

**David Chuenyan Lai and Guo Ding, *Great Fortune Dream: The Struggles and Triumphs of Chinese Settlers in Canada, 1858-1966*. Halfmoon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press, 2016. 288 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-987915037.**

The history of Chinese immigration to Canada can be divided into two periods. From 1858 to 1966 the Chinese entering Canada experienced discrimination and segregation. After 1967, federal immigration policies changed, allowing Chinese immigrants to enter Canada on the same basis as other immigrants. In 1858, gold was first discovered in the Fraser River. News of this discovery travelled to the Pearl River Delta, where in the aftermath of the Opium Wars, many Chinese sought to escape poverty, overcrowding, political unrest and even slavery. This tumultuous period marked the beginning of Chinese migration to Canada and has come to be known as the Chinese diaspora – the dispersion of the Chinese from their homeland. This volume covers the first part of the Chinese experience in Canada when discrimination and negative stereotypes plagued Chinese communities in Canada before 1967.

At first white settlers welcomed the cheap labour provided by these “coolie labourers,” but as the gold rushes came to an end, so did this period of relative peace. For the century that followed, segregation and discrimination against the Chinese would be a hallmark of white citizens of Canada. *Great Fortune Dream: The Struggles and Triumphs of Chinese Settlers in Canada, 1858-1966* describes Chinese migration and life in Canada according to four periods of Canada’s immigration policies on Chinese, ranging from Free Entry to Exclusion. It is an interdisciplinary study that draws on history, geography, anthropology and statistics to paint a comprehensive picture of Chinese experiences within mainstream Canadian society in the past, and to allow today’s readers to appreciate the historically significant and valuable contributions the overseas Chinese made to the development of Canada.

The first period of the diaspora is known as the Era of Free Entry 1858-1884. As mentioned earlier, the Fraser River gold rush marked the first wave of early Chinese immigration to British Columbia. Many people lost their lives on the long voyage but after some of the first emigrants returned with wealth to their home villages, they inspired more people from this region to make the hazardous trans-Pacific voyage to pursue their “great fortune dream” in western Canada. The second wave began in the early 1880s, when hundreds of Chinese labourers were recruited to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway that would connect the new province of British Columbia to the rest of Canada. During the construction of the railway, which had 3,800 kilometers of track, Chinese railway workers experienced harsh working and living conditions. Many of them died during blasting or were killed by collapsing tunnels and they were left in unmarked graves

along the rail lines. The line “perished for the railway,” written by an anonymous poet reflected a sense of sorrow felt by these Chinese workers. But interestingly enough, apart from the dominant Euro-Canadians, a different relationship was forged between the Chinese labourers and First Nations people. They sympathised with each other, helped each other by participating in two-way exchanges and learned from each other.

Part II of this diaspora is known as The Head Tax Era, 1885-1922. After the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed in 1885, several factors converged that made a head tax seem likely to provide a solution to the perceived problem of Chinese immigration. The anti-Chinese prejudice prevalent in the West began to spread eastward, helped by the media and influencing political actions taken by provincial and federal governments. Thus, the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration was formed in July 1884. After that a tax of fifty dollars per head was levied per immigrant in order to restrict the entry of Chinese people into Canada. The tax also meant that these immigrants could not afford to bring their families – who would also have to pay the tax – to Canada, nor could they afford to return to China to visit them. When this head tax was raised to five hundred dollars, the number of immigrants dwindled further. But in spite of the heavy head tax, Chinese people continued to come to Canada to find work and two-thirds of them lived in British Columbia. Here they began to diversify their economic base by entering new businesses and working at a greater variety of jobs. Thus, as the Chinese population in Canada grew, the Chinatowns developed. The Chinese maintained their cultural traditions in Chinatown. They spoke Chinese, ate Chinese food and wore Chinese clothing. In addition, they followed their traditional religious and spiritual practices and enjoyed artistic traditions they had brought from China. The education of Chinese children was of special concern, and this period also saw the emergence of new Chinese schools.

Part III comprises The Exclusion Era, 1923-1946. Anti-Chinese legislation passed by both federal and provincial governments prevented the Chinese from participating fully in Canadian economic, social and political life. In 1923, the Canadian government passed legislation that prohibited Chinese immigrants from entering Canada entirely. Therefore, the flow of newcomers ceased with just a few exceptions. The immigration of Chinese people that had begun over fifty years earlier was halted by legislation that would not be repealed for a quarter of a century. Thus, Chinese communities came under huge pressure, and their survival and development were threatened. The exclusion era also saw Chinatowns across Canada struggling to survive the compounded difficulties imposed by anti-Chinese sentiments, the Great Depression, depopulation and disruptions in some industries caused by mechanisation. Adapting as best as they could to their reduced circumstances, Chinese immigrants proved themselves to be tenacious and self-reliant. Even though many small-town Chinatowns became

extinct during the exclusion era, their spirit and heritage were carried on in major cities by Chinese people who had migrated there from small towns. Also during this exclusion era, Canadian-born Chinese began to form their own organisation, which gradually came to play a prominent role in the Chinese community. The second generation, eager to improve their community, wanted to change the biased impression the society at large held about the Chinese. They also wished to introduce elements of Western culture into Chinatowns to modify some Chinese cultural practices that were becoming increasingly problematic. During this period, Chinese newspapers also established their role as the mouthpiece of the Chinese community. As far as religion was concerned Confucianism remained the most prevalent doctrine in the daily life of the overseas Chinese.

The Chinese in Canada were involved in war from 1937, when they began supporting China in the Sino-Japanese War, until the end of World War II. After World War II expanded into the Pacific theatre, they supported Canada and its allies, which included China. These wars deeply affected the lives of Chinese Canadians. When World War II expanded into the Pacific theatre in 1941, young Chinese Canadians set aside the discrimination they faced in their own country and fought for Canada. Their participation, even though they did not enjoy full citizenship rights, laid the foundations for post-war changes in the unjust treatment of the Chinese in Canada. When the war ended, the surviving Chinese soldiers and pilots returned to Canada alongside their colleagues to begin a new life. Although the number of Chinese soldiers was perhaps insignificant in winning the war, their participation helped change negative opinions about the Chinese to more positive territory, stimulating a move towards more equitable treatment of the Chinese in Canada in the post-war period.

The last section of the book comprises Part IV, The Era of Selective Entry, 1947-1966. After the end of World War II, Chinese veterans and community leaders fought hard for equal treatment for the Chinese. In the process of a policy shift, Chinese-Canadian veterans became a major force advocating for the abolition of anti-Chinese legislation. Eventually, the Canadian government repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act that had banned Chinese entry to Canada. However, various rules and policies that were selectively applied between the end of the war and 1967 continued to inhibit Chinese immigration. The change in Canadian immigration legislation underscored a shift in the social status of the Chinese in Canada. Furthermore, the new law stipulated that as soon as an applicant was deemed by the immigration authorities to be eligible and capable of becoming self-reliant once in Canada, the applicant could bring his wife and children with him. This was unprecedented in the history of Chinese immigration to Canada.

This book was originally written in Chinese and later translated into English. It is easy reading and is a goldmine of information. The interviews with descendants of Chinese immigrants and both Chinese and English-language

archival materials supplement and bring to life the experiences of the Chinese in Canada. Besides this, the good number of black and white photographs, most of which have been sourced from the Vancouver Public Library Archives, add to the attraction of the book. It can be enjoyed by the specialist and the layman alike.

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