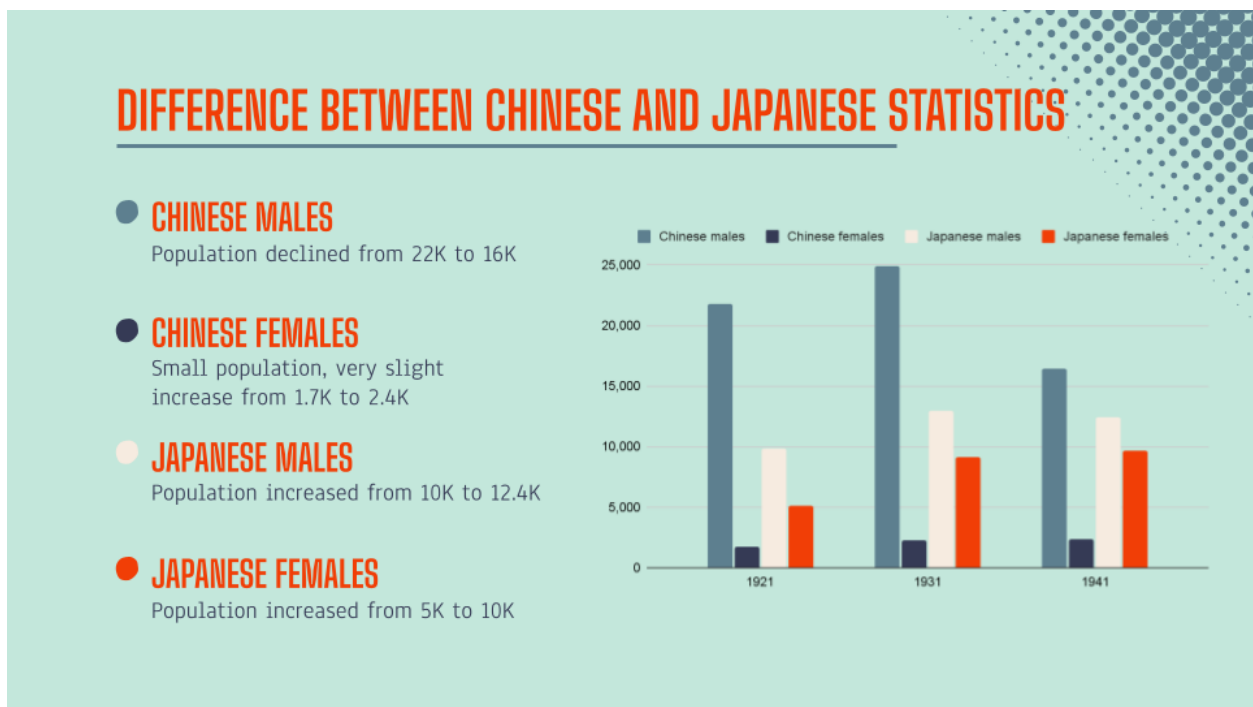


The Ramifications of the Head Tax and *Chinese Exclusion Act*

Under the pressures of the Anti-Chinese movement, the *Chinese Exclusion Act* was passed to cease all Chinese immigration to Canada. The impacts to the Chinese community were significant enough to see the population dwindle to less than half in a few years. The emergence of “bachelor societies” saw the breakage of families since wives and children of Chinese men already in Canada were not permitted to immigrate. The resulting lack of Chinese women in Canada and the taboo of inter-racial marriages limited the community’s natural growth. Chinese communities across Canada, especially those in High River that began with a small population, were stunted.

Growth was impossible without women or children.

The below data shows the difference between Chinese and Japanese population statistics (notably, the ratio of female to male) within the same census years in British Columbia:



Population of Persons of Chinese and Japanese racial origin in British Columbia, by gender, 1921 – 1941. (Canada, Census, 1921 – 1941)

The Chinese in High River



Figure 1: 司徒鋤 Seto Gan beloved grandfather to all the children.
Courtesy of M. Wong

司徒鋤 Seto Gan had a wife and daughter in China. By the time the family was able reunite in the 1970s, Seto's wife had passed and the daughter Jean had already raised a family of her own. He did not watch his daughter grow up nor get to be present in her childhood. They only had the opportunity to get to know one another decades later. And he was considered a lucky one.

During his working years in High River, he lived above the café with one family, while another remained in China, separated by legislation.

This was a familiar story.

His compatriots at Wing Chong Laundry, 謝 Tse and 黃馥蘭 Wong Fook Lan, were similarly impacted by the Head Tax and *Chinese Exclusion Act*. Wong Fook Lan died a “bachelor” and never had an opportunity to start a family. The *Chinese Exclusion Act* was in place from 1923 and only repealed years after Wong's death.

The Tse couple was separated by legislation, only reunited in their later years. Based on information from an audio interview, Mrs. and Mr. Tse lived apart for 46 years before reuniting in Canada. She raised four children alone in China and Hong Kong. At the time of reuniting, her oldest child would have been in their 40s. One son is in China, and some are in the U.S. It is suggested they resided at “Old Gold Mountain”—the common expression for San Francisco used by early pioneers.



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