

Cultivating Connections

The Making of Chinese Prairie Canada

By Alison R. Marshall



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Preface

The release of Alison Marshall's new book, *Cultivating Connections: The Making of Chinese Prairie Canada*, coincides with a rising level of interest among many Canadians of Chinese origin in discovering their family stories. It is a valuable resource for someone like me, a descendant of an immigrant, for it describes the various ways the early pioneers from China came together, in the face of many obstacles, to offer support, provide company, and build community in villages and towns across Western Canada.

My maternal grandparents, Yee Clun and Eng Shee Yee, arrived separately in Canada during the early part of the last century. Our search for even the most basic details of their experiences in this country began over ten years ago. As if we were on a good scavenger hunt – we moved about from family gatherings to small conversation, library to archive, special collection to family photograph, city directory to old newspaper, the story of their lives has slowly begun to emerge.

Grandfather Yee Clun arrived from the village in China in 1902 as a labourer and paid one hundred dollars to enter Canada. Following several years of travelling around rural Saskatchewan, he settled in Regina and eventually earned merchant status, enabling him to bring Grandmother into this country in late 1919, exempt from the head tax. He partnered with others to operate cafes, restaurants, and merchandise stores around the city, and together with Grandmother raised a family and established roots within this new land. They returned to China in 1932, reunited in Regina in 1941, and relocated to Vancouver in 1947 to spend their retirement years.

During the past few years, my mother Katie, Aunt Mamie, and late uncle Danny reminisced about their parents and recounted their own experiences of growing up in Regina during the late 1920s and into the 1940s. We were fortunate to hear of Alison's research on Chinese Canadian history in 2011, to meet with her that summer, and to be given the opportunity to contribute material toward the preparation of this book. Working together has been a rewarding experience, as a good portion of my mother's family's life was

spent in the very places and during the years that Alison's book explores. The historical context that her work provides adds greater meaning to and understanding of our family's particular story. It is both a surprise and an honour to have it included in the book, and we are thankful to Alison for that, since in no way did my mother and her siblings consider their lives extraordinary or imagine that they would some day become the subject matter for academic study.

Clarence Sihoe

Introduction

When I completed my book *The Way of the Bachelor* and was editing the final proofs, I saw I had built a considerable archive. I had so much material and many more stories that needed to be told. I had to tell people about Prairie networks, power brokers, and labourers, and most importantly about family and women. In this book, I try to include all the stories I have gathered since 2005, when I embarked on a research project to understand early Chinese Prairie settlement.¹ As I interviewed people in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, and collected materials in Chinese and English, I came to expect that many of the early settlers I was hearing about were connected. Almost all of them were. When I launched *The Way of the Bachelor* in April 2011, three families (now living in Vancouver or outside of it) of research participants attended, and the fathers and grandfathers knew each other. To them, the stories, photographs, and documents I had collected had personal significance. Research talks became reunions. Unlike my previous work on arcane aspects of Chinese religious literature and theory, this research endeavour actually meant something to people living today. Thus, it has been my pleasure to collect and share many (sadly not all) of the stories that were told to me.

The aim of this book is to document the processes of migration, settlement, and adaptation through the study of affect-sentiments, connections, and networks.² As I collected a large volume of material, I came to see that emotional experiences linking people to the past and to others were still dynamic and that they could be categorized. People wept when they sang the Chinese nationalist anthem. People spoke loudly and with enthusiasm when they talked about men for whom the Chinese community had “good feelings.” I wasn’t experiencing distinct disembodied moments in time. Having immersed myself in the Chinese Prairie community, I was experiencing moments along a temporal continuum. If I traced each moment back in time, I could understand positive and negative affect in various network channels. Narrative accounts, texts, and performances reinforced the idea

that affect from the first five decades of twentieth-century Chinese Prairie Canada had lingering embers that I myself had seen and experienced. Although this book draws heavily on the influence of affect as Chinese nationalism between 1909 and 1949, I do not define affect as simply that which coalesced when people imagined and struggled to create a new modern China. Affect was ambiguous, but over time it came to mingle and swell with era-specific traits as I built a large collection of materials. Whereas I first noticed affect in old poems, songs, oral history accounts, and other archival materials, I tried to understand the basis for each emotional experience and tie through Chinese theory and *renqing* (human sentiment).³

This book also traces the relationships and political and/or religious affiliations that enabled Chinese immigrants to have close ties and serve their friends. To this end, I examine the everyday lives of Chinese men and women that are documented in written archival, oral history, and other materials. I foreground the moments, encounters, and emotional situations that brought people together, knitting them into a specific kind of networked society. I pay attention to stories that simmer with meaning as homesick boys forged life-changing bonds.⁴

Poems, songs, and newspaper accounts teemed with patriotic language describing stoical, brave, loyal, respected male leaders with strong ties and alliances. By contrast, Chinese Canadian letters, diaries, biographies, and oral history accounts showed women's evolution from grief-stricken, selfish, lonely, dissatisfied, and grumpy young wives to similar kinds of affected elderly mothers.⁵ Broader Christian society continued along these negative channels, emphasizing Chinese women's reputed involvement in prostitution and slavery. In the four chapters on women in this book, I challenge stereotypes and trace the arc of women's religious and family interactions that sutured lives of joy and contentment, despite racism and exclusion by Chinese and non-Chinese society. Those who were warmly regarded enjoyed stronger ties to Chinese and non-Chinese society. Those who were less warmly regarded and formed weaker ties were more prone to exclusion in early Prairie life.⁶ Prairie Chinese were linked to global networks and processes as well, and thus my discussion also draws on American literature.

In the summer of 1923, Arthur Mar (Cantonese: Mah Ping Chong) left Taishan, China, and sailed to Victoria, Canada. He paid five hundred dollars in head tax and then took the train to Winnipeg, Manitoba.⁷ He was fourteen years old, alone and homesick. He didn't know a word of English. Arthur attended school for a few years, formed close friendships with teachers and

students, and then went to work in Winnipeg Chinatown cafes. After thirteen years, he returned to China. He married Sue Fong Wong and then sailed back without her because Canadian law would not allow most Chinese wives as immigrants.

Arthur continued to live as a bachelor and laboured in Winnipeg's Chinatown, saving money, sending remittances to his wife and parents, and helping those in need. He waited eleven years in the hope that the restrictive Chinese Immigration Act would some day be repealed, permitting his loved ones to move to Canada. The act was finally repealed in 1947. Arthur returned to China and became a father. He sailed back to Canada alone, bought the Goodway Cafe in Lac du Bonnet, Manitoba, and made preparations for the family to join him. He was now a merchant and father, and life was good after Arthur's family arrived. He and his wife went on to have four more children in Lac du Bonnet and to form close ties to the community. Arthur loved politics and his friends. But most of all, he adored his family. While Arthur arrived at the end of the second wave of migration to the Prairies, he was like thousands of Chinese. He had found ways to persevere, flourish, and leave a legacy on the Canadian Prairies in spite of tremendous adversity.

Through goodwill, word of mouth, and advertisements in Chinese and English newspapers, Arthur and thousands of so-called bachelors between the 1870s and 1920 moved out of coastal British Columbia and the western United States.⁸ They moved onto the Prairies and beyond, to Toronto, Ottawa, or Montreal.⁹ They travelled east along new railway lines and old networks, and north through rancher pathways to Canada across the United States border.¹⁰ They were attracted to the sparsely populated Prairies by opportunities to escape poverty, to open shops, and to become merchants.¹¹ With merchant status, men inched closer to "whiteness" and had economic, social, and cultural opportunities that labourers did not. They and their families could travel relatively freely between Canada and China. Most importantly, however, they were exempt from paying head tax until 1923. During the exclusion era between 1923 and 1947, most people of Chinese descent – but not merchants – were prohibited from entering Canada.¹² On the Prairies, valuable merchant status was more easily attained, and people were generally less hostile toward Chinese immigrants than were those who lived elsewhere in Canada.¹³ Merchants dominated the realms of politics, religion, and business, brokering relations between Chinese and non-Chinese Canada. They opened the first laundry shops and groceries in dozens of small cities, towns, and villages.

Laundry work was the largest and earliest documented Chinese-run business on the Prairies. It was governed by early trade guild and clan territorial rules that determined where a man could operate a business. Laundries provided a Chinese location where men could gather, sleep, socialize, organize, recite poetry, and read Chinese newspapers. They provided the income and merchant status needed to bring wives and families to Canada before 1924, or to support wives met and married in Canada and children born there after that time. Laundry work required men to labour throughout the week and even on the Sabbath, when Christian society paused to worship at church. Thus, in many ways, laundry work placed Chinese men necessarily beyond the dominant frame of Canadian life until 1895, when cafes became more acceptable and positive enterprises.¹⁴

A global network of Chinese nationalism, or affective regimes, began to form in 1909 when Prairie settlements coalesced. Networks of affect strengthened as the last Chinese dynasty fell in 1911, and Chinese nationalist clubhouses opened a year later. Patriotism surged as Japan invaded and was at war with China in the 1930s. Nationalist ties became so valuable that over time they superseded familial ones. Affective regimes were experienced differently in 1920s Canada, depending on whether one lived on the Prairies or on the coast, and whether one was male or female. Experiences were also determined by merchant, nationalist, Confucian, Christian, Buddhist, or Daoist affiliation and practice. Ties and networks had momentum that moved people to act or not, to be racist or not. Affective regimes were developed by state elites, non-elites, and the populace in Canada and in China. At the same time, they were inhabited by men who came to take on, and then influence, favoured nationalist customs and ideas. They were the central but not the only network in early Prairie Canada.¹⁵

Prairie Chinese joined networks and organizations that were related to their clan, trade, and politics. In Canada and the United States, all Chinese were expected to be fee-paying members of the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA).¹⁶ The CBA, with its headquarters in Victoria, helped unite Chinese throughout Canada from 1884 to 1909.¹⁷ Many Chinese who came to the Prairies initially lived in Victoria, where they competed with “whites” and other Chinese for work in mines, factories, canneries, wash shops, saloons, hotels, and stores.¹⁸ Victoria’s Chinatown had the infrastructure and activities one would expect in a community of southern Chinese migrants: clan, trade, and voluntary association buildings, schools, churches, missions, Chinese offering halls, temples, and sites where one could watch an opera or gamble.¹⁹ By 1911, Vancouver’s Chinatown had surpassed the



Figure 1 KMT Winnipeg picnic, 1918. *Source:* Manitoba KMT.

size of Victoria's and had become the main destination for Chinese newcomers.²⁰ The CBA led Chinese communities in Victoria, Vancouver, New York, and many other cities. But on the Prairies, the Kuomintang (KMT), otherwise known as the Chinese Nationalist League, held power; until 1950, Chinese were expected to belong to the association.²¹

In addition, Chinese political organizations with headquarters in New York and San Francisco reached into Canada, which meant that Prairie and American Chinese shared alliances, ties, and worldviews. Exclusionary racist legislation in the United States created the impetus for Chinese border crossings into Canada and the Prairies. However, Chinese who migrated to the Prairies shared experiences of racist legislation that privileged "white" British settlers. After transcontinental railways were built – the first phase of the United States railway was completed in 1869, and Canada's was done by 1885 – and Chinese labourers were no longer needed, both Canada and the United States enacted exclusionary legislation. The American 1882 Exclusion Act, in force until 1943, prohibited both citizenship and the entry of most Chinese.²² North American institutionalized racism in the 1880s and 1890s inflamed racist ideologies and drove Chinese out of American settlements and into urban and rural Prairie Canada.²³

Many Chinese immigrants came to Canada from the United States through ports and border checkpoints. These had guards and clerks who scrutinized arrivals and identities. Port and border agents collected head tax from 1885 to 1923 and monitored trans-border movement through land and water between more populous California and British Columbia, and Alberta and

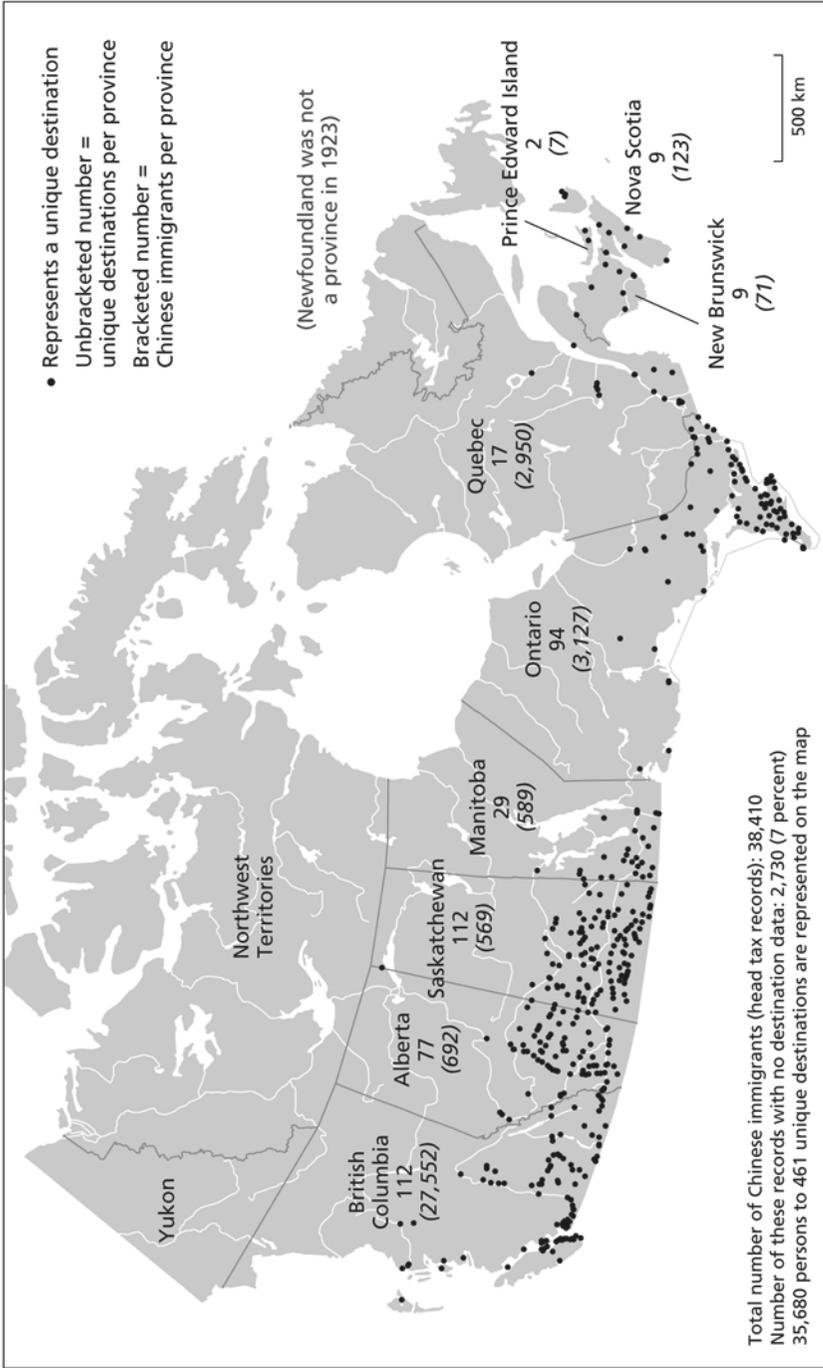


Figure 2 Canadian destinations of Chinese immigrants between 1910 and 1923. Source: Henry Yu, Canadian Chinese Head Tax database, redrawn by Eric Leinberger.

Montana.²⁴ Chinese communities throughout these borderlands shared networks, racism, cultures, and stereotypes.²⁵ The legal borders didn't seem to matter to the Chinese, who habitually moved across them. Sometimes they also used them to avoid deportation and paying head tax. Legal borders certainly mattered to most state agents, who wished to stem the perceived tide of illicit Chinese.²⁶ Traffic across eastern Prairie borders into Canada from North Dakota and Minnesota, however, was not well patrolled. Border officials may have turned a blind eye to Chinese illegal immigrants who served a purpose in border towns, offering laundry services and, after 1895, meals to non-Chinese bachelor communities.

Aside from shifting Chinese across borderlands within established networks, both Canadian and American exclusionary legislation severely limited the migration of women, which greatly altered Chinese society. The 1875 Page Law enacted in the United States drastically reduced the number of women who were able to immigrate.²⁷ Women who remained after the 1880s were mostly wealthy merchant-class wives or young women.²⁸ Chinese men in the United States who were desirous of family life and marriage found it nearly impossible to find Chinese wives, and Chinese and "white" mixed marriages were banned in fourteen states.²⁹ Institutionalized racism in the United States helped transform and then fix Chinese settlement as largely male.³⁰

The dearth of women also contributed to overseas nationalist ideology and structures.³¹ In traditional China, people identified with the empire (until 1911) or the state (after 1911) through the family and household unit. Overseas Chinese men identified with the state through friendship and nationalism. Nationalist networks provided new processes and structures to facilitate connections in bachelor society, which lacked family households or women.

Many Chinese who came from British Columbia or the United States in the 1880s and 1890s were drawn to Manitoba, where there was the possibility of becoming a merchant with enough money to marry either a Chinese or non-Chinese bride.³² When Chinese moved into Manitoba, it was often to Mennonite and English-speaking towns and villages close to the United States border, such as Gretna. Most places that could be reached by railway lines in 1880s Manitoba had some kind of Chinese business. Chinese did not usually settle in Franco-Manitoban towns near the American border. Integrating into small English "white" Prairie towns was difficult enough.³³ Notably, in 1892, Gretna, located next to the American border, had a sizeable Chinese population. Reports of Chinese quarantined during the July 1892 smallpox outbreak contradict each other. One suggests that between fifteen

and twenty males lived in and worked at Gretna's local laundry at the time of the outbreak.³⁴ A separate account of the smallpox epidemic targets Gretna's newly arrived Chinese residents as the source of contagion. In this account, the Chinese had come to Gretna from Winnipeg and were intending to migrate to the United States when they became sick. The summer of 1892 was a particularly severe time for smallpox, scarlet fever, and diphtheria outbreaks in immigration buildings. Infections spread through steamships and then railway cars.³⁵ Extensive research of the era's pattern of North American Chinese settlement and trans-border migration, however, indicate that the Gretna Chinese would probably not have wanted to return to the United States in 1892, when racism was particularly severe. Local histories and census data show settlements of varying sizes in Manitoba between the early 1880s and 1900s, including Brandon, Boissevain, Cartwright, Cypress River, Dominion City, Elgin, Emerson, Crystal City, Holland, Killarney, Lyleton, Miami, Souris, and Waskada.³⁶

By the early 1900s, local histories and census data indicate similar settlements of varying sizes in Saskatchewan's Alameda, Arcola, Carnduff, Estevan, Gainsborough, Oxbow, Radville, and Lampman. (Saskatchewan did not join the Dominion of Canada as a province until 1905, and many towns had not yet been incorporated.)³⁷ Usually, these early settlements were located close to the American border. For instance, the 1901 census showed five Chinese men (from different clans) living in the border village of North Portal, Saskatchewan. The men, who were between thirty and fifty-five years old, self-identified as single and Christian. Unlike in other Chinese settlements of the era, only one of them worked in a laundry. The remainder were merchants, who probably facilitated the cross-border movement of goods. Archival research suggests that Chinese continued to enter Canada through North Portal into the 1910s.³⁸

Manitoba's mature Chinese political and economic networks facilitated the connection of newcomers to powerful Chinese elders, useful information, and established associations. Newly arrived Chinese were visited by elders who drove to their small towns to fundraise for the dream of a new republic in China. Elders also invited newcomers to travel to Winnipeg for banquets or summer picnics. Networks, businesses, and affective ties developed as men helped their friends in Chinese and non-Chinese communities beyond Chinatown.

In Manitoba, people were modest and fairly accepting of newcomers who were different from themselves.³⁹ Chinese could reside in neighbourhoods beyond Manitoba Chinatowns, though they tended to stay on the margins

of better districts.⁴⁰ Ma Seung (Ma Xiang, 1872-1951), a missionary and minister, brought his family to Manitoba because of the extreme racism in Cumberland, British Columbia. His youngest son, Jacque Mar (1912-2012), confirmed this, noting that the family went on to experience very little racism in Manitoba.⁴¹ Winnipeg was a more tolerant place to live than many other cities in Western Canada.⁴²

Around 1909, the population of Chinese settlers on the eastern Prairies began to stabilize. Chinese men, and sometimes women, were putting down roots in Manitoba, which became the geographical centre of Prairie Chinese Canada.⁴³ Many early Chinese settlers who left large coastal settlements were first drawn to Winnipeg's Chinatown. It was an enclave where Chinese political groups organized and dramatic troupes performed. It was also a haven where a Chinese newcomer who had just gotten off the train could get help from fellow countrymen. Around 1909, the Chinese United League (Tongmeng Hui) opened a secret clubhouse at 223 Alexander Avenue.⁴⁴ The clubhouse, which Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen probably visited in 1911, was part of a global political network that facilitated the flow of member donations to establish a new republic in China.⁴⁵ It also functioned to unite worldviews of all its early members. In 1912, the Chinese United League became the Chinese Nationalist League's secret Prairie headquarters.⁴⁶

By 1919, there were 900 Chinese men and women living in Winnipeg, including eight families.⁴⁷ By contrast, 400 Chinese lived in Edmonton, and 450 lived in Nanaimo.⁴⁸ Winnipeg was the fifth-largest area of Chinese settlement in the nation, after Vancouver, Victoria, Toronto, and Montreal.⁴⁹ Interviews with early Chinese Canadian residents suggest that an equal number of Chinese usually lived inside and outside Winnipeg, though there were fewer women in rural areas. Whereas Winnipeg had a small Chinatown, other Prairie locales such as Regina, Brandon, and Saskatoon had Chinatowns that were even smaller – no larger than a couple of city blocks.⁵⁰ Newcomers found temporary lodging in Chinatown, and bachelor old-timers retired there.

Winnipeg residents were predominantly of British ancestry, and almost half the city's total population in 1921 had been born in another country, making it a highly cosmopolitan centre. Gerald Friesen writes:

To descend from the train at the CPR station in Winnipeg was to enter an international bazaar: the noise of thousands of voices and a dozen tongues circled the high marble pillars and drifted out into the street ... This was not

a polite and ordered society but rather was customarily described as Little Europe, Babel, New Jerusalem, or the Chicago of the North.⁵¹

Indeed, as Friesen observes, Winnipeg was the Chicago of the North, and some of the earliest Prairie settlers had entered Canada through Manitoba's border with the northern United States and resided in villages and towns near the border. Chinese men regularly made the trip to Winnipeg's Chinatown to pick up supplies and visit with friends at clubhouses. They also attended Chinese mission events at 418-20 Logan Avenue (established by 1917) and went to Bible-study classes.⁵² Sometimes they gambled. Chinese men were drawn to and remained in the region because of membership and fellowship found in Chinese political groups based in Winnipeg's Chinatown.⁵³

Chinese events were held in Winnipeg to mark the New Year, the Moon Festival, and, after October 10, 1911, the Double Tenth Festival.⁵⁴ It was also the place where early Methodists and Presbyterians (before the United Church formed in 1925), who led Prairie Chinese Christian work, had their missions. Thus, Chinese political and religious networks had hubs in Winnipeg and provided significant outreach, support, and also surveillance of the Prairie hinterland.⁵⁵

Relationships formed gradually in Manitoba, providing young boys with mentorship and guidance from elders who were familiar with the province and life in Canada. As a result, Chinese boys raised in Manitoba (such as Frank Chan, discussed in Chapter 3) often became community leaders.⁵⁶ Saskatchewan, located on the outskirts of nationalist networks, was different. Its Chinese population was still negligible by 1900; the 1901 Census shows only a handful of Chinese residing there, in contrast to 209 Chinese in Manitoba. In just over ten years, however, almost 1,000 young Chinese men settled in more than one hundred Saskatchewan villages, towns, and cities.⁵⁷ By 1911, the number of Chinese migrants residing in Saskatchewan had exceeded the number in Manitoba, who were spread out in only twenty-eight places.⁵⁸

Lacking role models and seasoned mentors of their own ethnicity, early Chinese male settlers in Saskatchewan were also disadvantaged because the province had no large cosmopolitan centre. It had Regina, Moose Jaw, and Saskatoon – all small cities. The absence of a diverse urban centre made Saskatchewan a socially and culturally less attractive place to settle. The harsh conditions of Canadian Prairie life made the cultivation of good human relationships essential. Winter on the Prairies lasted from November

to April. People needed each other during the coldest months, when almost all activity was indoors.⁵⁹ Most Prairie shops and suites lacked coal furnaces, and winters were spent with frozen windows, floors, and pipes.⁶⁰ Settlers slept in beds with others to keep warm and burned wood in cast iron stoves. Prairie winters were lonely: people visited infrequently during months when roads were made impassable by heavy snowfall and ice.

According to Canadian census data, between 1911 and 1921 Saskatchewan experienced the West's largest population surge, from 492,432 to 757,510.⁶¹ By 1921, the Canadian census showed that the Chinese population in Saskatchewan was double the number in Manitoba. In both provinces, the new Chinese settlers were chiefly males between eleven and twenty years old; the youngest newcomers arrived at the age of seven or eight. The rapid increase in Saskatchewan's Chinese population offered little chance for newcomers to visit with experienced elders, build rapport, and obtain assistance from well-established Winnipeg-centred networks and power brokers.⁶² Regional differences between the two provinces resulted in different social and legal climates and related settlement experiences.

In Saskatchewan, as in British Columbia, Chinese could not vote for a time and could not employ "white" women.⁶³ The dominant society feared Chinese men, whom it saw as the "yellow peril."⁶⁴ Hundreds of young Chinese boys and men had appeared suddenly, threatening the European status quo. Many of them were merchants and entrepreneurs who inhabited nearly every small Saskatchewan village, town, and city by 1919. Some people imagined that these men, who had no family households, must live as homosexuals. At any rate, the assumption was that a large number of unattached young foreign men could not be good for small-town Saskatchewan.

These men were perceived to be taking away "white" jobs. And some people feared they were making "white" women their slaves.⁶⁵ Young Chinese entrepreneurs might become sexually involved with these "slaves" and female employees. This violation of the boundary between "white" and "non-white" society might even be long-term, resulting in "white" women marrying Chinese men and sullyng the species with mixed-race offspring. It was fine for Chinese men to marry First Nations or Metis women, or one of the rare Japanese or Chinese women. "White" women, however, risked ruining good reputations and racial purity through interaction with these imagined "yellow" alien sexual deviants. Thus, in Saskatchewan from 1912 to 1969, many towns and cities would not tolerate Chinese hiring "white" women.⁶⁶ These forms of institutionalized racism reflected dominant society views of Chinese residents and contributed to other processes of racism.⁶⁷ Some

Saskatchewan-born Chinese interviewees remembered seeing the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) erect and then burn crosses across the street from their houses, and being warned not to make trouble. In late 1920s Canada, the KKK made its presence most strongly known in Saskatchewan.⁶⁸

Experiences of racism generally varied by era and by province, settlement region, specific village, town, and city, and on an individual basis. For instance, the Icelandic colony in Baldur, Manitoba, had welcomed and expressed interest in Chinese settlers since the late 1890s.⁶⁹ Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, a Hungarian settlement, was a similarly welcoming community, where Chinese and British settlers became popular and prosperous merchants. Both Baldur and Esterhazy were populated by Chinese nationalist men. Community relationships and networking with non-Chinese appeared to reduce racial prejudice by the dominant population and minimize the Chinese man's sense of being hated, excluded, or unwanted.

Although the new networks created by resilient Chinese successfully transformed and reinvented "white" dominant social perceptions and spaces, they nevertheless were constrained by the need for margins, where some Chinese were relegated by nature of gender, geography, religion, and economic status. Rita Dhamoon adds, "Difference ... always implicates power. It is an instrument and an effect of power."⁷⁰ To some extent, elite Chinese men used power and networks to indirectly create difference between themselves and those without money or connections.

Many Chinese men, and later families, remained in Winnipeg or Manitoba because they experienced fewer social and legal restrictions than in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, or the United States. Those who lived in Manitoba could vote in municipal, provincial, and federal elections.⁷¹ They could study medicine at the University of Manitoba and could practise as licensed physicians.⁷² If they lived in Manitoba and operated a cafe, they could also obtain a liquor licence.⁷³

Despite the absence of certain barriers in particular areas, however, Chinese were still discriminated against in Manitoba and Saskatchewan – mostly by non-Chinese, but sometimes also by fellow Chinese. During my interviews with numerous Chinese Canadians who lived during the exclusion era, I heard stories of parents who wanted their children to marry only "pure" Chinese.⁷⁴ This was one of the reasons, for instance, that three of Ma Seung's four children returned to China. Even men who had married Ukrainian, French, or British girls confessed to children that though a mixed-race marriage was good enough for them (because there were so few Chinese women in Canada at the time), it was not good enough for their offspring.

Mixed-race Chinese children felt that they were looked down upon by those who had two Chinese parents. Chinese who lived on the rural Prairies were seen as less sophisticated and worthy than those who lived in Winnipeg or Regina. Chinese of the merchant class in Vancouver were seen as superior to those in Winnipeg or Regina. Even today, it is not uncommon to find that Chinese Canadians discriminate against each other, based on wealth, education, profession, class, rurality, southern Chinese, or nationalist or communist affiliation. There is also religious discrimination. Those who are affiliated with Christianity sometimes discriminate against those who are Buddhists, Daoists, and/or more generally associated with “superstitious practices.”⁷⁵

Methodology

During the eight-plus years I spent writing this book, I used a combination of embodied ethnography (participant observation fieldwork, interviewing with/without surveys, oral history collection) and historical/archival methods (collecting Chinese and English materials: newspaper articles, letters, postcards, photographs, directories, KMT membership and event registers, United Church clergy records, Chinese Canadian obituaries, and personal scrapbooks).⁷⁶ I try to render names, places, and terms following local usage. The everyday language of early Chinese Prairie Canada was Cantonese, though KMT comrades used Mandarin, too. Most Chinese who spoke to me referred to the Chinese nationalists by the Cantonese acronym (KMT), not the Mandarin one (GMD). Where possible, I noted the names of individuals and places in Cantonese as well as English. For most organizations, names, and terms that I discovered through Chinese archival sources, I use the Mandarin Pinyin romanization system. Similarly, Pinyin names appear in parentheses following Chinese names throughout the book. It was nearly impossible to discover how some Chinese names may have been written in Cantonese. I have also included one poem in Chinese with my own English translation.

In the course of researching and writing, I interviewed more than three hundred people both formally and informally. Subjects ranged in age from eighteen to one hundred, but the core participants who provided the detailed information in this book were born between 1912 and 1930. All of them lived through the exclusion era (between 1923 and 1947) in Canada. In addition to interviewing, my research methods included participant observation of events, rituals, and ceremonies.⁷⁷ During fieldwork I collected photographs (and used photo elicitation to add to interview and fieldwork notes) and other materials, and photographed events with participants' permission.⁷⁸

Feminist qualitative methods also guided my research.⁷⁹ Throughout the research, I drew on interviews that shed light on experiences of racism, racialization, and sexism. I also tried to allow for the contributions of research participants to add to the book in meaningful ways.⁸⁰ Several chapters in this book were shown to participants for comment, resulting in further depth and context to the material. The semi-structured interview techniques that I employed were directed by the participants themselves, who were sometimes comfortable with interviews being audio-recorded and transcribed, and at other times wished only for note taking during interviews.⁸¹ As much as possible, I attempted to present details as I found them.

Ethnographic research is complex and time consuming because only part of a researcher's time is spent documenting research experiences in notes. Half of the time is spent in the field and cultivating relationships. When I first began doing fieldwork more than fifteen years ago, I learned that I couldn't simply call people, write them a letter, or email them and expect them to respond and open up to me with their life stories. Webs of relationships have to be cultivated. In 2000, when I moved to Manitoba, I endeavoured to understand the makeup of Prairie society and the history of diversity in this region. Over more than a decade, I attended and participated in all sorts of religious, cultural, and Chinese nationalist events, such as the annual grave custom, Moon Festival, Lunar New Year, and parades and processions throughout Canada.⁸² From 2009 to 2012, I also served as a director of the Winnipeg Chinese Cultural and Community Centre (WCCCC). In connection with this directorship, I took on an advisory role as a research contractor for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights' Chinese head tax exhibit. I am not ethnically Chinese, but becoming part of the Chinese community enabled me to develop a more nuanced understanding of Chinese community structures, processes, and adaptations.⁸³ Through my involvement, I volunteered to help organize and host a number of Chinese community events, and thereby formed relationships.

The other half of my ethnographic research involved setting up interviews, going through the university ethics process, obtaining informed consent, conducting interviews, and transcribing notes and feedback on interview transcripts shared with research participants. Sometimes interviews continued over email, telephone calls, letters, and follow-up meetings.

When I began to examine Chinese settlement patterns outside British Columbia, I found only fragmentary references to early Chinese events, leaders, and Christian involvement in the Prairie region. Although Manitoba

began production of its own Chinese community nationalist newspaper in 1915, there are no extant copies of that paper today. There are references to the Manitoba Chinese settlement in the Chinese Freemasons (CKT) publication the *Chinese Times*, as well as in the large collection of materials in the Consolidated Chinese Benevolent Association archives. All of these fulsome collections, however, are skewed toward the telling of Chinese Canadian events from a coastal British Columbian settler perspective. Finding few materials in local, provincial, and national collections, I turned to ethnography and built my own archive.⁸⁴ Access to a large number of Chinese and English sources documenting Prairie nationalist lives and activities between 1920 and 1950 helped me write the first chapter. Access to the Ma Seung family archives, written and collected over more than fifty years by six people, enabled me to understand, chronicle, and compare experiences of racism from British Columbia to Manitoba between 1891 and 1935. Ma Seung and his family accounts of religion, racism, and ties within the Prairie affective regime form Chapter 2. The third chapter of this book is also foregrounded in original personal archival material, using Frank Chan's scrapbook (most of it in Chinese), which I discovered on a dusty bookshelf in Winnipeg's Chinatown.

I historicize affect by chronicling relationships and ties in written archival materials, photographs, and established histories. My own experiences of affect – fieldwork, participant-observation experiences, and immersion – enable me to understand and contextualize specific kinds of ties and to gather more materials. By tracing people's historical and emotional connections, I was able to recognize affect because of this ethnographic method of immersion. My interdisciplinary approach counterbalances top-down archival and historical accounts written by scholars, reporters, local historians, and dominant Chinese society. These accounts tended to assign normative meanings to early Chinese male and female interactions within Prairie society from 1870 to 1950. I had to rely on oral history accounts and ethnography to discover more nuanced women's experiences on the Prairies.⁸⁵

Coming to historical research from an ethnographic background led me on an adventure from Quebec to British Columbia in search of stories. It enabled me to ethnographically interpret patterns in the hundreds of stories I heard while sharing dim sum in Winnipeg's Chinatown, drinking tea at the Vancouver Lawn Bowling Club, or touring the halls of Regina's old KMT building at midnight with Sam Gee. These experiences built relationships of trust, and they also instilled in me a tacit understanding of historical

and powerful affective ties between Lees and Wongs (the two main Manitoba clans), or the significance of a connection to famous merchant and nationalist Charlie Foo in pre-1950s Prairie Canada. I came to appreciate that Yee Clun's wife, Eng Shee, may have lived entirely as a housewife, but that "she was content being a mom."

Narrative accounts complicated the stereotypes of early Chinese women that linked race and sex. Through the telling and retelling of early women's histories, women became embodied as more than immodest, exotic, unnamed, and unknowable people. I learned what women thought about and why, and what they wanted to do but couldn't because of where they lived on the Prairies or because the singular demands of motherhood prevented them. Life stories remoulded the channels that ranked and chronicled women last, and fathers, husbands, and sons first.⁸⁶ Women, as part of the uterine family, were excluded in family genealogies and party and clan lineages. Sometimes they were present only in marginal notations, or mentioned via their husband's clan names. Aside from weaving women back into the historical fabric, narrative accounts showed me what research participants wished they knew about their female forebears. They provided letters, photographs, embroidery, and other artifacts that culturally translated the key moments in women's emotional lives. By historicizing affect through affect, my method and theoretical framework were not only honed in archives, libraries, and in front of books, screens, colleagues, and classrooms; they also evolved out of years of immersion and from my understanding of what Pierre Bourdieu called the "habitus" or "how to play the game" in Chinese Prairie Canada.⁸⁷

Over time, through my interest and involvements, I developed strong and weak ties to various Chinese Prairie groups. The process was an organic one in which my method and theory were guided by interactions and the kinds of stories people wanted to tell. I used my position as a researcher to help the groups and people to whom I was connected by writing grant applications and contributing research to local history publications and other projects. As time progressed, research contacts referred me to others who sent stories, family documents, and photographs. As my archive grew, I emphasized to research participants that I would work with people to write the stories they wanted told and, where possible, to eventually digitize, catalogue, and contribute their resources to public collections. In my interactions with participants and in my writing, I am careful to avoid distancing language and theory, consistent with third-wave feminist methods and

theory. I do not avoid first person pronouns such as “I” to create the illusion of a more objective and distanced account. I acknowledge my role, position, and bias in writing and shaping stories. I also share my writing with research participants to ensure that my methods and theories are clear to them.⁸⁸ Once the manuscript had been completed and I was confident that I had written the stories that participants wanted, I stepped back from the networks I had joined. I wanted to preserve participant perspectives and voices and to ensure that the book was completed.⁸⁹ I also had new research projects and family obligations. I no longer had the time to attend all the events and contribute to community organizations. In doing this, I would sever ties with power brokers and friends throughout various community realms and experience varying degrees of social closure. I knew that research resources (data, invitations, and collaborations) would no longer flow easily to me because of my strong or weak ties.

Both this book and my previous one, *The Way of the Bachelor*, include prefaces written by research participants. This is part of my method. I deliberately shared draft portions of each book with participants to ensure that the theories and arguments I used to write about them and their families were understandable and acceptable. They decided whether they wanted their own names or pseudonyms used in the book. Some people opted to keep their involvement confidential. I didn’t want my scholarly work to add another layer of exclusion and domination to the telling of Chinese Canadian stories.

Powerful bachelors, brokers, and merchants between 1920 and 1950 were most often described as patriotic, charismatic, sympathetic, and warm, and as diplomats and senators. The most powerful nationalist merchants tended to marry English-speaking Ukrainian, French, and British wives who had active roles outside the home.⁹⁰ When I wrote *The Way of the Bachelor*, I wasn’t able to shed light on the women in their lives – their mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and especially their wives whose roles were unsung and often unseen. It would take another three years of interviews and research to reveal those stories.

Relying on a rich trove of bilingual documentary, visual, and other unpublished evidence from the exclusion era, this book explores the themes of religion, racism, and gender in the making of Chinese Prairie networks. Religion, which is the first theme, has a prominent place in all of the book’s chapters. The cult of Sun Yat-sen, Christianity, and Daoist and Buddhist practice strongly influenced gendered sociability, boundary setting, and

agency.⁹¹ The nationalist religious project was in part designed to stabilize Chinese worldviews, interactions, and behaviour. In public, Chinese Canadian men and women dressed, moved, and behaved deferentially in an effort to appear as good Christians and loyal nationalists.⁹² Some urban Prairie women's interactions and ties came through Christian involvements and sociality, which led to expansive modern women's networks and less anguish.⁹³ But many rural women's interactions came through Buddhist, Daoist, or other forms of household religious practice.⁹⁴ These religious interactions tied women to deities, symbolically to the past, and to families.

Brokers and other powerful bachelors were free to continue to live relatively ambiguously, as long as they maintained the public nationalist face. In their interactions with Chinese and non-Chinese society, they were free to use a combination of both tactics and strategies to meet competing demands.⁹⁵ Chinese Canadian women, by contrast, were at best only indirectly included in nationalist regimes. They were yoked to the home and usually had inferior social positions, which required tactics. Women's religious lives gave them power and a chance for happiness.⁹⁶ Throughout the book, I use this first theme of religion to investigate Christian, nationalist, Daoist, or Buddhist affiliations that created weak and strong ties and positions within networks. I aim to show how nationalist propaganda and power brokers, from Vancouver to Winnipeg, fixed new hierarchies and borders of power.⁹⁷

Racism is the second theme in the book. My approach to racism is consistent with critical race theory.⁹⁸ I focus on Canadian legislation that virtually banned the immigration of people of Chinese descent, though not people with specific physical traits or skin colour. By excluding women and families, federal legislation forced loved ones to live apart and married men to live as bachelors. This, along with provincially and municipally enacted legislation, helped create a national imaginary of "Chineseness" that was dirty, heathen, untrustworthy, and exotic. Institutionalized racism set up structures of power and understandings of access to citizenship, universities, neighbourhoods, careers, and family life that were based on merchant class and race. It privileged dominant European groups who were free to amuse themselves by dressing up as First Nations, Chinese, Japanese, and Jewish characters in minstrel shows, winter masquerades, school plays, and Christmas concerts.⁹⁹ I approach racism and race relations through a focus on Chinese and non-Chinese culture, sports, and entertainment, most notably during events at which "white" dominant European society members disguised themselves as non-dominant society members for fun.

Entertainment in many small towns followed the seasons. Masquerades were favoured during winter curling and hockey rink celebrations, beginning in the 1880s.¹⁰⁰ Often they were organized by church groups. These masquerades and other events where ethnic drag took place functioned as normative commentaries on social and religious hierarchies and the inferior place of newcomers within them.¹⁰¹ They empowered those who could act, engage, and connect with dominant society, while forgetting, excluding, and making strangers out of others.¹⁰² Masquerades influenced the cultural fabric of Prairie towns, transmitting positive affect for some and blocking its flow for others. They were humorous events to the performers and the spectators, evocative of the dizzy excitement that comes with becoming other than who you are in everyday life. However, ethnic drag was not a form of carnivalesque performance in the way Mikhail Bakhtin has theorized.¹⁰³ Masquerades, minstrel shows, chautauquas, Christmas and school concerts, and blackface performances in Prairie Canada were not moments when rigid boundaries between the dominated and dominating broke down and when society was equalized. Asians, blacks, Jews, and First Nations peoples were the stock comical characters of 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s Prairie Canadian ethnic drag.¹⁰⁴ There is no surviving documentary evidence to suggest that the subjects and spectacles of ethnic drag were ever included in the performances or asked to dress up. Even if they had been invited to participate, I doubt that members of these minority groups would have risked precarious community status by dressing up in whiteface or as caricatured uptight Presbyterians. Many Chinese Canadians already lacked the right to citizenship, voting, or entering university professional programs and practising as physicians. They did not enjoy the privilege of performing and imagining race.

Among the dominant culture's favourite costumes was the "Chinaman." It was through newspaper reports about Chinese stereotypes, and not about a Chinese man's everyday life, that one came to learn about Chinese society in Davidson, Saskatchewan. The "Chinaman" costume usually included a pigtail and face paint to accentuate the eyes and wrinkles from long hours of work. It also included long silk dresses that made Chinese men into feminine spectacles.¹⁰⁵ In a description of the Davidson 1909 school Christmas concert, we see reflected the local acceptance of racist masquerading:

A welcome drill by thirty-one girls, parasol drill by sixteen girls. Chinamen drill by ten boys, fancy march by seventeen girls and a clown drill by sixteen

boys are just a few of the numbers that are sure to bring down the house at the school concert on Thursday night next. There will be heaps of other amusing and entertaining features.¹⁰⁶

Newspaper reports described the so-called amusing sight of “white” children masquerading as “Chinamen” and thereby dominating them.¹⁰⁷ They carried descriptions of church women and townspeople dressing up and winning prizes for the best Asian or blackface costume. These stories reinforced local relations of power and the Chinese man’s place in “white” society.

I wish to emphasize that occasional race-bridging acts do not mean that there was no racism in a given Christian or community context. Inter-marriage, widespread access to integrated education, and one instance in this book in which a Chinese missionary family shared their home with a non-Chinese woman do not negate the fact that Chinese experienced pervasive racism on the Prairies. Christianity may be a multi-ethnic religion in 2014, but before and during the Chinese exclusion era (1923-47), Christianity was associated with Victorian culture and Canada as a nation.¹⁰⁸ Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Catholics, Baptists, and, later, United Church leaders, ministers, and missionary workers were sometimes racist toward Chinese living in Canada.¹⁰⁹ As I examined the personal letters and reports in the Ma Seung archival collection, I recognized the value of Ma Seung to Chinese missionary work in Canada and that he was warmly regarded by some members of the church, especially by female teachers. But my attention was drawn to correspondence in which leaders used demeaning language toward Chinese and female missionaries. Although I knew that all church workers had low salaries, it was also hard to overlook a pattern of Chinese missionary underfunding.

On the Prairies, Christian churches were the dominant religious institutions whose bells were heard throughout the day and whose pews were filled each Sunday and on Christian holidays throughout the year. Legal jurisdictions historically overlapped with religious ones, where legislation prevented work on Christian holidays and encouraged the use of the Bible to swear an oath. Aside from these processes that held sway over everyday life, Canadian political systems, policies, and leaders were commonly Christian. Ministers, priests, pastors, missionaries, deacons and deaconesses, and others were part of hierarchies that determined priorities, funding, and mission field curriculums. Many missionary workers from England, Ireland, Scotland, and China were newcomers themselves. Most were from well-educated elite backgrounds and also familiar with agrarian life. But missionaries, with the

exception of Chinese and other non-Europeans, were seldom newly converted Christians. The multivalence of church and missionary work in Canada and overseas, as foreign policy and local diplomacy, and as cultural translation and imperialism, meant that churches both shaped social reality and were shaped by it. In this way, Christianity was a highly organized structure that influenced inclusion and exclusion.¹¹⁰

Webs of power were created by the need for Chinese interactions in a racist world. Chinese organizations and associations were usually male structures that formed as people sought mutual assistance. People needed the networks to survive. They provided the channels along which good feelings, jobs, and other resources flowed. Prairie networks (which had both positive and negative aspects) functioned to decrease racism for Chinese Canadians who were physically, ideologically, and politically close to Winnipeg and nationalism. Racism toward some Chinese non-nationalist men and women remained unchanged, and in some cases it worsened as nationalism swept through overseas communities. Racism was both intentional and unintentional and was reflected in human relationships. Timothy Stanley adds,

Racialized differences can appear to be naturally occurring, immutable, and self-evident, but they in fact change with time, place and circumstance. What to one person in one time and place is an obvious and fundamental difference is simply invisible to another in a different time and place. This is not to say that how people are seen in terms of racialized difference is unimportant; indeed, it can be a matter of life and death. It is to say that race differences are made through social processes rather than natural or biological ones.¹¹¹

Some Prairie communities, such as Davidson, where Charles Yee lived from 1918 to 1925, displayed ideologies that were much more than mere opinion. In different times and places, these negative feelings became so powerful as to galvanize large numbers of people to behave in discriminating ways.¹¹² Just like positive affect, negative affect spread in waves and had long-term damaging consequences. In this book, I am interested in understanding the structures, processes, and cultural adaptations that create inclusion and exclusion. I consider the effects of institutionalized racism and also the interactions through sport, theatre, band, church, choir, or clubs that changed this kind of “race-thinking.” My research shows that cultural interactions through politics, sport, theatre, and masquerading were as important as, and sometimes more important than, daily work in laundry shops or cafes. Leisure activities were powerful reminders of what early Prairie people did (or were

allowed to do) when they paused from work. There wasn't a lot of time for leisurely activities. But most Chinese men were estranged from families, and thus social lives helped them feel connected to Canada and to their trans-Pacific homes. I also consider nationalism and the impact of railway and transportation technologies, which encouraged the flow of people, and of racist and anti-racist acts and ideas, across borderlands, nations, provinces, and rural-urban divides.¹¹³ Institutionalized racism, along with new ideologies, shifted (and continues to shift) networks, cultures, identities, family, and belonging.¹¹⁴

Gender is the third theme. Four chapters showcase the lives of male bachelors, ministers, and brokers. Fewer than twenty Chinese wives lived in 1920 eastern Prairie Canada, then populated by more than four thousand Chinese men.¹¹⁵ During the exclusion era, most wives could not emigrate from China. The paucity of women had a profound impact on affective regimes. Life was lived transnationally for all, especially the men who relied on the KMT for affective links and integration. The absence of these ties in local communities brought devastating loneliness, isolation, and in extreme cases, maternal death.

Masculinity was in some ways re-created to suit the demands of a largely male Prairie society. Men did washing and cooking (women's work) in order to move into the realm of the merchant class. They became manly as masters of the kitchen, having spent formative years as cafe cooks and chefs in Canada. They also became manly through the performance of their affections to home and host nations.¹¹⁶ When they became involved with the KMT, they were "saving China." These new men were generally second-born sons who were deemed by their families as most capable of surviving life in Prairie Canada.¹¹⁷ The iconic Chinese man was the quietly noble diaspora gentleman (*junzi*).¹¹⁸ Aside from a shared birth order and talent for cooking, however, diaspora gentlemen were not the same. Iconic manhood had martial (*wu*) characteristics, as it was honed in response to Prairie wilderness conditions, and it required innovation and bravery to survive harsh winters and loneliness in a small town without family. For many men I talked to and heard about, manhood had martial characteristics also owing to service in the early Chinese republican army (in the late 1910s) or in Chiang Kai-shek's youth corps (in the mid-1940s). Some men's fathers, or they themselves, had volunteered for military service in the First and Second World Wars.¹¹⁹ Masculinity had civil (*wen*) characteristics, too. Civility was defined most often through culture, as most men had little more than a Chinese or English elementary school education. This *wen/wu* binary was destabilized by a rich

collection of traits such as benevolence, righteousness, loyalty, bravery, and talent, gleaned from traditional Chinese texts.¹²⁰

In some ways, Chinese North American manhood developed in response to racism and exclusion. As David Eng aptly writes:

The historical period of exclusion was a time when popular stereotypes of Chinese as unassimilable heathens, economic sojourners, and “yellow peril” prevailed. The abstraction and consolidation of the nation’s citizenry as an imagined community of whiteness in the nineteenth century depended not only on the rhetoric of these injurious stereotypes; the relative success of the nation-state ... also relied upon the strict management of the cultural terrain and visual apparatus.¹²¹

The “Chinaman” of which Eng speaks was a popular figure in Canadian advertising campaigns, travelling theatre shows, and popular literature. He was also the subject of exclusionary legislation that targeted migration by the China man, or man from China. This fictional and racialized character persisted long after Chinese Canadian men had cut their trademark queues (pigtales) between 1910 and 1911, and changed their appearance in other ways. After 1911, Chinese men wore Western suits, ties, fedoras, and polished shoes. By this time, large numbers of Chinese men ran cafes, tailor shops, and groceries. They could no longer be associated with dirty laundry and perceived undesirable values. Many early Chinese Canadian men may not have been highly educated, but archival records prove that they were cosmopolitan and sophisticated poets, performers, and Confucians.

Four chapters of the book explore femininity and the lives of extraordinary women (*qi nuzi*).¹²² Traditional Chinese gender stereotypes did not capture the identities of the quietly dedicated wives, mothers, and daughters I talk about in the book. Men had to overcome stereotypes that they were effeminate heathens and homosexuals. But these women had to deal with racist expectations that they were prostitutes.¹²³

The first Chinese women to settle on the Prairies were noble, chaste ladies and wives. They were, however, much more than simply traditional beauties (*jiaren*), described by Confucianism, patriarchy, and represented by bound feet.¹²⁴ Only one woman of the twenty-eight featured in this book came to Canada with bound feet. On the Prairies they became exemplary modern girls and new women who favoured short, fashionable bob hairstyles and dresses.¹²⁵ Women’s talent and roles were traditionally defined by domestic arts such as sewing, crocheting, knitting, and embroidery, and by child

rearing. Classes were offered in Canada and in southern China, by Christian and non-Christian women, to teach domestic skills.¹²⁶ Patriarchy and tradition linked women to domestic talent. To the Chinese diaspora that started to leave China for global migrant work in large numbers by the 1850s, tradition still defined normative Chinese values, culture, and some aspects of individual identities.¹²⁷ As I argue in the book, Chinese Canadian gender, nationalism, and discrimination in many ways revolved around modern adaptations and reinventions of thought, culture, and affect.

Overview

Networks made the fabric of Chinese Prairie Canada. Chapter 1, “Affective Regimes, Nationalism, and the KMT,” introduces the organizations, relationships, and ties that determined inclusion or exclusion. Friendships were vital for Chinese Canadian men, who often spent entire lives apart from their families because of immigration laws. Ties developed over the decades and became strengthened by nationalist membership, donations, and roles within the party, proximity to Winnipeg, and gender. To a lesser extent than in British Columbia or elsewhere, affect was determined by clan affiliation.

Chapter 2, “Reverend Ma Seung,” presents the biography of a Chinese missionary. He and other low-ranking men shared the network periphery, not because of geography, but because they lacked nationalist involvement and loyalties. By renouncing KMT membership, Ma Seung effectively renounced the power and lifestyle that came through being knitted into the nationalist fabric. Through his biography and exclusion-era experiences, I map Ma’s mission work and associations from British Columbia to Ontario.

Chapter 3, “Bachelor Uncles: Frank Chan and Sam Dong,” focuses on travelling salesmen who lived across the Prairies and periodically in Winnipeg. Salesmen and KMT operatives, Chan and Dong provided valuable interactions, visiting, and ties to lone Chinese gentlemen and families scattered throughout the Prairies. Chapter 4, “Affect through Sports: Mark Ki and Happy Young,” shows two examples of men who adapted to rural life and became symbolic citizens through sports involvement.

Winnipeg leaders are examined in Chapter 5, “Married Nationalists: Charles Yee and Charlie Foo.” Yee and Foo lived at the centre of organizations and enjoyed wide-ranging social capital and connections with a large group of people, but they were still bound by the limits of “white” dominant society.¹²⁸ Chinese, knowing the power of relationships and good rapport, longed to serve their comrades.

Four chapters provide insight into the lives of Prairie Chinese women. Chapter 6, “Women beyond the Frame,” offers a summary of the early Chinese Canadian wife, who often wasn’t the only wife, as some men had left another behind in China. In Canada, most Chinese immigrant women couldn’t read or write, because they hadn’t been educated. In China, a woman had to live in her mother-in-law’s home and sometimes also with her sister-in-law. On the Prairies, she lived in her own home without adult female companionship, at least until her daughters became older.¹²⁹

Chapters 7, “Early Chinese Prairie Wives,” and 8, “Quongying’s Coins and Sword,” present a range of stories about early wives in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. As in traditional southern China where they were born, Canadian society was organized by a patriline that assigned women to the domestic and inner sphere. Expected to bear a son within a year of marriage, some wives were also asked to raise children who were not their own, usually of Chinese men and non-Chinese women.¹³⁰ Most often, early Chinese wives were traditional women who added status to their respected and admired husbands and provided them with children.¹³¹ Conventional wives remained in the home almost all the time, except on occasional summer outings. Rural wives tended to be more traditional and to practise Buddhist and Daoist rituals in secret. Urban women enjoyed ties to broader Chinese and non-Chinese society through Christian involvements.

Until the 1940s, most people knew these women as “Mrs. Wong” or “Mr. Lee’s wife.” By the 1950s, women numbered fewer than 10 of the total 434 members of the Manitoba KMT since its formal inception in 1916.¹³² Nationalist networks for first-generation Chinese wives were negative, excluding structures. Chapter 9, “Chinese Prairie Daughters,” relates the stories of second-generation offspring who enjoyed stronger alliances.

The repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1947 radically changed the quality of life of Chinese men and, especially, women throughout Canada. On the sparsely populated Prairies, this repeal saw waves of women and children arrive within a decade, transforming lonely lives through conviviality and companionship. Family bonds were joyfully renewed, but the social ties and organizations that had so helped the early Chinese adapt and prosper left an indelible mark on Chinese Prairie communities.