

# Approaches to the Study of the Chinese in British Columbia

W. E. WILLMOTT

In broad terms the aim of this paper is to encourage historical research on the Chinese communities of British Columbia.\* It is intended therefore to be suggestive rather than conclusive. I hope to interest students of British Columbian history in the sociological and historical problems arising from the presence of a Chinese population and its relations with the other settlers of this province for, despite the importance of the Chinese in the building of British Columbia, little scholarly attention has been directed towards this group.<sup>1</sup> However, before turning to a sociological examination of Chinese history in BC, it may be useful to examine in some detail the provenance of the Chinese in Canada with a view to understanding their emigration in such large numbers.

With very few exceptions, overseas Chinese throughout the world come from two provinces in southeastern China — Fukien and Kwangtung — and except for a handful of immigrants from north China, the Chinese in North America are from Kwangtung Province, almost all of them from a small region southeast of Canton only thirty miles in radius. Southeastern China is a region of cultural and linguistic diversity — at least six different Chinese languages are spoken in Kwangtung Province alone. Nearly all the Chinese in North America, however, speak Cantonese, albeit in several dialects, and of the more than 80,000 Chinese in Canada

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<sup>1</sup> One study, David T. H. Lee's recent book *The Chinese in Canada* (1968), is in Chinese and is therefore inaccessible to most Canadian historians. However, some other sources (e.g., Bronsdon, Cheng, Lyman, and Willmott listed in the bibliography) are available, and there are scores of elderly Chinese living throughout the province whose memories, carefully assessed, could provide documentation for much of the life of the community.

today, probably fewer than 2000 are non-Cantonese.<sup>2</sup> Thus, unlike the countries of Southeast Asia, where there are major Chinese populations speaking five or more different languages, Canada's Chinese are culturally similar. Indeed, the only countries where there are more homogeneous Chinese populations are Great Britain, where almost all Chinese come from a still smaller area of Kwangtung near Hongkong, and Jamaica, where they are almost all Hakka speakers.

The tiny region with which we are concerned is composed of six counties, or *xian*. It is important to appreciate that even though these agricultural counties can be divided analytically into three regions — the rural Si-yi (four districts), the suburban Pan-yu near Canton City, and the Chung-shan in the delta of the Pearl River, an area that has been famous for commerce, piracy, and revolt for some centuries — the overseas Chinese were primarily peasant in origin. In fact, this part of the country fits our Western stereotype of traditional China: wet-rice agriculture, water buffalo pulling ploughs and harrows, and small villages housing rather large family units in compounds.<sup>3</sup> It was densely populated and dependent on intensive rather than extensive agriculture. Land was heavily capitalized because the farmer, in a constant struggle to increase his own productivity in order to improve his living or even to hold his own against usurers and landlords, invested labour and money in irrigation and fertilizer to compensate for the lack of additional arable land.

Professor Skinner has pointed out that the basic unit of traditional China was the market community, comprising a market town and its hinterland of villages (Skinner 1964: 196); each of these market communities contained about 7000 people. In the part of Kwangtung from which North America's Chinese emigrated, these communities were geographically small because of population pressure and intensive agriculture. Consequently, every peasant was within a mile or so of a market town and, more important, within several miles of a larger central market which served as the hub of several market communities. Because of this

<sup>2</sup> The other Chinese languages spoken by immigrants to Canada are Hakka, representing less than a hundred Chinese in Vancouver; a dialect of Hokkien spoken by about thirty immigrants from the village of Lundou in Chung-shan County; and Mandarin, spoken by some of the students who settled in Canada. The most recent immigrants, who are not treated in this paper, include speakers of Teochiu (from Swatow) and perhaps others of the languages now represented in Hongkong.

<sup>3</sup> Most of traditional Chinese society of the Yangtse and Yellow River basins does not fit this stereotype, for the staple crops in the north are millet and wheat, the draft animals are oxen, the lineages are less important in rural social organization, leaving the family more independent. For views of Cantonese traditional rural society, see Freedman (1958 and 1966), Potter (1967), Wakeman (1966), Barth (1964), and Yang (1959).

he had very direct knowledge of how his own market fitted into a larger market system which, in turn, was integrated into a system centred on Canton. Thus, he had first-hand knowledge of the commercial relations connecting his production to the world market and, unlike most peasants in traditional China and elsewhere, a good measure of commercial experience.

The large family is also part of the stereotype we have of traditional China. In fact, the average Chinese family was not much larger than the average Canadian family.<sup>4</sup> However, there was a strong value placed on maintaining a large family. In north China, the only people who could achieve this value were of the upper class, for only they had the property and resources to maintain a huge family under one roof. In south China, partly because of dense population and intensive agriculture but also because of a greater reliance upon kinship as an organizing principle, the peasant family was closer to the Chinese ideal than was the family in the north: agnatic relatives, sometimes two married couples and their children, were often part of a traditional southern Chinese household.

Even more important, social organization in southeastern China was based on family loyalties expressed in large kinship units, lineages, and clans. The lineage consisted of a collection of families related by male descent from a common male ancestor. The lineage, in turn, was related to other lineages by common descent from a more remote ancestor, and these solidarities were symbolized by common ancestral temples.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a whole network of kinship united families in this region much more intensely than in other parts of China; indeed, in southeastern China an entire village might have the same surname. Wives were sought from other villages, thus developing marriage links between villages and further extending the kinship network. As well as serving ritual functions in ancestor worship, these lineages had many economic functions, often owning land as a corporation; for example, in Shun-de, 60 per cent of the land was owned by lineages (Freedman 1966: 32). Welfare and education also were often matters of lineage concern.

Another aspect of this part of China which should be noted was the presence of secret societies as a legitimate part of local social organization. Dissidence, expressed in what has been described as a ritual of rebellion, often found a focus in secret societies. While this was not an uncommon

<sup>4</sup> See Olga Lang's important study of the Chinese family which indicates the average family size in 1934 was 5.5 (Lang 1946, 147). The average Canadian family consisted of 3.9 persons in 1966.

<sup>5</sup> Freedman has ably analysed the nature of lineage organization in southeastern China (Freedman 1958 and 1966).

pattern throughout China, the extent of their institutionalization in Kwangtung seems to have been greater.

The Canton area has been a hotbed of political movements from long before the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), through Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang and the beginnings of the Communist Party, to the ultra-leftists of the Cultural Revolution. Political instability is revealed as a reason for emigration in the stories of the emigrants themselves. In 250 biographies of elderly Chinese men which I collected in Cambodia, "confusion in the interior" was a common reason for leaving the homeland. From the emigrants and from accounts available elsewhere (e.g., Wakeman 1966), one gets the impression that throughout the past century in Kwangtung, when there was not outright rebellion or revolution (as in 1850-64, 1910-12, 1943-49), bandit groups were moving across the interior towards Canton or retreating from it, causing chronic conditions of war.

Besides political disorder the peasants around Canton also experienced acute poverty, not only because of the land shortage, but also because there was a serious and related problem of landlordism. At first glance, the issue of landlordism seemed to be tempered by the fact that much land was owned by lineages, but within the lineage itself the wealthier members were clearly in control of the resources, while the poorer peasants were exploited by their own kinsmen (Freedman 1958: 74).

Of course, there was no part of traditional China where the peasants did not suffer from economic hardship and certainly no part of China in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century where political unrest was not endemic. Although one can perhaps argue that peasants in the area around Canton suffered more intensely, two factors provide the ancillary explanations that distinguish this area from the rest of China, for they caused a diaspora rather than a solution to these internal problems. One was the fact that the peasants were themselves clearly aware of market enterprise and therefore possessed a business acumen which was exportable. Although the peasant could not very well export his agricultural talents unless there was land to go to, he could export his commercial experience with the confidence that wherever he sought his fortune he could enter into business. The other important factor was the presence of a lineage system, which made it possible for an individual man to leave without causing hardship at home. In north China if a peasant wished to emigrate he left behind him a wife who could not manage the farm and family without him. In southeastern China an emigrant left behind him a family embedded in and supported by a lineage in which other men could take over some of his functions. Thus, individual men were ex-

pendable and, faced with the alternatives of continuing hardship in China or the tantalizing possibilities depicted in the stories of returned travellers of the fantastic riches to be had in "the Golden Mountain" of North America, many of them chose to emigrate.

One may wonder why the Chinese in North America come from only this very small part of Kwangtung Province. The answer lies in what has been described as "chain immigration": migration which tends to follow the patterns set down by earlier settlers who spread the word to relatives at home, thereby bringing migrants to the same parts of the world. Migration has proceeded from Shantung Province to Japan, from Amoy to the Philippines and Indonesia, from Swatow and Amoy to Malaysia, from Swatow to Thailand and Cambodia, from Canton to Vietnam, and from this small area southeast of Canton to North America, New Zealand, and Australia. This tendency was reinforced by Canadian immigration laws, which at times permitted immigration of Chinese only if they were immediate relatives of already settled immigrants.

Furthermore, the Chinese emigrant left China with the intention of maintaining solid contacts, for rather than cutting himself off from his homeland or uprooting his family from its village, he remained a member of an on-going social unit—the lineage—whose fortunes he went abroad to enhance. He left in order to remit whatever savings he could afford to aid his family in China. In effect, he left to sojourn elsewhere, with the clear intention of returning to his home, of supporting it in the meantime, and of eventually being buried in his village. This is, of course, in keeping with the traditional Chinese view that land is the only real wealth and that commerce is merely a means to wealth. Thus, a commercial enterprise is built in order to accumulate liquid capital with the aim of buying land. However, when a Chinese sets up his own business abroad, this view is modified; he is in a new environment with an enterprise he has built himself, and his life goals may change. Consequently, there is today considerable variation among Canadian Chinese businessmen in their identification with China, and the connection is bound to dwindle in the second and third generations born away from China.

Let me now turn to a brief overview of the history of Chinese in British Columbia. These Chinese see their history in this province somewhat differently than I, since I am interested primarily in the sociological perspective. Mr. Foon Sein, who is writing a history of the Chinese in Canada, has suggested that there are five distinct stages in this history: the very early period, 1848-1881; the "railroad epoch," 1881-1901; the time of great immigration, 1901-1923; the "dark ages," 1923-47, follow-

ing the total prohibition of immigration; and finally, the "renaissance," 1947 to the present, when the community has experienced a resurgence through renewed immigration. In contrast, I prefer a periodization based on the development of Chinese community organization: the prehistory up to 1858; the origins of Chinese community in the gold rush, 1858-80; the railroad era, 1880-1900; reaction, 1900-23; consolidation, 1923-47; and growth and conflict, 1947 to the present.

For lack of a better date, the prehistory of British Columbia's Chinese community can be said to begin in 1848 with the arrival in San Francisco of the first Chinese. I do not know the subsequent date when the first Chinese arrived in the British colonies north of California (perhaps 1858), but there are two events, one historical and one legendary, that refer to even earlier contact between China and this area. One of these, an expedition organized by Captain John Meares, brought fifty Chinese workers to Nootka Sound in 1788 to build a fort. The fort was later destroyed by the Spanish, and the group of Chinese, having been enlarged by new arrivals in 1789, disappeared. Some amateur anthropologists argue that one can see traces, both genetic and cultural, of this early Chinese settlement in the surviving Indians of the area, but I have not seen this demonstrated convincingly. Legend refers to a Chinese monk, Fa Hsien, whose travels abroad during the third century AD are recorded in the annals of Chinese history. I have heard Chinese state that Fa Hsien reached the Western hemisphere and that China is responsible, through this missionary, for all the civilizations of the new world (Aztec, Mayan, and Inca) as well as for much Northwest Coast art, but this is a hypothesis that is difficult to support.<sup>6</sup> In any case, neither of these events contributed to the origins of the Chinese community of today.

The first Chinese to arrive in San Francisco were wealthy merchants investigating the possibilities of trade with the burgeoning community there. They set up trading houses at this end of their Canton-based operations, which subsequently branched northward to Victoria. One of these houses, the Taisun Trading Company, issued its own notes printed on pieces of silk, a currency that was accepted as tender far beyond the Chinese community because it had the confidence of the non-Chinese in Victoria. However, there was no large-scale Chinese settlement until the gold rush brought greater numbers into the northwest.

The Cariboo gold rush produced a settlement at Barkerville (whose population has been estimated variously from five to twelve thousand

<sup>6</sup> Fa Hsien, of course, travelled west, not east, from China. There is no basis in his record or in the commentaries for an assertion that he visited North America.

people in the early 1860s), the largest city west of Chicago and north of San Francisco at the time. Of these, some three to five thousand were Chinese, who came there from California, as did most of the prospectors.<sup>7</sup> The Chinese came primarily to provide those services needed by a population made up largely of single men with money to spend, such as cooking, washing, and growing vegetables. These occupations provided substantial incomes with little risk (beyond the violence endemic in that society). Somewhat later, as the mines increased in scale, Chinese also provided mine labour; some became independent miners themselves, often taking over claims which returned too little to interest the earlier prospectors. Cariboo folklore includes stories of Chinese labourers who dumped gold back into the waste piles then bought the claims when the miners thought they had finished them. However, even without subterfuge, it is probable that Chinese were working claims two decades after earlier miners had "panned out" because they were willing to work harder for smaller returns. In fact, the rules of a Chinese secret society deal with claim-jumping and other disputes which clearly indicate that by 1882 the Chinese were actively engaged in mining (Lyman, Willmott, and Ho 1964).

Another source of income for the Chinese in this period was jade from the Fraser Canyon, which other prospectors — Swedes, Germans, Englishmen, or Russians — passed by because they were unaware of its value. One of my informants stated that British Columbia was a major source of jade for China, with eight to ten tons being shipped each year during the 1880s (some of it, according to Artie Phair, amateur historian of Lillooet, in the coffins of Chinese being returned for burial in their homeland).

To the sociologist, the most important aspect of this period was the congregation of a large number of Chinese in one community in Canada and the consequent establishment in 1862 of the first association of Chinese in Canada, a secret society known variously at that time as Hung Sun Tong, Hung-men Hui, or Chi Gung Tong and now known in English as the Chinese Freemasons. This association ran a hostel and meeting hall in Barkerville which has recently been reconstructed using materials collected from it and similar halls in the area. In 1961 Mr. Les Cook, then in charge of the reconstruction, discovered a large rule board at nearby Quesnel Forks which we have dated at 1882 (Lyman, Willmott, and Ho 1964). Most of the rules have to do with life in the hostel, estab-

<sup>7</sup> The current research of Professor J. C. Lawrence of the University of British Columbia will shed more light on the provenance of Barkerville's inhabitants.

lishing a roster of jobs, ensuring that everyone tidied up his own dishes, setting nightly rates, and the like. Some of the rules, however, deal with peace in the Chinese community and establish rather impressive sanctions against antisocial behaviour among Chinese. For instance, the penalty for collaborating with "outsiders" in a dispute with a fellow member was the loss of one or both ears. The penalty for revealing secrets of the association to outsiders was one hundred and eight strokes (presumably with a bamboo rod). From these rules, there can be no doubt that the secret society represented a strong solidarity among the Chinese. Because of the need for protection from violence, it is likely that it was the only association among the Chinese at the time, and the records suggest that it had several branches in various towns in the Cariboo.

Meanwhile, Victoria was prospering as a result of the gold rush, "being transformed from a quiet English village into a busy commercial centre" (Ormsby 1958: 141). The gold rush was followed by the lumber industry, and then by the development of coal mining near Nanaimo. Robert Dunsmuir, a former employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, became resident manager of one coal company in 1864 (Ormsby 1958: 215), and thus began the fortunes of the Dunsmuir family, based upon "black gold." Dunsmuir and other managers of mining companies quickly discovered that they could hire Chinese labour to work under conditions and at wages that other miners would not accept. This led to a struggle which became one of the main issues of labour in British Columbia until 1928: the demand for the exclusion of Orientals from certain occupations, and indeed from the province entirely. In 1883, for instance, there was a great strike at the Wellington mine during which the Dunsmuirs hired Chinese from Victoria, who knew nothing about the issues, as scab labour to break the strike. Eventually the striking workers made only one demand: that Chinese be excluded from mining coal (Phillips 1967: 8). This and similar conflicts ultimately led the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council to pass a resolution in 1890 calling for the exclusion of all Orientals from British Columbia. This resolution remained official policy until 1919 when, under the influence of Mr. Ernest Winch and others, it was removed for five months, after which it again became official policy until late in the 1920s (Phillips 1967: 78-85).

Victoria itself, at the hub of the gold rush and other industries involving Chinese, quickly developed a large Chinese community living in a Chinatown of some proportions. One informed source told me that there were more Chinese than non-Chinese in Victoria during the 1860s, and that when Governor Kennedy arrived in Victoria in 1864 the first man



to shake his hand as he stepped off the boat was a Chinese businessman, part of a delegation from the 2000 Chinese said to be living there at the time (Cheng 1951: 36). Victoria's Chinatown attempted to offer the Chinese worker from the mines all the distractions he longed for, thus extracting from him whatever money he had intended to send or take back to China. At one time there were three separate Chinese opera houses playing Cantonese opera in Victoria, and gambling houses, opium shops, and brothels proliferated, along with restaurants and reading rooms.

In this bustling Chinatown, several Chinese associations were established. The same secret society which appeared at Barkerville organized a branch in Victoria, and it is interesting to note that throughout North America there seems to have been only this one secret society among the Chinese, originally organized in San Francisco and subsequently established in almost every Chinese settlement. Thus, unlike Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, the Chinese in North America were not factionally split among different secret societies. They were divided, however, into locality associations which recruited on the basis of place of origin in China. One of these associations emerged among the Chinese from each *xian*: Chung-shan, Pan-yu, Shun-de, Tai-shan, Kai-ping, Yen-ping, Hsin-hui. In San Francisco, these locality associations were called the "six companies," among which considerable conflict developed at times, producing what were called "tong wars" by the Californians. In Victoria, there is no record of violent conflict, perhaps because of the much smaller Chinese population. The locality associations looked after connections with the homeland by arranging trips in both directions, expediting remittances to relatives in China, and ultimately arranging for the disinterment and shipment of bones to be buried in China (after seven years' interment in Canada). They also provided clubrooms and hostel facilities for *landsmänner* passing through or resident in Victoria.

The next major change in the history of the Chinese came with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, 1880-86. Andrew Onderdonk, much the most ambitious of the contractors who undertook portions of the construction in BC, landed over 2000 Chinese labourers under contract at Yale in 1881; they were followed by many more, but the exact number is not known. By the time the railroad was completed to Vancouver in 1886, a small Chinatown had grown there, and it was immediately confronted with a large number of unemployed Chinese. Some Chinese assert that the Canadian government reneged on an agreement to pay return passage to China for contracted labour, thus causing

a serious problem of indigence in both Vancouver and Victoria. In the face of this problem, the Chinese organized their first community-wide association, the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA), or Chung-hua Hui-guan. This association, first founded in Victoria in 1884, undertook general welfare functions besides representing the Chinese community in its relations with governments and agencies at the municipal and federal levels. Since there was at this time no Chinese consul in British Columbia, such community association was the only protection the Chinese could muster against attacks, the most serious of which was a riot in Vancouver in 1887.

This period is one full of intriguing historical questions, some of which may be answered by diligent historians. For example, I have seen nothing on the life of the Chinese contract-labourers in the Fraser Canyon; the riot of 1887 is relatively obscure; and the beginnings of Chinatown in Vancouver along Dupont Avenue (now Pender Street) are as yet undocumented. Although none of this is within living memory, the examination of CPR archives (if such exist) and of various contemporary accounts might well shed light on this period of formation of the Vancouver Chinese community.

At the turn of the century, there began a period of reaction against the Chinese community which lasted for three decades. Of course, as early as 1879 some politicians in BC had spoken against Chinese immigration (Ormsby 1958: 280), and there had been various moves against them in the intervening years. At times, the Canadian government had attempted to stem the flow of immigrants by increasing the poll tax charged landing immigrants — in 1903 it was suddenly increased from \$100 to \$500. Four years later, the issue came to a head with the passing by the BC legislature of a Natal Act barring Oriental immigrants. It is true that at this time Christian and labour leaders seemed more concerned about Japanese than Chinese immigration, but in any event the Lieutenant-Governor refused to sign the bill, and this led to the founding of the Asiatic Exclusion League in the summer of 1907 (Ormsby 1958: 350). There followed a serious riot, on September 8, 1907, in which Vancouver's Chinatown was invaded and pillaged before the mob moved on to "Little Tokyo" to do the same. Unlike the passive Chinese, Japanese met violence with violence, barricading their streets and eventually routing their tormenters. These disturbances, led by prominent members of the Protestant clergy and the Knights of Labour, were investigated by the then Deputy Minister of Labour, W. L. Mackenzie King.

In August 1921, the Asiatic Exclusion League held a meeting which

brought together church leaders, businessmen, and veterans of the first world war with representatives of six trade unions and the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. The League issued a program calling for the abolition of all Oriental immigration and then began a campaign which culminated in the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1923, which so effectively barred immigration that only eight Chinese were able to get immigrant status between then and 1947, when the act was repealed.

During this period of reaction, the socialists in the Independent Labour Party provided the main opposition to the exclusionists; Ernest Winch's efforts in the VTLC was one of several efforts. Finally in 1928, the Canadian Labour Party split with the TLC on this issue, when it called for the enfranchisement of Orientals in BC. In 1935 the Liberal Party campaigned federally under the slogan, "A Vote for the CCF is a vote to give the Chinaman the same voting right you have! A vote for the Liberals is a vote against Oriental enfranchisement."<sup>8</sup>

From 1900 to 1920 the Chinese community itself was preoccupied with the revolution in China. Sun Yat-sen was touring overseas Chinese communities to gain support, both moral and financial, for his cause. He visited Vancouver and Victoria several times, and there are Chinese alive today who remember those visits and Sun's electrifying effect upon both communities. Sun Yat-sen declared that "the Overseas Chinese are the parents of the Revolution," by which he meant not only that they were the main source of money, but also that they provided the ideological direction for his party. Here in North America he was seeking the support of the secret society and got it. This organization, known as the Hungmen Hui or Chi Gung Tong, adopted the name Freemasons, not because of any relation with Freemasonry in the West, but because the name implied a legitimate secret society. In China Freemasons date back to the beginning of the Ch'ing dynasty (1644), when they organized secretly among Ming patriots against the foreign Manchus. Their slogan, "Overthrow the Ch'ing, restore the Ming," was reinterpreted slightly as "Overthrow the Manchu, restore Chinese rule," the essence of the original slogan somewhat modernized. As well as being a dynastic name, the word "ming" means bright, and Sun put this reading upon it. The Freemasons here mortgaged their buildings and organized campaigns, and amassed \$150,000 to support Sun. This and comparable gifts from Chinese in other countries made it possible for him to raise an army in Canton and carry through the revolt in 1911.

<sup>8</sup> Professor Phillips (1967) has documented the struggle against exclusion in the labour movement of British Columbia.

In Victoria, a small group of pro-Sun revolutionaries was organized by Seto More (Seto Ying-shek), for many years the most prominent Chinese scholar in British Columbia,<sup>9</sup> Mr. Wu Hsiang-ying, who later became a minister in Chiang Kai-shek's government, and Mr. Chu Chi-ngok, who is today one of the major poets in Vancouver's Chinatown.<sup>10</sup> After several years of writing and meeting, this group finally became the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) in BC in 1923.

From 1923 until 1947, when no Chinese immigration was permitted, the Chinese community consolidated around four kinds of associations to form a structure which, until very recently, characterized the Chinese community in BC. The Kuomintang and the Freemasons, fraternal associations to which any Chinese may belong if he is accepted for membership, were the major associations in the smaller towns.<sup>11</sup> Once the revolution had succeeded in its aims, those associations became somewhat separated from the politics of China and emerged as contending fraternal associations among the Chinese here. A strong antagonism developed between them, which the Freemasons claim resulted from the refusal of the new Nationalist government in China to honour its pledges to them of participation in the Republican government. Whatever the reasons, the two soon became organizational centres for two factions in each community, each with its own hall and activities. I have already mentioned the locality associations, which recruit on the basis of provenance. Obviously, these were mutually exclusive in membership, since a person from Tai-shan, for example, could join only the Tai-shan Locality Association, a person from Kai-ping could join only the Kai-ping Association, and so on. The third kind of association was the clan association, grouping all those Chinese with a common surname. All Lees belong (nominally) to the Lee Clan Association, all Setos to the Seto Association, and so on. The fourth kind of association was the community-wide association, such as the CBA of Vancouver or the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria.<sup>12</sup> Because these categories of associations recruit upon differ-

<sup>9</sup> Mr. Seto More collected an impressive library including many pamphlets and books. After his death in 1968 his heirs kindly donated this library to the University of British Columbia, where it is housed in the Asian Studies Library.

<sup>10</sup> A book of poems by Mr. Chu was published by the Chinese Times Publishing Company in a small volume which includes appreciations by many literary Chinese.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller discussion of these groups see my article, "Some Aspects of Chinese Communities in British Columbia Towns" (Willmott 1968).

<sup>12</sup> To complete the picture a residual category should be added comprising all other associations, such as opera societies, music clubs, and the like. See my article on Chinese associations in Vancouver (Willmott 1964).

ent criteria, it is easy to see that their membership lists cross-cut each other: a person from Kai-ping named Wong will belong to a clan association with Wongs belonging to other locality associations and will belong to a locality association with members of other clan associations. This mitigates against the development of serious cleavages within the community, for a dispute between two Chinese can usually be brought to the executive of an association to which they both belong. The associations thus provide what one scholar has described as "the warp and woof of associational structure" (T'ien 1953:10).

Unity within the Chinese community was further reinforced by the second world war, when the Chinese came together in support of the Chungking government. This war also improved their relations with the non-Chinese community, for the resident Chinese were seen by the majority for the first time as "our brave Asian allies" rather than as a sinister menace within our borders. The changing attitudes of non-Chinese led directly to the post-war situation in which the borders of the community, maintained by prejudice and discrimination as much as by the organization of the community itself, became somewhat blurred.

The post-war period of growth in the Chinese community began with the lifting of the immigration bar and the enfranchisement of the Chinese in 1947. Immigration was limited for over a decade to immediate relatives of residents in Canada — a limitation which, discriminatory as it was, produced a major increase in the Chinese population, part of it entering illegally using false identities. Many of these recent immigrants, coming from a much more modern China, found the traditionalist clan and locality associations of Chinatown anachronistic and refused to participate in them. Other Chinese, born in Canada and speaking English as their major language from the time they entered school, developed interests and friends outside the Chinese community and ceased to give any allegiance to Chinatown's associations. The result has been a deterioration of the political power of Chinese leaders and a consequent lack of clarity in the boundaries of the Chinese community.<sup>13</sup> Since Chinese are recognizable racially, total assimilation is impossible, of course, in marked contrast to the situation in Southeast Asia, where many Chinese have

<sup>13</sup> Along with the atrophy of power in Chinatown has gone a disintegration of the power wielded by Chinese associations in Vancouver and Victoria over Chinese communities elsewhere in Canada. Although several associations today claim to be national headquarters for similar associations across the country (and some for the whole continent), local chapters of clan and locality associations in fact operate quite independently today. I have not researched the nature of co-ordination between the various chapters of the Freemasons or the Kuomintang.

been completely assimilated into the host populations. For those Chinese in the penumbra of a Chinatown, an ambivalence develops between the individual's desire to declare his independence from Chinatown (a lower-class, foreign image) and his knowledge that he can never completely escape his Chinese identity.<sup>14</sup> As a result, sociological interest shifts from associational structure to questions of assimilation and identity, from the heart to the boundaries of the Chinese community.

In the face of a changed population and changed environment, the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver has attempted to remain paramount by adapting to the new conditions. In 1962 it reconstituted its ruling committee to include representatives from all the associations in Chinatown, at that time over eighty. However, it has been faced with a new political split within the community as a result of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. It is manifest generationally as well as politically and affects every extant association as well as produces new ones.

However, the scene today, complicated and contemporary, cannot yet be treated as history, and I do not propose to analyse it here. My object has been to excite some scholars about the possibilities of doing research among Chinese so that we can gain a better insight into the contribution of the Chinese to the building of this province and better understand our heritage. There are still alive many Chinese whose memories span half a century and whose recollections are therefore invaluable. In 1961, when I went to Barkerville with Professor Lyman and Mr. Ho, we visited an old Chinese who lived alone on the outskirts of Wells. During the course of the conversation, which was more inspirational than informative because his dialect and idiolect were almost unintelligible even to Mr. Ho, the old man went into the back room, where he rummaged among his things for several minutes, then brought out a bamboo carrying-pole, now polished and dark with age, with which he had carried across his shoulders the two bundles containing all his worldly possessions when he walked the Cariboo Trail sixty years before. Dozens of men, who like him have led fascinating lives, still live in Chinatowns today. I hope I have inspired some historians to record their stories before they leave us.

<sup>14</sup> One interesting study of this problem has been done by Miss Madeline Bronsdon, whose MA thesis treats with generational differences in Chinese families running grocery stores in Vancouver (Bronsdon 1965).

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