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<td>池田, 年穂 (Ikeda, Toshiho)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>共立薬科大学</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publication year</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<td>Jtitle</td>
<td>共立薬科大学研究年報 (The annual report of the Kyoritsu College of Pharmacy). No.46 (2001.), p.31-42</td>
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<td>Abstract</td>
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A Diasporic Novel and Guangdongese Women
— Five Female Characters in The Excluded Wife by Yuen-Fong Woon —

Toshiho IKEDA

Though the plight of Chinese men who immigrated to Canada in the early 20th century has received public attention, that of their wives left behind in China, who were prevented from joining their husbands by Canada's Chinese Immigration (Exclusion) Act of 1923, has not. That's why University of Victoria sociologist Dr. Yuen-Fong Woon wrote The Excluded Wife, a novel published in 1988 (as to the title, see Note 2). During the course of conducting research on Overseas Chinese, Dr. Woon heard many moving stories that could not be incorporated into the framework of scholarly sociological journals, so she set out to write a novel. The novel follows Sau-Ping, a woman from Guangdong Province, who, in 1933, marries an Overseas Chinese man working in Vancouver. Left behind in China, Sau-Ping cares for her husband's family members through a turbulent period of Chinese history, experiencing famine, Japanese invasion, civil war, revolution, and political persecution. After fleeing to Hong Kong where she lives as a refugee, Sau-Ping finally rejoins her husband in Vancouver in 1955, eight years after the repeal of the Exclusion Act in 1947. In Canada, she struggles to rebuild her life with a spouse whom she hardly knows in a culture radically alien to her experience. Dr. Yuen-Fong Woon has conducted research on Overseas Chinese in Canada and their relations with their home communities in South China and has also visited villages in Guangdong Province on numerous occasions, conducting household surveys and working closely with local historians there. Throughout the novel, Dr. Yuen-Fong Woon draws on her extensive and detailed knowledge of customs, ritual, folk songs, and social and family relations, enriching the reader's experience of the socio-cultural milieu without distracting his or her mind from the story and the feelings of its protagonists. The reader of this novel can hear the voices of Chinese women that have been shrouded in mystery and myth due to their illiteracy and silenced by discrimination and multiple cultural barriers. In this essay five female characters are introduced and commented on. Toshiho Ikeda was awarded “Canadian Prime Minister's Awards for Publishing: PMA:2001/2002” for the translation of this book, and the Japanese version will be published by Hukyosha Publishing Inc. next year. The text used for this essay is Woon, Yuen-fong, The Excluded Wife, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998. All the quotations except Note 4 and Note 5 are from the book.

Like so many novels by Chinese female writers in North America, including Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, The Excluded Wife deals with matrilineal relationship and generational gap, immigration and identity, Chinese convention and the breaking up of it, transition of woman's position in her clan or lineage through migration, and a tight network of women. As Dr. Yuen-Fong Woon is not a professional novelist but a well-known scholar and has woven the fruit of her research into a novel, internal conflict or emotional nuance of the characters are sometimes ignored or sacrificed in order to make the cultural and historical background understandable to the reader. We can find many interesting female characters (including two daughters and a daughter-in-law plus a close friend of Sau-Ping) in this novel.

1) Sau-Ping: Heroine of The Excluded Wife and the synopsis of this novel

It is clearly expressed in the synopsis that the heroine of the novel is Sau-Ping. The novel is divided into three parts, each of which has a different geographical background.

Guangdong Province, China (中国，广东省)

The story begins in a small village in Toi-Shaan County [台南縣], Guangdong Province. Sau-Ping was a thirteen-year-old girl, who had started living in a maiden-house. She had a father, a mother, an elder sister, and a younger brother. Her elder sister, Sau-Ha, married a Hong Kong resident through the traditional custom of matchmaking. The same go-between arranged Sau-Ping's engagement with a Gold Mountain Guest [金山客, Overseas Chinese in either the USA]
or Canada], whose native village, Saifo, was not far from that of Sau-Ping. She was fifteen years old when she married. Her husband, Leung Yik-Man left his village at the age of ten and had worked with his father and his paternal uncle in the family’s restaurant in Vancouver, British Columbia, for seventeen years. This was his first visit to Saifo village since he emigrated to Vancouver. Marriage with a Gold Mountain Guest meant that Sau-Ping would become a “Grass Widow” just like her mother-in-law, Yuen Tsing-Haan. Saifo was the village of the Leung lineage, but it kept some slaves who served the Leung lineage without payment. Siu-Kong was among these slaves. After a bandits’ attack, Yik-Man was forced to go back to Vancouver, partly for financial reasons, and partly because of the Canadian immigration regulation. This regulation also prohibited Yik-Man from sponsoring his wife’s immigration to Canada. Sau-Ping became an “Excluded Wife.” Before Yik-Man returned to Vancouver, Sau-Ping became pregnant. Yik-Man believed the baby would be a son, and he applied for a birth certificate using a boy’s name, Kin-On, to Canadian government. Sau-Ping gave birth to a girl. The unexpected baby was named Fei-Yin. Sau-Ping’s mother-in-law, Yuen Tsing-Haan, consulted her husband and his son in Vancouver and decided to purchase a two-year-old boy, who was one year junior to Fei-Yin, for Yik-Man and named him Kin-Pong. With remittance sent from Vancouver, Sau-Ping’s family became better off and built a Western-style house. Sudden air raids by the Japanese, however, brought a life of privation to her family. Afraid of starvation and the Japanese attacks, Sau-Ping, her mother-in-law, brother-in-law and two little children were forced to flee to Yeung-Kong County [ erotiske. On returning to Saifo village after so many ordeals, Yuen Tsing-Haan died from debility. In August of 1945, WW II ended. Sau-Pin and her brother-in-law, Leung Yik-Mo, could retrieve their paddy field and the Western-style house. Though Canadian immigration policy changed, Sau-Pin was disappointed to find out that only parents over 60 and children under 18 could be sponsored to immigrate to Canada. She was still an “Excluded Wife.” The Civil War between the Communists and KMT [ = 国民党, Kuomintang] broke out. In October of 1949, the People’s Republic of China was founded. Under the new regime, the tables were turned. Siu-Kong, once a slave, was now a Communist leader of the village. Sau-Ping’s family were labeled as “Overseas Chinese Landlords” and severely persecuted. Yik-Mo was sentenced to five years’ hard labor. Sau-Ping’s family made up their mind to flee to Hong Kong without Yik-Mo’s escort. They were accompanied by Sau-Ping’s close friend Wong Mei-Kuen and her daughter, and some of the good neighbors.

Hong Kong (香港)

Sau-Ping met her sister Sau-Ha and her family in Hong Kong. As Sau-Ha’s family lived in a crowded sublet cubicle, Sau-Pin, Mei-Kuen, and their family members were forced to squat in a shack in Shek Kip Mei [ = 石硖尾] where quite a few refugees had already lived in shanties. They made a living vending vegetables or working for a plastic factory. In due course, Yik-Man wrote to Kin-Pong as the females were illiterate. He wanted his purchased son to come help him in their restaurant in Vancouver. Only one sentence was addressed to Sau-Ping and Fei-Yin in a ‘postscript.” After Kin-Pong left Hong Kong, a series of disasters occurred one after another. This included a typhoon and a big fire. Sau-Ping contracted tuberculosis and took a long time to recover. The expense for the treatment was remitted and paid for by Yik-Man, who had sold Fei-Yin’s birth certificate to his paternal uncle, Leung Kwok-Ko. Kwok-Ko was not married and wanted to adopt and sponsor a son to immigrate to Canada with this certificate. Poor Fei-Yin was to be adopted into Sau-Ha’s family. For Vancouver Sau-Ping left Hong Kong, leaving her daughter, her sister’s family and her close friend behind.

Vancouver, Canada (加拿大, 温哥華)

Sau-Ping started living with her husband, Yik-Man, her son, Kin-Pong, and her uncle-in-law, Kwok-Ko in Chinatown (as to Chinatown, see Note 4 and Note 5) in Vancouver. She lived above their restaurant. She began working in the kitchen washing dishes and cleaning the restaurant as early as her second day in Vancouver. Though she was around forty years old and was working hard, she delivered another girl, Pauline. Yik-Mo was so disappointed and took out his frustration on Sau-Ping and his adopted son, saying he wanted a son of his own blood.’ Sau-Ping became isolated. Luckily she became pregnant again, and this time the baby was a son, Joe. In the 1960s the news from China and Hong Kong was always dismal and terrifying. Sau-Ping and Yik-man wanted to send money or parcels to Yik-Mo in Guangdong. But they hesitated to do so, because they were afraid of being labeled “Communists” by the Canadian government and deported. The hard-working and filial son, Kin-Pong, married a Hong Kong girl, Katherine, who had been raised in a Catholic orphanage but was originally from Toi-Shaan County. As she could speak English, she contributed much to the family restaurant business but refused to serve her mother-in-law. Kin-Pong begot two daughters. Sau-Ping, raising her own little children, looked after her grandchildren as well. The new Immigration Act of 1967 enabled Chinese in Hong Kong and Mainland China, who couldn’t hope to be sponsored, to immigrate by
themselves if admitted. Sau-Ping looked forward to seeing Fei-Yin again. Fei-Yin married without the help of a conventional go-between. Her husband, Yue Ming-Fai, was a machinist. At the age of 63 Yik-Man was suffering from cancer and was waiting for Fei-Yin and her family at his deathbed. They arrived just before Yik-Man's death and his last words were "...happy now..." In Vancouver Sau-Ping made her little children and grandchildren attend Chinese school as well as public school. Chinese, including little children, faced racial discrimination. Pauline and Joe became teenagers and their Canadian manners and clothes often embarrassed Sau-Ping. Pauline who would never obey "The Moral of Three Obediences" [She(Sau-Ping) remembered her mother telling her about the "three obediences." A woman should obey her father when she was young, obey her husband after her marriage, and obey her son when she grew old... (p.181)] was a source of worry for Sau-Ping. The Generational gap seemed to break up the family. Pauline fell in love with a Caucasian boy and started cohabiting with him. The boy, however, shrank back in the face of his parents' opposition. After she graduated from university, she worked as a counselor and married a Caucasian who was studying about China. Joe worked as an engineer in Ontario and married a third-generation Chinese-Canadian, who couldn't understand the Chinese language and culture at all. Sau-Ping realized that even Kin-Pong and Katherine wanted to live in the Canadian way. She made up her mind to share a room with Mei-Kuen in an apartment for the elderly. One night she dreamt of Yik-Man and started to think of going back to China. Pauline wanted to accompany her. In 1987, Sau-Ping revisited Guangdong via Hong Kong. Hong Kong was now a very modern city. Sau-Ha lived happily and her sons succeeded in their construction business. Saifo village in Guangdong Province was in an "open economy" system. The houses had greatly changed. Yik-Mo, Sau-Ping's brother-in-law, and Siu-Kong, their former persecutor, took Sau-Ping and Pauline on a tour of the village. The main ancestral hall of the Leung lineage, which was forbidden for females to enter before the Revolution, was now a bamboo factory. Both Sau-Ping and Pauline were astonished to know that most of the villagers wanted to send their daughters or granddaughters to North America whatever means. They still wanted to use women to build bridges with the Overseas Chinese.

2) Sau-Ping's elder daughter Fei-Yin: An Unassertive Woman?
Fei-Yin's being born a girl was a source of humiliation. First, her birth certificate stated that she was a boy, as her father had believed she would be. Second, a girl could not be an heirress, which meant a boy had to be adopted or purchased as an heir.

"Oh! Yil!" Kin-Pong exclaimed in childish excitement. He turned to Sau-Ping, but she avoided his eyes. "Ma wants to come too," Kin-Pong declared, looking at her. Yik-Mo shook his head and said in the teacherly voice he had adopted since the death of his mother, "She can't. She's not real Leung." There was no malice in his tone. It was a statement of fact, just as he might have said, "I cut my hair today."

A deep resentment welled up inside Sau-Ping. How was it that she, who in this family took the primary responsibility for seeing that the ancestral worship of the Leung household was carried out in the most respectful and thorough fashion, was not a real Leung, while this stranger's son of unknown birth, as yet a mere child, already had all the rights of a full-fledged member of the Leung lineage? Carefully hiding her feelings, she said, "A group of Daoist priests will also be there chanting prayers to the dead. We don't have the resources to make paper boats or paper yeung-lau [=洋樓, 洋館のこと ], but the two of you should at least take some food, ritual money, and old clothing to burn there. You can find those yourself." (p.87)

Third, while Fei-Yin was living in Hong Kong and her mother was suffering from tuberculosis, her father in Vancouver sold his daughter's birth certificate in order to make money for a doctor's fee and Sau-Ping's passage. Fei-Yin gave up her hope to cross the ocean.

"But daughters have never been consulted when their parents made plans for them," she said at last, heaving a long sigh. Sau-Ping was certain that her sister was thinking about maidens they had known in Fun-Yeung [=Sau-Ping's native village] who were married off blindly and dropped into the unknown. She and Sau-Ha had been two of those maidens. (p.179)

Fei-Yin was lucky to be adopted into her aunt's family. Fourth, her father wouldn't offer to hire a go-between and make a match for her. When Fei-Yin informed the Vancouver family that she would marry a technician of her own choice, Yik-Man sent a very small sum of money as
a gift. Fei-Yin had always been a filial and compliant daughter. That she hardly uttered in Part I (Guangdong) of this novel may well astonish the reader. She had tried to emulate her mother and didn't assert herself. She believed in “The Moral of Three Obediences” as her mother did. Fei-Yin remained illiterate while her brother Kin-Pong went on to high school. She worked hard in the field but didn't complain. To a certain extent, the miserable life as a refugee in Hong Kong lifted the ban imposed on females from Fei-Yin. Modernization of Hong Kong later allowed her to be economically independent and get married without the help of a go-between. She didn't resent her father for his heartlessness. She was among the masses that were elevated to the lower middle class through urbanization and industrialization in many countries in the 1960s. She arrived at her father's deathbed accompanied by her husband and child. Her father had abandoned her, but she couldn't abandon him.

3) Sau-Ping's daughter-in-law Katherine: An Acculturative Woman?
When Yik-Man and Sau-Ping wanted to find Kin-Pong a wife, they decided to choose a compromise. As there were few girls in Chinatown in Vancouver (as to the sex-ratio in Chinatown, see Note 4 and Note 5), they asked Sau-Ha to approach go-betweens in Hong Kong. Sau-Ha's husband sent a letter with forty photographs of young women to Sau-Ping, who in turn selected ten photos of girls of Toi-Shaanese origin for Kin-Pong. Kin-Pong selected Katherine's photo. Yik-Man and Sau-Ping also allowed Kin-Pong to visit Hong Kong for a month and get to know her well. Sau-Ping also heard about Fei-Yin's boyfriend from Kin-Pong and was embarrassed.

"...Kin-Pong," said Sau-Ping, "I am concerned with Fei-Yin's future happiness. Did Auntie Sau-Ha contact a go-between for her?"

"Ma, you are so old-fashioned! Many young people in Hong Kong now choose their own marriage partners. Big Sister Fei-Yin is seeing a machinist she met in her garment factory when he came to service the machines. His name is Yue Ming-Fai, and he lives and works out of what they call the 'engineering complex' in Shanghai Street [=上海街] in Yau-matei [=油麻地]. A very honest, easygoing man. I like him. When I went out with Katherine, he and Big Sister sometimes came along. We had double outings."

Sau-Ping could not imagine a "double outing" with four unmarried people, two men, two women. The walls erected by families to protect a modest young woman were crumbling even in China, not to mention Hong Kong! Yet she asked no questions about these outings (did the girls speak? did hands touch? did they watch one another eat?) because it was much more important to learn about the young man: Yue Ming-Fai. (p.219)

Sau-Ping was again embarrassed when the wedding was held at a Christian church.

Katherine was an orphan and had been raised in the orphan asylum run by Catholic missionaries. She earned her own living but couldn't afford to bring a dowry, which was naturally expected by the groom's family. She had some merit, though. As she was taught English by Catholic sisters, she could speak and write English and became a great help to the restaurant business. She gave birth to two children. As Katherine was busy with the restaurant, Sau-Ping was expected to look after her grandchildren along with her own little children. Sau-Ping couldn't help convincing herself and accepting the fact that she couldn't expect to be respected and served by her daughter-in-law as her mother-in-law used to be.

...Late one night Sau-Ping remarked to Kin-Pong, "Josie [=daughter of Kin-Pong and Katherine] is growing very quickly."

"Is that so?" he replied politely.

"Yes," said Sau-Ping, "she's quite heavy now."

"She doesn't look so heavy," said Kin-Pong. "She's still a little small for her age, I think."

"Ah, She's pretty heavy," said Sau-Ping. "I should know because I carry her to and from the English school and the Chinese school every day when I take Pauline and Joe."

Kin-Pong raised an eyebrow. "Is it a lot of trouble, Ma?"

"No," said Sau-Ping. "It's not trouble. Not really. Unless she throws a tantrum, but she only does that once or twice a day. Sometimes three times. But I'm used to it."

Kin-Pong fully understood the message behind his mother's words, but offered no solution. Instead, he defended his wife.

"Ma, I know if we were in China, your daughter-in-law would take care of you in addition to her own children. But this is Gold Mountain. Katherine is being filial in her own way. Her works in the restaurant benefits the whole family, including you. Since she has been there, we've done much better. I'm sorry if Josie is a lot of trouble, but we must think in terms of efficiency." (p.228-229)

When Sau-Ping learned later that Kin-Pong and Katherine wanted to move to a new house in a suburb in North Vancouver (outside Chinatown) and live in the Canadian way, she made up her mind to share a room with Mei-Kuen in a senior citizens' apartment.
4) Sau-Ping's second daughter Pauline: A Totally Caucasian-minded Woman?

Pauline was born and raised in Vancouver. She had an Oriental appearance. To Sau-Ping, however, she seemed to be a Caucasian-oriented teenager. Which she really was. It was rather strange that Pauline herself didn't seem to suffer from internal conflict or malaise deriving from her situation. She was not proud of being a Chinese and was eager to act and look like a Caucasian.

Pauline, her daughter, was the most difficult to handle, for this hybrid girl had no patience with Chinese customs that commanded women to obey and serve their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. She succumbed to her sister-in-law, Katherine, for being subservient to Kin-Pong and once even accused Sau-Ping of abandoning Big Sister Fei-Yin—her own first-born daughter—in Hong Kong without a fight! Pauline thought it horrible that a woman like Katherine would allow herself to be married to a man who had chosen her from a batch of photographs, and she declared herself to be uninterested in Chinese boys because they were too "short and wimpy." She wanted someone who looked like a hockey player!

Sometimes Joe related Pauline's complaints to Sau-Ping, and in this way the mother learned that Pauline wished she could live a life that was free of curfews, glittering with brand-name clothes, punctuated by swift automobile rides, and unburdened by housework, the sort of life she insisted all her Caucasian classmates enjoyed. She hated wearing old-fashioned homemade outfits and being forced to help out in the restaurant for free whenever a waitress happened to be ill. "She says she hates the way the restaurant smells, it gives her a headache," Joe reported. (p.254)

The relationship between Sau-Ping (a newcomer) and Pauline (a second-generation Chinese-Canadian) represented both a generational gap and a cultural gap. Pauline was also a product of the roaring 60s. The atmosphere of the 1960s encouraged her to flee from the traditional Guangdongese ways of her mother, but her 'racial' identity wasn't awakened as we might suppose it would be. She eloped with a Caucasian boy but came back home disheartened. It was after she began to work as a counselor for newcomers from Hong Kong and China and had a Caucasian steady boyfriend who majored in China studies that she admitted her 'ethnic' identity.

When Sau-Ping made up her mind to revisit China via Hong Kong, Mei-Kuen refused to accompany her. Pauline, who had never seen China, wanted to go with her mother. She played the role of a 'critic' in provincial Guangdong. She tried to respect her elders but couldn't restrain herself from asking merciless questions. China under ever-changing social conditions and regimes wouldn't allow people to live honestly and peacefully. Injustices occurred all the time! What was unjust depended on the situation and the times. For example, Siu-Kong, an attractive antagonist who persecuted Yik-Mo just after the Communists started ruling the village, now offered to show the village to Sau-Ping and Pauline. At the end of this novel, Pauline had a talk with Sau-Ping.

Pauline sighed. "Mother, I'm puzzled. I am trying to be fair. I'm trying not to judge people whose lives have been so hard. But tell me this: why do people in Sai-Fok or Fung-Yeung still want to leave? From what I gathered, the government's policies have given the Toi-Shaan economy a big boost. People can worship their ancestors. They can choose their own occupations; even farming seems easier. Toi-Shaan City and Shan-Taai Market looked prosperous to me. The peasants in Sai-Fok and Fung-Yeung are getting rich — look at some of those houses! Judging from what you've told me about your past, their standard of living is probably much higher than it's ever been."

Sau-Ping listened silently to her daughter's argument. Pauline resumed, "There's political stability, it seems to me — no more bandit attacks or lineage feuds or warlords and soldiers roaming around, or cruel Japanese invaders, or Red Guards. The schools and other public buildings look wonderful thanks to all these donations from the Overseas Chinese. And every Overseas Chinese wants to visit home — just like you! So why do the Toi-Shaanese want to give it all up and leave their native communities to wash greasy dishes in Canada or the United States? The girls would have no outside contact because they can't speak English, and if they're married to strangers who are only looking for submissive women to serve them, they'll probably be abused. Cold climate. Second-class citizenship, even now. Language difficulties. Do they really think that North America is covered with gold?! Can't someone tell them it's not?"

Pauline's voice had risen in pitch as she argued against an invisible opponent. Sau-Ping said simply, "There is more money in Canada."

"And what about Ah Ying [=Yik-Mo's granddaughter] or other young women in Toi-Shaan? They must be better educated than you were, and according to Jeff [=Pauline's husband who studied about China], Chairman Mao at least preached in favor of women's equality and freedom of choice in marriage. Isn't that right? So don't they feel at all resentful"
that a member of the senior generation is openly arranging a blind marriage for them at the
tender age of fifteen? How do they feel when they are being used as a means to obtain re-
mittances or high-quality foreign goods for their parents and their brothers? How do they
feel when they are used as a bridge to get the male members of their household to Gold
Mountain?"

Pauline’s face was drenched with tears, as if she’d been standing in the spray of the great
ship. “Can you imagine putting yourself in Ah Ying’s shoes, Mom?”

“Yes,” said Sau-Ping. (p.283)

As a product of the ‘permissive’ 60s, Pauline was unable to imagine putting herself in Ah
Ying’s shoes.

5) Sau-Ping’s close friend Mei-Kuen: A Chinese Amazon?

Mei-Kuen was an acquaintance of Sau-Ping’s in the maiden house. In her teens she was a tom-
boy. She had the amazing ability to survive. She was abducted by and married to a bandit
chief. After her husband died, she and her daughter were forced to wander like beggars. Sau-
Ping offered to let them live with her. Mei-Kuen was always a faithful friend of Sau-Ping.
Though she went through a lot of ordeals, this optimistic woman was never discouraged. Of
course, a character like Mei-Kuen is rather popular in novels of various countries. But that an
acquaintance of the “maiden house” could be a lifelong friend in China is interesting in that the
“maiden house” functioned also as something similar to a “sorority.” When Kin-Pong hesitated to
cross the ocean for Vancouver leaving only females in their shack in Shek Kip Mei, Mei-Kuen
protested with asperity.

.....Like a prowling tiger, Mei-Kuen slipped back inside the hut. Her face was intent, her eyes
burning. In a dangerous voice she spoke to Kin-Pong, “I know you are a good son and
brother. Look at me. Don’t worry about us. We women are tough! We have been through
many typhoons, floods, and landslides in Toi-Shaan. Long before you were born, your mother
and I carried water, weeded, transplanted, harvested, and did the heavy farm chores. You are
a schoolboy and your father...I remember how he kicked the sedan chair. [N.B. When a bride
was carried into her groom’s house on a sedan chair, it was customary for a groom to kick
the sedan chair violently to show his strength.] He is a kite in the wind. He is a man with-
out muscle.”

“Friend,” called Sau-Ping, rising to stop the storm that had suddenly entered their flimsy
house. “For years my husband—”

“I lived in mountain caves for ten long years with bandits! I will take care of your mother
and sister!”(pp.164-165)

Mei-Kuen, when she finally immigrated to Canada in 1980, could easily cross the geographical
and cultural border, though she couldn’t speak English. She might be what is called a woman
for all seasons and for all places.

...It did take time. But then the day arrived—12 September 1980—and when Sau-Ping
walked into her garden that morning, she laughed to see the sun alight in the eastern sky,
as always, as if this were a normal, unexceptional day. Hours later she stood in the airport.
None of her surroundings appeared real to her; she did not quite believe that the long, sleek
hallways and travel posters could ever produce her earthy, unpredictable friend Mei-Kuen.
Yet the moment Mei-Kuen walked out of the Canada Customs room carrying two suitcases
with the easy determination of a Hong Kong street vendor, Sau-Ping felt her spirit snap to
attention. This was real! Mei-Kuen immediately spotted her daughter and friend and ex-
claimed, “I have always wanted to see Gold Mountain. Now my dream has come true!”

“How do you like it so far?” laughed Sau-Ping, happy to see that her friend’s heart had not
aged in twenty-five years.

“Well, there is no gold, but the mountains here certainly look more magnificent than the
mountains I’ve lived in! Has anybody ever been to the top?”

Lai-Sheung [=Mei-Kuen’s daughter] touched her mother’s hair. “Grey hair! Old woman! We’ll
make you climb to the top.”

“Hmm, I’m stronger than you are, I would bet. Who is this silent man? How do I say his
name?” Mei-Kuen laughed, turning to Jack [=Lai-sheung’s husband] easily as if he were a
proper, Toi-Shaanese man. (p.256)

Mei-Kuen didn’t need to depend on men. She had power and energy. She knew how to sur-
vive. She was a genuine ‘feminist,’ though she didn’t know this word. We can see something like
‘womanly love of comrade’ between Sau-Ping and Mei-Kuen. Mei-Kuen was outside the close kin-
ship network of Sau-Ping. But, what Sau-Ping shared with Mei-Kuen we cannot underestimate.

Yuen Tsing-Haan, Sau-Ping’s mother-in-law, also plays an important role in this novel. As a long-
term 'grass widow,' she kept her family in conformity with the Old Chinese custom and mores. Her thriftiness, stubbornness, pragmatism, self-sacrifice, and harshness sometimes directed toward Sau-Ping...seems to have been derived from her determination to maintain the family, worship the ancestors and continue the lineage. Yuen Tsing-Haan neither faced the Communist regime nor crossed the boundary of Guangdong Province. She died a woman of Old China.

Today Chinese, the largest minority group in Vancouver represents more than 16% of the total population with more females than males! Their houses are not confined to Chinatown, while recently Vancouver has several suburbs almost exclusively inhabited by well-off Chinese. It seems that Chinese have become still more mobile than they once were. They cross both geographical and socioeconomic border with ease. There are many newcomers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia and Mainland China. The Excluded Wife, however, isn't merely a nostalgic and retrospective novel. Tsing-Haan, Sau-Ha, Sau-Ping, Mei-Kuen, Fei-Yin, Katherine, Pauline...stories and anecdotes about women over three generations are woven into an impressive 'diasporic novel' by Yuen-fong Woon.

Notes
1. The author, Dr. Yuen-fong Woon, is Professor of Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, University of Victoria, BC, Canada.
2. The author explains why she calls this novel The Excluded Wife in "Preface" of the book. The reader can also get familiar with the change of Canadian immigration policy.

...The earliest Chinese who were attracted first by the Gold Rush in California in the 1850s and then by the subsequent Gold Rush in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia in the early 1860s. They were therefore known colloquially as "Gold Mountain guests" (ham-shaan haak). Starting in the 1880s, Canadian immigration laws had a drastic impact on the family life of the Chinese immigrants. After the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed with the critical use of Chinese labour, the Canadian government yielded to pressure from British Columbia to limit Chinese immigration. It started to collect head taxes from each Chinese coming into the country. Beginning at fifty dollars in 1885, this tax was increased to one hundred dollars in 1900 and five hundred dollars in 1903. In 1923 the Chinese Immigration Act was passed. Known more commonly as the Chinese Exclusion Act, it forbade almost all categories of Chinese from entering the country. It was not lifted until 1947.

As a result of the Exclusion Act, the predominantly male Chinese population in Canada, many of whom had already made the trip home to marry with a view to producing sons, were denied the choice of bringing their wives or children to Canada. While some Gold Mountain guests returned home, others stayed in Canada trying to make a living. To ensure the economic security and comfort of their family in the home village and to prepare for their own eventual retirement, the more successful among them sent money home to build foreign-style mansions (yeung-lau) and acquire farmland or shops there. The less successful never made it home. They died in Canada, but their bones were returned to their families in South China.

Between 1923 and 1947, the wife of Gold Mountain guest had to shoulder the double burden of farm and domestic chores in the home village. Her lot was not a happy one. Married without her consent at a tender age, she single-handedly raised the children and served her husband's parents and his younger unmarried siblings. Even though she was the one who performed the daily worship of the four generations of her absentee husband's ancestors at the domestic ancestral altar, she had very little status in her married home. Until or unless she gave birth to a son, she lived in fear of being abused by her mother-in-law or deserted by her husband in Gold Mountain. Outside her domestic confines she was often bullied by members of her husband's lineage and had to face numerous life crises as well as natural and man-made disasters largely beyond her control. External forces might deprive her of all or part of the overseas remittances she received. She and her children also faced the prospect of being attacked or persecuted by predators or invaders who were greedy for the foreign currency and imposing foreign-style houses built with the blood and sweat of her husband in Canada. Such a woman, one who was left waiting for the return of her husband from Gold Mountain, was known colloquially as a shaang-kwa-foo (=生寡婦), or a "grass widow," although I refer to her as an "Excluded Wife" in relation to the Chinese Exclusion Act.

For twenty years after the Exclusion Act was lifted, few "excluded wives" or "excluded children" joined the Chinese community in Canada. Politics ensured that many were unable to come. For thirty years after its takeover in 1949, the Chinese Communist regime forbade emigration of its citizens, so that unless the Overseas Chinese dependents escaped to Hong Kong, they had no way of leaving the country. Canada, meanwhile, cut off diplomatic relations with the Communist regime in 1950 when the Korean War broke out. Most significantly, however, the 1947 Canada Immigration Act set an upper age limit of eighteen (extended to twenty-one in 1950) for Chinese
children to be sponsored into Canada as dependents.

Since they had been denied cohabitation with their wives for the twenty-four years between 1923 and 1947, many Gold Mountain guests had no children under eighteen or twenty-one. Those with daughters of appropriate age did not want to sponsor females to Canada. As a result, there was substantial buying and selling of birth certificates in Hong Kong. A large percentage of the young male immigrants in the 1950s entered Canada as "paper sons" because they still regarded Canada as the "Gold Mountain," full of economic opportunities.

It was only with a new immigration act in 1967 that the Chinese were allowed to come to Canada as independent immigrants, without having to be sponsored by parents or spouses. This new immigration act and subsequent ones attracted a larger, more diverse, better educated, more skilled, and wealthier wave of Chinese immigrants into the country which in turn resulted in a revival and restructuring of the Chinese-Canadian community, particularly in major cities such as Vancouver and Toronto.

3. Asian Canadians recently produced a lot of good writings. For a good example, Michael Ondaatje, author of The English Patient and Booker Prize winner, enjoys much popularity among Japanese readers through translation. Prominent recent works are in the following list (authors' names in alphabetical order).

Badami, Anita Rau (Ind=India) The hero’s walk. 2000
Baldwin, Shauna Singh (Ind) What the body remembers. 1999
Bates, Judy Fong (Chi=China) China dog and other tales from a Chinese laundry. 1997
Chong, Kevin (Chi) Baroque-a-nova. 2001
Ghatage, Shree (Ind) Awake When All the World is Asleep : stories. 1997
Goto, Hiromi (Jpn=Japan) The Kappa child. 2001
Kobayashi, Tamai (Jpn) Exile and the heart: lesbian fiction. 1998
Kwa, Lydia (Sin=Singapore) This place called absence. 2000
Lau, Evelyn (Chi) Choose me. 1999
Mathur, Ashok (Ind) The short, happy life of Harry Kumar. 2001
Mcllwraith, Hiro (Ind)Shahnaz. 2000
Ozeki, Ruth (Jpn) My year of meats. 1998
Parameswaran, Uma (Ind) What was always hers. 1999
Quan, Andy (Chi) Calendar boy. 2001
Sakamoto, Kerri (Jpn) The electrical field. 1998
Selvadurai, Shyam (SL) Cinnamon gardens. 1998
Thien, Madeleine. (Chi) Simple Recipes 2001
Watada, Terry (Jpn) Daruma Days. 1997
Woo, Terry (Chi) Banana Boys. 2000
and Woon, Yuen-fong (Chi) The Excluded Wife. 1998

4. Lien Chao explains about Chinatown in her book on Chinese Canadian Literature. (Born in China, Lien Chao finished her B.A. in English from Wuhan Teachers’ College in 1982. In 1984, she moved to Canada to study. She finished her M.A. and Ph.D. in English both from York University.)

In almost every Canadian city there grew a Chinatown. In the past one hundred years, the image of Chinatown has changed dramatically, reflecting the social changes in the broader Canadian society. As discussed above, underlining the earlier Canadian immigration policies was the assimilation model and the unassimilability of Chinese and other coloured peoples. For over one hundred years, the Canadian media promoted various negative stereotypes against the Chinese community. Chinatowns were presented as dirty and dangerous, full of opium dens, gambling houses, brothels, and dirty vegetable markets, where illegal immigrants, aliens, and criminals gathered. Reverend John Mackay, who subscribed to the idea of "the yellow peril," warned the public that before 1914 Chinese would submerge white civilization in a Canadian society which was not sufficiently strong to meet such a challenge (Baureiss p.24) [Baureiss, Gunter. "Chinese Immigration, Chinese Stereotypes, and Chinese Labour," Canadian Ethnic Studies XIX.3(1987):15-34]. A lurid piece of fiction, The Writing on the Wall, written by H. Glynn-Ward and published in 1923 by The Vancouver Sun, touched every nerve of white racism, catering to white superiority and fear of the other races. In the story, omniscient Chinese criminal lords used opium to enslave white girls as prostitutes, while planning the subjection of British Columbia to the Oriental will (Wickberg p.121) [Wickberg, Edgar, ed. et al. From China to Canada: A history of the Chinese Communities in Canada. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, and Department of State, 1982]. Even as late as 1962, Maclean’s magazine manipulated the public using the same racist thesis that the Chinese could not be assimilated due to their high illiteracy, quasi-self-government by the clan system, high criminal record, and illegal activities such as violating Canadian taxation and immigration laws (Phillips p.11, pp.40-48) [Phillips, Alan. "The Criminal Society that Dominates the Chinese in Canada."
Maclean’s 7 April 1962:11, 40-48]. By presenting the Chinese as alien and Chinese culture as evil, the media inflamed white xenophobia and prolonged the structural sanctions against the Chinese in Canada. This in turn ensured the low political and economic status of the Chinese Canadians for several more decades in contemporary society.

The negative stereotypes of Chinatown and its inhabitants isolated Chinese from the rest of Canadian society. For many decades almost all Chinese immigrants, transient labourers, and married-bachelors were confined to Chinatowns. Here they could find a place to stay, find their food, and seek friendship and support in place of the families they lacked. Chinatown businesses employed mostly Chinese, and so they helped recent immigrants survive. Illegal activities such as gambling, opium-smoking, and prostitution in Chinatowns were historical and cultural byproducts of anti-Chinese racism. The 6% Chinese female to male ratio, a direct result of increasing head taxes and exclusion laws, led to prostitution. Segregation of the Chinese meant that they could not attend the cinema or any other places of normal recreation, except for church, where it was hoped they would be converted to Christianity. Some married-bachelors (married men with absent wives) found their own recreation in gambling or opium-smoking. However, the Chinatown syndrome started to change when the attitude of the dominant groups towards Chinese started to change, and when the political and economic status of the Chinese in Canada began to improve. After the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1947, especially after the sex ratio reached a balance in 1981 and conjugal and family life was restored, Chinatown started to look more attractive.

At present Chinatowns are primarily commercial districts, where ethnic food, goods and services are marketed. In most of the Canadian cities Chinatowns are designated tourist zones by the municipal governments, enabling Chinese businesses to open seven days a week, catering to people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, for Chinese-Canadians Chinatowns still bear the stigma inherited from historical anti-Chinese racism. They bear the mark of a segregation that is self-imposed in order to avoid competition or conflict with the dominant groups. Chinatowns, where the employees are almost homogeneously Chinese and the businesses are almost exclusively of the service variety, remain an entrance-job market for non-English-speaking Chinese. Whereas the occupational choices for Chinese Canadians and new Chinese immigrants have generally improved, statistics show that Chinese Canadians are under-represented in politics, government offices, social sciences, teaching, transportation, art, and literature, and under-represented in the service industry, natural science, and engineering.

The pioneering generations of Chinese immigrants, the contract labourers who were collectively called “sojourners,” are dying out. Because their prime years were spent as bachelors or married-bachelors, the appearance of the Canadian-born generations has been delayed significantly in Chinese Canadian communities across the country. A hundred and thirty-seven years after the Chinese landed in Canada as a noticeable racial group, the Chinese population in Canada still shows a higher number of foreign-born than native-born people. New immigrants of Chinese origin come from all over the world, making the Chinese community multicultural itself. The homogeneous Taishan [=Toi-Shaan] population and culture of the 1860s has long been replaced by a linguistically diversified Chinese community. Due to the large number of Chinese immigrants coming to Canada in the last ten years, the Chinese Canadian community remains largely an immigrant community. Its racial visibility at the entrance status makes structural assimilation for Chinese Canadians a continuing struggle. (pp. 12-14*)

5. As reference data, the brief chronology (strictly limited to the affairs of Chinese in Canada) and the sex ratio in Vancouver are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>April, first rush of gold seekers from San Francisco June, first Chinese arrive from San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>First Chinese woman to arrive in British North America (wife of the owner of the Kwong Lee Company, Victoria, BC) Increase in Chinese arrivals, mostly from Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Won Alexander Cumyow, first Chinese baby born in Canada (Port Douglas, BC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Chinese employed in Nanaimo coalfields British Columbia joins Confederation Increase in anti-Chinese sentiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Anti-Chinese Society formed in Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR</td>
<td>EVENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>Chinese construct Grand Trunk Road to Hope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1875 | Chinese barred physically from voting in Nanaimo  
BC Legislature passes law to disqualify Chinese from voting  
Motion to bar Chinese from employment on Victoria city works passed |
| 1878 | Bill to exclude Chinese from provincial works passed  
Bill levying $30 license on all Chinese passed, leading to a general strike of Chinese in Victoria |
| 1880 | April, construction of CPR in BC begins  
June, Euro-Americans/Europeans and Chinese/Japanese laborers arrive from San Francisco, followed by Chinese laborers from Hong Kong in July |
| 1881 | Chinese laborers arrive in larger numbers  
Shortage of Chinese labor in Victoria |
| 1882 | Peak of Chinese immigration (8,083) from San Francisco and Hong Kong  
US bill prohibits immigration of Chinese |
| 1883 | Chinese killed in riot at CPR construction site |
| 1884 | Chinese laborers break strike in Dunsmuir mines  
Establishment of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (中華會館…池田注) (Victoria, BC) by Chinese Canadian merchants  
Provincial Chinese Regulation Act passed, later disallowed  
Provincial act to prevent Chinese immigration passed, later disallowed by the federal government  
First Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration (1884-85) |
| 1885 | Province again passes act to prevent Chinese immigration, later disallowed by the federal government  
Head tax on Chinese set at $50  
Franchise Act excludes Chinese |
| 1886 | Province inserts anti-Chinese clauses in all private bills  
Chinese construct CPR extension to New Westminster  
Chinese population decreasing |
| 1888 | US suddenly passes absolute exclusion bill causing an increase in Chinese immigration to BC |
| 1890 | BT Rogers offered bonus and tax concessions for sugar refinery in Vancouver, provided he employ No Chinese |
| 1891 | Increased Chinese immigration |
| 1893 | Request to raise head tax to $100 passed, refused by federal government |
| 1897 | Increased Chinese and Japanese immigration |
| 1900 | Head tax increased to $100, effective 1901 |
| 1901 | Second Royal Commission on Oriental Affairs (1901-02) |
| 1903 | 13 BC anti-Oriental bills disallowed by the federal government  
Head tax increased to $500, effective 1904 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Importation, manufacture, and sale of opium prohibited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Grand Trunk Pacific complains of inability to import Chinese labor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Canadian Northern and Kettle Valley Railway Bills pass with stipulation that white labor be used. Fourth Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration. Chinese immigration again increasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Republic of China established. Chinese immigration continues to increase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Naturalization Bill stipulates 5-year residence and adequate knowledge of French or English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-18</td>
<td>World War I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Provincial laws make it illegal for Chinese-owned restaurants and laundromats to hire white women (also in SK, MB, ON).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-21</td>
<td>Increased opposition to Orientals and Europeans from veterans and businessmen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>BC passes resolution in favor of complete exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>New Immigration Act, in effect excludes Chinese; consuls, merchants, and students exempt. Gentleman's Agreement, same categories as 1908 but now limited to 150 annually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Revisions to Gentleman's Agreement, wives and children are now included in the 150 per annum quota.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Revival of anti-Asian agitation (result of the Manchurian Affair).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-45</td>
<td>World War II; Chinese join armed forces voluntarily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Attack of Pearl Harbor (December 7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Chinese protest lack of franchise, their restriction from certain professions, and anti-Chinese clauses in government contracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Chinese conscripted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Japanese, Chinese, Indians, and Natives who served in WW II are granted the provincial vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Chinese wives and unmarried children allowed to enter Canada. Repeal of The Chinese Immigration Act of 1923. Repeal discriminatory clause in BC Provincial Elections Act (included Chinese and Indians, but excluded Japanese); allows entry into previously barred professions such as pharmacy, accountancy, and law.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1951 | Anti-Chinese clauses in Crown leases dropped
1955 | Margaret Gee becomes the first Chinese Canadian woman lawyer called to the bar
1957 | Douglas Jung becomes the first Chinese Canadian Member of Parliament (Vancouver Center)
1962 | Racial discrimination in immigrant selection removed (emphasis on education and skills)
1967 | Immigration based on point system; all Asian Canadians are allowed to sponsor relatives
1988 | David Lam becomes BC’s Lieutenant Governor
1995 | $975 application fee for immigrants and refugees
1998 | Vivienne Poy becomes the first Chinese Canadian senator
1999 | Adrienne Clarkson becomes the first Chinese Canadian Governor-General

ii) Male/Female Populations and Sex Ratios of Vancouver from 1921 to 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>M/F Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>5,790</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>10/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>11,952</td>
<td>1,059</td>
<td>11/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>5,973</td>
<td>1,201</td>
<td>5/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2002. 1. 31)