

Chinese Attempts to Discourage Emigration to Canada: Some Findings from the Chinese Archives in Victoria¹

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Institutional records are important sources of research materials because they usually provide new or additional information on past activities of communities which are associated with the institutions. It is known, for example, that before 1923 the provincial government of British Columbia tried very hard to restrict the number of Chinese entering Canada, but it is rarely heard that Chinese themselves in Victoria made similar attempts. The correspondence, circulars, minutes and other documentary records of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, established in 1884 in Victoria, indicate that the Association tried at least three times before 1915 to discourage people in China from coming to Canada and urged the Chinese government to restrict emigration.² The purpose of this paper is to reveal the findings from the study of the Association's archives concerning these attempts, in the hope that it will supplement our knowledge of the history of the Chinese in the province.

The decision of the Association to discourage Chinese emigration to Canada was partly influenced by the growing agitation against the Chinese by white labourers in the province. They viewed the Chinese as a menace to their livelihood because they could not compete with Chinese workers who could afford to work at reduced wages owing to their simple and easily satisfied needs, and lower standard of living. The clamour for restricting Chinese immigration finally led to the passing of the Immigration Act of 1885 by the Dominion government.³ This Act provided for a fifty dollar head tax to be paid by Chinese immigrants entering Canada. This temporarily appeased the provincial legislators. Five years later simmering hostility towards the Chinese began to boil again, as indicated by

¹ Acknowledgement is given to the Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Victoria, for supporting this research project.

² Lai, Chuen-yan, "The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria: Its Origins and Functions," *BC Studies*, No. 15, Autumn 1972, pp. 53-67. For brevity, hereafter the Association refers to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria.

³ *Statutes of Canada 1885*, 48-49, Victoria, Chap. 71, pp. 207-212.

two petitions sent to the provincial legislature in 1890. One was delivered by a group of workers in the city of Victoria who requested that "in all future contracts . . . for public works . . . a clause shall be inserted prohibiting the employment of Chinese labourers in any capacity."⁴ The other one came from the miners and residents of the mining districts of Nanaimo, Wellington and Comox, urging the government to "exclude Chinese from working underground in any of the collieries of this Province."⁵

Petitions of similar purport were presented from time to time to both the provincial and Dominion governments. In 1891, for example, over 70 petitions were presented to the Dominion parliament, declaring that in the opinion of the petitioners "the importation into Canada of Chinese labour is not in the best interests of the country and should be prohibited, and praying for such legislation as will have the effect of totally prohibiting the importation of Chinese labour into the Dominion."⁶ In 1897, petitions signed by citizens of Vancouver District, Nanaimo, Port Haney, Kaslo and Vernon, were sent to the Dominion parliament, complaining that the large influx of labourers from China had caused grave injury to the working class in the province.⁷ In 1899 it was reported that the average number of Chinese immigrants for the past three years was over 2,100 per year and that "this enormous influx, together with the present Chinese population of the province, has already driven working men of British race and blood out of many of the fields of labour, and threatens before long, if not stopped, to leave very little occupation remaining for the white labourer."⁸ These petitions indicated that the complaints were lodged mainly against the Chinese workers in the province, who then found it more and more difficult to get jobs as a result.

The prevalence of unemployment and the continuing influx of people from China had also vexed the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Between 1881 and 1884, nearly 16,000 Chinese entered British Columbia,⁹ many of them being brought over by contract to work on the Onderdonk section of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia. It was estimated that 3,510 of the 9,629 Chinese labourers in the province

⁴ *B.C. Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers*, 1890, p. 391.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁶ Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 1902, *Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada*, Sessional Paper No. 54, Vol. 13, Ottawa, 1902, p. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹ *Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence*, Ottawa, 1885, p. 398.

were engaged in railway construction in 1884.¹⁰ Upon the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 and the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway a year later, many Chinese were thrown out of work. With starvation staring them in the face, they entered almost every type of employment, as labourers in logging camps and coal mines, on ranches and farms, and in the fish-canning industry. When unemployed, they would drift back to Chinatowns and seek help from their relatives or associations.¹¹ While these associations already felt the increasing pressure of supporting their unemployed fellow-countrymen, people from China continued to arrive in the province in large numbers. During the two years of 1897 and 1898, a total of 8,345 Chinese landed in British Columbia.¹² Accordingly, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association decided to hold a meeting in April 1899, at which it was agreed that people in China should be informed accurately of the difficult economic conditions in Canada, and be discouraged from emigrating. The Association drafted a notice which was later duplicated and sent to China to be posted in many villages and cities in Kwangtung province. The content of the circular is translated as follows (Figure 1):

Notice of the Chinese Association

In recent years, the commerce and industry of Victoria have not been prosperous. Chinese are prohibited from underground work in the Nanaimo coal mines. Those gold mines that are still in operation are nearly all exhausted. The only means of earning a living here is to work in the fish-canning industry during the two fishing seasons — summer and autumn. Last year, each canning worker was paid some thirty dollars in advance, but this year, each could only get ten dollars or a little more, mainly because of a surplus of workers and a lack of jobs. At most, each worker could earn only some twenty dollars during the two fishing seasons. However, after the seasons are over, workers will be laid off in winter and spring, when it is bitterly cold, rainy and snowy. They can do nothing but sit idly and wait for the next fishing season.

The cost of living in a foreign country is very high. The rent and the price of daily necessities such as food and clothing in Victoria are ten times as much as those in China. The minimum expenditure per capita is five to six dollars per month or between sixty to seventy dollars per year. Therefore the annual income of ten to twenty dollars cannot cover the expenses. If

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

¹¹ Detailed discussions of Chinese voluntary associations are found in two articles by W. E. Willmott: "Some Aspects of Chinese Communities in British Columbia Towns," *BC Studies*, No. 1, Winter 1968-69, pp. 27-36 and "Chinese Clan Associations in Vancouver," *Man*, Vol. IXIV, No. 49, 1964, pp. 33-37.

¹² *B.C. Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers*, 1899, pp. 1383-4.

one is fortunate enough to have some relatives or friends in Victoria, he may rely on their support for a short while, but not for long. Those who know no one here will receive no help and will suffer from starvation and cold. It is impossible to sneak into the United States to seek a living because the frontier is strictly guarded. Even for those who have, by chance, succeeded in entering the United States, repatriation to China would be the sure outcome should they be caught by the American police. Therefore, many people who are unemployed and suffering from hunger have nowhere to go but to stay in despair in Victoria.

The foregoing narration is the genuine account of the difficulties and hardship of Chinese people in Victoria. In the last few months, there has been a continual arrival of about 700 to 800 of our fellow countrymen from Hong Kong. Many of them are unemployed, and loitering aimlessly in Victoria. Some of them said that they had heard that railroads were being built in Victoria and that new gold mines with rich reserves were discovered. In fact, the railroad has long been completed. Although there may be plans to construct branch lines, the government will employ white labourers only. Moreover, each of these branch lines is no more than about 20 to 30 *li* long.¹³ The construction work will last only a few months and require only a small labour force, say, some 100 people. With regard to the new gold mines in the northern part of British Columbia, they are about 1,700 miles (about 5,700 *li*) away from Victoria.¹⁴ The travelling cost from here to these mines is 500 to 600 dollars. They are situated in a bitterly cold area, covered with snow for a greater part of the year, and in a region which is rugged, precipitous and nearly inaccessible. Only Westerners dare go there. It has been known that many of them have died of cold or hunger. So far, none of the Chinese here have attempted to make a journey to this remote region. Even if we had the courage to make this trip, we would be hindered by the envious Westerners. It is therefore futile to think of setting out to the north to seek gold.

We have been living in Victoria for a long time and understand the hardships of the Chinese here. We cannot bear to keep our mouth shut while we see our fellow countrymen coming here, only to be plunged into a sea of trouble and sorrows. This is why we are sending this notice to inform you that if you wish to come here to look for a job, do not do so unless you are promised that you will be employed or supported financially after you arrive in Victoria. If you are not sure of this, never think of coming to Canada. If you do not take our advice, and are determined to come, you should bring along with you some extra money for emergencies. After you have paid for the fare to Victoria and the head tax, you should have an extra 30 to 90 dollars so that you will have money to pay for your board and lodging while you are still seeking work. Otherwise, you will find yourself in a terrible plight and have to sleep in the open with no job, no food, and no salvation.

¹³ One "li" (Chinese mile) is equivalent to 0.359 mile or 0.576 km.

¹⁴ The correct conversion is about 4,800 "li."

The 1899 circular evidently had no effect because within the first three months of the following year, 1,325 Chinese landed in Victoria.¹⁵ The outcry against the influx of Chinese led to the passing of the British Columbia Immigration Act in August 1900 which declared that it was unlawful for any person to enter the province who failed "to write out and sign in the characters of some language of Europe."¹⁶ Although the act was later disallowed by the Dominion government, the tempo of demands for restricting Chinese immigration was increasing.

After the turn of the century, anti-Chinese feeling was reflected in every election platform in the province. No politician could expect popular support if he did not attack the "heathen Chinese" and make a clamour for increasing the head tax. As early as 1892, a motion had been moved in the Legislative Assembly to increase the capitation tax from fifty dollars to five hundred dollars, which was "the lowest entrance duty that should be charged if Chinese are allowed to enter Canada at all."¹⁷ The motion was defeated by only one vote, but the Assembly finally passed a resolution in 1899 to ask the Dominion government to increase the per capita tax on Chinese immigrants to at least five hundred dollars.¹⁸ Eventually the Dominion government consented to the increase to one hundred dollars in July 1900,¹⁹ and later to five hundred dollars in July 1903.²⁰

The increase of the head tax and the continuing influx of people from China worried the Association. It was apprehensive that if China did not restrict their own emigration, sooner or later the Canadian government would completely terminate all Chinese immigration. The Association's 1899 circular was ineffective because in those days, many people, especially the villagers, were illiterate and might be unaware of the circular. Those who read it, might not have heard of the Association and therefore discount its advice. Moreover, the circular was not a government notice and therefore carried little weight in the villages. Accordingly, in March 1903, the Association sent a letter directly to the Chinese ambassador in Britain, begging him to advise the viceroy of Kwangtung province to post a notice urging people to refrain from coming to Canada (Figure 2). The letter said that

¹⁵ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration*, 1902, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Statutes of the Province of British Columbia, 1900*, Chap. 11, p. 36.

¹⁷ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, Session 1892*, p. 85.

¹⁸ *B.C. Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers*, 1899, p. 1385.

¹⁹ *Statutes of Canada, 1900*, 63-64, Victoria, Chap. 32, pp. 215-221.

²⁰ *Statutes of Canada, 1903*, 3 Edward VII, Chap. 8, pp. 105-11.

具稟人英屬加拿大中華會館董理賤商
 陳錦祥等伏廣東省大
 為華民擁至工礙工角乞恩轉電粵
 督出示自禁以經華民而安工商事宜
 英通商利航民貿易英屬利益均沾向
 安無異今以中國積弱之故而各國通商
 口岸概不准華人進口獨英屬加拿大有
 雖身親身如仍往未利便則華人出洋
 凡在商有一途自本年正月數水船轉
 擁而乘約計一月間多至于付人全往
 洋人界序震恐引語至者之慘無窮
 理名之者倘其病病之仍恐恐之
 料持未若奉行若則亦速願於外洋
 道途至地極遠行行旅之跡生險甚
 洋生為之場貨事為者性人心惶惶
 呼天歎地如恐恐非海通商善先行
 東順
 電達領慰佳憲士人街順興情恩
 准特電粵督若自身以海旅良而
 安工商不惟商善共戴鴻恩取海外
 備旅亦特頌甘棠而恒召伯無任馨香
 禱祝三玉莫負此社
 出使英國 欽差大臣 曹前 翁 恩 准 行
 光緒三十三年二月 日 酉

FIGURE 2. A letter of March 1903 sent by the Association to the Chinese ambassador to Great Britain, imploring him to telegraph to the viceroy of Kwangtung province to undertake a self-imposed restriction on emigration.

Many countries today are not open to Chinese immigration because China is weak. Canada is one of the few places where Chinese are still permitted to enter, although they have to pay a heavy head tax. Since January 1903, several ships loaded with Chinese arrived at Victoria, and within one month over a thousand had come. Because of this influx of our fellow-countrymen, the white people here trembled with fear and were talking of introducing laws to drive us away. If our fellow-countrymen continue to pour into Canada, we fear that eventually laws will be passed to exclude Chinese from immigration. This apprehension has been haunting us and forced us to resort to the help of Your Excellency. We beg Your Excellency to advise His Excellency the Viceroy of Kwangtung Province to put up a notice restricting emigration to Canada. The efforts of Your Excellency will console the overseas Chinese and pacify the unrest of the workers and mechants here.

The response from the Manchu government to the Association's request stated only that it would consider its suggestion carefully. So far as is known, the viceroy of Kwangtung province took no action to curtail emigration.

The imposition of the five-hundred-dollar head tax had an immediate effect, as indicated by the number of Chinese immigrants paying this tax. The number dropped abruptly from 4,719 in 1904 to 8 in 1905, and rose slightly to 22 in the following year (Figure 3).²¹ Having recovered from the initial shock, however, people in China considered that it still paid to come to Canada, where a labourer might earn more than thirty dollars per month, instead of only about two dollars in China. If he spent most of his lifetime in Canada, he would eventually save enough to pay his debts for his passage fare and head tax and to support his family in the village by remittance. This partly explained why, despite the heavy head tax, the number of immigrants grew to 1,482 in 1908.

In 1908 Mackenzie King, who represented Canada on the Joint Opium Commission at Shanghai, went to Peking and discussed the problem of Chinese immigration with Liang Tun-yen, the acting president of the Wai-Wu Pu.²² These meetings were significant because they marked the first direct official communication between China and Canada concerning the issue of Chinese immigration. King proposed that if China herself, like Japan and India, restricted emigration by the issue of a limited number of passports, Canada would remove the capitation tax on Chi-

²¹ *Canada Year Book, 1915*, Ottawa, 1916, p. 116.

²² *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 1, 1909-1918 Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, 1967, p. 598. The Wai-Wu Pu was a board for foreign affairs established in 1901. It was replaced by the Wai-Chiao Pu (The Foreign Ministry) after the Manchu government was overthrown in 1911.

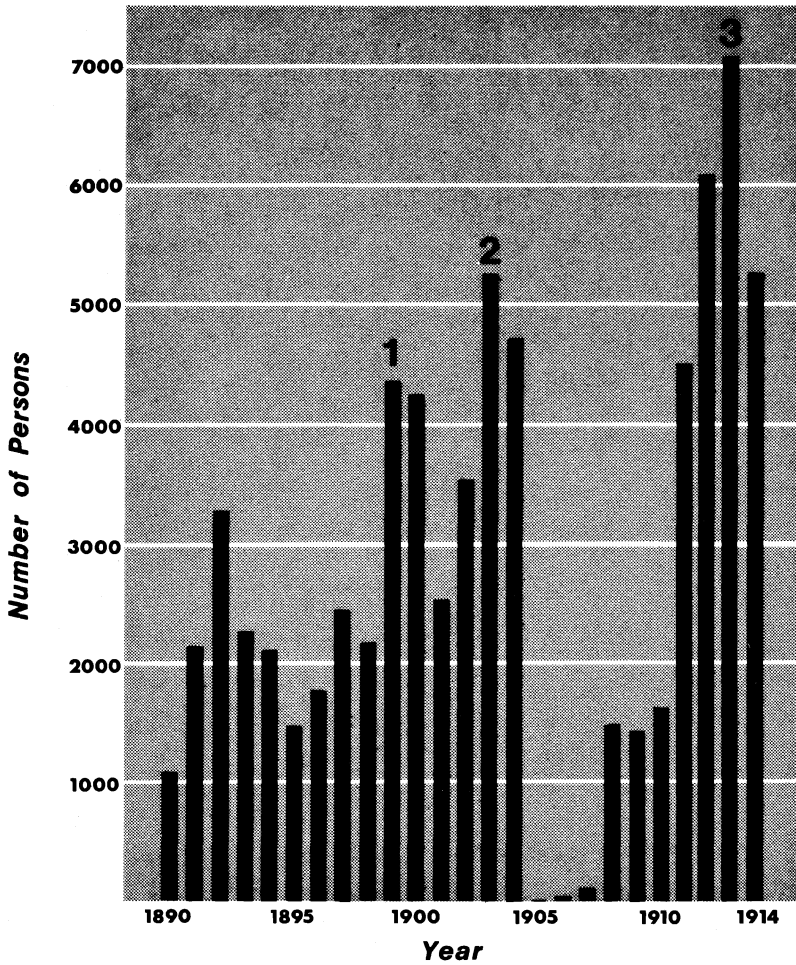


FIGURE 3. The record of Chinese immigrants paying the head tax, 1890-1914. Note that the three attempts of the Association to discourage emigration coincide with the three years of the largest number of immigrants. (Source: *Canada Year Book, 1915*, Ottawa, 1916, p 116).

本會
 再勸人不可到加拿大待事
 伯叔兄弟均望敝舍信其信事功於同胞勿謂加拿大非原因時局變
 遷工商皆置不惜良言以阻止者亦奉因胞以未深信者尚
 希深慮自尋煩惱也今加拿大政府有一例限明年三月止不許再
 入三北等語如有此說所謂未入者係指所度人而言不其非華人會
 也誠恐有人誤合聽人說以此藉口又恐權而乘機道知免信所
 為三變人皆納人又稅國時亦可來但為此示先期刻下僑胞若不信
 不知凡幾飢寒交迫時處非非甚苦且屋所能形容後以不容活位
 區區之心統於聲家并做尋身
 十二月信身

FIGURE 4. A circular drafted by the Association in December 1903, persuading Chinese not to migrate to Canada.

nese immigrants.²³ The ministers of the Wai-Wu Pu regarded the whole matter as so important that "it is consequently impossible to come to a definite decision at short notice as to how the matter should be treated."²⁴ They suggested that King "should return to Canada to bring forward to the Chinese Consul-General (who was being appointed) any matter which he may have for discussion. The Consul-General will refer to this Board (the Wai-Wu Pu) for instructions."²⁵ The evasive and indecisive attitude of the Manchu officials was partly attributable to the fact that they had had so many unhappy experiences in the past decades in signing unequal treaties with other foreign powers that they hesitated to accept King's proposal readily. Moreover, they might worry that the adoption of the system of restriction on emigration to Canada by means of passports might lead to similar demands by other nations such as Holland and Australia. It is also possible that the Manchu government was so fully occupied by internal political and economic problems that it was unable to direct attention to the matter. Inefficiency, irresponsibility, and red tape in government offices may also have been contributing factors to the failure in reaching an agreement with Canada while King was in Peking. As no policy was adopted to restrict emigration, Chinese continued to enter Canada in increasing numbers. Entries averaged about 1,500 per year between the period from 1908 to 1910, but they soared to over 5,000 in 1911, 6,000 in 1912 and 7,000 in 1913 (Table 1). A large proportion of the immigrants stayed in British Columbia, which had the largest Chinese population in the census years of both 1901 and 1911 (Table 2). The enormous flow of people from China prompted the Association to send another circular to China (Figure 4).

Another Circular Advising People Not to Migrate to Canada

Dear Uncles and Brothers,

The Association has already distributed a circular advising our fellow-countrymen not to migrate to Canada because commerce and industry are experiencing difficulties. Unfortunately, a large number of our fellow-countrymen continue to arrive. Their disbelief in our advice will bring nothing but trouble upon themselves. The Canadian government has recently announced that Asian people will not be permitted to immigrate into Canada after March 1914. The phrase "Asian people" refers to Indians and not to Chinese. We are afraid that you may be moved by rumours and decide to

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 602-604.

²⁴ "A communication of March 28, 1909, signed by Prince Ching and Ministers of the Wai-Wu Pu to Sir John Jordan, English Minister in China," *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 1, p. 605.

²⁵ *Ibid.*



FIGURE 5. A letter of December 1913 addressed to both Yang-Shu-yen, the Chinese Consul-General in Ottawa, and Lin Shih-yuan, the consul in Vancouver, requesting them to advise the Chinese government to temporarily prohibit Chinese workers from emigrating to Canada.

dash to Canada. This is why we are sending this circular to tell you the truth so that you will not be misinformed. As long as you are willing to pay a head tax, you are permitted to enter Canada. However, it is not advisable to come because innumerable overseas Chinese here are jobless and many are suffering from cold and hunger. They are so miserable that their anguish is beyond description. In a nutshell, it is better not to come. We hope you will understand our well-meant intention and listen to our advice.

December 1913.

The Association realized that its second circular, like the first in 1899, would have little effect if it did not have an official support. Although it received a poor response from the Manchu government in 1903, the Association hoped that the new National government established in 1912 might be more helpful. Therefore, the Association sent a letter to both Yang Shu-wen, the Chinese Consul-General in Ottawa and Lin Shih-yuan, the Consul in Vancouver (Figure 5), stating that

About five to six out of ten Chinese here are unemployed, and struggling miserably for survival. In view of this, the Association has distributed two circulars advising our fellow countrymen to refrain from coming to Canada. We have taken these actions because we think that it is better to restrict voluntarily our own emigration than to let other people terminate our immigration. It will be more effective if our government would promulgate a decree to prohibit Chinese workers from emigrating to Canada. If our government adopts this policy, the Canadian government will not find a pretext for terminating Chinese immigration.

The letter implored the consuls to convey the opinion of the Association to the central government of China.

Lin Shih-yuan, whose voice would have carried greater weight in China, declined to send a telegram to China himself, perhaps because he disagreed with the suggestions of the Association or did not wish to take on the responsibility for the matter. Instead, he suggested that a telegram in the name of various associations in Victoria should be sent to the civil magistrate of Kwangtung province, requesting him to put up a notice to persuade people to refrain temporarily from coming to Canada. The telegram drafted by Lin read as follows (Figure 6) :

Because of the decline of commerce and industry here, and the increasing oppression of Westerners, livelihood is becoming more difficult, and many are out of jobs. However, people from China continue to come. If too many are unemployed, it is unavoidable that some will degrade themselves by stealing and will bring disgrace on China and defame the overseas Chinese. The Chinese Association has distributed in Hong Kong thousands of copies of its circular advising the public to refrain from coming to Canada. As our



FIGURE 6. A telegram of 17 April, 1914 sent by eleven representatives of overseas Chinese in Victoria to the civil magistrate of Kwangtung province, requesting him to advise the district magistrates to discourage people from coming to Canada.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF CHINESE IMMIGRANTS, 1907-1914

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Number destined for British Columbia</i>
1908	1,719	39	126	1,884	1,554
1909	1,695	36	156	1,887	1,539
1910	1,866	58	232	2,156	1,948
1911	4,859	77	342	5,278	4,794
1912	5,776	80	391	6,247	5,480
1913	7,029	85	331	7,445	6,691
1914	5,230	89	193	5,512	4,679

SOURCE: *Report on Oriental Activities Within the Province*, Victoria, British Columbia, 1927, p. 6.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF CHINESE BY PROVINCES, 1901 and 1911

<i>Province</i>	<i>1901</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>Increase</i>
British Columbia	14,885	19,568	4,683
Ontario	732	2,766	2,034
Alberta	235	1,787	1,552
Quebec	1,037	1,578	541
Saskatchewan	41	957	916
Manitoba	206	885	679
Nova Scotia	106	134	28
New Brunswick	59	93	34
Prince Edward Island	4	6	2
Yukon Territory	7	0	-7
North West Territories	0	0	0
Total:	17,312	27,774	10,462

SOURCE: *Canada Year Book*, 1915, Ottawa, 1916, p. 117.

circular is not an official notice, it is not effective. We, the representative of overseas Chinese from eleven counties of Kwangtung Province, are imploring Your Excellency to advise the eleven district magistrates to post notices appealing to people to refrain from coming to Canada because of her extreme economic difficulties. Also, please advise them not to listen to the agents from Hong Kong, otherwise they will plunge into a sea of sorrow when they arrive here.²⁶

The telegram, dated April 17, 1914, was signed by eleven representatives of overseas Chinese coming from the counties of Hsinling, Hsinhui,

²⁶ In the early days, agents from Hong Kong went from time to time to villages and cities in South China, where they recruited labourers, brought them to Hong Kong and shipped them to the countries where they were required. In many cases the labourers did not know where they were going.

Chungshan, Kaiping, Nanhai, Panyu, Tsengchen, Enping, Tungkwan, Shunte, and Hsinon.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Consul-General in Ottawa had also begun to discuss with the Canadian government the question of restricting Chinese immigration into Canada. One June 22, 1914, he sent a letter to the prime minister, suggesting that (1) China was willing to restrict the number of Chinese immigrants to 1,000 persons per year or such greater number as the Canadian government might think proper; (2) the head tax of \$500 should be discontinued; (3) Chinese should enjoy the same rights and privileges while in Canada as the subjects of the most favoured nations; (4) if Chinese labourers were brought in to expedite any work or enterprise in Canada, and if their number were in excess of the number stipulated by the agreement, the Chinese government would cooperate with the Canadian government to remedy the situation; and (5) the Chinese Immigration Act should be repealed and Chinese should be governed by the general Immigration Act of Canada, which applied to all other nations.²⁷

The Canadian government rejected the first suggestion because it was thought that "the limit set by the Chinese Consul is larger than should be considered."²⁸ It could not accept the third proposal because Canada "would very likely be put in the position of having to veto provincial legislation such as that introduced by the Saskatchewan and Ontario parliaments prohibiting the employment of white girls by Chinese and Japanese employers."²⁹ As no satisfactory arrangement was made and the five-hundred-dollar head tax failed to check immigration, Chinese were finally excluded from entering Canada by the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923.³⁰

The few items from the Chinese archives translated in this paper throw some light on the economic hardship and the prevalence of unemployment among the Chinese in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They also indicate that people in China were ignorant of the situation and continued to emigrate in large numbers. This prompted the Association to make at least three attempts, which coincided with the three years of the heaviest inflow of Chinese immigrants between 1890 and 1914. Since most of the immigrants were poor, un-

²⁷ *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 1, pp. 651-652.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 653.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Statutes of Canada, 1923, 13-14* George V. Chap. 38, pp. 301-315.

skilled workers, they incensed local white labourers and not only aggravated the difficult economic situation but also made life more difficult for local Chinese merchants to whom the white workers were not strongly antagonistic. The Association which the local merchants led had to protect those already established in Canada. Therefore, apart from their increasing concern for the unemployed poor, protection of their self-interest might also be a factor motivating the Association to discourage people from coming to Canada, and to suggest to the Chinese government the policy of voluntary restriction on emigration.

The archives also manifest the important role played by the Association in Chinese society in Canada. Before the establishment of the Chinese consulate in 1909, the Association functioned as a consulate in Canada, protecting the interests of local Chinese and communicating their opinions to the Chinese government. Since it was not a government office, however, its words did not carry much weight back in China. Without proper support from the government, the efforts of the Association to solve the Chinese immigration problem resulted in frustration and disappointment.

In retrospect, the Manchu officials missed a rare opportunity to talk seriously with Mackenzie King when he approached them in 1909 and asked them to follow the system adopted by Japan and India, which had undertaken the restriction of their own immigration. King's short stay in Peking was critical because negotiations might have been easier at that time than in later years, when the clamour for terminating Chinese immigration became louder and more widespread in Canada. Had the Manchu government taken up the suggestion of the Association as early as 1903 and entered into arrangements with Canada in 1909 under which China would restrict her emigration in return for the removal of the capitation tax, the eventual exclusion of Chinese from Canada might have been avoided.