

Chinese reconciliation and a tale of two cities

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We are thankful to God for New Westminster city council's decision Aug. 31 to proceed on a process of reconciliation with the Chinese community. Your decision was both a correct and timely one.

This month, the State of California made the declaration that, each year, Dec. 17 would be a "Day of Inclusion" (as a redemptive act in light of the Chinese Exclusion Act 1882-1943).

On Sept. 15, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a resolution acknowledging the historic role of the city government in advancing the policies of the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act. The resolution also calls for encouraging the learning of history as well as celebration of the contributions of Chinese Americans.

It is remarkable to note the sad parallel in history between California and British Columbia: with Chinese being rendered a scapegoat after the completion of the respective railways, and with local governments pushing the respective federal governments to pass respective Chinese Exclusion Act.

So it should be no surprise that the name Yi Fao (the Chinese name for New Westminster) is not alone on the west coast. Yi Fao and Yee Fow are actually the same Chinese words, just spelled differently. The former name is a reference to New Westminster being the second port of entry to British Columbia (after Victoria) while the latter a reference to Sacramento being the second large city next to San Francisco.

This is just the beginning of a new tale of two cities. Despite the progress made by California and the New Westminster council, reconciliation will be a process rather than a single action. To see if it is transformative, any resolution or proclamation can only be judged by the extent it will engage every family, church, business, government and institution in the land to a change. As mentioned on June 1, the process of reconciliation can be a beautiful exercise.

Now miraculously we are seeing some of it. Just like their participation in the continent's past dark history, the city as well as the citizens can now shape part of this continent's redemptive history that is being formed. For the sake of a new beginning for our shared humanity, may we be inspired to do more.

Bill Chu
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