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# THE ASIANADIAN

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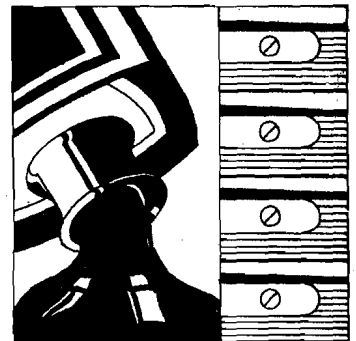
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# Editorial



The history of Canadian immigration policy towards Asians has been beset by contradictions. Canada has needed cheap Asian labour, but has been apprehensive about the people who embodied the labour. In the late 19th century and early twentieth century the mine owners and railway magnates sent agents to recruit labour in Japan and China. But once in Canada, these workers were denied their basic rights and were subject to oppressive measures.

The essential objectives of all these practices was to ensure that Asians remained mere providers of needed cheap labour and were not to be confused with human beings. The right of settlement, to form permanent communities within Canada did not seem to have been contemplated by Canadian society when the Asians were admitted into Canada. Therefore, those who insisted on making Canada their home were to be set apart, treated differently -- that seemed to be the motive of the laws enacted by the government. In spite of these disabilities many Asian communities flourished -- to the seeming discomfiture of many in Canada.

Before the Second World War few communities in Canada were as well established as the Japanese of British Co-

lumbia. And yet within weeks of the bombing of Pearl Harbour they found themselves herded in concentration camps deprived of all their property for alleged complicity with Japan. Perhaps the most compelling part of these sorry episode is that only Japanese Canadians were favoured with this treatment -- other immigrant groups such as Canadians or German Canadians were not so honoured.

And now over thirty years later, the Japanese community is looking back on this event in its history. Shin Imai in his article "The Silence Broken -- Japanese Canadians and Redress" in this issue shows how the community is trying to come to term with itself and with the larger Canadian society.

As Shin Imai suggests several ideas are being discussed by various elements in the community. To arrive at a consensus with which to approach the Canadian government for a redress will be a time consuming process. For all Canadians, but particularly for Asian Canadians, the resolution of this issue will be of great symbolic significance. It will among other things show how for Canadian society was evolved in the last thirty years in its acceptance of Asians.

## ASIANADIAN AIMS

- 1) To find new dignity and pride in being Asian in Canada.
- 2) To promote an understanding between Asian Canadians and other Canadians.
- 3) To speak out against those conditions, individuals and institutions perpetuating racism in Canada.
- 4) To stand up against the distort-

ions of our history in Canada, stereotypes, economic exploitations, and the general tendency towards injustice and inequality practised on minority groups.

- 5) To provide a forum for Asian Canadian writers, artists, musicians, etc.
- 6) To promote unity by bridging the gap between Asians with roots in Canada and recent immigrants.

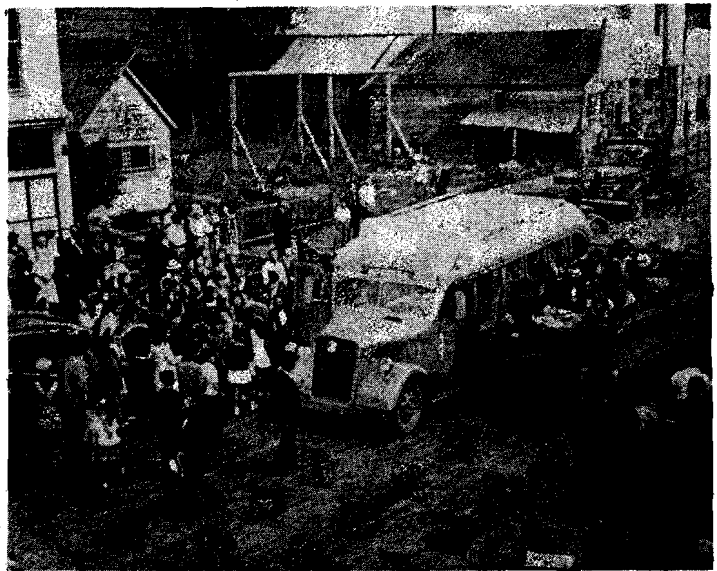
# THE SILENCE BROKEN: Japanese Canadians and Redress

SHIN IMAI

Over forty years have passed since this country declared war on Japanese Canadians. It is only in the last decade, however, that the silence around those events has been broken. Since then, books of history, poetry, and most recently, Joy Kogawa's award winning novel, *Obasan*, have appeared in print. They reveal to us the outlines of the unseen burden carried by those who endured the internment camps and carried on after the destruction of the communities.

The story begins in Japan in 1854 with American gun boats waiting in the harbour of the capital city, Yedo, for a response to their ultimatum. In 1637, a powerful shogun had sealed Japan off from foreign contact, and prohibited the exit of Japanese. So it remained while European powers and the United States continued their imperial expansion into more and more remote parts of the globe. Earlier in the nineteenth century, China was torn asunder, and now it was Japan's turn. Japan had no arms which could challenge the American firepower, and had no choice but to accede to the entry of first the Americans, then the Europeans. Japan had begun her first full-scale contacts with the outside world in over 200 years.

The first organized and significant Japanese immigration to Canada began at the turn of the century. Like the Chinese before them, they were recruited by labour agencies on behalf of large Canadian employers, such as the railroads. The Japanese were not warmly received. To-



Photos courtesy of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre Archive.

gether with other members of the "Asiatic races", the Chinese and the East Indians, they lived under a legal regime which denied them the franchise, access to many types of employment, and a host of other discriminatory measures. One law approved by the Supreme Court of Canada even prevented Asiatics from hiring white women. Employers advocated open immigration, but promoted extreme racism, using Asians freely as strikebreakers and paying them at rates 50% lower than they paid to white workers.

At a time when racial theories were no more sophisticated than Kipling's idea of the "white man's burden", it is not surprising that workers were no less racist than their employers and politicians. The solution of many unions, then, was merely the obverse of the employer's policy which was to restrict the entry of Asians.

Socialist groups had always taken a stand against racism and as the Thirties approached, the racism in the ranks of labour had subsided to the extent that the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council was able to drop its anti-Asian stand and permit a Japanese union to affiliate.

Politicians did not let the matter drop however, and they fanned the flames of racial hatred throughout the Depression. The problem of unemployment was blamed on Japanese fishermen, and the province began restricting their fishing rights. Just before the war, a riot in Vancouver raged through the streets of Japantown. With Pearl Harbour, the fate of the Japanese Canadians was sealed.

## War Declared

In Pearl Harbour, on December 7, 1941, Japanese bombs announced that Japan and the United States were at war. In British Columbia, the next day, the confiscation of 1,200 fishing boats by the federal government announced that Canada had declared war on Japanese Canadians. Both were "sneak attacks." While the Americans were surprised at the bombing of Pearl Harbour, the conflict was not unexpected. The Japanese Canadians on the other hand had no premonition of what was to happen to them. Despite half a century of intense racism, Japanese Canadians had chosen Canada as their country, and in many respects, became better Canadians than their Anglo-Canadian counterparts who remained loyal to the Queen and the Union Jack. The first generation of Japanese Canadians,

the Issei, and the second generation, the Nisei, were intent on making Canada a place that would be open to them, and were buoyed by the hope that discriminatory laws could be changed.

Because of the magnitude of discrimination, Japanese Canadians often found themselves in court. In 1903, Tomey Homma went to the Privy Council in England to demand that Japanese who were naturalized in Canada be allowed to vote.

In 1904, a man named Kanamura went to court to try to overturn a municipal policy against granting liquor licenses to Japanese. In 1908, Nakane challenged a British Columbia law barring the entry of Japanese immigrants. The list goes on. Some cases were won, and some were lost, but the message was the same. It was expressed this way by Jun Kisawa who broke a discriminatory fishing regulation on purpose to test the law in court. He told the judge,

*The reason why I am here is not to defend myself, because I am aware that I broke the law. I'm here to appeal for justice. We Japanese, like other people have immigrated to Canada and have become citizens of Canada. Some of us have been born in Canada. Canada is not only your country but also our country. We are all Canadians.*

Kisawa was fortunate, and won his case.

Because of this commitment to Canada, Japanese Canadians received a double shock in December of 1941. Not only were they as surprised at the bombing of Pearl Harbour as any other North American, they were stunned to learn that they had been found guilty as a people of complicity with the war efforts of Japan. They were stunned because there was never any assistance given to the Japanese war effort by the Japanese Canadian community. After the war, Prime Minister Mackenzie King admitted this to the

House of Commons, and we now know that the Cabinet at that time had information from the RCMP and the military that Japanese Canadians posed no security threat. The internment in the concentration camps, and the subsequent giveaway of the spoils was purely a political move, calculated to raise excitement about the war by creating an enemy at home. The Japanese Canadian community was, as Ken Adachi titled his history, "the enemy that never was."

### '... first evacuation of military-aged men ordered...'

A week after the seizure of the fishing boats, the government ordered the registration of all Japanese Canadians. In early January, the first evacuation of military-aged males was ordered and by the end of February, 1942, every Japanese Canadian was forced to leave British Columbia. They were ordered out of their homes, sometimes with only a few hours notice, and herded into temporary detention centres before being shipped out into concentration camps in the interior of British Columbia. About 21,000 people were forced out of B.C., and 75% of them were Canadian citizens.

As the evacuation proceeded, the government began selling off the property of the Japanese Canadians. Some of the property was very valuable. There were large lumber businesses, fishing operations, and real estate. Then there was the bulk of the property of small businessmen and workers earned after a lifetime of eking out a living in a hostile environment. The sales were a farce. Everyone was sure to get a bargain and everyone got a cut of the action.

Take the case of George Suzuki. He had land, a house and some chickens, all of which he esti-

mated were worth \$4,725. The estate was sold by the government for \$1,492.59. After taxes, commissions, and other charges, Suzuki ended up with \$39.32 in his hands. Or take the case of Torazu Iwasaki. He had a 640 acre property on Saltspring Island in British Columbia.

In 1942, the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property confiscated his land. It was put up for sale through the agent of the Custodian, G.C. Mouat. Mouat was also a 20% owner of Saltspring Lands Ltd., and sat on the Board of Directors of the company. Iwasaki's land was a good piece of real estate, so good, in fact, that Mouat decided to buy the land through his own company. He paid \$5,250 for the property. Iwasaki estimated that it was worth \$66,000. The money from the sale of the property was kept by the government.

Those who were in the concentration camps were forced to pay out \$100 per month from this fund to pay for their own incarceration. Those without money were required to work.



In the United States, a similar evacuation involving 110,000 Japanese Americans was taking place. But in spite of the size, and sometimes more violent nature of United States program, their measures were milder than those in Canada. There was loss of property, but no full scale liquidation, as there was in Canada. As well, the detention did not last as long as in Canada. Americans went to court immediately, and although they lost some important cases, one court challenge brought by a man called Endo was successful. The Supreme Court of the United States held that the government was not justified in detaining Japanese Americans who were classified as loyal to the United States. Before the war was over, then, most Japanese Americans were free to leave the camps.

### '... the 'enemy alien' label was removed ...'

In Canada, the end of the war was not a time for rejoicing. Some people were still in camps as late as 1948; Japanese Canadians were not given the federal vote until 1948, and the provincial vote until 1949; Japanese Canadians were not permitted to go back to British Columbia until 1949; and immigration restrictions, even for former residents of Canada were not relaxed for Japanese Canadians until the "enemy alien" label was removed in 1952.

The harshest measure involved Prime Minister Mackenzie King's plan to remove Japanese from Canada. Since the early 1900s, King had been involved in efforts to prohibit the entry of Chinese, Japanese, and East Indians. The war provided a good opportunity to rid Canada of those Japanese who had entered. In April 1945, his government began to implement plans to repatriate Japanese. The RCMP entered the concentration camps and told the internees that they could voluntarily sign forms requesting repatriation to Japan, or they would have to

move out of the camps and go to eastern Canada. Many Japanese did not want to leave the relative safety of the camps in view of the well-known anti-Japanese sentiments all across the country. There were also charges that people were told that camp privileges would be refused if they did not sign the forms. As civil libertarian Frank Scott said in a public letter protesting the government actions, "It is like offering a condemned man a pistol so that he may choose swift suicide to a public hanging. Is his death voluntary?"

The Liberal government of Mackenzie King was enthusiastic about carrying forward their plans. In December 1945, after the war was over, King passed an Order-in-Council deporting those who signed the forms. This affected the life of about 10,000 Japanese Canadians. After public protests, the Orders were referred to the courts for an opinion on their validity. In shocking decisions, the Supreme Court of Canada and the Privy Council in England upheld the validity of the deportation orders. Although King had succeeded in law, a storm of protest awaited the Orders in Canada. Led by a coalition of church, labour, civil libertarian groups and the CCF (forerunner of N.D.P.), called the Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians, King was forced to withdraw his Orders. By that time, over 4,000 had been induced to "voluntarily" leave Canada.

Public pressure also forced a reluctant government to agree that Japanese Canadians should be compensated for property losses, and in July 1947, the Bird Commission was appointed to investigate compensation.

It is difficult to estimate the monetary value of the losses to property, the lost income and the lost business opportunities. A survey of 198 family heads in Toronto resulted in estimate of \$4 million in losses of all kinds including lost income and loss in property alone, at \$15 million.



so that all losses would be much higher.

The Bird Commission, however, was very limited in its mandate. It was only allowed to consider certain types of losses. Of the \$4 million estimated lost by the 198 people survey in Toronto, for example, only claims of \$1.6 million could be considered by the Bird Commission, and only \$500,000 was awarded.

Bird was not permitted to look into a wide range of other losses such as lost income, interest kept by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property on moneys realized from the sale of property, the money that the Japanese Canadians were forced to pay for their own internment, and the losses of people who were repatriated. As well, many people did not make claims, or claimed that they never got the money. It was a shoddy slapdash affair, and it was capped off by forcing those who received compensation to sign a release form saying that they would consider the matter closed.

One of those appearing before the Bird Commission was Torazu Iwasaki, the former owner of property on Saltspring Island. His land had fetched \$5,250 when the Custodian's agent G.C. Mouat sold the land to his own company. The Bird Commis-

sion felt that the land had been undervalued, and awarded Iwasaki an extra \$6,750. The Bird Commission was not empowered to hand property back to their Japanese Canadian owners. Before accepting the money, Iwasaki had to sign one of the releases. By 1967, the property on Saltspring Island was extremely valuable. To coincide with Canada's Centennial celebrations, Iwasaki sued the government for return of the land or compensation for its current worth which was \$1.5 million. The judge in the Federal Court rejected all arguments raised on behalf of Iwasaki. He said that there was nothing wrong with the sale by Mouat to his own company because Mouat was not really involved at all in any part of the transaction. Mr. Justice Sheppard's reasons would only make sense to a lawyer. The judge said that the person selling the land was not Mouat, but the Custodian, and Mouat only represented the Custodian. The person buying the land was not Mouat, but an incorporated company. Therefore, the Custodian had sold land to an incorporated company, and nothing was wrong with the transaction. In addition, the judge said that the release signed by Iwasaki when he got his money from the Bird Commission closed the matter. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. After three days of hearings, in February 1970, the Supreme Court issued a one paragraph decision dismissing the appeal by Iwasaki.

## Redress

There were many ways of coping with internment. After the war, the government encouraged, dispersal to eastern Canada, so many people spread into little towns and large urban centre and tried to become unobtrusive, careful not to form geographical communities, speaking English in the homes, and not rocking the boat. For many, it brought a moderate, or even an enviable amount of success. The children married *haku-jin* (white people) and became successful in a way their grandparents had not



dreamed possible. Others turned inward, still viewing life with apprehension and distrust, referring to white Canadians with semi-conscious irony as *gai-jin* (foreigners). Some never recovered financially. Others still suffer from memories that would not go away with silence. A Hamilton Japanese Canadian was taken away from his home in handcuffs when he refused to obey an expropriation order earlier this year. He had been a victim of the evacuation and he had lost his property then. He said that he would not easily lose his property to the government a second time.

Beneath the thirty years of self-imposed silence was an undercurrent of resentment and dissatisfaction. These feelings are beginning to bubble to the surface.

The issue of redress or reparations broke into the open in the United States. Reluctant to broach the issue at first, the Japanese Americans with the exception of a few prominent people like Senator Hayakawa, are solidly behind the move. It is no longer a question of whether to bring the question to the public. The issue is what the appropriate remedy is.

In 1979, concrete action was being taken. One group of Japanese Americans pushed for legislation which would have awarded \$15,000 plus \$15 per day to those that were interned. This Bill was opposed by the mainstream Japanese American Citizens League which marshalled the support of most of the Japanese American legislators to support the creation of a commission to inquire into the appropriate remedy. The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was established on July 31, 1980 and commenced to hold hearings on the events of the War, as well as proposals for solutions. A variety of representations were made to the Commission, both by individuals describing their experiences and by organizations of lawyers presenting the legal basis for monetary compensation.

Professor of law Floyd Shimomura at the University of California at Davis prepared a brief for the Japanese American Citizen's League (JACL) outlining the three parties that were injured, and the remedies appropriate for each.

First, Japanese American individuals suffered injury and should be compensated. Shimomura argues that at this point, return of the property is not feasible, and it is impossible to turn back the pages of history, so that the only compensation that the law provides is money. If the incarcerations are characterized as false arrest and imprisonment, he feels that individuals should be entitled to damages for shame and humiliation, mental and emotional distress and injury to peace and happiness. He cites several American cases in which awards as high as \$110,000 were granted for a few hours of illegal detention. As well, he feels that individuals should be compensated for losses from the sale of their property, the income lost due to internment and medical expenses. Although Shimomura does not cite a money figure, the JACL is considering requesting \$25,000 to \$50,000 for each individual.

The second party injured was the Japanese American communities in California. These communities cannot be reconstructed. Nevertheless, the destruction of the communities had negative consequences. It was particularly difficult for elderly Issei (the first generation) and older Nisei (second generation) to recover from the dislocation. They need low cost housing, nutrition programs, and other social services. For the Sansei (third generation) and the Yonsei (fourth generation) the denial of Japanese American heritage has led to identity problems. For their benefit, there should be special educational and cultural programs to assist them in regaining their cultural heritage.

The final party injured was the United States itself. The laws that permitted the incarceration of the Japanese Americans were upheld by American courts. The process may be repeated once more against Japanese Americans or some other minority in society. "The evacuation precedent remains with us like a loaded weapon," says Shimomura. The appropriate remedy would be to pass legislation which would prevent the government from taking such action in the future.

In March 1983, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians released its report. It found that there had been a great injustice done, and that in the United States, there was no military or other reason for the action. Much of the responsibility for the decision was placed on President Roosevelt. The Commission is expected to release its recommendations for the appropriate remedy in June of this year.

Meanwhile, other action is taking place in the United States. California, Los Angeles and San Francisco have already decided to compensate employees of those governments who were dismissed during the war, and will pay \$1,250 each year for the next five years. Similar legislation is being proposed in other Pacific States.

Out of Chicago, a group called the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR) has raised \$100,000 to begin a suit against the American government. It is demanding \$200,000 for each victim for a total claim of \$25 billion.

On the West Coast, the Japanese Americans who lost their cases in the Supreme Court of the United States during the Second World War are now filing petitions to have their cases reopened. They base their argument on the fact that the government of the United States supplied the courts with false information about the security risk posed by the Japanese

Americans. Undoubtedly, the findings of the Commission of Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians will assist them in their efforts.

Japanese Canadians have been considering redress for a number of years now, but with the Americans progressing in their efforts, more concrete positions are being discussed in Canada. As in the United States, there are various options being considered. The remedies that have been discussed range from a proposal to repeal the War Measures Act, the law under which all the actions against Japanese Canadians were taken, to the establishment of a trust fund that would be tied to international human rights issues. It is now clear that some sort of redress is forthcoming, and some sort of redress is felt to be appropriate. Those that formerly were reluctant to discuss the issue publically are now of the opinion that the issue must be raised.



At present, three approaches are being actively supported by different segments of the community. One proposal, adopted by the National Redress Committee of the National Association of Japanese Canadians is for a \$50,000,000 trust fund for the Japanese Canadian community, for the promotion of human rights in Canada and for the improvement of relations between Japan and Canada. It has not yet been adopted as the official position of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

Out of Vancouver, the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project Redress Committee is exploring options, and keeping open the possibility of pursuing individual compensation or establishing a Royal Commission, similar to the Commission in the United States, that would look into the matter and recommend appropriate remedies.

The third approach is supported by the Sodan Kai (Discussion Group) in Toronto. The members of this group feel that it is important to involve as many members of the community as possible in the discussion of the issue, with the goal of eventually reaching a rough consensus. One or more meetings will be organized to provide information and a forum for the exchange of ideas.

There are many ways of characterizing the demand for redress. It can be seen as a fine the government must pay for a crime committed. It can be seen as compensation for the loss of property and the loss of civil liberties. It can be seen as concrete evidence of an admission that a wrong was done. No matter how it is characterized, it is important that redress be given. From the point of view of the individual victims, it will recognize that they were innocent and remove the burden of imposed guilt. For Canada, it will serve as a reminder and a deterrent against future abridgement of human rights and civil liberties.

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- Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*
- Takeo Nakano, *Inside the Barbed Wire Fence*.
- Yukio Shibata, et.al., *The Forgotten History of the Japanese Canadians*.
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Shin Imai practises law in Toronto and is a member of Sodan Kai.

# conflict in the east indian community in toronto: historical overview

JAN BHARATI

Three types of conflicts affect Toronto's East India community: conflicts between the East India community and the Canadian State; conflicts among the various East Indian community groups; and finally conflicts within each of the individual groups themselves.

In this article, we will focus on the first two types of conflicts. In order to understand the nature of these conflicts, we will first examine the evolution of Canadian immigration policy and then the background of the East Indian immigrant population.

## EVOLUTION OF IMMIGRATION POLICY OF CANADA

"Large scale immigration from the Orient would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population." This fear haunted MacKenzie King. Since his time this paranoia has guided the immigration policies of every Canadian Government right up to the present. Thus East Indians have been up against the racist immigration policies of Canada since the beginning of the twentieth century. These policies, sometimes overtly racist and sometimes disguised, have always been influenced by this fear of altering the "fundamental composition" of the Canadian population. Legal mechanisms were devised to bar East Indians (along with other Asian immigrants) from Canada. Regulations such as an "Order-in-Council" excluding immigrants who did not come to Canada by direct continuous journey from their homeland, and the requirement of a landing fee of \$200 for Asiatic immigrants were some of the most overtly racist features of the Canadian immigration policies. If the legal mechanism did not work to stop East Indians from coming to Canada, naked physical force was

used to stop them from entering Canada, such as the infamous incident of the Kamagata Maru in 1914 when East Indians were refused permission to land in the Port Vancouver.

It would seem, that such treatment meted out to East Indian people as a whole would have united the community against the Canadian state. Unfortunately, as we know from history, it did not happen. Even under these circumstances when the East Indian community in Canada was openly discriminated against, the community remained divided. There were agents among the East Indian community, who collaborated with the authorities against their own community.

Since the passage of the "Alien Act" of 1897, there have been many changes and amendments in the immigration regulations to suit the changing conditions of Canadian society. Until the beginning of the second half of this century, every new change in the immigration regulations meant more barriers for Asian immigrants. These policies would have continued, if the international political situation had remained unchanged. During the late 40's and 50's, many colonies won their independence and the political and economic climate of the world made it difficult for the Canadian State to continue an openly racist immigration policies. Thus, a new immigration law to suit the needs of the Canadian State in the fast changing world became necessary. Although the age old policy of the Canadian State --- "keep Canada white" --- was not abandoned, there were enough changes in the new immigration law to give it an appearance of being just and non-discriminatory, not only in the eyes of all sectors of the Canadian society, but also to the outside world. In

these new regulations, which became law in 1967, discrimination on the basis of race and nationality was "eliminated" --- at least on paper. However, in reality this was not so.

Three changes were made in the new regulations : (1) point system was introduced which gave special preference to those with a high level of education and professional qualifications; (2) visitors to Canada were allowed to apply for immigrant status from within Canada; and (3) entry requirements for immediate family members of immigrants were lowered. This policy enabled South Asian population in Canada to grow from a few thousand in 1967 to the present 200,000 (half of which are residing in the Greater Toronto area).

As a result of this increase the authorities became alarmed and saw in it a threat to the "fundamental composition" of the Canadian population. The law had to be changed. In preparation of this change, the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission published a public policy paper in which it raised the spectre of Canada's changing racial composition leading to disorders in the cities. After some debate over this policy, the law was revised in 1977. The new law included new measures to stop the inflow of Asiatic immigrants to Canada. However, the greatest barrier to immigration is the arbitrary power granted to immigration officers regarding the selection of immigrants. Of course, the vast majority of these officers are white. Under the present immigration policy, immediate families are being split, genuine cases of sponsored relatives such as parents and spouses are being rejected, and even for the successful applicants, the process now takes years to complete.

It would seem that awareness of these facts about the present immigration policies would unite the East Indian community against these policies. As during the

Kamagata Maru episode this has not happened. At times, there have been encouraging developments such as the emergence of some progressive and grass-root community organizations and even some signs of understanding among various groups on the issue of racism. But the conflicts within the community remain as sharp as ever. For the past two years these conflicts have overshadowed the common interest of the community.

#### BACKGROUND OF EAST INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

Most of the East Indian immigrants who settled around the Toronto area, arrived after the introduction of the new immigration regulations in 1967. They were mostly young people with various levels of technical and university education. They came from all regions of India, but most of them came from the land-owning middle-class families of Punjab. The really rich did not bother and the poor could not make it even to the nearest passport office.

Punjab is the north-western province of India, sharing its border on one side with Pakistan. There are Hindus, untouchables and other castes and religions, but the land-owning Sikh peasants make up more than half of the population of Punjab. The age old divisions of caste and religion remain quite deep and there is only a minimal interaction among the various communities and castes. Some of the political parties of Punjab are formed strictly on religious lines and to some degree, all political parties exploit these divisions. Although the East Indians who have come to Canada represent a very small section of the Indian society, and those from Punjab, a very small section of the Punjabi society, there are notable differences in their social and political outlooks. To mention a few of the differences, there are rural, urban and occupational differences, differences in political ideology, and levels of education. These differences play an important role in the development of the community within Canadian society.

## CONFLICTS DUE TO INDIAN POLITICS

In the beginning, new immigrants from India were quite sentimentally attached to the political parties of India which range from the extreme left to the extreme right. The political scene of India at that time was regularly and hotly debated among members of the East Indian community of Canada. There were tensions among supporters of different political parties in India. At times, there were violent clashes among these groups. Whatever leadership of the East Indian community in Canada emerged during that period, remained, most of the time, preoccupied with what was happening in India.

## CONFLICTS AMONG EAST INDIANS IN CANADA

The first group of East Indian immigrants to arrive in Toronto had many adjustment problems to overcome such as the different ways of life, financial worries, unemployment, underemployment, institutional racism, racial abuses and physical attacks. The community was at the stage of infancy, it had few resources to deal with the hostile environment in which it found itself. Some members of the community who had lived in England had gone through similar experiences ten years earlier. They, however, did not prove to be much help. The community had to mature through its own experience. During this turbulent period, some of the established radical parties of the left tried to exploit the situation to gain members. Their rhetoric and slogans, at times, did seem to work and won them temporary support in the community. But their inflexibility in imposing their ready made "solutions" to the community's complex problems and also their open contempt for the the community's collective feelings in most situations made them quickly lose all credibility in the community. As a result, no common front emerged from within the community to solve the community's problems. It may not be apparent from outside that the East Indian community is heterogeneous; it is a community within communities.

It is composed of Bengalis, Punjabis, Gujratis, and each group has its own solutions to the common problem of racism. Only the elites within these different communities seem to be in agreement among themselves on the issue of racism. According to them, there was no racism in Canada until these uneducated and uncultured people from villages of Punjab arrived in Toronto. No wonder that during the mass demonstration of November 6, 1977 it was mainly the "uneducated" and "uncultured" people from villages of Punjab who came out in thousands to protest against the racist policies of the Canadian state, while the middle class elites and their followers were busy in currying favour with the authorities. Their strategy consisted of carefully orchestrating media event in which they presented a report on "the concerns of South Asian Canadian community regarding their place in the Canadian mosaic." On the other hand, they took little notice of the so-called "uneducated" and "uncultured" members of the Punjabi community who were at the forefront of the struggle against racism. Unfortunately, the Punjabi community itself was plagued by internal dissension.

## BACKGROUND OF FACTIONALISM WITHIN THE PUNJABI COMMUNITY

Along with the differences of socio-economic background and on Indian politics, several factors have played an important role in the Punjabi community's development in Toronto. It is worth noting that at the initial stage, it was much easier to reach a large number of Punjabi people in Toronto than it is today. This was mainly because at the beginning, without resources, without much knowledge of the Canadian society and not much help available from outside the community, people were a lot more dependent on each other within the community. This dependency forced people to form clusters around a group of relatives, or a group of friends or in some cases, around certain community leaders. The outlook of people living in these clusters was of a feudal nature in

that one person, who commanded the most respect, either because of the favours he may have done or because of his feudal connections spoke for the whole group without consulting other members. To call a meeting on any issue it was sufficient to get hold of these group leaders and get commitment on behalf of the whole group. Another factor which influenced the outlook of Punjabi immigrants was that in Punjab both sections of the two communist parties of India have relied mainly on the strength of their feudal links to gain members. Most of their time is spent in politicizing the population of Punjab by means of lectures and literature. Thus they have produced pseudo-intellectuals among the middle-class youth rather than the political activists among the toiling classes of Punjab. So, among the Punjabi youth, it is quite fashionable to talk about the left politics rather than participate in the bread and butter struggles. A similar pattern developed among the Punjabi community in the Toronto area. Organizations with progressive sounding names and objec-

tives were really fronts for groups of friends and/or relatives or feudal associations with connections in India. But, as the sponsored relatives --- parents, spouses, children --- started to arrive and people started to move out of the residential clusters in search of jobs, these organizations began to weaken as did the political dreams of some of the radical parties and organizations of the left.

Sharomani Sikh Society (Pape Gurudwara) being the only platform which was available to the Punjabi community at that time, became the center of most of the activities of the Punjabi community. Gurudwara elections were fought on the strength and politics of these groups and there were violent clashes among these groups for the control of that platform. Although most of the early groups have now disintegrated and new alliances and groups, based on the interests, within the framework of the Canadian society, are beginning to emerge, old scars from some of the violent clashes among these groups have not completely healed.



The mass demonstration of November 6, 1977 was a high point of the East Indian community's anger against institutional as well as individual racism. In spite of the divisions within the community, about forty South Asian organizations lent their support for that protest march. This level of anger of the East Indian community alarmed the authorities whose concern was two-fold --- management of conflicts within the community and pacifying the community's anger against the State. They had no link with the East Indian organizations and very little knowledge of the divisions within the East Indian community, which they could exploit. At the same time, the elites of the East Indian community middle class were already in the process of organizing themselves. They decided not to participate in the mass protest, but used this mass protest to establish a link with the authorities. The authorities promised them a historic role --- that is as a liaison between the State and the community. But they got nothing in terms of concessions from the authorities to show to the community. Quickly, some government positions affording little real power and mainly around the race relations, were allocated to them. This they interpreted to their community as the beginning of equal opportunities for the community at large. The middle class leadership was not without conflicts either. There were disagreements on matters such as, who would sit next to the Attorney General of Ontario during the presentation of the report on racism, and there were disappointments about the way crumbs from the authorities were distributed. Those who felt they deserved more, either because of their qualifications or because of their support in the community, made some noises, but felt helpless and decided to wait their chance.

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The East Indian community in Toronto is still in a stage of immaturity -- a stage which the Indian community in England was ten years ago. At the present time, as it was in England, the dominating conflict within the East Indian community are still the conflicts of the first generation immigrants and thus the politics of India is playing a significant role in shaping the attitude of the community. Every political crisis in India leads to renewed interest in Indian politics among East Indian immigrants, and new conflicts within the East Indian community of Toronto emerge. As it is impossible to pacify the interest of the first generation immigrants in the Indian politics, it is impossible to eliminate the conflicts within the East Indian community on that issue. The negative impact of this conflict in regard to the Indian politics, on the development of a broad front around the issue of racism, can only be minimized with the development of a clear and non-sectarian approach towards the issue of racism which affects the majority of East Indian immigrants regardless of their stand on Indian politics.

There is hope that something will develop in that direction. Young people, who have spent most their lives in Canada rather than in India, are beginning to question the wisdom of some of the attitudes and actions of their elders, especially in regard to their infighting within the community. The recent violent incidents which, in a way, can be traced to the earlier clashes of various organizations of the mid-70s or to the politics of India, cannot be totally comprehended by the new generation. There is pressure being applied from the new generation on the old which will in time have significant influence on the values of the older generation. New community groups and alliances, more in line with the realities of the Canadian life, will emerge and a better understanding of the issues confronting the East Indian community of Toronto, will develop.



# International Forum

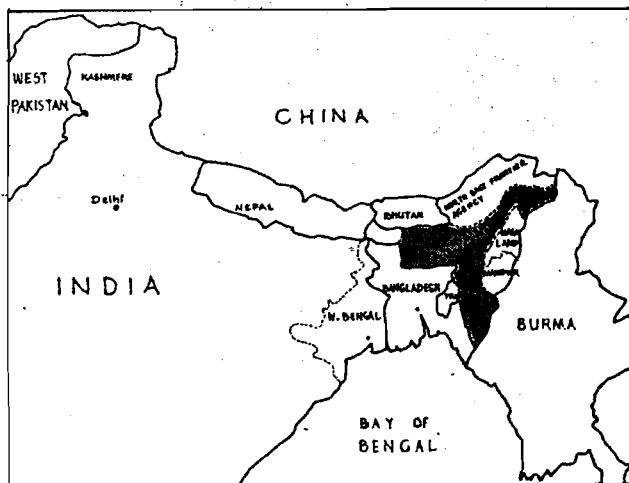
## ASSAM: Another View

RONJI BOROAH

The recent carnage in Assam was not the result of sectarian violence. Such an explanation makes a good story, but the truth is far more complex. Of the more than 3,000 dead, Bangladeshi Muslims constituted the largest number, while Assamese -- both Hindu and Muslim -- formed the second largest group of fatalities. Third were Bangladeshi Hindus, followed by tribesmen. Most of the Bangladeshi Muslims were killed by tribesmen in Nellie. Assamese fatalities occurred at the hands of tribesmen, Bangladeshis (both Hindu and Muslim), and the Central Reserve Police, a paramilitary organization which had 55 divisions stationed in Assam.

Certain patterns emerge from such bloody mayhem. There were, in fact, three groups of protagonists: Assamese (Hindu and Muslim), tribesmen, and Bangladeshis (Hindu and Muslim). Most of the killings occurred in rural areas, where 80% of the state population resides; to a large extent, Assamese and plains tribal farmers sought revenge from Bangladeshi (or East Pakistani) infiltrators who had taken their land. Furthermore, the spate of violence signals the end of communal harmony and of traditional ethnic coalitions in Assam,

both of which had contributed to political stability in a heterogeneous state. We can expect political instability -- even ethnic violence -- for some time to come. To understand why this tragedy occurred, we have to look at the recent history of the State.



Assam did not form part of the various Indian empires through the ages until 1826, when the British (then the East India Company) annexed the State. The British brought the first wave of Bengali settlers to help them rule the new territory. The Bengalis already spoke English and were trained

to assist the British in performing clerical and administrative tasks, as Bengal was the first region in India under British domination. The British also brought labour from other eastern states to work in tea plantations and in the oil fields, and more Bengalis to farm the Brahmaputra valley around the turn of the century. The British incorporated large Bengali speaking territories into the new Assamese State without regard for the sentiments of either nationality. With the advice of Bengalis, they even imposed Bengali as the State language of Assam from 1836 to 1876, a move that favoured Bengalis during the crucial early period of modernization in Assam. The impact of this Bengali domination still affects the Assamese today.

Where Assam was treated as an outpost by the British in India, this attitude has been continued by Indian national leaders after Independence, even though this resource-rich state contributes substantial revenue to the country. Assam supplies 55% of the total tea (a major export item) produced in the country, 60% of the nation's crude oil supply and nearly 100% of all plywood production, as well as considerable amounts of coal, jute and timber. In all, goods worth about Rs. 300 (or \$38) billion are sent annually from Assam to the rest of India.

Despite the productive contributions of the state, it remains poor and neglected by the central government. Industrialization in the state has been restrained and food production has not kept up with population increases. The transportation and communication infrastructure is old and inadequate. Investment in employment and infrastructure by the central government has typically favoured the non-Assamese. For example, although 67% of the tracks of the North East Frontier Railway are inside Assam, only 15% of the employees are

Assamese; most are Bengali. The head offices of major public and private sector organizations operating in Assam are situated outside Assam. Most management hiring is therefore done outside Assam. Even in the Indian Administrative Service, over half the cadre are from outside Assam. The history of economic relations between Assam and Delhi has been a continuation of the colonial past.

"Traditional Assamese fears of

Bengali domination have

been realized"

Due to the nature of modernization and economic development in Assam -- both before and after Independence -- most industries are resource-based, require enormous amounts of capital, and have not resulted in a multiplier economy. As a result of this exclusion from modernization and industrialization the Assamese have not developed modern merchant, entrepreneur, white-collar or labour classes. Today, the traditional Assamese fears of Bengali domination have been realized: there are more Bengali than Assamese white-collar workers in the State, and more Bengalis than Assamese in the State.

Historically, the cause of conflict in Assam -- unlike the rest of India -- has been language, not religion. Linguistic tensions have increased since Independence due to the influx of Bengalis into the State. Most Bengali immigration in recent times has been illegal (from East Pakistan before 1971, and Bangladesh since 1971) and has included both Hindus and Muslims.

Until 1971, India subscribed to the unofficial policy of giving shelter to all Hindus and deporting all Muslim infiltrations from East Pakistan.

In reality, both groups stayed. The inflow of foreigners has increased since the creation of Bangladesh.

Even a cursory examination of demographic figures is illuminating. The population of Assam grew by 35% in each of the three decades between 1951 and 1981; the numbers have more than doubled in a generation. Of the estimated 1983 population of 21 million (up from 14.6 million in 1971), the Assamese population is estimated to be 5-6 million, the plains tribals to be 2.5 million, and the Bengali population to be 12 million. About 4-5 million of the Bengalis are suspected of being illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The Assamese do not even constitute an electoral majority in any of the districts of the State. Furthermore, the Assamese are surrounded by 75 million Bengalis in Bangladesh and 45 million Bengalis in West Bengal, a total of 120 million Bengalis, representing one of the largest linguistic groups in South Asia, second only to Hindi.



Assamese chauvinism in the last decade was essentially a reaction to the Bengali presence. Unfortunately, it also helped coalesce a united Bengali front, bringing together West and East Bengal -- an ironic reversal of partition -- at the instigation and at the expense of the Assamese. Traditional alliances between Assamese and plains tribals had also broken down, leaving the Assamese a political minority in their own state. As a result, the centre's first call for elections in 1979, with the illegal immigrants on the electoral rolls, was the last straw for the desperate Assamese electorate.

Events moved in rapid succession after that. Three years of non-cooperation by the Assamese, led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU); numerous marches, work stoppages, road blockades and strikes; dissolution of Parliament and imposition of President's rule in Assam, save for intermediary puppet governments to legitimize central rule; and over two dozen fruitless rounds of talks between the Assamese and the central government, or a non-partisan central committee. Finally, in 1983, the Congress(1) decided to hold elections, although no further resolutions of the foreigners issue had been achieved, and despite protests of illegality from the three main opposition parties (BJP, Janata, Lok Dal), all of whom boycotted the elections. The rest is history.

Throughout this period, the Assamese demand was simple: Assam must not be made to bear the whole burden of the influx of illegal foreigners. Their final offer during the talks with the central (Government) essentially consisted of two conditions: firstly, that India deport all foreigners entering Assam after 1971; and, secondly, that India remove all foreigners entering Assam between 1961-1971, and relocate

them in other states within the country. In exchange, Assam would keep all 1951-1961 infiltrators. Ultimately, this position proved politically unpalatable for the centre, and politically naive for the Assamese leaders.

The centre accepted the first condition, but not the second. The first condition was based on an existing agreement with Bangladesh to repatriate its citizens. Though politically difficult, it could be achieved more readily than the removal of hundreds of thousands of foreigners to other parts of India, most of which are more densely populated than Assam and more powerful politically.

Also, a large portion of the illegal immigrants were Muslim. As the Muslims number about 80 million or 11% of the national population and have a tradition of bloc-voting for the Congress party, the centre did not want to prejudice that vote bank. Moreover, many Indians are employed in the Middle East, from where they send valuable foreign currency back to India; the centre did not want to jeopardize its relationship with these Muslim countries. Caution under these circumstances is understandable, but the disregard of 5 million infiltrators, simply because they form a captive vote bank, is cynical in the extreme.

There are two overriding issues at stake in Assam: the issue of language as the primary basis for distinguishing one state from another, and the issue of citizenship and constitutional rights. In a country the size of Western Europe, and with as many languages and ethnic groups, the primacy of language plays a crucial role in the development of a state. The linguistic division of the country into states was continued after Independence as a basic building-block of national development. It provided each native popula-

tion with access to education, employment and other opportunities, and helped maintain cultural and political stability.

Assam is an extreme case where, within this country, the local population has gradually been outnumbered by outsiders. Nothing in the Constitution foresaw the problem of the domination of a local population. The centre, however, has absolved itself of responsibility and leadership in this matter. The centre's argument that minority rights must be protected would surely apply to the Assamese as much as to the Bangladeshis. Moreover, the Assamese have not denied Bangladeshis their rights so much as asked the centre to transfer these rights elsewhere, in order to ensure the rights of both groups.

The second issue, that of citizenship and voting rights, forms part of a package of rights protected by the Constitution. As in any other country, illegal aliens are not allowed to vote. The Assamese asked for this move as a minimum condition for elections. In Assam, the central Government has decided to deny these constitutional rights to the Assamese, and confer voting rights to foreigners, solely to win an election.

I do not know of any other country which has done this to its own citizens under the pretence of democracy. Although elections were held in Assam on the basis of a constitutional technicality, the entire basis of the national constitution and democratic process was unjustifiably compromised to ensure the election of a political party.

This insensitive attitude of the centre is not directed only toward Assam. Since Independence, successive central (congress) governments have been consistently insensitive to the cultural, political,

to be continued on page 24

# IS oriental AN O - CCIDENT ?

AMINUR RAHIM

In the October issue of *The Asianadian* (Vol. 4, No. 3), Leonard Preyra sets out to survey about the recent developments in ethnic semantics. "My interests in ethnic semantics," writes Preyra, "is more than academic. It was aroused by a misunderstanding I recently had with a colleague over the use of the word 'Oriental'. She finds the term 'objectionable'... I myself find absolutely nothing offensive with the term. In fact, it has quite noble etymology."

Preyra then goes into the etymological usage of "Oriental" as given in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, *The Dictionary of Word of Origins*, and *Names on the Globe*. He argues that particular historical associations which are no longer acceptable should not render an ethnic term unusable. Should the Philippines, for example, change its name because it is derived from King Phillip II of Spain? To Preyra, the only connotation that matters is what is left after historical associations are stripped away leaving a datum. Preyra has raised an important issue. Are historical associations and cultural attitudes to be regarded as mere dress and is all ethnicity to be ground into the dust which some empiricist gods deign supreme in the name of science!

Preyra's comment on ethnic semantics requires a serious answer. If one addresses oneself to history, it is better not to engage in flaneurism. Preyra's theory of semantics it seems has been nourished and sustained in the dominant school of logical positivism, that is, first set out the facts straight and draw conclusions

from them. In other words, as C.P. Scott says, "facts are sacred, opinion is free." Secondly, my vehement objection to Preyra's article stems from the fundamental object of *The Asianadian* which purports to provide an alternative forum to explore the nature of Asian reality from a popular perspective. In other words, as this writer understands it, the purpose of *The Asianadian* is to engender counter-consciousness among the Asians against the dominant ideological practice of the West which for a long time has monopolized the information media. The motto of *The Asianadian* is to represent itself rather than to be represented. Preyra has the same elitist notion of history as the liberal intellectual: knowledge is the domain of a few chosen people who are specialized in some areas of knowledge. The masses are simply camp followers. Either they listen to the "established discourse" or consult a dictionary to gain knowledge. After all, their minds are empty.

Language, like idea, is not a thing in itself, rather it is impregnated with historical circumstances. In this sense, the origin of language is rooted in the historical development of society. Thus language is a part and parcel of society, what may be called "societal reality". Therefore, language does not function above social reality nor does it remain outside of the social realm. Preyra's failure to understand this dynamic aspect of language stems from the Eurocentric liberal notion of history. Many of the Third World intellectuals suffer from this nostalgia for such sources and origins and Preyra is not an exception. But there are some who have already

moved away from the "tourist notion of history", or who have already reached the threshold of "critical consciousness", and have become critical of the *status quo* oriented historiography. It is a welcome relief that finally the Eurocentric liberal notion of idea is giving way to counter knowledge which in its turn has created a critical consciousness and produced a difference where at present there are none.

Language, as mentioned, is an integral part of society which can be conceived of as social activity. Being aware of this function of language, Wittgenstein describes language "as tools". Like tools, languages can perform various functions. Therefore language is not innate. It cannot act be itself. Rather it can be judged on the way it performs. "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life," observes Wittgenstein. So, the principal function of language is not to evoke image but to engage in "language games". Like all other games, "language games" have their own rules and regulations. In other words, "I am supposing that in every society," writes Foucault, "the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures... The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is prohibited. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything". This passage explains who controls the source of knowledge and decides how it should be disseminated to the people. One should not have to be a scholar or professional intellectual to guess why certain words such as "oriental", "orientalists", "orientalism" etc., are popular in the Western "market place of ideas". The counterpart of "orient" and "oriental" are "occident" and "occidental". Curiously enough, we hardly come across these terms in our discourse. We never call an expert on Western philosophy, history, or anthropology as "occidentalist". One may wonder why?

The mass popularity of "orientalism" as a form of scholarship in the West is associated with

imperialism. Imperialism is not only an economic phenomenon, but it is also a political and cultural phenomenon. The main thrust of this cultural phenomenon was to redefine and restructure the knowledge of the colonized. The purpose was to dominate the colonized people, not only through coercion, but also through consensus. This consensus can only be arrived at through messianic rationalism and dominating ideas. This cultural and ideological leadership of the West in the past has given the Western scholar a right to give name to the things in the Third World. To name something is almost attaching a label to a thing. Wittgenstein gives an example how children give names to their dolls and then talk about them and to them. So naming and objectifying are not blind response to stimuli. The naming of an object is an intuitive expression of an approximate reality rather than reality. So, this reality can be changed in space and time. If Preyra's colleague raises objection to the use of the word "oriental", he should not get upset about it. About one hundred years ago, Marx drew our attention to the cynicism of Ricardo's language in this way, "to put the costs of production of hats in the same category as the subsistence costs of people is to turn people into hats. But don't howl too much about the cynicism: the cynicism is in reality, not in the words which designate it."

As mentioned above, a word is not an empty expression, but it articulates the social value of changing reality. Language as an historical growth evolves with the changing relations of productive forces not the reverse. The development of any standard language be it English, French, Dutch occurred in a definite historical epoch. This standardization of language is inevitably linked with the power and prestige of a dominating social class. In this sense, language is also a class question.

A name is given to a thing not just for the sake of it but to legitimize its function in society so that it would be accepted universally. In order to function to be continued on page 27

# ASIAN AMERICAN ART:

## Tradition and information

Fred Wei-Han Honn

*The following is an extract of a keynote speech delivered by Fred Wei-Han Honn at Smith College, Asian American Arts Conference, Northampton, Massachusetts.*

What is Asian American art and culture? Asian American art and culture is still developing, still being defined. Yet I and others I know and work with believe that Asian American art and culture broadly reflects the Asian American experience and people. We believe Asian American art and culture to exist as a unique, integral totality: continuous (that is, with a tradition and process of development that builds upon and extends that tradition), fluid (able to incorporate many forms); and a dynamic entity (changing, involved with social transformation).

Culture is critical to identity and both are based upon and shaped by social experience and history. To say "I'm an Asian American" means that there is a collective body of experience that Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean and others of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry share in common being in America. Asian American culture is the totality of Chinese American, Korean American, Japanese American, Filipino American cultures. Asian American culture is the expression of these experiences -- the collective life of Asians in America.

Of course, we are all individuals but we live and exist in society, as part of definite social classes and nationalities, with a history in the development of this society. Asian American art and culture is more than the eclectic collec-

tion of individual expressions. It is often asked: "Is art that happens to be done by an Asian American artist Asian American art? Does it have to be an explicit Asian statement?" Basic to this is the definition of Asian American art and culture and the very notion of what is art and culture *per se*. People create art and certainly culture is the way of life of particular peoples. Art does not exist outside society -- it exists in society, the artist exists as part of it. The notion of an Asian American art points that the Asian American comes first, rather than art by a person who happens to be an Asian American.

There is the stereotype that Asian Americans are not creative. We can do well in math and science, but can't express ourselves and are not imaginative. This stereotype is the extension of the more pervasive one that Asian people are passive, model minorities who don't make waves, trying to out-do the whites. Both are not true. I believe that Asians are discouraged from entering the arts. For white artists it is tough to make a living doing art, but Third World artists face a double jeopardy: we cannot generally make a living from art and we are oppressed because of our nationality.

Very, very few artists -- and fewer Asian American and Third World artists live solely off their art work. Most have to teach, do side jobs as a main source of income. Furthermore, our art and culture is ignored or distorted in the mainstream cultural industry: Hollywood, Broadway and off-Broadway, the clubs and amongst the publishers.

For an actor or actress, looking for auditions, the Asian roles are stereotypes: servants, prostitutes, bar girls, cooks, and insidious enemy agents. The music clubs are not ready to take on traditional Asian instruments or deal with songs that speak about Asians. So the professional arts have been pretty much closed to us both from earning a living and from doing something respectable and honest about Asian American life.

But Asian American art and culture persists despite the obstacles. A people will have a culture. We have a rich and vibrant tradition. There's the talk story tradition that emerged from the early Asian labourers. Our people are filled with stories: of home villages, family, gossip, biographies, and autobiographies. The talk story tradition is an oral tradition, passed on by word of mouth and often going through many changes by a different story teller.

There's the poetry carved on Angel Island. Hundreds of anonymous poems of the sorrow and pain of the immigrants detained on that hell-hole interrogation station. And while they were incarcerated in the camps, pottery, sculpture, short stories, crafts were produced to express that experience.

This has been our cultural tradition as Asians in America. Of course, we have carried in our voices music, performances and writing the strong and beautiful traditional Asian forms: earthly folk songs, traditional instruments, plays, legends, and stories. By the 1960s, John Okada had written the first Japanese American novel, *No-No Boy*; Toshio Mori had published his first collection of short stories, *Yokohama California*, in the aesthetic context of Japan. This is just as valid as an Asian American wanting to play Mozart and Chopin as it should be played in the context of European con-

cert music. But I think as Asian American artists, we are challenged to create and innovate a new culture that is about our experience in American society. This must inherit the traditional Asian sources, much of which continues to pulsate in the communities and



among the immigrants. We should be proud of these roots and not pit contemporary western forms against the traditional Asian ones. This would only serve to divide our people and exacerbate our differences. As artists we can be unifiers, exponents of a new context, providing a vision of what could be. The traditional culture is part of our experience. We should not deny or feel ashamed of it.

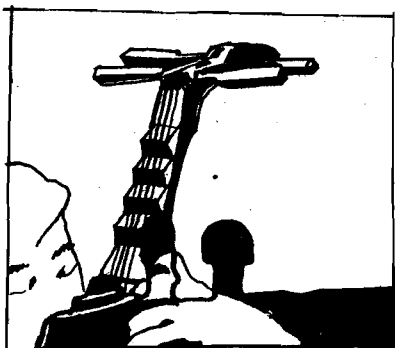
At the same time, experimentation, utilizing contemporary western forms is not being less "Asian" and more American. We should encourage an attitude of mutual respect, collectivity and learning from all the traditions and develop our work to be artistically powerful and politically progressive.

Art, politics, and community are not separate. Indeed, they are closely intertwined, just as life itself. Many of the active Asian American artists and art organizations today address community issues such as the struggle for land and



housing in the Asian American community and against gentrification; the issue of redress and repatriation has inspired a profusion of new plays.

I believe the main danger to Asian American culture in the coming future is the threat of forced assimilation: the complete erasure of our cultural memory and the wholesale adoption of the mainstream white commercial culture. The revival of racist stereotypes like Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan are ominous. Yet, effective boycotts organized by the Asian American communities, with a strong active participation by Asian American media people and artists, proved that we would not allow the more grossly overt negative images to come back.



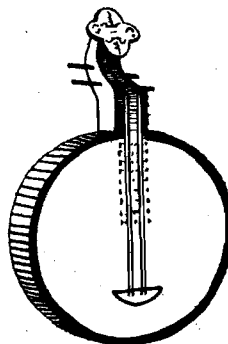
Just as Fu and Charlie Chan are images and presentations of Asians foisted upon us, the racist white cultural industry also attempts to selectively praise certain Asian American artists and their work and project them to represent all of Asian America. It is an insidious ploy: "Gee, look, Asian Americans are just like us whites, they should be like us whites." This again is cultural chauvinism and forced assimilation: the closer you reflect the white standard and ideology and the less you are committed to representing the truth of Asian America, you are praised and given funds.

With the growth of the Asian American middle class from the 1960s struggle that increased access to higher education and professions for Asians, more Asian American artists have grown up outside the Asian com-

munities in middle class white suburbs. They come up with notions such as "universalism" and dreams of the Asian American top 40 hits or the first Asian American "West Side Story" musical. ("West Side Story" did really nothing for the Latinos. It did make Leonard Bernstein a lot of money).

They also quip, "why does my art have to deal with the oppression and struggle?" "I don't want to do social protest art." "This Asian political stuff is too limiting, I want to express the human experience."

Believe me, most of us have to struggle to survive. We are not trying to do "social protest art." We are just describing what is around us, what we face in our lives. Most of us don't come from Bel-air. Most of us don't hold university posts in English departments or have record contracts.



Asian American life is rich, deep and complex to provide a fertile source for Asian American comedies, musicals, works that have an entertainment function. But Asian American art must be about the truth of our lives. And this involves struggle at all levels: the struggle in the family; between feudal, traditional ways; the more contemporary American ways; the relationship between the immigrant and American-born; interracial relationships.

Today "things-Oriental" are in vogue. This is also a fascination with stereotypes. Though some may argue this is a "good" stereotype. By definition it takes an aspect of reality, exaggerates, oversimplifies, distorts it and then passes this fixed image off as a general portrayal.

I am not advocating a glorified view of Asian Americans struggling in the movement as a model for artistic works. On the contrary, we need works that examine the weaknesses, the divisions among our people. But the artist should look at these problems deeply, with insight and understanding. A superficial presentation only further stereotypes of one sort or another and reinforces the negative view that we are in large part responsible for our own failures in society. Some recent works that have received white critical attention poke fun at real, serious problems of our communities. This is negative as it serves to trivialize them.

I think a poem by Sonia Sanchez hits at the core of what I'm saying:

*Oppression must be funny  
Cause when I told the brothers  
how I had to back down from a  
white cop  
they all rolled.*

continue from page 18

and economic aspirations of the southern and eastern regions of India. The growth of regionalism in these areas is therefore an attempt at collective bargaining and cultural survival as much as it is a growth of secessionism, an argument of often used by

the centre to dismiss regional demands and maintain the *status quo*.

It is time again for both sides to negotiate for realistic solutions rather than being intractable in their demands and responses. The Assamese leaders have to be flexible and seek economic and political compensation in other forms. The centre should not trivialize regional demands by distorting them into communal politics. Central discussion of further division of the state into two or three mini-states might solve the language issue; however, it will do so at the expense of reducing collective political power and hence retarding economic development in a splintered region. The centre seems to offer this solution to maintain the *status quo*.

If peace is to be restored to this region, the progressive alienation of the Assamese must be reversed by assuring them a secure national future, both economic and political, within the Indian Federation. Such assurance can be given without ignoring the human plight of the foreigners. The alternative of repression by the centre can only lead to radicalism and further needless tragedy.

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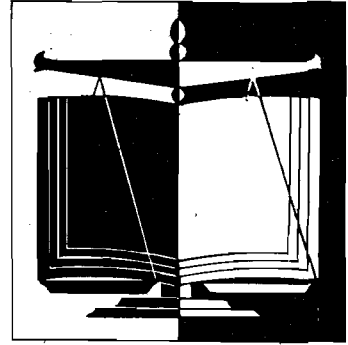
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# Reviews



**ANTHONY B. CHAN**

## 金山 GOLD MOUNTAIN

**THE CHINESE  
IN THE NEW WORLD**

THE CHILD OF GOLD  
MOUNTAIN COME OF AGE:  
HISTORY WITH  
A DIFFERENCE?

Jin Tan

*When you read a work of history,  
always listen out for the buzzing.  
If you can detect none, either  
you are tone deaf or your his-  
torian is a dull dog.*

E.H. Carr : *What is History?*

The writing of history is a very personal endeavour, for me anyway. Since falling under the spell of Clio, I have been unable to remain aloof or indifferent to what I do. Studying Chinese immigration over the years has heightened my sense of ethnic consciousness in an esoteric way; and during that time, I have found that as much as I

have unconsciously fashioned history in my own image, the discipline has also changed my thinking, my perception of society, my understanding of my self as a Chinese, and a Canadian.

Although I have serious reservations about the way Anthony Chan "does" history, I share his sentiments when he explains the inspiration for his recent book *Gold Mountain*.

*The idea for this book was born in October 1974 when I moved to Peking for one year. There, I began to reflect on the irony of the fact that in China I was considered a Canadian, a foreigner; yet all my life in Canada and the United States I had been considered a Chinese. It soon became obvious that the Chinese in Canada had never been explained by someone who had lived on both sides of this contradiction.  
(page 8)*

*Gold Mountain is Anthony Chan's personal statement of what it means to be Chinese Canadian. It is, as he says, a Chinese Canadian insider's view of Canadian history. It is not, however, what it is also intended to be --- a history of the Chinese in Canada which rises above the realm of fortune cookie cliches.*

*Equality and tolerance are nothing more than an illusion -- "Fool's Gold" -- in a racist society. This is the central theme of *Gold Mountain*, a re-*

curing theme in Chan's writing. The "W-5" issue, the focal point of Chan's treatise, brought that point home, hard and swift. It hardly matters whether one is native-born, naturalized or landed immigrant in this country, it seems, because, in the popular mind, to be a "visible minority" is to be a foreigner. Canada, we are reminded, is still a "White Man's Country".

In an earlier paper, Chan traced the historical development of the foreigner image, and claimed to have exploded "The Myth of the Chinese Sojourner in Canada."

As one might expect, Chan contended that the sojourner myth is a racist myth which scholars and "white Asians" have uncritically accepted over time. He contended that Chinese came over with every intention of staying had they been given the opportunity.

In another paper written by him ("Orientalism and Image Making: The Sojourner in Canadian History", *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Fall, 1981 : pages 37-46), Chan chided these arrogant misinformed souls, conditioned by "the pattern of strength" of Western (read white) supremacy, of imposing their preconceived notions on the Chinese.

If the Chinese behaved like sojourners, he argued, it was because they were *made* sojourners in Canada; if they did not bring their wives, put down roots, and raise families here, it was because of the hostile reaction they encountered, and the multitude of discriminatory policies and laws which prevented them from doing so; if they maintained their village ties, did not assimilate, and yearned to go "home", it was because they were not welcome in Canada.

All this has a certain ring of truth to it. However, we must distinguish between what Chan argues and what he implies.

At one level, he argues that the problem lies with the Chinese, and our perceptions of the Chinese.

At another level he argues the Chinese were, in historical reality, involuntary sojourners.

By implication, then, the Chinese were immigrants, in the true sense of the word, and not merely transients.

His argument is neither convincing nor conclusive. What Chan should have done, of course, was to ask: what was the original intention of the Chinese emigrants?

The real problem lies with Anthony Chan, his line of reasoning, his own preconceived notions, and his reading of history --- backwards.

Ironically, Chan unwittingly adopts a Handlinesque interpretation of immigration. Like Oscar Handlin earlier, Chan assumes that people emigrate and settle on a permanent basis. People come to North America, the land of opportunity and abundance, to settle; if they do not display this inclination, then there is something pathological about their presence. In the case of the Chinese, the cause of the pathology is racism.

That Chan, a professionally-trained historian of China, should adopt such premises is indeed surprising. He, of all people, should understand that Chinese emigration was an economic activity of the family. It was men's search for work.

Emigration did not mean crossing the ocean with one's wife and children, severing family ties to begin life anew. On the contrary, emigration strengthened the bonds of family solidarity. It created social networks for the emigrants abroad, and facilitated chain migration. This is evident in the Southern Asian experience, and there is nothing to suggest it is any different in the North American case. Emigration was not always a flight from misery. For the Chinese, it was also a means of enhancing one's own, and one's family's social and economic status in the village.

Writers studying the Chinese in Canada are overwhelmed by the opprobrium of racism. So much so that they seriously underestimate the capacity of the oppressed to shape and organize the world in which they functioned. Writing about the Chinese as victims encourages intellectual indolence, a reliance on shock explanations. Thus, the paucity of Chinese women can be readily explained in terms of unfavourable structural conditions, and discriminatory immigration laws.

Despite what Chan may think, he has treated us to yet another collection of fortune cookie cliches in his angry interpretation of the Chinese Canadian experience. That is to be expected since he is focussing on the Chinese as victims. In doing so, however, Chan denies the existence of the sojourners. Chan is engaging in a war with racism. Unfortunately, his defensive attitude misguides his reading of the past.

Jin Tan, a student in the Department of History and Philosophy of Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

continue from page 20

properly a thing requires a legitimate sanction. After all, words such as "mission civilisatrice", "the White Man's Burden", "Orientalism", had been coined at a certain epoch of history. In this epoch of history, it is known as "the Age of Imperialism", the people of the Third World were portrayed according to the cultural standards of Western colonial scholars.

Following the Second World War and the subsequent liquidation of the empires, the people of the Third World are in quest of their self-esteem which was buried beneath the ashes of colonial scholarship. In order to redeem their past, they are attempting to go back to their source. They are beginning to question colonial historiography. So it has become imperative for them to upset the *status quo* oriented ideology of knowledge, and create an environment for the development of criticism, counter-consciousness and above all make an effort to appreciate and understand the meaning of social reality from below rather than above. This sense of quest for the source has compelled the people of Rhodesia to change its name to Zimbabwe and its capital Salisbury to Harare. Of course, the people of the Philippines can change the name of their country if they wish to.

The problem of colonized intellectualism is that it is unable to understand the dynamism of self-determination and cultural struggle. Liberation struggle is not only confined to territorial liberation but it has also extended to liberation from the clutches of cultural and spiritual imperialism. In order to raise against the past and present Occidental domination and persuasion, an elaborate inventory, critical consciousness and counter-memory are required. To this end, the weapon of criticism can only rely on the study of history from the colonized perspective rather than the colonizer's perspective.

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# Community News

## CANASIAN ARTIST GROUP

The Canasian Artists Group is an exciting, new concept that is sure to become a vital part of the Arts movement in Canada. The organization intends to develop an appreciative national audience for works by Asian Canadian artists in all fields of endeavour: film, theatre, visual arts, dance, creative writing, music, photography, crafts and fashion. In order to do such, Canasian seeks to introduce artists to each other in order to exchange ideas, promote talent, increase visibility and further their creative output. The following is the mandate that encompasses the above goals:

- (1) to recognize and promote the different talents of Asian Canadians in the Arts in Ontario;
- (2) to provide an outlet for Canadian Asian artists to present their work to the Canadian public;
- (3) to develop an appreciative, supportive audience for the creative talents of Asian Canadians in the Arts;
- (4) to provide a network for Asian artists to exchange ideas and to pool their resources to provide a public service; and
- (5) to expand the profile of a multicultural, multifaceted group to Canadians at large.

Unfortunately, to realize such a mandate is difficult. Asian Canadian artists have the desire to express themselves creatively but have not found the work or even the encouragement to do so. Ca-



nasian seeks to rectify the situation by initiating its own productions and exhibitions.

The first theatre production for the group is Rick Shiomi's *Yellow Fever*. Rick is a native Torontonian whose play has been produced to critical and public success in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Ostensibly a humorous detective mystery set in Vancouver, it in actuality deals with the Japanese Canadian experience. Its use of Japanese, Chinese, and Caucasian characters makes it a truly unique play, ideal for Canasian. Moreover, Gina Mallet of the *Toronto Star* gave it a rave review for its New York run and asked the poignant question, "Why hasn't it been produced in Canada?" Therefore, Canasian has decided

to seize the opportunity to create Canada's FIRST ASIAN CANADIAN THEATRE COMPANY to produce a work by an Asian Canadian playwright.

Other projects in the works are a group showing of Asian Canadian Visual Artists and the Asian North American Film Festival. Both projects are ambitious and totally unique. They certainly have high profile potential.

The three initial projects will be overseen by the Founding Members committee, a central body which fostered the Canasian idea. In future, the governing committee will change on a regular basis, thereby, constantly bringing vitality to the group. Furthermore, the controlling committee with members of the governing body and outside experts of Canasian projects will form and collapse with each new project. It must be emphasized that all ideas for projects will be submitted by any Canasian member, and any member may become involved with the accepted projects.

In its infancy, Canasian is being nurtured by the Founding Members, a collection of competent, responsible and vari-talented artists with a sincere sympathy for Asian artists in an indifferent milieu. Daniel Blyth and Josephine Cheung, Toronto based artists; Nancy Ing, a C.B.C. television researcher; Phillip Ing, a free lance producer; Anna Jong, a C.B.C. radio program assistant; Rosie Or, an art entrepreneur; John To, a commercial photographer; and Terry Watada, a musical composer.

The Founding Members committee officially formed Canasian on March 9, 1983 with its first gathering of Asian Canadian artists. An encouraging eighty people of all disciplines and Asian cultures attended. Most became members, all became enthusiastic.

As it stands now, Canasian has the hearty support of all three levels of government. The various Asian communities of Toronto are intrigued and willing to become

involved. Representative organizations outside of Ontario and Canada have at least heard of it. Perhaps one day Canasian will boast of a national and international capacity for the mutual exchange of performances and exhibitions. All this in a mere month of existence! With such an auspicious beginning, Canasian promises to become a vital weave in the tenuous fabric of multicultural relations in Canada.

For more information, write to:

The Canasian Artists Group  
c/o 44 Huntley Street,  
#303,  
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M4Y 2L1

Enclosed is my \$15.00 annual membership fee to the CANASIAN ARTISTS GROUP.  
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