

# SCHOOLING, WHITE SUPREMACY, AND THE FORMATION OF A CHINESE MERCHANT PUBLIC IN BRITISH COLUMBIA\*

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ON 9 JULY 1919, two hundred people, including one hundred students, participated in the First Annual Picnic of the Victoria Chinese Public School (cps) [Weibu Huaqiao Gongli Xuexiao]. While this event may not have been remarkable in itself, it is significant that it was reported in *Tai-hon Kung-po* [*Dahan Gongbao*] or *The Chinese Times*,<sup>1</sup> a paper published by the Chee

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<sup>1</sup> As Cantonese was most often the spoken language of the Chinese residents of British Columbia, it is inappropriate to romanize Chinese characters used in B.C. by means of the standard Mandarin *pinyin* system. Therefore, as far as possible, I have followed local usages for the names of organizations and people in the text while providing the *pinyin* romanization in square brackets. However, I have used *pinyin* in the footnotes. The standard in this as in other matters has been set by Edgar Wickberg (ed.), *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*, Generations Series (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982). See the glossary of local usages, pp. 272-294.

Kung Tong (CKT) [Zhi Gongtang] or “Chinese Free Masons,” in Vancouver.<sup>2</sup>

*The Chinese Times* had a number of reasons for reporting the picnic. Victoria, as the second largest and oldest Chinese community in Canada, was an essential part of the newspaper’s market. In addition, Victoria was the location of the CKT’s Canadian headquarters, and the organization was actively involved in local politics and community organizations.<sup>3</sup> These factors no doubt encouraged the newspaper to follow events in Victoria with great interest, as indeed it did.<sup>4</sup>

The cps picnic did not attract the interest of Victoria’s English-language daily newspapers even though these papers did report regularly on the social activities of various groups in and around Victoria. Indeed during the same week as the cps event, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* and the *Victoria Daily Times* reported on the picnics of groups as diverse as the Corner Club, the St. Jude’s Junior Women’s Auxiliary, and the Board of Trade.<sup>5</sup> These papers tended to be interested in Chinese events only insofar as they directly affected whites, provided local colour, or offered a further opportunity to paint the Chinese as intrinsically different from whites.<sup>6</sup> By World War I, the

<sup>2</sup> See “Weibu Huaqiao Gongxiao youxing jicheng [Report on the Victoria Chinese Public School’s excursion],” *Dahan Gongbao*, 11 July 1919, 3. *Dahan Gongbao* began publishing in Vancouver in 1907. Microfilm copies of the paper are only available from 1915 onwards. Access to this publication can be gained through the Chinese Canadian Research Collection at the Special Collections division of the University of British Columbia. This collection contains much of the background research for the Generations Series history of the Chinese, *From China to Canada*. As part of the preparation for this volume, four Chinese speakers read through the newspaper from 1914 to 1970 making notes in English on matters of interest. Their notes can be used as a table of contents for the journal; however, care should be taken in using the resulting translations without reference to the original Chinese. See UBC Special Collections, Chinese Canadian Research Collection (CCRC), Boxes 4-7.

<sup>3</sup> On the activities of the CKT and other Chinese “political-fraternal” groups in Canada, see Wickberg, *From Canada to China*, 73-90, 101-117, 157-169. See also Edgar Wickberg, “Chinese and Canadian Influences on Chinese Politics in Vancouver, 1900-1947,” *BC Studies* 45 (Spring 1980): 37-55, passim.

<sup>4</sup> See CCRC, Box 4.

<sup>5</sup> The *Victoria Daily Colonist* reported these activities in its “City and District in Brief” column. See “Hold Splendid Outing,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 10 July, 1919, 6; “Picnic for Members,” *ibid.*, 11 July, 1919, 6; “Will Hold Picnic,” *ibid.*, 13 July, 1919, 6. See the “News in Brief” column of the *Victoria Daily Times*, for example, “St. Jude’s Picnic,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 7 July, 1919, 9.

<sup>6</sup> My usage of racial categories such as “Chinese” and “white” follows that of early twentieth century sources. These sources treat such categories as “natural” and unproblematic identities. However, the invention and maintenance of such categories is integral to racism. See Robert Miles, *Racism*, Key Ideas Series (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). I explore the problematic nature of such identities in a forthcoming paper, “Chinamen, wherever we go’: Chinese Nationalism and Guangdong Merchants in British Columbia, 1871-1911.” Anglo-European attitudes towards “the Chinese” and other Asians have been well documented. The most detailed work is Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and*

“social distance” between Chinese and whites was such that most whites were unaware of Chinese activities like the cps picnic.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever else this state of affairs implies, it points to the existence of a Chinese “public” largely separate from that of British Columbia’s Anglo-Canadian society. Historians have tended to use the concept of “public” uncritically, referring to such things as “public opinion,” “public policy,” or “public life,” as if they were monolithic.<sup>8</sup> But as Jürgen Habermas has pointed out, the concept really involves “a multiplicity of concurrent meanings.” According to Habermas, in bourgeois societies these meanings have built up over time into a single category so that the various meanings “fuse into a clouded amalgam.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, although the distinct Chinese “public” of British Columbia encompassed a significant number of people whose activities within a complex network of institutions were beyond the ken of the Anglo-Canadian society, it can best be understood as comprising a number of overlapping phenomena.

The coverage afforded by *The Chinese Times* to the annual picnics of the Victoria cps, and to similar events in the Chinese communities of British Columbia, points to the existence of a Chinese “public” in at least three different senses of the term. First, it documents a network of “public” institutions within B.C.’s Chinese communities. The Chinese Public School itself was part of this network, under the direct control of,

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*Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989), although important insights remain from W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978). Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991) combines theoretical sophistication with a thorough study of local government activities.

<sup>7</sup> This point has essentially been made by W. Peter Ward, “Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939,” *BC Studies* 45 (1980): 17-35. For white working class attitudes, see Gillian Creese, “Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the ‘Oriental Problem,’” *BC Studies* 80 (Winter 1988-89): 24-51. That the members of racially oppressed minorities are often well aware of the activities of members of the dominant group, while the latter tend to be unaware of the former, is a point that has been made in a different context by bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre* (Boston: South End Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> This is evident, for example, in Ward’s usages in *White Canada Forever*. This is not restricted to British Columbia historians. See, for example, the discussion of the division between public and private violence in Judy M. Torrance, *Public Violence in Canada, 1867-1982* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1986), 14-16. Bruce Curtis, who cites the creation of a public as an aspect of state formation through early school reform, also does not define the term. See Bruce Curtis, “Preconditions of the Canadian State: Educational Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837-1846,” *Studies in Political Economy* 10 (1983): 99-121; and *Building The Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ont.: The Athlouse Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 1. I am indebted to Bill Maciejko for bringing this work to my attention.

and funded by, what for most Chinese was a “public” institution: the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) [Zhonghua Huiguan]. For the Chinese, the CCBA, and the Chinese Benevolent Associations (CBAs) [Zhonghua Huiguan]<sup>10</sup> of other cities performed key local governmental functions including organizing self-defence, social control, and welfare. These organizations were accountable in their actions to other Chinese, in particular adult male members of the merchant class. Thus, for the Chinese, the Victoria CPS was a “public” institution in much the same way that B.C.’s provincially controlled public schools were for members of the dominant society. Second, the Chinese “public” extended beyond the leadership of these institutions. As the CPS picnic illustrates, the students and teachers of the Chinese schools<sup>11</sup> were part of a broader group of people whose activities were open to the view of others. Third, the schools themselves were actively involved in creating and recreating a “public” or audience for Chinese institutions.<sup>12</sup> This involved instilling an identity as Chinese in students and continuing such acts of “public representation”<sup>13</sup> as the annual celebrations of Confucius’ birthday. By maintaining and extending the group of people literate in Chinese, language instruction in itself formed a Chinese “reading public” which was an additional way of creating this Chinese public.<sup>14</sup> As the Chinese schools illustrate, various aspects of this separate Chinese public had complex relationships with the institutions, ideology, and officials belonging to the Chinese “state.”<sup>15</sup>

While not all individuals involved in the Chinese public in each of the above senses belonged to it in every sense, most were involved in it in more than one sense. For example, not all those literate in Chinese

<sup>10</sup> The terms for the CCBA and CBA are the same in Chinese.

<sup>11</sup> While Cantonese and written Chinese were the principal languages of instruction in these schools, they were not solely language schools. The CPS of both Victoria and Vancouver offered English language instruction and many schools offered a full curriculum, including subjects such as History, Geography, and even Mathematics and Science, similar to those of elementary schools in China. Hence I refer to them as Chinese schools rather than as Chinese language schools.

<sup>12</sup> In this respect the establishment of Chinese schools paralleled the same kind of state-forming activities as those of school reformers in early nineteenth century Ontario. See Curtis, *Building the Educational State*. This issue as well as that of the role of Chinese schools in responding to racism is examined more closely in Timothy J. Stanley, “Defining the Chinese Other: White Supremacy, Schooling and Social Structure in British Columbia before 1923” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1991), esp. 266-318.

<sup>13</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 5 ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-26.

<sup>15</sup> My usage of the term “state” is intended to follow that of Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State [1977],” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1,1 (March 1988): 58-89 and Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985). This is also Curtis’ usage. See *Building the Educational State*, *passim*.

belonged to the audience for such practices as honouring Confucius' birthday or could claim Chinese public institutions as their own. A few non-Chinese were literate in Chinese as indeed were some Chinese women. However, men were overwhelmingly the predominant actors within Chinese public institutions. By the same token, although male Chinese workers were often the intended clients of the programs organized by CBAs, such as public welfare undertakings like Chinese hospitals, the CBAs themselves as a terrain of action primarily belonged to upper class male merchants. These considerations point to the class and gendered nature of the Chinese public sphere. As a sphere controlled by merchants, it was an important element in the class relations of Chinese communities. As a sphere controlled by men, it played an important role in the social construction of gender within these same communities.<sup>16</sup>

The fragmentation of the public realm indicated by the existence of this separate Chinese public has been an important element in the social structure of racism in British Columbia. As will be argued below, it was occasioned in the first place by the racist measures adopted in British Columbia following Confederation and the resulting need for Chinese merchants to create their own institutions to further their class interests. Like their Anglo-Canadian counterparts, Chinese British Columbians drew upon those cultural practices with which they were already familiar — i.e. those of their homeland — to create their institutions and to define their interests.

Once this separation between Chinese and Anglo-Canadian publics was effected, it also helped to perpetuate racism by insulating whites from the consequences of anti-Chinese racism, while allowing these consequences to be only too real for Chinese British Columbians. The large English daily newspapers, for example, not only failed to report school picnics, they also failed to notice recurring anti-Chinese violence as well, a matter actively followed in the Chinese

<sup>16</sup> The social construction of gender within Chinese communities points to an additional sense in which there was a distinct Chinese public sphere. Habermas discusses this in the context of the Greek polis, *Structural Transformation*, 3-4. This notion has more recently been developed by feminist scholars as a major aspect of the social construction of gender. See Margaret Stacy, "The Division of Labour Revisited or Overcoming the Two Adams," in Philip Abrams, et al., (eds.), *Practice and Progress: British Sociology, 1950-1980* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 172-190 and Eva Gamarnikow et al. (eds.), *The Public and the Private* (London: Heineman, 1983). On the differing social constructions of gender within Chinese and white communities in North America, see Peggy Pascoe, "Gender Systems in Conflict: The Marriages of Mission-Educated Chinese American Women, 1874-1939," *Journal of Social History* 22, 4 (September 1989): 631-652.

press.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the consequences of anti-Chinese racism were private as far as members of the dominant society were concerned and only too public as far as the Chinese were concerned.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that this fragmentation of the public realm has often led historians of British Columbia's "race relations" to underplay the significance of racism in shaping the lives of the members of affected groups such as the Chinese. In focusing almost exclusively on white attitudes and activities, they have most often fallen into one of two perspectives on the Chinese themselves. Either historians have pointed to the separate institutional life of the Chinese as evidence of an unwillingness to assimilate — i.e. as a cause of the alleged "alienness" which bred anti-Chinese racism — or they have tended to represent the Chinese as the hapless victims of white racism, objects of, rather than actors within, the province's history.<sup>19</sup> Both perspectives arise from the sources that these historians have used for their studies, sources which have themselves been shaped by racism. Insofar as Anglo-Canadians were insulated from the consequences of racism, their historical records are silent on the issue. It is only by recognizing that Chinese language sources are also part of British Columbia's historical record that a fuller view of Chinese British Columbia and of racism becomes possible. This view sees the Chinese as actors in the province's history in their own right and sees racism as a structuring of relations between white and Chinese British Columbias. Thus, although white attitudes and exclusionary measures have been thoroughly documented, it is still necessary to outline them in order to delineate some of their consequences for the creators of the Chinese public, the men of the merchant class.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, in 1915 a Chinese schoolgirl in Victoria, the target of a stoning by a group of white boys, was so seriously injured that she required emergency surgery to save her life. This incident went unreported in the Victoria English language papers, but not in *The Chinese Times*. See "Hua nu beiwu" [Chinese girl assaulted], *Dahan Gongbao*, 26 February 1915, 3. Indeed, *The Chinese Times* is probably the best source on white supremacist activities during this era. See CCR, Box 4, passim.

<sup>18</sup> These issues are developed more fully in Stanley, "Defining the Chinese Other."

<sup>19</sup> If many Chinese were "sojourners" and made repeated trips back to the old country, the fact that so did many of British Columbia's Anglo-Canadian "settlers" seems to have escaped notice. There has been some progress in incorporating Chinese activities in the province's history. See, for example, Gillian Creese, "Class, Ethnicity and Conflict: The Case of Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1880-1923," in Rennie Warburton and David Coburn (eds.), *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 54-85.

Following British Columbia's entry into Confederation, the laws and procedures established during the colonial period were remade to better fit the needs of British and Anglo-Canadian "settlers," the institutions of the new provincial government were established, and those of the federal government extended to B.C.<sup>20</sup> Confederation, therefore, involved an extensive remaking of state institutions in British Columbia. Part and parcel of this remaking was the exclusion from the new governmental structures of the two largest non-European groups: First Nations and Chinese people. Imperialism, coupled with political opportunism, appears to have been the motive for this exclusion.<sup>21</sup> Essentially "British" Columbia was to be for the British and Anglo-Canadians or those like them, while Others were to be excluded.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, one of the first acts of the new legislature was to disenfranchise First Nations people who were then the overwhelming majority of the population, and the Chinese who were a significant proportion of the non-First Nations population.<sup>23</sup> Over the next seventy-five years this disenfranchisement was repeatedly reaffirmed at the provincial and federal levels as well as extended to municipal and school board elections.<sup>24</sup> Between 1871 and 1914 alone,

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver: MacMillan of Canada, 1958), 252 ff.

<sup>21</sup> On political opportunism as a motive for Chinese disenfranchisement, see Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 54. On imperialism in Canada, see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) and Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), especially 125-148. On racism and imperialism, see, for example, Robert A. Huttenback, "No Strangers within the Gates: Attitudes and Policies towards the Non-White Residents of the British Empire of Settlement," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 1 (1973), 271-302.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the "private" comments of Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken to the members of the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration. Cited by J. A. Chapleau in Canada, House of Commons, *Debates* 1885, 3009. Helmcken reportedly told the Commissioners, "we want you to prevent the influx of Mongolians because we want to be here ourselves, and do not want others to be here." See also the comments with respect to "settlers" and "sojourners" in Edgar Wickberg, Review of *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914*, by Patricia E. Roy, in *BC Studies* 88 (Winter 1990-91): 97-100.

<sup>23</sup> For population figures, see Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 179.

<sup>24</sup> A bill disenfranchising the Chinese and First Nations was passed by the legislature in 1872, but was not signed into law until 1874. See, Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man's Province*, 45. Since the federal franchise was provincially based at the time, these acts also had the effect of disenfranchising the Chinese residents of British Columbia at the federal level. When the federal government established its own electoral system under the *Dominion Franchise Act* in 1885, Chinese disenfranchisement was re-affirmed. The Act applied to "persons" which it defined as males "excluding a person of Mongolian or Chinese race." See *Statutes of Canada* 1885, Chapter 40, section 2. Another section of this Act disenfranchised all First Nations

fifteen pieces of provincial legislation excluded the Chinese from the franchise or from holding public office.<sup>25</sup>

Once these initial exclusions from the institutions of the new province were effected, first Chinese and later Japanese exclusion tended to assume dynamics of their own. Between 1872 and 1922, the province enacted over one hundred pieces of legislation discriminating against the Chinese and other Asians. The federal government also enacted discriminatory immigration and franchise provisions. At various times, the Chinese were barred from working on Crown contracts and from working underground in coalmines or from holding public office except as official translators. They were also subjected to discriminatory taxation, licensing procedures, and immigration measures, the latter at the provincial as well as the federal levels.<sup>26</sup>

Although these laws were a patch-work, and individual enactments were often overturned by the courts or the federal government, their overall thrust was to circumscribe the lives of Chinese residents while making B.C. state institutions into the preserves of people of European, primarily British, descent. To the Chinese people of the province, these laws meant that British Columbia state institutions and officials were not "for" them, and indeed were often hostile to them.<sup>27</sup>

For example, the legal system was controlled by whites. Disenfranchisement not only ensured that the Chinese could not participate in the enactment of laws, it also prevented them from becoming

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people west of Ontario. On the significance of this Act in terms of Canadian political history, see Gordon Stewart, "John A. Macdonald's Greatest Triumph," *Canadian Historical Review* 63 (1982), 3-33.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Ryder, "Racism and the Constitution: The Constitutional Fate of British Columbia Anti-Asian Legislation, 1872-1922" (unpublished ms., 1990), 166. Part of this work is published as "Racism and the Constitution: The Constitutional Fate of British Columbia Anti-Asian Legislation, 1884-1909," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 29, 3 (1991): 619-676, however all references below are to the unpublished manuscript. "Race" rather than national origin or citizenship was the basis for these exclusions. See *Ibid*, 1, n.1, and Peter S. Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 35. With few exceptions these exclusions were upheld by the courts, often on the grounds that as their provisions applied equally to Canadian-born and immigrant Chinese, they were not discriminatory. See Ryder, "Racism and the Constitution," 141-166.

<sup>26</sup> Ryder, "Racism and the Constitution," provides the best discussion of B.C. legislation. Roy also provides an excellent discussion. See *A White Man's Province*, passim.

<sup>27</sup> Legal exclusion was accompanied by a broader ideological process which represented the Chinese residents of B.C. as "alien" and whites as "native." On this construction in general, see Stanley, "Defining the Chinese Other," 162-207. Officially sanctioned textbooks also fostered it. See Timothy J. Stanley, "White Supremacy and the Rhetoric of Educational Indoctrination: A Canadian Case Study," in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 144-162.



lawyers and judges, while other legislation barred them from serving on juries. Since anti-Chinese violence was a continual problem for the Chinese during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,<sup>28</sup> exclusion meant that the Chinese could not rely on the courts for relief. The courts rarely convicted or gave only minimal sentences to whites who perpetrated violence against the Chinese. Often this was explained on the basis that the Chinese were unreliable witnesses. Chinese accused of crimes, by contrast, were rarely given the benefit of judicial doubt.<sup>29</sup>

Chinese property owners, who in most cases were well-to-do merchants, were in an especially ambivalent position with respect to British Columbia state institutions. There is some evidence that before Confederation, Chinese property-owners actively participated in the public life of British Columbia. During this era most Chinese were itinerant workers in the gold mining industry, but their numbers included merchants who were among the largest landowners in the area. For example, in 1862, the second largest landowner in the city of Victoria after the Hudson's Bay Company was the Kwong Lee Company.<sup>30</sup> A number of Chinese voted in the first provincial election and in earlier colonial ones,<sup>31</sup> while Chinese merchants in Victoria and New Westminster also participated in public subscription campaigns like that for the Royal Jubilee Hospital, and in the welcoming of new governors and visiting royalty.<sup>32</sup>

After Confederation, official indifference or open hostility towards the Chinese meant that Chinese property rights were far from secure. Chinese property owners could appeal to other property owners, state officials and the courts, but they could not rely upon them for their

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 24-25, 37, 44-46, 49, 63-64. For an example in a different context see Cole Harris, "Industry and the Good Life Around Idaho Peak," *Canadian Historical Review* 66, 3 (September 1985): 355 and n. 15.

<sup>29</sup> The discriminatory nature of the court system during the building of the CPR is outlined by Patricia E. Roy, "A Choice Between Evils: The Chinese and the Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia," in Hugh A. Dempsey (ed.), *The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984), 13-34. *The Chinese Times* regularly reported on court cases in which whites were given minimal sentences for assaults on Chinese. Compare for example the Chinese Canadian Research Collections entries for 12 August 1915 and 10 June 1916 with those of 2 November 1916 and 17 January 1917 in CCRC Box 4. See also the entry for 13 October 1919, CCRC, Box 4.

<sup>30</sup> Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Roy, *White Man's Province*, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 34-35. The best discussion of Chinese merchants in British Columbia is provided by Paul Yee, "Chinese Business in Vancouver, 1886-1914" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1983). On the Chinese in British Columbia during this era, see also Jin Tan, "Chinese Labour and the Reconstituted Social Order," *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Etudes ethniques au Canada* 19, 3 (1987): 68-88.

protection.<sup>33</sup> For example, some whites used the idea that all property owners had certain rights to support the Chinese in their struggle against school segregation in Victoria during 1922-1923. As a 1922 editorial in *The Victoria Daily Colonist* pointed out, "So long as Orientals, or the members of any foreign race, are property owners in British Columbia our municipalities cannot refuse to provide for the education of their children."<sup>34</sup> The notion that Chinese taxpayers had a right to fair treatment did not stop the Victoria School District from singling out Chinese children for segregation.<sup>35</sup>

In this context, it should be noted that the definition of property rights along "race" lines was at the heart of the exclusions established at Confederation. This not only involved imposing Western, specifically British, forms of property on the territory of British Columbia, while marginalizing the practices of First Nations people, it also involved barring First Nations people from the new forms of property. Under the Land Acts of 1866 and 1872, North American aboriginal people were effectively prevented from pre-empting land.<sup>36</sup> Although Chinese property rights were not affected at this point, there were several attempts at limiting them.<sup>37</sup> It was not until 1884, after much of the prime land in southwestern British Columbia which had been frozen in a railway reserve became available for pre-emption, that the Chinese were barred from directly acquiring land from the Crown. In the late nineteenth century, as the economy of the province became dominated by corporations, the Chinese were barred from registering "any Chinese company or association" under the 1897 Companies Act.<sup>38</sup> After World War I, groups such as the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, the Vancouver Board of Trade, and the B.C. Federation

<sup>33</sup> In this respect it is interesting to note that the federal government had to intervene to pay for the property damage arising from the 1907 anti-Asian riot in Vancouver.

<sup>34</sup> "Segregation in Schools," *The Daily Colonist*, 14 October 1922, 4.

<sup>35</sup> On school segregation, see Mary Ashworth, *The Forces Which Shaped Them: A History of the Education of Minority Group Children in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1979); David Chuen-Yan Lai, "The Issue of Discrimination in Education in Victoria, 1901-1923," *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Études ethniques au Canada* 19, 3 (1987): 47-67 and Timothy J. Stanley, "White Supremacy, Chinese Schooling, and School Segregation in Victoria: The Case of the Chinese Students' Strike, 1922-23," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 2, 2 (Fall 1990): 287-306.

<sup>36</sup> See Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), 165. On the issue of land title, see Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> For example, in 1878 legislation allowed officials to seize the goods of those Chinese who could not prove that they had paid a special poll tax.

<sup>38</sup> Ryder, "Racism and the Constitution," 177 ff. On the corporate nature of the B.C. economy, see Robin, *Rush for Spoils*.

of Agriculture spearheaded calls to bar the Chinese and other Asians from owning land.

Not only were their property rights insecure, the Chinese themselves were subject to the harassment and inspection of local health and police officials. Before World War I, Vancouver health officials repeatedly harassed the residents of Chinatown while ignoring abuses elsewhere in the city.<sup>39</sup> In 1906 Vancouver's Chinese Board of Trade, representing the largest Chinese merchant houses of the city, protested to Vancouver City Council that its members

have been constantly annoyed by what we believe to be an unjustifiable intrusion of certain members of the Vancouver Police Force . . . in the habit of going into our stores and rooms where our families live, showing no warrant whatsoever, nor do they claim any business with us . . . . We are subjected to indignities and discriminating treatment to which no other class would submit and to which *your* laws, we are advised, we are not required to submit.<sup>40</sup>

In many ways, efforts at subjecting the Chinese of all classes to official inspection culminated in the provisions of the 1923 federal Chinese Immigration Act. This act required all Chinese in Canada, native and foreign born, citizen and non-citizen alike, to register with the federal government, and obtain certificates of residence entitling them to remain in Canada. These certificates were subject to inspection without notice and the Chinese were required to carry them with them at all times.<sup>41</sup>

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The response of Chinese merchants to their exclusion from the public realm of British Columbia state institutions was one neither of passive compliance nor futile, but heroic, resistance. Although it is apparent that the Chinese often strenuously resisted efforts to extend exclusion (as, for example, was the case with school segregation) and, insofar as they were able, they used the resources of the dominant society to their advantage,<sup>42</sup> their response to exclusion often involved

<sup>39</sup> See Kay J. Anderson, "East' as 'West': Place, State and the Institutionalization of Myth in Vancouver's Chinatown, 1880-1980" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> Emphasis in the original. Cited in *ibid.*, 171. See also Yee, "Chinese Business," 49.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the provisions of the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, see Cheng Tien-fang, *Oriental Immigration in Canada* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1931), 90-96.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Chinese workers made considerable use of workers compensation. See Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 135.

creating their own institutions to take care of their needs. Indeed, the institutional complexities of the Chinese communities of Canada are among their defining characteristics.<sup>43</sup>

These institutions either paralleled those of the dominant society or took traditional Chinese forms. For example, most Chinese in Canada belonged to clan or district associations similar to those of south China and other Overseas Chinese communities. One such district association, composed of people from Toi-san [Taishan] county, was the Ning Yung Yu Hing Tong [Ning Yang Yu Qing Tang] established in Victoria in 1893 and in Vancouver by 1912. By the early twentieth century, Chinese trade associations included labour unions such as the Chinese Shingle Workers Union which actively organized strikes for higher wages and against racist employment practices.<sup>44</sup>

The most important institutions, however, were the Zhonghua Huiguan (lit. "Chinese Association") or Chinese Benevolent Associations (CBAs). Edgar Wickberg has variously described CBAs as umbrella organizations which "stood at the apex of community organizations and spoke for them all and for their membership," and as "the dominant agency of internal control in the community as well as the community's spokesperson to white government and society."<sup>45</sup> The geographer David Chuen-Yan Lai, who has examined the archives of the first CBA in Canada, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria, has gone so far as to describe it as "the de facto Chinese government in Canada."<sup>46</sup> Although this latter characterization seems to be an exaggeration, it is apparent that CBAs exercised a number of local governmental functions within Chinese communities. These functions included resolving internal disputes, policing Chinatowns, organizing welfare functions, and managing collective institutions, including Chinese Public Schools. CBAs were also the principal associations for organizing the defence for Chinese communities as a whole and assisting individuals who were in trouble with the white-controlled legal system or who were facing individual violence or

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Edgar Wickberg, "Chinese Associations in Canada, 1923-47," in K. Victor Ujimoto and Gordon Hirabayashi (eds.), *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1980), 23-31.

<sup>44</sup> See Creese, "Exclusion or Solidarity?"

<sup>45</sup> Edgar Wickberg, "Chinese Organizations and the Canadian Political Process: Two Case Studies," in Jorgan Dahlie and Tissa Fernando (eds.), *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Methuen, 1981), 172; and Edgar Wickberg, "Chinese and Canadian Influences on Chinese Politics in Vancouver, 1900-1947," *BC Studies* 45 (Spring 1980): 44.

<sup>46</sup> David Chuen-Yan Lai, "The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria: Its Origins and Functions," *BC Studies* 15 (Autumn 1972): 57. This claim is repeated by Anthony B. Chan, *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983), 89.

discrimination.<sup>47</sup> From their inceptions, CBAs were controlled by well-to-do merchants. The first CBA, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria, was established in 1884 by several Victoria-based merchants who were then the leading Chinese merchants of British Columbia. They petitioned the Imperial Chinese Consulate in San Francisco for assistance after several thousand Chinese labourers and their camp followers arrived to build the CPR during the early 1880s. This intensified white hostility against the Chinese, created problems of crime and violence which adversely affected Chinese merchants, and by 1883 led to widespread privation among Chinese workers.<sup>48</sup> In their letter requesting assistance, the petitioners noted that Chinese merchants and labourers were both important to the economy of the province and that “the country’s officials should welcome the Chinese, but instead are infected with cruel habits even surpassing that seen in recent years in the United States.” They complained about “external troubles,” including a proposed poll tax on the Chinese and “the enforcement of every kind of cruel law restricting commerce, work and habitation,” and noted that “internal troubles” — gamblers, criminals, prostitutes, and privation amongst workers — were also growing.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly they asked for the consulate’s assistance in ending discriminatory laws and banning Chinese prostitutes, called for the establishment of a Chinese consulate in Victoria, and urged the formation of a Chinese Association [*zhonghua huiguan*] “to unite the feelings of the multitude.”<sup>50</sup> The San Francisco consulate, which the year before had granted a charter for a Chinese association to the leading merchants of San Francisco,<sup>51</sup> responded by sending one of its officials to Victoria. Under his supervision, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association was established under Imperial charter in 1884, incorporating under provincial statutes the following year.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> See Wickberg, “Chinese Organizations and the Canadian Political Process.”

<sup>48</sup> Roy provides the best account of the overall political context of these problems. See “A Choice Between Evils,” *passim*. See also Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 36.

<sup>49</sup> David T. H. Lee [Li Donghai], *Jianada Huaqiao shi* [History of the Overseas Chinese in Canada] (Taipei: Zhonghua Da Dian Bianying She, 1967), 177. Lee reproduces this letter in its entirety. A facsimile of the original letter is reproduced in David Chuen-Yan Lai, “The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria: Its Origins and Functions,” *BC Studies* 15 (Autumn 1972): 53-67. Wickberg has called Lee’s work, “[t]he most comprehensive source on the history of the Chinese in Canada,” *From China to Canada*, 334.

<sup>50</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 178-79.

<sup>51</sup> Him Mark Lai, “Historical Development of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Huiguan System,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 1987 (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1987), 13-51.

<sup>52</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 176-78.

When first established, the Victoria CCBA nominally represented all Chinese in British Columbia. Its charter provided that "the Association will be commonly held [*gongyou*] by all the Chinese gentry (*shi*), merchants, workers and others, residing in the English territory of British Columbia province," and that its officials would be elected by the membership-at-large.<sup>53</sup> In the 1880s close to one-third of the 15,000 Chinese in the province, including many outside the Victoria area, paid the two dollar levy established by the association as its membership fee.<sup>54</sup>

The CCBA never exercised absolute control over Chinese affairs outside of Victoria, but it was still influential. By the mid-1890s, Vancouver included a number of Chinese merchants of sufficient stature to be able to establish their own Chinese Benevolent Association. The Vancouver CBA, however, did not officially incorporate until 1908. Interestingly, even though this CBA was established in the interests of well-to-do merchants, it could not be funded through a per capita levy because so many Chinese residents in Vancouver had already paid one to the CCBA. Instead, it relied upon the contributions of merchants, and other Chinese associations, as well as a loan from a white businessman, to fund its activities.<sup>55</sup>

The CCBA of Victoria, and later the CBA of Vancouver, could bring considerable sanctions to bear against any Chinese who did not recognize their sway within their immediate areas of control. Since many Chinese labourers, like their white counterparts, used these cities as their bases of operation and locations during the off-season,<sup>56</sup> the associations' influence extended throughout B.C. These sanctions included official ones decided upon by the CBA board of directors such as refusing to act for those who had not paid their membership levies. However, since the principals of the CBA tended to be the leading merchants, other more effective sanctions could also be brought to bear. For example, these merchants included the Chinese agents for trans-Pacific steamship companies.<sup>57</sup> Thus they could refuse to sell tickets to any who could not produce a dues receipt. This method was used during the late 1890s by the CCBA in Victoria to finance a new

<sup>53</sup> "Constitution of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association," reproduced in Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 179.

<sup>54</sup> Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 195.

<sup>56</sup> See Robert A. J. McDonald, "Working-Class Vancouver, 1886-1914: Urbanism and Class in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 69-70 (Spring-Summer 1986): 33-69.

<sup>57</sup> See Paul Yee, "Chinese Business."

Chinese hospital. All those leaving the country had to make a two dollar contribution.<sup>58</sup> In later years similar methods were used to fund clan and district associations, which would have their agents waiting on the docks.<sup>59</sup> Since Chinese merchants were often also labour contractors upon whom Chinese workers were dependent for employment and support during the off-season, and since they performed such other functions as forwarding letters and remittances back to families in China, other unofficial sanctions also carried weight.<sup>60</sup>

The creation of a quasi-governmental organization by Chinese merchants to protect their communal interests *vis-à-vis* the dominant society, as well as to ensure their control within their communities, was in many ways an extension of their class position within Chinese society. In late imperial China, a class of scholar/landlords, often called the gentry, were the chief underpinnings of the state. They actively mediated between the relatively small imperial bureaucracy and the population as a whole, and were particularly important in organizing local government on an ad hoc basis. Although much has been made of the traditional Confucian hierarchy of gentry, peasants, artisans, and merchants, which regarded merchants as unproductive parasites at the bottom of the social ladder, by the nineteenth century the larger merchants, particularly those of the cities and treaty-ports, were in fact members of the gentry/landlord élite.<sup>61</sup> Well-to-do Chinese merchants in Canada, like those of Victoria and Vancouver, in creating CBAs were by and large continuing traditional gentry roles.<sup>62</sup> Thus the well-to-do Chinese merchants in Canada were "the public"

<sup>58</sup> David Chuen-Yan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 213-14.

<sup>59</sup> *Daban Gongbao*, 4 September 1914, 2, and 1 December 1914, 3. Cited in CCRC, Box 3.

<sup>60</sup> On the roles of merchants in forwarding letters and remittances to China, see Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 35. On the labour contract system, see Li, *The Chinese in Canada*, and Creese, "Class, Ethnicity and Conflict."

<sup>61</sup> For the view that merchants were at the bottom of the social ladder in China, while at the top in the new world, see Chan, *Gold Mountain*, 22; and Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1988), 25. For an important discussion of the social position of merchants in late imperial Chinese society, see Marie-Claire Bergère, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie, 1911-1937*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Paris: Editions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 1986), especially 13-23.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of continuities between the roles of merchants in South China and British Columbia, see Chee Chiu Clement Ng, "The Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver, 1889-1923: A Response to Local Conditions" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1986). On élite activism in China, see Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); and William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

for institutions like the CBA in much the same way that the Chinese gentry was "the public" for imperial institutions.<sup>63</sup>

The importance of CBAs was reflected in the battles that various political-fraternal groups waged in order to control them.<sup>64</sup> The oldest such group was the CKT, which had started in B.C. as an anti-Manchu secret society during the nineteenth century. This organization also provided its members with welfare and mutual support benefits. The CKT was joined in the early twentieth century by the Bao Huang Hui or the Empire Reform Association. This group, which involved many of the largest merchants, was established by the reformers Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement, which eventually became the Kuomintang [Guomindang] or KMT, also became active in British Columbia. All of these groups had links to politics in China, as well as to more local interests. Although their rank-and-file members included labourers, their leadership circles consisted of merchants of various descriptions.<sup>65</sup> After the 1911 republican revolution in China, struggles for control principally involved the CKT and the KMT. As groups of merchants, and political parties, jockeyed for control of public institutions, the result was a Chinese politics in Canada independent of that of the dominant society.<sup>66</sup>

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Schooling was an important aspect of this formation of Chinese politics and institutions. Chinese schools were not only intended for purposes of cultural retention or language instruction, they also served explicitly political purposes.

Before 1900, there were relatively few second generation Chinese in British Columbia. The head taxes on Chinese immigration,<sup>67</sup> in conjunction with low wages and widespread anti-Chinese hostility,

<sup>63</sup> One must be careful not to carry this analogy too far. What Habermas calls a "rational public," one which used reason to forestall tyranny, did not emerge in China until the twentieth century. Even then, although the Chinese public was strong enough to prevent Yuan Shikai, the prototypical warlord, from re-establishing the imperial system in 1916, it was not strong enough to unify the country. See William T. Rowe, "The Public Sphere in Modern China," *Modern China* 16, 3 (July 1990): 309-329.

<sup>64</sup> Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 101-115.

<sup>65</sup> On the origins of these groups, see Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 30-34, 73-76. On their political machinations, see *ibid.*, *passim*, and Wickberg, "Chinese and Canadian Influences."

<sup>66</sup> This is most striking if one examines the contents of the CKT paper, *The Chinese Times*. See Chinese Canadian Research Collection, Box 4, *passim*.

<sup>67</sup> In 1885 a fifty dollar immigration head tax was placed on Chinese labourers and their families. By 1904, this tax had been raised to \$500. "Bona fide" Chinese merchants and their families were specifically excluded from these taxes. The head taxes were abolished in 1923 when Chinese immigration of all types was ended.



made it virtually impossible for male Chinese labourers to bring their families to Canada. Only the well-to-do merchants, to whom the head taxes did not apply, were secure enough to bring their wives and dependent children to Canada. The result was that most Chinese families in Canada belonged to the merchant class, as did most children.<sup>68</sup> These merchants, following gentry practices in China, often hired tutors directly from China to instruct their children. Tutors were themselves members of the gentry, who had passed the county level of the Imperial civil service examinations. Those who held such official certificates could always make their living as teachers or tutors. In the nineteenth century, there was also a number of private "schools," but these were likely to have been little more than rooms in the backs of shops or in private dwellings in which clerks working for merchant houses taught basic literacy, accounting, and other skills.<sup>69</sup>

The first formal Chinese school was consequently not established until 1899. In that year, under the auspices of the CCBA in Victoria, the *Le Qun Yishu* [literally "Happy Multitude Free School"] was established on the third floor of the CCBA building on Fisgard Street. Although one of the prime instigators of the school was Lee Mong Kow, the immigration interpreter, the school was organized following extensive discussions within the CCBA and after it had raised three thousand dollars to support the school. The school employed two graduates of the county examinations in China as its teachers, and taught a classical Confucian curriculum similar to that of would-be participants in the Imperial examination system in China.<sup>70</sup> As an *yishu* or "free school," it charged no tuition and was accordingly supported by the CCBA, the charitable contributions of merchants, and benefit performances. This school was reorganized in 1908 to accommodate non-English-speaking Chinese students who had been expelled from the Victoria Public School system. This reorganization placed the school under the direct control of the CCBA and modernized its curriculum. In the same era, the school was recognized by and received funding from the Imperial Chinese Ministry of Education, reopening in 1909 at a new site, a block further up Fisgard Street, as

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, the information on the Chinese population of Victoria supplied by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1902), 12-13.

<sup>69</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 321 ff. On the education activities of the leading Chinese merchant in Vancouver, see *Yeh Ch'un-t'ien xiansheng chuanji* [Biography of Yipsang] (Hong Kong: n.p., [1973]), 6.

<sup>70</sup> Lai, *Chinatowns*, 215.

the Imperial Chinese School [Daqing Zhonghua Xuexiao], but was renamed the Chinese Public School shortly thereafter.<sup>71</sup>

This school's importance is indicated by its enrolment. From 1908 to 1923, between 43 and 127 new students a year entered in the school.<sup>72</sup> For example, in 1914-15, it enrolled ninety students in six classes. The four upper classes were held during the evening as they were made up of students who attended the white public schools during the day. The two lower classes were held during the daytime.<sup>73</sup>

A similar Chinese Public School was not established in Vancouver until 1917. In that year the Chinese Benevolent Association in that city raised funds for the school through public subscriptions and benefits, establishing it rent-free in the CBA building. When established, this school was a modern one by Chinese standards. This was evident in the credentials of its teachers, who had degrees from universities, high schools, and normal schools in China, Japan, and Canada. Its curriculum was also organized along modern lines, and included English language instruction.<sup>74</sup> Although this school in the 1930s became the largest Chinese school in Canada under the patronage of the Kuomintang, it operated intermittently during the 1920s due to mounting costs and the decision of its key organizers to return to China.<sup>75</sup>

By the post World War I era, there were a number of schools controlled by political groups and other associations. In 1904 and 1905 respectively, the Empire Reform Association had opened two "Patriotic Schools [Aiguo Xuetaang]" in Vancouver and Victoria respectively. This era was one of rapid educational change in China. For example, in 1905 the Qing dynasty abolished the old civil service examination system, while the year before it had established a modern Ministry of

<sup>71</sup> The cps in Victoria is still in operation. Detailed information on the history of this school can be found in Lim Bang, "Weibu Zhonghua Huiguan zhi yuange ji qiaoxiao chuangli zhi yuanqi" [The origins of the Victoria Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the reasons for the creation of overseas schools], in Lee T'ung-hai (ed.), *Jianada Weiduoli Zhonghua Huiguan/Huaqiao Xuexiao chengli qishiwu/liushi zhounian jinian qikan* [Special publication marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of Canada's Victoria Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the sixtieth anniversary of the Overseas Chinese School] (Victoria: Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 1960), Part IV, 1-5. See also Guan Qiyi, "Jianada Huaqiao jiaoyu shilue," (A short history of Overseas Chinese education in Canada), *ibid.*, Part IV, 17-18; "Benxiao xiaoshi," [A history of our school], *ibid.*, Part III, 54-58; and Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 321-324, 329-334.

<sup>72</sup> *Jianada Weiduoli Zhonghua Huiguan qikan*, Part V, 26.

<sup>73</sup> "Weibu Huaqiao Gongxue baogao ce" [Text of the report of the Victoria Chinese Public School], *Daban Gongbao*, 13 July 1915, 1.

<sup>74</sup> "Weibu Zhonghua Huiguan Gongli Huaqiao Xuexiao chao sheng guang gao" [The advertisement for students of the Vancouver Chinese Benevolent Association Overseas Chinese Public School], *Daban Gongbao*, 24 April 1917, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 334.

Education with a hierarchy of officially recognized schools. The idea that through the appropriate kind of education and training China could gain “the wealth and power” of the West was a popular one in intellectual circles in China. Thus the establishment of the Aiguo Schools which instructed in the “new knowledge” [*xin zhi*] was a logical extension of the association’s policies of reform. These schools were still in operation in the 1920s although apparently they had not been in operation continuously.<sup>76</sup> In 1921 and 1922, the CKT established schools in Victoria and New Westminster.<sup>77</sup> In Vancouver, there were several schools controlled by clan and district associations, and by Christian missionaries, as well as night schools for adults.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, in the 1920s and 1930s, as various educational innovations took root among the Chinese in China, the number of Chinese schools proliferated, so much so that their numbers far exceeded the supply of available Chinese children.<sup>79</sup>

The enrolment patterns of these schools suggest that the nature and functions of Chinese schools changed over time. At least during the early part of the twentieth century, they were the most important educational institutions to the Chinese, while the provincial public schools were of secondary importance. By the 1920s, this hierarchy had begun to reverse. Although by the 1920s, most of these schools likely held classes at hours outside of those of the British Columbia public schools, during the first decades of the century some Chinese schools appear to have been day schools. For some time, between 1900 and 1915, the Chinese Public School in Victoria, in its various incarnations, appears to have enrolled more Chinese students than the provincial public schools in the area. For example, when the Le Qun

<sup>76</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 324-329. On educational reform in China during this era, see Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth Century China*, translated by Paul Bailey (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1988); and Paul Bailey, *Reform the People: Popular Education and Educational Reform in Twentieth Century China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991). On these schools in the late 1910s, see, for example, “Wenfou — Aiguo Xuetaang Tonggao [Vancouver — Patriotic School Notice],” *Daban Gongbao*, 30 July 1917, 3. After the 1911 revolution the Empire Reform Association became the Constitutionalist Party. Before 1923, with the exception of the cps in Victoria, Chinese schools in B.C. operated intermittently. See Stanley, “Defining the Chinese Other,” 312-18.

<sup>77</sup> “Qing Xue Xiao kai mu zhi chengdian” [Report on the opening ceremonies of the Educate Promising Talent School], *Daban Gongbao*, 18 July 1921, 3. See also *ibid.*, 19 March 1922, cited in ccrc, Box 4.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, “Guangzhi Xue Xiao zhi qian xue” [The Broad Knowledge School to move], *Daban Gongbao*, 23 October 1922, 3; “Jingcun Xueshi Minguo si nian dier qi xiali kaoshi chengsi” [The results of the second term of the 1915 summer session of the Jingcun School], *ibid.*, 20 July 1915, 3; and “Huaqiao jiang duo yi xiao xi Zhong Ying wen” [Overseas Chinese get another school to study Chinese and English], *ibid.*, 22 April 1922, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Wickberg, “Chinese Associations in Canada,” 25.

Yishu opened in 1899 it enrolled thirty-nine students, while the Victoria School Board only enrolled fifteen Chinese students in 1900.<sup>80</sup> The following year there were twenty-nine Chinese students in Victoria public schools, but 142 Canadian-born Chinese children living in the city.<sup>81</sup> During the World War I era, the school's junior classes were held during the daytime, while until the early 1920s, it appears that the Chinese Public School in Victoria enrolled more Chinese girls than did the Victoria School Board Schools.<sup>82</sup>

Certainly, successive Chinese governments found the Chinese schools in British Columbia to be worthy of their attention. Before 1911, Overseas Chinese communities were valuable staging areas for revolutionary political organizations. The Imperial Qing government was consequently keenly interested in winning the support of overseas communities and in spying out the activities of their rivals. One manifestation of this interest was a Qing educational delegation which in 1908 visited the Americas to set up schools. The reorganization of the "Chinese School" in Victoria (later called the cps), required by the exclusion of unilingual Chinese students from the Victoria School Board Schools, neatly fit into their plans. The new school was opened in 1909 with the financial support of the Chinese government. Although this school was mainly concerned with teaching English to students who had been refused admission to the Victoria School Board schools, it followed a curriculum prescribed by Beijing and its teachers were certified by the Chinese Ministry of Education.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, throughout this era, Chinese teachers in the Chinese schools usually held credentials either directly from, or recognized by, Chinese normal schools and universities.

Between 1915 and 1922, the Chinese schools of Vancouver and Victoria were inspected by official Chinese government delegations on at least three occasions. These inspections were conducted by leading Chinese scholars on behalf of the Northern Chinese government, which had official Canadian recognition.<sup>84</sup> Again here, no doubt the motive for these inspections was to win support away from the Southern Kuomintang government. The Chinese delegates in these inspection tours also seem to have been active in selling Chinese

<sup>80</sup> See "To Exclude the Chinese," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 10 February 1901, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, *Report of the Commission*, 12-13.

<sup>82</sup> Stanley, "White Supremacy, Chinese Schooling and School Segregation," 301 ff.

<sup>83</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 329-331.

<sup>84</sup> Until briefly re-unified under the KMT in the late 1920s, China was divided between a Northern government located in Beijing and the KMT-led government in Canton. The Northern government was the one recognized by the foreign powers and by Canada.

government bonds. Nonetheless, the inspections were major events accompanied by official banquets and much speech-making. A particularly warm reception was extended to a delegation headed by the principal of Beijing University, Cai Yuanpei, in 1921. Meanwhile in 1918-1919, the Chinese delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference stopped over in Vancouver and Victoria to inspect the CPS and Aiguo schools and present prize money to the students.<sup>85</sup>

This connection to the Chinese government was further evident in the invitations extended to the Vancouver-based Chinese consuls to present prizes and degrees to graduating students at the CPS in Victoria and schools in Vancouver. Since the CKT supported the Northern government, it is not surprising that such events were reported in its official organ, *The Chinese Times*. But this activity also reflected the role of the consuls as the leading Chinese citizens in British Columbia. Chinese consuls at least had the right of audience with hostile local officials and often acted as a buffer against the dominant society. They were also the ultimate authority figures. On two occasions in 1920 and 1922, the CBA in Vancouver held meetings with all the Chinese students attending Vancouver School Board schools, at which the Chinese consul "explained the rules of the schools" and urged students to obey them in order to forestall school segregation.<sup>86</sup>

Chinese teachers were notable figures in their own right. As the most educated members of the local Chinese communities, they were automatically part of the social élite. Their comings and goings were consequently reported in *The Chinese Times*, as were their other activities. During the summer of 1918, *The Chinese Times* reported on the tour of the province by two teachers from the Victoria CPS, a tour which included a series of banquets for the travelling scholars organized by various associations. In 1921 the teacher from the CKT school in Victoria not only visited Vancouver but also wrote several guest editorials in *The Chinese Times*.<sup>87</sup> His position as a scholar, and therefore presumably an informed commentator, was evident in the fact that one of the editorials was on the rationale behind Canadian

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, "Huanying hui zhi renao" [The warmth of the Welcome meeting], *Daban Gongbao*, 3 May 1918, 3; "Lingshu lai han zhao lu" [Record of delegation's visit], *ibid.*, 2 January 1919, 2; "Cai Yuanpei Xiansheng zhi cheng kuang" [Mr. Cai Yuanpei's activities], *ibid.*, 7 July 1921 and "Cai Yuanpei Xiansheng yanshuo ci" [The text of Mr. Cai Yuanpei's address], *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> "Zhonghua Huiguan zhixuan xuesheng jishi" [Memo on the Chinese Benevolent Association instructions to students], *ibid.*, 7 September 1920, 3; and "Lin Lingshi bugao" [Notice from Ambassador Lin], *ibid.*, 7 November, 1922 3.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, *Daban Gongbao*, 22 July 1918, 3; *ibid.*, 5 November 1921; and *ibid.*, 1 December 1921, 1. Cited in CCR, Box 4.

immigration policies and the difficulties this occasioned for the Chinese in Canada.

School openings, especially, were public events, even when the schools were sponsored by a particular organization. This was evident when the Qing Consul General in San Francisco came to Victoria to open the new Chinese Public School building in 1909.<sup>88</sup> But from 1914 onwards, *The Chinese Times* faithfully reported school openings including the speeches of the notables at them. These events seemed to move beyond partisan concerns, as was evident when *The Chinese Times* reported on the participation of the Kuomintang at the opening ceremonies for the CKT school in New Westminster. This was despite the fact that the two groups were inveterate, even deadly, enemies.<sup>89</sup>

All of this activity on the part of Chinese schools, their teachers, sponsoring organizations, and Chinese government officials, faithfully reported in *The Chinese Times*, points to the existence of a collective terrain of common interest to the newspaper's readers. The term sometimes used in the newspaper itself to describe this terrain was *huajie*, meaning "Chinese district" or "Chinese domain."<sup>90</sup> This "jie" was not only the creation of *The Chinese Times*, however. Indeed, the paper provides evidence of a broader construction. As the official paper of the CKT, it is not surprising that it reported on the CKT and the activities of its members. However, it also reported on the activities of other schools, most of which were not affiliated to the CKT. For example, it reported on the graduation ceremonies of the Guangzhi school in Vancouver, as well as the CPS in Victoria. It also reported on the recruitment of Chinese teachers by various clan organizations in Vancouver and Victoria.<sup>91</sup>

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Chinese schools, however, were not only part of a Chinese public in the sense that their activities were covered by the Chinese language press. They were actively involved in forming a Chinese public by

<sup>88</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 329-330.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, *Daban Gongbao*, 19 March 1922, cited in CCRC Box 4.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, the editorial "Ben bao zhi zhizhi" [The mission of this newspaper], *Daban Gongbao*, 17 May 1918, 1.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, "Guangzhi Xuexiao zhi qian xue" [The Broad Knowledge School to move], *Daban Gongbao*, 23 October 1922, 3; "Jingcun Xueshi Minguo si nian dier qi xiali kaoshi chengsi" [The results of the second term of the 1915 summer session of the Jingcun School], *ibid.*, 20 July 1915, 3; "Weiduoli Huaqiao Gong Xue diyi hui biye tishi" [First graduation ceremony of the Victoria Overseas Chinese Public School], *ibid.*, 22 March 1915, 3. On clan association school-teachers, see *ibid.*, 17 November 1920, cited CCRC, Box 4.

inculcating certain habits in the Chinese students themselves. In particular they were concerned with anchoring a sense of Chineseness in the selves of the students. Indeed, this appears to have been part of the motivation for the establishment of the first Chinese school in Canada, Victoria's Le Qun Yishu. Quoting an anonymous Chinese, who was probably Lee Mong Kow, the immigration interpreter, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* claimed that the school was created because the Chinese felt, "We are Chinamen wherever we go, . . . , and find that, in view of the international commercial relations now opening up, it is necessary to have an education in Chinese as well as English."<sup>92</sup> Certainly the school was established to provide Chinese children with a sense of their heritage,<sup>93</sup> but the heavy Confucian emphasis of its curriculum and the traditional qualifications of its teachers are suggestive of a desire to instil Confucian morality more than a desire to merely promote cultural retention. At the Le Qun Yishu, students, along with their parents, formally observed Confucius' birthday, including bowing before his portrait. This Confucian emphasis continued even after World War I. The cps in Victoria and the one in Vancouver, the Aiguo schools, and the CKT schools all marked Confucius' birthday with public exercises.<sup>94</sup>

Language instruction also provided a vehicle for instilling an identity as Chinese in students. Literacy in written Chinese, and the ability to speak standard Chinese languages, were vital elements in becoming "Chinamen wherever we go." Although British Columbia's first generation Chinese mainly originated in the same Chinese province [Guangdong], they spoke several different dialects of Cantonese or even the minority Hakka language. Individual self-identifications, place of residence in Canada, and even occupation were consequently based on place of origin and dialect spoken.<sup>95</sup> People from outside of one's native district who spoke with a different pronunciation often were greeted with hostility. For example, on one occasion Sun Yat-sen was heckled by his audience in Vancouver because he spoke a dialect other than the dominant one there.<sup>96</sup> Lack

<sup>92</sup> "A Chinese School," *Colonist*, 18 January 1899, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Lee, *Jianada Huaqiao shi*, 323.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, the entries in ccrc Box 4, for *Dahan Gongbao* on 13 October 1917, 2 October 1918, 8 October 1920, 11 October 1920, 29 September 1921, 20 September, 1921.

<sup>95</sup> See David Chuen-Yan Lai, "Home County and Clan Origins of Overseas Chinese in Canada in the Early 1880s," *BC Studies* 27 (Autumn 1975):3-29. See also Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 7-9, 25-6.

<sup>96</sup> See Yun Ho Chang's reminiscences in Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter (compilers and editors), *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage Series, VIII, 1 and 2 (Victoria: Minister of Provincial Secretary and Government Services, Provincial Archives, 1979), 40.

of a common language was especially difficult in the larger centres. For example, the cps in Victoria had to conduct its public meetings simultaneously in four languages: Mandarin, standard Cantonese, and two local dialects.<sup>97</sup>

Schooling in Chinese helped to foster a collective identity. Written Chinese had long performed an integrative function in China by allowing those who did not speak the same language to correspond with each other. Literacy in itself was useful to the Chinese in British Columbia because through it one could become aware of what was happening in other districts of the province, which areas were becoming closed to Chinese activities, or which areas were opening up.<sup>98</sup> It also allowed business relations to flourish despite other barriers. Thus by promoting literacy, the Chinese language schools were fostering means of communication which transcended local identities. Chinese language schools also promoted standard spoken Chinese. This primarily involved instruction in standard Cantonese, although Mandarin was also taught. This too fostered a collective identity. For example, standard Cantonese was the language of instruction at the cps in Victoria, even though most of its students spoke local dialects.<sup>99</sup>

However, these schools were not entirely successful in their objectives of cultural conservation. Financial considerations meant that relatively few students were able to complete their courses of study and graduate from the schools.<sup>100</sup> For many second generation Chinese students, attending Chinese language school was more of an ordeal than a pleasure. This was especially so when classes were organized outside of the hours of the provincial public school. Sing Lim, for example, who attended one of these schools in the 1920s, found the approach of his provincial public schoolteacher to be far gentler than that of his Chinese language schoolteacher.<sup>101</sup> In this respect, Chinese language school may have produced "unintended

<sup>97</sup> See "Weiduoli Huaqiao Gong Xue diyi hui biye li shi" [The first graduation ceremony of the Victoria cps], *Dahan Gongbao*, 23 March 1915, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley, "White Supremacy, Chinese Schooling and School Segregation."

<sup>99</sup> *The Chinese Times* reported that "every girl and boy who graduates from the first class can leave behind their local dialects and are fluent in Cantonese when reading and speaking." "Weibu qikao zhuzhong Shenghua Guoyu ying sheng zhi tese," [Special characteristics of the pronunciation of Cantonese and Mandarin at the Victoria end of term examinations], *Dahan Gongbao*, 17 July 1915, 3. The writer complained that Victoria's Cantonese was not standard as it "suffered from the influence of the students."

<sup>100</sup> See Stanley, "Defining the Chinese Other," 314-18.

<sup>101</sup> Sing Lim, *West Coast Chinese Boy* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1979).



consequences"<sup>102</sup> by alienating Chinese students from the traditions of China as much as they strengthened them.

Some Chinese language schools also challenged traditional gender roles. A significant number of girls attended these schools and graduated from them.<sup>103</sup> The presence of so many girls in classrooms was already a departure from established gender roles since traditional Confucian practice did not allow for the schooling of women. The number of girls who made up the graduating class of the cps in Victoria suggests that the right of girls to an education had gained some recognition from the leading merchants, as indeed it was in China during the same era. Indeed Susan Yipsang, one of the daughters of a leading Vancouver merchant, started attending the University of British Columbia in 1914-15 and later graduated from Teachers' College, Columbia.<sup>104</sup>

This openness to the education of girls may have reflected the importance of Chinese women to the merchant economy, rather than a weakening of Chinese patriarchy. Since the unpaid labour of Chinese women was particularly valuable to Chinese merchants,<sup>105</sup> and since acting as clerks and the like required some literacy, conservative merchants may have allowed their daughters to attend Chinese schools. However, there certainly did not appear to be any openness to allowing women to participate in the organizational life of the Chinese Benevolent Associations or other groups, although they were sometimes commissioned to perform specific tasks.<sup>106</sup> Thus despite allowing Chinese women access to schooling, the Chinese public sphere in British Columbia remained overwhelmingly male in nature.

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From the above, it is evident that by the early 1920s, the male Chinese merchants of Vancouver and Victoria had created their own institutional networks which were among their principal resources in

<sup>102</sup> Brian Simon, "Can Education Change Society?" in J. Donald Wilson (ed.), *An Imperfect Past: Education and Society in Canadian History* (Vancouver: Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, University of British Columbia, 1984), 30-47.

<sup>103</sup> See the graduation pictures of the Victoria Chinese Public School in *Weiduoli Zhonghua Hui Guan qikan*, passim.

<sup>104</sup> Wickberg, *From China to Canada*, 95.

<sup>105</sup> Tamara Adilman, "A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia 1858-1950," in Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (eds.), *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 53-78.

<sup>106</sup> A Mrs. Yip, for example, had been commissioned by the CBA in Vancouver to visit sick Chinese patients in the hospitals. See *Daban Gongbao*, 5 December 1922, CCRC Box 4.

responding to the dominance of whites and their exclusion from white-controlled institutions. Their lives within these institutions were governed by politics having their roots in China as well as in the conditions of British Columbia. Their actions were judged by an audience of people literate in written Chinese. Chinese schools preserved and perpetuated this domain, at the same time that they contributed some of the principal actors within it. In many ways, this domain was really closer to the institutions and ideologies of the Chinese "state" than the Canadian one.

Whether this merchant public was unique to the Chinese or was found in similar domains within other minority groups in Canada is an unanswered question. It is certainly likely that a similar phenomenon existed among the Japanese in British Columbia and continues to exist among some First Nations.<sup>107</sup> While it may be that various immigrant groups created institutions such as language schools for their mutual benefit, and that these groups had their own ethnic presses which reported on the activities of political groups oriented towards "the old country," it is doubtful that European immigrant groups had the same kind of relationships to the dominant Anglo-Canadian "public" or to their native states that the Chinese had. In this respect the Chinese public sphere only came into existence after Chinese merchants were excluded from the dominant public. In addition, many activities within the Chinese public sphere appear to have been licensed or condoned to at least some degree by the governments of Canada and China.<sup>108</sup>

It is also interesting to note that the policy of Chinese exclusion adopted by Canadian governments and private institutions did not fundamentally alter this Chinese merchant public. When in 1923 the federal government ended Chinese immigration of all kinds under the Chinese Immigration Act, the Chinese communities of Canada went into decline in terms of their numbers, but their separate institutional lives continued unabated.<sup>109</sup> Having been forced into the margins, the

<sup>107</sup> See the account of Japanese newspapers and organizations told by Ryuichi Yoshida in Rolf Knight and Maya Koizumi, *A Man for our Times: The Life History of a Japanese-Canadian Fisherman* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1976). For an example of the continued existence of traditional forms of rule within a First Nation, see Terry Glavin, *A Death Feast in Dimlahamid* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990).

<sup>108</sup> This is not to deny that there were not certain parallels in the experiences of Chinese immigrants and those from Europe. Compare, for example, the description of the "sojourning" of Chinese "bachelor workers" brought to Canada under the labour contract system found in Chan, *Gold Mountain*, 47-73, and that of Italian male workers imported under the *padroni* system found in Robert Harney, "Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930," *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Études ethniques au Canada* 11, 1 (1979): 29-51.

<sup>109</sup> Wickberg, "Chinese Associations in Canada."

Chinese had created their own terrain for action. White supremacy could keep them out of certain institutions, but in the long run it could not stop them from being actors in the history of Canada. A truly “multicultural history”<sup>110</sup> of British Columbia must recognize this.

<sup>110</sup> Wickberg, Review of *A White Man's Province*, 100.