

Chinese Canadians offer a dramatic example of an immigrant group that, until quite recently, lived in 'ethnic enclaves.' The term ethnic enclave has been used to document how racist ideologies forced minority ethnic groups to settle in less-desirable urban neighbourhoods.¹ Historians, sociologists and economists have also shown how such residential and business concentration allowed groups to form tight-knit communities that facilitated networks of support which proved essential to survival, to advancement, and ultimately to challenging the very racist and ethnocentric beliefs and practices that pushed them to the social and political margins. As a category of analysis, 'ethnic enclave' has helped map out the history of race, ethnicity, and migration. But it is also misleading; it draws our attention away from the many forms of contact that crossed racial, ethnic, and cultural lines, contact that went beyond what was necessary for mere survival.² Consequently, the history of Chinese Canadians and Americans exists in an historiographic enclave, separate and distinct from, but also enclosed and trapped within, a larger, white Canadian historiography.

Drawing on oral interviews, personal photographic archives and Toronto's tabloid press, this paper presents the preliminary results of my research on the history of sexual intimacy between white women and Chinese men in Toronto between roughly 1920 and 1960. This rich qualitative evidence of interracial relationships complicates the dominant paradigm of segregation and isolation. When we include in the history of Chinese Canada the white women who engaged in intimate relations with Chinese Canadian men, a more heterogeneous picture of Toronto's Chinatown community, and a more multifaceted social history, emerges. Simply put, when we place the history of sexuality at the centre of our analysis, it becomes clear that Chinese Canadians were not as socially isolated as the current historiography suggests.

Up until the mid-1960s, most male Chinese Canadian migrants lived out their adult lives in bleak isolation, or so the story goes. Sojourners' own ambition to return home with more wealth than he could hope to earn in Guangdong province, the region from which the bulk of migrants came, combined with the imposition of ever-increasing head taxes on Chinese migrants, the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, and intense racism among non-Asians toward the Chinese meant that the vast majority were doomed to live their lives without the emotional, material, or

Identity
- sex worker
- affective
- effective
- what is "proper" history?

John Price 12-6-9 10:28 AM
Comment: It depends on how it is read. I certainly don't read the histories of Chinatowns as preventing contact with non-Chinese. Have you read the excerpt from the 1885 Royal Commission report on Chinese immigration of an interview with a white woman—the only woman cited in this huge report. I would phrase this a bit different, 'taken in isolation it can be misleading'

John Price 12-6-9 10:29 AM
Comment: This is a big conclusion which I don't disagree with but it either requires more explanation or put a bit more modestly

¹ Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Multicultural History Society of Ontario, *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, Studies in Ethnic and Immigration History (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985).

² For examples of recent literature that explores political relationships with non-Chinese Canadians see Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Stephanie Bangarth, "We Are Not Asking You to Open Wide the Gates for Chinese Immigration": The Committee for the Repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act and Early Human Rights Activism in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 84, no. 3 (September 2003): 395-422.

domestic support or companionship provided by wives and children. Although many men made trips home to marry and father children, most returned to Canada to continue working, and were *de facto* bachelors if not bachelors in fact. Thus, surrounded largely by other men much like themselves, scholars characterize pre-reunification North American Chinese communities as 'bachelor societies.'

Enforced bachelorhood is a central motif in the history of Chinese overseas experience; it serves as a powerful and poignant marker of just how circumscribed Chinese migrant men's lives were. Yet historians have yet to undertake empirical research on what precisely it meant to live in a bachelor society. Capitalist imperatives and racist antagonisms combined to create conditions of poverty, forcing many men to engage in long hours of work which furthered their social isolation, but we have yet to explore how these conditions placed enormous constraints on possibilities for finding emotional and sexual intimacy with an opposite sex partner.³ What, if any, possibilities for intimacy, sociability, and domesticity existed? How were cultural values and beliefs about intimacy and morality reshaped, and how were ideas about masculinity and sexual desire re-formulated in distant contexts?

This article draws on research concerning interracial relationships between Chinese Canadian men and white Canadian women in Toronto from the early twentieth century to the 1950s to suggest that historians' failure to include fleeting commercial, long-term companionate, and marital interracial relationships in their studies of overseas Chinese ignores important aspects of Chinese Canadian experience, and reinforces racial (and racist) stereotypes about both white and Chinese Canadians. Sexual and intimate relationships across racial lines were common throughout this period, and had important effects for those who lived them. Acknowledging this history requires that we place sexual desire as well as the history of sex work at the centre of our analysis. In so doing, a more heterogeneous image of Chinatown, and of the experience of Chinese, emerges. It is true that Chinese overseas communities were predominantly male; historians frequently point out the high male to female ratio of Chinese residents to emphasize the point. However, the bachelor designation and population demographics hides a striking reality: Chinese women were not the only sexual and emotional partners available to Chinese migrants and settlers. Despite intense anti-Chinese attitudes, sexual and intimate relationships between interracial relations were much more common than the literature would have us believe.

For example, in 1953 *Justice Weekly*, Toronto's premier yellow newspaper, reported that 54 year-old Bing Chong and 32 year-old Rose Robitaille were jointly charged with keeping a common bawdy house at 61 Mutual Street, located half-way between Toronto's Chinatown and the city's tenderloin district. Though some historians might write this incident off as too

³ Madeline Hsu, "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints: Restoring Homosocial Normativity to Chinese American History," *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 2 (2003): 229-253; Nayan Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates': Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 703-725; Jennifer Ting, "Bachelor Society: Deviant Heterosexuality and Asian American Historiography," in *Priviledging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1995), 271-279.

John Price 12-6-9 10:31 AM

Comment: Keep in mind the women left behind— have you read Yuen Fong Woon's book?

John Price 12-6-9 10:37 AM

Comment: Note your references are all from Asian American sources. The relationship between CA and CC is complicated and needs careful handling. I would mention how Asian American sources are exploring new frontiers, can't imitate but may be useful.

John Price 12-6-9 10:34 AM

Comment: I understand the need to stake out your ground but this is very accusatory. In the big picture of racism, the reinforcing done by historians or CC community surely needs to be weighted against important positive role.

salacious, too improper, or too marginal to merit further attention, stories like these illustrate how the search for sexual pleasure led to more than just a demand for sex trade workers, it also led to business relationships between Chinese men interested in such services and white women willing to arrange and provide them. The desire for physical contact, sexual engagement, companionship and even marriage led white women and Chinese men to form mutually beneficial relationships that complicate the ethnic enclave paradigm. Rose and Bing may have been business associates, or they may have also been lovers or even a common-law couple. Either way, their story is a clue to how adapting to and negotiating the various social and economic constraints non-Chinese working class women and Chinese men faced, they formed hybrid, affective relationships that suggest that Chinatowns were not ethnic enclaves, and Chinese men did not live sexless lives as isolated bachelors.

John Price 12-6-9 10:39 AM

Comment: Christianity was also an important means of crossing racial barriers.

John Price 12-6-9 10:40 AM

Comment: Such contact did not have to be sexual or intimate, the whole issue of white women working for Chinese restaurants is an interesting dimension. New MA thesis on this, I can did it out if you are interested

It is a truism that few of us make history under conditions of our own choosing, yet we must take care not to reduce the history of oppressed and marginalized peoples to a history of their oppression. This requires that we make those who are object of oppression the *subjects* of investigation. Borrowing from Anne Ducille's proposed methodology for the study of the history of African Americans, this means we must adopt: (1) a historical frame of reference for Chinese Canadians that places them, and not the perspectives of the dominant society, at the centre of the story; (2) an analytical framework that considers bachelor sexuality in the context of a culture of resistance developed initially by a diasporized people in order to survive in an alien and exploitive environment; (3) a methodological strategy that actively authorizes and centers "bachelors" as subjects of discourse.⁴

Since her article was first published, historians of race and racialization have expertly adopted such methodological approaches. Nevertheless the fact remains that:

our present diction forces us to write the oppressed in the language of the oppressor. 'Minority,' 'periphery,' 'mainstream,' 'Indian,' 'other,' 'premarital,' 'illegitimate,' – quotation marks around these words may acknowledge our awareness of the problematic nature of our discourse, but they do not let us off the hook. What we are confronted with is... a pressing need to revise the language by which people of color are written in our scholarship.

We must not only "purg[e] our inculcated white/Western/male values and assumptions," Ducille continues, we must also "recognize the limitations of and the biases embedded in [history's and historians'] present diction." Approaching the sexual and family history of the Chinese in Canada means using a different periodization. Lives were structure by historic events such as the imposition of and increases to the head tax, 1923 Exclusion Act, the second Sino-Japanese War, and post-WWII family reunification rather than those around which mainstream Canadian history is organized, such as the two European Wars and the post-World War Two economic and baby boom.

⁴ Ann Ducille, "'Othered' Matters: Reconceptualizing Dominance and Difference in the History of Sexuality in America," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 1 (July 1, 1990): 102–127.

Ducille's proposed methodology for historicizing the experiences of people of colour can also be applied to thinking about the history of sex workers. Like 'Oriental,' the word prostitute refers to a particular social type that emerged at the same historical moment as the 'heathen Chinese.'⁵ Many middle-class Anglo-Canadians regarded both prostitutes and the Chinese as obstacles to building a 'city upon a hill'; they were festering sores on the social body, and a moral danger that needed to be contained if not eradicated.⁶ White anxieties about sex across racial lines had significant effect on the lived experiences of Chinese Canadians, on their non-Chinese wives, girlfriends and lovers, and on their mixed-race progeny.

This article places interracial sex and intimacy at the centre of its investigation by focusing on the family history of Mavis Garland. Garland is the first-born daughter of Ethel Frances Bradfield Nealon and Chu Yet San, whose Canadian name was Henry Chu. Ethel Nealon came from a respectable, well-to-do Anglo-Canadian family; her father earned his reputation as a man of consequence while serving as a Major in the Canadian Army during the Boer War. Raised in Toronto, Ethel enjoyed many of the privileges of conventional family life in the tony Avenue Road neighbourhood. Some time in 1923, however, her life took an unconventional turn. Henry Chu, an employee of the Oriental Trading Company, a small gift shop that operated on Yonge Street, travelled door-to-door with samples of the store's wares. When he presented himself at the Nealand's, Ethel's father invited him inside for a chat. Ethel, then 18 years old, was charmed by Chu and from that day on she visited him in his Yonge Street shop whenever she could. Together they shared cups of tea and grew increasingly enamored of each other. Chu's local kinship network became alarmed by the budding romance, and Henry was quickly shipped home to Guangdong province where he was married off to a Chinese wife. Within the year his wife gave birth to a boy. When Henry returned to Toronto, he did so alone, as was the practice and the fate of overseas married men. By that time Ethel had also married, and had given birth to twins. Nevertheless when Ethel became aware of Henry's return, she began visiting him once again, and in 1932 or '33 took the very unusual step of leaving her middle-class Anglo-Canadian husband to establish a household with Henry. She assumed she would retain custody of the children of her first marriage, but tragically she was mistaken. Men retained legal right to the custody of children and as a white woman who chose a Chinese lover, she had virtually no chance of successfully challenging her husband's claim.

Thereafter Ethel's life course followed the trajectory of a working-class immigrant, not a middle-class white Canadian, woman. Two to three years after setting up a household with Harry Ethel gave birth another child, and two more quickly followed. Estranged from her family of

⁵ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1982); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

⁶ Patricia Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989); Madge Pon, "Like a Chinese Puzzle: The Construction of Chinese Masculinity in Jack Canuck," in *Gender and History in Canada*, ed. Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996), 88-100; Sherene Razack, "Race, Space, and Prostitution: The Making of the Bourgeois Subject," *Canadian Journal of Women & the Law* 10, no. 2 (December 1998): 338-379; Constance Backhouse, *Colour-coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*; Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*.

origin, and busy with the labour of raising three children, she rarely left Chinatown. Yet, Sadly, Henry died of cancer just four years after he and Ethel set up a household together. Devastated by her loss, Ethel nevertheless had three young children to feed and care for, and in the 1940s had few options but to find a suitable husband to help support her family. Her second husband, Lew, was a friend of her first husband's. Attractive and hard-working, he seemed a suitable choice. His income, however, was too modest for the family's needs. Ethel and Lew supplemented the family income by taking in boarders. They and their three children occupied two rooms on the main floor; the kitchen was shared, and the rest of the rooms in the house were let out to single Chinese men.

According to Mavis, most of the boarders had white girlfriends who visited them on a weekly basis. "A lot of these Chinese men had girlfriends... and the girlfriends were Caucasian women and I would say that some of them were call girls." Indeed, Chinatown was Toronto's second red light district. A steady traffic of women serviced the needs of the bachelor community. Organized bawdy houses and small hotels owned by whites and by Chinese did brisk business: sex trade workers' pick-up line was "ten and three?" meaning ten dollars for sex, three dollars for the room. With most tricks taking less than thirty minutes to turn, and hotels and room hours rates set at per use and not per night, the trade provided a substantial source of income.

Sex negotiated on the street, however, may have been the least common form of commercial sex. Meeting the demand for sex appears to have been well-organized and well-integrated into everyday life. For example, a circuit of women travelled throughout Ontario to provide sexual services to men who worked in small town laundries and restaurants and who could neither frequent local taverns where they might meet women interested in sexual relations, nor could turn to a local sex trade. In Toronto, the Chinese Freemasons attempted to provide a more selective service to their members: through their own networks they provided younger women who were reputedly 'clean' and free from sexually-transmitted disease who came to the Freemasons building, thus providing discretion and saving the cost of renting a room.⁷

Chinese Canadian attitudes toward sex workers are sharply different from those in mainstream white Canada. Most non-Asian Canadians regarded sex trade workers as social outcasts, as morally depraved, and outside the family. Their labour was criminalized and stigmatized, and if they had children, they were more at risk of having them removed by the state than were the children of other women. These attitudes had no place in Toronto's Chinatown; sex trade workers were not unwelcome. For example, not only was commercial sex a normative part of the day-to-day lives of Chinese Canadian men, it was also integrated into Mavis' family life thus indicating that white Canadian attitudes toward sex workers have no place in . The comings-and-goings of boarders' girlfriends were part of the everyday rhythm of the household.

[When we were children] these women would come and visit and we knew on Wednesday night it was, say, Flo would come to see somebody upstairs and we'd just say they were their girlfriend. She got used to us kids being around after so much I remember

⁷ Interview, anonymous, Toronto, June 2011.

John Price 12-6-9 10 53 AM

Comment: Evidence that supports this very big generalization?

we were babysitting one night, my brother and I, and she brought us a bag of chips, well that was really neat. We'd say 'Hi Flo.' Cause she had to come in through the hall and walk past us, and we'd say 'Hi Flo.' The story behind her was, my mom told me, she had a boy, she had a son, and she had him in military school and she wanted to keep him there... so she would come to visit so-and-so every Wednesday.

Rather than shield their children from the intimate goings-on in the family household, rather than shun the women who traded their time and skill as love-makers and companions, Mavis' parents integrated them into the warp and woof of domestic life. They understood that like their male boarders, these women were real people with real needs who did the best they could with the limited resources available to them.⁸

Indeed, sex trade workers were so well integrated into Mavis' family household that one of these women, who was the regular companion of Mavis's uncle, earned the honorific 'Auntie.'

Auntie [Grace], she became like an advocate for me. I remember when I was taking up tap dancing [and when there was a problem] she went to the school and ask why that was going on, where my mother was more timid and she wouldn't do that. I admired [Grace] for that.

[Grace]'s affective relationships extended to Ethel, too. Concerned that she had not had a holiday in some years, Grace once took Ethel to Montreal for a weekend free of domestic responsibility. Eventually [Grace] lost touch with the family, but she was important enough to Mavis that, as an adult, she searched her out to invite her to her wedding.

Mavis' family experience is illustrative, not exceptional, of postwar life in Toronto's Chinatown. Sex trade workers and interracial couples were not just present, and they more than merely tolerated. They were a part of the everyday life in Chinatown. Local pharmacist Tom Lock, for example, stocked and sold condoms to his Chinese customers, and is well known for having passed the time watching, and timing, sex trade workers and their clients as they slipped in and out of bawdy houses like the one operated by Bing and Rose. Sex trade workers filled local Chinese restaurants where they moved their propositioning skills from the streets to the seats. Some, like Flo, eventually left the Chinatown neighbourhood but others married or lived common-law with their Chinese male partners and raised families together. Mixed race children born to sex trade workers were adopted by married Chinese couples and single Chinese men. Sex trade workers were part of what made the community work, grow and in some ways, prosper, and here I don't just mean economically. Though not under conditions of their own choosing, women found ways to supplement their income and men found much desired companionship. In some cases, they together formed deep affective relationships. Sex and money was not the sum total of many of these relationships. There was friendship, familiarity, comfort and succor to be found in them.

Treating sex trade workers as if they 'count', and acknowledging bachelors' need and desire for sex and intimacy, however, is not something we are trained to do. Like gambling dens

⁸ Social capital would be one of those resources of which these women and men had but little.

John Price 12-6-9 10:45 AM

Comment: I'm not sure you've provided enough evidence to prove this contention, at least not in this article. I think we're only beginning to get a sense of what family life was like in Chinatowns

and opium smoking, exchanging sex for money is treated as the less respectable side of Canada's otherwise upstanding Chinese community. This is not to say that the Chinese Canadian communities are not upstanding, but that the measure of 'upstanding' is taken according to a set of values that most people in the community did not share. In a recent publication, for example, historian John Zucchi writes: "By the late 19th century the rich associational life of Chinese bachelors, distant husbands and a few families filled in the quarters. True, gambling dens and brothels retained a presence but temples, schools, churches and other properties owned by organizations emerged with time." By phrasing it thusly, we apply a set of judgments, standards and measures from the viewpoint of mainstream white society, not from the viewpoint of Chinatown residents for whom gambling dens and brothels were equally if not more valued than churches, temples and schools.