

BOOK REVIEW

A Graphic History

David Wong's *Escape to Gold Mountain* is a well-researched, graphic history of the experiences of Chinese immigrants in Canada and the United States over the period of 1750 to 2000.

By Foster Stockwell

Escape to Gold Mountain

by David H. T. Wong

Published by Arsenal Pulp Press in Vancouver, BC

Paperback edition, \$19.95

Graphic novels, a relatively new type of book, have become quite popular among certain readers. These are picture books, but picture books that are not just for kids or fans of superheroes and comic books. These books develop complex themes and focus on the lives of real people. In addition, the artwork is stylish and offers an entertaining alternative to the traditional novel.

David Wong's *Escape to Gold Mountain* fits well into the graphic novel format, but it is anything but a novel. It is a well-researched, graphic history of the experiences of Chinese immigrants in Canada and the United States over the period from 1750 to 2000.

Large numbers of early Chinese immigrants came from the Pearl River Delta region of South China to San Francisco. Some of them migrated north to Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia. These Chinese immigrants were seeking new opportunities in Gam Saan (Gold Mountain), a term they applied to much of the West Coast and with no distinction between Canada and the United States.

Their hoped for opportunities turned into incredibly harsh discrimination and unspeakable atrocities caused by ordinary Canadian and U.S.

citizens, as well as legalized racism. This included the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (U.S.) and the Head Tax (Canada 1885-1923), and the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 (Canada). Such laws effectively shut most Chinese out of Gam Saan for decades.

Wong begins his book with the experiences of

the Chinese workers in the fish canning factories who were replaced by machines named "iron chinks," apparently so named to insult to the former workers. He then describes the role of the Chinese in building the transpacific railroad across the U.S. West.

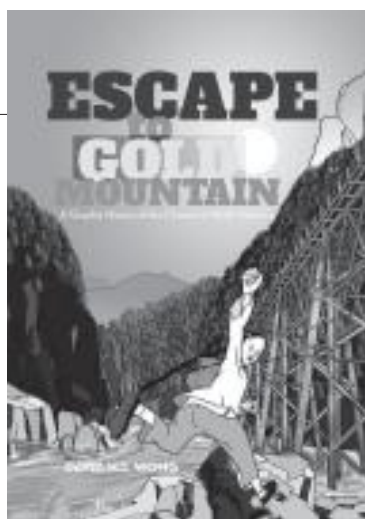
Among other topics he covers are the First Opium War, Chinese immigrants who were engaged in gold mining, arrival of Chinese in Hawaii, arranged marriages and paper sons, anti-Chinese riots and lynching of some Chinese, the expulsion of Chinese immigrants from Tacoma, the building of Canada's rail system, the democracy movement sparked by Sun Yat-sen, and the role

of Chinese immigrants in World War II.

The author weaves the story of several generations of his own family into this history of Chinese immigration into the western regions of Canada. I found that the pictured text made some of the events stand out much more vividly than



A page from Wong's *Escape to Gold Mountain*.



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the same events do when only presented in a text alone setting. The author also includes many notes as to his sources, which should please any researcher.

This is a book that any Chinese-American or Chinese-Canadian might find useful in introducing their teen-age children or adult friends to the rich history of the Chinese in America and Canada.

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Foster Stockwell grew up in China (12 years) first in Fujian Province and then in Szechuan Province (city of Chengdu) as the son of American missionaries. Returned to the U.S. just before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. After completing college, became a writer and editor working for various magazine, newspaper, and book publishers. For 20 years was a senior editor for World Book Encyclopedia in Chicago, and for 10 years was the publishing director for China Books and Periodicals in San Francisco. Has written six published books, two of which are about China (Religion in China Today, and Westerners in China) and has traveled to China more than 15 times over the past 25 years, working as a polisher and consultant for the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. Now retired and living in Des Moines, Washington.

