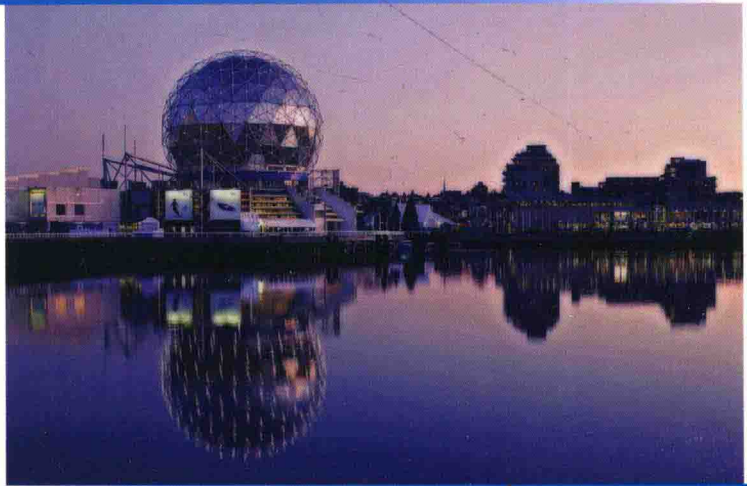


Chinese Take Root in Canada

Shasha & Amber



12 people from Vancouver recount their life stories

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Becoming True Chinese Canadians

Chinese people have been helping build Canada for centuries, yet their history can only be characterized as a bittersweet experience. The “bitter” would be the days when Chinese immigrants were mistreated and humiliated. The “sweet” would be when the new immigrants, like those profiled in this book, started creating one success story after another and being accepted, respected and praised as members of Canadian society.

In the late 1700s, a British fur trader imported a group of Chinese carpenters from Guangzhou and Macao to Vancouver Island to help build a ship. In 1858 young, illiterate immigrants escaping from poverty and war in their country – and burning up with “gold fever” – arrived in British Columbia, intending to pan for gold and send money back home. Other Chinese came north from California. More Chinese arrived in the 1880s to build the Canadian Pacific Railway from the Pacific to British Columbia’s Monashee Mountains.

Canadians perceived the Chinese as a hardy, industrious people who would work for low wages and eat only fish and rice – and who were inferior to whites. For example, on the railway, the Chinese were given the most dangerous jobs, such as tunneling and using explosives. One estimate put the Chinese death toll as four dead for every mile of railroad. For this, workers were paid a dollar a day, two-thirds the white man’s earnings.

After the railway was completed, the Chinese were no longer seen as

useful – although they had literally been building the country. In 1885, Canada passed the Chinese Immigration Act, which imposed a \$50 head tax on any new immigrant from China. This rose to \$100 in 1900. In addition, employment was restricted. Chinese were forced into low-paying jobs at sawmills and canneries or had to open their own businesses, such as laundries and restaurants.

Most Chinese then lived on Victoria Island and in Vancouver, British Columbia, the closest Canadian land to China across the Pacific at around 6,000 miles. According to the 1911 census, more than 7,000 Chinese lived in BC. Canadians relegated the Chinese into “Chinatowns,” then claimed that conditions there proved that Chinese life and culture posed a threat to white civilization.

Following anti-Chinese riots in western Canada, on July 1, 1923 – “Humiliation Day” to the Chinese – the government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which made it nearly impossible for any Chinese to immigrate to Canada. By mid-year all Chinese were required to register as legal residents or be fined \$500, sent to prison for a year, or both.

Canada was not alone in its xenophobia. Its attitudes mirrored those in the United States, where race riots occurred simultaneously with those in British Columbia. The U.S. also passed its own Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.

During the 24 years of Canada’s Exclusion Act, immigration was nearly stopped completely. Wives and families were barred from coming to Canada, and Chinatowns teemed with bachelors. Families were separated for decades and many were never reunited.

Racist views slowly began to change, before and especially during World War II. Chinese made a large contribution to the Canadian war effort. Canada and China also were allies in the fight, and some Chinese Canadians served in the Pacific. Others raised funds and bought war bonds. Praise was heard

for the patriotism of Canada's resident Chinese. In 1944, the United States repealed its Exclusion Act. Canada did the same in 1947.

The "sweet" part of the Chinese story in Canada began when racist attitudes began to mellow and Chinese residents were viewed as "Chinese Canadians" and granted citizenship in 1947. In 2006 Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on the floor of Parliament for the country's treatment of Chinese immigrants since 1885. He called this a "grave injustice."

From 1947 to the 1970s, Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan or other Overseas Chinese communities settled mostly in British Columbia and Ontario. By 2001, over 80 percent of the country's Chinese lived in these two provinces. Canada did not have diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China until 1970.

Before the return of Hong Kong, wealthy entrepreneurs fled to Canada, about 30,000 from 1991 to 1996, according to the Canadian Consulate. Ironically, they sparked some resentment from the white population as being too wealthy – what a contrast from past attitudes!

In the 21st century, thousands of immigrants poured in from the Chinese Mainland. Chinese Canadians now compose one of the largest Overseas Chinese communities in the world. In 2013 the Chinese population stood at 1,485,580, or 4.5 percent of Canada's total. The official statistics agency projects that by 2031, the Chinese Canadian population could reach 3 million, about 6 percent of the total.

These "newcomers" are truly Chinese Canadians; in 2001, a quarter of the Chinese in Canada had been born there. Future population growth will reflect Canadian births as well as immigration. The new Chinese immigrants are also not the illiterate peasants that first came to Canada. They are educated people, not seeking menial jobs but instead quality educational institutions and medical treatment options not widely available at home, as well as

economic and investment opportunities and a good environment. In short, a good life.

The new Chinese are also builders, like their forebears, but their contributions fall into every category of Canadian society: government and politics, entertainment, business, philanthropy, fine arts, media, literature, science and technology, and education.

In the pages of this book, you will meet only a tiny fraction of these new Chinese builders of Canada. Even for them, making a life in a new country was not easy. But, like those who paved the way before, they overcame challenges and became builders in Canada. Both they and their adopted country have put the bitterness of the past behind them and are experiencing the “sweetness” of having Chinese in Canada.

Paul Adams, Ph.D.

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By Shaha & Amber

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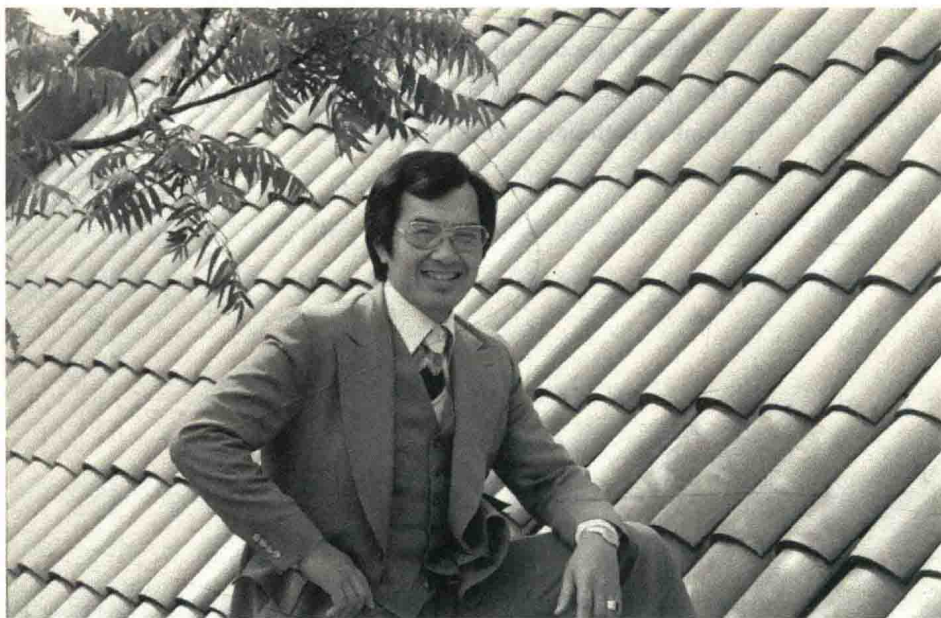


The Making of a Real-estate Mogul

Build a good reputation... If you cross the line, then people know that you did that, and they are not going to recommend you. Always think of both sides... And be honest.

—Robert H. Lee

*R*obert H. Lee, a Canadian businessman and philanthropist, was born on June 25, 1933. After graduating from what was then the University of British Columbia Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration in 1956, Lee opened a real estate business and began to build an extensive network. He is the founder and chairman of the integrated real estate company the Prospero Group. As an ardent philanthropist, Lee has donated



As a young real estate salesman in Chinatown



Robert Lee, whose charitable giving extended to his home village in China, inculcated the importance of giving back in the Lee children. The school in this photograph was built with funds donated by Robert Lee

much money to a myriad of causes in Vancouver's Chinatown. He also has sent money to his ancestral home village in China.

Lee is a recipient of many awards. He received the Order of British Columbia and was named Businessman of the Year in 1990. He is also a trustee of the Bank of British Columbia, a director of the Real Estate Institute of Canada, the Vancouver Foundation, the B.C. Paraplegic Foundation and of the Port Authority of Vancouver. He has also received an Order of Canada and an Honorary Doctorate of Law from UBC.

He also is a member of YMCA Vancouver and serves as a director of Crown Life Insurance, Canadian National Railway and Wall Financial Corporation. In addition, Lee has been a governor and chancellor of UBC and was responsible for generating \$400 million for the school's endowment as a founding member of the UBC Properties Fund.

Real estate mogul Robert H. Lee's influence on Vancouver is apparent to



Robert Lee and his
wife Lily

anyone who's paid attention to the local business community over the past five decades. His name graces the building housing the YMCA on Burrard Street. The graduate school at the University of British Columbia was also named in his honor after he made a \$C5 million donation. As a founder of UBC Properties Trust, he played a pivotal role in the development of housing on the UBC Sauder School of Business Point Grey campus, which has generated windfall revenues for the university. And as a former chancellor of UBC, Lee can easily be thought of as a member of Vancouver's power elite.

But it wasn't always this way. A historical project funded by the federal government presents a humble picture of Lee's childhood. *Chinese Canadian*



With UBC President Martha Piper (middle)

Stories: Uncommon Histories from a Common Past, led by UBC historian Henry Yu, recently released a CD of videos of various local luminaries of Chinese descent, including Lee, who was born in Vancouver. He spent his first years in Chinatown before moving to the neighborhood near Cambie Street and West 7th Avenue. And on-screen, he tells how his father worked days in a greenhouse and nights at a restaurant before owning a store. “We saw our dad for two hours a week for 12 years,” Lee says. “I never went for a haircut until I was 18 because he cut our hair with a rice bowl.”

Around the age of 13 or 14, Lee became interested in real estate, a subject that also intrigued his father. But the teenager’s marks weren’t very good, and a counsellor recommended that he just proceed through high school and not continue to the university. “My dad never saw my report card or didn’t

know anything about education because he was so busy at work,” he says.

In the video, Lee says he worked hard enough to get into UBC, and his marks improved when he studied business, which interested him. Lee earned a Bachelor of Commerce degree in 1956.

Chinese tradition dictated that upon graduation, Lee should join his father’s import business. But this lasted only two years, as he envisioned a more prosperous future, joking that his father didn’t pay him enough to support his lifestyle. He joined the real estate firm H.A. Roberts and moved on to co-found Wall Financial Corp. in 1966. In 1979, he built a formidable real estate business by forming the highly successful Prospero Group of



With the Olympic flame during the Olympics torch relay, Vancouver

companies. And he immediately started networking with his father's friends, including Tong Louie, whose descendants own the IGA and London Drugs chains.

Long-term vision, entrepreneurial drive and a strong dedication to community – these are the hallmarks of Bob Lee's life and career. Lee's foresight in fostering business ties to Asia, at a time when few others recognized its future influence, sparked major Asian investments in British Columbia and marked a significant development in the province's economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s. He built a strong real estate presence on the west coast of Canada and the U.S., with extensive commercial real estate holdings in the Lower Mainland.

Lee's big break came in the late 1960s when there was widespread fear in Hong Kong that China was going to try to take it over. That led to an exodus of wealthy residents, many of whom moved to Vancouver. When these newcomers visited local banks, they were advised to visit Lee because he could speak their language. One of Lee's business associates for many years was philanthropist David Lam, later B.C.'s lieutenant governor, who came to Canada from Hong Kong in 1967.

Lee: I thanked my father for making me go to Chinese school for 12 years.

Lee also describes how a "short fellow" – who wasn't identified by name – showed up and said that he wanted to buy apartments. As they drove through the West End near English Bay, the man spotted Imperial Towers, then the city's largest apartment block with 263 suites. Lee says the owner at the time was Tom Campbell, who later became mayor.

They haggled for a while and Lee reveals that on one weekend, he shot a dismal 120 on the golf course because he was so preoccupied about the

potential real estate commission. Eventually, Campbell consented to sell the building, and Lee reports that he made 10 times his annual salary on that one transaction. In 1979, Lee founded the Prospero Group, which has an extensive portfolio of residential, office, retail, and industrial properties.

Lee: My father donated to many causes in Chinatown, including the Chinese school, and sent money back to his ancestral village in China throughout his life.

Lee's kindest words are for his wife, Lily, who held the family together during the lean years by scrupulously managing the household budget. All four of their children – who followed in their father's enterprising footsteps – and their spouses went on to graduate from UBC. It was there that Lee also had met Lily.



Robert Lee's Order of
Canada insignia

Lee's career has combined outstanding achievements with philanthropy and community service. His business acumen and knowledge have enabled him to play a key role in a number of community institutions. A long-time patron of UBC, Lee served as member of the Board of Governors (1984-1990), chancellor (1993-1996) and chair of the UBC Foundation. In November 2006, the Robert H. Lee Graduate School was established at the Sauder School of Business. The school is named for his generous gift to graduate education at the school as well as his long-term support of UBC. He is a director of the Vancouver Foundation and the Prostate Centre at Vancouver General Hospital. His many past directorships include the Vancouver Port Corporation, the Vancouver Board of Trade