
The Way of the Bachelor

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Alison R. Marshall

The Way of the Bachelor:
Early Chinese Settlement in Manitoba



UBC Press Vancouver Toronto

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To the bachelors

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Preface

*The Honourable Inky Mark, former Member of Parliament
for Dauphin-Swan River-Marquette, Manitoba*

I am honoured to write this preface for Alison Marshall's book, *The Way of the Bachelor: Early Chinese Settlement in Manitoba*. As a third-generation Chinese immigrant to Canada, I find that this book answers many questions I still have as an adult. Reading it was like reliving my childhood in Gilbert Plains, Manitoba. Why were my parents so devoted to Sun Yat-sen? Why did they read the Chinese newspaper from cover to cover? Why did they practise their Buddhist beliefs in private? Why did they send their children off to church every Sunday? Why did they always visit the Chinese restaurants in other small rural towns in Manitoba? Why did they make sure that their children integrated into Canadian society? Why was the food that the family ate so different from the food that was served to the customer? Reading Alison's book has given me many answers to how I became an assimilated Canadian of Chinese descent. My grandfather came to western Manitoba over one hundred years ago, and I grew up in a Chinese restaurant named the Rex Cafe in Gilbert Plains. This is the environment in which I learned to understand people of all ethnic backgrounds. I believe this served me well in adult life as an elected official – as city councillor, mayor of Dauphin, and Member of Parliament.

The Chinese immigrant has struggled with discrimination since the first day he set foot in Canada in the 1800s. Officially, the government repealed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 (which is known to the Chinese community as the Chinese Exclusion Act) in 1947. Despite the way the Chinese were treated, they remain thankful and loyal to Canada.

Alison's book takes the reader through many of the challenges faced by Canada's earliest Chinese immigrants, especially those experienced by lonely men who had to return to China to marry and have children. As she makes clear, *The Way of the Bachelor* is not about racist practices; rather, it is about how these men survived despite the difficulties they faced. I am the

direct beneficiary of the suffering that my forefathers experienced. My generation can only be thankful that Alison Marshall has put into words what very few have written. Thank you, Alison, for opening the window so that all Canadians can see what has gone before us and, with greater understanding, Canada will be a more peaceful place in which to live.

The Way of the Bachelor

Introduction

The first Chinese to settle in western Manitoba felt as alienated from their non-Chinese neighbours as their non-Chinese neighbours did from them.¹ For thirty-three years they had to live as bachelors, without the wives, daughters, and mothers who normally animate Chinese communities. But it wasn't simply living that was the challenge. Over the course of those thirty-three years, they also had to figure out how to make bachelor life meaningful. This they did through a process that I call the *dao*, or way, of the bachelor. It could not be a way based on the usual duality of men and women; rather, it had to be a way structured entirely through relationships with men. Only through other men could these bachelors sustain their connections to their homes and negotiate their relationships with their hosts.

The first Chinese to reach western Manitoba, according to the accounts that survive, arrived in 1884. The sources documenting Chinese life during the first three decades are meagre, which is why I focus primarily on the period between the national revolution in 1911 and the division of China and Taiwan in 1949. Nineteen eleven was not only the year the Qing dynasty fell but also the year that Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the revolutionary credited with bringing down the dynasty, spoke at the Chinese Freemasons office in Winnipeg to hundreds of Chinese who flocked there from all across the eastern Prairies. Within a year, Chinese Manitobans were also congregating at the Chinese Nationalist League, or Kuomintang (KMT),² offices both in Winnipeg and in Brandon.³ By 1914, they were attending events at the Winnipeg Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA). These institutions grew around and through each other, creating a social network and a governance structure in which, in Manitoba at least, the KMT took the lead. And they were entirely staffed, supported, and enjoyed by bachelors.

Sun Yat-sen became an important figurehead for the KMT and the Chinese bachelors (even though he would only be provincial president in China

until March 1912). He rose to this position not only because he was a revolutionary who had travelled extensively, visiting many of the world's overseas Chinese communities, but also because KMT leaders worked to put him there. He had lived the same life as had the bachelors, coming from a southern village and living far away from China. Like them he had been exposed to Western life and its religions. When he spoke to large groups of bachelors he drew on these shared experiences to motivate them to donate to his party and to help China. But his speeches didn't just communicate political messages: from 1911 until 1925, when he died, they were designed to inspire belief and faith in nationalism and in him as leader. His speeches also communicated religious messages.

These religious messages combined old Chinese ideas, most often from Confucianism (as well as those from the earlier Ruists, or Emerging Scholars), with new Christian ideas, such as the importance of faith and belief in daily life. In this way, Sun Yat-sen's speeches, which bachelors listened to and were encouraged to study, helped to cultivate the model of an ideal immigrant identity. This immigrant identity incorporated modern Chinese ideas (which emerged around 1900),⁴ Western Christian ideas, and Confucian and Nationalist ideas.

The earliest bachelors endeavoured to be like Sun Yat-sen, to become modern and Western. And, in so doing, they not only adapted to foreign life in Canada but also flourished. That the bachelors succeeded is quite extraordinary, given that they were living in a very different cultural, geographical, political, religious, and social world from that in which they grew up. But their successes may be explained by two factors: relationships and efficacy (the dominant idea in Chinese religion defined below). In traditional China (prior to 1900, when the modern period began) there were five traditional relationships. Some people believe that these five relationships were modelled after those in the emperor's own family. These relationships are defined in the Confucian text entitled *Doctrine of the Mean*, which has been attributed to Confucius' grandson Zisi/Kong Ji (492-31 BCE). According to this text, these relationships are, in order of importance: (1) ruler to subject, (2) father to son, (3) husband to wife, (4) brother to brother, and (5) friend to friend. In western Manitoba, where there were no Chinese women for thirty-three years,⁵ these relationships had to be re-imagined.

The first relationships to form in western Manitoba were friendships. In China, this relationship was voluntary, equal, and the least important.⁶ In western Manitoba, it was the opposite: friendships were non-voluntary, unequal, and the most important relationship a person could have. Some friends had higher positions, and others had lower ones; consequently,

friends were ranked in terms of their power in Manitoba's Chinese political hierarchies. But it was not just the absence of women that influenced the new meaning given to bachelor friendships. Most Chinese men in Manitoba lived without family relationships.⁷ Some men in rural western Manitoba might have come to Canada with relatives, but very few ended up residing near kin. Their fictive kin were made up of men they met or reconnected with along the journey from China to Manitoba. Homosociality, or friendship with other men (both Chinese and non-Chinese), was one of the key dynamics of the way of the bachelor. As connections developed so, too, did a network of fictive kinship (those treated like family but unrelated by blood). This resulted in the creation of social cohesion, authority, and economic capital, thereby providing important avenues to better-paying jobs, places to live, and a chance for remarriage and family life in Canada. Friendships also came to have religious dimensions.

Unlike friendships in China, friendships in Canada provided for human needs and thus embodied "efficacy," the dominant idea in Chinese religion. Chinese religion should not be understood to refer to one China or to one set of unchanging traditions; rather, modern Chinese religiosity occurs in many places and has many forms within the Chinese cultural sphere, whether that be in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, the United States, Canada, or elsewhere.⁸ Individuals may simultaneously belong to a number of different religious groups, including those that are categorized as Daoist, Buddhist, or Christian; however, Chinese religious behaviour cannot be adequately defined by these traditional categories as its boundaries are much more porous.⁹ If we are looking for a unifying concept that connects all the different layers and aspects of Chinese religion and ritual action, then we should look to the notion of efficacy.

Efficacy (*ling*), which is at the heart of Chinese religion, refers to human efforts to meet practical needs through reverential interaction with deities and ancestors, whose purpose it is to provide for those needs.¹⁰ I do not think that either mode of action, human or divine, is more important than the other. Nor do I think that one can be considered without some reference to the other.¹¹ Efficacy requires sincerity from the human and reciprocity from the divine. The implication and expectation is that the deity or ancestor will respond appropriately to a sincere person's wishes or needs.

Sometimes efficacy is defined as miraculous power; other times it is defined as spirit/the numinous. Both of these definitions emphasize the dominance of the divine agent. If we examine the character *ling*, we see that it includes the Chinese radical for rain (three mouths) and the character for *wu* (a name for the male and female mediums who were important in early

Chinese religion). In the *Nine Songs (Jiuge)* of the *Anthology of Chu (Chuci)*, the *ling* are male and female mediums who lure the gods down to possess them.¹² But efficacy as defined by this character is misleading because it highlights only the agency of divine roles. Efficacy is about more than magical actions: it is also about everyday concerns and ordinary people. Adam Chau defines it well:

At the core ... is the concept of magical efficacy (*ling*), which is conceived of as a particular deity's miraculous response (*lingying*) to the worshipper's request for divine assistance ... These miraculous responses are socially constructed: it is people and their actions that enable the establishment of human-deity relations and interactions.¹³

Ritual actions performed sincerely and according to established patterns, on the part of both human and divine agents, have efficacious results. When ritual actions involving human and/or divine agents no longer meet human needs, they are adjusted until they once again become efficacious. Efficacy changes according to the needs of daily life. In Manitoba, these new ritual actions were created both from the top-down and at the grassroots level.

As Chinese settlers adapted to life in Manitoba, new efficacies and rituals developed. For the bachelors, it was no longer socially appropriate, or efficacious, to worship traditional Chinese deities such as *Guanyin* or *Mazu* (Buddhist goddesses associated with salvation, family, and childbirth) or *Guangong* (also known as *Guandi*, a god associated with war, loyalty, righteousness, Chinese triads, and Daoism)¹⁴ in the same way that they did in China, since these deities could provide little assistance in their new home. Instead, Sun Yat-sen, the Father of Modern China, was transformed into a god-like figure, and the earliest settlers became ancestors who were to be acknowledged in a special annual funerary celebration known as Decoration Day.¹⁵ This remained the predominant funerary custom until after 1947, when, with the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act, wives and children were able to immigrate to Canada.¹⁶

Quotidian rituals changed too. In China, everyday life and the festivals that punctuated it were organized according to male and female roles within the family and, to a much lesser extent, by district magistrates. In Manitoba, Chinese people seldom lived near family, and there were very few women until after 1947. Under these circumstances, homosocial (not to be confused with homosexual) relationships necessarily took on religious dimensions, connecting men to each other, to Sun Yat-sen, to the Canadian landscape, and to China. KMT offices came to function as Chinese religious

institutions where men could congregate and could also celebrate the festivals, revere Sun as their new god, remember early settlers, and read the Manitoba-produced KMT weekly newspaper and the library's traditional texts (as well as those written by Sun Yat-sen). The newspapers and texts inculcated Confucian values, which were deemed both nationalistic and appropriate.¹⁷ It makes sense that, as a new alienated minority community developed in western Manitoba, so, too, did new articulations of efficacy – articulations that replaced those that had been appropriate in China.

The first Chinese settlers reinvented relationships and efficacies so that their lives in Manitoba would be less strange and so that those around them would not perceive them as strangers. For thirty-three years they developed connections to local, provincial, national, and global Chinese and non-Chinese communities,¹⁸ and, through them, forged intercultural bridges facilitated by involvement in the KMT and in Christian missions and churches. Once women began to arrive in 1918, and in greater numbers after 1947, new efficacies emerged to address their needs and the needs of families.

There are strong parallels between the experience of western Manitoban Chinese Canadians and the global experiences of those subjected to institutionalized racism. In the mid-1800s, a number of terrible conditions in southern China drove the bachelors to immigrate and to live apart from their families. The Chinese population had swelled dramatically by this point, and there were successive droughts, earthquakes, epidemics, and other natural disasters. People were desperate to survive. This is when the first wave of transcontinental migration to Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada took place. The trend to protect “white” labourers from the competition of Chinese migrants began with New Zealand's Chinese Immigration Act, which passed in 1881. This act was followed by the US Chinese Exclusion Act, which was passed in 1882. Three years later, in 1885, Canada passed its Chinese Immigration Act. Under Section 4, this act, which the Chinese Canadian community often refers to as the Chinese Exclusion Act, imposed a fifty-dollar head tax on all Chinese who entered the country.

The head tax made it too expensive for most wives and children to be able to accompany fathers to Canada. In 1900, the act doubled the amount to one hundred dollars; and, by 1903, the head tax stood at five hundred dollars.¹⁹ Immigration was effectively halted beginning in 1923, when a new version of the Chinese Immigration Act excluded all immigrants except merchants, students, and diplomats and their staff.²⁰ The act was only repealed in 1947. After 1923, all people in Canada of Chinese descent,



FIGURE 1 Joe Yuen head tax certificate, 1920.

Source: Wade Yuen

whether they were born here or not, were required to register with the federal government within twelve months. Failure to comply resulted in a fine of up to five hundred dollars and/or imprisonment of up to a year.

Studies of large urban settlements and Chinatowns in Victoria and Vancouver have shed light on racism and discrimination in Canada.²¹ Other works have attempted to present a broader picture of Canada's Chinese immigrant history.²² There have also been a few articles and monographs written about smaller Chinese communities in Peterborough and Timmins, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island.²³ As for scholarly writings about eastern Prairie Chinese communities, these, too, have tended to focus on the larger urban centres of Winnipeg, Regina, and Saskatoon.²⁴ And, while these writings have provided essential context for some of what happened in western Manitoba, they have not been able to fully explain it. Why, for example, was there less bigotry in Manitoba than in other parts of the Prairies, such as in Saskatchewan, especially near Regina and Moose Jaw, where, in the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan began to form.

The first Chinese to settle in western Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada worked in laundries and restaurants. To open these businesses they relied on chain migration as well as on their own social, political, and economic capital, which flowed to them through global institutions and networks. The Chinese population grew quickly through chain migration,²⁵ whereby bachelors sponsored other male family and friends to come to Canada and work. Once men reached Manitoba, they raised money to start their own businesses by joining rotating credit associations (*hui*). These had been used in China since 221 CE and were continued in Canada and other parts of the diaspora to help men obtain private loans from friends.²⁶ Lai Man Cheung, who was interviewed by Clement Ng in Winnipeg in 1983, explains:

If twenty people got together, they would have \$100 (each contributed \$5). If people decided that they needed the money, people would make a bid. If they were willing to pay the highest interest, then they would win. After that, they had to repay the money every week. There must be a sponsor. For example, if I sponsor you, and you failed to repay the other members, I had to pay them on your behalf.²⁶

The bachelors asked Chinese friends within their established social networks and institutions to introduce them to groups and individuals who could help raise the capital needed to open laundries and restaurants. In the early period of migration, Chinese men dominated the laundry business.²⁸ Over time, washing by hand was made obsolete by steam laundries, and, gradually, people turned to restaurant work. Those whose English skills were better moved out of the restaurant profession and into the distribution of tobacco, rice, and meat, and the selling of insurance.

Paul Siu, in his pioneering ethnographic studies of laundrymen in the United States, concluded that Chinese settlers were sojourners who had come to make money and to increase their social status at home.²⁹ He noted, nevertheless, that they never integrated into the societies in which they lived and that they constantly looked back to China for news of family and friends.³⁰ There are similarities between Siu's sojourners and Manitoba's bachelors; however, there are also some key differences. Early miners, railway labourers, and some laundrymen may have been sojourners, but many others who were drawn to Manitoba in their wake were not.³¹ During my research, it was not uncommon for me to encounter families who had been living in western Manitoba for almost one hundred years. People here made the transition from sojourner to resident more quickly than did people in other places.

In 1977, Frank Quo noted in a government report that people on the Canadian Prairies were less hostile towards Chinese immigrants than were those who lived elsewhere in Canada.³² I found this to be largely true. At first I attributed the success of eastern Prairie bachelors to a lack of ethnic enclaves and the resultant economic pressure to acculturate to the communities in which they found themselves. Men were welcomed and accepted by small communities that wanted to grow and to have Chinese businesses such as laundries and cafes. All of the communities I examined also had active Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican (and, after 1925, United) churches, ministers, or missions that would have helped build intercultural bridges between Chinese and non-Chinese groups.

But then I encountered small rural Christian communities in which there were only one or two Chinese settlers, yet in which there was considerable racism, marginalization, and/or separation.³³ These people who lived further away from the KMT centre and had fewer connections were more alone than were others on the Prairies. I noticed that when there were fewer opportunities to create social heat and to be welcomed at Chinese- or Christian-organized events, there was a greater experience of racism. Reflecting on the data, I noted that most of the Prairie communities I was examining in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were white (without large First Nations populations) and that normative behaviour was obviously defined by white society. Conforming to what that society deemed to be socially acceptable enabled one to have power, prestige, and to own property. Racism existed in all of these communities, and the language used to describe Chinese men ("Chinamen," "Chink," "Celestials,"³⁴ and "Charlie") was usually pejorative at least until after 1947 and, in some cases, much later. In determining the degree of racism shown by a community I could not rely on language as an indicator because it was consistently used in negative and demeaning ways. I came to judge racism by whether a place had a Chinese restaurant or laundry (thus showing that it was receptive to foreign culture), whether that establishment was owned (as opposed to being rented) by the Chinese man (indicating he had quite likely been living there for longer than a summer), and how often he and his business were mentioned in the local newspaper. I came to recognize extreme cases of racism in towns or villages that had one or two Chinese businesses and that only sporadically mentioned them in their newspapers. In these places, there were more frequent references to winter masquerades and school plays in which individuals dressed up as "Chinamen" and in blackface. I also came to notice that the places where there appeared to be less racism were those with large non-British settlements, such as Esterhazy (Hungarian), Dauphin (Ukrainian), and

Baldur (Icelandic). Further, there appeared to be less racism in communities within a four-hundred-kilometre radius of Winnipeg, which was the Western Regional Headquarters of the KMT in Canada. Winnipeg was where most bachelors (even those living in Saskatchewan) went to pick up items from food distributors. Based on my discussions with old-timers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, I knew that, historically, men in both provinces had travelled by horse trail, train, and sometimes by car each month to Winnipeg or to an outpost of the KMT to attend meetings and to pick up supplies. Winnipeg elders also made regular trips to these outposts to visit members and to solicit donations. I concluded that one likely experienced considerably less racism inside the four-hundred-kilometre radius of Winnipeg than outside it because those living inside it continued to be exposed to Chinese immigrants and their culture through KMT-sponsored intercultural events as well as through Christian and banking institutions and networks.³⁵ In and through these events, institutions, and networks, non-Chinese residents grew to understand the bachelors and to form relationships with them. Unlike people who lived in more populous cities, where Chinese men were associated with the sometimes “exotic” but mostly “sinful” domain of Chinatown, or were perceived to be a threat to white British labour, those who lived in smaller rural areas regarded Chinese culture more favourably. The tiny Chinese western Manitoba population was mostly rural and dispersed, being historically and physically united not by clan or clan associations but, rather, by the KMT, which facilitated the flow of social, political, and economic capital.³⁶

I should add that my research uncovered less racism towards Chinese in Manitoban cities (such as Brandon and Winnipeg) than in some other Canadian cities (such as Victoria and Vancouver). The size of Brandon and Winnipeg’s Chinese populations, which were considerably smaller than those in Vancouver or Victoria, helped to produce a better relationship with the dominant non-Chinese society. But here again this relationship could not have happened without the efforts of KMT leaders and, later, other Chinese community leaders. From the beginning, these leaders (who themselves often married British, Ukrainian, or French women) have worked with non-Chinese Christians and politicians to organize and host events. This has been a consistently important aspect of community life. Unlike many Chinese communities elsewhere in Canada, the one in Manitoba has been less inward-looking. Its strength and longevity has depended on the consistent involvement and support of non-Chinese people who have been asked to take active roles as event-organizing committee members, treasurers, and fundraising directors, some for more than three decades. In these

ways, since 1912, the Manitoba Chinese community has successfully used traditional and political events to create understanding between Chinese and non-Chinese communities and to reduce (though not to eliminate) racism.

Contained within the way of the bachelor are the religious dimensions of friendship and new forms of efficacy whose architecture may be discerned through four intersecting themes: (1) everyday religious practices, (2) ambiguity, (3) foodways, and (4) social heat. The everyday religious practices I describe are those that emerged as Chinese immigrants settled into Canadian Prairie society, got involved in Chinese political and non-Chinese Christian organizations, and strove to become modern and Western. Meredith McGuire suggests that, in order to recognize the everyday practices that characterize lived religion outside of the realm of traditional religiosity, “a good starting point might be a better appreciation of the many and complex ways ... [in which] religions are the products of considerable human creativity, cultural improvisation, and construction from diverse elements, only some of which [are] inherited from the same tradition.”³⁷ Everyday religion makes room for things that, ordinarily, are classed as social rather than as religious activities, such as banquets and other food events and customs discussed in this book. But the term “religious practices” also includes the “boundary resources” provided by ethnic associations that help define the community as a group, connect it to others, and serve practical and therapeutic needs.³⁸

The everyday practices that evolved in Manitoba reflected the influences of emerging social, political, and economic hierarchies and identities. For example, although the men lacked experience and knowledge related to the domestic sphere, they were free to enter it and to cross traditional boundaries that had prevented them from doing “women’s work” in China.³⁹ Laundrymen and restaurant owners became very successful in the inner (private) spheres as opposed to the outer (public) spheres to which they had been traditionally relegated in China. Gender relationships and status in both China and Canada were determined by and intricately connected to labour roles and the various economic aspects of the public and private spheres.⁴⁰ In Canada, Chinese women were very few in number and, before 1947, practically invisible. While the dominant society was aware of Chinese “bachelors” (who, in the period before 1912, were usually referred to as “Chinks,” “Chinamen,” “Charlie,” and “Celestials”), white males (and members of Western society in general) tended to view them as feminized and weak. These bachelors apprenticed with other Chinese men, who taught them how to wash, cook, and run their own small households.

Located outside the boundaries and understandings of normative Chinese gender and labour roles, the men in Manitoba eventually became modern Westerners who used relationships here in Canada to ascend hierarchies just being conceived.

Chinese men who worked together in laundries and cafes may not have been brothers by blood, but they were perceived to be family and, therefore, as “brothers” by race. In Chinese Canadian political circles they were also brothers in another sense, being united by Sun Yat-sen’s three principles of democracy, livelihood, and nation. Theirs was a religiosity focused on the modern moment and the meeting of everyday needs, but it seldom concerned the “spiritual.” The veneration of Chinese deities – with incense, spirit money, mediums, blood oaths, and other ritual actions that, from a modernist perspective, appeared as “superstitious” – was a blight on the image of the modern Western Nationalist gentleman. While it was acceptable for the small numbers of Chinese women (and a few men) who lived in western Manitoba after 1918 to use prayer beads or to practise other Buddhist or Daoist rituals, in general, “superstitious” practices sullied an otherwise modernist self-image. Private rituals and customs belonging to these modalities could only be tolerated in the remotest backwaters of life: if performed indoors, then it must be in a bedroom; if performed outdoors, then it must be in the backyard or garage or before the sun’s rays touched the front lawn. People could offer lit incense, meals, whisky, and flowers in public at gravesites during Decoration Day, or Qingming (in the spring) and Chongyang (in the autumn) (the traditional Chinese grave-sweeping festivals), but these non-normative behaviours had to be offset by actions vested with the authority and power of nationalism. The leadership thereby encouraged KMT members to forge relationships within and beyond the Chinese community. It also prodded them to venerate Confucius as a teacher; to study Confucian classical texts that inculcated virtues such as loyalty, humaneness, and righteousness; to read their newspapers; and to become familiar with Sun Yat-sen’s will. Sun Yat-sen had written two wills, both of which were legal documents. The first one, which I mention throughout this book, was addressed to his Nationalist colleagues, and the second one was addressed to his family. Sun’s first will became a key Nationalist text and attained scriptural status. It explained the social significance of the three principles of livelihood, nationalism, and democracy and encouraged people to continue to work towards the creation of a free and democratic China.

Borne out of efficacy and practical needs, the ritual actions of bachelors enabled them to move back and forth between the public and the private, and between Chinese/traditional and Christian/modern. Erving Goffman’s

notion of front-stage and back-stage behaviours offers a useful lens through which to view what motivated the “doing” of everyday religion in these settings, which, for Chinese settlers in western Manitoba, ranged from picnics, ice cream socials, and banquets to KMT offices, churches and cemeteries, and political processions. By adapting theatrical terms such as “performance,” “roles,” and “stage,” Goffman attempts to express the motivation for all kinds of social interaction. He argues that how people behave (or the roles they take on) in various settings changed, depending on whether they were doing something at the front of the stage (i.e., in public) or at the back of the stage (i.e., in private). People adjusted their behaviour to be in accord with different situations (e.g., at a funeral, people behave solemnly; at a picnic, people behave jovially). As Goffman reminds us: “When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behaviour as a whole.”⁴¹ Thus, bachelors behaved as Christians on the front stage and in more traditional ways on the back stage.

Because everyday religious practices and identities changed, depending on the public or private context, they were somewhat ambiguous. Ambiguity, the second intersecting theme of this book, characterized all realms of social interaction, including those related to religion and those pertaining to gender, labour, and politics. Identity needed to be flexible in order to straddle these boundaries and to accommodate the differing demands of home and host nations. In Canada, immigrants lived like peasants in order to save enough money to support their wives and growing families in China. These distant families imagined the settlers as gentry because they lived in Gold Mountain, a place that conjured visions of infinite opportunity. These men existed in a world whose spatial and temporal existence, though anchored in China’s past, was oriented towards an uncertain present – one that was neither wholly here nor wholly there. As a result, the men adopted new modalities and rituals to cope with a changing and often foreign world. As Seligman et al. point out:

In dealing with ambiguities, ritual engages boundaries: boundaries are crossed, violated, blurred, and then, in an oscillating way, reaffirmed, reestablished and strengthened. Among the paradoxes that attend the performance of ritual is the paradox that ritual plays out a completion, a closure that solves the problem at hand. Yet, at the same time the very nature of the repetitiveness of ritual implicitly shows that the problem is

not solved once and for all, that all is not complete and perfect. There is, at bottom, a quality of “either-or, both-and” in the realm of ritual.⁴²

In traditional Chinese religious practice ambiguity is a component of efficacy, and Chinese immigrants adapted it to modern Western life in order to survive. On official documents, under “religion,” Chinese men put “Anglican,” “Presbyterian,” “Methodist,” or (after 1925) “United Church.” While we can’t be sure that everyone in the community realized that they were self-identifying on these documents, certainly some people did. This public Christian identity was efficacious as it helped them gain acceptance and trust in small communities.

The men did not fill in these documents dishonestly. Indeed, they appreciated the opportunities to attend missionary and church Bible lessons, where they could learn about Canadian values and practise their English. Most of all, they enjoyed the chance to make friends and to form relationships. In other words, their ambiguity was genuine. While public religious identities and behaviours were often nominally Christian, private ones were traditional. Among fellow Chinese friends and co-workers, most settlers would say that they had no religion, or were not religious, or did not believe in God. During Chinese New Year, the Mid-Autumn Festival, or Confucius’ birthday, they would gather with other bachelors and share a meal in the back regions of laundries and restaurants (and, after 1912, in the KMT hall).

In dealing with the third intersecting theme of this book, foodways (or food ideas and food customs), I divide the discussion into (1) the traditional significance of food and (2) the everyday food practices that materialized in western Manitoba. That food is tremendously important in traditional Chinese society and culture should not surprise most readers. As E.N. Anderson notes:

Chinese use food to mark ethnicity, culture change, calendric and family events, and social transactions. No business deal is complete without a dinner. No family visit is complete without sharing a meal. No major religious event is correctly done without offering up special food proper to the ritual context.⁴³

Lettuce means wealth; circular sweet candies and noodles connote togetherness; kumquats are important because they are gold in colour and symbolize wealth and the comfort associated with it; apples are significant because their name sounds like “peace”; and black moss figures in traditional dishes

because its name sounds like “prosperity.” The thirty-three-year absence of Chinese women from Manitoba not only transformed relationships but also engendered novel food customs. In China, women made the food eaten during the festivals. They were familiar with the recipes, the ingredients, and the other dynamics required to put together the meals in celebration of the numerous yearly events. But there were no women in western Manitoba until 1918, thus, the responsibility for organizing and hosting key festival meals had to shift to men. In Manitoba, before 1910, it was male elders who took on these roles, had the recipes, and set the menus; after that date, Chinese Freemason and KMT leaders did so. Thus, the absence of women resulted in the understandings and boundaries of traditional food rituals being located outside the home and family.

Gender not only influenced the production of food in traditional private settings but also altered food production in public. The customs that developed around food reflected the mixing of cultures and communities as bachelors strove to become modern cafe owners who transformed ordinary and affordable celery and cabbage into the chop suey (*zasui*, or various chopped and cooked foods) of Chinese Canadian cuisine. Like the food itself, the bachelor, through food production, conveyed to the public a persona that was both pleasant and intriguing. Terry Threadgold elaborates on the power of food to express identity and to translate diasporic culture:

Food became ... a complex intermediary in this network of actors, a way of translating what they could not tell us in English about who they were, what they knew and why it mattered. It had ceased, in other words, to be no more than an empty sign of cosmo-multiculturalism and become an intermediary of cross-cultural translation.⁴⁴

In other words, food communicates the ambiguities of diaspora identity, labour, and community formation.

The fourth and last intersecting theme of *The Way of the Bachelor* is social heat. Adam Chau, in his study of popular religion in rural Northern Shaanbei, China, uses the concept of social heat to highlight the religious dimensions of events and relationships established when people gather in a specific social space: “The concept embodies a native conception of social life that values the convergence and intermingling of a lot of people and the collective production and consumption of loud noises, vibrant colors, fragrant smells, savory tastes, radiant heat, and heightened excitement.”⁴⁵ Social heat (red and fiery/*honghuo* in Shaanbei, hot and noisy/*renao* in

Mandarin) signifies a dramatic shift away from a calm ordinary situation towards an excited extraordinary one. The shift occurs when many people gather together in isolated areas of rural China. While western Manitoba is appreciably quieter than rural China (and the settlers who lived here were from the southern, not the northern, part of China), and while the food consumed here is more sweet than savoury, I think the term may still be used appropriately. This is because the essential feature of the shift remains the same. It indicates two contrasting registers – one that is quiet and one that is loud.

The majority of events (and social heat) I describe took place between 1911 and 1949, when there were only a few Chinese men living in each eastern Prairie (i.e., Manitoba and Saskatchewan) town, village, and small city. Hosted most often by the KMT (but sometimes by other Chinese political groups and non-Chinese Christian organizations), the events brought together hundreds and sometimes thousands of Chinese men and transformed spaces in remarkable ways. Newspaper accounts describe the lively sounds and heady smells that came out of Winnipeg's Chinatown during New Year's celebrations and other events. During festivals, men accustomed to a calm life in English-speaking, modest, Christian small towns, where they ate a daily diet of plain rice and a few vegetables, would have been overwhelmed by fellowship, food, sounds, and sensations. And, although these lively events may not have had the same feverish pitch, smells, tastes, and colours as those in China, it would nevertheless have been extraordinary for a bachelor living in western Manitoba to gather with other Toisanese-speaking people and eat. These moments, in which Chinese men mingled and shared food, were therefore socially, politically, economically, and culturally transformative, instilling in them shared Nationalist and Christian values and beliefs, and ritualizing relationships. Food events were not just dinners or picnics: they also contained conspicuous religious elements. Missionary- and church-sponsored events prominently featured Christian prayers, singing, and (often) Bible study. If the events were hosted by the KMT, meals were preceded by toasts to Sun Yat-sen (when he was still alive) or the reading of his will (after his death in 1925). As well, everyone in attendance sang the Nationalist anthem, and some people bowed before the framed portrait of Sun Yat-sen, which was always placed on a table with a vase of fresh flowers at the front of the room. National couplets (four Chinese characters written vertically) were often displayed as well. These ritual actions conveyed the religious significance of event hosting and organization in western Manitoba as well as the religious dimensions of the homosocial relationships they so carefully fostered. They also manifested diaspora

efficacies and *social heat*, whereby Sun Yat-sen and others were transformed into deities and the KMT evolved into a kind of church lacking in spiritual elements.

Methodology

More than half of the more than two hundred people whom I interviewed for this book knew some of the early Chinese settlers who came to Manitoba.⁴⁶ They were their wives, sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, cousins, employees and employers, and friends. The majority of research participants were born in southern China; the remainder were from the north as well as from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Canada. I used semi-structured interview techniques and gathered oral histories in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Toisanese. I can speak, read, and write Mandarin Chinese. For those few interviews that were conducted in Cantonese and Toisanese, I employed a translator. Sometimes I exchanged notes in Chinese to clarify important points. More than half of these people immigrated to, or were born in, Canada before 1947, roughly one-quarter came after 1947, and the balance arrived in the 1960s and later, when immigration laws no longer favoured Europeans. Interviews, the collecting of oral histories, and informal discussions, ranging from fifteen minutes to four hours in length, took place in settings that involved food – breakfast, coffee breaks, dim sum, lunch, and dinner.⁴⁷ Conversations began in a multi-sited “field,” and many continued later over the phone and the internet (these were with people who, like me, spent their work days in front of computer screens).⁴⁸

Ethnographic fieldwork helped me to develop the context of lives spent in rural areas of Canada, where racism was not unusual. However, it was not nearly as prevalent in Manitoba as it was in places such as British Columbia, where ethnic enclaves dominated the pattern of settlement. From the beginning, I used an ethnographic approach to gather personal and complicated data about experiences in rural areas beyond Winnipeg and Brandon’s Chinatowns. Relationships developed over the years. Once people no longer perceived me to be a stranger,⁴⁹ sometimes during the first interview but more often in subsequent encounters, they would recount their life stories. The collecting of oral histories thus enabled me to tell their side of history. As Paul Thompson notes:

By introducing new evidence from the underside, by shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the assumptions and accepted judgements of historians, by bringing recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored, a cumulative process of

transformation is set in motion ... The use of oral evidence breaks down barriers.⁵⁰

As I interviewed native and non-native Chinese people, many of the accounts I heard – about fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, friends, and employers – had similar ways of expressing the importance of immigrant integration and success.

My team and I completed extensive ethnographic research and also examined reams of archival and historical documents in English and Chinese. This research yielded a significant amount of information about early Chinese life in western Manitoba. Unfortunately, many documents, photographs, and accounts of early Prairie life have been lost. Local histories contain paragraphs and sometimes pages that tell about the lives, accomplishments, and contributions of early British, Irish, Scottish, and sometimes Ukrainian or Jewish settlers. In contrast, if there is a story about an early Chinese bachelor and his business, it is generally told in one line, perhaps in a paragraph, but never in a whole page. Sometimes the reference is to a “Chinaman” who apparently has no last name. At other times, he is given the generic name “Lee,” which was common practice in Manitoba as well as in other provinces. For instance, the entry for Reston, Manitoba’s Chinese laundry reads: “‘Lee’ was his name, if memory serves, but the little Chinese laundry man in Reston was better known as ‘No Tickee, No Washee.’”⁵¹

Given the sixty-two years of institutionalized racism in this country, it is equally difficult to find early bachelors in head tax and other government documents. Some men came here as “paper sons,” with fake purchased birth certificates and pseudonyms. White clerks wrote their names down phonetically on immigration registers and on other official documents on their arrival at Canadian ports. In this way, Chinese men came to have monikers that slightly or drastically varied from their native ones. Lee Low’s Chinese immigration papers for June 1911 listed him as Lau Kong Lee. The General Register of Chinese Immigration varied the spelling so that he became known as Low Kon Lee.⁵² Eventually, Lee Low dropped the “Kong” in his name and simply became known to Carberry restaurant patrons as Lee Low. As a result, many men had alternate versions of their names, which must have been very frustrating and demeaning for the Chinese immigrant. The findings presented here are, accordingly, preliminary.

Overview

The Way of the Bachelor examines the history and religion of Chinese immigrants in western Manitoba, in particular, and in Manitoba and Saskatchewan

in general. It is about the lived experiences of mostly male settlers who immigrated to Canada, paid a head tax that ranged from fifty (in 1885) to five hundred dollars (in 1903), and lived outside of Chinatowns in predominantly rural areas. It is also about the ways in which, from 1885 to 1947, institutionalized racism shaped migration patterns, prevented families from living together, and influenced the production of global identities, ideas, labour, and institutions. Throughout these pages I tell the stories of men who, through homosocial relationships, survived and found meaning in their new Canadian lives.

Most of the data I present pertain to communities in Brandon, Manitoba. As the second largest city in the province, it is the hub for the region and has the largest Chinese community outside of Winnipeg. Although the material concentrates on Brandon, there is also information about laundries, restaurants, and everyday rituals in some of the smaller rural towns and villages. Because rural and urban lives often intersect, the reader will be able to learn about the history of the Winnipeg-based Manitoba KMT and Christian and missionary groups. I also write about laundries, restaurants, and customs in that city and in the Prairies more generally (especially in Saskatchewan, which shares Manitoba's western border).

Chapter 1 uncovers the history of the KMT in western Manitoba, relating how Sun Yat-sen drew on the authority of Christianity to motivate overseas men to support the revolutionary cause. It also explains how tradition dictated that political leaders were responsible for taking care of the overseas Chinese bachelors. But the influence of Sun Yat-sen, the KMT, and nationalism on beliefs, practices, and identity is only half the story. Christianity, in particular the United Church, is the other half. The United Church (and, before 1925, the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches) helped new immigrants learn English and Canadian values that would enable them to become accepted in local communities.⁵³ It is important to recognize the significance of non-Chinese and Chinese friendships. These relationships were complex and their meaning was not stable. Young boys, brought over to Canada to work and live with men who might or might not have been their fathers, had better lives because of their relationships with Christians. Ministers and churchwomen became their surrogate parents. Christian relationships with Chinese were ambiguous and, at least until after the First World War, were prompted by a desire to convert and to civilize. Generally, after this time, ministers and congregations were very accepting; and, when men married non-Chinese women, ceremonies were held in churches.⁵⁴ The bachelors were as ambivalent towards Westerners as the latter were towards them. In the beginning, a desire to learn English and Canadian values

prompted them to make Christian friends. As with many budding friendships, there were many things the two sides didn't know, and didn't want to know, about each other.

Chapter 2 introduces the experiences of the men who first arrived in western Manitoba and entered the laundry business. The hours were long, the work was terrible, and the pay was low. The bachelor-turned-laundryman became legendary for his ability to make shirts whiter and clothes cleaner than anyone else. When the popularity of laundries waned in the late 1940s, the men reinvented themselves and turned to the restaurant business, marketing concoctions such as chop suey as traditional fare that could be served to a Western market.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I focus on the Chinese bachelors who provided food to members of the dominant non-Chinese society, thereby engaging in regular and positive interaction with repeat customers. As interactions intensified, intercultural bridges were built and soon became conduits for the sharing of ideas, cultures, and traditions. Chapter 3 tells the story of the rural western Manitoban restaurant, a business whose strategy aimed at future integration. By the 1950s, almost every village, town, and city on the Prairies had such a restaurant. Chinese Canadian restaurants functioned as Prairie nodes, offering places for people to work, to gather, and to erect altars to *Guangong* and *Guanyin* (and other ancestors and gods) behind the kitchen doors. After 1950, they began to bring some of these back-stage customs to the front and so to add to the Orientalist appeal of eating Chinese food. Yet, restaurants also served the needs of rural communities and Prairie ethnic groups such as Ukrainians and Jews. They ate "ordinary" meals at Chinese Canadian restaurants and celebrated holidays and birthdays there, as well. The Chinese Canadian restaurant enabled Jews and Ukrainians to form a minority community of their own. Chapter 4 continues the discussion of food, integration, and identity, reflecting on the agency of ambiguity and the intentional and sustained fashioning of an identity that was pleasing and exotic to both children and adults.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the fundamentals of the everyday religion of Chinese Manitobans, which grew out of early labour patterns as well as out of KMT leaders' views on Christianity, Confucianism, everyday religion, and education (especially for children, who needed to be able to communicate in Chinese when they returned to visit family in China). KMT Confucianism expressed itself through events that leaders organized and hosted at their district branch offices. It also influenced the formation of everyday rituals that were performed by elders, families, and individuals within the various communities after 1949 (when the KMT retreated to Taiwan) and after 1947

(when large numbers of Chinese women and families started to come to Canada). Throughout my discussion of the KMT, laundries, restaurants, and food, I highlight the expediency of homosocial relationships and the importance of efficacy with regard to enabling early settlers to survive, adapt, and create futures for their immediate families and descendants.

1

Christianity and the Manitoba Kuomintang

I begin my examination of the way of the bachelor with a discussion of the earliest Chinese political and religious groups in the province. Homosociality and the religious dimensions of friendship are inextricably linked to involvement in these groups. While, from the beginning of settlement, there were many political groups, the Kuomintang, being the strongest (at least in this province), had an informal partnership with Christian and missionary groups that had started to coalesce decades earlier in China.¹ This partnership started to form in China when Sun Yat-sen and others became involved in the early stages of the revolutionary movement and formed groups that, after 1911, would become the KMT. Sun Yat-sen and others saw in Christianity a doorway to the West. They believed that, by learning about its tenets, they could begin to understand and be understood by Westerners. They were right. I begin by looking at the history of the relationship among churches, missionaries, and bachelors in western Manitoba.

Protestant Christians and the Chinese

Most western Manitoban Chinese bachelors and, later, Chinese Canadians have always looked to ministers, reverends, pastors, and male and female missionaries for fellowship and support. Although a few of them have also formed strong bonds with Roman Catholic priests in small eastern Prairie communities, it has usually been the Protestant Christians (and those in the United Church) who have been the first point of contact for newcomers. In larger urban settlements these relationships have led to Chinese Christian congregations and churches. For more than fifty years now, these kinds of religious communities and institutions have existed in, for example, Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg. In Brandon, there has been one failed attempt in the past to provide Mandarin, Cantonese, and Toisanese Protestant services and Chinese Bible study classes. In 1979, Vietnamese Chinese refugees

came to Manitoba, and some settled in Brandon. In the 1980s, the larger Chinese population created a demand for Chinese services and Bible study classes. But most of the Vietnamese Chinese did not settle permanently in the area, and the special Chinese services and classes did not continue beyond a few years.² By 2006, hundreds of Chinese had moved to Brandon to work at Maple Leaf Consumer Foods. Initially, Chinese men came to the province without wives and children. By January 2009 wives and children had arrived and another weekly Chinese Bible study class had been organized in Brandon. By October 2009, the class had grown to seventy and was meeting for Chinese services at a local church. It will be interesting to see whether these new Chinese Canadians convert to Christianity or remain nominally Christian, as has been the tendency in the area.

The majority of Chinese Canadians in western Manitoba have tended to be nominal Christians who publicly identify as Christian when asked questions about religious affiliation by customers or by census survey takers. In private situations, these same individuals often say they have no religion or are Buddhist or Confucian. This pattern of public and private self-identification seems to have been a widespread tactic used by early settlers to adapt to the expectations of the dominant Canadian society. As I explain, this tactic was not based on deception; rather, it was the product of ambiguity and ambivalence – both of which are common aspects of Chinese religiosity.³ As W. Peter Ward notes: “Protestant missionaries had chosen an extremely difficult task and, in consequence, they enjoyed less success than they must originally have anticipated. The greatest of all obstacles was the indifference, if not opposition, of most Orientals to the message of the Gospel.”⁴

An attitude of religious ambivalence enabled one to honestly profess an identity to one person and then adjust that identity for another, depending on what was socially acceptable in different settings and to different actors. Thus, religious ambivalence enabled a new settler to be both a Christian and, say, a Buddhist. Sun Yat-sen himself had been baptized, but in other ways he was only a nominal Christian, and he admired the teachings of Confucianism as well as other aspects of traditional Chinese culture. Sun Yat-sen’s persona was famous and presented itself as a model of a Chinese man who had influence in both Chinese and Western circles.

In the 1901 Canadian census, 63.3 percent (19/30) of Chinese immigrants in the Brandon District self-identified as Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or just Christian. By 1911, the pattern continued, and 89 percent (87/97) self-identified as Anglican, Baptist, Roman Catholic, or as Methodist and Presbyterian. While it was not uncommon for immigrants to self-identify

Table 1

**Brandon District data for those identifying China as birthplace,
1901 and 1911 censuses**

	1901	1911
Total	30	97
Anglican	0	9
Baptist	2	8
Church of England	0	3
Confucian	0	1
Methodist	6	16
Meyzu/no religion	0	6
Presbyterian	10	49
Roman Catholic	0	2
Blank or erased	0	3
Buddhist	11	0
Christian	1	0

Note: The table covers the Brandon District only and does not include the Portage la Prairie District, where, in 1911, there were two additional Confucian Chinese men.

in this manner,⁵ these data create the impression that the Chinese newcomers were overwhelmingly Christian (see Table 1.1).

I assumed that data from the 1901 and 1911 censuses reflected the religion of research participants; however, as I interviewed family members and friends of the first wave of Chinese immigrants, and as I read newspapers and archival material, these assumptions were proven incorrect. The men may have attended church or said that they were Christian when responding to a census survey, but, for the most part, they were not religious in this way. Their willingness to give these answers had to do with their desire to fit into local communities, their increased involvement with the KMT and other Chinese political and social institutions, religious ambivalence, the ambiguous nature of Chinese religion, and efficacy. I now turn to a discussion of the relationship between early immigrants and missionary and church work both in western Manitoba and overseas.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, residents in small cities, towns, and villages throughout western Manitoba began to find themselves with Chinese-operated laundries and restaurants. Although people appreciated the services offered by the new businesses, they were less sure about the foreigners who operated them. The men were strange-looking (they had pigtails!), spoke a different language, had strange customs, and often lived

alone. At first the missionaries preyed on the strangers and were overtly racist in their attitude towards them. However, as time progressed and more missionaries went to China and returned, racism became less intense.

Large numbers of missionaries began to travel from Canada to China during the First Opium War (1839-42). After the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), the Second Opium War (1856-60), and the Boxer Rebellion (1900), many more people were recruited to minister in China and, after 1900,⁶ to provide food, housing, medical assistance, and clothing.⁷ Jessie Lutz contends that “Western Protestant evangelists increased from 1,296 in 1889 to 3,883 in 1906 to 6,636 in 1919 ... Only 106 *hsien* (counties) out of 1,704 in China proper and Manchuria were without some Protestant evangelical activity.”⁸ As more people went to China, local newspapers wrote about missionary activities as well as uprisings and various disasters. When Canadian missionaries were killed, newspapers reported these stories, too. Chinese men living in western Manitoba were blamed for the deaths, and restaurants and laundries became targets of white hostility: rocks were thrown through windows and laundrymen were assaulted. Missionary reports only served to reinforce the public impression that the “Chinaman” was a barbarous, curious, dirty, idolatrous, and savage heathen.⁹ As W. Peter Ward explains: “Repeatedly mission reports and correspondence emphasized that idolatry, superstition, spiritual indifference, moral inadequacy, and imperviousness to the Christian gospel were typical of the Oriental character.”¹⁰ In Canada, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others felt threatened by the new settlers and feared that they would not assimilate.¹¹

Over time, Christian views about Chinese immigrants softened, partly because missionaries grew to understand their customs and partly because missionaries were being treated better in China. Local ministers and others who had been overseas became known as experts, and they were called on to give public presentations on Chinese traditions and history.¹² As the immigrants got more involved in missionary activities, some of the barriers between white culture and Chinese culture dissolved. For instance, in 1919, the Carberry, Manitoba chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire held its tea and sale in the local Chinese restaurant.¹³ Missionaries began to sympathize with the men who worked long hours for very little pay and who had difficulty communicating because of limited English skills. Missionaries and members of the church were vocal opponents of the successive racist and discriminatory versions of the Chinese Immigration Act, 1885, which was only repealed in 1947.

In China, after 1911, for the most part the new republican government held Christianity in high regard. I say “for the most part” because, between

1922 and 1927, intellectuals, students, and KMT party activists rallied together to protest missionary activities in port cities and especially in Beijing; however, these protests did not take place in the rural areas from which many of the overseas men had emigrated.¹⁴ The anti-Christian campaigns represented the long-held view that foreign missionary bodies had too much power in China. Nevertheless, Rebecca Nedostup notes that the KMT still regarded “Protestant Christianity as the implied or overt benchmark [of religion].”¹⁵ Protestant Christianity was a Western religion and represented many of the ideals that the KMT wanted modern China to possess.

Sun Yat-sen and others within the KMT were Christians, and, once the imperial era ended in 1911, Christianity was perceived to be the standard by which all other religions were to be judged. This meant that missionaries now enjoyed higher status in China. Many of the Chinese bachelors had emigrated from rural southern areas of China and later had become KMT members in Canada. Coming from the southern coast of Guangdong, the men would have been familiar with Western culture and Christianity. When they became KMT members they became even more predisposed to participate in missionary activities. They wanted to appear as Christians and Westerners like Sun Yat-sen and, thus, to be perceived as socially acceptable and modern gentlemen. According to Jiwu Wang: “Attendance at mission activities increased remarkably, and the attitude towards Christianity of the Chinese immigrants improved noticeably. It was reported that more than 1,000 Chinese attended a series of religious services organised by a local Methodist church in Vancouver.”¹⁶ In the rest of Canada and in western Manitoba, missionary efforts to convert bachelors to Christianity continued, but the relationship was never one-sided. Prairie churches, missions, and local women offered Sunday school, Chinese Bible classes, summer picnics, ice cream socials, teas, and recreational activities for the local communities in western Manitoba.¹⁷ When new immigrants attended them they not only learned about religiosity but also how to speak English, and they had a chance to mix with whites in the community.¹⁸ One Winnipeg old-timer explained: “Church socials and church Christmas parties opened their doors to the city’s lonely immigrants. Many Chinese were converted to Christianity because of these contacts.”¹⁹ Through the church, people made friends and formed contacts that led to opportunities to work outside of the laundries and restaurants. As time passed, the bond between Chinese and non-Chinese religious communities strengthened.

In summary, a Chinese Christian would self-identify as such on census surveys and when asked by the white community. He would also have a

church ceremony for his wedding, and, when he died, a minister would speak at his funeral. Being known in this way was efficacious, conveying that you had a network of Canadian and Chinese friends and that you had been accepted. Research participants have repeatedly noted that, while many people in western Manitoba frowned on mixed-race marriages between Chinese men and white women, churches were very accepting of them. On 22 September 1910, the *Baldur Gazette* remarked on one mixed marriage that took place in Brandon: "Mah How and a white girl named Miss Louie Morris got married in St. Matthew's [Anglican] rectory in Brandon, Manitoba on September 15, 1910."²⁰ I note that several of the marriages of influential early KMT elders in the province were of the mixed-race variety.

In one oral history interview, a research participant told a story about someone who was not a formal Christian but who had always wanted to be welcomed and accepted by members of the larger dominant society:

I remember once talking with a very fine minister of First Church United and we were arranging a funeral and he called [a particular Chinese-Canadian man] a Christian. And I said, "You know, I don't think [he] was baptized Christian." He said, "It doesn't matter. He was a very Christian man and I list him as a Christian."

For both the research participant and the person who had died, being a good Christian was synonymous with being a good Canadian. As it was explained to me, it would have been a great honour to have a white minister speak this way about an early Chinese settler who spoke broken English and didn't have the right to vote until 1947.²¹

After the repeal of the Chinese Immigration act in 1947, many men were able to bring over their children and wives in what came to be another wave of migration. The children got involved in Christian youth groups, church camps, and bands. And, while their fathers, uncles, and grandfathers might have been indifferent to Christianity, the members of this later wave were much more open to conversion. A research participant commented on the importance of the local church in his own adaptation to, and success in, Canada:

We [the kids] ended up in the United Church and became Christians. The church opened its doors to us. They offered leadership training and moulded me in many aspects. At the same time, my mother and father forced us to go to church. Through the church I became assimilated and Canadian ... At

New Year and at other times Mom would pray and burn incense and put out food. The Chinese United Church played a huge role too. Ministers took me under their wing ... My parents were both buried in funerals where United Church ministers officiated. But they were not real members. It was a place that their children went to.

It was not uncommon for Chinese to burn incense and, behind the scenes, to torch other symbolic offerings seen to be desirable gifts. The list of these desirable gifts is long. Most items are made of paper. There are paper cars, paper television sets, and paper telephones. But the most important and common gift is spirit money, which is also referred to as Hell Bank Money, Ghost Money, and Joss Paper. Spirit money would have been available for purchase in Chinatowns in overseas communities throughout the world. People would have burned it in metal pails in front of altars and gravesites on the birthdays of ancestors and during Qingming, Chongyang, and on Decoration Day.²²

Involvement with churches, missionaries, and women who hosted Bible classes and other events in Manitoba helped the men and their families become Canadians, but the KMT helped them too. Many early settlers who were involved in Christian organizations or who attended Bible classes belonged to overlapping political organizations and, especially, to the KMT.

The KMT in Manitoba

Aside from self-identifying as Christians, new settlers also self-identified in a more political and private manner. Although after 1912 the eventual dominant form of political affiliation in the province was the KMT, several organizations predated it. Winnipeg's branch of the Chinese Freemasons (*Hongmen* 洪門/ *Zhigongtang* 致公堂) was formed in 1910,²³ and Wong Muk (Mandarin: *Wang Mu* 王木), Lam Syu (Mandarin: *Lin Shu* 林樹), Lee Yik Chap (Mandarin: *Li Yiqi* 李奕緝), and Lee Hungyeui (Mandarin: *Li Hongrui* 李鴻銳)²⁴ were its early leaders.²⁵ While the branch was not recognized by the Grand Lodge of Masons in Manitoba, it was connected to the other lodges that opened covertly in Victoria and Toronto that year. The address of the Winnipeg Lodge was 259 King Street, and it had three hundred members. It could be found in the heart of an emerging Chinatown, along with laundries, restaurants, groceries, rooming houses, and apartments that dotted Portage Avenue, Pacific Avenue, King Street, Princess Street, and Main Street.²⁶ Baureiss and Kwong note that, in 1909, it was the increasing number of Chinese grocery stores that finally created the core area known as "Chinatown" at King Street and Alexander Avenue.²⁷ Here, you could

find traditional foods as well as medicines, porcelain vases, silk, and a growing Chinese community who came to hear about the political and social events taking place in the region.

In 1910, the Chinese Masonic Lodge also housed the Tongmenghui (Chinese United League 同盟會),²⁸ which, two years later, became the secret Manitoba KMT.²⁹ Large handwritten signs in Chinese were posted on storefront windows along Winnipeg's King Street to announce news and events to men who were drawn from other urban and rural areas of the Prairies.³⁰ The Chinese Freemasons and, by extension, the Chinese United League were most fondly remembered for bringing Sun Yat-sen to Winnipeg in April 1911.³¹ Sun Yat-sen had come to Canada in July 1897 and again in February 1910, and Chinese United League leaders convinced him to make a stop in Winnipeg after he spoke in Vancouver in January 1911. They met Sun at the CPR station near Chinatown and acted as his bodyguards (along with the ones he brought with him) as he toured the city, held fundraising meetings, and gave political speeches.³² If his 1911 trip to Winnipeg attracted any public attention at all, there is no trace of it in local Chinese and English newspapers. The visit appears to have been a private community one and was kept out of the media.

Over the next fourteen years, Sun's 1911 tour to Manitoba and other places in Canada and the United States paid off. He knew many of the local leaders by name and could use these connections to rally support in distant communities. Sun was so successful at fundraising in North America because, in addition to his familiarity with North American leaders and their terrain, his speeches and letters conveyed an air of Western sophistication. They drew heavily on a Protestant Christian rhetoric of faith, support, and belief in the revolution in China.³³ Sun embodied the bachelors' idea of a new China. With him as their figurehead, they were able to imagine a nation that was Western, modern, and new.³⁴ Donating to the Nationalist cause at any bank in Manitoba, or to the KMT party directly, gave the men a way to lessen the suffering of their nation and to become Sun's martyrs.³⁵ Member donations to KMT fundraising campaigns were advertised in Chinese and, later, in English newspapers. Those who made the largest contributions had the highest status within the community. Six months after Sun Yat-sen's trip to the province and shortly after the Wuchang Uprising, men in Brandon's Chinese community were interviewed by the local paper regarding their financial contributions to Sun:

Some of the local Chinamen have the \$10 bill newly printed by the Revolutionist party in China. According to the local revolutionist sympathizers,

this bill is given in exchange for a Canadian five dollar. If the insurgents win the bill will be worth ten dollars; if they lose it will be worthless. This seems to be a pretty good scheme to finance the revolution, and if the revolution is successful, which seems altogether likely at present, there will be some rich Celestials in the west, as a good many of them have contributed in this manner to the insurgent war chest.³⁶

Many of these men lived like peasants on the rural Canadian Prairies, travelling from job to job and place to place. For them, five dollars was an enormous amount of money. They overlooked the costs of these revolutionary bills because they were inspired by the Chinese revolution and by Sun Yat-sen's vision of a new republic.³⁷ In addition to the 1911 Brandon community contributions, larger branches in the country took out mortgages on their Chinese United League and Chinese Freemason buildings, raising between 63,000 and 100,000 Hong Kong dollars.³⁸

While people in western Manitoba had been able to read about Chinese history, politics, and customs in local newspapers before Sun Yat-sen's visit to the province, they knew much more about him, China, and Chinese customs after his visit. Many articles appeared in local newspapers on the queue (the long pigtail worn by Chinese settlers before 1911),³⁹ opium,⁴⁰ and the nation's politics. The *Brandon Weekly Sun* reported on the history of southern Chinese uprisings on Thursday, 18 May 1911;⁴¹ later that same year, it ran stories about the increased rioting and uprisings in China and the danger to missionaries in the region.⁴² Local newspapers informed their readers when the Wuchang Uprising took place on 10 October 1911 – an uprising that led to the Xinhai Revolution and the eventual collapse of the Qing dynasty.⁴³ When Sun Yat-sen became president of China in late December 1911, the *Brandon Weekly Sun* ran the story.⁴⁴

1912 to present

As one research participant noted, belonging to the early KMT in Canada was, for Chinese men, like being a member of one of today's political parties. The only difference was that, if you were Chinese and living in Manitoba in the early part of the twentieth century, you were expected to be a member of the KMT and to support it. Those who chose not to join were branded as "young communists." These men were often associated with the Chinese Dramatic Society.

In Manitoba, the KMT was historically centre-right in its pro-Nationalist views, although at times it forged alliances with left-wing groups in the province to protest against "fascism" and to fundraise.⁴⁵ In 1915, the secret



FIGURE 2 Memorial plaque, c. 1929, Huanghuagang, Seventy-Two Martyrs Mausoleum, Guangzhou, China.

Source: Kenny Choy

KMT, which was established in 1912, issued a press release to the *Manitoba Free Press* announcing its inaugural meeting.⁴⁶ For the next several years, the KMT office frequently changed locations, and, by 1916, it opened its doors at 263 King Street. Five years later, it moved to 77 Lily Street, and by 1932 it had moved to the Johnstone Building (209-13 Pacific Avenue), which it rented for one year and then purchased. The Winnipeg branch was the regional Prairie headquarters of the KMT in Canada, and, by 1914, it was one of the most active and powerful of the country's forty-one branches.

Though now forgotten,⁴⁷ a rural KMT outpost had opened in Brandon by 1913. The discovery of this KMT office in the middle of the Prairies came about by accident through a search of *Henderson's Directories* for proprietors of laundries and restaurants. Later, these references were corroborated by an international Chinese business directory that mentioned a local office of the KMT.⁴⁸ This was one of the first nine sites of the new party to be located east of Vancouver and Victoria.⁴⁹ In 1916, Brandon's Chinese bachelors formally announced the KMT branch in the local newspaper:

The Chinese living in Brandon have fallen into line with their compatriots in other cities and have organized a branch of a national association, the

initial meeting to take place at the headquarters on Twelfth Street ... the local association will have a membership of between 150 and 200. This national association is to have branches all over Canada and speakers from Winnipeg, Moose Jaw, Regina and Calgary will be here for the opening night, which promises to be an epoch making event among the celestials here ... Lee James is the president of the local association, Wong Higgins, secretary, and Hum Jink, treasurer.⁵⁰

Wong Higgins,⁵¹ secretary of the Brandon KMT, had been one of the founding members of the Winnipeg Chinese Freemasons, who had arranged Sun Yat-sen's visit and may have been part of the committee that had provided his bodyguards during his stay in the province. Wong's involvement with the early rural group had no doubt helped foster the widespread loyalty to Sun Yat-sen during his lifetime and the veneration for him after his death.

Through discussions with old-timers I learned that Brandon's office was the rural headquarters of the provincial KMT. Located in a house at 135-12th Street, it was used as a residence for migrant workers in the laundries and restaurants, and it formed the core of Brandon's tiny Chinatown. Unlike Chinatowns in other small Canadian cities, this one was several blocks away from the CPR station. Like the others, it was defined by Chinese residences and rooming houses, businesses such as laundries and a grocer, and the KMT office.⁵² The city's four Chinese Canadian restaurants were a few blocks away, outside of Chinatown.⁵³

Brandon's Chinatown was plain. There were no roof tiles in brilliant yellow hues or exotic creatures lining winged roofs of buildings. Chinese in Manitoba didn't construct their own buildings. They rented and purchased pre-existing Western ones, and this is why, unlike Victoria and Vancouver, Brandon and Winnipeg have no original Chinese architecture and/or historic buildings. And there are certainly no underground tunnels connecting basements. However, calligraphy was visible from the street on a sign above the KMT office door, and the posters, written in Chinese, that were periodically hung on its windows advertised rural Chinese and Chinatown events as well as those in Winnipeg. In this office people could find a bit of China and someone to organize traditional events.⁵⁴ As with many older buildings in Brandon, this one was demolished decades ago.

During the First World War, many Canadian KMT leaders encouraged members to contribute to the war effort and to support the Allied soldiers.⁵⁵ But they also communicated with each other by code, and there was a growing concern that Chinese bachelors were becoming too well organized and

well connected during the war. In any case, midway through it, members of the Department of Justice began to monitor the intelligence networks of KMT offices in Canada. Two years later, KMT activities were suspended after an incident in which a Chinese barber in Victoria murdered a Chinese diplomat and then committed suicide. The diplomat had reportedly been passing through Canada on his way back to China. The Canadian government investigated the murder and determined that it was a political crime related to the KMT's revolutionary efforts in China.⁵⁶ As a result, on 18 September 1918, the government declared the KMT illegal, along with twelve other ethnically based political organizations. It closed all KMT offices from 28 September 1918 to 2 April 1919, when Order in Council PC 2384 was repealed. During the time that the offices were closed, many Chinese, including L.S. Quong, a student in Vancouver, wrote several letters to the Department of Justice protesting the ban and lamenting the loss of the organization, which had functioned as a moral compass for overseas Chinese. He noted:

Some of the other aims of this party are: to reform China socially, politically and *morally* both at home and abroad, and to attain these only by peaceful and lawful means. To accomplish these objects the League has established branches throughout the whole world where Chinese are to be found ... Outside of China its work is more of a moral rather than a political character.⁵⁷

Chinese throughout Canada were very interested in reopening the KMT offices that had been closed during the ban, and they began a letter-writing campaign to that end. As mentioned above, in 1919 the order was repealed and, shortly after that, the offices reopened and resumed their activities. While the Canadian government had been aware that the CBA, Chinese Freemasons, and KMT offices were communicating in code, it seems to have been unaware that Sun Yat-sen had built an aviation centre in Saskatoon (and later in other places) and had started to actively train revolutionary pilots there in the early 1920s.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, Sam Wong, a prominent local restaurant owner and KMT leader from Montreal, whom I discuss in Chapter 3, was close friends with a man named Charlie Foo. Like Foo, Wong was an experienced local KMT leader with ties to Winnipeg and Montreal,⁵⁸ fundraiser, and one-time KMT building owner. Foo was president and an executive member of the Winnipeg KMT, the CBA, and Chinese Patriotic

League (branches of which had been established across Canada in 1937) for more than four decades. This significant relationship eventually produced a marriage alliance between the Foo and Wong families, and, through this, the KMT secured the allegiance of the Wong Association within Winnipeg and beyond. Historically, however, it should be noted that the relationship between Foo and Wong may have had deeper family roots. Foo's Chinese name was Au Foo (Mandarin: *Ou Fu* 區富), and, like Wong's first wife, he was from the Au 區 clan in China.⁵⁹

Although the KMT maintained a presence in Brandon until the 1950s, its Chinatown office had disappeared by 1934, when Sam Wong was the last recorded owner. The Chinese population sharply declined in the 1930s,⁶⁰ in part because of the Depression and in part because of the 1923 version of the Chinese Immigration Act, which massively curtailed immigration to Canada until years after its repeal in 1947.⁶¹ Members could no longer support the operation of two provincial offices and still afford to send donations to China following the 1931 Japanese invasion and the Second Sino-Japanese war in 1937. Membership fees (which were really more like prescribed donations) soared in this period, causing too much of a financial burden for the many who eventually left the area.⁶² From 1935 until the late 1950s, the KMT maintained a presence, but not an office, in the city, operating boarding houses on Sixth Street and Twelfth Street.⁶³

The year 1947 brought the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act, and two years after that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of mainland China. By 1949, when the KMT retreated to Taiwan, it was said to have ten thousand Canadian members.⁶⁴ Membership dropped steadily after that, and many annual events were no longer organized. As women and children began to immigrate to Manitoba in large numbers, men returned to the way life was practised in traditional families, with their wives managing their religious and social lives. Chinese communities once dominated by bachelor societies were now filled with families, and, accordingly, KMT governance responded to the needs of this new group, using various events to educate newcomers about citizenship rights in Manitoba.⁶⁵ Thus, in the 1950s, Brandon was the site of the Chinese Canadian Citizens' Association of Manitoba, which lasted for a decade.⁶⁶ The association was one of many groups operated by the leaders of Winnipeg's KMT, but it was the only one located outside the city. Like the KMT, the Chinese Canadian Citizens Association of Manitoba had an intercultural aim: to encourage Chinese Canadians to become familiar with non-Chinese customs, groups, politics, and, mostly significantly, citizenship.⁶⁷

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21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Canada on FSC-certified ancient-forest-free paper (100% post-consumer recycled) that is processed chlorine- and acid-free.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Marshall, Alison R.

The way of the bachelor : early Chinese settlement in Manitoba /
Alison R. Marshall.

(Asian religions & society series, ISSN 1705-4761)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7748-1915-2

1. Chinese Canadians – Manitoba – Social conditions – 20th century. 2. Chinese Canadians – Social networks – Manitoba – History – 20th century. 3. Chinese Canadians – Manitoba – Religion – History – 20th century. 4. Chinese Canadians – Manitoba – Politics and government – 20th century. 5. Zhongguo guo min dang. Manitoba branch – History. 6. Laundries – Manitoba – History – 20th century. 7. Chinese restaurants – Manitoba – History – 20th century. 8. Bachelors – Manitoba – History – 20th century. I. Title. II. Series: Asian religions and society series

FC3400.C5M37 2011

305.38'89510712709041

C2010-906512-3

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

www.ubcpress.ca

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