

# *The Response of the WMS to the Immigration of Asian Women 1888-1942*

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In the 1880s, Victoria's Chinatown was the largest Chinese community in British Columbia.<sup>1</sup> With a population of over 1500, Chinatown, separated by a stream from Victoria's downtown,<sup>2</sup> occupied four city blocks just off the harbour front. All incoming Chinese entered British Columbia through the port of Victoria. While some stayed, others scattered throughout the province. Chinese men were the first arrivals from China and San Francisco in the 1860s and 1870s. Later as Chinese labourers left employment with the CPR, many returned to Victoria looking for work and recreation.<sup>3</sup> Those who had wives had left them in China hoping one day to return or to be able to bring them to British Columbia at a future date. A series of head taxes which began in 1886 and culminated in the Oriental Exclusion Act (1923) largely prevented the immigration of Chinese wives of the labouring class to the west coast. In 1885, 1661 Chinese men lived in Victoria compared to fewer than one hundred women, half of them prostitutes, the rest merchant wives.<sup>4</sup> Chinese merchants, unlike the contracted labourers, were permitted by the Immigration Department to settle in British Columbia with their families which often consisted of elderly parents, wives, sons and daughters and male and female domestic servants. This small merchant elite exercised authority over the Chinese community and controlled trade with China, including the illegal immigration of Chinese women brought for the purpose of prostitution.<sup>5</sup>

In China young women were bought, then brought to British Columbia where they were resold for as much as \$1500<sup>6</sup> to Chinese men. These women were usually forced to sign a contract stating that they agreed to prostitute themselves for a specified length of time, after which they were free. In China, the selling of daughters by fathers was an acceptable practice. Usually a daughter was given to a man to be his wife for an agreed price, but in times of

need a father might explicitly sell his daughter either to a brothel owner or to a wealthy family to be a domestic servant.<sup>7</sup> Merchant wives brought many girls under the age of fifteen into the country, pretending to be their mothers. These domestics, too, were bound to their owners until they were either sold into marriage or into prostitution. The buying and selling of Chinese girls and women was in part a transporting of Chinese cultural practices to British Columbia and in part a response to the shortage of Chinese women in British Columbia.

Popular racist sentiment in British Columbia toward Chinese women was typical of the racist response to the Chinese presence in general. All Chinese women were believed to be prostitutes who seduced young white boys and transmitted venereal disease. Chinese women, it was argued, posed a serious threat to Canadian society because they undermined the morals and health of the white community.<sup>8</sup> In a society that preferred to maintain a European, and ideally British, ethnic heritage, Chinese women were also feared because of their potential to increase the Chinese population. It was also argued that more Chinese would mean greater competition between whites and Asians for jobs. The 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration was the federal government's response to the perceived threat. Their solution was the imposition of a \$10.00 head tax designed to restrict Chinese immigration,<sup>9</sup> which in effect retarded only the legal immigration of Chinese women.

While the white community debated the relative merits of Chinese immigration at the Royal Commission hearings in 1885, J.E. Gardner began his personal Christian mission to the Chinese prostitutes in Victoria. Gardner, born in China to Presbyterian missionary parents, came to Victoria from San Francisco to act as interpreter for some Chinese involved in a court case. He had a fluent understanding of Cantonese and was later offered a job as the Chinese interpreter at the Customs Office. In a short time, Gardner joined the Metropolitan Methodist Church and became acquainted with the Chinese community. It seems that he was particularly disturbed by the lack of attention given to the prostitutes' spiritual lives, and by the bondage in which they lived.<sup>10</sup> Gardner's decision to set up a Home for Chinese women was based on his own Christian missionary ideals and was probably drawn from his familiarity with a similar kind of project run by the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. Gardner viewed the prostitutes as victims of a larger immoral social structure that had enslaved women in a degrading environment. Changing the environment, he therefore believed, would provide them with the possibility for personal growth and salvation. With the assistance of the police, Gardner succeeded in removing two prostitutes from Chinatown. However, the police refused to intervene again on behalf of the prostitutes, so Gardner relied on cooperative Chinese businessmen to introduce him to dissatisfied women. Because Gardner's effort was not well received among the Methodist congregation in Victoria, little financial assistance or moral support was given him. Reverend Starr wrote:

In spite of appeal after appeal only about a dozen women of my congregation have responded with

contributions of clothing and their presence at the home. While among the men I have only received \$36.50. To give you an idea of the prejudice, the first Sabbath morning the girls were at Church a prominent female member of the church offered Mrs. Starr a seat in her pew, remarking "she must be very uncomfortable" among those Chinese girls... Another woman and member of the Church whose house adjoins the Home threatened to complain against it to City Council as a nuisance.<sup>11</sup>

In 1887, Reverend Starr of the Metropolitan Methodist Church explained Gardner's concerns to the President of the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) of the Methodist Church, Mrs. E.S. Strachen of Toronto. His letter read:

"What shall I do with them?" ... It was a big question--he was at the time unmarried. Save his salary he was without means--such is the antipathy to the Chinese among the people of the Pacific Coast. He was without even sympathy. But at all costs he thought these poor creatures, Christ's sisters and mine must be saved.

Accordingly he borrowed the money (pledging installments of his salary to repay it) rented a house--had it equipped with the necessary furniture and bedding, secured a matron and ... at his own expense ... maintained and supported, and so originated the home for rescued Chinese girls in Victoria.<sup>12</sup>

Since Starr and Gardner were unable to financially support the project, they appealed to the WMS: "apart from our faith in God the outlook is dreary enough unless the women of the Methodist Church of Canada come to the Home's help."<sup>13</sup> Besides running the Home, Gardner was also paying legal costs which arose from his rescue attempts. The rescue attempts understandably aroused the animosity of the Chinese community and the challenged Gardner's right to keep these women by issuing writs of *habeas corpus* demanding the appearance of the women in court. Usually the women were given the choice of returning to their Chinese owners or to the Home. Thus, Starr felt the WMS was financially better able to support the Home and to pay the legal costs involved in rescue. Furthermore, women working with Chinese women would be less vulnerable to attack by the Chinese community than was an unmarried man with incomprehensible motives.

The WMS quickly responded to Starr's request that it assume responsibility over Gardner's Home. In 1888, the Society purchased a house at 100 Cormorant Street in Victoria, called it the Rescue Home for Chinese Girls, and appointed Miss Leaky, a missionary from Nova Scotia, as matron.<sup>14</sup> Seven Chinese prostitutes were brought to the Home by Gardner. The WMS treasury took over responsibility for funding the Home, and a board of managers, made up of five prominent women from Victoria's Methodist Church, arranged to meet monthly to advise on all its matters. This marked the beginning of WMS's sole authority over the Home's functions, agenda and appointments until it closed in 1942.

The decision by the WMS to run the Rescue Home for Chinese Girls was made in the context of a Christian reform movement. Much later called the Social Gospel Movement, it was influenced by Christian evangelical ideology and sought to solve social problems by converting individuals to a Christian vision of the moral society. In Canada, the focus of the movement was the urban poor and ethnic minorities. The Methodist Church was the leading Protestant denomination actively engaged in mission work because of both its theology and its history of work among the impoverished in England.<sup>15</sup> Through the Missionary Society, and especially through the Women's Missionary Society, established in 1881, boys' and girls' homes were established across Canada for orphans and delinquents; soup kitchens were set up for the hungry, and religious and educational facilities were run to meet a host of needs. Most of the reform work dealing with women and children was undertaken by the WMS.

The establishment of Women's Missionary Societies in most Protestant denominations in the 1870s and 1880s<sup>16</sup> was indicative of an increased autonomy and power that women had gained within the Church. The WMS had responsibility over its own treasury. The active members were backed by a large group of middle and upper-class women who lent their time to the cause principally by fund raising. This money financed schools in areas such as training women missionaries. From these schools women graduated who were dedicated workers for the church. The graduates were then appointed by the WMS to staff missions throughout Canada. In the 1880s in British Columbia, the WMS, in addition to managing the Rescue Home in Victoria, established three homes for Native children: The Crosby's Girls' School and Home in Port Simpson, the Kitimat Home and School in Kitimat, and the Coqualeetza Institute in Sardis.

Paralleling the increased power of women in the Church was a greater concern about the role of women in society. The ideology of nineteenth-century Christian reformers emphasized the value of women's role as wife and mother, but they also believed that the obligations of mothers extended to participation in the public sphere. Thus, education was considered to be a prerequisite for marriage and motherhood, but it also was appropriate for women in the helping professions, such as nursing, teaching and missionary work. In the late nineteenth century, the WMS aggressively moved to bring their ideology to Native and immigrant women and children.

The most common means used to teach their education and values was the "Home." Designed as a surrogate family, the Home was used to teach girls a Christian meaning of womanhood coupled with essentially white middle-class behaviour and values. In effect, the missionaries hoped that foreign girls and women would assimilate the values of the dominant culture and would in turn raise their children in a Christian and Western home. The ideology, however, was more idealistic than practical. Experience proved that. The values of the WMS clashed with the established relations between men and women in Chinese communities. Resistance to the imposition of Christian sexual and marital values was inevitable. Nevertheless, the educational opportunities offered through the WMS homes provided a way for minority women to learn about Canadian society.

The Rescue Home for Chinese Girls was an example of how one group of women strove to Christianize foreigners whom they hoped would ultimately be integrated into society. While the white community's fear of the Asian presence manifested itself in discriminatory legislation, the WMS Home tried to amend those fears through education. Although the WMS never overcame prejudice, their solution was unique.

For fifty-four years, the WMS was involved in the lives of Asian women and girls. The history of the Home offers a unique opportunity to explore the personal experiences of many Chinese, and later Japanese, women who took refuge in the Home, albeit through the records left by Canadian missionaries. The WMS carefully recorded in its Registration Books a history of each woman and child who entered the Home. The Society also recorded in its *Annual Reports* its progress and frustrations. The information of the Home is important because it provides descriptions of the condition of life for Asian women in British Columbia and of the role that Christian women played in attempting to reform the personal lives of those who patronized the Home.

The Rescue Home for Chinese Girls, first established as a Home for Chinese prostitutes, was within a few years sheltering many young Asian women. The initial aim of rescuing Chinese prostitutes was quickly dropped when it became clear that they were unwilling or unable to adapt to the Home. Efforts thereafter concentrated on young domestic servants (or "slaves" as the WMS called them). After 1895, Japanese women and children also began residing in the Home. As the number of residents increased, the WMS added full-time teachers and evangelistic workers to the original staff of one matron. Activities quickly expanded. Inside the Home, day school, kindergarten, Sunday School and weekly prayer meetings were added. Outside the Home door-to-door evangelism began. Those residing in the Home were prepared for marriage with ongoing lessons in fancy work, housekeeping, sewing and manners. Preparation for Christian conversion required English language lessons and Biblical instruction. Outside the Home, door-to-door evangelism was seen as a way of expanding the Christian influence and of gaining access to Asian homes. In 1908, due to the need for a larger home, the WMS built the Oriental Home and School with a capacity of twenty-three permanent residents to replace the smaller Rescue Home which had a capacity of fifteen.

Gardner had had definite objectives for the Home according to Reverend Starr:

- 1st - To break up the villainous traffic.
- 2nd - To Christianize and convert the girls rescued.
- 3rd - To prepare them for household duties in case of marriage.
- 4th - To train and educate such of these girls as evince an aptitude for the work to become Bible women among the Chinese women either here or in China.<sup>17</sup>

The WMS closely adhered to the objectives established by Gardner. The missionaries concentrated first on meeting the physical needs of the Chinese women and girls and then on their spiritual values. The process of transformation was slow, but the missionaries tenaciously hung on to their

goal of training women missionaries. Their persistence can be explained only by their belief in the ultimate purpose of their work. Elizabeth Churchill, teacher and evangelistic worker, stated:

it would be strange ... if, on looking back over a year of Christian effort and work, we could say that no shadows had fallen across our pathway; but ... the consciousness that the Divine approval has rested upon us and our work more than compensates for all the rest and has enabled us to go steadily forward, turning neither to the right nor the left, with a firm purpose that "none of these things move us."<sup>18</sup>

The first prostitutes brought to the Rescue Home were a great disappointment to the WMS. While a small number married Christian Chinese men and adopted a Christian lifestyle, most of the twenty-six women who entered the Home between 1888 and 1917 (the last reported case) remained only a short time. Repeatedly, the WMS *Annual Reports* described the unwillingness of prostitutes to stay in the Home:

A Chinese woman sought refuge with us. We made her welcome and tried to induce her to stay, but after three days, she preferred to return to the dark life which had already claimed six years of her existence.

We had charge of a Chinese woman for nearly three weeks but she is unimproved in her life, as she is an inveterate gambler and prostitute.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the prostitutes suffered from abuse and addiction to opium. Often the WMS kept them in the Home for many years. The *Annual Reports* recorded that

...Eva, a rescued prostitute, who had been addicted to opium, and was not bright, thus being constant care among so many little ones on account of her temper and morals, was transferred to a Mission Home for such in China after being in the Home over thirteen years.<sup>20</sup>

In 1941 the Home Matron reported:

Over 50 years ago this Home was founded as a place of refuge for slave girls. Milly was rescued from the streets in Chinatown. As she has but the mentality of a child, she has never gone out to work, or to be married but she ought to receive due reward some day for the thousands of times she has scrubbed floors and washed dishes.<sup>21</sup>

Because of their disappointments, the WMS soon restricted their involvement with the prostitutes to evangelistic visits, although the Home was always open to any woman wishing refuge.

Evangelism was an important part of missionary work. Each day, an evangelical missionary from the Home visited Chinese families, usually with a Chinese woman from the Home as interpreter. When the missionary was granted permission to enter a home, usually by the husband, she talked about

the Bible. If the Chinese woman could read, the missionary left a copy of one of the gospels. English, described as "...often the means by which we gain our first foothold,"<sup>22</sup> was taught to women who requested it. The missionaries recorded both the number of homes entered and the number of homes not open to them. Regular visits continued and attempts were constantly made to reach those who denied them entrance. Margaret Sherlock commented:

The Chinatown which has become so familiar to me scarcely measures up to my idea of mission work. One evening when the work seemed rather discouraging, this passage was given me, "Moses stood between the living and the dead, and the plague was stayed." So perhaps our presence in Chinatown stays the tide of evil. A few times I have been told to go away, that they didn't care to hear about Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, door-to-door evangelism appears to have spread the knowledge of the Rescue Home among Chinese women and also to have introduced the missionaries to the domestic circumstances of Chinese women.

Evangelistic visits gave the missionaries an intimate view of Chinese customs and the lives of these women. In many homes, there was more than one wife and often as many as four. The circumstances of some second, third and fourth wives were very unhappy. Eventually, some took refuge in the Home as a way to escape abusive husbands and first wives. Between 1904 and 1908, one second wife and two fourth wives sought protection from the Home; one ultimately returned to her husband and two returned to China. However, the missionaries were more concerned with the young girls who worked as domestic servants in the homes of the wealthiest Chinese families. These girls were often brought to Victoria by the merchants' wives who purchased them in China. The missionaries knew that, in many instances, these girls were well treated, but they also knew that the girls who were destined to be sold in marriage lacked the opportunity to be educated. Probably as a result of the evangelistic visits, the girls often found their own way to the Home. The missionaries attempted to keep these young girls in the Home by gaining legal custody over them in the courts. Ida Snyder, Home Matron, reported two such cases:

We have just got over the excitement of our last rescue case--that of a young slave girl, Toy King--who sought our protection and whom the law has given us the right to protect. The costs, \$120.00, may seem large, and yet can we estimate the value of one human soul in money? As we hear the house ring with the merry laughter of these rescued ones and see their bright smiling faces, we feel, indeed, that God has used us in this work, and we believe that some day they will sing the song of the redeemed.<sup>24</sup>

The second case of two girls escaping to the Home showed the intense reaction of the Chinese community. The following account was reported in the 1902-03 *Annual Report*:

In June we had the pleasure of welcoming two slave

girls who escaped from their masters. The elder one had been in Victoria three years and the younger only eight months; but as they lived in adjoining houses they had become friends. The only way of escape was through the store ... They first went to the home of one of our Christians and were refused help; but Elsie, who happened to be there, after sending the woman of the house downstairs to see how many men were in the store (only as an excuse), told the girls to go out as if they were returning home, but to wait at a certain place for her. She soon joined them; and led them by a circuitous route to the Home. The men were after them four minutes after they arrived. The next day we were besieged by Chinese ... Day after day we had visitors--men, women and children--all tempting the girls to return; when we told them we did not bear expenses alone, and mentioned the names of our Advisory Board, the masters made personal appeals to two of its members; failing there, they sent a lawyer demanding the return of the girls. We explained the situation to them as best we could, and after he had seen and questioned the girls, he said he would not take up the case against us. But the Chinese were not discouraged even yet ... an attempt to buy the matron with the promise of two large presents if the girls were allowed to go. Of course this failed ... The two girls we named Hope and Joy. Hope is fifteen years old and Joy thirteen.<sup>25</sup>

Because the rescue of domestic servants was not accepted by the Chinese community, the missionaries were often refused entrance into the homes where the girls were kept. Margaret Sherlock stated, "When a new (slave) girl comes to the Home it prevents me from entering some home for a time at least, if not altogether and thus it would seem to hinder the preaching of the gospel."<sup>26</sup> Despite opposition from the Chinese community, the missionaries persisted in evangelizing Chinese women. Their efforts succeeded in inducing a small number of dissatisfied women and girls to come to the Home. At any one time, however, there were never more than five or six Chinese women and girls registered in the Home.

Life in the Rescue Home was designed to educate, convert and instruct women in household duties in preparation for marriage. Unlike the prostitutes who were older and less likely to change, the rescued girls were young and impressionable. Each girl was required to attend the Home school which functioned regularly from September to June. The curriculum included reading, writing, arithmetic, physiology, history, grammar and music. The primary aim of the education, however, was Christian instruction, as Elizabeth Churchill, teacher and evangelistic worker, explained:

My pupils have made very satisfactory progress in English, and have committed to memory a large number of scripture texts, which I hope by God's blessing, will find a permanent lodging place in their hearts, and some day bear fruit into eternal life.<sup>27</sup>



The missionaries also concentrated on teaching domestic skills such as sewing European clothes and cooking, to prepare the girls for marriage and motherhood. Deportment and personal cleanliness were also stressed as Sarah Bowes suggested when she reported "I have been, during the year, endeavouring to teach the girls to take pleasure in keeping clean and neat, the outside as well as the inside."<sup>28</sup>

The missionaries promoted marriage between residents and Christian Chinese men by inviting men from the Chinese Mission for social gatherings at the Home, where under the watchful eye of the missionaries, introductions were made. Sarah Bowes described one such meeting, "At 8:30 in the evening the young Chinese men of the missions, with their teachers and ministers, to the number of 34, filed into our large school-room, where social conversation and singing were the order of the evening."<sup>29</sup> The missionaries, being the legal guardians of many of the residents, ensured as far as possible that the women made appropriate choices, as Ida Snyder suggested when she wrote, "We have many suitors for the two girls, Bell and Jena, but find it very difficult to make a choice; and indeed we wish to keep them with us as long as possible, that they may be more settled in their habits."<sup>30</sup>

In 1896, the WMS organized a day school in Chinatown to expand their influence among Chinese children. They were hopeful that the rudiments of Christianity could be imparted to the children, for, as Ida Snyder wrote "... in them lies our brightest hope for the future."<sup>31</sup> Through their evangelistic efforts, the missionaries convinced parents to send their children, both boys and girls, to the school. Although many families were non-Christian, they wanted their children to have the same educational opportunities as their Canadian peers. The WMS complained, however, that few girls were sent to the school because Chinese girls were educated traditionally only in household duties and in submission to men. In fact, the WMS Home and day school provided the only alternative educational opportunities for Chinese girls in Victoria. In 1900, the Chinese Benevolent Association built a school for Chinese boys as a way of asserting traditional Chinese values in reaction to the incursions made by Christians into spiritual and cultural life of Chinese children. The Chinese school did not, however, drastically affect attendance at the WMS day school which averaged approximately thirty students a day.

In conjunction with the day schools, a Sunday School was started in the Home. The teachers attempted to persuade the students from the day school to attend Sunday School. They were not always successful, as Kate Morgan explained: "Our Sunday School has registered 35 but the average attendance is much lower as bright Sundays and Chinese feast days deplete our numbers."<sup>32</sup> The WMS hoped that the children who learned the Christian message would take it home to their parents. It appears that in some cases this did occur: after one of their pupils accidentally drowned, her parents "asked for a Christian burial, because they said Toshio loved the school and Sunday School, and when she came home often showed them how to sing and pray."<sup>33</sup>

The WMS also organized meetings to bring together the small number of Chinese women, married and single, who had adopted Christianity. These

women participated in Friday meetings, the Mission Band and eventually the Chinese Women's Auxiliary to the WMS. The groups were devoted to reading scriptures and praying. For the most part, these women had spent some time in the Home and, through the guidance of WMS, had married Christian Chinese men. Ida Snyder wrote: "Of course it is our own girls who come regularly, but occasionally we have some of the heathen women drawn in by their desire to see the inside of the Home."<sup>34</sup> One Chinese woman, on the other hand, was so determined to get permission from her husband to attend church and the Friday meetings that she took refuge in the Home for five days until her husband agreed to allow her to attend.

In the final analysis, the WMS's attempt to implement their ideology among Chinese women in Victoria between 1888 and 1908 proved only marginally successful. Sixty-five women and girls registered in the Home, yet success, measured by Christian marriage, baptism or missionary work, was almost exclusively with young girls who spent many years in the Home. However, the WMS persisted in nurturing their small groups of converted women and in providing for those women who sought shelter in the Home. In Chinatown, evangelical efforts had been met with considerable resistance mainly because of the disruptions caused by the rescue efforts. The willingness of Chinese parents to send their children to day school and their reluctance to send them to Sunday School showed that the Chinese were most interested in educational opportunities, especially for their sons. Also, their reluctance to send their daughters to school indicated an unwillingness to tamper with traditional male/female roles. The WMS met this challenge by placing greater emphasis on education for both boys and girls, with the hope that education would lead to conversion. Thus, despite their lack of success, the missionaries continued to consider evangelism the correct social priority. Ida Snyder wrote, "While labour unions are exercised about the influx of so many foreigners, we are more alarmed because of the very inadequate efforts toward their evangelization."<sup>35</sup> Evangelism meant full cultural and religious conversion and assimilation.

By 1907, the Chinese in the Rescue Home were outnumbered by Japanese women and girls. Between 1895 and 1907, 121 Japanese women and girls were registered in the Home. Most were sent by Immigration officials to await permission to enter Canada or to proceed to the United States and most stayed in the Home for only two or three days. Some were deported on suspicion that they were prostitutes, others because of various diseases. The missionaries considered it "a great opportunity to have these women in the Home even for a few days or weeks, as they can give their undivided attention to what we have to tell them."<sup>36</sup> A Bible written in Japanese was given to each woman upon her departure from the Home.

Many of the Japanese women came to British Columbia as "picture brides." They arranged, through correspondence, to marry men already living in British Columbia. Their marriages were registered and celebrated in Japan before the women set out to meet their husbands.<sup>37</sup> Because the Immigration Department insisted that the couples marry under Canadian law as soon as the women were allowed legal entry, there was an urgent need for a place to

hold the ceremony. The WMS offered to hold weddings in the Home and reported that between 1903 and 1915, 697 weddings were performed. Each couple was given a Bible written in Japanese as a wedding gift.

Japanese women became acquainted with the Rescue Home after having stayed or having been married there. Some of these same women sought the protection of the WMS from abusive husbands. No doubt the uncertainties involved in arranged marriages and the struggle to live in a hostile, foreign society resulted not only in disappointment but in wife abuse. A typical set of circumstances was reported by Ida Synder:

Three Japanese married women have sought our aid during the year. One of them returned to Japan, taking her little daughter with her, but leaving her dissolute husband in Vancouver. Another ... returned to her husband. The last one put her little girl in the Home and is at service.<sup>38</sup>

The circumstances experienced by most Japanese women in British Columbia were markedly different from that of Chinese women. Immigration policy regarding the Japanese did not bar the free immigration of women, as was the case with the Chinese.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the population of Japanese women quickly outnumbered that of the Chinese women. According to official statistics, 1074 Chinese women arrived in British Columbia between 1906 and 1942, compared with 8037 Japanese women.<sup>40</sup> The large number of Japanese women in British Columbia was reflected in their predominance in the Home. Yet the missionaries responded to the Japanese women as they had to the Chinese. By 1907, however, the Rescue Home for Chinese Girls could not accommodate all the Asian women and girls who sought shelter. An article entitled "Build New Chinese Girl's Mission Home" in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, April 3, 1908, contained the following description:

The new building will be of solid brick on stone foundation and of good appearance. The basement will be occupied by a large laundry and drying room, store rooms and furnace room. On the first floor will be a large school room, girls' and teachers' dining rooms, parlor office, a play room and a large reception room in the front and ample kitchen accommodation will be provided. The second floor will contain two large dormitories for the girls, bedrooms for the teachers, a sick room, sewing room and other necessary departments.<sup>41</sup>

The WMS named this building The Oriental Home and School. The name reflected the changes that had taken place during the twenty years of operation of the Rescue Home for Chinese Girls. The Home, which was no longer strictly for Chinese women, included Japanese women and girls and it was no longer a Rescue Home. Rather, the Home served more as a temporary shelter for women. Inclusion of the word "school" also reflected the greater emphasis placed on education. The growth of the Rescue Home into the larger Oriental Home and School suggests that Asian communities were expanding and that women were accepting and using the Home.

The WMS responded to the increased work in the Home by intensifying its educational and religious programs and by responding to the needs of women seeking short-term assistance. They worked almost exclusively with Japanese and Chinese Christian women, leaving evangelistic work largely to the newly established Oriental Christian Missions. The consolidation of work into educational and religious organizations suggests that the Society was satisfied that concentration on these activities would result in their long-held desire to see Chinese and Japanese women make a commitment to missionary work.

The regular appearance of women, often with their children, seeking protection through the WMS between 1908 and 1942 is striking. A total of thirty-seven Chinese women, ninety-two Japanese women and one American, one Swiss and one English woman, each married to Asian men, came to the Home for temporary shelter. Sometimes women simply needed a place to rest from stress and illness, or a place to stay while waiting for a boat to return them to their home country. In most cases, however, women were escaping abusive husbands or families. Of the many cases described by the WMS, the following are typical examples of Asian women who sought protection:

...a young Japanese woman, whose home relations had been very unhappy turned to us for help. Her husband was addicted to drink and this led to much trouble between them. When he threatened to send her back to Japan, she fled from his home ... Through the help of a Christian family in Vancouver, she got a position.<sup>42</sup>

...in answer to an S.O.S. call, I went a day's journey into the mountains and brought back with me a bright, attractive Chinese girl of 19 years. She was in surroundings quite unfitted to develop the best in her and threatened with being forced to marry a man who already had a wife in China and who was many years her senior.<sup>43</sup>

Once at the Home, the women chose either to return to their home country or to take a job in the city, usually as domestic servants. Other women went to the shelter while they negotiated better conditions in their own homes. The WMS reported that

...two Japanese women each with a daughter 10 or 12 sought our sympathy and protection both tired with the strain of work, financial difficulties and unsympathetic treatment in their homes. Japanese friends succeeded in adjusting their affairs and restoring more happy conditions.<sup>44</sup>

Another Chinese woman, second wife of a prominent merchant in Vancouver, was dissatisfied with the treatment she received from her husband and his first wife and came to our Home with her daughter seven years old ... her husband was very anxious to have her return home as he felt keenly the disgrace of her leaving him. He made many and favourable promises,

assured her of financial consideration and just treatment and she finally decided to return.<sup>45</sup>

The use of the Home as a refuge suggests that no social structures existed in the Asian communities to address the grievances of women. No Asian organizations existed to counter men's power over women. This was especially true of the first generation of Japanese women who were cut off from the family support groups which traditionally arbitrated disagreements between couples.

The WMS expanded its educational and religious work. Between 1908 and 1942, over 200 girls and a few boys were registered in the Home. To over fifty of the girls the missionaries were virtually mothers. Girls were often placed in the Home by their fathers because their mothers had died or by parents who were unable to care for them. Others were placed by the Children's Aid Society. Some were brought from as far away as Toronto and Nova Scotia. Still others lived only temporarily at the home while attending school. The following example is typical of the many circumstances under which children came to the Home:

Three have been bereft of both parents, two have been deserted by the one who should be their best friend, their mother, and the other three have the sad experience of being separated from home and parents because their father is completely disabled and their mother is forced to become bread winner for a family of seven.<sup>46</sup>

Many children were left only temporarily in the Home while their parents were absent or while they arranged their affairs:

The ten who left us during the year are as follows: A Japanese girl of 7 years, who was left in our care for 4 months during her mother's absence in Japan ... two little Japanese children who lost their mother, the elder returned home when his father secured a housekeeper and the baby went to board in an English home for a year.<sup>47</sup>

A number of girls and women were also sent to the Home by their parents or husbands to attend school and to acquire the habits of Christian living. The WMS always accepted these boarders because their appearance indicated the Home's acceptability among the Asian community:

We are very glad to have with us all year a little Chinese girl of 10 years, daughter of a Chinese merchant of Steveston. This is the first Chinese girl we have ever had as a boarder. This shows how differently our Home and School is looked upon by Chinese people now.<sup>48</sup>

The willingness of the Home and the WMS to care for, and sometimes rear, girls attests to their ability to respond to the needs and conditions of the Asian community. In turn, these communities must have viewed the Home as an appropriate place of care and education for their girls.

Once a part of the Home, residents were required to participate in the

domestic activities required to maintain a family of as many as thirty. Elizabeth Staples, Domestic Science teacher, explained:

In looking on the surface of my work it might be said to be teaching the girls the art of caring for dining rooms, kitchen, pantries and store rooms; the preparation and cooking of foods... the purchasing and taking care of all food and supplies used in my department; the planning and serving of six meals a day ... One of these meals is Oriental ... Besides these meals, the youngest each has one pint of milk every day .. Then there are many extras, such as canning fruit ... preparations for Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving, Christmas ... When you take into consideration that there are eight girls under my supervision, and that every week there is a different girl on each part of the work assigned to one, and that my ambition is not merely to teach the regular routine of work but even more to emphasize the importance of being trustworthy, dependable, upright, fair and just in all our dealings ... you may in a degree understand my responsibility along these lines.<sup>49</sup>

The WMS kept the Japanese and Chinese educational activities separate, giving each group specialized attention. Lessons in English as well as Chinese or Japanese were given to each group. For the Japanese children, kindergarten operated each day in the Home, whereas one for Chinese children operated at the Chinese Mission, Chinatown, where children from the Home and from the community met each day. The WMS used their kindergarten educational program to teach the Bible to the young and to gain the confidence of the old. Annie Martin, Home Matron, reported that the Chinese kindergarten

...has opened new homes to us, largely among the better class. Then as we have won the love of these little ones we have gained the strong confidence of their parents and are warmly welcomed into their homes, and where indifference was before shown to the gospel message, in several cases we find a gratifying interest.<sup>50</sup>

As the number of advanced students increased, additional grades were added until levels from kindergarten to high school were taught in the Home. In 1915, the WMS reported that the first two girls from the Home successfully passed the provincial high school entrance examination.

Between 1908 and 1942, the WMS concentrated less on evangelistic work and more on consolidating both younger and older women into religious organizations. Sunday School for children was vigorously promoted as the first step; then, as the girls matured, a Chinese and Japanese Canadian Girls in Training was organized along with groups of Young Women's Christian Temperance Union, Young Peoples and Blue Birds. For married women, Friday meetings, women's prayer meetings, Chinese and Japanese Mission Band and Auxiliaries met regularly. The missionaries viewed the young women as potential spiritual leaders of their communities. They hoped that

through these organizations development of leadership qualities would take place. The WMS reported that gains were being made of a

...physical, mental, [and] social... nature, as evidenced during our meetings in their proficiency in playing basketball and other games, their abilities to debate and give a speech when required.<sup>51</sup>

These organizations also addressed practical questions such as the contrast between the Christian-Canadian lifestyle and that of communities to which they belonged. Young women found themselves estranged from their communities, yet not fully accepted by Canadian society. This was a serious and perplexing identity issue.<sup>52</sup> The missionaries, however, through their religious groups, attempted to provide Asian women with an alternative: a self-supporting peer group, designed to be an example of Christian living among their communities.

The educational and religious programs in the Home finally resulted in the first pupils making life commitments to missionary work. In her 1920-21 Report to the WMS, Home Matron, Annie Martin, reflected over her fourteen years of service at the Home:

...there come back the thoughts to which I then gave expression "How splendid it would be if this Home could train girls who would go out as missionaries to their own people either here or in their own home lands across the sea." The realization of that desire did not seem a very near possibility at that time, but today, the hearts of the workers past and present, are lifted in a great thanksgiving to God, for from the little group who greeted their new teacher that day, three have consecrated their lives to the service of God as missionary workers. Hara Uyohara ... has already given two years of splendid service among her own Japanese people in Seattle. Victoria Chung is preparing for medical missionary work and Annie Nakabayashi, who graduated from the Normal School in May, has entered upon her duties as public school teacher of our Home ... We are happy also to have 4 or 5 others who are studying with the thought of missionary work.<sup>53</sup>

Every woman who made a commitment to missionary work had spent most of her childhood under the influence of the WMS. The missionaries were not nearly so successful with those who had spent only a short time in the Home. By 1942, the WMS had assisted in training and supporting eleven missionaries: one doctor, five graduate nurses, three trained kindergarten teachers and two teachers. While Gardner had envisioned the transformation of Chinese prostitutes into missionary women, the WMS recognized that such a possibility lay only with girls adopted and raised in its Christian educational community. Success, especially after 1920, was a testament to the strength and devotion of the missionary workers. While only a few Home women actually became missionaries, many others supported Christian causes. Also, the Asian community's acceptance of the educational

opportunities offered to girls resulted in a generation of Asian women better equipped to cope with their adopted society.

By 1942, national and international political tensions brought an abrupt end to the Oriental Home and School. The war between Japan and China created animosity between the two communities in British Columbia. Furthermore, after Pearl Harbor, Canadian-Japanese relations drastically deteriorated and in May, 1942, the Government of Canada ordered all Japanese on the west coast transported to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia. The eviction order included eighteen young Japanese girls living in the Oriental Home and School. Elsa Daniels, Home Matron, reported in 1942:

There is one and only one major event to report for the first half of 1942, namely the evacuation of the Japanese children from the Oriental Home in Victoria, B.C. to the Girls' Residence in Assiniboia, Sask. But we are very proud of that accomplishment. When war was declared between Canada and Japan these eighteen Canadian-born Japanese children, through no fault of their own, became a sudden liability to our society, in that they had to be removed from the Defence Area... Our children were motherless, and any fathers living had already been removed to labour camps. Eleven of the children were under twelve years of age. It was no time to "let them down" when they needed our care and love more than ever before. After a great deal of negotiation, it was decided that they should be moved to a partially empty school home in a southern Saskatchewan town... Of course there were many prejudices to be broken down, but the children won their own way just by being the loveable, attractive, personalities that they are. Assiniboia referred to our coming as the "Invasion." "But" they added, referring to the shiny-haired, dark-eyed little folk... "they came, we saw, they conquered."<sup>54</sup>

In June, 1942, when only six Chinese girls were left in the Home, the long arm of World War II transformed the Home to a service club for men in the forces. At the request of the government, the WMS leased the building to the Knights of Columbus.<sup>55</sup> In September, the WMS created a Centre for Chinese Christian Work, with one woman in charge who would also manage a small Home for Chinese Girls. The evacuation of the Japanese from the west coast removed not only the majority of residents in the Home, but also the whole Japanese community which the WMS had served. Consequently, the missionary role of the WMS in Victoria diminished abruptly.

The events of 1942 are clearly a part of the historical white racist sentiment in British Columbia. Beginning with the Chinese and expanding with Japanese immigration, racist sentiment was opposed to the immigration of Orientals to British Columbia. Within the context of anti-Asiatic immigration the WMS pursued their goals of evangelism and education. The Christian ideology received opposition from both the Asian and white



community. Although the WMS reports are unable to clearly recount the opinions of the Asian communities, it appears that they were slow to approve of the fundamental changes that the WMS was attempting to make in relations between women and men. It is evident that a split occurred between the traditionalists and those who supported western education and Christianity. The white community also opposed the WMS largely because it was reluctant to accept Asians as an integral part of British Columbia's political, economic and social community.

The WMS pursued their goals virtually alone. In the Rescue Home, in the Oriental Home and School and in the Chinese and Japanese communities, the WMS attempted to impart values consistent with their own. The society successfully met its objectives by providing educational opportunities for Asian girls and equipping some of them with the values of Christian marriage and motherhood, and inspiring others to missionary work. The unexpected closure of the Oriental Home and School in 1942 ended the era of Christian charitable missions throughout Canada. This era predates and overlaps with the establishment of government agencies dealing with welfare and education. The course of events in the Home clearly showed that a shift in emphasis from religion to social welfare and education occurred. This shift took place not because of ideological change, but because of the pressing need for a shelter and an orphanage. This essay only begins to show the response of white women to the immigration of Asian women to British Columbia and the development of these communities in an hostile environment.

## Footnotes

1. Chuen-Yan Lai, "The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria: Its Origins and Functions," *BC Studies* 15 (Autumn 1972): 55.
2. *Market Square Historical Background* (Pamphlet distributed by Market Square, Victoria, BC): 3.
3. Stanford M. Lyman, "Contrasts in the Community Organization of Chinese and Japanese in North America," in *BC Historical Readings*, ed. W. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981): 647.
4. Government of Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration 1885* (Ottawa: Report and Evidence, 1885): 363. Needless to say, these absolute numbers are questionable.
5. *Market Square*, p. 3.
6. See J.E. Starr, "A Report upon 'The Home' for Rescued Chinese Girls in Victoria, BC.: The Origin" (United Church of Canada, BC Conference Archives, Vancouver School of Theology), and L.C. Hirata "Chinese Immigrant Women in Nineteenth-Century California" in *Women of America*, ed. C.R. Berkin and M.B. Norton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979): 240.
7. See I. Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han* (California: Stanford University Press, 1967) and Sue Gronewold, "Beautiful Merchandise: Prostitution in China, 1860-1936," *Women and History* 1 (Spring, 1982): 1-111 for descriptions of the selling of daughters.
8. *Royal Commission*, see evidence by C.T. Bloomfield, p. 48; P. Crowley, p.24; J. Flewin, p. 50.
9. Anthony B. Chan, *Gold Mountain* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983): 11.
10. S.S. Osterhous, *Orientalism in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1929): 173.
11. J.E. Starr, letter, United Church Archives, Vancouver School of Theology, UBC.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. S.S. Osterhous, p. 172.
15. W. Mitchinson, "Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies in Nineteenth Century: A Step Toward Independence," *Atlantis* 2 (Spring 1977): 68, and George N. Emery, "The Origins of Canadian Methodist Involvement in the Social Gospel Movement, 1890-1914," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* XIX (March-June, 1977): 116.
16. *Ibid.*
17. J.E. Starr, letter. United Church Archives.
18. Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada, *Annual Reports* (Toronto: Nillian Briggo, 1897-98): lxxxiii.
19. WMS, *Annual Reports*, 1898-99: lxxxiii, and 1901-02: xxxiv.
20. *Ibid.*, 1912-13: xcix.
21. *Ibid.*, 1941-42: 114.
22. *Ibid.*, 1907-08: xciv.
23. *Ibid.*, 1902-03: lxxxii.
24. *Ibid.*, 1900-01: xcv.
25. *Ibid.*, 1902-03: lxxxiv.
26. *Ibid.*, 1903-04: lxxxvii.
27. *Ibid.*, 1898-99: lxxxix.
28. *Ibid.*, 1895-96: 23.
29. *Ibid.*: 24.

30. *Ibid.*, 1900-01: xcv.
31. *Ibid.*, 1906-07: lxxvi.
32. *Ibid.*, 1898-99: lxxxvii.
33. *Ibid.*, 1906-07: lxxviii.
34. *Ibid.*, 1900-01: xcvi.
35. *Ibid.*, 1906-07: lxxvii.
36. *Ibid.*, 1904-05: lxxxiv.
37. Ito Kazuo, *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America* (Japan: Japan Publications, 1973): 188-191.
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41. *Victoria Daily Colonist*, April 3, 1908: 7.
42. WMS, *Annual Reports*, 1933-34: 346.
43. *Ibid.*, 1924-25: cliii.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 1925-26: 188-189.
46. *Ibid.*, 1929-30: 348.
47. *Ibid.*, 1918-1919: cviii.
48. *Ibid.*, 1917-18: cx.
49. *Ibid.*, 1926-27: 330-331.
50. *Ibid.*, 1913-14: xclx.
51. *Ibid.*, 1920-21: cxxii.
52. Charles H. Young and Helen R.Y. Reid, *The Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1938): 90-91.
53. WMS, *Annual Reports*, 1920-21: cxxiv.
54. *Ibid.*, 1942-43: 121.
55. *Victoria Daily Colonist*, November 14, 1942: 15.