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In the sea of sterile mountains

Excerpt from a book written by historian James Morton entitled *In the sea of sterile mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia*, published in 1973.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

But it was the gold mines, and to some extent the Chinese, that brought dollars and pounds into Victoria. The city was a great funnel into which was poured men and supplies, most of which flowed down the every-narrowing neck to the gulf, the river, the canyons, the gorges and the untrammelled valleys of the interior.

[...]

It is not known how many Orientals [Asians] lived in [Victoria] at this time but those required to pay taxes for the half year beginning July 1, 1862 included Al Foo (Fruiterer), Ah Sing (Trader), Du Quong The heaviest assessment was levelled at the Hudson's Bay Company, to the amount of 25 000 pounds sterling, but next was none other than the Kwong Lee Company at 6560 pounds, on which was paid a tax of 15 pounds. Janion and Green and J. J. Southgate were assessed at 6000 pounds each, followed by four companies at between 2000 and 6000 pounds. At the 2000-pound level were several establishments including De Cosmos (Printer) Government Street, Tai-Soon (Merchant) and the Yong-Wo-Sang Company (Merchants) each of whom paid a tax of six pounds. If this was any sign of the wealth of the city, the three Chinese merchant companies provided a remarkable proportion of it.

The Chinese not only improved the commerce of the city but also contributed to the health and well-being of the good housewives of the town—or, more accurately of those households who could afford a Chinese servant. As Henry Pelling Perew Crease later pointed out, life in the colony had been rugged before the arrival of the Chinese The Chinese proved to be ideal servants and the Oriental washman, trotting the muddy streets with his bags of dirty linen strung across his shoulders on a bamboo pole, was a great boon to them.

James Morton, *In the sea of sterile mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver, BC: J. J. Douglas, 1973), pp. 9, 11, 12–13.

