Peter Ward readily concluded that “the major cleavages” in British Columbia’s society had “been those of race.”<sup>30</sup> Ward’s critics, however, argued that “class” was a fundamental factor in explaining the province’s history.<sup>31</sup>

Later scholars questioned the race/class debate itself. One American noted that it pivots “on an axis bounded by two unhelpfully formalistic, artificially separated poles”;<sup>32</sup> another described deciding “whether class or race factors were more powerful” as a “silly and unproductive exercise” since “racial ideology constituted only

one element of the whole ideology of each class.”<sup>33</sup> David Roediger, an American labour historian, also warned that the “privileging of class over race is not always productive or meaningful.”<sup>34</sup>

A basic problem in the debate is that of defining terms. As explained above, “race” is a problematic word. So too is “class.” Although E.P. Thompson said simply that “class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is the only definition,”<sup>35</sup> his disciples have read far more into the notion of class and have engaged in lively debates on its complexities and nuances. Indeed, a good part of the discussion in British Columbia over “race” and “class” revolved around definitions of “class.” Nevertheless, the debate stimulated some scholarship. For example, in examining Asians in the labour market, sociologist Gillian Creese found that “the racist content of Euro-Canadian labour organizations, with its exclusionary policies and anti-Asian demands, cannot be interpreted simply as racism overshadowing class-consciousness.”<sup>36</sup>

In British Columbia, both “class” and “race” were factors in shaping society but they were often intertwined and their relative importance varied according to time, place, and the individual or group concerned. It is difficult to ascertain the motives even of individuals. For example, did “race” or “class” interests motivate the workingman’s wife as she chose to patronize a white or a Chinese grocer or did she simply consider service, price, and quality of the produce?

Since a simple dichotomy between “race” and “class” has not satisfactorily explained the complexities of British Columbia society, scholars have turned to other concepts. Robert A.J. McDonald argues that at least in the case of Vancouver before 1914, both class and race were factors. He suggests that “status,” or “respectability,” is a better analytical tool. According to his definition, “to be ‘respectable’ was to be of good character: pious, sober, honest, industrious and self-sufficient,” and “respectability” was associated with rootedness or stability, families, and British culture.<sup>37</sup> Although Asians could be of good character, and the evidence suggests most were – paradoxically their industriousness was a major complaint against them – the perception was that they were not respectable. Moreover, their travels across the Pacific, the lack of families among the Chinese, and language limitations among immigrants automatically excluded Asians from this definition of respectability. In concluding that the segregation of Asians “ultimately rested on the hardpan of racial prejudice,” McDonald is close to the mark.<sup>38</sup> However, he deals only with the period before 1914 and his definition of “respectability” becomes less relevant for Asians as a generation of Canadian-born Asians, particularly Japanese Canadians, grew up and showed every intention of remaining rooted in the province, raised families, and tried hard to adopt what, by the 1930s, was more of a Canadian than a British culture. In the larger coastal cities, Asians remained very definitely the “other,” or outsiders, until after the Second World War. Limited anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that this may have been less so in smaller centres where Asians’ respectability could be judged on an individual basis.<sup>39</sup> In Prince

Rupert, for example, the social columns of the local newspaper listed both Occidental and Japanese guests at a bridal shower, and both Chinese and Japanese residents donated to the construction of a new civic centre.<sup>40</sup>

By 1914, British Columbia was no longer a traditional colonial society either constitutionally or in practice, for an elected government represented the overwhelming majority of the adult male population.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the observation of Ann Laura Stoler that in colonial societies “what sustained racial membership was a middle-class morality, nationalist sentiments, bourgeois sensibilities, normalized sexuality, and a carefully circumscribed ‘milieu’ in home and school” has some applicability in British Columbia.<sup>42</sup> Whether British Columbia was still intellectually a colonial society or whether the phenomenon described by Stoler was not necessarily confined to colonies merits further investigation.



This is a study in “racial relations,”<sup>43</sup> but it is not a complete story. As Timothy J. Stanley rightly observes, understanding the effects of racism “requires engagement with the meanings of the excluded.”<sup>44</sup> A comprehensive examination awaits more research on the internal dynamics of the Chinese and Japanese communities in British Columbia and their responses to the situations in which they found themselves. Asian communities were not monolithic. Conflicts between merchants and labourers<sup>45</sup> and between political factions<sup>46</sup> divided Chinatowns; merchants and members of the Japanese Labour Union vied for control of the Japanese Association that claimed to speak for all of them. The union itself had splits between owner-operators of small businesses such as laundries and those who were employees.<sup>47</sup> How such divisions and conflicts between the Chinese and Japanese communities may have affected responses to discriminatory measures deserves a study of its own. Fortunately, the relevant literature is growing. The older but still valuable historical studies such as those by Adachi, Takata, Li, Con et al., Chan, Lai, and Yee<sup>48</sup> are now complemented by memoirs and historical analyses.<sup>49</sup> Particularly as the Canadian-born grew up, more Asians in British Columbia became articulate in English. Thus, it has been possible to include some “Asian voices” here.

As a study of how white British Columbians acted toward Asians and why they acted as they did, this work fits into the growing literature by “outsiders,” including myself. James Walker and Constance Backhouse have examined the legal manifestations of Canadian racial laws. The geographer Kay Anderson has used theoretical constructs of race to examine Vancouver’s Chinatown and to analyze race relations in that city. And Peter Ward, in a book now in its third edition, has explored policies and attitudes against a background of stereotypes.<sup>50</sup> Their approaches are useful but underplay the complex origins of the opposition to Asians in British Columbia. As will become evident, I rely more on empirical evidence than on theories to make my arguments.

A few words on terminology are necessary. In his collection of essays, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, the historical geographer Cole Harris boldly asserts that “whiteness became the first and most essential marker of social respectability.”<sup>51</sup> Although Harris focuses mainly on the nineteenth century – during which, until the 1880s, another non-white group, Native Indians, formed the largest portion of the total population – the idea still has some relevance to the twentieth century. The fit, however, is not perfect. As recent American critics of “Whiteness” studies have observed, “white” is a moving target; people can “become” white depending on how they are perceived.<sup>52</sup> That is a problem in British Columbia too where Doukhobors were often not considered “white” despite their skin colour and European origins and where, according to folklore, French Canadians were told to “speak white.” I define “whites” simply as those people who were defined by themselves and others as “white” – that is, who were not Asian, Aboriginal, or African and who had European ancestors.

The term “Oriental” was always at least slightly derisive and is now considered offensive. Thus, I have substituted “Asian” except in quotations or close paraphrases where substituting “Asian” for “Oriental” would shift the tone of the statement. Curiously, the pejoratives “Chink” and “Jap” long survived in British Columbia speech.<sup>53</sup> The word “Chink,” however, rarely appeared in print. Headline writers, however, seldom resisted the abbreviation, “Jap.” The terms “Oriental” and “Asiatic” frequently appeared and were always at least a slight term of derision and are now considered offensive.<sup>54</sup>

The word “man” also requires explanation. At the time, it was a collective noun that included both women and men. Thus, for example, women’s institutes passed resolutions to keep this “a white man’s country.”<sup>55</sup> There were no discernible gender differences in attitudes toward Asian immigrants. Women’s organizations and individual women could be just as hostile to Asians as could men. There was little to distinguish for example, between the views of most women’s institutes and those of the Great War Veterans’ Association (GVWA) or between the propaganda work of J.S. Cowper and that of Hilda Glynn-Ward. On the other side, individual women such as Nellie McClung were as scarce as such men as Professor Henry F. Angus who publicly expressed sympathy for enfranchising Canadian-born Asians. Although the evidence is scattered and only anecdotal, one variable among whites in their attitudes to Asians appears to have been age; at play or in school, but not in their homes, children seem to have ignored “racial” differences.

As the notes reveal, this book relies mainly on the papers of politicians, the records of relevant government departments, and the newspapers of the time. The newspapers do have a problem with bias; most had a clear political slant. But the existence of competing dailies even in smaller centres such as Prince Rupert, however, helps to compensate for that. Whether newspapers make or reflect public opinion or whether they can create an “imagined community” is, of course, open to debate.<sup>56</sup> Had they followed lines of argument incompatible with the majority

opinion of their readers and advertisers, they were unlikely to survive.<sup>57</sup> And almost all of the newspapers operating in 1914 were still in business in 1941. The only significant exceptions were the *Vancouver World* and its successor, the *Vancouver Star*, that went out of business in 1924 and 1932 respectively. That the *World* was perhaps the most virulent anti-Asian journal in the province was probably not the cause of its demise; its anti-Asian sensationalism may have been a bid to win readers. Certainly, the *Vancouver Sun*, which did survive, advertised its anti-Japanese campaign in the late 1930s as it sought new readers. Yet the *Sun* did not always oppose Asians. At times, for example, it warned that anti-Asian agitation could impair trans-Pacific trade. Such inconsistency was not uncommon among the province's newspapers whose opinions shifted with the times. After the outbreak of the European war in 1939 the press was censored. Editors generally co-operated with the censor and, as tension with Japan mounted, many counselled readers to distinguish between Japan and the Japanese in Canada. In the short run, that may have had a calming effect but it did not long survive Pearl Harbor.

Although I have not read every page of every newspaper published in the province between 1914 and 1941, I have read the major dailies for Vancouver, Victoria, New Westminster, Nanaimo, and Prince Rupert and most of the weeklies for Kamloops, the Okanagan and Fraser Valleys, and Vancouver Island. For other communities, mainly in the Kootenays, I looked at the local press in times of province-wide controversy, or when other evidence suggested that there might be a local issue.

The organization of this volume follows the mixture of thematic and chronological chapters used in *A White Man's Province*. Thus, a recurrent issue, notably fears of Japan's military ambitions, is in a chapter covering the entire time frame. Chapter 2, on "inassimilability," focuses on the 1920s, when that notion was most frequently expressed. The other chapters fall into more or less chronological units as they explain the fears and prejudices that developed as the Far Eastern conflict evolved into the Pacific war. This volume, as a prelude to the events following Pearl Harbor that led to the removal of all Japanese from the coast in 1942, shows how politicians, by exploiting the complex fears of an "Oriental Menace," kept racial prejudices alive even after they had seemingly consolidated the whiteness of their province.