ABSTRACT

Much has been written about Chinatowns in North America as a self-sustained community with fairly complete social institutions. Chinatowns emerged under an era of racism and discrimination and offered some degrees of protection and opportunity to the Chinese. Historically, Vancouver’s Chinatown suffered from a public image of an unhygienic and immoral neighborhood where Chinese resided and where Chinese shops and businesses congregated. This image began to change in the 1930s as the Chinese reshaped Chinatown to suit the racial ideology of a culturally exotic neighborhood that offered Oriental cuisine and festivities to Canadians. As more Chinese immigrated to Canada after World War II, a new Chinese middle class began to emerge. Although Vancouver Chinatown continued to grow and to retain the image of a tourist attraction, it has ceased to be the choice residential and business location for the Chinese. In contrast, Richmond south of Vancouver has developed into a vibrant and affluent business and residential enclave for middle-class Chinese. This article argues that the emergence and decline of Vancouver’s Chinatown have been shaped by the nature of race formation in society as well as the internal composition and social organization of the Chinese community.