

**The History and Consequences of Sinophobia and Anti-Chinese Racism in
Canada: A Submission to the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal
Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions**

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Introduction

Racisms are commonly understood to be individual prejudices, ignorance and even acts of violence. Central to this view is that an action must be intended to be racist. In fact, racisms are social structures that organize people's interactions and consequently the forms of knowledge and experience that they take for granted. These structures have on-going effects that can be invisible to those acting on taken-for-granted understandings and in received ways.

The following provides an overview of the origins and consequences of anti-Chinese racism and Sinophobia in Canada, and sketches how a historically produced social structure of racist exclusion shapes much of current discourse about Chinese foreign interference, including the responses of government agencies. This structure also contributes to the underdevelopment of the knowledge-creation capacity of Canadian institutions with respect to China. In the absence of this knowledge, it is easy for taken-for-granted racist assumptions to dominate. Unless this structure and its contemporary consequences are understood, there is consequently a great danger not only that some Canadian communities will be scapegoated solely because of their origins, but also that we will be unable to properly identify and respond to real state-organized foreign interference including that on the part of the Chinese government.

Although I am discussing anti-Chinese racism in this brief, it should be noted that it is not the only social structure of racist exclusion at work in Canada. Similar structures are at work in the case of other racialized communities as well as Indigenous peoples.

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book *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-racism and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (UBC Press) won prizes from the Canadian Historical Association and the Canadian History of Education Association. In 1976-78, during my MA studies in Chinese History at the University of British Columbia, I was a Canada-People's Republic of China Exchange Scholar who studied for six months at the Beijing Languages Institute (today's Beijing Language and Culture University) and for a year and a half at Peking University. I was in the fourth cohort of this program, which was established by Prime Minister P.E. Trudeau and Premier Chou Enlai to promote understanding between the peoples of China and Canada. Today, it is the oldest scholarly exchange program in the history of both countries. In 2014 when I was the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the University of Ottawa, I returned to China for the first time since 1978 to attend a conference with the U15 Canadian research universities and their Chinese D-10 counterparts to discuss the creation of joint PhD Programs. Since then, I have returned several times seeking to build links between my home faculty and Chinese faculties of education. Since July 2021, I have been a member of the Advisory Committee of Canada-China Focus, which seeks to create a non-partisan space for critical discussion of Canada-China relations and to promote better understandings of China in Canada. We have become increasingly concerned by the recent upsurge of anti-Chinese racism. However, the views expressed in this submission are entirely my own.

Canada Has Always Been Linked to China

Although most Canadians are unaware of it, Canada exists the way that it does because of its links to China. The same forces of emerging global economy that brought people from Europe to what became Canada also brought people from China.

The search for a direct route to China and the Far East first brought European explorers to what is today Canada. For example, the seventeenth century explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle carried a silk gown with him in case he met the Emperor of China around the next bend in the river. His settlement on the Island of Montreal was even called Lachine.¹ As late as the middle of the nineteenth century, European explorers were looking for the Northwest Passage.

Connections to China led to Canada having a Pacific coast. In the late 18th century, British and New England merchants developed a triangular trade between their home ports, the Northwest coast of North America, and Canton. At the time, the Pacific Northwest was the farthest place in the world from Europe in terms of travel time, but, as the crew of Captain James Cook found, the region's thick sea otter pelts could be sold in China at fabulous profits.² This triangular trade also brought people from China to North America. In 1788, most of the crew for the British sea captain John Meares's second voyage to Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island were Cantonese. The Cantonese

¹ Céline Dupré, "Cavelier de La Salle, René-Robert," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cavelier_de_la_salle_rene_robert_1E.html.

² James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

shipwrights and sailors he brought built the fur trading post and sailing ship that established the British claim to the territory. Canada today has a west coast because of this link to China and the efforts of these Chinese workers.³

Chinese links motivated and facilitated the construction of Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1882-5, in what at the time was one of the largest infrastructural projects ever undertaken by a western government, Chinese workers helped to build the British Columbia section of the Canadian Pacific Railway, literally welding the country together. The railway opened a British Empire-controlled route from Great Britain to Hong Kong, which the China trade was intended to pay for it.

Today, China is Canada's third most important trading partner after the United States and the European Community. Manufactured products ranging from the Apple computer I am writing this submission on to children's toys all come from China. Canada's 1.7 million Chinese Canadians, of whom close to 1 million are first generation immigrants, the majority with roots in the People's Republic of China, ensures that there are multiple and complex connections between people and institutions in China and in Canada.

Because of these connections, people of Chinese origins have continuously been in what became Canada since before the country existed. In 1858 the Fraser River gold rush brought thousands of gold miners including several thousand Chinese from California to the territory. At the time, there were at most 500 non-Indigenous people in the territory, almost all of whom were employees of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Chinese made up the bulk of the gold miners in a second gold rush in the Caribou district that began in the early 1860s. Consequently, by the time the colony of British Columbia entered the Canadian Confederation as a province in 1871, the Chinese may well have been the largest group of adult men in the territory after the overwhelming majority of First Nations people. They were certainly the majority in some districts.⁴ The San Francisco-based Kwong Lee Company, which employed most of the Chinese, was the territory's second largest company after the Hudson's Bay Company.⁵

A measure of the significance of the Chinese and Indigenous populations of British Columbia in relation to the relatively tiny size of the newly arrived Anglo-European population is that until the 1890s, the language of work in British Columbia was Chinook, the Indigenous trade language of the Pacific Northwest. Indeed, in industries like the salmon canneries that employed diverse workforces it remained such well into the twentieth century

³ John Prices, "Relocating Yuquot: The Indigenous Pacific and Transpacific Migrations," *BC Studies* 204 (2019/2020): 21-44.

⁴ Robert Galois and Cole Harris, "Recalibrating Society: The Population Geography of British Columbia in 1881," *The Canadian Geographer* 38, no. 1 (1994): 37-53.

⁵ Harry Con, Ronald J. Con, Graham Johnson, and Edgar Wickberg, *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1982), 16

Homogenization and Exclusion

British Columbia's mountainous geography, its distance from other areas of European domination and the size of its Indigenous population led British, Eastern Canadian, and America colonizers to feel that they had only a tenuous hold on the territory. As a result, they very quickly came to see Chinese migrants as a threat to their own dominance.⁶ Starting in the late 1860s, they began to use the state to limit the ability of the Chinese to compete with them. Following the merger of the colony of Vancouver Island with the mainland colony of British Columbia in 1866, the colonial government began forcing the local Indigenous people onto tiny reserves while opening the rest of their territories to pre-emption by the invaders. In this context, the colonial legislature blocked both "Indians" and "Chinamen" from pre-empting these lands, the former without the permission of the governor. Pre-emptors could claim up to 150 acres (60 hectares) per person (hence a family of four could claim 600 acres/240 hectares) while Indigenous reserves were laid out at 20 acres per person (8 hectares). Indigenous nations could do little to resist this invasion since they had suffered a 95% population decline in three generations mainly due to European-introduced diseases⁷ Furthermore, the British occupation of the coast was reinforced by the most highly developed military technology of the nineteenth century, the Royal Navy gunboat.⁸ However, in 1871, the Indigenous population was still at least five times the size of the white population.⁹

People from China who were British subjects, including those who naturalized after being resident in the territory for three years, voted in colonial elections and in the first Canadian election following British Columbia's 1871 entry into Confederation. However, the third act of the newly established provincial legislature barred both First Nations people and the Chinese from voting in elections, and from running for or holding public office, i.e., it created a system of white minority rule.¹⁰ As John Sebastian Helmcken, the Hudson's Bay Company doctor who was one of the first British settlers, explained to the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese immigration, the Chinese needed to be kept out "because we want to be here ourselves, and do not want others to be here. You will not consider it strange if we tell you that as good Englishmen, we see no reasons why any men except good Englishmen should live in this country (Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 2 July 2, 1885, 3009, Hon. Adolphe Chapleau)." British Columbia was to be "the white man's province" and settlers of European origins used the legislature to create their own dominance.

⁶ Patricia E. Roy, "British Columbia's Fear of Asians, 1900-1950." *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 13, no. 25 (1980): 161-172.

⁷ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002) and Richard Colebrook Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

⁸ Barry Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984).

⁹ Galois and Harris.

¹⁰ Timothy J. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), esp. 59-64.

A 2014 study by the Government of British Columbia found that one tenth of all the laws passed in the province's history, a total of 223 pieces of legislation, discriminated against the Chinese. Until 1947, these laws repeatedly prevented the Chinese from voting. They blocked them from working for the BC government, for its contractors, as well as for provincially incorporated companies. Because they were not on the voters list, the Chinese could not become lawyers or pharmacists. Other legislation prevented them from serving on juries or holding certain commercial licenses including crown timber licenses.¹¹ Municipal regulations similarly banned Chinese contractors and access to public facilities such as Victoria's Crystal Pool. Chinese children often were forced to attend racially segregated public schools or classrooms. Meanwhile, popular racist violence reinforced the exclusions of this legislated racism by closing entire districts of the province to the Chinese.¹² In 1907 an anti-Asian mob drew international attention when it rampaged through Vancouver's Chinatown and its Japanese quarter following a rally organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League addressed by leading politicians and religious leaders and endorsed by all of the city's white-only trade unions.¹³ Twenty years later, the residents of Canton Alley in Vancouver's Chinatown maintained a heavy metal gate that could be dropped at a moment's notice in the event of another riot.¹⁴

Something of the flavour of anti-Chinese discourse during the era becomes apparent in 1878 when Arthur Bunster, a Liberal MP from British Columbia who had been a member of the first session of the BC legislature when it disenfranchised the Chinese, introduced a motion in the House of Commons that would have blocked subjects of the Qing Empire from working on the construction of the transcontinental railway. He argued, "Canadians should take measures to protect themselves against the introduction of a population so detestable, and prevent their manhood from degenerating through the use of the opium drug ... and other evils ... which had been introduced by these people, and which gave cause for serious reflection to every father of a family as to the difficulties of guarding against them." Because of the Chinese, "every white man ... regretted having come to a Province where he had to come in contact with such a race." According to Bunster, it was the duty of the government to take steps that would "maintain our own race in its vigour and manhood, and to retain the tardy pioneer who went there to develop its resources (*Commons Debates*, 18 March, 1878, 1207-8)." Bunster seemed unaware that it was the British who had forced opium on China in the 1839-42 Opium War. More importantly, by claiming that the Chinese threatened "the tardy pioneer", Bunster, who was born in Ireland, was legitimizing his occupation of an Indigenous territory and that of his compatriots. If the Chinese did not belong, it was because people like him did. Furthermore, he was racializing the terms "Canadian" and "Chinese", i.e., fixing them into absolute and

¹¹ British Columbia. *Chinese Legacy BC Legislation Review Report* (2014), https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/our-history/historic-places/documents/heritage/chinese-legacy/legislation_review-report_final.pdf.

¹² Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*.

¹³ Henry Tsang, *White Riot: The 1907 Anti-Asian Riots in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2023).

¹⁴ Sing Lim, *West Coast Chinese Boy* (Montreal: Tundra Press, 1979), 14.

unchanging categories based on immutable alleged cultural differences in which the latter could never be the former.

That such racialization was new is shown by the fact that the Prime Minister of the time Alexander Mackenzie attacked Bunster's resolution as "unprecedented in its character and altogether unprecedented in its spirit, and at variance with those tolerant laws that afforded employment and an asylum to all who came into our country, regardless of color, hair or anything else." He claimed that legislating "against any class of people" entering the country was not seemly for "a British community." Finally, he noted that many Chinese immigrants were from Hong Kong and consequently, "as much British subjects as were the hon. members ... and, as such, were entitled to the rights and privileges of British subjects anywhere over the entire extent of the empire. (*Commons Debates*, 18 March, 1878, 1209)."

As Bunster's comments show, anti-Chinese racism homogenizes people of Chinese origins into a single undifferentiated and supposedly unchanging group. In the 1870s, racist exclusions were directed at "Chinamen." Although this is a derogatory term today, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was common in English to refer to people based on their country of origin. Thus, there were also Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Irishmen. Still, this term homogenized people into a single absolute category who did not necessarily see themselves as members of the same group. Nineteenth century and early twentieth century migrants from China were overwhelmingly from the four counties (Siyi) located on the west side of the Pearl River Delta in Southern Guangdong province. A smaller number were from the three counties (Sanyi) surrounding Canton. Ten percent were Hakkas, a Chinese ethnic minority.¹⁵ These migrants did not share a common language as they spoke Hakka and four at times mutually unintelligible dialects of Cantonese. They primarily identified with their home village or county of origin and with their clan/surname group. They were subjects of the Qing Empire and not Chinese citizens. Reflecting Cantonese practice, they called their settlements, known in English as Chinatowns, "Tang people's street," *Tangren Jie* 唐人街 (i.e., people of the Tang dynasty) rather than the modern term "Han people's street" *Hanren* 漢人街 (i.e., people of the Han dynasty, usually translated as ethnic Chinese). Thus, when Anglo-European settler colonizers called them "Chinamen" or "Chinese," they were ascribing a homogenous identity onto people who did not see themselves as members of the same group.¹⁶

Ascribed homogenization also shaped official discourse. We can see such ascription at work in 1885 when much of the report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration was devoted to establishing "the character of the Chinaman." The Commission arrived at its conclusions by canvassing the reports of other colonizing regimes such as those of British authorities in the Straits Settlements (today's Malaya and Singapore) and of the United States Congress when it passed its *Chinese*

¹⁵ David Chuen-yan Lai, "Home County and Clan Origins of Overseas Chinese in Canada in the Early 1880s," *BC Studies* 27 (Autumn 1975): 3-29. See also, *From China to Canada*, esp. 13-29.

¹⁶ *From Canada to China*; Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*,

Exclusion Act in 1882. It ignored the comments of the one Chinese witness to appear before it, the Qing Consular official Huang Sic-chen (Huang Xiquan).¹⁷ In other words, it developed its characterization of the Chinese based on what other European settler colonizers and colonizing authorities said about them, and did not engage with the ways in which the Chinese saw their own activities. The resulting portrait of the “Chinaman” was a fantasy. Insofar as the ascription of this identity homogenized all people from China into a single category, it was also thoroughly racialized.

By the mid 1880s, racializations increasingly began to be fixed in inescapable biological terms. For example, in 1885 Prime Minister John A. Macdonald disenfranchised everyone of “Chinese or Mongolian race.” At the time, he was creating a federal electoral system based on ownership of private property and he was afraid that Chinese property-owners in BC might control the vote there. He initially proposed disenfranchising “Chinamen,” but when a member of the opposition asked whether British subjects from Hong Kong were “Chinamen,” he switched to the racial categorization, a category that people could not escape based on citizenship or place of origin. As he explained to the House of Commons, Chinese exclusion was necessary because the Chinese were “aliens” who “had no British feelings, or British aspirations or sentiments.” Echoing the racist theories of the French Comte de Gobineau who held that all advanced civilizations were founded by a pure Aryan race that subsequently become corrupted by marrying lesser races, he further claimed that Chinese members of Parliament “would represent Chinese eccentricities, Chinese immorality, Asiatic principles altogether opposite to our wishes; and, in the even balance of parties, they might enforce those Asiatic principles, those immoralities . . . , the eccentricities which are abhorrent to the Aryan race and Aryan principles, on this House.” He further claimed, “the Aryan races will not wholesomely amalgamate with the Africans or the Asiatics.” and that “the cross of those races, like the cross of the dog and the fox, is not successful; it cannot be, and never will be.” He then warned that a Chinese population would mean that “the Aryan character of the future of British North America” would be destroyed. That characterizing people in terms of alleged biological characters was a relatively new idea at the time is shown by the fact that Macdonald was the only member of parliament to use such language. Indeed, his racist arguments shocked members of the opposition. For example, they protested that the Chinese in Montreal were “a respectable body of men -- good, peace-loving citizens,” and “industrious people” who had “voted in the last election” (*Commons Debates*, May 4, 1885, pp. 1582 and 1585). When his legislation reached the upper house of the federal parliament, the appointed Senate, Macdonald’s own appointees debated whether they could vote against the act because of its invidious distinctions.¹⁸

For Macdonald, keeping the Chinese out was central to his project of building an “Aryan” nation, a project that involved converting the territories of Indigenous peoples into the private property of people of European and especially British origins and their

¹⁷ Canada Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence* (Ottawa: By order of the Commission, 1885).

¹⁸ Timothy J. Stanley, “John A. Macdonald, ‘The Chinese’ and Racist State Formation in Canada,” *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry* 3, 1 (2016): 6-34.

Canadian-born descendants. His next piece of legislation consequently imposed a head tax on the immigration of Chinese workers and their families to limit the entry of people from China. So as not to interfere with the China trade, Macdonald excluded Chinese merchants from the head tax. However, his franchise legislation ensured that these merchants would have no say in the Canadian state, which would consequently remain firmly in the hands of settlers of European origins like himself (Macdonald was born in Scotland but grew up in Canada). For Macdonald, excluding the Chinese was only part of his larger project of extending the British Empire. In 1885, he was actively organizing the cultural genocide and, in some cases, the out and out genocide of the Indigenous peoples of the western great plains, while giving away their lands to the settlers his government was actively recruiting from Europe.¹⁹

The head tax shaped the demographic structure of Chinese Canadian communities. It was initially set at \$50. Although this increased the costs of entering Canada, workers could often work off the additional costs of immigrating within a year of arrival, but it did make the migration of the wives and children more difficult. By 1903 the head tax was raised to \$500, which was more than a year's income for the average worker's family. Consequently, although by 1921 when over twenty percent of the Canadian population was foreign-born, the Chinese were less than 0.5% of the total population. The Chinese, who were the largest racialized group after Indigenous peoples, were almost entirely men since the head tax kept their families in China. The few women and children in Canada as well as most of the Canadian-born population tended to belong to merchant families to whom the head tax did not apply after 1900.²⁰ The immigration of other groups that might threaten white dominance was also controlled. Starting in 1907, Japanese immigration was limited by agreement with the Japanese government.²¹ Immigration from British-controlled India was limited by the notorious "continuous passage rule" and forcibly maintained by the Canadian navy in the 1914 Komagata Maru incident.²² Immigration regulations also prevented African Americans from immigrating based on the fantasy that they were biologically unsuited to Canada's cold climate.²³

By the early 1920s, the idea that Canada was and should be a white country, a new idea in 1885, had come to be widely accepted as common sense. People of European origins made up over 98% of the population.²⁴ All members of the federal parliament and the provincial legislatures were white.²⁵ So-called "status Indians", who had been marginalized on reserves, were barred from voting in federal and provincial

¹⁹ James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina, Saskatchewan: University of Regina Press, 2013).

²⁰ *From China to Canada*, esp. 91-100.

²¹ John Price, *Orienteering Canada: Race, Empire and the Transpacific* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

²² Johnston, Hugh J. M. *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*. Expanded and Fully revised edition. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014

²³ Troper, Harold Martin. "The Creek-Negroes of Oklahoma and Canadian Immigration, 1909-11." *The Canadian Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1972): 272-88.

²⁴ *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, Volume I - Population* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1924) 253.

²⁵ Parliament of Canada, *Parlinfo: Parliamentarians*, https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/People/parliamentarians.

elections, and were treated in law as children who could not sign contracts or leave their reserves without permission. In 1920, the federal government was actively organizing their cultural genocide by making attendance of their children in residential schools compulsory.²⁶ Chinese, Japanese and South Asians could not vote in British Columbia, the province where their communities were the largest. Chinese were also barred from voting in Saskatchewan.²⁷ The speeches of political leaders, articles in the popular press, and popular novels built on the larger Yellow Peril discourses that ran throughout the western world to characterize the Chinese in Canada and other Asians not only as foreigners who did not belong, but as people who threatened white dominance.²⁸ Government-approved public-school textbooks taught that Chinese and Japanese people in Canada were “visitors” while immigrants from Europe were “New Canadians.”²⁹ Textbooks also introduced young people to the racist pseudo-science that established a hierarchy of racial groups, each with their different mental characteristics, in which whites were the most superior. I have argued that questioning these teachings would have been like questioning that the earth rotated around the sun.³⁰

In this context, even though Chinese and Japanese immigration was already controlled and the size of their populations in no ways threatened Anglo-European dominance, major “respectable” organizations increasingly called for the complete exclusion of “Orientals,” a term that referred to all East Asians. For example, in 1921, the Asiatic Exclusion Committee of the Victoria, BC, Chamber of Commerce called for the end of all Chinese and Japanese immigration, for blocking both groups from owning land, and proposed the racial segregation of Chinese children in the public schools.³¹ In 1922, during a debate in the House of Commons over “Oriental Immigration” resolutions calling for exclusion were introduced from the British Columbia legislature and from prominent national associations including the Retail Merchants Association of Canada, the Great War Veterans Association, and the Trades and Labour Council of Canada (an umbrella trade union organization). The last two organizations also called for blocking Chinese and Japanese from owning land (*Commons Debates*, May 8, 1923, pp. 1511-1514). N.B., since at the time agriculture was Canada’s largest industry, call for blocking the Chinese from owning land were similar to blocking them from controlled resources today.

²⁶ *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Vancouver, British Columbia: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

²⁷ Elections Canada. *A History of the Vote in Canada*. Third edition. (Ottawa: Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, 2021).

https://www.elections.ca/res/his/WEB_EC%2091135%20History%20of%20the%20Vote_Third%20edition_EN.pdf.

²⁸ E.G., John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats (eds.), *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (London: Verso, 2014).

²⁹ E.G., D. J. Dickie, *All about Canada for little folk, Dent’s Canadian history readers, book one* (Toronto: Dent and Sons, 1924).

³⁰ Timothy J. Stanley, “White Supremacy and the Rhetoric of Educational Indoctrination: A Canadian Case Study,” in *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism*, edited by J. A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 144-62 and Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*, 96-114.

³¹ See, “Aim Resolutions against Orientals,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, November 21, 1921, 3.

During the 1922 debate some members of parliament went so far as to characterize Asian immigrants as “invaders.” According to the MP from New Westminster William Garland McQuarrie, “The Orientals have invaded the province of Alberta where they own or control many hotels, restaurants and laundries (*Commons Debates*, May 8, 1922, 1513)”. Alfred Stork of Skeena, echoed his comments, warning that “the oriental problem” needed to be settled “while the white population is still in possession of the province of British Columbia” (*Commons Debates*, May 8, 1922, p. 1517). Calling Chinese and Japanese immigrants “an invading army”, the MP for the Yukon, George Black, claimed,

The invaders are consolidating their position in British Columbia; they have made their way into Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the advance guard is right here now in Ottawa making its presence felt.

He even warned that soon Canadians would be battling these invaders for their existence (*Commons Debates*, May 8, 1922, p. 1521).

These comments were not just hyperbolic rhetoric; by positioning the Chinese and other Asians as invaders, these MPs were positioning themselves as the people who naturally and properly belonged in the country. In so doing they were hiding the fact that they themselves were the invaders of Indigenous lands. George Black, who was born in Ontario, invaded the Yukon along with thousands of others during the 1898 Klondike gold rush when the area was only nominally under Canadian control.³² Canada only signed treaties with the Indigenous nations of the Yukon in 1921. McQuarrie and Stork were both born in Ontario as well, the latter even before BC entered Confederation. McQuarrie grew up in New Westminster, BC, when the area was still overwhelmingly Indigenous.³³ Similarly, by claiming that the Chinese were foreigners who did not belong, John A Macdonald had earlier positioned people from Europe like himself as those who did belong in Canada. Positioning Chinese people as threatening foreigners, naturalizes the presence as “native” of those doing the positioning. Thus, the underlying grammar of racist exclusion became that whites belong, Indigenous people are displaced, others are interlopers, and the land, resources, and political system are the monopoly of the former.

In 1923, the federal government enacted a new *Chinese Immigration Act*, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act. Until its repeal in 1947, this act in practice banned the immigration of people of “Chinese origins or descent.”³⁴ Between 1923 and 1947 only 44 Chinese people were admitted as immigrants to Canada, while 1.25 million Europeans were.³⁵ The act further required that all Chinese in Canada, including the Canadian-born, register with the government. Their registration certificates were then subject to inspection at any time without notice. Those who failed to register or to

³² Hall Guest, “George Black,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2008), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/george-black>.

³³ Hector Willoughby Charlesworth, *A Cyclopædia of Canadian Biography: Brief Biographies of Persons Distinguished in the Professional, Military and Political Life, and the Commerce and Industry of Canada, in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Hunter-Rose Company, 1919).

³⁴ Canada, *Chinese Immigration Act* (1923), s.2, e.

³⁵ Catherine Clement, *Paper Trail to the Chinese Exclusion Act* [Exhibition] (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Museum, 2023).

produce a certificate of registration on request faced fines and imprisonment and, in the case of non-citizens, deportation. The Chinese are the only group in Canadian history subjected to this kind of regulation and control.³⁶

Following the Second World War, most of this legalized racism was dismantled. The Chinese Immigration Act was repealed in 1947 and voting rights were extended to the Chinese and other Asians in the same era. However, racial quotas continued to limit Chinese immigration until 1967 when they were replaced by the racially neutral points system. According to the 1951 census, the Chinese population had fallen to less than 0.2% of the overall population.³⁷ Thus, people and things Chinese in Canada had truly come to be unusual exceptions to the rule of European dominance.

Chinese Canadian State Formation

In the face of their exclusion, Chinese Canadians developed their own institutions to manage their affairs. For example, in the 1870s. Victoria-based merchants collectively hired lawyers to fight discriminatory legislation in the courts, successfully overturning a poll tax on the Chinese only. Such banding together across differences helped to develop a shared identity as Chinese.³⁸

In 1884 the leading merchants of Victoria wrote to the Qing consul general in San Francisco requesting assistance in establishing a *Zhonghua Huiguan* or the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) as it was known in English.³⁹ The CCBA functioned as kind of local government for the Chinese. It sanctioned criminals, suppressed prostitution, organized communal self-defense, and supported those in conflict with Canadian authorities. It also witnessed contracts, mediated disputes, and organized collective social services such as welfare, hospitals, and returning the bones of those who died to their place of origins in China.⁴⁰ In 1899, it even opened a tuition-free school for Chinese children, which was later re-organized as the Chinese Public School, offering an official curriculum approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education and inspected by Chinese officials.⁴¹ Starting in the 1890s, Chinese Benevolent Associations (CBAs) began to be organized in other cities. The Vancouver CBA organized a general strike of the Chinese workers in the city after the 1907 riot, which forced the Canadian government to appoint a royal commission to settle the damages.

³⁶ Timothy J. Stanley, "The *Chinese Immigration [Exclusion] Act, 1923* and the Structure of Anti-Chinese Racism in Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, in press. During the First and Second World War, so-called "enemy aliens" had to register with the government. In 1941 before Canada's entry into the war against Japan, Japanese Canadians "voluntarily" registered with the government to prove that there was no substantial illegal Japanese immigration.

³⁷ Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics. *Ninth Census of Canada, 1951. Volume 1. Population: General Characteristics* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1953), 31-1 to 32-2.

³⁸ *From China to Canada*, 30-41.

³⁹ For the nineteenth century meanings of *Huaren*, see "Patterns of Chinese Migration in Historical Perspective," in Wang Gungwu, *China and the Overseas Chinese* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ David Chuen-yan Lai, "The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria: Its Origins and Functions," *BC Studies* 15 (Autumn 1972): 53-67.

⁴¹ Timothy J. Stanley, "Schooling, White Supremacy and the Formation of a Chinese Merchant Public in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, 107 (1995): 3-27.

Exclusion led to the development of a collective identity as Chinese people linked to China based on the belief that a strong and modern China would be able to protect the Chinese in Canada. In Victoria in 1899, the Confucian reformer Kang Youwei, the leader of the abortive Hundred Days Reform in China, brought together the leading merchants of Vancouver and Victoria to create the Bao Huang Hui, known in English as the Chinese Empire Reform Association. The association cut across differences of place of origin, ethnicity, and social class, and by 1903 had a world-wide membership of over 100,000, becoming the first mass political party in China's history.⁴² As the merchants' 1899 petition to the Empress Dowager CiXi explained, China's weakness produced a general contempt towards China and its peoples, resulting in the abrogation of Chinese sovereignty within China and racism against those living overseas. They claimed that as Chinese merchant they continually faced "the belittling insults of foreigners," but with the reform of the government in China, they would no longer suffer such humiliation.⁴³ Thus, their development of Chinese nationalist impulses was directly tied to the racist exclusion they experienced in Canada. In the early twentieth century, Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Party was able to tap into similar sentiments to build support for overthrowing the Qing. In January 1911, on his third trip to Canada, Sun addressed several crowds of up to three thousand people at a time at rallies in Vancouver. In the upsurge of revolutionary fervor that ensued, the rival Chee Kong Tong (CKT) even mortgaged its Victoria headquarters to support Sun.⁴⁴ In the 1920s through 1960s, the dominant political organizations in Chinese Canadian communities were Sun's Kuomintang (KMT) and the CKT (also known as the Chinese Freemasons), both groups with links to China. As is the case with many expatriate communities around the world, so-called Overseas Chinese in Canada were expected to vote in the few elections that were held in China. Like the United States, China as far back as the Qing dynasty has never recognized dual citizenship.

A collective identity as Chinese facilitated the fight against racism in Canada. For example, in 1922, the Chinese Canadian Club, an organization of the locally-born Chinese that invented the term "Chinese Canadian," successfully organized a year-long boycott of Victoria's public schools after the local school board sought to racially segregate Chinese children. The students' strike as it was called was widely supported in the community, bringing together rival associations and political parties, as well as gaining support from the city's Chinese workers, few of whom had children in the schools.⁴⁵ In 1923, the Victoria CCBA organized across Canada opposition to the Exclusion Act. It commissioned a prominent lawyer to critique the act, while its April 12 circular on the legislation exposed how disastrous the act was for the Chinese in Canada. It wrote to the CBAs in other cities, which quickly led to an unprecedented level of mobilization across the country. The lobbying of Chinese delegates even got the Senate to abandon some of the act's worst provisions affecting the Chinese already in

⁴² Timothy J. Stanley, "'Chinamen, wherever we go': Chinese Nationalism and Guangdong Merchants in British Columbia, 1871-1911," *Canadian Historical Review*, 77, 4 (1996): 475-503.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 484-5.

⁴⁴ *From China to Canada*, 102-3.

⁴⁵ Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*.

Canada.⁴⁶ After the Second World War, Kew Dock Yip, the first Chinese Canadian to become a lawyer, along with Chinese Canadian war veterans and supported by other veterans and church groups, successfully lobbied for the ending of race-based voting systems.

Sinophobia

Throughout this era, anti-Chinese discourse focused more on the alleged threat of Chinese immigrants than it did on the actions of the Chinese government. Popular discourse centred on the idea that Chinese workers competed unfairly with white workers because they could work for less because they did not have families that they had to support (in fact, they were supporting families in China who could not come to Canada). Furthermore, as we have seen, the Chinese were represented to be so culturally and even biologically different that they could not be assimilated to Canadian ways (something that was simply untrue in the case of the Canadian-born who were completely assimilated). Chinese men were portrayed as threatening young white women, which led several provinces to ban Chinese restaurants from employing white and Indigenous women and which also led to the criminal prosecution of some Chinese men.⁴⁷ The Chinese were accused of practicing white slavery. Women of my generation who grew up in Vancouver remember being warned against going into the basements of Chinatown stores where they would assuredly be kidnapped, a trope popularized in the sensational 1935 film *The Secrets of Chinatown*, which claimed to present the truth about Vancouver's Chinatown. Finally, that those Chinese already in Canada were the vanguard of an invasion by millions became a trope of popular fiction as shown in the serialized novel *The Writing on the Wall*, published in the Vancouver Sun in the early 1920s and an earlier serialization of a similar story in *British Columbia Magazine* during the 1910s.⁴⁸

In this context, there was relatively little discussion of any threats coming from the Chinese government. For much of the twentieth century China was considered to be a friendly, even an allied country. During the First World War, after China entered the war on the side of Great Britain, the Canadian government acted on the advice of the northern warlord government in Beijing, which it officially recognized, to ban Sun Yat-sen's rival KMT under the War Measures Act. During the Second World War, Canada and China were once again allies.

However, China was generally considered to be such a weak country that it could not be a threat, but instead needed Canadian aid. For example, during the 1922 debate on "Oriental Immigration," Prime Minister Mackenzie King even argued that Chinese university students needed to be admissible to Canada as part of the country's Christian duty to help lift China out of barbarism.

⁴⁶ Stanley, "The Chinese Immigration [Exclusion] Act, 1923.

⁴⁷ Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: Published for the Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History by University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁴⁸ Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*.

Still, racist exclusion led to the banning of Chinese judicial processes supposedly taking place in Canada. Thus, while allowing for the lawful arbitration of disputes, the *Chinese Immigration Act (1923)* made participation in “any sort of court or tribunal composed of Chinese persons” a criminal offence.⁴⁹ This subjected groups like the CCBA to government surveillance.

The idea that China presents a government-organized threat only emerged after the Communist takeover. This first occurred during the Korean War when China and Canada fought on opposing sides. During the “Red Scare” of the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese Canadians were targeted as alleged spies and agents of the Chinese Communist Party. Ironically, during this era, any foreign influence here had come from the Taiwanese-based KMT that controlled most CBAs in Canada.

During the 1950-1970s, China was isolated from much of the world. There were no direct flights from Canada to China until the late 1970s, for example. Travel between the countries was unusual and expensive. There was at most a handful of western journalists in China and reporting on Chinese affairs was rare and often uninformed. Indeed, when I first arrived in Beijing in 1976, there were few foreigners in the country other than diplomats and their families, about 300 foreign experts employed by the Chinese government, and several thousand foreign students almost entirely from Third World countries. China then was a completely closed society, cut off from the western world.

It is only as China has emerged as a major economic power with advanced technological and growing military capabilities that Sinophobia has taken full force. We can see this in much public discourse in which it is assumed that China is a monolith and that all the actions of Chinese authorities are evil. I wish to be clear here. I am under no illusions that the final purpose of the Chinese Communist Party is anything other than preserving its own power at whatever costs and, furthermore, that many policies of the Chinese government such as its potential cultural genocide in Xinjiang are unconscionable, but I also note that China is a complicated place.⁵⁰ The Chinese Communist Party alone has over 90 million members. I.E., it is an organization that is almost three times the size of Canada’s total population, and contrary to the wishes of President Xi, I know from my own discussions with people in China that not everyone agrees with what Beijing is doing. I also know that most people in China, like people in Canada, including the vast majority of Chinese Canadians, are apolitical, supporting the status quo only insofar as they appear to benefit from it. In China’s case, popular support of the current regime is also based on the fact that in the last 30 years, the Chinese government under the leadership of the CCP has pulled 600 million people out of poverty, something that no other political system has ever done. Indeed, many

⁴⁹ *Bill C-45, An Act Respecting Chinese Immigration 1923*, s. 25, *Bill C-45. An act respecting Chinese Immigration.* (1923). 1st Reading March 2, 1923, 14th Parliament, 2nd session. *House of Commons Bills, 14th Parliament, 2nd Session: 2-82*, Parliamentary Historical Resources https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.bills_HOC_1402_1/605.

⁵⁰ David Brophy, *China Panic: Australia’s Alternative to Paranoia and Pandering* (Carlton, VIC: La Trobe University Press in conjunction with Black Inc., 2021) provides an insightful discussion of similar concerns in an Australian context. Without pulling any punches on the nature of Chinese genocide in Xinjiang, he identifies the basis for a realist approach to relations with China.

Chinese immigrants have been able to come to Canada only because these reforms led them to have the necessary education and financial resources. China's complexity, its economic and technological strength, the size of its population, mean that whatever else the government of China may be doing, it is not going to go away.

Consequences: Chinese Canadians

To fully understand how racisms act to structure people's experiences of the world and their interactions with others, we need to first consider their effects on the people they exclude. This becomes particular evident with the *Chinese Immigration [Exclusion] Act of 1923*

The act was a disaster for the Chinese in Canada. Altogether 55,982 people registered under the act. Of these 87% were adult men, most of whom had families in China.⁵¹ The act condemned these men to years of loneliness and isolation, and the impossibility of bringing their family members over from China. Typical was Yun Ho Chang of Vancouver who arrived in Canada in 1908 paying the \$500 head tax. He returned to China in 1911 where he married, spending three months with his wife who was not able to come to Canada until 1949. As he recalled, "I went back several times ... but I couldn't bring her over without paying the \$500 head tax which all Chinese had to pay. And then after 1923 she wasn't allowed to come."⁵²

The 44 Chinese immigrants allowed into Canada between 1923 and 1947 were always admitted under special circumstances. For example, the Poy family was allowed temporary residence in 1942 when they were repatriated on a Red Cross ship from Japanese-occupied Hong Kong. They were only admitted because the father, William, was an Australian-born British subject who had worked for the Canadian Trade Commission in Hong Kong, and in the wartime conditions their repatriation to Australia was impossible. Only the act's repeal prevented their deportation. Their two-year-old daughter Adrienne, better known today under her professional name as Adrienne Clarkson, eventually became the 24th Governor General of Canada.⁵³

The registration requirement subjected Chinese Canadians, including the Canadian born, to government surveillance and inspection. This permanently branded them as foreigners who did not belong, a feeling that continued even after the act's repeal. A measure of this is that my mother, Ann Stanley, Fong Yuk-Hsiu, who was born in Montreal, had to register under the act at the age of eight. Even though she lived to the age of 100, she kept her registration certificate with her for her entire life, along with those of sisters after they died.

⁵¹ Clement, *Paper Trail*.

⁵² "Yun Ho Chang," in *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage Series*, VIII, 1 and 2, edited and compiled by Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter (Victoria: Minister of Provincial Secretary and Government Services, Provincial Archives, 1979), 40.

⁵³ Eric Koch, "Adrienne Clarkson," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2010), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/adrienne-louise-clarkson>.

The act produced a steep decline in Chinese Canadian communities. The 1951 census shows a Chinese population of less than 36,000, a mere 0.2% of the total population.⁵⁴ The lack of Chinese presence had several consequences. Historically the Canadian-born Chinese population has been tiny. However, as we have seen in the case of the Chinese Canadian Club, the locally born Chinese were key fighters against racist exclusions. For example, Won Alexander Cumyow, the first Chinese Canadian, was born at Fort Harrison, BC in 1861, ten years before the territory became part of Canada. His parents were storekeepers who had Chinese, Indigenous, and white customers. He consequently grew up speaking his parent's Hakka, several dialects of Cantonese, as well as English and Chinook, the Indigenous trade language. Educated in the BC public schools, he attended school in New Westminster, BC with Richard McBride the first BC-born provincial premier. A member of the Anglican Church, he was blocked from voting because of his race. Trained as a lawyer he could not practice law because he was not on the voters' list. In 1884, he was one of the founders of the CCBA and in 1899 of the Chinese Empire Reform Association, serving as the English language secretary of both organizations. In 1923, he was the official Chinese and Chinook interpreter for the Vancouver Police Department, but still had to register under the Exclusion Act. Cumyow was finally able to vote in the 1949 federal election. He had had to wait until he was 88 years old to enjoy the unrestricted right to vote.⁵⁵

Because of the resistance of the Chinese and of members of other groups, the legislated racism of the past has largely disappeared in Canada, but their marginalization continues as they have repeatedly been positioned as newcomers whose presence is threatening, as those who don't belong, or as those whose presence needs explanation. In 1979, the CTV television network's news journal *W-5* published a report that alleged the "foreign" students were taking spaces away from "Canadians" at universities. Every time it mentioned "foreigners" it showed Chinese Canadians, most of whom were born in Canada. Chinese communities across Canada mobilized to force the network to retract the report and apologize.⁵⁶ In 1999, a major public outcry over Chinese invaders again arose in BC when four ships carrying undocumented migrants landed on the BC coast. For example, Trevor Lautens, a columnist for the *Vancouver Province* newspaper, claimed that the boat people as they were called were a small chapter in the larger story of BC "becoming an economic, cultural, and finally political dependency of Asia – a Pacific Columbia likely dominated by China." At stake was what he called "national sovereignty", saying "Nope, this isn't 'yellow peril' stuff. It's as deadpan as a history of Canada describing the invasion of Indian lands by Europeans."⁵⁷ In the face of the public outcry, the Canadian government used extraordinary means to deport these migrants.⁵⁸ In 2011, a columnist for a national news magazine resurrected nineteenth-century yellow peril discourses about how

⁵⁴ Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. 1953. *Ninth Census of Canada, 1951. Volume 1. Population: General Characteristics*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.

⁵⁵ Clayton Ma, "Won Alexander Cumyow," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2020).
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/won-alexander-cumyow>.

⁵⁶ Anthony B. Chan, *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983).

⁵⁷ Trevor Lautens, "China stakes out its future in a wobbly-kneed Canada," *The Vancouver Sun* (Sept. 4, 1999), 2.

⁵⁸ Alison Mountz, *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Chinese and other Asians were unfair competition for whites by alleging that “white students” were deliberately not applying to Toronto universities, because their student bodies were “too Asian.” Again, Chinese and other communities across the country mobilized to force an apology.⁵⁹

More recently, the Covid 19 pandemic produced an upsurge in anti-Chinese racism as Chinese Canadians were scapegoated for what then United States president Donald Trump called “the China virus.” By May 2020, fifty percent of Chinese Canadians surveyed reported being called names or insulted, 43% had been threatened or intimidated, and 60% reported having changed their habits for fear of being harassed or assaulted.⁶⁰ Extrapolating the latter figure to the total population of Chinese in Canada makes for a population of million people, which on a Canadian scale is the size of its fourth-largest city, Ottawa. This Covid-related racism intensified as the pandemic continued.⁶¹ Revealingly, in one of the first recorded Covid-related racist attacks, an Indigenous woman in Vancouver was told to “Go Back to Asia!” while being assaulted in Vancouver after she sneezed in public.⁶² Apparently, her attacker not only mistook the woman for being Chinese, he also thought that he had the right to control who could walk down the street.

This Covid-related racism came on top of the existing everyday racism that many Chinese Canadians report. For example, Daniel Quan-Watson, the former deputy minister of the federal Department of Indigenous Services, pointed to this reality in an open letter that he wrote in response to the claims that there is no systemic racism in Canada. He himself has experienced anti-Chinese racism more than 10,000 times in his life.⁶³ As a half-Chinese-half-European person who, unlike me, does not pass for white, he has been called the C-word thousands of times. Even though he was born in Canada, he has been asked what country he is from or told that he speaks English well (his parental language) hundreds of times. He has repeatedly been mistaken for hotel bell boys. Without checking his passport, a Canadian Border Services officer told him that he could not use the Canadians-only line at the airport. An airline employee insisted that he needed a visa to return to Canada despite being a Canadian citizen and bearing a diplomatic passport that never requires a visa. While he was a federal assistant deputy minister walking in front of his office during a break, a police officer stopped him and demanded to know, “What the %\$! did I think I was doing?” His children face racism in their schools and despite his admitted privilege as one of the most powerful

⁵⁹ Jeet Heer, Michael C.K. Ma, Davina Bhandar and RJ Gilmour (eds.), *“Too Asian?” Racism, Privilege, and Post-Secondary Education* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012).

⁶⁰ Angus Reid Institute, “Blame, Bullying and Disrespect: Chinese Canadians Reveal their Experiences with Racism during COVID-19.” July 22, 2020, <https://angusreid.org/racism-chinese-canadians-covid19/>.

⁶¹ Chinese Canadian National Council, Toronto Chapter and Project 1907 *Anti-Asian Racism Across Canada – 2 Years into the COVID-19 Pandemic*. (Toronto: Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice, 1922), https://ccncsj.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Anti-Asian-Racism-Across-Canada-Two-Years-Into-The-Pandemic_March-2022.pdf.

⁶² Stephanie Ip, “Indigenous Woman Mistaken for Asian, Punched after Sneezing,” *Vancouver Sun*, 18 May 2020, <https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/indigenous-woman-mistaken-for-asian-punched-after-sneezing/>.

⁶³ See Daniel Quan Watson in Dan Donovan, “A Learning Moment for Erin O’Toole and Rex Murphy on Racism in Canada,” *Ottawa Life Magazine*, December 17, 2020. <https://www.ottawalife.com/article/an-answer-to-rex-murphys-questions-on-racism-in-canada?c=1>.

people in the country, he still faces the daily possibility of racist assault whenever he leaves his office.⁶⁴

Today, many Chinese Canadian academic report a chilly climate as their links to Chinese institutions, links that are normal in many sciences, have come under suspicion CSIS now has its own officials located in universities reviewing grant applications, even though it is unclear what these agents understand of how research is conducted. Among other things, this also creates the danger of cutting Canada off from what has become often cutting-edge research in China on subjects like climate change.

Consequences: All Canadians

A significant factor in the racisms of the kind reported by Chinese Canadians is that their bodies are read in racializing ways against a cultural landscape that is both the product of European settler colonialism and that hides it by normalizing the presence of people of European origin by excluding the representation of others.⁶⁵ Paralleling the ways gender shapes the experience of sexualized violence, racialization shapes how people experience a specific geography. A significant number of people who are racialized as East Asian or Chinese face the ever-present potential of being assaulted by those who claim that they do not belong.⁶⁶ Those who have not directly experienced this violence still face its potential occurrence. Even if they choose to leave the country because of racism, they are still living its effects. That there is nothing that the people being targeted by this racism can do to escape its consequences is not a coincidence; inescapability is part of what makes something racist.⁶⁷

By the cultural landscape, I mean the material constructions that surround us coupled with their signification through cultural representations. These systems include signs, symbols, devices, languages, even the way buildings are designed, as well as the narratives that circulate in popular culture, which appear to explain the presence of these things and of those who “naturally” belong. Those of us in the dominant group encounter these landscapes much as our ancestors encountered the natural world, as givens, material arrangements that we need to act upon but cannot fundamentally change on our own. This is despite knowing that everything around us is a human construct. For example, travelling from my home to my university, I follow a network of roads that I take for granted as if they are natural artifacts that have always been there;

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, 4 (2006): 387-409; Puwar, *Space Invaders*; Timothy J. Stanley, “The Banality of Colonialism: Encountering Artifacts of Genocide and White Supremacy in Vancouver Today,” in *Diversity and Multiculturalism: A Reader*, ed. Shirley Steinberg (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 143-59.

⁶⁶ E.G., Statistics Canada, “Perceptions of Personal Safety among Population Groups Designated as Visible Minorities in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic,” July 8, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00046-eng.htm>.

⁶⁷ For example, religious antisemitism is escapable at least in theory by conversion. In racist antisemitism the convert remains a Jew. Indeed, under racism, being Jewish then has nothing to do with a person’s actual religious or ethnic practices. Similarly, skin colour racisms have little to do with people’s actual ancestry and everything to do with how other people read their bodies.

that is until I must grumpily detour due to road construction. But I also encounter this landscape with a culturally determined repertoire of knowledge, understandings, tools, and devices that enable me to navigate it. In Ottawa, where I live, the street signs are in English and in French, i.e., in my first and second languages that years of government-controlled schooling taught me to read. Except for a handful of signs in Anishinabe, only one of which is an official street sign, English and French signage excludes the language that was spoken on this territory for millennia. Government-controlled schooling, including the residential and day schools responsible for the cultural genocide of Indigenous people, have made English and French dominant in these spaces, even though they have come from the other side of the world. I think of none of this when I use one of these languages to order my morning coffee. The street names celebrate historical figures about whom I have also been taught, almost without exceptions Europeans and their Canadian-born descendants—Laurier, Wellington, Georges-Étienne Cartier. The designs of the buildings have intentional continuities with Europe, rather than with the Algonquin Anishinabeg or with China. Meanwhile the things that fill this space—the university, the system of laws that govern it, the “universal” traffic signs, the Arabic letters that I read as numerals, and perhaps most importantly the system of property that defines every space (private, public, open, closed)—are also of European origins. The historical narratives that I learned naturalize all of this, hiding the ethnic cleansing, genocide and white supremacist exclusions that made and continue to make this landscape.

Chinese Canadians, and those mistaken for being Chinese, are often read against these cultural landscapes as foreigners who do not belong or as newcomers whose presence needs explanation. Many Chinese Canadians report being asked where they are from and when they say “Ottawa” or “Calgary”, they are asked where they are really from, something that I am never asked. Even though I too am half Chinese/half European, my white skin, unlike that of Quan-Watson’s, is read against this landscape as unproblematically belonging; I am therefore not stopped by police demanding to know what I am doing. I do not experience “somatic dissonance”, what the British feminist scholar Nirmal Puwar calls the feeling that arises from not seeing yourself reflected back in the surrounding space.⁶⁸ I do not read myself nor am I read as a “space invader,” even though my presence here and everything that surrounds me is the product of invasion. As the Australian theorist of settler colonialism Patrick Wolfe famously stated, “settler colonizers come to stay -- invasion is a structure not an event.”⁶⁹ This structure has a history that can be known, but first we need to recognize that the structure exists.

The absence of people and things Chinese from this structure, except for the signs on the occasional Chinese restaurant, grocery store, or in the heritage districts of Chinatowns arises for several reasons. In part, it has to do with the long history of Sinophobia and yellow peril discourses in the western world, which have displaced genuine knowledge of people and things Chinese. These discourses have recently gained increased emphasis in Canada due to the alleged illicit foreign influence in

⁶⁸ Puwar, *Space Invaders*.

⁶⁹ Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 388.

Canadian affairs of the Chinese government. Not surprisingly, it is also the product of the numerical dominance of people of European origins. It is also a product of the demographics of Chinese Canadian communities. According to the 2021 census, there are 1.7 million self-identified Chinese people in Canada, of whom 70% are first generation immigrants. As the origins of Chinese immigrants to Canada has shifted over the years from the Cantonese- and Hakka-speaking immigrants of the nineteenth century to the Cantonese-speakers from Hong Kong during the 1980s and the Mandarin-speakers from north China during the 1990s, Chinese Canadian communities have also changed, and many are composed of seeming newcomers. By contrast only 3.7% of the total Chinese Canadian population (approximately 60,000 people) are third generation or more while 56% of the overall population, more than 20 million people, are third generation or more.⁷⁰ Among other things, this means that when most Canadians encounter Chinese Canadians, it is most likely to be with people who are “newcomers,” even though many first-generation immigrants have been in the country longer than people born in Canada.

By contrast, the same cultural landscapes that exclude people of Chinese origins, and indeed the members of other racialized groups as well as Indigenous people teach people of European, especially native Anglophones and Francophones depending in where they are in the country, that they naturally and unproblematically belong. Given the weight of these landscapes in our everyday lives, it is not people’s fault if their readings of who belongs and who does not are racist. Indeed, in the absence of a thorough understanding of the processes of racist exclusion that produced these landscapes in the first place, how could their readings be otherwise?

Considering the foregoing, anti-Chinese racism in Canada is not the result of the individual prejudices, ignorance, or even the bad intentions of damaged people. While some people certainly are prejudiced, ignorant, or badly intentioned, what licenses them to put their racism into effect are larger structures of settler colonialism and exclusion that made the country, its institutions, and the cultural landscapes that its people inhabit. Because of its history of exclusion, Chinese Canadian communities are at once among the oldest and youngest in Canada. Few Canadian institutions, including its security services consequently have deep roots with the many different Chinese communities in Canada. Indeed, in many ways, there is no such thing as a single Chinese Canadian community. People who self-identify as Chinese speak different languages, have ancestors who came to the country at different times, have highly developed deep links with China or have none at all, support the Chinese Communist Party or are its fierce opponents, and so forth. Understanding this complexity in Canada, let alone its links to the Chinese government, requires a significant knowledge-making capacity and staffing that reflects the full diversity of Chinese Canadian communities.

⁷⁰ StatCan Plus, “Chinese New Year and quality of life among Chinese in Canada,” (. (2023, January 24). <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/2816-chinese-new-year-and-quality-life-among-chinese-canada>.

Underdevelopment of Knowledge-Making Capacity

Given this history of racist exclusion, it is not surprising that the capacity of Canadian institutions, including universities and government agencies, to make knowledge of China is highly underdeveloped. My university, for example, which is one of the top ten research universities of Canada, has difficulty maintaining its Chinese language programs. You cannot study the history of China there, let alone do a PhD in it. The exchange program that I participated in is no longer able to recruit the twenty-five Canadian participants per year that it allows. The number of people in government, in the security services, and in other leading Canadian institutions who read Chinese fluently are probably no more than a few dozen, despite the fact that Chinese languages have been spoken and written in Canada for 166 years. Similarly, the number of people who understand the differences between Beijing and Xian, Shandong and Yunnan, let alone Tibet and Xinjiang are even fewer. Until recently, this lack of understanding and engagement with Chinese realities also produced a certain naivety in Canadian policies with respect to China. It should come as no surprise that China, like very other great power, has its own interests, which at times may conflict with those of Canada.

In this context, I wonder whether much of the concern about Chinese interference in elections reflects the failure of candidates to have Chinese social media strategies. We know that the Chinese blogosphere is fiercely nationalistic, which means that, not surprisingly, people seen as anti-China are targeted. And while the Chinese government controls much social media in China, it does not automatically control it all. Indeed, at times Chinese authorities have been concerned by the ultranationalism of some blog postings. Still, it seems to me that having a WeChat strategy to counter misinformation would be wise for any candidate in a riding with a significant Chinese Canadian population. However, this too requires a knowledge-making capacity; people who are literate in Chinese and in Chinese social media.

This lack of knowledge about China in depth and of the complex links between many Chinese Canadians and people and things Chinese I fear may also be shaping at least some of the actions of Canadian security services.

Final Thoughts

1. Finally, China is today a world power. It will not go away. For good or for evil, Canadians will remain tied to it for years to come. Canadians need to figure out how to live with it, which means we need to move beyond racist exclusions and find ways of creating genuine knowledge of people and things Chinese in China and in Canada.
2. The historical exclusion of people racialized as Chinese continues to shape the cultural landscapes and taken-for-granted understandings of Canadians. When read against the landscapes, it can appear that Chinese people do not belong in Canada the same way that people of European origins do. This social structure of exclusion has profound consequences both on how members of the dominant

group relate to people of Chinese origins and how they understand people and things Chinese. Because of these exclusions, Chinese Canadians and the knowledge that they bring are under-represented in Canadian institutions, including its security services. This has serious consequences in Canada's ability to constructively identify, engage and even counter, potential illicit actions by the Chinese government.

3. Effective antiracism programs that make visible this structure of exclusion are essential to properly identifying real acts of untoward foreign interference. Otherwise, there is a great danger that Sinophobia and racialized understandings will result in a failure to engage with the full complexity of Chinese Canadians and their experiences, which will in turn lead to scapegoating and further exclusion.
4. There are disturbing parallels between contemporary discourses about the China threat and historic ones. Concerns about unfair Chinese competition has moved from concerns about Chinese workers in Canada to Chinese workers in China. Concerns about Chinese being not assimilable have morphed into concerns that they are agents or dupes of the Chinese Community Party. Concerns about Chinese tribunals have transformed into concerns about supposed Chinese police stations. Concerns about the Chinese being inscrutable aliens have led to China being positioned as an existential threat. The continuity of these discourses suggests that a larger social structure at work that organizes our knowledge and understandings; the terms may have changed, but the underlying grammar has not. Separating out reality from the fictions generated by the structure requires first being aware that it exists and then engaging with the meanings of Chinese Canadians from many different backgrounds to make this structure visible. Only then will it be possible to separate truth from fiction.
5. Effective antiracism programs in Canadian institutions including its security services need to move beyond victim blaming and must create a new and more developed understanding of what racisms are and how they affect all of us. For example, it is neither helpful nor particularly true to say that all white people and only white people are racist. Many are also antiracist. It is true however that the social structures of racist exclusions are built so deeply into the everyday lives of all Canadians that we are all implicated in the important task of ending them.