

Chinese Religious Life in Victoria, BC 1858-1930

by

Liang Han
B.A., Beijing Normal University, 2014

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Lynne Marks, Department of History
Supervisor

Dr. Zhongping Chen, Department of History
Departmental Member

Abstract

Between 1858 and 1930, Victoria's Chinese immigrants brought their homeland religions to the Canadian city of Victoria BC. They experienced a broad range of challenges as they attempted to fit into the mainstream society. This continual struggle affected their religious lives in particular as they sought to adjust in ways that helped them deal with racial discrimination. As a result, Chinese folk religions, especially those emphasizing ancestral worship, became intertwined with local Chinese associations as a way of strengthening the emotional connections between association members. Some associations broadened their membership by adding ancestral deities or worshipping the deity of sworn brotherhood in a bid to create broader connections among the Chinese men who dominated Victoria's Chinese community. At the same time, Christians, who practiced the religion of Victoria's mainstream society, reached out to the Chinese, at first by offering practical language training and later by establishing missions and churches that focused on the Chinese. Many Chinese immigrants welcomed English classes and the social opportunities that churches provided but resisted conversion, as the discrimination they faced in mainstream society had left them sceptical about Christianity, which was seen as closely linked to the dominant Western culture. However, Chinese attitudes towards Christianity became more favorable after the 1910s, when the patriotism of Chinese immigrants led them to support revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen and his new Chinese government, which promoted Christianity as a symbol of modernity.

In general, the Chinese in Victoria were not especially enthusiastic about religion, whether Chinese folk religion or Christianity, although women were generally more interested in religion than men. Although many Chinese pragmatically sought comfort

and assistance from both religions, they followed Confucian orthodoxy in focusing primarily on daily life rather than religious life. At the same time, over the decades between 1858 and 1930 both Chinese folk religion and Christianity affected the Chinese community as this community adopted a mixture of Western and Eastern cultures, including religious elements from both cultures.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vi
List of Illustrations	vii
List of Figures	viii
Acknowledgments.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 “By the Name of Ancestors”: China-Originated Religions in Victoria’s Chinatown.....	19
A. Ancestor worship and the burial rituals	20
B. Chinese temples and their deities.....	28
C. Lived Religion in Victoria’s Chinatown.....	44
Chapter 2 “Somewhere in Between”: Missionary Activities in Victoria’s Chinatown and Chinese Attitudes toward Christianity	52
A. Early missionary activities in Victoria’s Chinatown and the establishment of churches	53
B. Chinese attitudes towards Christianity.....	69
a. The responses to Christianity by Chinese men	69
b. Chinese women’s responses to Christianity	73
c. Forming of Chinese Christians.....	80
Chapter 3 “The Truth with Different Names”: The Changes and the Integration of Religions among the Chinese.....	84
A. Co-existence of Chinese Religions and Christianity before 1890	84
B. The Crisis of Christianity and Chinese Folk Religion Between the Mid-1890s and 1930.....	92
C. The Integration of Different Religions.....	105
Conclusion	115
Bibliography	122

List of Tables

Table 1: Church buildings for the Chinese in Victoria, 1888-1930.....68

List of Illustrations

Chart 1: Minutes of the proceedings of the third (to eleventh) session of the British Columbia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church.....	93
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List of Figures

Figure 1: Funeral at Ross Bay Cemetery, Victoria	22
Figure 2: Food offerings for Chinese funeral, Victoria.....	23
Figure 3: Victoria Oriental Home and School Group.....	75
Figure 4: Second Mandarin, arrived Victoria circa 1890.....	106
Figure 5: First Graduation Class of the Chinese Public School, Chinatown, Victoria. Principal: Lee Mong Kow	106
Figure 6: Chinese funeral, Government Street, Victoria BC.....	108
Figure 7: Chinese funeral procession southbound on Government Street, picture taken from Johnson Street	108
Figure 8: Chinese funeral, Victoria	108
Figure 9: The altar at the Chinese cemetery, Victoria.....	109
Figure 10: Group in Chinese Christian Church, Victoria.....	112

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Introduction

The idea to explore Victoria's religious history in relation to the Chinese community came to me when I had the opportunity to visit the Chinese cemetery at Harling Point in Oak Bay with a friend, shortly after arriving in Victoria to start my MA project. It is said that the cemetery was selected based on the principles of feng shui, an ancient Chinese system of harmonizing buildings with their surrounding environments. When we reached the cemetery, an indescribable feeling came over me as soon as I saw the tombs facing the ocean. It was very quiet there, and the tranquility was somehow enhanced by the blowing wind. I saw the long shadows of the concrete towers cast by the sunset, and I could not stop myself from wondering how this place may have been hearing the rhythm of the waves and seeing the waxing and waning of the moon. A hundred years ago, were the Chinese wishing to rest in a place near the sea to be closer to the continent where they used to live across the ocean? I knew that the nostalgia I sensed might have been an illusion, but it was clear that the selection of the location itself, as much as the standing altar, represented the fact that the Chinese had carried their religious beliefs and rituals from China to Victoria. That moment sparked my research into the religious lives of the Chinese immigrants in early Victoria.

My first opportunity to explore primary resources connected to the Chinese community came when I was tasked with summarizing the Chinese-related contents of newspaper clippings from the *Daily Colonist*, which contained a variety of accounts of Chinese immigrants' lives and struggles in the early years. It did not take long for me to realize that most of these reports were not positive, as the majority of the Chinese in

Victoria at that time were laborers, and their presence was seen by the mainstream as something of a threat to Western society. The anti-Chinese sentiments were broadly shared by many reporters who wrote for the local English-language newspapers, and they focused a great deal on the differences between Chinese and Western customs. Chinese clothing, hair styles, and food were all portrayed as aberrant to the mainstream.

Everything Chinese, including religious practices, was usually described in a derogatory or sarcastic way. On the contrary, celebrations held in Chinese churches were always depicted in a positive light. I found it interesting to see how both the China-originated religions and Christianity influenced reporters' impressions of the Chinese living in Victoria at the time. I started to consider how the different religions coexisted within the Chinese community, as well as how the Chinese adapted to them, in the early settlement of Victoria.

The period of time covered in this thesis is from 1858 to 1930, starting with the first recorded Chinese arriving in Victoria and ending with the decade of the Chinese Exclusion Act, originally passed by the Canadian Parliament as the Chinese Immigration Act in 1923, which effectively excluded new Chinese immigrants from coming to Canada. These years presented many challenges to most first-generation and some second-generation Chinese Canadians. I wanted to provide a window into the religious life of the Chinese community in Victoria during this period.

To begin learning about Chinese Canadian history in general, I drew from diverse literature written about the Chinese diaspora. As one of the earliest immigrant groups to come to Canada, Chinese Canadians have received increasing attention in ethnic studies since multiculturalism became Canada's official policy in 1971. Peter S. Li's study, *The*

Chinese in Canada, was one of the general studies of Chinese immigrants in Canada from 1858 through 1980, covering a variety of topics including avenues of emigration, leadership within the Chinese community, discrimination toward the Chinese, and changes to immigration laws.¹ Likewise, Edgar Wickberg's volume, *From China to Canada*, featured six authors who are pioneers in examining the history of Chinese communities in Canada, and provided a broad summary of the political, social, and economic lives of Chinese Canadians by tracing discriminatory laws and their effects on the Chinese.² Both works present a chronological history by using primary sources including family documents, government statistics, interviews, and newspapers in both English and Chinese. Canada's immigration policy toward the Chinese was a primary focus in both studies, while Peter Li's work focuses specifically on the reasons why Canadian society discriminated against Chinese immigrants and how changes in the labor market affected this situation.

Instead of seeing the politicization and unification of overseas Chinese as being largely a by-product of the discrimination they experienced, some other scholars on the political history of the Chinese diaspora also argue that Chinese immigrants were also the makers of their own history. Zhongping Chen, for example, discusses the various political activities of an important late-Qing political reformer, Kang Youwei, and his daughter, Kang Tongbi, in Victoria and other cities in North America, revealing that their political mobilization deeply affected the reformist movement of the overseas Chinese,

¹ Peter S. Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

² Edgar Wickberg et. Al., eds., *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982; in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publications Centre).

and vice versa.³ Kang Tongbi's leadership crossed national boundaries, operating in both Canada and the US from 1903 to 1905. Although the association Kang Tongbi initiated, the Chinese Empire Ladies Reform Association, did not last long, it directly influenced the sociopolitical life of women in North American overseas Chinese communities.⁴ These studies revealed a new paradigm—international networks among the Chinese playing an important role in the global as well as local arenas. In this context, it is clear that the changes occurring in China and elsewhere influenced the Chinese living in Victoria, and were a part of the motivation for them to take actions accordingly. Zhongping Chen's examination on the formation of the Chinese Empire Ladies Reform Association also indicated that Chinese women living overseas—a much smaller population compared to their male counterparts—took political action regardless of racial discrimination in their overseas communities and gender biases rooted in Chinese traditions.

Understanding Chinese communities' connections within Canada requires fuller portraits of the individuals who participated in the process of migration. Lisa Rose Mar used immigration interpreters, legal advisors, the 1922–23 Chinese student strike in Victoria, the 1924 Survey of Race Relations, and the workers' movement during World War II to examine the role of brokering between Chinatowns and the mainstream society. Mar observed in her book, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945*, that the character of the broker indicated a change in leadership, representing

³ Zhongping Chen, "Kang Youwei's Activities in Canada and the Reformist Movement Among the Global Chinese Diaspora, 1899–1909," *Twentieth-Century China* 39, no. 1 (January 2014): 3–23.

⁴ Zhongping Chen, "Kang Tongbi's Pioneering Feminism and the First Transnational Organization of Chinese Feminist Politics, 1903–1905," *Twentieth-Century China* 44, no. 1 (January 2019): 3–32.

the important role that networks and personal connections had in Chinese life.⁵ Similarly, Alison R. Marshall emphasizes the networks that the Chinese immigrants formed through politics, religion, and other emotional connections, which fundamentally affected the community structure.

Marshall presents important analyses of Chinese religion. She discusses the complex nature of Chinese religion and the concept of “efficacy,” which was essential to understanding Chinese religiosity: The Chinese expected efficacious results from religious practices; rituals could be changed or adjusted if the results did not meet people’s needs.⁶ This underlying attitude helps to explain why many halls of Chinese associations combined religious and irreligious functions at the same time, offering people places to practice fellowship as well as ritual and venues to develop their social lives. In another study, Marshall focused on the Chinese communities in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, examining several individuals’ stories—women included—to produce a specific and complex understanding of the Chinese communities in the Canadian Prairies and the role played by religion in these communities.⁷

Another concept that is important to introduce is “lived religion,” described in the book *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* as “religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life.”⁸ In the first chapter in this collection of essays focusing on the ways of people’s practice, author

⁵ Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada’s Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ Alison R. Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor: Early Chinese Settlement in Manitoba* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012).

⁷ Alison R. Marshall, *Cultivating Connections: The Making of Chinese Prairie Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014).

⁸ David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7.

Robert Orsi explores the space of lived religion as distinct from the religion of elite assumptions, proposing that lived religion does not emphasize stable, formal or sacred rites but is more inclusive regarding how people actually practice religion in their everyday lives. This method broadens the range of religious practices beyond an elite construct and provides an approach to view Chinese religious life in Victoria as a dynamic that integrates formal religion and everyday life experience.

In addition, a study of Chinese religiosity in Victoria requires an understanding of the ethnic community's history in the local area. Rich scholarship was built on the exploration of racism, and Patricia E. Roy and Timothy J. Stanley in particular contributed to the study of this topic.⁹ Roy argued that anti-Chinese discourse related specifically to Chinese men because Chinese immigrants were almost all male in British Columbia in the 19th century. Even if Chinese women did immigrate to Canada, they did not compete directly with European settlers economically, so their presence was not considered a significant threat, or a root of anti-Chinese sentiment per se. Stanley shared similar views with Roy, adding that the notions of not only 'Chinese' but also 'White' were inherently gendered. According to Stanley, disenfranchisement ensured that white men were dominant, and they feared that Chinese men would challenge their dominance through economic development and miscegenation. In her historical analysis Roy used a binary system, dividing people into "White men" and "Asian immigrants," as British Columbians did in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In contrast, Stanley's conviction was that historians had to devise ways of writing histories that did not reproduce racial

⁹ Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989); Timothy J. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

categories such as “White” and “Chinese,” which were “part of the problem,” and he used “racialized Whites” and “racialized Chinese” instead. In addition, Stanley’s theoretical perspective was that both racism and anti-racism existed. However, in the context of this binary, he mentioned that even those who were not willing to be actively racist against Chinese people also fell into the Chinese-Canadian binary by viewing the Chinese as “non-Canadian” —which fundamentally denied the citizenship of Chinese immigrants in Canada, making White men part of “Canadian nationalism” and Chinese immigrants part of “Chinese nationalism.” To break from that created classification, Stanley introduced the perspective of “Chinese Canadians” in his study. Those second- or third-generation Chinese immigrants were “racialized Chinese” because of their physical appearance in the context of a racist culture, but they were raised in the same way as “racialized Canadians,” so they did not differ from other settlers in terms of culture. They did not easily fall into either category.

With regard to Victoria’s Chinese Canadian history, studies by David Chuen-yan Lai and Robert Amos and Kileasa Wong provide basic summaries of the associations and culture of Victoria’s Chinese, offering insight into the most significant trends in Chinese Canadians’ lives in Victoria. The three authors’ two respective works provide comprehensive studies of Victoria’s Chinatown, including a detailed examination of Chinese religions in Victoria.¹⁰ Although informative and clearly presented, Amos and Wong’s study is descriptive rather than analytical, and the book is organized as a chronological narrative. Similar to Lai’s *The Forbidden City Within Victoria*, Amos and

¹⁰ David Chuen-yan Lai, *The Forbidden City within Victoria* (Victoria: Orca Book Publishers, 1991); Robert Amos and Kileasa Wong, *Inside Chinatown: Ancient Culture in a New World* (Victoria: TouchWood Editions, 2009).

Wong's *Inside Chinatown: Ancient Culture in a New World* describes many associations. In his later work, *Chinese Community Leadership: Case Study of Victoria in Canada*, Lai focused on the most powerful association, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), to offer a case study of Chinatown leadership and organizational development in Canada, listing dates and brief descriptions for the most important historical events.¹¹

Though a significant amount of literature exists on Chinese Canadian history, in the religious context the topic has received relatively little coverage. Some of the previously mentioned broader histories had sections or chapters related to religion, but very little has been written about it from a historical perspective. The book *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, edited by Larry DeVries, Don Baker and Dan Overmyer, includes discussions on understanding Christianity in the Chinese context, and elaborations on Chinese religions in British Columbia from the past to the recent years. However, their main focus is on contemporary rather than historical religious history, which is helpful in terms of understanding recent trends but can only offer limited contributions to our understanding of the religious history of earlier eras.¹² I also read various academic studies of religious history ranging from the United Church of Canada to the Chinese religions in both ancient and contemporary history.¹³ In general, these studies combined chronological and thematic articles or chapters. Don Schweitzer portrayed the United Church of Canada as a

¹¹ David Chuen-yan Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership: Case Study of Victoria in Canada* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010).

¹² Larry DeVries, Don Baker and Dan Overmyer edited, *Asian Religions in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

¹³ Don Schweitzer, editor, *The United Church of Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011); C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Jordan Paper, *Through the Earth Darkly: Female Spirituality in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 43–107.

Canadian religious institution of national significance, while C. K. Yang provided a comprehensive introduction to Chinese religiosity. The main religions discussed in Yang's study are the "Three Teachings"—Confucianism (which is not a religion but does have spiritual practices), Daoism, and Buddhism, with a focus on the "function" of religion in Chinese society. Yang referred to the connections between religion and economy, social structure, political influence, and moral standardization. Jordan Paper also discussed Chinese religions, including the Three Teachings, but his perspective examined the religious roles of women. In Paper's comparative religious study, the female deities and the rituals performed by females were equally important in Chinese religiosity, which he states was always misread by conventional Western studies. Compared to Paper, Yang's work is more of a sociological study, focusing on the role that religions played in the integration of the family and kinship structure. The insights of both studies were complementary: together they depicted a fuller picture of Chinese religions and sought to rise above the traditionally Western-centric point of view that pervades the literature. However, it is important to recognize that the situation for overseas Chinese may not correspond exactly to the experiences described in most of the above studies because the authority and networks in the host lands were different from those in China.

In addition to the above scholarship regarding the history of religion in general, some missionaries' studies contributed to early Chinese Canadian Christian history. Joyce Chan's *Rediscover the Fading Memories: The Early Chinese Canadian Christian History*, along with Norman Knowles' "They Are Here to be Evangelized: Anglican Missions to British Columbia's Chinese Community, 1861-1940," chronologically

summarized the history of missions to Chinese communities in Canada.¹⁴ Using archival church documents, Chan and Knowles spoke from the perspective of missionaries, aiming to highlight the efforts and contributions of missionaries and the devotion of Chinese Christians. As a result, the stories were glamorized and glorified, leaving a part of the history untold. To have a fuller portrait of the missionaries who worked among the Chinese in Canada, the work of Jiwu Wang provides a short overview of the history of Christian missionaries among Chinese immigrants in Canada, especially in Victoria.¹⁵ Wang demonstrated how Chinese immigrants employed their traditional religions to respond to the missionaries' message, and the role Chinese religions played in consolidating the Chinese ethnic identity when the group was in cultural conflict with the dominant group in Canadian society. Nonetheless, Wang mainly focused on the history of Protestant missions and their Chinese converts in Canada, but paid little attention to the China-originated religions in Canadian Chinatowns. In contrast to Wang's discussion of the Protestant missions in Canada, Rosemary R. A Gagan focused on female Methodist missionaries' work.¹⁶ Wang and Gagan both elaborated on why and how missionaries built close relations with the Chinese. Their accounts are an important part of the story: The missionaries were relatively well-informed about the community's inner workings,

¹⁴ Joyce Chan, *Rediscover the Fading Memories: The Early Chinese Canadian Christian History*, (Burnaby, BC: Chinese Christian Missions, 2013); Norman Knowles, "They Are Here to be Evangelized: Anglican Missions to British Columbia's Chinese Community, 1861-1940," printed in the 105th anniversary publication of the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd.

¹⁵ Jiwu Wang, "Organised Protestant Missions to Chinese Immigrants in Canada, 1885-1923," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54, no. 4 (October 2003): 691-94; Jiwu Wang, "'His Dominion' and the 'Yellow Peril': Protestant Missions to Chinese Immigrants in Canada, 1859-1967" (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Rosemary R. Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

due to their attempts to bring the Chinese into rather than exclude them from Canadian society.

As an institution managed and financed to shelter and provide Christian education to Chinese women (and later to Japanese women as well), Victoria's Chinese Rescue Home received attention from scholars as it gave insight into the lives of some Chinese females. Marilyn F. Whiteley's article, "'Allee Samee Melican Lady': Imperialism and Negotiation at the Chinese Rescue Home," and Shelly D. Ikebuchi's book, *From Slave Girls to Salvation: Gender, Race, and Victoria's Chinese Rescue Home, 1886-1923*, are both case studies of the Rescue Home that illuminate the work of this mission toward Chinese women, which was intended to shelter them in order, ultimately, to evangelize them.¹⁷ Both works contribute to the history of Chinese females in a religious context, as well as testifying to the moral superiority inherent in the missionaries' sense of Britishness. The primary goal of the Rescue Home was religious conversion, but the missionaries also conflated Christianity with Western culture, regarding the Chinese immigrants as inferior. Ikebuchi went further than Whiteley in challenging the overly positive images of the Rescue Home, questioning whether all of its residents who were categorized as rescued slaves were in fact housed willingly.

Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia by Lynne Marks offers additional relevant background information and context for understanding religion in Victoria. Marks' comparative analysis provides insightful analyses regarding the typical religious attitudes in British Columbia and the reasons

¹⁷ Marilyn F. Whiteley, "'Allee Samee Melican Lady': Imperialism and Negotiation at the Chinese Rescue Home" *Resources for Feminist Research* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1993); Shelly D. Ikebuchi, *From Slave Girls to Salvation: Gender, Race, and Victoria's Chinese Rescue Home, 1886-1923* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015).

behind them through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, class, and culture. Exploring the intersections of races, the book mainly focuses on the argument that mainstream society of British Columbia was less religious compared to its counterparts in other provinces. It also contains some discussion of Chinese religion and anti-Chinese racism pre-WWI, investigating the connections of Chinese immigrants with the religiosity of British Columbia, where racially and religiously diverse groups lived, according to Marks, with lower levels of religious belief compared to the rest of Canada.¹⁸

Among all the literature, Marshall's and Wang's studies are the most valuable ones for my study. By providing a historical overview of Protestant missions to the Chinese in Canada, Wang balanced the story by emphasizing both sides—the efforts the missionaries made to win converts from the Chinese community as well as the reactions the Chinese had to ideological persuasion. Marshall's research enriched the gender and racial examinations of Chinese communities on the Canadian Prairies. Through her connections with individuals, she took a different approach from Wang to examining Chinese experiences in Canada, conducting more than 300 interviews and looking at many other materials, including scrapbooks, diaries, membership rosters, photographs, and letters. Drawing on these archives, Marshall wrote a narrative history from within the Chinese communities of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In *Cultivating Connections*, she paid specific attention to Chinese women, whose histories had been understudied and difficult to reveal because of the small population and the marginal roles Chinese women played in public within a male-dominated society. Marshall's use of oral history allowed the inclusion of Chinese women; she cultivated close relationships with the interviewees,

¹⁸ Lynne Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017).

who shared their personalities and details of their lives, which created the narrative Marshall used. It is noteworthy that as part of these relationships, Marshall was inclined to omit stories that her subjects specifically asked her not to include, as they were invested in her presenting their chosen versions of their stories. As a result, Marshall's study is probably less objective than it could have been had she included all the information that her interviewees shared.

The above-mentioned literature built a narrative of Chinese migration into Canada and the formation of Chinese institutions that were intended to provide support for Chinese immigrants in the face of discrimination from mainstream society, as well as to challenge such racism. Regarding religion, Christianity was prominent in many studies because the missionaries' efforts to convert the Chinese reflected the mainstream's attempt to assimilate them into the dominant culture. Thus, Chinese acceptance of or resistance to Christianity could be viewed through the lens of how much they were willing to compromise to ease the tension between themselves and the whites. However, the China-originated religions in Chinatowns in Canada have rarely received scholarly attention, nor has there been much exploration of the mutual impact of Christianity and China-originated religions. This study aims to fill that gap through an examination of both China-originated religions and Christianity, as well as through an exploration into ways that the multiple religions mutually affected Chinese religious lives. In addition, most previous studies have focused on the Chinese diaspora in a global, national, or metropolitan context rather than in small, localized communities to examine Chinese religiosity in a specific area. Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the daily

religious lives of early Chinese migrants and their descendants in one community, as a way of enriching both Chinese Canadian history, and Victoria's local history.

For sources, I used local newspapers and missionaries' reports to uncover Chinese experiences with religion in Victoria. Newspapers contain valuable information in the form of letters, reports, and articles, providing clear information on dates, participants, and events in well-written texts. However, all newspapers are products of a certain time period, and generally cannot escape the inherent prejudices of the time, and sometimes perhaps even the personal involvement of the reporters. While the biases of the different sources are unavoidable, as no source could ever be thoroughly objective, the influence of the biased perspectives could be reduced by bringing into focus different views on similar events. In this thesis, I used both English and Chinese newspapers (mainly Victoria's *Daily Colonist* and *Dahan Gongbao*, published in Vancouver) to balance the divergent perspectives of white and Chinese society. With the acknowledgment that the insights of the writers are not necessarily or always equivalent to facts, a biased report can still be useful, as long as readers are conscious that some reports were written from biased perspectives. Another strength of newspaper sources is that reporters usually wrote soon after events occurred, and such records are generally more reliable, given that factual recall tends to diminish significantly in the first two days.¹⁹ Even in English newspapers, with their intrinsic era-based racist biases, event descriptions as far as time, location, and processes or rituals contained study-worthy details.

My other main English sources were missionaries' reports, including the Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, *The Missionary Outlook*

¹⁹ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, second edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 17–21.

(published by the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church), and *The Acts and Proceedings* (published by the Presbyterian Church), all of which contained valuable details on the number of converts and the ways in which missionaries tried to attract more Chinese into churches in Canada. The missionaries' accounts aid in understanding their intentions and interpreting their behaviors. The main concern in using missionaries' reports is that the sources are based on missionaries' observations, and are usually written with the specific goal of gaining financial support for further missionary efforts from the churches. Therefore, these reports may emphasize or even exaggerate the efforts and successes of Chinese missions in Canada from the missionaries' perspectives.

Considering the fact that the majority of the sources are derived from the white, Christian society, the use of Chinese sources—interviews in particular—is essential to presenting the Chinese side of the story, and the views on their religious lives. Oral history plays an important role, as it contributes the actual voices and thoughts of the Chinese immigrants, although it must be acknowledged that none of the interviews used in this thesis were conducted firsthand. Given that the time covered in this thesis is prior to 1930, the interviews I used were mainly conducted by Theresa Low in the 1980s, covering many other aspects of early Chinese lives, while providing a limited discussion of religiosity in some interviews. As with all oral histories, the main limitations are issues of memory. As Valerie Raleigh Yow demonstrated in her book, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, memory is a selective process entailing encoding and decoding, and imagination can come into play. One should be conscious that the information extracted from interviews is based on memories at the moment that interviewees tried to recall them. Given the fact that the events mentioned in the

interviews occurred decades ago, the retrospective evidence might be considered problematic on its reliability based on the time elapsed since the event occurred.²⁰

That being said, the limitations of oral history do not override its strengths. What oral history does provide is the pieces largely missing from other public sources—the personal points of view of the Chinese individuals who had experiences relevant to this study. On one hand, their narratives may reflect some habitual thinking from Chinese traditional culture which they did not see as particularly related to religiosity. On the other hand, some interviewees candidly expressed their feelings with their interpretations of the meaning of religions. In using oral history as an important supplement, I was particularly careful when dealing with detailed information such as dates, as those could be recalled incorrectly. These concerns notwithstanding, the core information is usually consistent in the subjects' memories, and so deemed to be trustworthy.²¹ Without oral history, it would be impossible for this thesis to draw a theoretical framework introducing the concept of “lived religion,” which helps in understanding how people carried out their religious beliefs on a daily basis.

Understanding the strengths and limitations of different primary sources, I discuss in the first chapter how Victoria's Chinese brought religious beliefs and practices from China (mainly Chinese folk religion) to Canada while at the same time accepting changes in their native religious practices as they adapted to the local environment, and to the fact that most Chinese immigrants to Canada were male. Many Chinese institutions featured rooms that contained temples or shrines holding deities or spiritual tablets, hoping to

²⁰ On issues of memories in oral history, please see Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, second edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 17–21, 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22, 41–44.

unify the members through a common ancestor. The blend of secularity and spirituality in these rooms with shrines provided mental support and practical benefits to Chinese individuals, such as socializing and the ability to seek help from other members. The second chapter provides a chronological analysis of missionary activities and Chinese responses. In Victoria, missionaries from Protestant churches—mostly Methodists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans—started Chinese mission schools and gradually attracted more attendees to organized missions and later independent Chinese churches. The Chinese response was a mixture of positive and negative actions that were influenced by Canadian and Chinese politics in relation to the overseas Chinese. In the last chapter, I discuss changes in religious life within the local Chinese community, including both those religions that originated in China and Chinese churches under the mutual influence of both Chinese and Western religions. In this chapter I also discuss aspects of their religious integration.

Thus, this thesis contributes to the history of religions and the Chinese diaspora in a local context by exploring Chinese religious life in Victoria prior to 1930, discussing the impacts of both China-originated religions and Christianity on the local Chinese community. In previous ethnic studies, attention to the religious life of Chinese Canadians has been focused on Christians and Christianity. While this topic remains an important part in this thesis, complementary (but similarly important) discussions in relation to religions that originated in China are also included. By revealing how Chinese immigrants maintained their traditional religiosity but also adjusted the practices of China-originated religions on a daily basis, both on their own terms and in relation to Christianity, this thesis emphasizes that both kinds of religion existed in Victoria's

Chinatown with a mixture of tolerance and competition towards each other. Victoria's Chinese community experienced these mutual impacts, eventually developing a unique environment neither predominantly "Western" nor "Eastern" but a blend of both.

Chapter 1 “By the Name of Ancestors”: China-Originated Religions in Victoria’s Chinatown

Victoria’s Chinatown was founded at about the same time that the gold rush happened in British Columbia in 1858. With the arrival of more and more Chinese migrants, Chinese businesses lined Cormorant Street and three other nearby streets— Pandora Avenue, Fisgard Street, and Herald Street—and thus the area north of Johnson Street Ravine gradually became Chinatown, where most Chinese people lived or frequently visited.¹ Chinese immigrants brought their religions with them from their homeland to Canada in the early years of immigration, which created the very complex and interwoven types of Chinese religiosity found in Victoria, as had existed in Guangdong. Many temples and shrines, images of deities, and rituals of worship in Victoria’s Chinatown largely imitated their counterparts in Guangdong, but some deities and practices were adapted to the local environment. This chapter will focus on the China-originated religions that appeared in Victoria and their influences on the Chinese community between 1858 and 1930, to show local Chinese religious life and the homeland connections, as well as the changes resulting from adaptations.

The discussion begins by addressing how Chinese burial rites reflected local Chinese’s ongoing attachment to their homeland by keeping their basic religious beliefs in spirits in the after world. This belief explains the widespread ancestor worship within Victoria’s Chinatown’s lineage organizations. In these organizations they continued their single-surname pattern, while also adapting to a community mainly composed of single

¹ Lai, *The Forbidden City*, 3, 18-20.

men by developing a new type of joint-family ancestors worship and an American-born fraternal society.

A. Ancestor worship and the burial rituals

With the belief that spirits continue to exist after the body perishes, Victoria's Chinese have long expressed devotion for dead relatives or friends through a set of rituals—including burning paper, offering fruits and meat, kowtowing, and shipping bones—around the times of Chinese festivals, especially the Qingming Festival in early spring. These rituals highlight Chinese religious beliefs regarding life, death, and ancestor worship.

What locations in Victoria were available to the Chinese to inter their deceased loved ones? Chinese people who died before 1873 were interred in the Old Burying Ground (now Pioneer Square), and after 1873 in Ross Bay Cemetery in a separated area. Due to the lack of space and racist treatment towards Chinese in the former cemeteries, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) sought to build a separate cemetery for the Chinese near Swan Lake. However, their plan encountered strong resistance from local non-Chinese residents. Although the land was purchased in 1891, it was never developed as a cemetery for the Chinese. It was not until 1903 that the CCBA bought another piece of land to be used as a graveyard specifically for the Chinese. The new site was at Harling Point in Oak Bay, and it eventually became known as “the Chinese Cemetery” that we have today.²

Due to their specific rituals, Chinese funerals always caught the eye of non-Chinese residents, and the ceremonies were often recorded and published in local

² David Chuen-Yan Lai, “The Chinese Cemetery in Victoria,” *BC studies* 75 (Autumn 1987): 24-42.

newspapers in Victoria. Although there are no surviving images of Chinese burials in the Old Burying Ground, the Chinese migrants' Western neighbors started to observe the special rituals and ceremonies of the Chinese after 1873, when the Chinese regularly interred bodies in Ross Bay Cemetery.³

Chinese processions or ceremonies held for memorializing dead people always involved sacrificial food and paper money, which reflected the Chinese traditional rituals brought over to Victoria. In 1880, the local newspaper recorded that Chinese companies applied for permission (and were approved) to "erect a stone altar at Ross Bay Cemetery whereon to burn the paper used by them in the religious rites peculiar to the burial of their dead." This raised complaints about the danger of setting fires and causing serious damage.⁴ After the altars were established, Chinese people went to the cemetery during festivals to "drive away the devil." Paper burning and roasted pigs and hogs were offered up on the altar at Ross Bay cemetery.⁵

³ *Daily Colonist*, February 19, 1873, 3; May 14, 1876, 3; January 5, 1879, 3; December 14, 1879, 3.

⁴ *Daily Colonist*, March 25, 1880, 3; March 30, 1880, 3.

⁵ *Daily Colonist*, August 30, 1898, 5.



Figure 1 Funeral at Ross Bay Cemetery, Victoria| *BC Archives*, D-05257, 1900

Large Chinese funerals were usually held for famous Chinese people; these ceremonies started with a funeral procession in Chinatown and wound through the streets until they reached the cemetery. For example, in 1879, a funeral for the Chinese merchant Yip Jack, who was also a member of the Chinese Freemasons, was witnessed in Cormorant street:

“when the coffin was brought out and placed on a bier with an umbrella to shade the head. The corpse was then surrounded with all kinds of eatables – roast pig, sheep, etc., after which the head men and friends appeared, and after going through certain ceremonies, the coffin was placed in a hearse and, headed by two men carrying flags and a number of others attired in yellow and in white garments, proceeded to the cemetery, when Yip Jack was finally interred.”⁶

⁶ *Daily Colonist*, January 5, 1879, 3; March 17, 1909, 6.

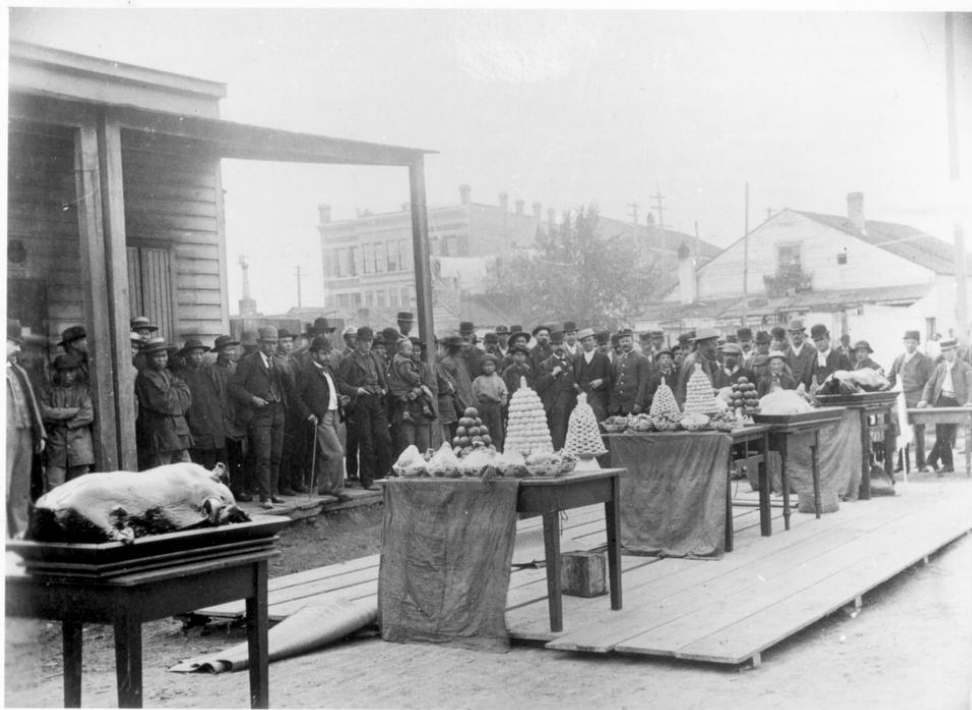


Figure 2 Food offerings for Chinese funeral, Victoria| *BC Archives*, D-05243, 1892

The Chinese had ceremonies for occasions other than funerals, and traditional Chinese festivals also brought them to the cemetery. The Qingming Festival, which was called the “feeding the dead” ceremony by the local newspaper, was held during the second or third month of the lunar calendar at cemeteries. The food for the ceremony included roasted pigs, chickens, ducks, bottles of Chinese wines and whiskey, cigarettes, apples etc. Similarly, the Chongyang Festival, which is held in the ninth lunar month, was also called a “feeding the dead” ritual, and it was generally held in October in the Western calendar. The rituals enacted during these days were described as below:

“(The food was) carted out and placed upon the altar at the cemetery, the whole being offerings made to the spirit of the departed Chinese whose remains lie in that corner of the cemetery. The array of eatables was placed little by little on the altar, and each succeeding caster of Chinese who went out kow-towed to the feast, and bowing their heads to the stones, said the mystic words in which the eatables are commended to the spirits. Fires are then lighted in the two little furnaces at either side of the altar, and papers with little squares of silver and gold are burned in large bunches, this being according to Chinese belief, the money for the departed Chinese to pay for anything they

may need, whether relief from annoying circumstances or necessities, or other things for which, like in the mundane sphere, they account money necessary to the spirits. The silver squares represent silver, ... Joss sticks, incense and candles were also burned in numbers, and the little many-holed papers were distributed, the object being to keep the bad spirits engaged in dodging through the many holes, while the incense, joss sticks and candles were to supplicate the good spirits of the air, wind and water.”⁷

Some other festivals were held at night, including one that was called the “Gin Tu Festival” by a Western journalist who witnessed it when the Chinese paraded along Fisgard and Government streets before midnight. The Chinese celebration included the usual accompaniment of burning paper and music, and a “benevolent Guy Fawkes looking image” and three priests were the prominent features.⁸

The rituals observed, such as burning paper and offering food, were long lasting traditions that had been widely practiced in China for thousands of years. Ancient Chinese funeral rites were based on the principle of rendering the same services to the dead as one would to the living. However, living people could not afford to buy actual objects for serving the deceased, so they used paper offerings, especially paper money, to replace physical objects. Paper items were expected to be transformed and become available for the dead to use during the process of burning them. Similarly, fruits and meat offerings provided the food, and kneeling and kowtowing showed respect—all of these items and gestures were ways of catering to the well-being of the spirits.⁹

Although maintaining food-offerings was an essential part of death-related ceremonies, some changes were made by the Chinese immigrants to adjust to the local environment. For example, the Chinese used to leave the roast pig and other foods and

⁷ *Daily Colonist*, April 3, 1901, 8; October 22, 1901, 2.

⁸ *Daily Colonist*, November 17, 1898, 3.

⁹ Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 1-26.

delicacies at the Ross Bay Cemetery for the dead, but they changed this practice upon learning that Indigenous people from Discovery Island frequently took food left on the altar. It was believed that this caused a conflict between the Chinese and First Nations peoples. As a result, after their funeral ceremonies, the Chinese started to bring the food offerings in wagons back to Chinatown, where the food could be used for feasts.¹⁰

Moreover, a unique reburial ritual was developed among all the Chinese funeral rituals that played a critical role for Chinese immigrants. The Chinese associations usually raised funds from members to hire people who picked up bones from different places of Canada, cleaned and packed the bones into boxes, put the boxes in the bone house. When the mound of boxes was large enough, the bones were shipped back to their homeland. In the case of the dead who were buried in Ross Bay Cemetery and the Chinese Cemetery, their remains were interred for 7 years before being dug out and preserved in the bone house. Digging bones scared many westerners, and the Chinese were strongly criticized for this behaviour.¹¹ In the Chinese Cemetery, in addition to a large altar, which was erected for the offerings, another special building, which was called "the bone house," was also established to preserve Chinese remains that were supposed to be sent back to China. It was not very common in China itself for bones to be exhumed and shipped to another place. However, in the Pacific Northwest and Western parts of Canada, repatriating the bones of the dead was a very important charitable act that raised broad attention from the Chinese community. Vancouver's Chinese-language newspaper *Dahan Gongbao* (The Chinese Times), which was published by and for the Chinese immigrants, posted notices about the conditions of the shipment of the bones

¹⁰ *Daily Colonist*, April 3, 1901, 8; Lai, "The Chinese Cemetery in Victoria," 28.

¹¹ *Daily Colonist*, April 1, 1880, 3.

year after year. Clan associations paid large amounts of money for the purpose of digging up and shipping bones back to China. An article published in *Dahan Gongbao* suggested that the practice of shipping bones grew out of the need to ensure that one's family—ideally one's sons and grandsons—would be able to make sacrifices at the family altar and maintain a grave in the family cemetery in China. Also, the belief grew among the Chinese that one had to be buried in the homeland, whether or not one's family would care for the grave.¹² Both assumptions demonstrate the emphasis on the bond with the homeland, and the belief that spirits exist after death.

The reburial ritual indicated that Chinese maintained traditional Chinese opinions about death and burials. In ancient China, the essence of the rituals was to form a continuous lineage, which protected the family history and tradition from forgetfulness. Sustained by a centuries-old agricultural society, a distinctive folk culture formed in rural China over thousands of years. One of its main tenets is a promise between the living and the dead—descendants worship their ancestors and the ancestors protect them in return. Members of China's rural society had a strong bond with the land on which they lived and people rarely moved from the villages in which they were born to other parts of the country. Generations growing up from the land and sharing experiences was the principle rule that shaped traditional Chinese society. The concept of "home" was identified with the land. Thus, the Chinese, especially the Chinese community from rural areas, always spoke of coming back to their "home" after death.¹³

¹² *Dahan Gongbao*, May 29, 1928, 3.

¹³ Xiaotong Fei, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 45-59, 94-100.

Although reburial had a long history in Guangdong province, it was a local ritual that did not spread all over China, and its meaning was changed to fulfill the needs of the Chinese in Victoria and in British Columbia. In China, reburial was more often used to give the family enough time to find somewhere more appropriate to the descendants and relatives of the deceased that aligns with the feng shui theory.¹⁴ But in Victoria, where its local cemetery had good feng shui, the reburial ritual was used for burial in homeland. With this emphasis on a burial in the homeland to give peace to the spirits, Chinese could not accept other kinds of burials, such as sea-burials. Giving peace to spirits was so important that twelve Chinese steerage passengers on a steamer in 1907 protested when sailors were going to bury a Chinese person who died in the steamship at sea. They “protested, begged, cajoled, for Chinese ever seek to carry the remains of their dead to land, whence the body can be shipped home for burial,”¹⁵ The traditional funeral rites like lighting joss sticks, burning silver or gold paper, which Chinese people scatter at funerals as gifts to the gods of wind and air, spilling wine, and placing a roast pig on a stone altar could not be done without resting the body in the land. Although the Chinese could slightly change these rites, such as bringing food back to Chinatown after the funeral and allowing the living to eat it, rather than leaving it on the altar for the dead, the above case of the refusal to accept a burial at sea indicates that the fundamental belief in remaining connected to the land (especially to the homeland) could not be easily changed. As late as 1930, for burials of well-respected Chinese people, bone shipping was still supposed to be very important after the body had lain in the Chinese cemetery for 7 years.¹⁶

¹⁴ Bin He, *Jiangzhe Hanzu Sangzang Wenhua* (The Burial Culture of Han Chinese in Jiangzhe Area) (Beijing: Central University of Nationalities Press, 1995), 23 – 46.

¹⁵ *Daily Colonist*, November 14, 1907, 16.

¹⁶ *Daily Colonist*, December 23, 1930, 5.

Because of the belief in the power of spirits, the place in which bodies were buried and the ceremonies held for the dead were meant not only for the well-being of the spirits, but also for the best conditions of the living. The Chinese believed that spirits were powerful, and ancestors, after death, could affect the lives of their offspring. In this way, ancestors' spirits, ghosts, and deities could be transformative and the boundaries between the living and dead were blurred. Similar rituals were conducted for both ancestors and deities, and sometimes deities were especially important ancestors who were viewed as having transformed into deities. In the next section, we will see that in Victoria's Chinatown, most deities were more or less the worshippers' "ancestors."

B. Chinese temples and their deities

In terms of Chinese religions, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (the Three Teachings) were usually viewed as the most important, as these three doctrines together formed the core of ancient Chinese civilization. Among the Three Teachings, Confucianism was the official state doctrine and dominated Chinese thoughts for centuries. However, it was more of a system of social and ethical philosophy than a religion. Daoism and Buddhism also made important contributions in forming a sophisticated Chinese philosophy but contained more religious elements and practices. Confucianism, as C.K. Yang stated, "may be regarded as a faith in the sense that, through centuries of enforcement and practice as a social doctrine, it won uncritical acceptance by the people and became an emotional attitude as well as a body of rational teaching. But it

is not a full-fledged theistic religion, since it poses no god or supernatural dogma as the symbol of its teachings.”¹⁷

The official ideology of China and a fundamental part of Chinese literature, Confucianism was always linked with Chinese religious history, dominating Chinese society, and fundamentally forming its traditional culture, deeply influencing the nation’s religiosity in consequence. An emphasis on everyday life was a key feature of Confucianism. In the Confucian classics, spiritual development comes after physical, emotional, and mental development. Confucius deliberately avoided discussing deities or spirits; however, he believed in performing the necessary rituals and sacrifices to pay respect to the spirits and the forces in heaven.¹⁸ For Chinese who travelled overseas to Canada, Confucianism was the root of their culture. Confucius was honoured in various venues in Victoria’s Chinatown.

Known as the “Joss House,” in English-language papers Lie Sheng Gong (The Palace of Saints) was taken over by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in 1885 and relocated to the third floor of the CCBA’s new building on 554-60 Fisgard Street. An independent temple existed in the same location before CCBA purchased the property and started to reconstruct the original building, which may be the origin of Lie Sheng Gong.¹⁹ Three deities—Cai Shen (the god of wealth), Guan Gong (the god of righteousness), and Tian Hou (the queen of Heaven, which was a patron of the seamen

¹⁷ C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley, U.S.: University of California Press, 1961), 244.

¹⁸ *The Chinese Times*, January 6, 1915, 1; September 26, 1916,3; September 30, 1918, 2; August 18, 1930, 11; David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri, eds., *Chinese Religious Life* (New York, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30-31.

¹⁹ *Daily Colonist*, March 14, 1885, 3. The Article does not mention when the original temple was built, but apparently it was constructed before 1885.

and a Daoist deity)—were enshrined before moving to the CCBA building, and Confucius and Hua Tuo (the god of medicine) were added as new deities in 1899. Confucius was thus worshipped inside the CCBA, where lamp oil and incense sticks were prepared as offerings.²⁰

The Chinese schools in Victoria also held annual ceremonies to celebrate Confucius’s birthday, with flowers placed in the hall of the Chinese school and music played when the participants sang praising songs to show their respect for Confucius. On a daily basis, the Chinese schools offered classes to teach Confucian classics to students, while Chinese literature argued that Confucianism existed prior to Western ideology.²¹

Under the influence of Confucianism, Chinese, whether in China or abroad, always performed their social duties first and downplayed, in relative terms, their spiritual lives. Although certain rituals were involved, they were merely for the sake of appearances, and attention mainly focused on social matters and living morally in this world. It should be noted that ancestor worship and the belief in fate are the exceptions within this context. Confucianism does not prohibit adherents from memorizing details about their ancestors or forbid them from believing in fate. In fact, the belief in the “Mandate of Heaven” was irresistible and imposed limits on human power in Confucianism. As explained by Mencius, “That which no man can do but is accomplished is the Mandate of Heaven. That which no man asks but comes is from fate.”²² The earliest definition of “Mandate of Heaven” recalled the intentions and

²⁰ Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership*, 40-47, 67-72. Amos and Wong, *Inside Chinatown*, 38-43. Amos and Wong say that the shrine was moved to the second floor of the Chinese Public School after 1966, which is at 636 Fisgard Street.

²¹ *The Chinese Times*, January 6, 1915, 1; September 26, 1916,3; September 30, 1918, 2; August 18, 1930, 11; David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri, eds., *Chinese Religious Life* (New York, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30-31.

²² Xuelian Duan and Yuxiao Chen eds., *The Mencius* (Beijing Union Press, 2015), 101.

instructions that Heaven expressed to humans, implying that Heaven, the supreme power that predetermines all events in the universe, metes out rewards and punishments to human beings based on their moral conduct. The Mandate of Heaven was considered an unstoppable force that determined dynastic changes, the rise and fall of nations, and even the fate of ordinary people.²³

Like Confucianism, Daoism originated in China and shared the belief in the mandate of heaven. As a philosophy, Daoism emphasizes the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. As a religion, it is polytheistic; it emerged from folk religions, myths, divination, and medicine; and developed widespread practices to divine individuals' futures. To adapt to the local environment, Buddhism, mainly Mahayana Buddhist teachings in China, borrowed many terms from Daoism in its translated scripts when it was introduced to China from India. Buddhist thoughts on rebirth, karma, heaven, and hell became influential in China, and Buddhist deities were incorporated by Daoism and were given Daoist titles. In a local and rural setting, Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism mingled together and manifested as Chinese folk religion with some extra ideas and rituals broadly performed but not originally and officially included in the Three Teachings. Varying with the requirements of locals, Chinese folk religion, with its fluid religiosity and inclusivity, was the most popular religion for Chinese. A person could go to Daoist temples and not be criticized, even if he or she were a Confucian. Similarly, it was not surprising to find a temple containing Daoist and Buddhist deities at the same time.²⁴

²³ About the "mandate of Heaven", see Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 133-137.

²⁴ Doris R. Jakobsh, eds., *World Religions: Canadian Perspectives* (Toronto, Ontario: Nelson Education, 2013), 205 – 211; Jordan Paper, Laurence G. Thompson, *The Chinese Way in Religion* (Belmont, Ontario: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1998), 89-101, 128-145, 153-155.

As an unorthodox religion that was not authorized by the central government, Chinese folk religion was never accepted by the Chinese elites, but it was practiced widely in rural China. It contained many aspects of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, with less emphasis on a moral dimension. Overlapping with the deities of the Three Teachings, Chinese folk religion also tended to develop local deities. In Victoria, many temples reflected this folk religion and were shrines of local deities. The earliest temple, Tam Kung Temple, was a typical example of this.

The first Chinese temple that appeared in Victoria, according to David Lai, was likely erected in 1875 at the corner of Fisgard and Government Streets. It was only a small house rented by Hakka people and purchased on 22 January 1877 by Tsay Ching and Dong Sang.²⁵ Lai assumed that they bought it on behalf of the Hakka people in Victoria.²⁶ With an uncertain beginning, this account of the temple's origin remains a shadowy legend with no factual basis.

In 1877, the Hakka temple - Tum Kung Temple, was the most visual and prominent Chinese temple in Victoria's Chinatown. It was believed to have been built according to traditional Chinese temple design, including a traditional temple roof with decorative cresting behind a brick wall. This one story temple was demolished and replaced by a new three-story brick building on 14 October 1911, when a Hakka association, the Yen Wo Society, took over the building. Since then, Tam Kung Temple had always been on the top floor of the building (which is now located at 1713 Government Street).²⁷

²⁵ Hakka is a group of the Chinese which belongs to Han ethnic but contains its own particular language and culture.

²⁶ Lai, *The Forbidden City within Victoria*, 60–61.

²⁷ Lai, *The Forbidden City*, 62.

With splendid dedication boards, a statuette of Tum Kung was installed in an embedded cube altar with “vases of flowers and plates of fruit...displayed on its top. Behind the front altar table is a simpler altar table on which incense burners and candlestick holders are placed.”²⁸ There is also a wooden stand holding a drum and a cast-iron bell (1887), which was struck twice a day. Some of the earliest dated furnishings were donated between 1887 and 1906. Following the Chinese tradition, those donated objects were inscribed with wish words, donors’ names, and the dates. Many objects in the Tum Kung Temple, such as the carved wood ornaments, were imported directly from Guangdong.

As to the origin of Tam Kung, Lai mentioned three possibilities in his book, *The Forbidden City*, and ended with an assumption that Tam Siu was the origin of Victoria’s Tam Kung deity. Tam Siu, an orphan from Huiyang County in Guangdong Province, who performed many miracles, was a patron saint of the Hakka people and of seafarers in South China and was depicted as an aged child (although Tam Kung’s appearance seems to depend on the imagination of the painter or sculptor). The legend claimed that Tam Kung, as a real person, lived about 800 years ago; he died at 80 years old with a childlike face. This description matched the Tam Kung statue in Victoria.²⁹

Chinese folk religion temples like the Tam Kung Temple attracted both Chinese and non-Chinese visitors when they were opened to the public. In 1905, a Western visitor described the building, which was likely Tam Kung Temple, as “a large room across which run two high counters, one behind the other, at a distance of five feet; the bottoms are ornamented with handsome wood carving, heavily gilt; the tops covered with all sorts

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 53.

of queer boxes, jars, trays of most extraordinary sweetmeats, and stands for joss-sticks, which are burnt on the same principle candles are in some European churches...behind the last counter sit three josses, one raised higher than the others, bedecked in tinsel and silk, but the effect was poor and tawdry. The walls were covered with the popular scrolls, and had on the ground large stands of antique arms copied in wood and metal; but here, again, they were too evidently imitations.” From the journalist’s perspective, the most interesting thing about the temple was a peculiar gray stone, about a foot high by three feet long, beautifully carved, with a small hole in the left side for water. It was functional for burning papers and served as a relic of the old sacrificial stone. Visitors were able to buy paper and incense at the door and use them when praying to the deity.³⁰

During the Chinese New Year, Tam Kung Temple experienced its busiest time. The temple had been “treated to new coats of red and green paint and gilding,” and was crowded with visitors. Some of those visitors were worshippers who burnt joss sticks and prayer papers before the shrine.³¹ This was a feature of Victoria’s Chinese temples - relatively quiet during the workday and crowded during festivals, similar to folk temples in China. However, they did not have some of the commercial functions of temples in China, such as hosting temple fairs with significant amounts of trading. What helped to keep the temple running were donations from visitors, and the payments some believers made for fortune telling. In the Tam Kung temple, people could get answers to a question or request by casting lots. When a person rolled a tube, and the stick dropped on the ground, the priest of the temple would interpret the meaning of the stick, which was

³⁰ *Daily Colonist*, February 1905, 14.

³¹ *Daily Colonist*, February 08, 1902, 7; January 28, 1903, 8.

marked with Chinese characters; it was believed to represent the will of the deity Tam Kung, and to reveal the person's fortune.³²

Another type of Victoria's temples, or to be more accurate, shrines, was the ancestor temple, which had its own special functions and shared features with the Chinese folk religion temples of Victoria. Most of the so-called temples reported about in English newspapers appeared to be altars within a space that belonged to a secular organization. Thus, many essentially secular associations maintained places for religious rituals. Ancestral shrines were installed in the Lung Kong Association, the Lee's Association, and other clan associations.³³

These shrines were set up with spirit tablets, incense burners on the altar, and offerings in front of the idols or the tablets, which would be worshipped during special events or on specific dates, including (for example) the rituals that occurred in the Tam Kung Temple. An associational hall contained a shrine-like area, but the organization itself was primarily secular in function. This tradition added even more cultural diversity and secular color to Chinese religious thoughts and activities in Victoria.

Unlike in China, where the basic unit of the community was a family, Victoria's Chinese community was mainly comprised of male individuals. To unite them, an ancestor temple served as a shrine for a mutual ancestor who ensured that every member of the association could connect with him. In this way, the "ancestor" that was worshipped within the associations was historical, well known, and almost legendary. The shrines of Lee's Association, the Lung Kong Association and Chee Kung Tong

³² Lai, *The Forbidden City*, 62-63.

³³ Amos and Wong, *Inside Chinatown*, 22-95; Lai, *The Forbidden City*, 60.

provided good examples of how ancestor temples worked differently in Victoria than they did in China.

The Lee's Association in Victoria was established in the early 1880s. At that time, many wealthy merchants with the surname of Lee (Li) had companies in this coastal city, and the Lee clan was one of the largest clans in the Chinese community.³⁴ In the 1910s, about 3000 Chinese people lived in Victoria, and one out of six belonged to the Lee's clan. The population dropped over time, but it was still significant up until 1923, with more than 400 Chinese migrants claiming the Lee surname. Due to the need to promote the welfare of their clan, Lee lineage's leaders raised funds and in 1909, they purchased a property at 612-614 Fisgard Street to serve as the Lee association's meeting hall; they installed a painting of Laozi in this building in a prominent spot in the middle of one of the walls because the Lee clan traced its roots back to Laozi (the personal name is Li Er), the founder of philosophical Taoism who lived during the 6th–5th century BC.³⁵

Li Er, who was called Laozi as an honorific title, was half historical and half legendary. He was an official in the Zhou dynasty, and wrote a book in two parts before departing to the West. Regarded as the author of the *Daodejing* (Classic of the Way of Power), one of the oldest and the most significant Chinese classical works of literature, Laozi deeply affected Chinese culture and became one of the most important deities of Daoism. Due to his contributions to Chinese ancient philosophy and Daoism, many clans of the Lee family traced their descent to him, including Canada's Lee's Association.

³⁴ "Lee" is the older English spelling of "Li". Following the rules of an official Romanized spelling system, this Chinese character should now be transcribed as "Li".

³⁵ Disanjie Kenqin Weiyuanhui (The third congress committee), *Quanjin Lishi Disanjie Kenqin Jiniantekan* (The Third Congress of Lee's Association of Canada Special Edition) (Cloverdale, B.C.: Friesen Printers, 1986), 45-46, 67.

In the meeting hall of Lee's association, the figure of Laozi was painted as a deity, and the image hung over the altar. Laozi was depicted as a senior person in a full robe, wearing a topknot, having a long white beard, and holding his usual attribute, a fan. Behind his head was a round circle, surrounded by clouds, which demonstrated that he was an immortal deity. His robe was beautifully decorated with auspicious symbols, and there were several decorated paintings and calligraphies arranged symmetrically on both sides of the painting, and an altar upon which incenses and offerings to Laozi were placed.³⁶

It was common to see ancestor shrines established in association halls in Victoria from the 1860s to the 1890s or as additional wings attached to the associations' buildings. Normally, the altars were set in the halls in which member meetings were held.³⁷ In China, ancestral temples were different, in that they were often larger and built as individual buildings that contained many spirit tablets. In rural China, people from the same county were always related in some way, including by marriage. In such circumstances, a large ancestor temple was a symbol of the wealth and status of the local families. However, these rules did not adapt well to the "bachelor" society that characterized the largely male Chinese community in Victoria. In the looser frameworks of migrant society, in which the bonds of the extended traditional family frequently were broken by the pressures of urbanization and industrialization, young men came from different clans; therefore, regions needed associations to maintain traditional networking and charitable activities. Local fellowship and even fictional brotherhood became the

³⁶ Amos and Wong, *Inside of Chinatown*, 63-68.

³⁷ Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop; Powell Street Revue, *Inalienable rice: A Chinese & Japanese Canadian anthology* (Vancouver: Powell Street Revue: Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop, 1979), 79.

essential morality of Victoria's Chinatown, and people who came from relatively small clans sometimes needed to ally with others. Differing from the ancestor temples in China, Victoria's ancestor temples did not always emphasize the biological bonds among worshipers.³⁸

Indeed, ancestor temples were used to solidify a sense of brotherhood; the Lung Kong Association, for example, worshipped four ancestral characters from the "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*."³⁹The origin of the Lung Kong Association may be traced back to an ancient temple called "Lung Kong", which means "Dragon Hill" in southern China. It was believed that Dragon Hill, located in Kaiping County, Guangdong Province, contained the auspicious energy "qi", as the shape of the hill reminded people of a dragon's head facing upward. Given the general belief in feng shui, people who lived near this hill believed that the land would bring fortune to its owner's family, and so they were all eager to claim this hill for their own clans. At one time, Dragon Hill belonged to the Liu family that lived nearby, but this family was not large or strong enough to fight their neighbors for control of the hill. Therefore, they decided to ally with the Guan, Zhang and Zhao families, and together, these four families built an ancestor temple and claimed ownership of the hill in 1662. Inside the Temple built by the four families were laid the ancestors from each family—Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Zhao Yun—these were the four figures in the famous fourteenth-century historical novel, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. In the late Eastern Han dynasty, rebellions emerged in

³⁸ Amos and Wong, *Inside of Chinatown*, 63-68.

³⁹ *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is a 14th-century historical novel attributed to Luo Guanzhong. It is set in the turbulent years towards the end of the Han dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period in Chinese history, starting in 169 AD and ending with the reunification of the land in 280.

many places to against the corrupt central government. In the meantime, warlords took the opportunity of the chaos to take control of territories and armies.⁴⁰

According to the story, the four ancestors of the Lung Kong Association were not necessarily genetically related to the association members. This partly-historical, partly-fictional story was culled from historical resources and folk stories, and it created a wide acknowledgement of Liu Bei and his associates as brothers. The people of Shu-Han Kingdom, including its warlord Liu Bei and his generals Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Zhao Yun, were depicted gloriously. Their legends continued to be told by storytellers year after year, and many scenes were depicted in art, paintings, and plays. Among the most prevalent plots, the “Oath of the Peach Garden” was a memorable scene. It portrayed how Liu Bei, who was considered to be high of mind and kind of heart, attracted two warriors, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, to be his sworn brothers. The brotherhood among the three was portrayed as genuine, which showed their righteousness, honor, benevolence, loyalty, and selflessness.⁴¹

The fourth ancestor of the Lung Kong Association, Zhao Yun, possessed tremendous courage and unwavering loyalty to Liu Bei, but he was not (in history or in legend) a sworn brother of the other three ancestors. Liu, Guan, and Zhang were often depicted in paintings, sculptures and other art forms in China; in the Lung Kong Association, the fourth character Zhao Yun was added to the images of these three sworn brothers. This change reflected the effort that the association made to create social

⁴⁰ “The Origin of Lung Kong,” *Lung Kong Jikan* (Lung Kong 2005 Winter Issue Quarterly Magazine), no. 200 (2005), 7; “A Brief History of Lung Kong and the Origin of the Four Families,” *Lung Kong Jikan*, 8-9.

⁴¹ Lau Fuk, “The Spirit of Lung Kong,” <http://www.palungkong.org/spirit.htm> (accessed 8 April 2019).

solidarity by adjusting the ancestral identities to meet the need to ally families with each other.

The overseas Chinese from the four-surname groups first erected a temple in San Francisco around 1876 to replicate the Lung Kong Temple in Kaiping county. This temple was used for worship, and also as a place to hold meetings for the four-surname groups. As more and more members of these four-surname groups moved to North America, the Lung Kong Association became widespread in many cities. In 1900, the Mu Tin Association (which later changed its name to the Lung Kong Association) was established in Victoria. It was Canada's earliest Lung Kong Association.⁴²

Similar to other clan associations, Victoria's Lung Kong Association was built for gathering and supporting people with the four surnames. The association raised funds to erect a three-story building in 1905, and it set its meeting hall on the third floor. The main floor was used as a shop, and the second floor was housing for rent—both of these provided income to support the association. On the third-floor, the meeting hall housed the shrine to the four ancestors and the spirit tablet of Zhuge Liang, who was another important figure from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The painting of the four ancestors was hung on the wall, and candles and incense were put on the altar in front of the painting to represent the respect of the association members. Horizontally inscribed boards and delicate couplets were set around the shrine to elaborate on the eternal brotherhood of the four ancestors and their devoted fellowship.⁴³

⁴² James S. L. Jung, "A Concise History and Development of the Lung Kong Organization," Pan American Lung Kong Tin Yee Association, <http://www.palungkong.org/concise%20lk%20history.htm> (accessed 5 March 2018).

⁴³ Wenjian Guan, "The Past and Current Situation of Canada's Lung Kong Association," Pan American Lung Kong Tin Yee Association, <http://www.palungkong.org/canada-history.htm> (accessed 5 March 2018).

Being relatively small surname clans, the Liu, Guan, Zhang and Zhao clans allied together to empower their clan association. With the purpose of solidifying the four surname-groups, the four ancestors were worshipped, as they provided strong imagery and symbolism that inspired friends to look after each other in times of hardship. Such ancestors were derived from Chinese historical and dramatic texts and featured Chinese “culture heroes”; however, they were not necessarily related to the worshippers by blood. Instead, they were designed to emphasize the proud traditions and interconnections of the four-surname groups. In the journals of the Lung Kong Association, and the origin story of Lung Kong, there are descriptions of celebrations, but there is no description of the specific rituals practiced for worshipping the ancestors. In the celebration of one of the ancestors, the association members gathered and bowed three times to the image of the ancestor, and then the members announced the ancestor’s biography, emphasizing his honesty, sincerity, bravery, righteousness and kindness to the nation, and encouraged members to follow the teachings of the noble and wise ancestors and to honor them as models to remember. After speeches came a banquet, with many people donating to the association. Later, the ceremony sometimes included (gun) salutes and musical performances, followed by the three bows and speeches; the celebration for the other ancestors were similar.⁴⁴ For Lung Kong members, it seems that what was truly important, and emphasized, was the spirits of the four ancestors and their loyal brotherhood to each other. As one member said, “the illustrious virtues, loyalty,

⁴⁴ *The Chinese Times*, June 20, 1921, 2; September 28, 1925, 3; October 26, 1925, 3; October 22, 1928, 3.

righteousness, humanity and courage displayed by the original founders of our Fraternal Order are the guiding principles of the Lung Kong World Federation.”⁴⁵

While the above examples include the features of extended family ancestor worship, the Chee Kong Tong (the Chinese Freemasons), a branch of the Hongmen Society, clearly stated that everyone was bonded mainly by sworn-brotherhood, not by any blood relationship.⁴⁶ In Victoria, the Chee Kong Tong (CKT) was established in 1876 and later became the main lodge of the Hongmen Society in North America. As a fraternal association, the CKT was no longer limited by the boundaries of counties and clans and instead stressed the pure sworn-brotherhood and righteousness of its members. The building of the CKT was first erected in 1886 at 22-24 Cormorant Street and was later moved to Fisgard Street; both were used as the meeting halls, and they included a shrine for the statue of Guan Yu (Kwan Kong), who represented the Liu-Guan-Zhang brotherhood, and images of Hongmen’s Five Ancestors, the five legendary monks who founded the Hongmen Society and swore a blood oath against the Qing dynasty. In front of this alter was a table with an incense burner, and over this hung a red lamp, on which was written the Chinese characters “Guan Sheng Di Jun” (the Daoist title, meaning "Holy Emperor Lord Guan", which refers to Guan Yu). Along the wall on either side were chairs for other officials.⁴⁷

In this room, the CKT celebrated the ancestors’ birthdays, with “feasting in the numerous restaurants, accompanied with music and other evidences of rejoicing.”⁴⁸ Guan

⁴⁵ Lau Fuk, “The Spirit of Lung Kong.” Pan American Lung Kong Tin Yee Association, <http://www.palungkong.org/spirit.htm>(accessed 5 March 2018).

⁴⁶ Hongmen Society was a very influential anti-Qing dynasty secret society in overseas Chinese.

⁴⁷ Bertil Lintner, *Blood Brothers: The Criminal Underworld of Asia* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 41-44; David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*, 205-206; *Daily Colonist*, September 29, 1894, 6; October 4, 1898, 5.

⁴⁸ *Daily Colonist*, September 2, 1896, 5.

Yu, who was worshipped by the Lung Kong Association as one of their four ancestors, was also worshipped by CKT members as an upholder of the code of brotherhood and a symbol of fraternal loyalty. His birthday was celebrated by the CKT, as reported in accounts of the ancestor birthday celebration for another founder of the Hongmen Society, Chen Jinnan (Chan Gunn Nam) or The Five Ancestors. The ceremony included rituals like bowing to the images of ancestors and making speeches that encouraged descendants to adopt their ancestors' will and moralities. Music, firecrackers and banquets (normally not held in the meeting hall) were involved as well. Candidates wishing to join the lodge were admitted in ceremonies held in the room with the images of the ancestors.⁴⁹

The most outstanding members of CKT were commended by the association every few years, and at the time of celebrations, their building was decorated with lanterns and “portraits of Chinese saints as the portals were guarded by gigantic statues of heroes.” As reported in the local *Daily Colonist*, across the end of the building, “a sort of high altar in carved gilt work was erected and on a table in front of it were all sorts of provisions. Before this table the high masonic dignitaries in bright scarlet stoles prayed, chanted, blessed and made genuflections amid a chorus of gongs, or brandished and twirled brass swords at the ancient worthies on the wall, who looked down in placid enjoyment of the scene.”⁵⁰ In addition to the burning of paper money and incense, CKT members sometimes paraded with a dragon dance and had “giant Josses” which were moved to outside to be set on fire.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *The Chinese times*, August 24, 1918, 3; April 16, 1925, 3; May 15, 1928, 3; July 5, 1928, 3; October 24, 1928, 3.

⁵⁰ *Daily Colonist*, January 17, 1883, 3; November 18, 1883, 3.

⁵¹ *Daily Colonist*, December 16, 1892, 5.

From a Western perspective, a shrine such as Chee Kung Tong's was seen as a temple that contained features similar to those found in the Tam Kung Temple. In one report, the CKT shrine was called "a joss house", and the interior of the CKT building was described thusly: "the walls were decorated by life-size reproductions of some of the most popular josses, and burning joss-sticks diffused a nauseating odor."⁵² However, as the above descriptions illustrate, the temples of Chinatown were intended to be more than simple religious places. The celebrations held in them had secular aspects as well, such as admitting new members and socializing during the feasts.⁵³ As might be expected, religious behaviors beyond these associations were equally complex. The next section will focus on the nature of religious practices in the daily life of Victoria's Chinese residents.

C. Lived Religion in Victoria's Chinatown

If we were to focus solely on associations' shrines and cemeteries, many other religious practices or beliefs of the Chinese migrants would be missed. Those religious practices of everyday life, which, although closely connected with material circumstances, nevertheless involved religious imagination. This type of practice should be viewed as a dynamic integration of religion and experience, meaning that it is not possible to understand people's religious behaviours outside of their social context. Thus, lived religion, as the study of the context and content of the practices of religious laity, is

⁵² *Daily Colonist*, January 17, 1883, 3; November 18, 1883, 3; November 19, 1904, 5.

⁵³ *Daily Colonist*, October 14, 1906, 3; *The Chinese Times*, August 31, 1921, 3.

needed here to enable a better understanding of people's religious idioms through dynamic "everyday thinking."⁵⁴

Religious beliefs permeated the everyday lives of the Chinese; for example, the fire crackers used at Chinese New Year were a highly important feature of the celebration because they were rooted in the belief in fighting the devil who appeared once a year:

"the consternation of the lurking devils who are routed by the firecracker bombardments. The evil spirits who infest those alleys will awake this morning with that proverbial tired feeling, a dark brown taste, and the conclusion of having passed a bad night, for not only were the firecrackers cracking and spluttering, but punks burned on every window sill, and even watermelon rinds were pressed into service to hold the smoldering sticks, whose smoke is perfume to the nostrils of the Chinese, but death to the devil."⁵⁵

Apparently, the symbolism of many Chinese traditions was related to religious thoughts. Whereas firecrackers were seen as a weapon with which to drive away the devil, Chinese lilies, which were the most popular flowers before and during Chinese New Year, were viewed as a symbol of good fortune. A Western visitor, who was invited to the home of a Victorian Chinese family, described how lily bulbs had been placed in small bowls, which were in turn placed on a small table before the family deity. He was told that among the Chinese, those whose lilies had not flowered before the New Year time began would be thought of as unlucky and fated to be accursed during the following year. It was said that this belief could be traced to a story that two men fell in love with the same woman and used lilies to decide who would marry her. Each man brought a lily bulb back to his own home, the agreement being that the one whose bulb blossomed first

⁵⁴ David D. Hall edited, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii, 1–8.

⁵⁵ *Daily Colonist*, January 28, 1903, 8.

would be the winner. The loser not only had to give up the woman he loved, he also hanged himself. Because of this, lilies blossoming late was seen as a sign of misfortune.⁵⁶

First-generation Chinese Canadian women took part in religious rituals through private practice. A common attribute of these women was domesticity, and they were barely seen in public. As they were relatively rare among the Chinese population in Victoria (and Canada) at this time, Chinese women raised the curiosity of Chinese men. In public places, they attracted attention and were criticized as “bad women.” In general, they stayed busy with work in the domestic domain, including taking care of families, sewing for tailors, and doing laundry. Based on oral history, Alison R. Marshall asserted that most Chinese women on the Canadian prairies practiced Buddhist and Daoist customs, which are seen in this paper as Chinese folk religious customs, on a daily basis in the private sphere. Many of the women she interviewed arrived at Victoria first and normally spent a period of time that was sometimes as long as several years in this city before moving to the Canadian prairies.⁵⁷ Therefore, their cases are also helpful in completing the picture of Chinese women’s religious life in Victoria.

Marshall provided the example of Lim Quongying, who was born to a “Daoist family,” to illustrate how a Chinese woman might have performed important religious practices at home. Quongying’s father was a geomancer who performed fortunate-telling and other rituals back in China, and she was seen as an Immortal Born Lady (Xiansheng) familiar with many Daoist religious practices. Quongying came to Canada to marry a wealthy merchant who had lost his first wife. After docking in Victoria on September 5,

⁵⁶ *Daily Colonist*, February 7, 1902, 5; January 28, 1903, 8.

⁵⁷ Alison R. Marshall, *Cultivating Connections: The Making of Chinese Prairie Canada* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2014), 139.

1921, she married her husband, Sam Wong, and enjoyed marriage parties and celebrations in British Columbia before leaving for the Prairies. It seemed that she had predicted her journey in Canada would start inauspiciously, given the facts that she travelled during the Ghost month and her husband's deceased ex-wife remained jealous of her. In addition, she kept coins that were "used as heavenly treasury money to restore destiny."⁵⁸ Coin swords were also used to protect Quongying and her family from the threat offered by the deceased ex-wife's spirit, though none of those could easily be found in a public area. Quongying and her husband installed a door with a lock to prevent anyone outside the family from accidentally seeing the religious implements as the ritual objects were to have been kept from public view.⁵⁹

It would not be surprising if the Chinese women who lived in Victoria acted in similar ways. A Chinese man, Hong Low, confirmed that his wife used to pray to (the deities) for the purpose of bringing her family an auspicious life.⁶⁰ A Canadian-born woman, Grace Lo, remembered her mother as very "superstitious"—the mother predicted Grace's destiny and believed she would die at a relatively young age.

The belief in fate or destiny was an important and widespread Chinese religious (and philosophical) belief which were rarely understood by Western observers. This belief led to the practice of various forms of divination, to attempt to predict one's fate. *The Chinese Times* printed advertisements for divination, including Bazi (eight

⁵⁸ Ibid, 144.

⁵⁹ Marshall, *Cultivating Connections*, 139–146.

⁶⁰ Grace Lo [pseudonym], interviewed by Helena Yeung, 1979, T3707: 0001, BC Archives, Victoria, BC; Hong Low, interviewed by Theresa Low, June 1980, T3710:0001–0002, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, BC Archives, Victoria, BC.

characters) predicting, face reading, palm reading, feng shui, and Chinese astrology all year round. Stores posted the ads over decades, one of which lasted until after 1930.⁶¹

The forms of divination were quite diverse. feng shui, for example, was widely used to orient buildings – often spiritually significant structures such as tombs – in an auspicious manner. As mentioned before, the Chinese Cemetery’s site was chosen and located at Harling Point because the place was believed to be auspicious. Based on the feng shui theory, Dr. David Lai found the auspicious sites of Victoria, one of which proved to be the Chinese Cemetery.⁶² Bazi, as another example, normally involved taking a person’s hour, day, month, and year of birth and using them to tell the individual about his or her destiny, current situation, and the field in which he or she would be most likely to succeed. The foundation of Chinese divination was Yi-ology, which was rooted in *The Book of Changes* and developed over millennia.⁶³

Chinese folk religion absorbed the idea and altered the “changes” from a more philosophic concept into a way of telling the future of individuals, families, institutions, or even countries. In *The Chinese Times*, some reviews emphasized the importance of fate – the Mandate of Heaven – to explain the historical and current fortunate or unfortunate signs and how the contemporary Chinese community should react to the tough situation they faced.⁶⁴ To some extent, the belief in fate brought comfort to Chinese immigrants by providing a feeling that the difficulties they encountered were predestined

⁶¹ *Dahan Gongbao (The Chinese Times)*, February 1, 1916, 4; February 1, 1918, 3; December 14, 1921, 3; December 27, 1921, 3; January 4, 1927, 10; February 22, 1927, 10; April 14, 1927, 10; February 2, 1928, 10; August 23, 1927, 10; September 27, 1930, 3; April 16, 1960, 3.

⁶² For the detailed process and explanation, see David Chuenyan Lai, "The Chinese Cemetery in Victoria," *BC Studies*, No. 75 (Autumn 1987): 24-42.

⁶³ Qiu Liang Hui edited, *International Research of the Yi-ology* (China Book Press, 2012), 15- 37, 64-72.

⁶⁴ *Dahan Gongbao*, August 11, 1919; January 12, 1920, 1; September 9, 1925, 1.

and that they should adapt themselves to fit within it. It could also be an inspiration for them, as auspicious signs increased confidence in the future.

In daily life, each traditional Chinese family could engage in more religious activities in its private life because the family could be seen as a religious unit, keeping spirit tablets of gods or ancestors, which would be worshipped as well as having sacrifices offered to them.⁶⁵ Chinese women usually played an important role in preparing the food in this process although they were not supposed to practice the rituals. At the time, Western people pictured the typical Chinese house as containing a shrine where incense was burnt.⁶⁶

This matches what people saw in Victorian Chinese families' homes, where shrines were kept at which to offer food to ancestors. These homes were likely the homes of middle- and upper-class merchant families, who were a relative minority of the Chinese community, as most Chinese labourers did not have their families in Canada at that time. For middle-class Chinese, when the Chinese New Year came, "one of the most solemn sacrifices at the home occur(red) on the last night of the old year." All the food, including fish, poultry, pork, rice, vegetables, and a liquor distilled from rice, was placed at the shrine to satisfy the hunger of the dead, and then the living would eat it. To protect the family ancestors' sacrifices, additional food was placed near the door to feed any wandering stranger spirits. Then, after burning incense and paper money, "the descendants bow(ed) before the shrine and pray(ed) for the protection and blessing of the ancestral spirits during the coming year." The offerings were based on the assumption that "upon the favor of these guardians (ancestors' spirits) depend(ed) happiness and

⁶⁵ Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 2–18.

⁶⁶ *Daily Colonist*, August 9, 1930, 13.

success, and that dire misfortune and trouble follow(ed) upon their displeasure.”⁶⁷

Another Western visitor to a Chinese family found that they had a table on which to offer food and tea for “some household god.”⁶⁸ Ancestor worship could sometimes be extended in intriguing ways, and even living people could be worshipped as deities. It was said that a person who passed by Cormorant Street one afternoon saw Chinese people performing incantations before the image of a governor who disagreed with excluding the Chinese from work in certain fields. To show their appreciation, the Chinese burned paper to treat him as a living patron.⁶⁹

Overall, Victoria’s Chinese community was very much impacted by the traditions they brought from China. At the same time, some of these traditions were adapted slightly to Canadian society, due to the fact that most Chinese in Canada were single men. As single men, they could not practice religion in the context of family, so they turned to associations instead. With their belief in spirits, Chinese paid much attention to ceremonies and worship rituals. To pay respect to their ancestors, they offered food, incense and burning papers to the deceased, who represented the mutual ancestors of a family clan or the brotherhood among association members. In many ways, religion may have been interwoven into the lives of the people we have been observing: “In the ritual system of the Chinese, religion, politics, morality, attitudes and compulsory modes of behavior and feelings were all intricately interdependent.”⁷⁰ Worshiping a historical figure or ancestors could strengthen the bonds between Chinese by clearly expressing the family or association’s attitude towards the morality they believed should be prioritized.

⁶⁷ *Daily Colonist*, February 7, 1902, 5; January 28, 1903, 8.

⁶⁸ *Daily Colonist*, February 17, 1905, 14.

⁶⁹ *Daily Colonist*, March 21, 1878, 2.

⁷⁰ Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 164.

In addition, the belief in fate and emphasis on daily lived religion formed the basis for the daily religious life of Chinese in Victoria.

Chapter 2 “Somewhere in Between”: Missionary Activities in Victoria’s Chinatown and Chinese Attitudes toward Christianity

*“I don't know what his name is--and
I don't care what you think,
But there's music in the heart and soul
Of that bright little Chink.
It did me good to listen, aye,
And filled my heart with joy,
To know God put such music in
That little Chinese boy.*

*Come back again and play to me!
Come back! I understand!
I'll teach you melodies I know,
Give you the helping hand.
Don't heed what other folks may say,
Or other folks might think,
You're "human"--that's what counts with me,
Althou' you're just a Chink.”*

--- An excerpt from a poem of "The Sidney Review."
Sidney, V.I., B.C., Canada. Bob Sloan.

This poem, written by Bob Sloan and published on April 10, 1924, several decades after the Chinese first came and tried to make a living on Vancouver Island, helps illustrate the viewpoints and opinions of the Euro-Canadians towards the Chinese. This poem shows that despite the important role they played in Canadian history, public figures labelled the Chinese as heathens, pagans, or "Chinamen". For the Chinese sojourners and settlers, one way to mitigate this sharp discrimination towards them was to be evangelized. Thus, religions that originated from China were not the only beliefs held by the Chinese immigrants in Victoria as missionaries connected with the newcomers in order to convert them as quickly as possible. From the viewpoint of Euro-Canadians, Christianity equalled civilized human beings and this conversion was thought to help bridge the gap between the

Euro-Canadians and Chinese-Canadians. However, Chinese-Canadians were still viewed as inferior even after they were converted to Christianity. This chapter will trace the history of Christianity in the Chinese community from the first arrival of the Chinese in Victoria in 1858 to 1930, a period when the missionaries in Canada were very influential. It will then investigate how the Chinese-Canadians showed both positive and negative attitudes towards the missionaries.

A. Early missionary activities in Victoria's Chinatown and the establishment of churches

Christianity was much more organized than the Chinese folk religion discussed in the previous chapter. Missionaries left reports and letters, many of which were preserved by the churches. Such primary sources can contribute to a relatively comprehensive view of missionary works. These materials, however, were still biased as their writers viewed things from their own perspectives, and their values were influenced by those of the white supremacy of that time. Moreover, missionaries were not only recording what happened during those periods, but were also trying to present their efforts and the interest demonstrated by their converts and potential converts in the best possible light, which would enable them to receive more financial support or perhaps more human resources from churches and other potential donors for further completion of their work. Therefore, they tried to beautify/modify the facts behind their efforts.

This discourse was therefore one-sided and presented far from the entire picture. In missionaries' stories, the Chinese were positively influenced by the work of evangelization. The missionary literature often generalized about the Chinese, overlooking the possibility that diversity within an ethnic group could sometimes be even larger than between different

groups. The detailed story was far more complicated, but for now, the focus will be on the missionaries' voices.

a. Individual volunteer work among the Chinese community

With the belief that people are all equal in God's eyes, and some former experience with Chinese communities in China, some missionaries were sympathetic towards recently arrived Chinese residents of Victoria. The early period witnessed individual endeavours to evangelize the Chinese before the churches set up missions. It is said that churches made efforts to Christianize hundreds of Chinese in 1859 in British Columbia. However, no details exist to document the nature of such efforts in this early period.¹

Protestant churches were dominant in BC and Methodist preachers were pioneers among the Protestants in evangelizing Chinese immigrants in Victoria. A more specific record showed that Christian missions began focusing on Victoria's Chinese immigrants in 1866, when the Methodist missionary Ephraim Evans organized a Chinese class in the Sunday school of his church.² Two years later, the Rev. A. E. Russ of Victoria's Methodist church also opened a school to teach the Chinese English in an unused barroom on the corner of Government and Herald streets. The school was run by Rev. Russ's wife along with other volunteers.³

Victoria's Chinese population had not yet attracted much official interest from the churches by that time. As noted above, the missionaries' first step was to open English classes to attract Chinese men. Several years later, the suggestion and contribution of a

¹ S.S. Osterhout, *Orientalism in Canada* (Toronto, Ont.: General Publicity and Missionary Education, 1929), 1.

² Jiwu Wang, *"His Dominion" and the "Yellow Peril": protestant missions to the Chinese immigrants in Canada, 1859-1967* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 35-36.

³ Osterhout, *Orientalism in Canada*, 73.

merchant named William Eli Sanford paved the way for the opening of the Sanford Mission School in 1874, under the pastorate of Rev. William Pollard, a Methodist minister. Rev. Pollard, together with his daughters and later with Rev. Russ and Miss Williams, took charge of the school, where they held two daily sessions for the Chinese, in a building on the corner of Government and Fisgard Streets.⁴

The teachings of this Methodist Mission school included English courses and preaching. Every Wednesday night, Mr. Russ preached to pupils with the assistance of an interpreter and a Father McKay who always made his speeches.⁵ On Sundays at 3 pm, Father McKay, along with three assistant teachers, taught pupils in the Methodist Sunday school.⁶

Another Chinese Missionary School opened at 4 Cormorant Street on March 20, 1874. The local newspaper reported “the prospect of encouraging success” with this school, as the staff welcomed a total of 30 children and adults on opening day. The school hours were from 9:00 to 12:00 am, and from 7:30 to 9:30 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.⁷ These Methodist missionary works were most likely voluntary. Such efforts appear to have been short-term and no other information is available about Chinese missionary schools until the first organized official mission that began in 1885.

Nearly all early missionary works should be credited to the Methodists and a few Presbyterians who worked voluntarily with the Chinese in Victoria. According to a Presbyterian report, Rev. P. McLeod of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church may have

⁴ Ibid, 71-75.

⁵ McKay was the deacon of a Methodist Church in Victoria. It is unclear why he is called “Father McKay”; this thesis just borrows the way he had been called in records.

⁶ Osterhout., *Oriental in Canada*, 71-75.

⁷ *Daily British Colonist*, March 20, 1874, 3.

carried out some voluntary missionary work before 1891, although there is no clear evidence of specific Presbyterian mission work.⁸

b. The organized mission with the Chinese immigrants

Methodist Church

The early missionaries held quite an optimistic view of Chinese locals based on the loyalty of new converts. The volunteer Methodist missionaries in Victoria appealed to the Methodist missionary society more than once to support their efforts by proclaiming Victoria a Chinese Mission field.⁹

The first organized mission with Chinese immigrants in Victoria was conducted by Methodists in 1885.¹⁰ In this period of history, Mr. Vrooman, who was otherwise known as John Endicott Gard(i)ner, played an essential role in missions amongst the Chinese.¹¹

⁸ Chinese Presbyterian Church 90th Anniversary Celebrations Committee, *To God be the glory: The Chinese Presbyterian Church*, Victoria, B.C., 1892-1983, 13; Presbyterian Church in Canada. General Assembly (17th: 1891: Kingston, Ont.), *The acts and proceedings of the seventeenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Kingston, June 10-18, 1891*, appendix no.10, liii.

⁹ For details of the missionaries' presentations about the bright future of converting the Chinese, see Ward, "The Oriental Immigrant and Canada's Protestant Clergy, 1858-1925"; Osterhout, *Orientalists in Canada*; Ward, *Oriental missions in British Columbia*; Chinese Presbyterian Church, *To God be the glory*.

¹⁰ The Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1891-1892, xxxii.

¹¹ Mr. Vrooman's initial name was John Endicott Gard(i)ner Jr., son of John Endicott Gardner Sr. and Anna Rose (Rosa) Gardner (her original family name was "Hunter"). In this paper, "Vrooman" and "Gardner" each refer to J.E. Gardner Jr. Gardner was born in Hong Kong. After his father's death, his mother, Anna, married another missionary, Daniel Vrooman. Daniel Vrooman had been working as the "superintendent to the Chinese Catechist" in Australia, and Gardner stayed there until 1882, when he came to San Francisco with his mother and stepfather. San Francisco was home to a Methodist asylum, called the Women's Rescue Asylum, which rescued Chinese women. This institution likely served a model for him to establish a similar rescue home for Chinese girls in Victoria. In 1885, he moved from San Francisco to Victoria to act as an interpreter for Chinese on trial, and then became an interpreter for the Customs Office. At that time, his legal last name was still Vrooman. He changed back to his father's family name, Gardner, when he was ordained in 1888, after resigning from government work. He was soon appointed as the first Methodist missionary working full time among the Chinese. Local Chinese merchants accused Gardner of mistreating immigrants, which may have prompted him to leave Victoria, though a reverend defended him against such accusations. He contributed most of his life to the Chinese mission. After leaving Victoria for San Francisco, he developed close ties with the San Francisco's Oriental Home, where he often taught classes in the afternoons and evenings. For more information about Gardiner's family history and his own experiences, see Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 62-63. Also see Mae M. Ngai, *The Lucky Ones: One Family and the Extraordinary Invention of Chinese America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 76-79, 81-87, 250-251. David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership: Case Study of*

He was born in China and was partly of Chinese ancestry. His father was an American Presbyterian missionary who worked in China, and his mother was the daughter of an American missionary and a Chinese woman. He lived in China with his parents for years and was fluent in Cantonese. With such a background, he was enthusiastic about evangelization and was able to easily connect with most Chinese in Victoria.

A report from February 1885 described the mission school as an achievement of Mr. Gardner. At the time Gardner arrived in Victoria, there were no formal Chinese missions. As an interpreter, he had opportunities to contact the Chinese community and witnessed their struggles living in a new land. He then suggested that the local churches open a school for Chinese newcomers. Consequently, the Methodist Church sent a report to the General Board of Missions, stating that the mission should be established as soon as possible. The mission school opened on Cormorant Street, with the purpose of teaching English first, and then teaching Christian precepts.¹² Under Gardner's lead, the school remained voluntary and largely depended on his volunteer work. On Sunday afternoons, the school offered Bible study classes and Chinese-language religious services to Chinese participants.¹³

The school was seen as a successful effort. In December 1885, a visitor from Montreal found the schoolroom crowded with boys and middle-aged men. He estimated that about 60 to 70 people were present for the night class. Gardner and his assistant teachers, three women and six men, taught each student to read and spell in English. All

Victoria in Canada (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010), 87. Also Liam O'Reilly, "Missionaries and Women in Victoria's Chinatown: The Establishment and Evolution of the Chinese Rescue Home, 1887-1900." (M.A., University of Victoria, 2010), 10-18.

¹² *Daily British Colonist*, February 4, 1885, 3.

¹³ "The Chinese Mission School", *The Missionary Outlook* (January 1886), 107.

students then sang a hymn in Chinese in order to express gratitude to the helpers and they prayed together in English.¹⁴

Gardner continued teaching and preaching to the Chinese on evenings and Sundays without payment. He won eleven converts in the autumn of 1885, including Mr. Cheung Sing Noon and Mr. Chue, who remained close to churches and contributed to missions in many ways in their later lives. In fact, the well-known Chinese missionary and doctor Victoria Cheung was Mr. Cheung's daughter.¹⁵

Another major project of the Methodist Church in Victoria, which was also based on Mr. Gardner's efforts, was the Chinese Girls Rescue Home, which later became the Oriental Home and School. Gardner established the institution in 1886 as a refuge for abused Chinese women, with the dual purpose of relieving these victims from human trafficking, and Christianizing them. The Home was set up in a rented house on the then Fredrick Street (now Balmoral Road), and was taken over by the Methodist Women's Missionary Society (WMS) in 1887.¹⁶

Gardner's voluntary work continued until 1888, when he left government service and entered the ministry of the Methodist Church. His services ended in 1894, when he left Victoria and spent two years in Vancouver before his return to San Francisco. After he departed, the Fisgard Street Missionary School was taken over by Rev. Chan Sing Kai for the next 6 years, was carried on by Rev. So Pul (Pei) Kow for 4 years, and then by Rev. Chan Yu Tan from 1909 to 1912. Lee Ga Tong sustained the mission for a short time

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories: The Early Chinese Canadian Christian History* (Burnaby, BC: Chinese Christian Mission, 2013), 88-89.

¹⁶ Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, "'Allee Samee Melican Lady': Imperialism and Negotiation at the Chinese Rescue Home," *Resources for Feminist Research* 22, no.3 (Fall 1993): 45.

thereafter. Rev. Kwan Yu Nam, originally from South China, worked there for the next decade. He was followed by Rev. Lum Chong (Choh) Hang (C.H.Lum), who turned the mission over to Rev. Lo Dart Tong in 1928.¹⁷

Among the Chinese missionaries noted above, Chan Sing Kai and Chan Yu Tan were brothers, born to a Christian family in China and trained in Hong Kong, where their family had built a Methodist missionary school.¹⁸ The General Board of Missionaries sent Chan Sing Kai to serve the Methodist church in Canada. He was the first ordained Chinese clergyman in the Methodist Church in BC.¹⁹ As for the other missionaries listed above, their biographies have not yet been found, which unfortunately leaves their backgrounds unknown.

Meanwhile, the Rescue Home was running under the WMS's direction. The WMS managed to erect a new building for the Rescue Home at 100 Cormorant Street in 1888. The location was close to the southeast border of Victoria's Chinatown. In the early period, the missionaries believed that girls were seen as property within the Chinese community, and could be sold or transferred by their "owners". The missionaries believed that almost all Chinese girls who stayed in the Rescue Home had somehow been enslaved by individuals or brothels before coming to the Home. Between 1888 and 1902, the missionaries reported that 40 Chinese females escaped from their "owners" to be sheltered in the Rescue Home. A few of these girls later escaped from the Home and claimed that

¹⁷ Osterhout, *Orientalists in Canada*, 71-75; Clippings of BC Archives, microfilm D-19, Reel 28, Frame 0213. Neither of the two sources mentioned who was in charge of the mission during 1904 and 1909. In addition, because these missionaries' names were recorded in Romanized Cantonese pronunciations, they often had multiple versions as in quotes.

¹⁸ They were also known as Sing Kai Chan and Yu Tan Chan. Chan is their family name.

¹⁹ Wang, *"His Dominion"*, 51; Chinese United Church, *A Hundred Years of Christian Chinese Work in British Columbia, 1859-1959* (Vancouver, BC: United Church of Canada, 1959); Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories*, 25.

they were mistreated there. This was likely because those Chinese girls had struggled to adjust to the Home's strict rules. Later on, the situation changed within the Home; more and more women, both Chinese and Japanese, were not rescued mistreated wives or sex trade workers but girls and women who wanted to be educated in English and came to stay at the Home temporarily.²⁰ The Rescue Home found the potential to affect families and the younger generation of the Chinese by educating more women and children.

In addition to basic education, some girls, usually those who were extraordinarily faithful Christians, continued receiving help from WMS to further their education. Agnes Chan, for instance, received help from WMS to enter the Women's College Hospital in Toronto, where she graduated as a doctor in 1923 before traveling to Detroit for post-graduate courses.²¹

In 1890, Gardner requested support to construct a specialised building for the Chinese Christians so they could come together and worship.²² After his request was approved, the Chinese Methodist Church, located at 526 Fisgard Street, was established in 1891. It served as the Chinese Methodist Church until 1925 and then as the Chinese United Church, after the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches joined together to form the United Church of Canada.

²⁰ Wang, *His Dominion*, 102; Whiteley, "Allee Samee Melican Lady", 45-50; "Oriental Home Record Book and Register, 1896-1914," Oriental Home and School Fonds, United Church BC Conference Archives.

²¹ Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories*, 66-69.

²² The Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1889-1890, xxvi.

Presbyterian Church

Following the Methodists, the Presbyterian Church was the next denomination to establish a formal Chinese Mission in Victoria. In 1887, a significant increase in the Chinese population on the Pacific coast brought the prospect of Chinese evangelization to the Presbyterian Church for the first time. However, things did not go well. The turning point only came in 1892, when Alexander B. Winchester, who had worked in China and knew Mandarin and some southern dialects, was designated to take charge of a Chinese Mission for the Presbyterian Church in Victoria on March 28. He had an assistant, Mr. Colman, who helped in the missionary work in October of the same year because of his strong skills in Cantonese.²³

The Presbyterians opened an evening school on the 9th of June and Sabbath services began on June 25, 1892. Soon after, a boys' school was opened in October 1892; classes were held at least five mornings a week. Unfortunately, neither initiative was going as the missionaries had hoped. Despite their passionate efforts, the attendance at Sabbath services only increased from 15 to 25 in 1894. The boys' day school, which was assisted by female teachers from October 1892, lasted less than 2 years with an average daily attendance of only nine students.²⁴

Winchester considered his language limitations to be a barrier to reach the Chinese population. As a result, in 1894, he sailed for China to develop his Cantonese as

²³ C.A.Colman, a former American Bible society man who later assisted in a school in South China, was an employee of the American Presbyterian Mission. He was capable of speaking Cantonese when working in Victoria's Chinese Mission. Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Winnipeg, June 9-17, 1887), appendix no.4, xxxiv; *The Acts and Proceedings* (Montreal, June 8-16, 1892), appendix no.25, viii; *The Acts and Proceedings* (St. John, N.B., June 13-21, 1894), appendix no.11, lxxi.

²⁴ Presbyterian Church in Canada, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Brantford, June 14-21, 1893), appendix no.11, lxxxix.

well as to engage a Chinese preacher. He successfully found a Chinese preacher, and returned with him on March 27, 1895. The Chinese preacher, Mr. Ng Man Hing, was a graduate of the American Presbyterian Theological School in Canton. He had been preaching the Gospel for about fourteen years. Prior to coming to Victoria, Mr. Ng Man Hing was a licentiate of the Presbyterian Church of the United States (North). His work in Victoria involved assisting Winchester in the study of Cantonese, as well as preaching and evangelising as directed. His arrival was considered to have improved the impact of the Presbyterian Church among the Chinese community. Moreover, Mr. Ng Mon Hing was ordained in 1911, making him the first Chinese minister in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.²⁵

With time, the Presbyterian Church's works developed and came to include Sabbath services, evening schools, as well as entertainment. Sabbath services were composed of indoor Gospel services as well as street preaching. The Presbyterian missionaries started their first Gospel service on the 17th of December 1893 in a Chinese theatre. Then, they moved the Sabbath evening services to their own hall. Services were regularly held once or twice every Sunday, starting with a preaching service, followed by a Bible class, and then a service comprised largely of singing and explanations of Gospel hymns. Sometimes a Bible class would follow in the afternoon before concluding with a preaching service in the evening. Additionally, when the weather and light would allow, missionaries would gather audiences on the streets or visit Chinese homes and deliver invitations to these Sabbath afternoons in an attempt to recruit new members for their school. Beginning in 1895, every Saturday evening featured a reception for anyone who

²⁵ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (London, Ont., 1895), appendix no.13, lxxii; Wang, "*His Dominion*", 102.

wished to come and discuss Christian doctrines. Mr. Ng took tea with the people who came for these meetings and explained the Scriptures to them.²⁶

Evening schools attracted the most visitors and saw an increase in participants. For instance, in 1899, Presbyterians held evening classes for the Chinese on 248 evenings, with an average of 47 attendees per night. In general, elementary English classes were held from 7:00 pm or 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm. After the English classes, religious exercises were carried out between 8:45 pm and 9:15 pm or as late as 9:30 pm. The teachers would either sing a Gospel hymn as they explained it or gave a short Gospel address, and then they would close with prayers in English and Chinese.²⁷

Mr. Colman spoke to the Chinese in Cantonese, to proclaim God's holy word. He considered the holy word as the most valuable work. During the winter of 1894, he took the school through a catechism of Christian teaching, reading questions and allowing pupils to read the answers. Every session took between 20 and 40 minutes. This study usually took place on various evenings every week. After school, the remaining students, normally Christian men, would have the option of taking a Bible class hosted by Mr. Ng to read the Scriptures.²⁸

Occasionally, the Presbyterian missionaries would hold various gatherings in the Presbyterian hall to entertain people. Their entertainment included magic lantern

²⁶ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (London, Ont.: 1895), appendix no. 13, lxxiv; Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Toronto, Ont.: 1896), appendix no. 6, lxxxii.

²⁷ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Halifax, N.S.: 1900), 151.

²⁸ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (London, Ont.: 1895), appendix no. 13, lxxiii; *The Acts and Proceedings* (Toronto, Ont.: 1896), appendix no. 6, lxxx–lxxxii.

entertainment, Christmas conversaciones, and Chinese New Year meetings. The last two were forms of annual entertainment.²⁹

Anglican Church (the Church of England)

The Anglican Church was the last Christian denomination to have an organised mission in evangelising the Chinese in Victoria.³⁰ The earliest related report indicates that the Anglican Church started a Chinese mission school in late 1891 on Langley Street. This mission school was run by C. F. Moore. Female teachers worked there with the aid of a catechist, Jim Lee, and under the superintendent, Rev. E. F. Lipscomb. At some point, the school was closed for months. It re-opened in August 1892 at the corner of Government and Cormorant streets. By then, the school offered English teaching in a room over a store. The Bishop of the Church of England visited its Chinese mission in Victoria and was pleased with its attendance. The teachers won some converts, as did their Methodist and Presbyterian peers.³¹

The following years saw the Church of England Mission continuing to work to convert the Chinese. The school was open every afternoon except for Saturday; Bible classes and Sunday services were also provided. Its second year anniversary drew about 50 Chinese and missionaries from other churches. A report in the *Daily British Colonist*

²⁹ Presbyterian Church in Canada General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (St. John: 1894), appendix no. 11, lxxiii.

³⁰ Jiwu Wang mentioned that Anglican Church started working among the Chinese in Canada as early as the 1860s. See Wang, *“His Dominion”*, 63-65; “Another letter from Bishop Hills”, which was published in *Daily Colonist* on March 14, 1861, mentioned that the Bishop Hills of Church of England had visited and conducted religious services in mines near Victoria. He met many Chinese and thought of them as people who could be converted. He claimed that he “applied to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to send missionaries” for the Chinese miners. If so, their attempts to work among the Chinese in B.C. started quite early. However, there is no further information to prove those works were being done in the city of Victoria.

³¹ *Daily British Colonist*, November 19, 1891, 8; August 14, 1892, 7; October 8, 1893, p5; February 8, 1894, 5.

commended the mission as one of the most remarkable of its kind in Victoria. This mission school celebrated its third anniversary in 1895.³²

The Church of England's Chinese mission fell silent after that, except in 1900 when Mr. Shi, from the Church of England's Chinese mission, addressed a missionary meeting in Victoria. It is unclear what specific work was done from 1900 to the early 1920s. As indicated by a report written in 1924 by the Anglican superintendent, there appeared to have been a female missionary and her Cantonese assistant who continued working in the kindergarten, and did other work related to women and children sometime between 1900 and 1924. This report mentioned four baptisms as well as four confirmed candidates, indicating that the Anglican Church was involved in working among the Chinese before its Good Hope Mission was founded.³³

The Anglican Church formally established the Good Hope Mission in Victoria under the direction of a Chinese missionary, Li Buoi Ding, in 1924. He was a pastor who had graduated from a school in China and from an American college. His work consisted of teaching, preaching, and administering the sacraments. The Mission offered four 'shifts' of educational service to Chinese children together with adults. In the daily routine, 25 children would go to the kindergarten in the morning and 30 children would attend an afternoon class after public school. Also, 15 boys played games, participated in drills, took singing lessons at 6:00 pm, and then 30 pupils came at 8:00 pm for the English school. The female missionaries, Mrs. Cooke and Miss Edith Coe (Koo), were

³² *Daily British Colonist*, July 8, 1892, 7; *Daily British Colonist*, May 30, 1893, 1; *Daily British Colonist*, December 7, 1893, 6; *Daily British Colonist*, January 26, 1895, 5.

³³ *Daily British Colonist*, February 1, 1900, 3; Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories*, 28-29.

mainly responsible for teaching these classes, whereas Charles Lee served at the catechist, giving a Cantonese gospel address after the evening school.³⁴

The Anglican Church's work seemed to focus on education, especially for children. The Good Hope Mission appears to have started much later than the Methodist and Presbyterian's Chinese Mission. In looking at the services of other institutions in the 1920s, the Oriental Home and School included kindergartens and other services for women in this period. The Chinese Immigration Act was passed in 1923 and made it almost completely impossible for new Chinese immigrants to come to this land. Given this, all churches began to concentrate on the education of the second generation of the former Chinese immigrants.³⁵

Overall, Protestant churches contributed significantly to evangelising Victoria's Chinese. These Protestant churches had a good relationship and cooperated with one another, especially the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Not only did the Presbyterian Church regularly hold the its Christmas and Chinese New Year Celebration together with the Methodist Mission Church, the Presbyterian missionaries would sometimes also join their Methodist peers in a 7:00 pm street service.³⁶

The regular services offered by churches were the same. They ran schools which included English classes and Bible classes, offered gospel services, organised choirs, preached in churches or on the streets, and organized gatherings like festivals,

³⁴ Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership*, 105; Norman Knowles, *They are Here to be Evangelized: Anglican Missions to British Columbia's Chinese Community, 1861-1940* (Vancouver: 105th Anniversary Publication of the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd), 84; N. Lascelles Ward, *Oriental missions in British Columbia*, 92-93; *Daily British Colonist*, June 29, 1927, 11; January 22, 1928, 3.

³⁵ Ward, *Oriental missions in British Columbia*, 94.

³⁶ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (St. John: 1894), appendix no. 11, lxxiii; *The Acts and Proceedings* (Winnipeg, Man.: 1897), 187.

anniversaries, people's farewell parties, or picnics. Sometimes, churches also held wedding ceremonies.³⁷

In addition to the regular services, missionaries led some other charitable activities. The Presbyterian missionary, Mr. Colman, visited Chinese lepers to comfort them, bringing daily necessities and preaching to them on Darcey Island. His Methodist peers also visited patients at home, and preached to prisoners beginning in 1891. In addition, missionaries would come to visit and talk with the Chinese immigrants who had just arrived in Victoria and were confined in the immigration building. Their warm encouraging words comforted these uneasy newcomers, and won them respect, thereby allowing the newcomers to feel welcomed. Missionaries took the opportunity to send tracts and Sunday school picture cards to whomever they spoke with. Thus, many boys were enticed to attend night schools from the beginning. Such missionary works were not confined to the city of Victoria but expanded to many other parts of the province, such as canneries along the Fraser River, as many Chinese worked there.³⁸

The establishment of church buildings reflected the stability of the Chinese population in Victoria. It also provided places for the Chinese to join in church services and reflected the achievements and significance of the Chinese missions.

³⁷ *Daily British Colonist*, January 29, 1914, 6; August 14, 1914, 2.

³⁸ Presbyterian Church in Canada General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings of the Twenty-First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (London, Ont.: 1895), appendix no. 13, lxxiv; Ward, *Oriental missions in British Columbia*, 50-52; Hong Len Jung interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3720: 0001, June and July 1980; Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories*, 28 - 30.

Table 1: Church buildings for the Chinese in Victoria, 1888-1930

Name	Time	Procedure	Location
The Chinese Rescue Home (the Oriental Home and School)	1888	The WMS and the Methodist Missionary Society erected the building since the former accommodation was too small; They had the old building replaced with the new one in the year 1908 and renamed the institution “the Oriental Home and School.”	100 Cormorant Street
The Chinese Methodist Church	13 March 1891	A pioneer, Reverend John Endicott Gardiner, purchased a lot with \$10,000 from the Methodist Mission Board.	526 Fisgard Street(1891-1925)
The Chinese Presbyterian Church	22 January 1899	This church was based at the Victoria Presbyterian Gospel Hall	The corner of Government and Cormorant streets (1899-1908). The corner of Government and Pandora streets(1908-)
Building of the Good Hope Mission*	1923 or 1924	The mission was sponsored by the Anglican Forward Movement.	543 Johnson street, in the Diocese of Columbia
The Chinese United Church	1925	The Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church and Congregational churches were united as the United Church of Canada.	526 Fisgard Street

Sources: David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership: Case Study of Victoria in Canada*; Jiwu Wang, *"His Dominion" and the "Yellow Peril": Protestant Missions to the Chinese Immigrants in Canada, 1859-1967*; Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories: The Early Chinese Canadian Christian History*; N. Lascelles Ward, *Oriental Missions in British Columbia*; Liam O'Reilly, “Missionaries and Women in Victoria’s Chinatown: The Establishment and Evolution of the Chinese Rescue Home, 1887-1900”; Shelly D. Ikebuchi, *From Slave Girls to Salvation: Gender, Race, and Victoria’s Chinese Rescue Home, 1886-1923*.

Note:

*David Lai did say the Chinese Anglican Church was the first church for the Chinese in Victoria, while according to Jiwu Wang, Good Hope Mission started much later than 1891. According to Minutes of the proceedings of the British Columbia Methodist Church, the Chinese Methodist Church is supposed to be the first church built for the Chinese in Canada. Dr.Lai was probably talking about the time when Anglican Chinese Mission was started, not a church that had been built.

B. Chinese attitudes towards Christianity

Christian efforts towards the Chinese in Victoria was never a one-dimensional phenomenon. Missionaries took the first steps to reach the Chinese immigrants and the reaction from the community at the time was varied. Far from being as simple as “accepting” or “rejecting” the faith, this diversity resulted in some division between Christians and non-Christians within the Chinese community in the 1900s and 1910s. This community was largely dominated by men, as the vast majority of Chinese immigrants were male prior to 1923, and they were the controlling force in the public sphere of the Chinese community.

a. The responses to Christianity by Chinese men

In general, missionaries’ efforts to reach male Chinese immigrants were initially welcomed by Chinese workers and merchants. Evidence of this is seen in the high attendance at mission schools which increased over time. It was clear that the students were eager to learn the English language and Canadian customs. In many reports it can be observed that the enthusiasm of the Chinese encouraged the missionaries to devote their time to the Chinese missions. The fact that Protestant churches turned some of these individual missions into their own churches revealed that their works had received positive feedback from the Chinese community.

The initial attraction offered by the churches was an opportunity to receive language training. Many Chinese men were motivated by a desire to learn English in order to secure employment. This strategy was fully used by missionaries to attract the Chinese, and ultimately convert some of them, or at least to temper the non-Christian Chinese people’s negative sentiments towards the Chinese Christians who converted

during a period when Chinese immigrants were subject to intense discrimination and prejudice by mainstream society.³⁹

Most of the attendees appreciated the opportunity to learn English. There is some evidence, at least within the missionary records, that Chinese students trusted and respected their teachers, referring to the school and teachers as “our school, our teachers”.⁴⁰ New Chinese immigrants saw churches as dependable places to learn English. A non-Christian Chinese man Fat Fun Kwan recalled his early days in Victoria that were spent working and learning English in “church night school.” Even after quitting the public school, he continued going to “church night school” and on leaving Victoria to work in Moose Jaw, he searched for a local Chinese church where he could study English further.⁴¹

English-language classes made it possible for missionaries to teach the Gospel after class. In the earliest Sanford Mission School that was opened in 1874, the attendance had once reached ninety and it did not take long for some of the members to become converts.⁴²

However, many converts paid a high price for accepting their new faith. Chan Sui’s story illustrates the process of conversion as a Chinese immigrant, while also showing how such converts demonstrated their loyalty to Christ. Chan Sui came to Victoria as a household servant, and eagerly attempted to learn English. He went to the

³⁹ Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858–1914* (Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1989), 8–9.

⁴⁰ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (St. John: 1894), appendix no. 11, lxxiv.

⁴¹ Fat Fun Kwan interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, *BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection*, T3748: 0001, August 1980. He did not mention which night school he went from 1921–1924, but the interview indicates that he went to the Chinese United Church’s night school afterwards.

⁴² Osterhout, *Orientalism in Canada*, 71–75.

night school that was provided by the Methodist church, and soon converted to Christianity through the preaching of Reverend Gardner. After saving money for a while, Chan started a grocery store in partnership with another Chinese Christian. Being faithful Christians, they did not open their store on Sunday. In reaction to this, a boycott was led by other Chinese residents, as they were accustomed to being able to go shopping on Sunday back in China. Other Chinese merchants suggested to the owners, "Either give up your business or give up your religion." Instead of opening on Sundays, to avoid this conflict, Chan decided to permanently close his business to keep the Christian Sabbath.⁴³

A Chinese-Canadian reverend described the time in a memoir thought to be written in the late 1890s. The reverend recalled that most Chinese migrants sent letters home to China, while rarely traveling between Canada and China unless to study or to marry. It did not appear to be easy for a Chinese Christian to express his faith to his homeland, particularly when most people criticized him for being a Christian. However, the reverend's friend, who had converted in Victoria, had managed to introduce the Christian faith to his friend, likely through letters sent to him in China, despite these pressures.⁴⁴ Based on these instances of Chinese Christians' devotion, N. Lascelles Ward, the Superintendent of Chinese missions in British Columbia in 1925, noted that there were a lot of Chinese Christians who had proved their genuine faith to Christianity.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, Lascelles was very aware that those individuals did not represent the majority of the Chinese community. He made a claim that the majority of the Chinese

⁴³ Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories*, 83-86.

⁴⁴ Chuk Ping Leung's story, S. Wah Leung, *Celebration of a Splendid Life* (Vancouver, BC: Dr. S. Wah Leung Endowment Fund, the University of British Columbia Faculty of Dentistry, 1992).

⁴⁵ Ward, *Oriental missions in British Columbia*, 79-80. The author was a Canadian who worked as a missionary in China in connection with the mission supported by the Canadian Church Missionary Society.

were not only indifferent, but hostile towards Christianity. From the beginning of the missionaries' work, the Chinese community often rejected the Christian message that missionaries had tried to instill in them. Mr. Winchester, for instance, revealed in his report that the Chinese disliked Christians and that the results of Victoria's Mission were admittedly less successful compared with those in other mission fields in Eastern Canada. Winchester believed that the reason for this was the neighborhood surrounding Chinatown was not reputable. As the Chinese assumed that all 'white people' were Christians and because the lower-class Euro-Canadians who lived around Chinatown displayed many immoral, un-Christian and racist behaviours, the Chinese considered Christianity to be a hypocritical religion.⁴⁶

In addition, anti-Chinese racism was much stronger in British Columbia compared to the Prairies or Ontario. The Euro-Canadians in BC were concerned that the Chinese were going to "drive our men from our factories, our farms, our workshops; take the bread from their mouths and compel them to look upon their children ill fed, ill clothed and without prospect of doing better."⁴⁷ Such racist attitudes built mistrust between the Chinese and Euro-Canadians. As a result, the Chinese sentiment against evangelization was strong at times, leaving the converts facing the risk of being banished by the Chinese community. For example, in 1894 when a Chinese Christian man in Victoria was about to die, his Chinese employer did not care about his bad health conditions and left him to die. The dead man's former Chinese friends were not interested

⁴⁶ Ward, *Oriental missions in British Columbia*, 80-85; Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Brantford, Ont.: 1893, June 14-21), appendix no. 11, Lxxxviii, xc. Chinese Presbyterian Church 90th Anniversary Celebrations Committee, *To god be the glory*, 15-16. In addition, the anti-Christian attitude of Chinese men was only part of the whole irreligious picture in BC, where the entire population had an unusually low rate of adherence to the Christian churches. Many of the male white British settlers were also indifferent to the churches. See Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches*, 56-76.

⁴⁷ *Daily Colonist*, January 20, 1899, 4.

in helping with his funeral. It was indicated that this was all because he had joined the church.⁴⁸ After observing these incidents, Winchester suggested that there were numerous hidden converts who feared showing their faith due to the concern that “their own people [who] would persecute him if he publicly professed faith in Christ.”⁴⁹ Their fear was validated by the baptized Chinese people, who appeared to have “suffered much for their faith.”⁵⁰

It can be observed that Christianity was criticized for being part of Anglo-Saxon society and the non-Christian Chinese regarded Christian Chinese men as unforgivable traitors for turning to Christianity which represented the racist ‘white society’. As a result, Chinese Christians as a group had to endure both Chinese hostility to Christianity and ‘white society’, and mainstream society’s hostility to the Chinese.

b. Chinese women’s responses to Christianity

The Rescue Home in Victoria was initially established for Chinese women only, and there was no equivalent for men. Ikebuchi argues that the Home performed its function as a literal ‘home’ in several ways. The female missionaries as well as matrons in charge of the home saw themselves as mothers to the Chinese girls. They took care of the girls, taught them English and domestic skills, and brought them to church. Moreover, missionaries became guardians of the Chinese girls till they left the Home. Numerous details suggest that the missionaries’ maternal role was at least partially accepted by the girls. For example, there was a matron who was called “Mawa” (mama) by the Chinese

⁴⁸ The anti-Christianity trend and reasons will be discussed in Chapter 3. *Daily British Colonist*, December 5, 1894, 5.

⁴⁹ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Toronto, Ont.: 1896), appendix no. 6, lxxx-lxxxii.

⁵⁰ Presbyterian Church in Canada, General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Winnipeg, Man.: 1897), 188.

girls. Some matrons accompanied Chinese girls at their wedding ceremonies and at times, they even hoped to have girls stay at the Home longer, suggesting the strength of their maternal feelings. Even after their marriages, some Chinese women still went back to the Home seeking help from the female missionaries.⁵¹

Ikebuchi states that the control over the residents was both physical and moral. The institution, as she said, “functioned paternalistically, both in the productive sense and in the disciplinary sense of the world.”⁵² This allowed the female missionaries working in the Home to win more trust from these Chinese women. In accordance with a report by one of the rescue home founders, the majority of girls who were rescued from brothels or other such places where they were forced to sell themselves, were quite happy to be sheltered. The first rescued girls claimed they would rather die than return to their awful and forced former lives. This most likely contributed to their preferences for being dressed in European dresses that safeguarded them from being harassed by Chinese highbinders in public.⁵³ The adoption of European dress was a way of assimilating into a Western lifestyle. In a picture taken in 1910, Chinese women and children are seen all wearing European dresses with hairstyles reflecting Western fashion. (see below)

⁵¹ Ikebuchi, *From Slave Girls to Salvation*, 91-100; O’Reilly, “Missionaries and Women in Victoria’s Chinatown”, 32; Whiteley, “Allee Samee Melican Lady”, 5; Clippings of *The Inland Sentinel* of 1890, January 24, Reel 27, microfilm D-19, BC Archives.

⁵² Ikebuchi, *From Slave Girls to Salvation*, 49-50, 55, 73.

⁵³ “A report upon ‘The Home’ for rescued Chinese Girls in Victoria, B. C.: The Origin”, September 1887, Chinese United Church Mission (Victoria, B.C.) fonds, United Church of Canada British Columbia Conference Archives; “Highbinders” was used in North America to call a fighter for Chinese secret societies, such as Chee Kung Tong (also known as “Chinese freemasons”). This institution was regarded, by Euro-Canadians at least, as an association of gangsters, which caused cases of murder in Chinatown. See *Harper’s Weekly*, February 13, 1886, 103; *British Colonist* January 18, 1888; about the Chinese girls dressed in Western style, see Rev. J. E. Starr, A Report on “The Home” for Rescued Chinese Girls in Victoria, B.C., 1887.



Figure 3 Victoria Oriental Home and School Group [some were Japanese women]

Source: Item C-07926, created in 1910, BC Archives.

Some girls were successfully converted to Christianity in this Christian educational environment. Between 1888 and 1902, forty Chinese women lived in the Rescue Home, and 22 of them raised their families with Christian values after leaving. One of the girls, Margaret Chan, was interviewed in her old age. Chan stated that she voluntarily went to the Home seeking help because her aunt treated her as a slave girl. The Home provided great help in improving her English and in supplying friendships. Although she did not think of herself as a “devoted Christian”, she revered God and was comforted by the thought that one is always with God. Chan did not seem to receive more support from the churches after leaving the Home. She worked in many different

places throughout her life, and her faith to God was a comfort in dealing with her tough life.⁵⁴

However, not everyone who lived in the Home had the same experience as Chan had and some Chinese women rejected Christian regulations. At the Rescue Home, Chinese women were required to attend church every Sunday and every morning started with worship; Chan recalled that the residents of the Home went to church as frequently as three times per day.⁵⁵ Even in such a Christian environment, the majority of Chinese women still insisted on not being baptized.

Some photos about the Home preserved in the British Columbia Archives with other textual records show that there were girls who insisted on wearing Chinese dresses. Even in a Christian marriage ceremony, the grooms and brides were most likely to be dressed in the Chinese way. In addition to clothing, more contradictions in life style suggest that the Chinese girls were not always happy to be in the Rescue Home. In several situations, some girls exhibited their refusal to adapt to a Western Christian lifestyle, by insisting on maintaining their customs or by escaping. As early as in 1898, the advisory committee for the Home made a clear statement that the fence and barbed wire were all for the purpose of preventing residents from escaping. Some of the women would run away from the Home despite being described as rescued, which made the concept of voluntary admissions problematic, and illustrated a very different scene to one the missionaries tried to present.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Jiwu Wang, "Organised Protestant Missions to Chinese Immigrants in Canada, 1885-1923." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54, no. 04 (2003): 702; Women's Book Committee, Chinese Canadian National Council, *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1992), 27-34.

⁵⁵ Ikebuchi, *From Slave Girls to Salvation*, 55; Women's Book Committee, *Jin Guo*, 27-34.

⁵⁶ O'Reilly, "Missionaries and Women in Victoria's Chinatown", 31- 36, 50 - 53; Clippings of *The Inland Sentinel* of 1890, January 24, Reel 27, microfilm D-19, BC Archives.

While there are contradictions and complexities in the stories and experience of women in the Home, the personal attitudes toward Christianity among the majority of Chinese women in Victoria are even more difficult to uncover. Their lives were very likely limited to the home because of dominant Chinese values regarding the centrality of domesticity for women. Nonetheless, oral history has helped historians to develop some understanding of the life of Chinese women at the time.

As all interviewees indicated, Chinese women at the time were bonded to their families. The majority of Chinese women in Victoria were separated from the outside world, lived in extremely domestic environments, and were victims of both racism and sexism.⁵⁷ An exception to this was the experience of a small number of women who were involved in institutions like the Rescue Home that was specifically founded by and for Chinese women. The fact that Chinese Christian women had already been isolated by their domestic roles helps to explain why they rarely encountered the negative attitudes faced by Chinese Christian men.

Churches provided the social networks most Chinese women could not find elsewhere. For some women, their only entertainment was gathering with other female Chinese members once a week in church. They listened to the music played by “foreign priests”, had the chance to meet with one another as church members, built up friendships, and went to picnics with other church members. This also meant that they had more contact with other women, including Christian Chinese and white women. A

⁵⁷ Koo Shee Chan interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3712: 0001, June 1980; Nancy [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126: 0001, April 1980; Waiking Lee [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126:0001, April 1980; Ying [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126:0001, April 1989; Women's Book Committee, *Jin Guo*, 17-21.

Chinese female Christian, Koo Shee Chan, recalled that all of the Chinese female church members in Victoria would take their children to churches at 1:00 pm. A Canadian-born Chinese woman, Alice Louie-Byne (née Quon), remembered that her mother Ng Shee and her aunt were friends who both attended meetings at the Oriental Home and School in Victoria, learning Canadian domestic skills such as crocheting and knitting.⁵⁸

In the meantime, many other Chinese women remained at home and shut their doors to Christianity. A female Presbyterian missionary tried to reach the Chinese women by visiting them, teaching them weaving techniques, and telling Bible stories at every opportunity, but her hard work in the form of door-to-door visiting brought little effect.⁵⁹ It is possible that first-generation Chinese women leaned on their Chinese folk religion rather than Christianity. As a male interviewee indicated, the Chinese women who lived in Guangdong eagerly embraced Chinese folk religion, and “almost every woman from Taishan must go to the temples for worshipping.”⁶⁰

For those first generation of Chinese women who attended church events, it was most likely that churches were not places for learning, writing and speaking English, or even converting to Christianity, but a place for socializing, entertaining, and having their children cared for. The majority talked about how they attended church activities, while few of them mentioned their faith in Christianity. It was quite easy to get a feeling from the interviews that churches played a similarly social role as that of the Chinese institutions for Chinese men, which was largely secular in function (see chapter 1). When

⁵⁸ Koo Shee Chan interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3712: 0001, June 1980; Interview with Alice Louie-Byne, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO), <http://www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen/en/database.php?c=114&tab=items> (accessed 18 March 2018).

⁵⁹ Joyce Chan, ed., *Rediscover the Fading Memories*, 28–29.

⁶⁰ Taishan, also known as Toishan, a county-level city in southwestern Guangdong, China. Hong Low, interview.

asked about whether the women helped in preaching, a Chinese female Presbyterian Church member stated that they did not get involved in evangelizing others, as only the missionaries who were running the church did so.⁶¹

Canadian-born Chinese women seemed to be more willing to get involved in church activities, and to convert to Christianity. They had been engaged in church activities from an early age, as many of them had attended kindergartens opened by churches. Despite noting that her mother remained committed to “superstitions” (probably traditional Chinese religion), Canadian-born Grace Lo still described becoming a church member and appeared quite happy in her Christian religious beliefs. She was also one of the few women interviewed who directly expressed their individual feelings about Christianity. Another Canadian-born Chinese woman, Grace Lee, remembered that her father was not happy when she decided to be baptized, and they had a serious quarrel over this before she eventually left home to attend missionary school. On the other hand, her mother, who did not oppose Christianity as strongly as her father, eventually converted to Christianity in Canada.⁶²

A church was a gathering place that crossed the boundaries of some social rules a Chinese-Canadian woman had to accept elsewhere. For instance, Alice Louie-Byne recalled that church groups were “the only occasion she had to mix with boys in a social setting” since she was generally expected not to talk with boys because of the strong

⁶¹ Koo Shee Chan interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3712:0001, June 1980.

⁶² April [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126, April 1989; Grace Lo [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Helena Yeung, BC Archives, T3707: 0001, 1979; Jan [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126, April 1989; Nancy [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126, April 1980; Ruth [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126, April 1989; Interview with Grace Lee, Part 1 of 4, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO), <http://www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen/en/database.php?c=379&tab=items> (accessed 18 March 2018).

gender role stereotyping within the Chinese community. The churches' social functions appeared to be important in enabling Chinese women to build up networks beyond their homes. "It didn't matter if you believed in the church or not, you went there," Alice explained. She claimed that she continued to participate in church activities after leaving for Calgary in 1920 at the age of twelve.⁶³

The experiences discussed above indicate that churches were more successful in keeping in touch with Chinese women and their children than with Chinese men. Although many first-generation Chinese women did not welcome missionaries, the second-generation women did not have strong sentiments against Christianity even if they were not believers. It was unlikely that Chinese women would say anything negative about Christianity, in contrast to the male interviewees who had not converted to Christianity. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that there may not have been enough interviews to provide a complete picture of the Chinese community in the past. Nonetheless, based on available evidence, it seems that Chinese men were more hostile to Christianity than the Chinese women. It is also worth noting that there were more female interviewees than males and the women were generally protected by pseudonyms. Despite this, these women were still much more cautious in keeping their religious views and any critiques they may have had to themselves.

c. Forming of Chinese Christians

Being a convert appears to have been the equivalent of making a claim to the Chinese community that one would associate with Christian individuals and families instead of non-Christians most of the time. Girls who remained in the Rescue Home for a

⁶³ Interview with Alice Louie-Byne, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO), <http://www.mhso.ca/chinesecanadianwomen/en/database.php?c=121&tab=donor> (accessed 18 March 2018).

significant period of time, rather than running away, always married Christian Chinese men. In assessing the experience of Daisy who lived in the home, it can be observed that she was mainly involved with the Home and other Christians following her marriage. Daisy was a Chinese woman who married a poor Chinese Christian. She tried to earn a reasonable living by providing nursing services to a Presbyterian lady when her husband fell sick. Later, when Daisy became sick herself, the Home played the role of her family until she died. Her funeral was attended by most of the married Christian Chinese.⁶⁴

Further resources from the time regarding the wedding ceremonies of Christian Chinese women told a similar story. The ceremony of Cherry, a Chinese bride from the Rescue Home, who married Jip Ti He, a Chinese Christian man, is discussed in a newspaper article. Their wedding ceremony was held in a Methodist church and all eight groomsmen “had accepted Christianity.” Their wedding offered appeal to numerous curious spectators, but the reporter made the important observation that the ceremony did not include many Chinese residents. According to the news, no Chinese were present at the wedding besides Chinese Christians.⁶⁵ It reflects the situation that the social circles of non-Christian Chinese and Chinese Christians might not have overlapped with one another too much in terms of personal events, especially for the Chinese who were not influential within the Chinese community.

Other Chinese people, including Christians and non-Christians of both sexes, also supported the idea of the relative independence of the Christian Chinese from the non-Christian Chinese. Interviewee Hong Len Jung said, “God-believers only hung out with

⁶⁴ *British Colonist*, February 23, 1899, 3; Newspaper clipping of *The Inland Sentinel* of 1890, January 24, Reel 27, microfilm D-19, BC Archives.

⁶⁵ Newspaper clipping of *The Inland Sentinel* of 1890, January 24, Reel 27, microfilm D-19, BC Archives.

God-believers; they did not play with non-believers like us,” when asked whether Chinese Christians dealt with non-Christians.⁶⁶ A Chinese woman Nancy, who had grown up in Christian kindergartens, also stated that there were quite a few Chinese women in Victoria, but her Christian family did not know those non-Christian Chinese women. Nancy’s family did not even reside in Chinatown, at a time when most Chinese people still lived there.⁶⁷

Evidence discussed above suggests that Chinese Christian immigrants were a unique group in Victoria at the time. Oral history reveals that Chinese Christians socialized together, irrespective of which church they belonged to. One Chinese Christian couple made a living running a restaurant offering “Western food” to “Western customers”, together with making “Western friends” who were connected to the churches.⁶⁸ Through conversion to Christianity, it would seem that Anglo-Saxon society was more accessible to them. Furthermore, their experience demonstrates that Chinese attitudes towards Christianity varied significantly between individuals and families.

To some extent, Christianity may have played a role in mitigating tensions between Chinese-Christians and the rest of society, while sometimes intensifying tensions within the Chinese community. From 1858 to 1930, some Chinese migrants embraced Christianity but negative attitudes toward Christianity existed within the

⁶⁶ Hong Len Jung interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3720:0001-0002, June and July 1980.

⁶⁷ Koo Shee Chan interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3712:0001, June 1980; Hong Low interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, *BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection*, T3710:0001-0002, June 1980; Hong Len Jung interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3720:0001, June and July 1980; Nancy [pseudonym] interview, interviewed by Tamara Adilman, BC Archives, T4126, April 1989.

⁶⁸ Koo Shee Chan interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3712: 0001, June 1980.

Chinese community for many years. Chinese-Canadians viewed missionaries as a symbol of Western civilization and had various reactions to their missionary efforts, depending on the treatment they received from mainstream society. Most Euro-Canadians viewed the Chinese immigrants as “heathens” whose values and customs were alien to Euro-Canadian society.

The Chinese community in general responded to this racist treatment by rejecting Christianity, which was seen to be deeply interwoven in the fabric of Western culture. This is the main reason why missionaries and ordinary church members who contributed to Chinese Missions were caught between the “occidental” and “oriental”. In this dilemma, it was challenging for the missionaries who worked among the Chinese to win support from mainstream society, and it was also hard for them to gain trust from the majority of the Chinese residents. The Chinese who converted to Christianity, on the other hand, often lost the protection that the Chinese community provided because they allied themselves with Christianity, which was seen as abandoning Chinese culture to adapt to a completely Western way of life. Residing between the two communities, these people deepened religious complexity among the Chinese immigrants by gradually forming a group – the Christian Chinese-- between the stereotyped ‘Chinatown’ and ‘white society’.

Chapter 3 “The Truth with Different Names”: The Changes and the Integration of Religions among the Chinese

As discussed in previous chapters, Chinese immigrants were impacted by both Chinese folk religion and Christianity in Victoria. The religious life of the Chinese was quite dynamic. Chinese-originated religions and Christianity did not always contradict each other; indeed, different religions co-existed, while mutually influencing each other to bring forth a dynamic system which gave rise to a multi-religious Chinese community. This chapter will focus on how the Chinese community changed in its response to both Chinese and Christian religions, and how these religions impacted and transformed each other in Victoria between 1858 and 1930. In the beginning of the chapter, I will provide a chronological picture of the changing relationship between the Chinese community and Christianity, as well as Chinese folk religion. Unavoidably, some of the themes have already been addressed in previous chapters, but the evidence and the discussion in Chapter 3 will more specifically elaborate on the nuanced tensions between Christianity and the Chinese community in the pre-1911 period and how the pragmatic attitudes of Chinese towards all religions influenced Chinese folk religion and Christianity, resulting in accommodation and integration on both sides.

A. Co-existence of Chinese Religions and Christianity before 1890

Chinese folk religions and Christianity both performed important functions within the Chinese community. The Chinese religions included both orthodox Chinese religions and folk religions and were typically linked to Chinese associations, and, accordingly developed earlier within the Chinese community than Christianity. For example, the Tam

Kung Temple was constructed as early as 1876. The Palace of Saints inside CCBA's premises was also a representative of Chinese folk religion together with orthodox Confucianism, and enshrined folk deities at the beginning of 1884. Meanwhile in this early period, the missionaries were voluntarily working among the Chinese, and 1884 was still two years away from the establishment of the first organized Christian mission.

Soon after their construction, the established temples of Chinese folk religion were able to attract many visitors. The local newspapers of 1876 reported on the popularity of Chinese folk religion, describing a scene of the opening of the Chinese 'Joss house'.¹ At the time, the 'Joss house' was filled with noisy musical sounds of bugles and cymbals, with statues of deities sitting in the shrine. Wax candles and rushes were arranged at the back of the shrine, with dishes full of fruits in the front. Here Chinese of all classes crowded into the place to view the deities, especially during Chinese New Year.²

Compared with Chinese folk religion, which easily attracted many visitors, Christianity was an external force that gradually attracted some Chinese who attended the English classes and Sabbath schools run by missionaries prior to the 1890s. However, in spite of the fact that participation in the churches was expanding, Christianity, as a representative of Western culture, soon triggered rejection from many within the Chinese community. As noted in the previous chapter, many Chinese saw Chinese Christians as traitors to the Chinese community, and sometimes even tried to use violence to stop the Chinese from being baptised. On the 23rd of February 1886, death threats were posted in

¹ *Daily British Colonist* usually named these places with a religious nature as 'Joss house' or 'temple of worship' in general, regardless of whether they served people in the same manner or not. It is not certain whether the places were truly temples or simply rooms with shrines. The largest difference between 'temple' and "room with shrine" is that the latter normally has functions that are more social. It is hard to tell which one journalists were referring to. Thus, I will use the same term appearing in specific primary sources to describe religious places.

² *Daily British Colonist*, January 23, 1876, 3; February 05, 1878, 3.

different parts of Chinatown targeting four Chinese boys who were about to be baptised in the Methodist church. These posters also warned the Chinese not to attend the mission. One of the Chinese individuals who was planning to attend was struck on his head by his uncle before going to the church. Huge numbers of Chinese people gathered on the streets on the day of the baptism, perhaps to oppose both the baptism and Gardner, the well-known Methodist missionary who worked among the Chinese.³

On the other hand, the Chinese leaders, who were mostly rich merchants, seemed to show their understanding and kindness towards the Christian churches. Chinese merchants rented rooms to the missionaries who had difficulty in finding Caucasians willing to rent a room to them because of the virulent anti-Chinese racism.⁴ The support of merchants did not just provide missionaries with the space and money they needed, but they also helped in reducing the conflicts between the Chinese and the churches. In the previously mentioned crisis, CCBA's president Wong Soy Chu responded to Gardner's request for assistance by tearing down the warning posters against the mission; the issue was settled after people witnessed that Wong was on the side of Gardner. Following this incident, Chinese people gathered in the Chinese mission hall that evening to hear Gardner's sermon. This seemingly indicated that the Chinese leaders supported Christianity. Chinese leaders did not want to see a major conflict between the church and the Chinese who disliked Christianity. As the representative of the Chinese community, Wong showed his support to the missionary by removing the posters, and the unorganised haters were immediately suppressed.⁵

³ *Daily British Colonist*, February 23, 1886, 3.

⁴ *The Missionary Outlook*, April 1885, 52; April 1886, 61, 64.

⁵ *Daily British Colonist*, January 23, 1876, 2; February 23, 1886, 3; *The Missionary Outlook*, May 1886, 77-78.

Aside from the help of the CCBA, another reason that Gardner's 1886 church event was successfully held could be attributable to the fact that not all Chinese workers were as hostile as the news portrayed. In fact, a number of Chinese were appreciative of the treatment they received from the missionaries. In 1886, after the president of the CCBA defused the tension triggered by the baptism, Gardner received a gold pen as a present from his Chinese students before he left Victoria. Students were quite sad about the departure of Gardner. Giving the missionary a precious gift made it seem as if the Chinese were affirming their affection for Christianity. However, as Wang suggested, most of these Chinese men more likely possessed positive emotions towards the missionaries themselves and the English classes that they taught, rather than Christianity.⁶

Prior to the mid-1890s, Chinese enthusiasm for religious sites appears to have been primarily linked to their desire to improve their livelihood. In regards to Chinese folk religion, temples partially increased the well-being of Chinese residents by providing emotional, social, and spiritual direction, essentially averting inner conflict. For example, the Tam Kung Temple provided divination sticks for people who encountered difficult times, offering them guidance or comfort for dealing with the unknowns within their future.⁷ On the other hand, missionaries could be seen to be providing more practical assistance than the priests sitting in temples by helping the Chinese to improve their English, as well as teaching them the customs of Christian culture, which were essential for the Chinese who wished to gain more economic and social opportunities in mainstream society.

⁶ *Daily British Colonist*, February 23, 1886. 3; Wang, "His Dominion", 121-124.

⁷ Lai, *The Forbidden City within Victoria*, 62-63.

Regardless of whether they were rich or poor, the Chinese were keen to connect with the non-Chinese in British Columbia to help them adjust to the host land. In the beginning of 1864, Chinese individuals distributed a declaration expressing their regard for Britain and their faithfulness to the Queen. There was a solid enthusiasm among the Chinese for English language training, with the ultimate goal of connecting with mainstream society. There were objections by various missionaries that the Chinese were anxious to only learn the language, demonstrating no enthusiasm for gospel services. While some missionaries, seeking to gain more financial support for their missions, emphasized the positive response of many Chinese men to Christianity, others acknowledged that the reactions of a large portion of the Chinese men to religious lessons were not very positive.⁸

The oral history interviews reveal the same trends. Several interviewees had been in church to learn English but none of them were successfully converted to Christianity. When some Chinese realized that the missionaries were not supportive of the fact that their only focus was on learning English, they left the church. For example, Fat Fun Kwan described his former experiences with churches in his interview. He searched out local churches in different places in order to learn English, but he left the English school opened by the United Church once he discovered that there were too many students in each class, limiting the available amount of time for individual practice with the teachers. The Chinese focus on learning English frustrated the missionaries who sought to convert them.⁹

Indeed, missionaries complained that the Chinese were too committed to a philosophy of pragmatism to be converted at a deeper level. Even for the ones who were

⁸ A news clipping on April 2, 1864, BC Archives, microfilm D-19, Reel 28, Frame 0253; Wang, *His Dominion*, 123; Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches*, 173-174.

⁹ Hong Low interview, BC Archives, T3710: 0001; Fat Fun Kwan interview, BC Archives, T3748:0001; James Chan interview, BC Archives, T3721: 0001; Fat Fun Kwan interview, BC Archives, T3748:0001.

interested in becoming Christians, the driving force could be the desire to avail themselves of the additional benefits associated with accepting Christianity. For example, some Chinese men wanted to be baptized merely because they wanted the opportunity to get married to a Chinese girl from the Rescue Home.¹⁰

Considering the historical reality of the racism that the Chinese faced in Canada, “the Chinese response to the Protestant missions was not simply an issue of religious orientation, for the Chinese experience in Canada, to a great degree, affected their attitude toward the Canadian Protestant churches and their missions.”¹¹ Certainly the racism that they faced helps to explain why many of the Chinese who attended church services did not have any interest in Christianity. For those who had not converted, listening to a preacher’s Gospel sermon was an option to spend some time participating after English class. Hong Low confirmed that he used to listen to preachers despite the fact that he had no belief in God.¹² In the same manner as Marshall explored in Manitoba’s Chinese community, “while they call the gathering ‘church’, there are no religious elements involved other than the fellowship together with the social heat produced.”¹³

Many Chinese immigrants held pragmatic attitudes towards religions, including Christianity and Chinese folk religion, which left both religions a space without excluding one another. These attitudes explain why local Chinese could accept either Chinese folk religious or Christian practices when done for practical purposes. Regarding the question of whether or not Chinese folk religion assumed a significant role among the Chinese, the

¹⁰ Ikebuchi, *From Slave Girls to Salvation*, 140.

¹¹ Wang, *His Dominion*, 121.

¹² Hong Low interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, *BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection*, T3710: 0001-0002, June 1980.

¹³ Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 57.

answer, at least for a majority of the Chinese men, was negative. A large portion of Chinese men did not appear interested in the religious components of religious sites - whether Chinese or Christian - instead they were taking advantage of opportunities provided by the churches and the Chinese associations. Unwavering devotion to the Christian God or Chinese gods did not seem, by all accounts, to be a focal inspiration for Chinese men in the churches or the temples. Oral history evidence suggests that at least some Chinese men who visited temples did not see visits to shrines as religious rituals, but merely as a social activity. A missionary's observation told the same story: when the beautiful decorations of Palace of Saints were presented, many Chinese visitors looked around this place out of curiosity. The missionary found that many Chinese did not take off their hats to show respect in front of the statues of Chinese deities, and some of them even kept smoking in the room where the deities were placed. In fact, religious activities such as kowtowing in temples only happened occasionally, and temples were much less popular than Chinese theatres in Victoria's Chinatown.¹⁴

Considering that the early Chinese migrants were profoundly impacted by Chinese traditional culture, it was not surprising that they lacked enthusiasm towards religions. Confucianism, which was essential in Chinese traditional culture, encouraged its followers to focus on their daily lives. As quoted from *The Analects* of Confucius, "In the event that you don't comprehend what life is, by what method would you comprehend demise," mirroring the concern of the day to day lives of Confucians and regular Chinese.¹⁵ Due to Confucian belief, Chinese individuals appeared to be detached from religion, and they paid

¹⁴ *The Missionary Outlook*, 1886, 62; A news clipping, BC Archives, microfilm D-19, Reel 27, Frame 2928.

¹⁵ *The Analects*, also known as *The Analects of Confucius*. It is a Confucian classic which recorded sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and his contemporaries. Zhonghua Book Press ed., *Confucius Quotes* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Press, 2015), 3.

significantly more consideration to their secular lives. For the majority of Chinese, Confucianism and ancestor-worship were not considered as ‘religious beliefs,’ but rather as the essence of Chinese culture, which extensively and fundamentally cultivated the morality of Chinese society by forming kinship values including filial piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage. In that case, worshipping ancestors was the equivalence of worshipping origins and pasts; ancestors could be more respected icons than spirits or deities for people who do not believe in any religion, and Confucianism encouraged people to maintain this social functional belief in its teachings. The interviewee Hong Len Jung, as an example, self-claimed to be an atheist, but regarding his ancestors, he suggested to “burn incenses and keep them in mind” to show respect.¹⁶

To fully understand Chinese attitudes towards religions, the concept of “efficacy” (known as *ling* in Chinese) should be introduced. According to Marshall, efficacy is a dominant idea referring to “human efforts to meet practical needs through reverential interactions with deities or ancestors, whose purpose it is to provide for those needs.”¹⁷ These efforts aimed to assist people to solve their problems in daily life, and if the results were not efficacious, people could adjust their ritual actions to meet their requirements. Therefore, the co-existence of different religions was acceptable for the Chinese residents as long as each religion was beneficial to the people. As such, it is not surprising that Chinese folk religion and Christianity displayed their tolerance to each other at the time. From a letter of Rev. W. W. Percival, it is clear that the Methodist evening school rented a room in a building containing the Palace of Saints, one of the main temples of Chinese folk

¹⁶ Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 278-280; Hong Len Jung interview, interviewed by Theresa Low, BC Archives, Chinese Historical Wrongs Legacy Initiative Collection, T3720:0003, June and July 1980.

¹⁷ Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 3.

religion. The situation interested Percival and he described it: “while the gods are quietly slumbering upstairs, the sound of the gospel is heard ringing in pure Cantonese in their very ears.” The two sites were so close to each other, but neither missionaries nor the Chinese seemed to mind.¹⁸

In general, due to the effect of Confucianism, most Chinese men – who made up the vast majority of the Chinese population – were largely indifferent towards religion, beyond using it for things that could help them in their daily lives. Both met the needs of the Chinese, consequently, Chinese folk religion and Christianity co-existed in the Chinese community in this period. However, the following years witnessed some less than pleasant events that held back the developing interaction and co-existence of the two religions.

B. The Crisis of Christianity and Chinese Folk Religion Between the Mid-1890s and 1930

After the mid-1890s, Christianity in the Chinese community reached a crisis. Between 1896 and 1897, membership in the Methodist Church suddenly dropped from 155 to 98. Membership continued to decrease over the next few years, where efforts to Christianize the Chinese remained relatively unsuccessful. The year 1899 witnessed another drastic drop and membership continued on a downturn into the 1900s.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid, 3-4; *The Missionary Outlook*, April 1886, 61, 64.

¹⁹ *The Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1896-1897*, xxxiv.

Chart 1 Chinese Membership in Victoria's Chinese Mission Methodist Church,
1889-1897



Source: Minutes of the proceedings of the third (to eleventh) session of the British Columbia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church

Similarly, from the mid-1890s, the Presbyterian missionaries had difficulty in bringing Chinese into the churches. Since the Presbyterian Church only launched the Chinese mission in 1892, efforts towards Christianization were still in the early stages, at a time when Chinese interest in Christianity was on the decline. Accordingly, the loss of Chinese interest in the Presbyterian mission was not as obvious as that seen for the Methodist Church. However, the situation still caused frustration for Presbyterian missionaries. In the report of 1896-1897, Winchester emphasized the negative impact on membership brought about by the increased anti-Chinese racism among Euro-Canadians, repeatedly mentioning the difficulties that Chinese Christians endured from other Chinese

immigrants because of their difference in beliefs. Despite the great effort of the missionaries, Sabbath services only attracted 18 individuals in 1897. From 1899 to 1900, the Presbyterian Chinese mission had an average attendance of 16 at Sabbath school, with no gains shown in the number of converts throughout the entire year. This number was quite similar to that seen in 1894, the very first year of the Sabbath school.²⁰

These declines in membership were likely the product of an increasing anti-Chinese racism and growing anti-Chinese movements in Canada. By 1897, a systematic attempt at further repression was on display in the proposed Alien Labor Act, which banned Chinese and Japanese people from various modes of employment. This act was not passed until the following year but under a new name: The Labor Regulation Act.²¹ During this period, anti-Chinese sentiment was at its fiercest; “the Provincial Legislature can hardly pass a bill, where one can possibly be inserted, without an anti-Chinese clause.”²² During this period, Victoria’s Chinese community tried to win some support from Li Hongzhang (spelt as “Li Hung Chang” at that time), a Chinese viceroy who travelled overseas as the special envoy of China, requesting that he intervene against the proposed increase in the head tax on the Chinese entering Canada. The head tax of \$50 on Chinese immigrants was brought in in 1885. Li Hongzhang was successful in temporarily delaying an increase in the head tax in 1896. But nonetheless the head tax was increased to \$100 in 1900 and further to \$500 by 1903 in the hopes of discouraging the Chinese from migrating to Canada.²³

²⁰ Presbyterian Church in Canada General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (St. John: 1894), appendix no. 11, lxxi; 1896, appendix no.6, lxxxii; 1897, 187-188.

²¹ Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership*, 51; Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 47-49, 55.

²² Presbyterian Church in Canada, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Winnipeg: 1897), 188.

²³ Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, 98,155; *British Colonist*, September 15, 1896, 6; September 17, 1896, 4; “Li Hongzhang: A Pioneer Chinese Reformer’s Visit to Victoria,” http://chinatown.library.uvic.ca/index.html%3Fq=li_hongzhang.html (accessed 24 August 2019).

If the earlier anti-Chinese racism only resulted in giving the Chinese a harder life, causing them to emotionally disconnect from mainstream society, then the rising head tax made it more difficult to enter Canada in the first place. At the same time, the Labor Regulation Act decreased their prospects of finding a job and shut the door on opportunities for them to make a living outside of the Chinese community. Further, the non-Chinese people growing up in such an environment entertained themselves by physically assaulting Chinese people, sometimes causing severe injury or even death. The reports of the Chinese who were repeatedly assaulted appeared in the local newspaper, with few perpetrators receiving the punishment they deserved. The Chinese were not safe outside of their community. From Presbyterian missionary Winchester's view, the maltreatment of the Chinese community made the Chinese vigilant and even antagonistic towards non-Chinese. The Chinese who faced more hostility tended to express their anger towards Christianity, a religion rooted in Western culture and linked to whiteness.²⁴

What pushed the Chinese further away from Christianity was that some missionaries also held these same anti-Chinese sentiments. In this period, although many missionaries stood with the Chinese by calling attention to the miserable experiences of the Chinese in BC, the sense of superiority of the Anglo-Saxon culture still framed the thinking and activities of Euro-Canadians, including a number of missionaries. When the public agitation towards Asians heated up, some missionaries and many other clergymen stood with the agitators who hated Chinese and Japanese, to please the "white and British" majorities who were seen as "superior" to the Asians in ethnicity. Some others, such as Bishop de Pencier, feared that Asian immigration would degrade the British race

²⁴ Presbyterian Church in Canada, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Winnipeg: 1897), 188.

through intermarriages.²⁵ Under these circumstances, even those Euro-Canadians who were willing to preach the Christian gospel among the Chinese often carried heavy racist cultural baggage. For instance, Kate Morgan, who worked in the Rescue Home, was called before the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration in 1901. Morgan believed the Chinese lacked “truthfulness.” She made her thoughts very clear, saying that they were “all a menace to the public from... the way they herd together.”²⁶

In addition, Ward argued that this hostility towards Christianity by the Chinese, which manifested prior to 1900, was also a result of what had happened to their motherland, China, where Christianity was seen as an integral part of foreign imperialism. Thus, Christianity was part of the threat that China faced in being forced to submit to the pressure of Western countries. According to Ward, rather than being opposed to Christianity itself, the Chinese were opposed to the idea of a Western hierarchy with “Christian civilization” placed at the top. “Culture is in their blood through years of Buddhist discipline and Taoist naturalism,” he concluded, “they would like to have ours; but not at the expense of theirs.”²⁷

Although it was not accurate to categorize Chinese culture as the simple product of Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, Ward got the point that the Chinese opposed Christianity, partly to protect their own culture. The early Christian missions had to fight against those Chinese who pressured their own people to continue with their traditional ways and heritage. This description revealed that the anti-Chinese sentiment in British Columbia stimulated the Chinese to embrace their traditions, which, in turn, helped to

²⁵ About details about racism among missionaries, see Patricia Roy, “An Ambiguous Relationship: Anglicans and the Japanese in British Columbia, 1902-1949”, *BC Studies*, no. 192 (Winter 2016-2017): 105-124.

²⁶ Presbyterian Church in Canada, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Winnipeg: 1897), 66-67, 146.

²⁷ Ward, *Oriental Missions in British Columbia*, 80-85.

reinforce their cultural identity. The racial conflicts that arose between Chinese and non-Chinese limited the further expansion of Christianity among Chinese people.

Rather than a war of religious faith, the root of the crisis of Christianity in the Chinese community was situated in the intention of the Chinese to safeguard their unified identity so they could support each other while facing discrimination from the mainstream. After all, the Chinese received very little assistance from the Euro-Canadians after they migrated to Canada. They could only depend on other Chinese with whom they shared a common ancestry and the common experience of discrimination. From a lot of reports in *Dahan Gongbao*, the overseas Chinese usually helped each other, navigating through many difficulties. Many organizations established branches in various places. This social network, often based on specific clanship, was an important pillar in the lives of early Chinese, even determining whether they could be aided financially as they journeyed from the remote motherland to British Columbia.²⁸ Under this circumstance, it was really important for the Chinese to maintain their reverential beliefs towards ancestors, since Chinese associations normally united with a shared feeling of having a mutual ancestor. However, Christianity regarded ancestor worship as one of the “superstitions” which needed to be abandoned. This was threatening to the core cohesion of Chinese traditional culture, ancestor worship, and if it was lost, each Chinese organization would inevitably encounter the risk of potential loss of identity and influence.

In addition, in contrast to the Christianity of today, Christianity at that time reinforced Britishness. The rivalry between Chinese Confucianism and British Christianity happened in both cultural and nationalistic terms. The cultural conflict and nationalism

²⁸ About the importance of network among the overseas Chinese, see Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 3-14.

were two sides of the same coin. Chinese ‘nationalists’ had to leave the Christian church and could not maintain a dual identity. A direct reflection of this conflict is seen in the Chinese organizations, which advocated learning Confucian culture in order to counter the influence of Christianity. The statue of Confucius was set in Chinese schools and people saluted it. Some reports clearly indicated that the unity of the Chinese community could best be safeguarded by strengthening Confucianism.²⁹

One political organization that valued Confucianism and unified many of the Chinese in one organization was called the Chinese Empire Reform Association or *Baohuanghui* (the Emperor Protective Society). Kang Youwei, a prominent Chinese political thinker and reformer at the time, established the association in Victoria on the 20th of July 1899.³⁰ The Chinese Empire Reform Association had been mentioned as an important opponent to Christian mission work. The society spread widely and introduced “sweeping reforms in China, as well as restoring Confucianism and ancestral worship to its supremacy as the religion of the Empire.” Additionally, the organization started a school in Victoria to teach pupils Chinese literature and history.³¹

The cultural conflicts, which were caused by the changes in both Canada and China, put Chinese Christians in an awkward position. Despite the hopes of some converts, becoming Christian did not create benefits to improve the secular living

²⁹ *Dahan Gongbao*, November 1, 1917, 3; March 23, 1918, 3; December 2, 1922, 3; February 10, 1926, 3.

³⁰ Empress Dowager Cixi saw Kang Youwei as a threat because he assisted Emperor Guangxu to reform the Qing dynasty in 1898. After the reform proved to be a failed attempt, Emperor Guangxu was placed under house arrest and Kang was ordered to be decapitated by the Empress Dowager. Therefore, Kang Youwei went overseas, travelled in many countries and established reform associations among Chinese residents in the United States, Canada, and Australia. For more detailed information, please see Zhongping Chen. "Kang Youwei's Activities in Canada and the Reformist Movement Among the Global Chinese Diaspora, 1899–1909." *Twentieth-Century China* 39, no. 1 (2014): 3-23.

³¹ Edgar Wickberg edited, *From China to Canada: a history of the Chinese communities in Canada*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 76.

conditions of Chinese people in Victoria. In fact, it was a very challenging option for them since it would separate them from other Chinese residents and leave them to a larger society that officially discriminated against them. As a result, the membership of the Methodist church appeared to hit bottom, with half of the Chinese churchgoers leaving the church in the same year that the Chinese Empire Reform Association was established.³²

The Chinese Empire Reform Association deliberately opposed Christianity by “holding meetings every Sabbath day in halls with pulpit and platform, with patriotic songs and addresses.” As a result, “a smaller attendance at gospel services on the Sabbath Day” was predictable.³³ Also, the association was suspected of planning to bomb the Chinese Methodist Church, although it denied any responsibility for planting a bomb to hurt Reverend Chan Sing Kai, stating, “We wish to see our true and lawful emperor back on the throne, but we have no feeling of hostility toward the young Christianized Chinese missionary.” Not discussed here is the related fact that Rev. Chan dissuaded churchgoing Chinese from joining the association. At the same time, celebrations with fewer Chinese religious elements - though beneficial to solidifying Chinese ethnic identity - were organized by the association and were very popular in the Chinese community. The majority of the Chinese, the younger generation included, regarded themselves as “reformers” and celebrated the birthdays of the Chinese Emperor and Confucius, along with the memorial for some ancestor patriots who died for their disinterested patriotism to the development of China.³⁴

³² Wang, “*His Dominion*”, 56.

³³ Presbyterian Church in Canada General Assembly, *The Acts and Proceedings* (Halifax, N.S.: 1900), 151.

³⁴ *British Colonist*, December 28, 1899, 2; May 10, 1908, 3.

When Christianity faced the challenge of keeping its followers, Chinese folk religion maintained its position in Victoria's Chinatown even though it was divided among the different deities of different associations. According to records, Chinese temples were bustling with activity during festivals, with no sign of decline in the late 1890s or 1900s. In one case, the Chinese were well-prepared for their religious festival, which "intended to re-awaken the religious feeling of the masses and strengthen their faith in the gods", while it was also "designed to incite them to the more regular practise of devotion towards their ancestors."³⁵ While the white settler paper the *British Colonist* reported this event under the name of "gods", the core of this religious event was ancestral worship, which the nationalists hoped to further develop among the Chinese.

Another change in both Chinese folk religion and Christianity soon arose. In the early 1910s, just after the Vancouver Anti-Asian riot of 1907, Methodist church membership among the Chinese once again decreased. The average attendance at church services in 1909 was between 60 and 75, and in 1910, only 40 to 50 Chinese regularly visited the church.³⁶ At this time, the decline in Christianity was temporary. After 1911, most Chinese, especially community leaders, accepted the existence of Christian churches as legitimate organizations among the Chinese people and would liaise and cooperate with the churches from time to time.³⁷

By the mid-1910s, the attitude of the Chinese toward Christianity became more favorable. Methodist and Presbyterian churches saw a rise in church attendance and activities. In 1914, the membership of the Chinese congregation of Victoria was 57, and

³⁵ *British Colonist*, November 29, 1901, 6.

³⁶ Joyce Chan edited, *Rediscover the Fading Memories*, 30; *British Colonist*, January 24, 1909, 6; Wang, "His Dominion", 52.

³⁷ Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership*, 136-137.

the evening school of the Presbyterian Church reached an average of 90 attendees in 1915.³⁸

In contrast, Chinese folk religions now faced challenges. After the Republic of China was founded in 1912, Sun Yat-sen became its first provisional president and remained as a unifying figure to the Chinese around the world. He addressed the need for modernizing the new China, and the need for modernization and patriotism led the Chinese people reject the existence of 'superstition'. This superstition was vaguely defined and generally did not include Confucianism and ancestor-worship, but it included many folk deities and practices such as fortune-telling and blessings. This form of religiosity was openly despised, and Confucianism was highly praised by the nationalists.³⁹

According to *The British Colonist* newspaper in 1909, the merchants of Victoria's Chinatown, who in those days were likely the members of the CCBA, made an effort to close all four local folk temples ("joss houses"), claiming that "they were relics of the old superstition and out of keeping with the new China." Lee Mow Kow, the Chinese school principal, believed that the Palace of Saints belonging to the CCBA housed the relics of superstition. He argued that the Palace of Saints should be closed and the statues of deities worshiped inside should also be destroyed. This proposal caused conflicts between some labourers, who worshipped these deities, and the merchants, who supported Lee Mow Kow. The merchants were in conflict themselves, so they wanted to come to a decision regarding the Palace of Saints through a vote. However, angry workers smashed the ballot boxes. It is said that they and the workers inside and outside of Victoria gave

³⁸ Wang, *His Dominion*, 61.

³⁹ Marshall, *Cultivating Connections*, 38.

money to protect the Palace of Saints. They strongly disagreed with demolishing the saints. In the ensuing chaos, the workers were dominant and a merchant who was badly injured alerted the police. The plan to demolish the Palace was finally abandoned. In this conflict, some Chinese community leaders allied with the Chinese merchants who were also representatives of the Christian community, showing that accommodation between the Chinese and Christianity and the change in Chinese folk religion was somewhat also under Christian influence. These relationships suggest that during this period, Chinese folk religion became more endangered than Christianity within Chinatown.⁴⁰

The above-mentioned event, the averted destruction of the Palace of Saints, exposed striking features of Confucianism. The day before this conflict was the birthday of Confucius, and the leaders hoisted flags, held banquets, and sung carols to celebrate. Even though this group of merchants were clearly followers of Confucianism, they nevertheless would agree to destroy the Palace of Saints that hosted a statue of Confucius.⁴¹ This fact indicated that Confucianism was more of a philosophical and moral direction for the Chinese leaders than a deity. Moreover, the merchants' attitudes showed that in Chinese culture, the belief one held in one's mind was more important than the rituals one practiced in daily life. In this way, some Chinese migrants got rid of the 'superstitious' ancestor worship rituals, while they still held the respect and worship towards Confucius and the other ancestors. They internalized the essence of Confucianism and ancestor worship, such as the value of kinship and the importance of honoring their ancestors' will and intention, with their daily lives being naturally directed by Confucian doctrines.

⁴⁰ *British Colonist*, October 12, 1909, 15.

⁴¹ Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership*, 123, 136-137.

Confucian culture was essential for the Chinese, but Chinese folk religion still existed because ancestor worship, at the heart of Chinese folk religion, was actively practiced among most of the Chinese. There were many reports in *Dahan Gongbao* regarding the celebration of various organizations, showing that some ancestors they settled in shrines overlapped with folk deities.⁴² People continued to pay respect to those deities and emphasized the spirits those deities represented.⁴³

Although Christianity temporarily suffered pushback under the pressure given by nationalism and Confucianism from the 1890s to the 1920s, the Chinese did not reject its doctrine. On the contrary, some Chinese believed that Christian doctrines were beneficial and that they shared similar ideas with Confucianism. People like Reverend Ma Seung could simultaneously be Confucians, Christians, and patriots. At an early age, Ma received an orthodox Confucian education in Taishan county, Guangdong province, and was outstanding enough to qualify as a Confucian scholar. However, he later turned into a reverend and dedicated his life to spreading Christianity. When Ma found that the Christian doctrine did not conflict with Chinese customs, he gradually turned to embrace Christianity, describing that he “assiduously studied the Dao of the bible.” Moreover, even when he became a staunch Christian, he still considered himself a disciple of Confucius and called himself “a disciple of the sages.” Even though he never joined a political party because of his identity as a Christian, his son recalled that he was also a

⁴² The ancestor worship mentioned in the article was not limited in ancestors with blood relationship. The range was more extensive, usually based on the acceptance of certain belief.

⁴³ *Dahan Gongbao*, October 22, 3; April 23, 1930, 2.

nationalist who not only made five-colored flags but also hoped that his children could devote themselves to the motherland.⁴⁴

In fact, even for the nationalists who were not Christians, after 1911 Christianity was not something that was opposed to Chinese patriotism any longer. Marshall argued that the relationship of members of the KMT to Sun Yat-sen represented a cult, with overtones of religious worship. In her ethnographic and historical research work, Marshall suggested that KMT leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen, became a Chinese Canadian deity in a new form of religious practice associating religiosity with Chinese and Canadian patriotism, morality, and citizenship. Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary leader of China, can be viewed as a typical example of a person who combined Confucianism, Christianity, and patriotism. As a Christian himself, he viewed Christianity as a gate to reach Western culture. While respecting and worshipping Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese nationalists could not take Christianity as the primary opponent, as their leader showed there was no fundamental conflict between Confucianism and Christianity. After 1911, the overall tensions between Christianity and the Chinese community eased somewhat, partly because of Sun's influence, despite the fact that some Chinese kept opposing Christianity.⁴⁵

Chinese community leaders in Victoria who considered themselves nationalists still hoped to elevate Confucianism over Christianity. However, at the same time they

⁴⁴ As the first Chinese Prairie Presbyterian minister in Canada, Ma Seung travelled extensively. Although his work was mainly kept in Prairie Canada, Victoria remains an important place for him, as it was his first stop in Canada. Ma worked in Victoria and learned English from classes provided by missionaries in the 1890s before converting to Christianity, and it was in here that he realized Christianity and Confucianism were not opponents. Because this change process happened in Victoria before he left for Manitoba, I consider his experience an example of some Chinese Christians preserving Confucian doctrines after their conversion. For more details, please see Marshall, *Cultivating Connection*, 48, 56-57.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 19-20, see note 91 and 94 of introduction.

gradually came to view the church as an international institution rather than a national religion that only represented whiteness. Thus, Chinese Christians wanted to have their own churches separate from those attended by Euro-Canadians. This change in view indicated that after 1911, Christianity was no longer viewed as an opponent to Chinese nationalism; this is attributable to the fact that the new Chinese government held a friendlier view towards both Western culture and Christianity. As a result, the tight link between Christianity and whiteness was loosened in the eyes of Victoria's Chinese leaders. Across many dimensions, the Christian church in Chinatown came to share a position similar to that held by other Chinese associations. For example, it would send congratulations to other associations and even participate in events celebrated by other associations. Chinese Christians showed their patriotism by raising funds to support the Chinese homeland in wars just as the other associations did. The United Chinese Christian Society also contributed money to the CCBA and thereby in 1920 won a seat on the board of directors, demonstrating that Chinese leaders came to accept the legitimacy of Chinese Christian churches and consider them as another kind of Chinese association. Thus, the church was able to confer on and make decisions about the various affairs in Chinatown along with other leaders.⁴⁶

C. The Integration of Different Religions

From 1858 to 1930, various religions seemed to have changed over time in Victoria's Chinese community; some people integrated both Christianity and Chinese folk religion into their lives, with both forming and influencing their everyday thinking. Over these years, many subtle changes had unconsciously taken place. It seemed that the

⁴⁶ *The Chinese Times*, April 23, 1915, page 3; May 4, 1915, page 3; March 27, 1930, page 2; March 31, 1930, page 3; September 10, 1930, page 3; Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership*, 136-137.

Chinese maintained a part of their cultural heritage, while also absorbing many new elements from Christianity in particular and Western culture in general. Meanwhile, Christian churches also assimilated Chinese cultural and even religious elements. For example, Chinese immigrants, including those who did not convert to Christianity, accepted some elements of mainstream culture including clothing, hairstyle, and lifestyle, to adapt to mainstream society. For a community that used to believe that Christianity and a Western lifestyle were synonymous, adapting to the mainstream was a sign of its acceptance of at least some elements of what it saw as Christian culture.

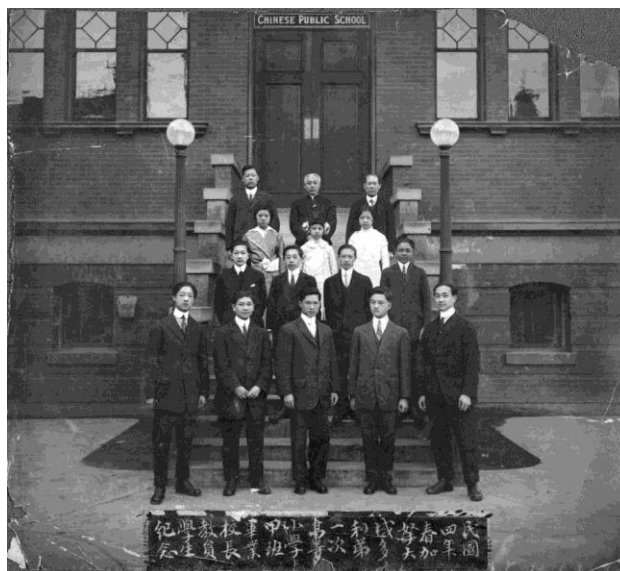


Figure 4 Second Mandarin, arrived Victoria circa 1890|*BC Archives, D-05603 (Left)*;

Figure 5 First Graduation Class of the Chinese Public School, Chinatown, Victoria.

Principal: Lee Mong Kow | *BC Archives, D-08821 (Right)*

As the photos above show, a Chinese person in 1890 might have dressed in a traditional Chinese way – which was exotic to Euro-Canadians who regarded this clothing style as a refusal to accept Western civilization. It was considered difficult for

the Christian mission to attract more converts from the Chinese schools such as Chinese Public School in Victoria, since those schools were “most reactionary in their influence,” which was seen as “extremely detrimental to the process of assimilation.”⁴⁷ But in the 1910s, Western style clothing, including shoes, pants, shirts, dresses, and suits, became common among the Chinese, as shown in the photo taken in 1915. It was the first graduating class of the Chinese Public School, with teachers and students, both girls and boys, dressed in the fashion of mainstream society, reflecting the changes under the dominant Christian culture. In addition, considering the fact that Chinese girls were not expected to be educated beyond the domestic world of their families in nineteenth century China, the appearance of girls at the graduation ceremony was a sign that Victoria’s Chinese community was adapting itself to the new culture.

The way Chinese people dressed in cemetery rituals changed as well. With the core belief of worshipping ancestors, the Chinese residents paid a great deal of attention to funeral ceremonies. Historical photography drawn from the BC Archives shows scenes of the Chinese parading in streets for funerals. In the earlier period, showing in the photo left (taken in 1888), relatives of the deceased dressed all in white (as the color represented mourning in Chinese traditional culture), held banners, and struck a gong to announce their presence. Another photo presented people dressing like soldiers of the Qing Dynasty and holding the soul guiding flag, still walking in lines at that time. In the Sun Yat-sen memorial parade on April 12, 1925, participants dressed in suits, wore hats, and attached name tags on their chests. A motorcycle led the procession and pacers held bouquets.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Osterhout, *Orientalism in Canada*, 8-9.

⁴⁸ Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, “*The Book of 1959*”, University of Victoria Archives.



Figure 6 Chinese funeral, Government Street, Victoria BC |*BC Archives, A-09585*(Left); Figure 7 Chinese funeral procession southbound on Government Street, picture taken from Johnson Street |*BC Archives, A-01548* (Right)



Figure 8 Chinese funeral, Victoria |*BC Archives, D-05992*

The photo above was taken in 1892 at Ross Bay Cemetery. Most Chinese in this photo maintained their traditional style with the pigtail and Chinese clothing. However, when the Chinese were seen in the Chinese Cemetery in 1903 as shown below, their clothing style was very different from before. Even though the Chinese apparently dressed in a more “Western way” during the ritual process in the picture, they preserved the traditional methods of showing respect to the dead by kowtowing in the graveyard and burning offerings to be sent to spirits. Sacrifice, burning paper money, and offering incense were still the most important parts of the ceremony.



Figure 9 The altar at the Chinese cemetery, Victoria |*BC Archives, G-03076*⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Since the Chinese cemetery opened in 1903, this photo must have been taken in that year or afterwards. BC Archives cited it as a photo of 1890, which is very possibly a mistake.

Missionaries who tried to assimilate the Chinese came to accept the fact that Chinese culture blended with Christian conduct everywhere, including among those who lived in Christian buildings like the Chinese Girls Rescue Home. In a similar pattern to the missionaries' approach to Indigenous converts, missionaries had tried to give Chinese girls English names and let them dress and eat in the middle-class Anglo-Saxon way at the Rescue Home. But their intention encountered resistance from girls in many different ways—many girls kept their former life style and dressed up traditionally—to the point where missionaries finally accepted a blend of “the East” and “the West.” For instance, in February of 1893 the girls were invited for a music programme at the Chinese Mission, which included a “Chinese instrumental piece, played on an instrument in use 500 B.C.” and the Rev. Chan SinKai was playing “the loving Shepherds” as to accompany the girls’ “solo in Chinese.”⁵⁰

Chinese festivities were celebrated by the girls of the Chinese Girls Rescue Home in a specific way that blended Chinese tradition and Christianity. During Chinese New Year, the matrons served Chinese girls “a piece of money in red paper” to please the girls, since this is a traditional custom in China. The effect was shown to be positive, as the Chinese girls seemed to be more relaxed when this Chinese tradition took place in the Rescue Home, where they were all surrounded by unfamiliar rituals practiced by Christians. The Methodist Church’s Chinese mission school also respected the Chinese

⁵⁰ Rutherford, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field*, 40; Liam O'Reilly, “Missionaries and Women in Victoria’s Chinatown: The Establishment and Evolution of the Chinese Rescue Home, 1886-1900.” Major Research Paper, Department of History, University of Victoria, 2011; *British Colonist*, February 21, 1893, 5.

cultural customs and gave three days off for their students during spring festival showing the tolerance of Christianity to Chinese culture.⁵¹

Weddings were also sometimes a mixture of two cultures. In a Chinese Christian wedding, the bride was attired in Chinese-styled clothing, wearing “a shield-shaped” traditional headwear while the groom dressed in “dark blue everyday Chinese cut (suit).” They took their vows in front of the altar, and then a blend of Western and Eastern tradition appeared at the end of the ceremony - someone at the door of the church poured a shower of rice upon the spectators and the couple, while fireworks were set off outside.⁵²

In addition to the girls in the Oriental Home, other Chinese mission schools also subtly changed in various ways. In Chinese churches, missionaries taught participants the Chinese gospel, in that they prayed in the Chinese language. Sometimes the baptism ceremonies were also conducted in Cantonese. In addition, the instruments which were played in Chinese churches were a combination of the two different cultures—in addition to playing the piano and pipe organ as in other churches, the Chinese were able to bring Chinese traditional musical instruments, such as the erhu and yueqin, into church for performances(as shown below).⁵³

⁵¹ *The Missionary Outlook*, April, 1894, 63; *The Missionary Outlook*, April 1885, 52-53.

⁵² Newspaper clipping of *The Inland Sentinel* of 1890, January 24, Reel 27, microfilm D-19, BC Archives.

⁵³ *The Missionary Outlook*, April 1885, 52-53; *The Missionary Outlook*, June-July, 1886, 107; Koo Shee Chan interview, BC Archives, T3712: 0001.



Figure 10 Group in Chinese Christian Church, Victoria |*BC Archives, G-01129*

Further, Chinese churches contained elements of Chinese decorations, such as Chinese calligraphy written in couplets, which were normally seen in Chinese shrines. Once a missionary described what he saw, “[M]ottoes on the wall were written both in English and Chinese and a Chinese map is hanged in the room.”⁵⁴ The photo shown above is part of an archival collection that provided a more direct impression for us to observe the particular decorations found in a Chinese church. A scroll is hung in the middle of the wall, with the embroidered words in Chinese as “Dao Guan Tian Ren,” which is usually related to Daoism, meaning that both human and nature (or heaven) are under Dao (the Way), with couplets appeared on both sides of the scroll, along with two Chinese symbol embroideries and two Chinese floral lanterns.

⁵⁴ *The Missionary Outlook*, April 1886, 61, 64; June – July 1886, 83.

The use of "Dao" was another feature which indicated the integrating of Christianity and Chinese-originated religions, such as Daoism, as this word has been used by Daoists for many years and served as the core concept of its philosophical view. As written in *Yijing* (The Book of Changes): "What transcends form is called Dao." Dao is the way or path taken by people, which could be extended as the general laws followed by things in different spheres. More specifically, the natural order by which the sun, moon and stars move was called the way of heaven; the rules that governed human activities were the way of man. The term which "Dao Guan Tian Ren" originally referred the integration and inherent relationship between heaven, earth, and human, that is, nature and human share the same principles. This concept was accepted by Confucian scholars for elaborating Confucianism later, and then "Dao" became a very significant part of classic Chinese philosophy.⁵⁵ Given the broad meaning of the term, Christianity used the term "Dao" to represent God. In this Chinese church the term "Dao Guan Tian Ren" was used to indicate the truth of the Christian faith, and its belief in the relationship between humanity and the natural world. By borrowing this concept from Daoism or Confucianism, Christianity could be better understood by the Chinese who were familiar with Chinese philosophical interpretation of the world.

The advantage to missionaries of integrating some elements of Chinese religions with Christianity was not only in using the terms of Chinese-originated religions, but also in taking advantage of their potential converts' familiarity with folk religion and Confucian doctrine. The missionaries could then make explicit comparisons between these beliefs and the doctrines of Christianity, focusing particularly on similarities

⁵⁵ Marshall, *Cultivating Connections*, 48.

between these beliefs. Marshall has argued that a knowledge of Confucian doctrine aided in the dissemination of Christianity among the Chinese; missionaries usually concentrated on the similarities between Confucianism and Christianity to attract and persuade Chinese listeners. Some of them, like Reverend Ma Seung, even suggested missionaries should learn more about Chinese ancient literature, which would bring them closer to the Chinese community. For those people, the way of Christianity and the way of Confucianism was merely the truth with different names.⁵⁶

Over seventy-two years, Christianity and China-originated religions, which were mainly represented by Chinese folk religion, were both influencing the Chinese community in Victoria. Their mutual impact upon Victoria's Chinese was reflected in many customs of daily life. The local Chinese gradually became tolerant of Christianity, even though only a minority of them became Christian converts. Their religious ceremonies, ranging from weddings to funerals, also adopted cultural elements from mainstream society. Meanwhile, missionaries added Chinese decorations into Chinese churches and used Chinese classics to attract more Chinese to listen to their gospel. Gradually, the integration of Chinese folk religion and Christianity occurred in a variety of ways, especially through the mixing of Eastern and Western cultures, easing the tension between the two cultures and eventually producing a unique culture in Victoria's Chinatown.

⁵⁶ Marshall, *Cultivating Connections*, 50-52; Ward, *Oriental missions in British Columbia*, 8-9.

Conclusion

Built upon documentary materials from local newspaper reports and church records, this thesis explores Victoria's religions from China (mainly Chinese folk religion), which are rooted in traditional Chinese culture, and Christianity, which is deeply interwoven with Western culture. It also discusses how both religions changed to adapt to the needs of the Chinese community, eventually leading to a Chinese-Canadian culture influenced by both religions.

Beginning in 1858, Chinese immigrants brought to Canada an array of religions from their home country, chiefly Chinese folk religion. Traditional Chinese religious beliefs were reflected in a variety of rituals, with the burning of paper money and the offering of food common sights in Victoria's cemeteries and temples. The commonalities between Chinese observances for deities and ancestors reveal the bonds between the two, as signified by beliefs in the continuation of spirits after death and the power of spirits to influence the living, with the potential for transformation from mortality to deity. Amid this religiosity and philosophy, ancestor worship remained fundamental within the Chinese community: Chinese associations emphasized it to shape morality, and it unified the people by reminding them that they were the descendants of a common ancestor.

Just as in rural China, many Chinese in Victoria, such as those in the Lee Association, remained in their single-surname lineage organization and persisted in its ancestor worship – but some Chinese who had relatively small surname groups, such as those of the Long Kong Association, developed a new type of joint-family ancestors worship that empowered their clans by adding a new ancestor to their shrine. Other associations opened their membership even further. Chee Kong Tong (CKT), for

example, developed from its parent association, the Hong Fraternal Society, and worshipped as its major deity Guan Yu, who represented the Liu–Guan–Zhang sworn brotherhood. This fraternal society, which bonded its members in sworn brotherhood, became very popular among North American Chinese.

Worship of the same ancestral deity helped enhance relationships among the Chinese community, especially in Victoria, whose limited Chinese population comprised mainly single men. Without families as the basic units of Chinese society, the power of lineage was weakened. Instead, a more inclusive association, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), was established, and its temple was devoted to five deities, including Confucius. Beyond the existence of institutional and semi-public shrines, the presence of CCBA's multi-deity temple indicates that local Chinese, although they still followed Confucian orthodoxy, focused on popular religions that could provide spiritual comfort and protection during their adventures in Canada. These popular religions, characterized by adjustability and diverse deities of different origins that could be worshipped at the same place, fulfilled people's different needs. Not surprisingly, many rituals of Chinese folk religions, especially those related to divination, were practiced daily, especially by Chinese women in private practice. The lived religion focus used in this thesis contributed to understanding these practices, allowing us to explore everyday life experiences in religious contexts that would otherwise have been omitted if the focus was solely on formal or sacred rites.

Meanwhile, as the dominant religion of Canada, Christianity saw its role in converting the Chinese immigrants. In Victoria, missionaries from Protestant churches, mostly Methodists, Presbyterians and Anglicans, reached out to the Chinese from 1866,

and began to provide English classes that included preaching. Their work gradually developed to include the founding of organised missions and Chinese churches. The missionaries encountered some resistance to these developments, but any outright hostility was tempered by Chinese workers' eagerness to attend the English classes and events hosted by the churches. However, although Chinese men were avid learners of English and Western culture, seeing such knowledge as a practical skill, they were not necessarily interested in converting to Christianity – and all the less so after the mid-1890s, when the Chinese community fought against extreme discrimination by the non-Chinese settlers of Victoria. Possibly, the situation was more complicated in that other factors, such as loneliness and language barriers, may also have affected Chinese immigrants' willingness to convert. However, according to available sources, by that time church attendance was at a low ebb as the Chinese sought to solidify their ethnic and cultural identities to create a stronger united community to protect themselves from attacks by the racist mainstream society. As a result, almost the entire Chinese community therefore opposed Christianity, which symbolized Western culture.

Chinese women, however, were seemingly less resistant to Christianity. This study might not provide a complete picture of the attitudes of Victoria's Chinese women, and the fuller story is doubtless more complex – oral history and missionaries' reports indicate that some Chinese women remained faithful to Chinese folk religion and refused to come into contact with missionaries; but even so no female interviewees made negative comments about Christianity, in contrast to the comments made by Chinese men. The Chinese Girls Rescue Home, which was founded by Methodists in 1886 and later became the Oriental Home and School, might have positively influenced Chinese

women's attitudes towards Christianity by having helped Chinese girls receive a higher education. Notably, however, beyond churches' providing a social arena for the first generation of Chinese women unavailable to them in Chinese associations, the interviewees were mainly second-generation Chinese women, who had been engaged in church activities from childhood and thus were probably fonder of Christianity.

However, the resistance of many Chinese men to Christianity before the 1910s left Chinese Christians to face the distrust or even hatred of the non-Christian Chinese, who were discriminated against by mainstream society and thus associated churches with the racism. Oral history suggests that Chinese Christians tended to socialize with one another and might also have been isolated from non-Christian Chinese, forming a third group positioned socially between the traditional Chinese community and the dominant Western society. Not until around 1911, when a revolution supported by overseas Chinese succeeded in China, replacing the old empire with the Republic of China, did the Chinese become more welcoming of Christianity. Some Chinese patriots' passion for modernizing China made them positive towards Christianity, which they saw as a gate through which to modernize. Furthermore, Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese revolutionary leader, was a Christian, and many of his local followers became Christians in imitation of their role model. In turn, Chinese Christians' patriotic attitudes regained them a level of trust and influence among non-Christian Chinese, allowing them to support the Chinese community through participation on the CCBA's board of directors. Through this repositioning from a symbol of white privilege and racism to one of modernity and democracy, Christianity became viewed more favourably by Victoria's Chinese.

Chinese attitudes towards religion in Canada – regardless of which religion – have historically been affected by their living circumstances there, as well as by political developments in China. Most Chinese in Victoria seem to have been attached not to a religion itself (although Chinese women are said to have been more religious than Chinese men) but rather to what that religion meant to them, perhaps based on their upbringing. This phenomenon could have reflected the influence of Confucianism, which emphasizes daily life over religious life, but it was also influenced by Victoria's largely male Chinese community, whose religious institutions were deeply interwoven with secular social events as individuals lost their clan connections and began to develop networks based on friendship and sworn-brotherhood within institutions. Over the period of this study, Christianity and China-originated religions, which were mainly represented by Chinese folk religion, were both influencing the Chinese community in Victoria. Their mutual impact upon Victoria's Chinese was reflected in many customs of daily life. The local Chinese gradually became tolerant of Christianity, even though only a minority of them became Christian converts. Their religious ceremonies, ranging from weddings to funerals, also adopted cultural elements from the mainstream society. Meanwhile, missionaries added Chinese decorations to Chinese churches and used Chinese classics to attract more Chinese to listen to their gospel. Gradually, the integration of Chinese folk religion and Christianity occurred in a variety of ways, especially through the mixing of Eastern and Western cultures, easing the tension between the two cultures and eventually producing a unique culture in Victoria's Chinatown.

As for methodology, with the benefit of oral history, the Chinese Canadians turned from "objects" into "subjects" in this part of history by telling their own stories

and expressing their opinions based on their earlier experiences in Victoria. The use of oral history also enabled me to include Chinese women's voices that otherwise would not have been heard. Besides, more objective details of Chinese religious lives were captured by the use of photography, which gives accurate representation of hitherto unknown or unstudied information that was recorded in the images either intentionally or by accident.

In focusing on historical local Chinese religious expressions and beliefs in Victoria before 1930, this thesis contributes to understandings of local history, Chinese Canadian history and Canadian religious history. In doing so, it uncovers a new perspective on the story of the Chinese who lived in Victoria, exploring their religiosity in contrast to previous studies' emphasis on migration, settlement, political structure and leadership among the local Chinese. In addition to examining the impacts of religions of Chinese origin and those of Christianity, this thesis investigates the hybridization of religions and cultures in the local Chinese community. What's more, this topic has the potential to extend beyond the present scope through future research: the story of Chinese religious life in Victoria after 1930 remains unwritten – and is probably very different from that seen earlier owing to the effect of further immigration from China, particularly since the 1970s. For this study, a lack of time forced me to rely on interviews conducted by others, seeking relevant information from portions of diverse dialogues rather than examining detailed individual experiences. As a result, I could describe only briefly, and then make further assumptions regarding Chinese women's participation in religious practices and rituals. This topic, however, could be further researched by conducting oral interviews with second- or third-generation Chinese Canadians who could share their

memories of their parents and grandparents, as well as their own memories, which will complete the story and add clearer voices of both Chinese women and Chinese men.

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