

# DO CANADIANS KNOW THEIR OWN HISTORY?

factsheet by Trent M.

Analysis of themes presented by Dr. Henry Yu in:  
"Refracting Pacific Canada: Seeing Our Uncommon Past" (2007)

## THE WRITING OF CANADIAN HISTORY

- Mainstream history is often only seen from one perspective, and important events are lost
- It is important to look at sources from multiple authors, and from different languages
- In regards to the Vancouver Race Riots of 1907, "Chinese-language newspapers discussed what was happening in the streets and in Vancouver in the months before the riots. Not surprisingly, they offered a very different view than did English-language newspapers."
- Historical research in different languages can unlock new perspectives and a more complete history of Canada

## TERMINOLOGY TO CONSIDER

- **Refraction:** Dr. Yu uses refraction in this context to describe a new and more in-depth way of looking at history. In this case, the history of Asian Canadians.
- **Uncommon Past:** Yu's definition: "I would also use the phrase 'uncommon past' to describe those elements of the past that are less common, in the sense of rarely remembered, ignored, or erased, but also uncommon in terms of being unique, different, or not assimilated into a common narrative."
- **Racialization of History:** Racialization is the historical and social processes of projecting meanings onto bodies, places and ideas.

## CANADA'S LOSS

- With the racialization of history, we simply lose out on the full picture of what occurred
- "Elements of [Asian Canadian] history left out or excluded, sometimes lost amidst the blinding light of narratives focused upon the British and the French, but sometimes also just ignored for not being considered interesting unless they involve interactions with European settlement."
- Canadian history tends to be read as a series of interactions between white settlers and other groups, while Indigenous and Asian peoples are disregarded unless events are significant for European settlers

## WHY IS PERSPECTIVE IMPORTANT?

- Students learn about Canadian and US history as it follows white settlers
- Indigenous, Asian, and other groups are only introduced as they interact with European settlers, and not as individuals who contributed greatly to the development of Canada
- "Trans-Pacific migrants were more than just victims of racism. As much as white supremacy might have constrained their activities, they lived rich lives that cannot be understood if all we know about them is what was done to them."
- It is important that we understand multiple perspectives to gain a more complete view of all peoples that contributed to the history of Canada

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

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- The legacies of White Supremacy and anti-Asian politics leave massive gaps in Canadian history
- In the current state of history, we are missing out on the rich background of thousands of interesting people that deserve our attention
- This is not only an issue of racism, but an issue of historical accuracy
- With a little refraction we can better reflect the past, and bestow historical figures the respect they deserve.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Yu, Henry. "Refracting Pacific Canada: Seeing Our Uncommon Past," *BC Studies* 156/157 (2007): 5-10.