

I would like to state that the communications to presenters was not clear and I was not aware of the three minute rule and the desired contents of the speech. However, I made last minute final changes at the event to ensure that I fit into the constraints set by the organizer.

From the Chinese Canadian Military Museum Society

The Chinese community in BC traces its roots to the wave of gold prospectors who arrived in large numbers in the 1850s. It was the presence of the Chinese who stayed behind to build new lives that drew a determined campaign of harassment by the governments in the decades that followed.

The present BC government's aim to start the dialogue to gather public input for a formal apology to the Chinese community for historical wrongs is welcome and a bold step to recognize this historic injustice. This process must be given due consideration as the government has only ONE chance to do it RIGHT!

In BC, it is not the Head Tax that is at issue as that is Federal Government legislation, albeit the BC government was implicated in its creation. The Head Tax imposed an extreme burden on the Chinese population in our province and that is one that has to be dealt with in the federal jurisdiction. The Federal government made an apology a few years ago and it rectified part of the situation. In Ottawa's case, the apology was for the Head Tax that it charged the Chinese immigrants from 1885 to 1923. The tax started out at \$50 per person in 1885, was raised to \$100 per person in 1900 and to \$500 per person in 1903, all huge amounts for lowly paid labours trying to bring their families to Canada. Subsequent compensations only satisfied some of the families affected by that program.

In British Columbia, the provincial legislations at that time revealed a systematic campaign to drive away a single ethnic group from this province. Legislations such as the BC Qualifications of Voters Act in 1872, which denied the Chinese and aboriginal people the right to vote; followed by a flood of laws that would marginalize the Chinese in BC. As the Chinese labourers who toiled building the CPR railway that united Canada, multiple laws were being drafted to deny them the right to work on BC government jobs or construction projects.

These Acts were aimed to deny, prevent or restrict Chinese from voting, participating and holding public office, imposing taxes and fees, exercising punitive licensing and regulatory requirements and restricting ownership of properties in the province.

Prime Minister Harper stated in his address in the federal apology in 2006 that, "For six decades, these malicious measures, aimed solely at the Chinese, were implemented with deliberation by the Canadian state..." and he further added, "This was grave injustice, and one morally obliged to acknowledge."

Minister Wat said that, "All British Columbians need to be a part of the important process if it is to have the currency it needs to be relevant.... We can't undo the past but we can move forward and leave a legacy for future generation by educating them about the past."

I want to say that in addition to a formal apology, which is an acknowledgement that must be done properly, with meaningful dialogue, as Minister Wat stated, “ ...in a respectful and collaborative manner.”

To me, it means to make sure there is a lasting reconciliation in place, to take this seriously, and that it is not just a one-time, one-day event!

To achieve this, the BC government must:

1. endeavour to review all provincial and including municipal legislations and repeal such, if any, remnant unjust discriminatory laws;
2. determine a means to enable for our citizens in the general population to learn and grow together through sharing the knowledge of this past history. Understanding this dark BC past is crucial for better appreciation of the pioneer Chinese Canadians’ experience. Without this understanding, the mainstream society will not know the significance of the suffering of those grievously affected by it;
3. revise and update our public school curriculum, both at the elementary and secondary levels, to educate our children of this sordid past; and
4. Further, the BC government should provide funding to support organizations that are dedicated in the preservation of our BC history such as museum and historical societies, library groups, documentary filmmakers and individual writers and historians who are active in pursuing this endeavour.

An apology is just words, and words can easily be lost or forgotten in time, but with positive and sustained actions that will perpetuate this part of our British Columbia history, future generations will learn and, hopefully, not repeat those injustice and suffering imposed on and experienced by the Chinese Canadians generations before us.

King Wan, President, Chinese Canadian Military Museum Society.