

# **Forum Summary Apology for Historical Wrongs Against Chinese British Columbians Consultation Forum Kelowna, BC**

**Tuesday, January 14, 2014**

**5:00 – 7:00pm**

**Best Western Plus, 2402 Hwy 97 North, Kelowna, BC**



Host: Silver Leung, President, Okanagan Chinese Canadian Association

Lead: Honourable Teresa Wat, Minister of International Trade  
and Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism

Attendance: 57 people

## Agenda

1. Silver Leung – Welcome and Opening Remarks
2. Bin Qi – Welcome and Opening Remarks
3. Minister Teresa Wat – Opening Remarks
4. Mark Seeley – Consultation Questions and Process
5. Comments from community members
6. Silver Leung – Closing Remarks

### Silver Leung Opening Remarks

- Welcomed friends, local media, Minister and the government body
- Introduced herself as the mediator and facilitator of this event
- Explained the purpose of the consultation
- Welcomed speakers to come forward to express ideas and opinions
- Introduced Minister Wat and thanked her for coming to Kelowna to address the community.

### Minister Teresa Wat Opening Remarks

- Minister Wat thanked Silver and the Okanagan Chinese Canadian Association (O.C.C.A.) for arranging this forum on the Ministry's behalf
- She felt honoured and privileged to be there and thanked everyone for being able to come
- Gave special thanks to colleagues from Legislature: Linda Larson, MLA for Boundary- Similkameen as well as Bruce Ralston, MLA for Surrey- Whalley.
- This is the 4th of the 7 forums held across the province to determine the appropriate wording, delivery and legacy effort for a formal apology to the Chinese community in BC for historical wrongs of past provincial governments
- BC is the most ethnically diverse province in Canada built by immigrants, and the Chinese community is part of this legacy.
- In 2010 Kelowna Chinatown was designated as a community historic district; the Chinese Store is reconstructed in the Kelowna Museum
- This history is a reminder of lives and customs of Kelowna's once thriving Chinese community; it provides the touchstone to the story of one of the Chinese families
- Her purpose tonight is to engage this community in a meaningful consultation and get everybody's feedback

### Mark Seeley Questions & Process

- On behalf of his colleagues, he thanked everyone and felt a great honour in being there
- Explained the process of allowing members of the audience to speak
- No time restriction set but important to keep in mind there may be others who want to speak
- The consultation seeks suggestions on three key points:
  1. the wording and tone of the apology and what it should cover;
  2. how the apology should be delivered and;

**Mark Seeley**  
**Questions**  
**& Process**  
**(continued)**

**Bin Qi**  
**Opening Remarks**

**Community**  
**Members**

3. what should be the legacy piece that comes from that apology
- Those choosing not to speak are welcome to submit comment via email or using the forms contained within the information packs
  - Silver will moderate and if needed Jennifer will translate and summarize key points between English and Cantonese so that everyone understands
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- On behalf of OCCA, she welcomed the Minister and everybody else for attending
  - Introduced herself as the current president of OCCA
  - The Chinese community suffered discrimination between 1885-1923 when discriminatory legislations were imposed, including the Chinese Immigration Act; again in 1923-1947 when Chinese individuals were restricted from entering Canada and the Chinese Exclusion Act
  - Today, we gather together as local residents of Chinese origin to express our concerns
  - OCCA believes an apology should not only for history, but also for current and future status of Chinese British Columbians
  - In order to prevent historical wrongs from being repeated, public awareness and education are very important and essential

**Pat Olson**  
**Entrepreneur**

- English name is Pat Olson, Chinese name is Pee-Chang Wen
- He has been living in Canada since 1967 when the immigration law was finally repealed allowing independent Chinese to immigrate to Canada
- Received Canadian citizenship in 1970 in Winnipeg Manitoba
- Believes Canada is the best country and never encountered discrimination since coming here
- Moved to BC in 1986 establishing his own private practice in audiology
- He was able to build a thriving practice with the support of local community
- The demographic of Kelowna is predominantly Caucasian so most of his patients are white, but there were some Chinese, Japanese
- Inspired by Mr. Ben Lee, one of our prominent citizens' in public service as well as Jang Mah whose family contributed during great depressions by providing soup to over 100 people during the Great Depression; both families were directly impacted by the Head Tax;
- These stories show that Chinese are resilient; whether they receive fair treatment or prejudicial treatments, they live harmoniously with this community because they choose to live here
- Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to Chinese for Head Tax, East Indians for Komagata Maru & to Japanese for the Internments so the most damaging acts have already been repealed
- This apology should not just be for Chinese, but also other groups affected by similar laws

## Community Members (continued)

- Wouldn't it be nice if the government could singularly address all these groups to save energy and tax dollars
- The 1948 Mine regulation act is relevant and should not be repealed; a person must have the required knowledge of English for a blasting certificate; some acts are just common sense
- In closing, I'd like to echo the recommendation made by the Vancouver Chinese Benevolent Association on Sunday January 12th 2014:
  - a. The BC government must disclose all discriminatory legislation from 1858-1972 such as: not allowing Chinese to vote, to buy land, hold office, business contracts.
  - b. The BC government at the Legislative level should issue an apology to address the hurt and suffering of the Chinese who were subject to these discriminatory acts.
  - c. The BC government should acknowledge the contribution of the Chinese migrant workers past and present.
  - d. The BC government needs to educate the public, advising these acts were prejudicial in the BC society of that time.
- I don't think prejudice comes from government but maybe from individuals; that are why public education is essential.
- The suffering of Asiatic should be in history textbooks so that mistakes like these don't ever happened again

### Shui Lee

#### Chair of Kelowna Freemasons

- Today is a happy day for the Lee family as they have been we've been waiting a long time for a chance to speak and he's proud to represent his family
- Every Head Tax payer has a story behind them
- His family has been here for 5 generations beginning with his great-great-grandfather who came to Canada in 1914 to for a better life for his family. He helped build the CP railway and paid the Head Tax. However, because no Chinese were allowed into the country during 1923 to 1947, his great-great-grandfather was separated from his wife and kids.
- Some time before his great-great-grandfather passing, the Head Tax paper was given to Shui Lee's mother. His mother said it was a very emotional experience to witness his tears and feelings of shame and lack of dignity. But today, he could finally rest in peace.
- There were many Chinese in Kelowna who paid the Head Tax and were not as lucky. They are no longer here and they didn't have a chance to see their family before they died
- No words can describe the suffering of those people.
- Many Chinese lost their lives on the job trying to build the railway while others had to endure poor working conditions. Some lost fingers due to frostbite working in extreme temperatures.
- Shui Lee's story takes place in 1969 during his first day at school. People aimed rocks at his head and spit on him. They told him to go home or go back where he came from.
- He hopes that by teaching the new generation we could stop racism, learn how to respect, appreciate and help each other

## Community Members (continued)

- Let's remember the old generation because without them, we would not have new generations here today.
- He is proud to be a Canadian and Chinese.
- He thanked Minister Wat for listening to his story and making an Apology on behalf of the government.

### Tun Sing Wong

- He belongs to one the oldest Chinese families in Kelowna and all his 11 siblings still live here
- Now 72, Tun was born and raised in Kelowna Chinatown and lived there for 27 years
- When he tried to register his birth certificate he was told to change it to an English name to make it simple at which point he just looked at them and said, "my parents gave me this name".
- His mother was 7 years old when she entered Canada in 1918. A Chinese merchant in Vancouver offered to pay her Head Tax in exchange to have her work as a servant for his children. When she was about 19 years old, she was sent to Kelowna to marry a wealthy Chinese merchant who was 24 years older than she was. They had two daughters together but he was murdered in Kelowna and the case remains unsolved. Later, she met Tun's father and they had 9 more children. In total he has 6 sisters and 4 brothers and he is the 5th eldest among them.
- He wanted to do something about his mom's head tax receipt, but when she passed away, they could not locate and later discovered that his Mom destroyed it before she died.
- He's sure that his dad paid a Head Tax as well but he passed away during Tun's last year of high school. At that time he didn't understand or appreciate the significance of this document.
- The history of how his father got here was lost.
- In 1930s and 1940s they were the only Chinese family in Kelowna Chinatown. His mother was the only Chinese female. This is largely due to the federal Head Tax and Exclusion Act, preventing Chinese male immigrant workers from bringing their wives and children
- After the Exclusion Act was repealed in 1947, some wives and children arrived but the number of Chinese in Kelowna decreased. Some passed on and some moved to other parts of BC
- The majority of these men died alone, unable to see their families. If they were fortunate, a few would go back to visit their family once or got married before returning to Canada
- When he first heard about the province's plan to apologize last spring, he assumed it was about the Head Tax but he only recently discovered that there were 89 pieces legislation and 49 motions that were discriminatory against the Chinese. He was ashamed that he was not aware of all these restrictions but a lot of these were not documented for the public to see.
- This is why people need to be educated about our past so that we can change present & future
- His parents and siblings all experienced discrimination
- On his 1st day at school in 1947, they called him a "chink" and his siblings were bullied daily
- Racism is still evident and will probably remain; it's our failure as humans

## Community Members (continued)

- The Kelowna museum has a collection of pictures and letters. Most letters said “miss you, please send money home”
- There needs to be more public acknowledge. He calls for:
  1. Full documentation and education in the curriculum for future generations about discriminatory laws
  2. Commemoration of our ancestors with the dignity they deserve regarding how they loyally served our province and prospered from hard work, determination & entrepreneurial spirit
- When family members of the war veterans asked why they volunteered, they answered: “I know I am Chinese but I was born in Canada and it’s the country I belong to now”
- During WWII, many Chinese men voluntarily joined forces with Canadian soldiers on top Okanagan Mountain but there is no official recognition of this sacrifice at this historical site
- His comments about the forum are as follows:
  1. He hopes that this is not a one-time media event; once an apology is written, it must be kept alive as a reminder not repeat it and this commitment must be completely documented
  2. Apology should address all the laws that discriminated against Chinese
  3. Acknowledge the government’s monetary gains from these laws which resulted in human suffering of BC Chinese residents and their families
  4. Acknowledge the sacrifice of our forefathers and offer their descents a better future
  5. Acknowledge that the Chinese contributed greatly to build BC into what it is today
  6. Include in a curriculum in our history class
  7. A historical site to recognize our sacrifice: post a sign on HW 97 (old Okanagan highway)
- There is optimism that BC government will apologize and make right for historical wrongs
- This makes him proud of being Chinese Canadian

### **Ben Lee**

#### **Retired Councillor for city of Kelowna**

- Nicknamed mayor of Rutland & founder of Chinese Folk Festival has a park named in his honor
- He shares many feelings expressed by Tun Wong towards this community
- Kelowna was comparable to Vancouver and early days of Victoria’s 1st Chinatown, before people started moving to Vancouver
- Experienced racism growing up with his 11 siblings; he was 5th among 7 boys and 4 girls
- Was raised in the valley and face of BC was quite different from what it is now
- They settled here for employment; many families specialized in gardening cultivating land
- Chinese grew garden celeries, Chinese vegetables and lettuce
- In the early days, Chinese worked hard. If not, they will have no money to send home

## Community Members (continued)

- They didn't keep money in banks because they sent most of the money back to families in China
- His dad came in 1910 while his mom joined in 1920 and had to pay a \$500 Head Tax and other cost for transportation. This was equivalent to 2 years' worth of labour back then
- Some communities still have books that contain restrictions on hiring Chinese. Books with these by-laws or regulations should either be destroyed or put in museums

### Jia Jun Yang (Timothy)

- He is a scholar at UBC Kelowna campus
- He has not experienced discrimination
- Thanked provincial government for hosting this forum
- He learned a lot from others tonight

### Lindsay

#### PHD student from UBC Okanagan campus

- She was born in Vancouver but her great-great-grandparents first came to Victoria
- She is half Chinese, half German
- The issue of the Head Tax is different in her family
- Her Chinese side of the family does not like to talk about the past but she has heard the stories about how it affected them
- She is in favour of an apology to raise awareness of that legacy
- Her mother was 9 years old when she was no longer allowed to speak Chinese. She felt the pain of conforming to a larger community. When she married a foreigner, her family disowned her
- In Richmond, she received lots of discrimination. Her mother also suffered a lot discrimination
- The legacy is for both Chinese and Canadians

### Arthur Law

#### Retired teacher

- Has been teaching and living in Canada for 40 years
- Was director of Kelowna Cultural Association and OCCA consultant
- As a cultural director, he visited and spoke to many families
- 20 years ago at a museum where he shared an exhibit with colleagues Hong and Robin Leung, the curator showed them two boxes full of Chinese letters that were donated to the museum. They were not just family letters. Some were wills and testimonies that never got mailed out. The three of them divided up the letters and discussed how they could send it back to their families as some had recipient addresses. 90% of the letters were from Head Tax survivors who were separated from their families due to the Exclusion Act and wrote that they didn't forget or abandon their families. They mentioned that they came to Gold Mountain to build the CPR and by Chinese tradition, they tried to do their best but because they couldn't change the law they failed their loved ones. Many wrote, "I beg your pardon and forgiveness". The letters brought tears to their eyes as they reflected upon them. For some letters they inserted explanations and mailed them back to their families.

## Community Members (continued)

- When he visited some of these families in China, some had a family trees but some were blank
- Wording: the apology should include amnesty to these men who were unable to bring their families to Canada. If you have this amnesty mentioned, some families would understand and forgive their ancestors. Otherwise, there may be conflict & bitterness among their descendent.
- Delivery: not just for the old but also for young generation to learn. It should be made into a plaque with Chinese and English and put in a cultural institution like the Vancouver public library, Kelowna museum, community halls and many other government agencies. Yong people don't know the past, but like tourist they may visit attractions so if it's a glass plaque, they will see it. Alternatively, have it published in Chinese newspapers.
- The suffering is done and gone. The plaque will make the memory of our past permanent.

## Silver Leung Closing Remarks

- All the comments and recommendations will be posted online
- Additional comments could be mailed or emailed to the Minister
- Thanked supporters and every for coming