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CULTURE CLASHES SIMMER IN B.C.

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**Article Text:**

The influx of Hong Kong immigrants such as Fai Chan has touched a raw nerve in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The clash of cultures comes from a difference in business styles, racism and hostility toward outsiders.

Attempting to challenge prejudice, the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. in February and March aired "Dim Sum Diaries," five stories about the ethnic Chinese experience in Canada.

But instead of being seen as a creative comment on a clash of cultures, the program generated accusations of insensitivity. A Vancouver Sun columnist even called it a "racist diatribe."

Despite the city's unceasing efforts to portray itself as a civilized, tolerant place, there exists beneath the shimmering surface a restlessness, a tension.

A taxi driver, using an obscenity, launches into a diatribe about "the damn Chinese" the immigrants who live in new houses that look like "big square ugly boxes a foot away from the neighbor's and block the sun."

Some old women doing tai chi exercises in an East Vancouver park are confronted by three white men who throw tomatoes and stones at them and scream, "Go back to Hong Kong."

The local newspaper talks of Asians trying to change the city into Hongcouver.

In Vancouver's Dynasty Restaurant, a favorite of ethnic Chinese professionals who do business

with Caucasians, three men eat braised tiger shark's fin soup and deep-fried crispy whole pigeon and talk about the challenges of being Chinese in Canada.

One issue that keeps resurfacing in their conversation is the difference between the Chinese and Canadian ways of doing business.

"The Chinese immigrants bring to Vancouver higher standards of entrepreneurship than most Canadians," says Paul T.K. Lin, a retired professor from Montreal's McGill University.

"A Caucasian told me, 'the trouble with you people is you never give us time; you want everything done yesterday,'" says Daniel Chan, past chairman of the Hong Kong Merchants Association.

"They don't understand time is money," responds Stephen Leung, who emigrated to Vancouver six years ago and now is managing director of the Marco Polo Group of companies.

"I was at a Canadian company recently where everybody but one person left early on Friday for the long weekend," Chan adds. "How can they do business with that attitude?"

But it is not just differences in business styles that Hong Kong immigrants encounter in Vancouver.

There is also racism and hostility toward outsiders, though Chan says most of that comes from an uneducated minority who resent a different face.

"We look and talk different," Chan says. "It's normal not to easily accept strange things."

Lin, who has lived in Canada almost all of his life, says the social discrimination felt by immigrants in Canada is nothing new. His family encountered open hostility when he was young.

"My psyche was formed by a series of identity crises," Lin says. "My father had to explain to children why we were rejected, why we had lost our dignity."

But it is still the children that are the reason why many Hong Kong immigrants come to Vancouver, Chan says. They want to allow the children time to adapt to Canadian society so they will have a future there.

But this also has caused some tension, particularly where Chinese students, many of whom don't speak English and need special training, have become the majority in some Vancouver schools.

But despite the problems, Vancouver is likely to continue to attract Chinese immigrants, as it has for more than a century.

The first wave of immigrants came during the 1880s to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Big money from China began to show up in the 1960s, most of it going into real estate.

A surge came after 1982 when Britain signed an agreement promising reversion of Hong Kong to China in 1997. That surge accelerated when the People's Liberation Army brutally put down a pro-democracy movement at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

So many Chinese friends and relatives are already there that a network exists to offer help and partnerships, and most Hong Kong business people already speak English. They also are familiar with the common law that forms the basis of Canadian law.

And Lin challenges Canadians who insist it is not they, but the Chinese immigrants, who first must take the step toward assimilation.

"Welcoming people from other cultures," Lin says, "is the responsibility of the mainstream. You can't demand that the people who are suffering take the first step."

Caption: Photo by STEVE NEHL - of The Oregonian staff.

Photo -- DANIEL CHAN

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