

LAURIE KRUK

## Made in China

---

*When the Canadian Pacific Railway was constructed between 1881 and 1885 ... Chinese were brought in from China to help build the railway. As soon as the CPR was completed, the Federal Government moved to restrict the immigration of Chinese to Canada. The first federal anti-Chinese bill was passed in 1885. It took the form of a Head tax of \$50 imposed, with few exceptions, upon every person of Chinese origin entering the country. No other group was targeted in this way.*

—*The Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act,*

Chinese Canadian National Council website

One hundred and twenty years after,  
the great-great granddaughters  
of those who stayed home,  
are the new princesses  
of a cold foreign land  
where barren royalty, aching  
behind shiny castle walls  
made money, went for tests, waited,  
phoned, waited, wrote, begged, cried and waited  
some more. Wrote China, who offered a tax  
for loneliness, the equivalent  
of a university degree  
for this learning: to travel half-way  
around the world  
and find her, their lost daughter,

in an orphanage, hiding, under a spell,  
 lifted into their trembling arms by witches posing as nurses  
 behind photo-ready smiles, government-paid translators. A gift,  
 many gifts, exchanged hands  
 in one turn of the planet. And the curse  
 suddenly seemed lifted.

Ten days of bewilderment followed  
 exposing their dream to the world beyond walls  
 target of other eyes, so many pointing fingers like thornbushes  
 to prick their new parental exuberance, mothers, fathers desperate  
 to make tiny smiles their new mirrors  
 as they drag loaded strollers, camcorders  
 and diaper bags over the Great Wall  
 with the other dream-families, tracked by White tourists  
 who want to take *their* picture. Then through  
 the fourteen-hour “mercy flight”  
 to Canada, preparing bottles  
 in sinks of tiny toilet cubicles  
 the nervous smiles, fumbled love,  
 embarrassed diaper-changing laughter  
 of these oldest of newborns—

Two years later, at a suburb carved  
 out of CPR land, a birthday party:  
 the princesses—now named Madison, Emily, Hanna—  
 reunite, aged three and four. Their parents, bearing toys, tiny  
 sweaters or shoes and cell phones,  
 greet, hug and share their new wealth, proud with complaints.  
 Lines on their pale faces mark their late arrival  
 at this crowded station. While the girls sit in a circle  
 for balloon animals made out of air  
 by Pickles the clown, they don’t yet know  
 their good fairy’s blessing: travellers with multiple passports,  
 and a complicated pedigree,  
 wearing Disney princess nightgowns

mini-ipods (made in China),  
t-shirts announcing the Year of the Rooster.  
College funds already compounding nicely,  
rewarded by time, like their parents, they will be  
the new royalty, perhaps fluent  
in two gazes, if not two tongues,  
the inside-out, the outside-in—

Meanwhile, the railroads bisecting bush, tundra and muskeg  
laid by their great-great-great-great uncles  
are pulled up  
with the new millennium, slag beds untended  
to sink back into the dark like unmarked graves.  
The National Dream of last century is now owned by bears or coyotes,  
taken over by smalltown or reserve kids riding their parents' ATVs  
wasting gas, picking up pig iron, scribbling  
their names or profanities  
on rock cuts blasted through lives  
inside-out of this country.