

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

**Wednesday, January 22, 2014**

**7:00 – 9:00pm**

**Civic Centre, 808 Civic Plaza, Prince George, BC**



Host: Vicki Larsen, President, Chinese Benevolent Association in Prince George

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

Attendance: 24 people

## Agenda

1. Vicki Larsen – Welcome and Opening Remarks
2. Minister Teresa Wat – Opening Remarks
3. Mark Seeley – Consultation Questions and Process
4. Comments from community members
5. Vicki Larsen – Closing Remarks

### Vicki Larsen Opening Remarks

- Welcomed everyone
- Explained the purpose of this event
- Welcomed and introduced Minister Wat

### Minister Teresa Wat Opening Remarks

- Feels honored and privileged to be there
- Thanked Vicki and the Prince George Chinese Benevolent Association which has been essential to the community in terms of assisting with local language, adjusting life to Canada.
- This is the 6th of 7 forum held across the province to determine the appropriate wording, delivery and legacy effort for a formal apology for the historical wrongs from past governments.
- Happy to see so many come out tonight
- The Chinese Monuments and the Chee Gong Tong building in Barkerville reminds her of the influence of Chinese
- Mentioned an exhibition funded by the government called “Who Am I”, bridging the history of the Pacific: from Guangdong to Barkerville and back, to give a glimpse into the lives of Chinese immigrants who came to Canada in the 19th and early 20th century. The exhibition will be held in Vancouver, Hong Kong and Mainland China; to ensure that the stories are not forgotten
- Today BC is the most ethnically diverse province in Canada. BC was built by immigrants and the Chinese community is part of this legacy
- Participation in this forum is important as the input received will guide the wording and delivery of a formal apology.
- The website [embracebc.ca](http://embracebc.ca), lists the chronology of historical wrongs between 1872-1948.
- Information in the binder is also a constant reminder that there needs to be an apology.
- The apology needs to be sincere and relevant.
- The Minister is working with the opposition and other MLAs to make sure the apology includes all parties in the Legislature and be completely non-partisan with the full support of the House.
- We want all British Columbians to be part of the process.
- We can't undo the past but we can move forward and leave a legacy for future generation.
- Acknowledgement of other MLAs present at forum: Richard Lee- Burnaby North; Doug Bing-Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows; Bruce Ralston--Surrey-Whalley

## Mark Seeley Questions & Process

- Introduced himself and explained the process
- This event is dedicated to listening to the history of the people here as well as their families, what an apology should be, who will do the apology and what initiative or legacy should have.
- All input will be recorded and those who choose not to speak could write comments in the form in the pack or email submission
- Videography of the event will be post on embracebc.ca
- Note-takers; Jennifer is the translator and summary will be posted on the website

## Community Members

### Sherman Nipp

#### Chinese Freemason (speaking in Cantonese)

- In regard to Chinese history, if you have been living in Canada for a long time, chances are you would have heard a little bit about the history of the Chinese.
- Mr. Nipp says this history should not be repeated because those were not their glory days and some of them are shameful.
- If the government wants to do a sincere apology, set up a monument with apology in English and Chinese. Put it in a meaningful area for people to see.
- Chinese also have stories of triumph such as helping to build BC and railway.
- They didn't have voting rights and they had to fight for it.
- A historic monument would be good for future generations to see. It will not cost much to the government and can be a part of the legacy.
- To learn more about the Chinese legacy, Mr. Nipp also recommended a book called History of Chinese-Canadian written by Dong Hoy Lee who was the headmaster of Victoria Public School and he graduated from the History department from university.
- Suggested locations for monument:
  1. Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden
  2. In front of the Legislature
  3. Barkerville
  4. In front of Civic Center in Prince George

### Simon Yu

#### Chinese Benevolent Association

- Simon came to Canada in 1975 to help his aunt with her restaurant.
- Her family emigrated from Hong Kong due to the turmoil there in the 60s. His aunt's husband's brother paid the Head Tax.
- They came to Vancouver and had a successful business.
- His uncle who was a photographer in Hong Kong came here in search of work but was told that he would scare away the customers because of his color.
- Now, his uncle is a world-renowned photographer in Vancouver.
- The Chinese turned the discrimination against them into motivation.
- Having spent many years in northern BC, he believes things are progressively getting better.

## Community Members (continued)

- Simon asked how the Provincial government apology would be different from the Federal government apology
- He wanted confirmation that all discriminatory legislations have all been overturned
- Simon also asked for clarification on whether the BC government was trying clump everything together into one apology for legal reasons
- Asked what the Ministry hopes to achieve once the apology has been finalized. Says it should have a lasting positive effect, not just for the Chinese but also as a historical record.
- Something should be gained from it with meaningful value. What do we want future generations to learn or feel from this
- Clearly, this discrimination should not happen again to any group of people.
- Mr. Yu acknowledges that history helps us to prevent mistakes from repeating itself but questions the purpose of reopening a deep wound that has happened so long ago which few if any are alive today to share their personal experience
- He believes that this dark chapter of the Chinese legacy is already well known and documented especially in the community of Prince George and Barkerville.
- Says there were other discriminatory legislation against Japanese, Indo-Canadians. He wanted to know if this apology focuses only on the 160 pieces of legislature against the Chinese or if there will be forums for the other groups as well
- History didn't just happen here. People came from all over the world to make a living here. In short, the apology should be used as a way to unite all people and it isn't a matter of the wording but rather about what we are trying leave behind.

### Minister Wat:

- The Minister explained that in 2006, Prime Minister Harper of the Federal Government made a formal apology in the Parliament to the Chinese community for the Head Tax as that particular legislation was passed by the Federal Government. To acknowledge this wrong they also provided some financial compensation for the survivors of Head Tax.
- However, the provincial government is responsible for about 160 pieces of discriminatory legislation that were passed by between the 1800s and 1900s.
- Some examples of these legislations include not allowing Chinese Canadians the right to vote or not being able to practice certain professions such as doctor, accounting, architect, not allowed to own property as well as fees and licensing imposed on the people based on admission.
- This apology is for what provincial government did in terms of historical wrongs. Head Tax is just one of these many pieces of legislation in those days.
- The Minister confirmed that these pieces of legislations have not been in effect for a long time
- She also clarified that this has nothing to do with the legality.

## Community Members (continued)

- Any government must admit to their wrongdoing in the past and look for ways to make it up to the victims and their families. Part of the process of making the apology is to raise public awareness of the past so that we can move forward and never repeat the mistakes again. It's an education process and one of aims of these consultations is to educate British Columbians, including the Chinese Canadian community about this part of the history.
- The Minister reiterated that the purpose of these consultations is to listen to their untold stories or their ancestors' stories passed down from generation to generation. It's important to hear these stories.
- Minister Wat acknowledges that she has been here close to 25 years but none of her ancestors suffered the legislation in those days. This is why it's important for her to listen to community members here tonight because it's a shared history for all British Columbians.
- From what has been heard in the past 5 consultations, the majority wants to have education legacy, not just this generation but also their future generations
- In regards to other historical wrongs, in 2008 the BC Legislature presented a formal apology for the Komagata Maru ship incident for overturning the East Indians back to India. A non-partisan formal apology was issued to the East Indians. That same year, the Federal government also apologized to the Aboriginal community for the residential schools. Financial compensations were awarded to the survivors of those schools many of whom were subject to physical, sexual and emotional abuse.
- For the interment of Japanese Canadians during WWII, the Federal government issued an apology in 1988 along with financial compensation. In 2012 the BC Legislature also did a formal apology to the Japanese Canadian community but we haven't yet done that for the Chinese community and that is why we are here now.
- The Minister invited two MLAs who are Head Tax descendants to speak about their experience

### **Richard Lee** **MLA, (speaking in Cantonese)**

- Mr. Lee's grandfather was born in Zhong Shan. In 1913 he heard about Gold Mountain so he borrowed \$500 from friends and paid the Head Tax to come over here. He was a farmer and he came to Victoria where he worked. At some point, he went back to China and got married. However, due to the Exclusion Act between 1923 to 1947, his wife couldn't come.
- After World War II, the immigration Act was modified allowing children under a certain age to come. In 1950, his grandfather went back to China but his father couldn't go with him to Canada because his father has married.
- They didn't have voting rights and couldn't unite with grandfather until after the Federal government allowed all family members to come. So in 1971, they finally came to Canada.
- These acts created separation for many families and had a great impact
- Although the Federal government passed the Head Tax, it was initiated by the BC government because there were a lot of Chinese in the province back then.



## Community Members (continued)

- The Head Tax was paid and took many years to repay. Back then, you can buy two pieces of lands or house in Vancouver Chinatown with that amount of money.
- No other ethnic groups had paid the Head Tax; only Chinese paid the Head Tax. So the meaning of it is significant and we should remember this history forever.
- But the legislation that caused the most suffering for the Chinese was the Exclusion Act starting in 1923. For over twenty years, it prevented many families from reuniting.
- It's a good idea to have a monument for future generations or a history record
- History is in the past but it's very important we learn from it.

### Doug Bing MLA

- His two grandfathers, uncle and dad who was only ten at the time came to Canada in 1910 and were all required to pay the Head Tax.
- He doesn't remember much of what happened but he has been told many stories such as the ill treatment and persecution of the Chinese at that time.
- Doug is the youngest of 11 children in his family. His father had 7 children with his first wife but when she went back to China to visit relatives she was captured while the Japanese were invading and sadly she died from cholera. Some years later his father remarried and had more children with Doug's biological mother.
- Legacy: the attitude of people toward the Chinese which has lasting implications
- Doug has two half-brothers who fought in WWII. Born in Canada, his brother Fred was just a regular kid who loved the Air Cadet. During the war, the military came looking for young men to join. At that time, they welcomed anyone who wanted to give their life for the country so it didn't matter whether volunteers were Chinese or White
- Because Fred was only 18, he was too young to sign the draft so he asked his father to sign the paper. His father was furious and asked him why he wanted to risk his life for a country that treated them so badly. Fred said he wanted to prove he loved this country and that he should be treated as first class citizen.
- The courage and bravery of the Chinese Canadians who fought the WWII was not sacrificed in vain. In 1947, the Canadian government removed discriminatory legislations so that the Chinese had the same rights as other Canadians. It was a significant breakthrough in history so we must
- remember this achievement.
- Born in 1951, Doug still remembers his aunt being forced out of her New Westminister apartment because she was Chinese and the owner didn't want her to be in the apartment lot. This kind of story really sticks with you because they are hurtful.
- Even after legislations have been removed, memories of discrimination remain.

## Community Members (continued)

### Jiangbing Li

- He's a new immigrant and not familiar with the history. He didn't know there were so many discriminatory legislations
- In terms of wording, he thinks it should include the background so that everyone in other communities who didn't know about it can learn about it.
- The apology should be sincere & have provisions to prevent future wrongdoings.
- In terms of who should do the apology, he thinks the Premier is the best person to do it on behalf of the province since the Prime Minister did it for the Federal government.
- A monument is good for future generations.

### Carla Johnston

- Carla is really touched by this and said this not just for the Chinese community. This is for everybody and it is a great opportunity for community to engage
- Legacy: she agrees with monument suggestion mentioned
- She wants to see a piece of public art displayed in Prince George
- There is a need to embrace the fabulous cultures here
- She is from Vancouver, lived there for 20 years and misses the Chinese New Year celebrations
- She is working on three public art projects and looking for creative ideas
- The downtown, Chinatown has deep roots in the railway
- Wants to participate in legacy, might do written submission to [embracebc.ca](http://embracebc.ca)

### Ken Dang

- Ken is a 3rd generation Chinese Canadian
- Legacy: Make all documents accessible such as Head Tax certificates. Have them scanned and put everything into digital archives
- Significance: Ken has been in Prince George 53/54 years. His dad came in 1959 and was never able to meet his grandfather.
- This is will give families who've been separated a chance to learn about their ancestor's history

### Allen

- Wants to confirm that the statement will be non-partisan;
- Both his daughters were adopted from China. He hopes they will never experience this kind of suffering. Need promise by the province/ house that this will never happen again to any group
- Legacy: agrees with Simon and Carla regarding a piece of art. He has his daughters in mind in terms of how materials can be used in education to enhance curriculum such as projects, cultural activities, historical resources showing contribution of Chinese in BC and make research accessible to BC

## Vicki Larsen

### Closing Remarks

- Vicki wanted to share her story. She came here in 1982 with her mother's side of family.
- Her mom's grandfather made some money here many years ago and then went back to China. Her grandpa was later sent here to study at UBC. After her grandpa graduated in architecture, he founded the first Chinese newspaper in Vancouver.
- Her mother is the youngest of four. She has two sisters and a brother but some of her siblings are 40 years apart. At first she didn't understand why but now she knows it was due to discrimination act that her grandpa couldn't go back to China for many years. He usually went back once every 10 years.
- Since coming to Canada she thought of Canada as a great country. She loves Prince George and this is her second home.
- She thanked everyone for coming tonight