



“Driven by poverty I sailed...”

I am in prison because I covet riches.
Driven by poverty I sailed over here
on the choppy sea.
If only I did not need to labour for money,
I would already have returned home to China.

From 1909-1923, some of the newly arrived Chinese immigrants were detained in cells in the Federal Immigration Detention Hospital in Victoria, BC while government officers sorted out their paperwork.

When the building was being demolished in 1977, Dr. David Chuenyan Lai recovered wall fragments with poems dated 1911 and 1919 written on them. Early Chinese immigrants expressed their first experience in Canada—their aspirations for the new land, thoughts of family and homeland, and sorrows and anger over their treatment.

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