WE ARE CHINESE CANADIAN:
THE RESPONSE OF VANCOUVER’S CHINESE
COMMUNITY TO HONG KONG IMMIGRANTS, 1980-1997

by

Julianne Rock
Bachelor of Arts Honours, Queen’s University, 2003

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
In the
Department
of
History

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Spring 2005

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Approval

Name: Julianne Rock
Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Research Project: We are Chinese Canadians: The Response of Vancouver's Chinese Community to Hong Kong Immigrants, 1980-1997

Examing Committee:
Chair: John Craig
Associate Professor, Department of History

______________________________

Jacob Eyferth
Senior Supervisor
Assistant Professor, Department of History

______________________________

Janice Matsumura
Supervisor
Assistant Professor, Department of History

______________________________

Hugh Johnston
Internal Examiner
Professor, Department of History

Approved: March 29, 2005
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Abstract

This project examines Vancouver’s Chinese Canadian community in light of the increase of Hong Kong Chinese immigration to Canada in the 1980s and 1990s. It illustrates how the term “Chinese Canadian” was claimed by a group of established Canadians of Chinese descent, as a means to articulate a distinct cultural identity in contrast to the new Hong Kong Chinese immigrants, who were not well received by Vancouver residents. It explores how media and institutions, such as the Chinese Cultural Centre, became outlets for the established Chinese community to present their distinctly “Canadian” identity; while revealing the inherent problems associated with the essentialist term, “Chinese Canadian.” Furthermore, this paper discusses why the new Hong Kong Chinese immigrants were not received into the existing Chinese community and what effect this may have had on both the new immigrants and the established community.
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Introduction

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Vancouver received a high influx of Hong Kong immigrants due to the anticipated 1997 handover of Hong Kong back to Mainland China. The large increase and visual presence of Hong Kong Chinese began to create tensions between “white Vancouverites,” angered by what they saw as the immigrants’ lack of respect for Canadian values and culture, and the established Chinese community. Due to misconceptions concerning Vancouver’s “Chinese community,” many established Canadians of Chinese descent were incorrectly identified as belonging to the same category as the new Hong Kong Chinese immigrants, and were at times on the receiving end of the intensifying prejudice.

The relationship between established Chinese Canadians and Hong Kong Chinese during the 1980s and 1990s in Vancouver has not been thoroughly analyzed. Nor have the actions and agenda of the Chinese Cultural Centre, a leading Chinatown organization with wide-range support from Chinese merchants and influential individuals been analyzed in light of the situation that developed over those two decades. Katharyne Mitchell’s article, “Transnational Subjects: Constituting the Cultural Citizen in the Era of Pacific Rim Capital,” focuses on Hong Kong immigrants and their relationship with “white” Vancouverites, but pays little attention to the interaction between Hong Kong immigrants and other members of the Chinese community. Kay Anderson’s Vancouver’s Chinatown explores the issue of Chinatown as racially defined space. Although enlightening, the work does not discuss the internal
dynamics and structure of the Chinese community. The Vancouver Chinese are portrayed as being continually acted upon by others without any agency of their own. Wing Chung Ng’s *The Chinese in Vancouver* extensively explores the relationship between different generations of Chinese Canadians in Vancouver, but his analysis stops short of the arrival of wealthy Hong Kong Chinese to Vancouver. The scholarly material that has thus far been produced has greatly assisted in the writing of this project. Where it leaves off, this project begins.

This project explores the theme of Vancouver’s Chinese community as imagined by both Chinese Canadians and others. In the past, Chinatown was the focal point for the community, it was the place where people lived and worked together and fought together for aims they deemed central to the community’s continuity. Since the 1970s, however, Chinatown’s role within the community has shifted. People moved away from the area, businesses established themselves in different neighbourhoods, and new Chinatowns in surrounding cities began to form. Yet, although Vancouver’s Chinatown lost its role as the sole home for the Chinese community in Vancouver, organizations established in the area and tied to its history remained prominent in the community during times of instability caused by the negative reception of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants.

The Chinese Cultural Centre (CCC) is one such organization. Opened in 1980 and funded by the Canadian government, Chinese merchants and other supporters, the Centre sponsors an extensive array of cultural programs and events. It was established at a time when upward mobility and urban expansion began to undermine the social cohesion of the old Chinatown. Since its founding, the CCC has commanded the
interest of various groups within the Chinese community. When proposals for its construction began in the early 1970s, the early immigrants, the Canadian-born and the post-war Chinese immigrants were all actively engaged in the process. By the late 1980s and 1990s, the Centre and its initiatives were still managed by its initial founders. When, in response to the new wave of Chinese immigration in the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream society began to question the authenticity of the established Chinese communities as “true” Canadians, the Chinese Cultural Centre began to propagate a “Chinese Canadian” identity, based to a large degree on the experiences and struggles of the older established Chinese community, to the larger Vancouver community and the newly immigrated Chinese.

“Chinese Canadian” became a viable identity in the 1970s with the introduction of Canadian “multi-culturalism,” the recognition of the People’s Republic of China by the Canadian government and changing popular perceptions of the Chinese community. The inherent problem with the term is that it essentializes the identity of all Canadians of Chinese descent as being a hybrid of an essentialist “Chinese” identity and an equally essentialist “Canadian” identity. However, the term is employed throughout this paper because Canadians of Chinese descent lay claim to this term. Multi-culturalism is enshrined in Canadian law and recognition of ethnicity is often rewarded with funding from the government to further promote cultural awareness and diversity. The introduction of a “Chinese Canadian” identity in the 1970s ultimately unified an otherwise diverse ethnic community. The term granted legal rights and recognition of the community within Canadian society on a level that did not previously exist. It “advanced the claim of the Chinese minority to be Canadian and at the same time
embedded a Chinese cultural component as its defining and enriching characteristic. Yet, although the category is theoretically open to all Chinese in Canada, in the 1980s and early 1990s, groups within Vancouver's "Chinese Canadian" community claimed the term for themselves and refused to extend the label to new Hong Kong Chinese immigrants due to the negative response the incoming group provoked upon arrival.

Though Chinese had lived in Canada since the 1850s, a distinct Chinese Canadian identity - in the sense that one can simultaneously be Canadian and Chinese and that becoming more Canadian does not necessarily distract from one's Chinese identity - became viable only with the introduction of multi-culturalism in the 1970s. Chinese Canadians as a category include the following groups: early immigrants, tusheng (Canadian-born Chinese), post-war immigrants and post-1984 immigrants. Early immigrants, defined as those entering Canada before 1923, differed culturally from their own Canadian born children and from their relatives who reunited with them after 1947. Canadian-born Chinese, also known as tusheng or "local born," thought of themselves as different from their China-born parents and peers because of their Canadian birth and identification with western society through language, education and social customs. In turn, the post-1947 immigrants identified themselves as distinct from both the elders, who they saw as too traditional, and the tusheng, who they believed had lost their "Chineseness" through assimilation. The term tusheng encompasses all Canadian born Chinese; however, this paper limits the definition to those born in the 1920s to 1950s.

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Within each of these categories, internal differences exist. However, this paper investigates more specifically how established Chinese Canadians (i.e., the tusheng and the post-war immigrants; to a lesser extent the aging pre-war immigrants, whose once uncontested leadership was being challenged in the 1970s by the two other groups) reacted as a group to the influx of new "Chinese Canadians," the Hong Kong Chinese. It investigates the construction "Chinese Canadians" as an imagined community through the discourses of media, neighbourhood associations and community discussions, and in direct relation to the messages being transmitted by the Chinese Cultural Centre.
Early Chinese Immigration to Vancouver

Large-scale Chinese immigration to Canada began in 1858 with the Fraser River gold rush. Before this time, from 1847 to 1852, thousands of Chinese emigrants already entered the United States and South America in search of the fast fortunes that were rumoured to be had by those who had gone ahead.² Labourers in China’s southern provinces were facing mass unemployment and starvation as the result of the Taiping Rebellion, while others were feeling the effects of the Opium Wars on China’s economy.³ The factors that structured Chinese emigration – the rural origins of migrants, the experience of poverty and violence, the involvement of gangs and self defence associations in the recruitment process – also structured the image of Chinese migrants who were perceived by the dominant “white” Canadians as poor and threatening.

Vancouver’s Chinatown dates back to 1885. Before the announcement that the Canadian Pacific Railway would extend its western terminus to the soon to be incorporated City of Vancouver, there were reportedly 114 Chinese living along the Burrard Inlet, among them merchants, cooks, laundry men, restaurant workers and labourers employed at the Hastings Saw Mill.⁴ Shortly after the Canadian Pacific Railway announcement in 1885, a small settlement of Chinese established themselves

⁴ Ng, 10.
on the southern fringe of the emerging city centre just north of False Creek. The "Chinatown" that emerged was an enclave of businesses, residences, clan associations, restaurants and other facilities set up to meet the needs of Chinese migrants. Small in size at first, Vancouver's Chinatown would grow to become one of the largest Chinese settlements in Canada by the early 1900s.

At the same time the Chinese settlement in Vancouver was growing, so too was anti-Chinese legislation. Beginning in 1885, the Canadian government under Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald established the first in a series of head taxes aimed to discourage further Chinese immigration to Canada. Starting at $50 in 1885, the head tax was raised to $100 in 1901, and then $500 in 1903. With these discriminatory laws in place, many male Chinese migrants could not afford to bring their wives and children with them. It should be remembered that most of the Chinese who were emigrating from China were fleeing from poverty. Fifty dollars would have been a large sum of money for a Chinese migrant labourer to pay for his own admission to the country, let alone that of his wife and children. What resulted from the head tax laws were the long years of bachelor societies within the Chinese communities, which white settlers took as further evidence of the Chinese migrants' unwillingness to integrate into Canadian society.

The anti-Chinese sentiment did not end with the discriminatory head tax laws. In 1923 the Chinese Immigration Act, which barred Chinese workers from entering the

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5 Ibid., 10.
6 Ibid., 11.
7 Madeline Hsu's *Dreaming of Gold, Dream of Home* provides an alternative explanation for the bachelor societies that prevailed in Chinese communities outside China, by arguing that overseas Chinese intended, or at least held the dream, of returning one day to China.
country, was enacted. Although the Chinese found ways around the discriminatory legislation and some still managed to enter into Canada, the Chinese population began to dwindle in the following decades. Some returned to their wives and families in China, while others remained; yet either way, the communities grew smaller as the population aged and failed to replenish itself. Chinatown as people knew it was disappearing. The post-war Chinatown that emerged reflected the changing demographics in the Chinese community. The tusheng and new migrants continued to battle against stereotypes that had less to do with them than with pre-war Chinatown. In 1947 the Chinese Immigration Act was repealed by Canadian parliament, finally permitting the reunification of families split between Canada and China. However, only the wives and children (under the age of eighteen) of those already living in Canada were permitted to enter. The law changed in 1950 to allow children up to the age of twenty-one to enter, and then again in 1955 to allow in children up to the age of twenty-five. It was not until 1967 however, with the introduction of the point system, that Canada’s immigration policy completely ceased its discriminatory practices against the Chinese.

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\[8 \text{ Ng, 19.}\]
Vancouver’s Chinatown and Its Community

In 1972, at a Wong’s Benevolent Association dinner, dignitaries from the municipal, provincial and federal levels pledged to support the proposal of a cultural centre for the Chinese community. In 1973, the Chinese Cultural Centre of Vancouver was founded with the support of the Canadian government, 53 community organizations and enthusiastic individuals. In 1974, the Centre was registered as a non-profit charitable organization, and finally in 1980, after a decade of toil, the first building – the administration and education complex – was completed. The idea of a cultural centre for the Chinese community was not new in 1972. Citizens within the community had suggested this throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but what made the proposal feasible in 1972 were the recent battles that had been fought and won by the Chinese community against city developers wishing to rezone areas of Chinatown and the surrounding area. In the wake of these crises, the Chinese community united together against city developers. A cultural centre then would presumably uphold and expand the feeling of unity among Chinese Canadians within Vancouver’s Chinese community.


Ng, 109.
Ibid., 109.
Ibid., 13. Chee Kung Tong renamed itself Chinese Freemasons in 1920, though they had no connections with established Masonic institutions.
arriving in Canada depended on surname associations, district societies and voluntary associations such as the Chee Kung Tong to find employment and housing.\textsuperscript{13} The organizations also provided a social life for the men, as well as a connection to their families back in China. Over the years, numerous organizations and associations began to appear in Chinatown. In order to have one spokesperson for the community, in 1918 the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA) declared itself a representative of all Chinese by allotting seats on its executive committee to native place organization members.\textsuperscript{14} In this way, the CBA consisted of representatives from the various organizations uniting together for the benefit of the larger community. It was natural for the CBA to take on this role since it was the oldest and most influential Chinese association in existence at the time. The earliest branch of the CBA, then called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, was established in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1884. Unlike the other associations and organizations, the CBA functioned primarily as an advocate for Chinese immigrants, protecting them to the best of its ability against racist legislature and poor social conditions, and helping immigrants in need.\textsuperscript{15} The CBA had close ties to political groups in China through its affiliation with Chinese kinship, business, political, religious and social associations, but its primary role was to look after the interests of the Chinese in Canada.

The associations and organizations of Vancouver’s Chinatown had little to offer the \textit{tusheng} and the new immigrants of the post-1947 era. They operated in the interests of the early migrants who saw little reason for modification, since there were so few new immigrants or children entering the community before this time. In the 1950s, \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 15. \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 15. \textsuperscript{15} Chan, \textit{Gold Mountain}, 86.
when more Chinese immigrants were coming to Canada as the result of changes to immigration laws, and the children of the early migrants, the tusheng, were either in their adolescence or beyond, the need arose for new organizations that reflected the varied interests of these groups. By the 1950s, opportunities for Canadian-born Chinese were expanding. The ratio of Canadian-born Chinese within the larger Chinese population was increasing, as can be seen in Figure 1, thereby allowing them to become more vocal and assertive as a group. In contrast to their parents, more Canadian-born Chinese were attending university, establishing themselves in professional white collar jobs and building up social lives outside of Chinatown. In addition to the English language skills that the Canadian-born possessed, provincial laws were changing to allow Chinese to enter professions that had previously been barred to them. Ultimately, their greater experience and comfort level with Canadian customs as well as the increasing openness of Canadian society allowed the local born to build up careers and lives beyond Chinatown and the traditional occupations of their elders.¹⁶

Post-1947 immigrants in their adolescence and beyond were also unable to identify with the existing Chinatown organizations due to their own generational experiences. Like the Canadian-born Chinese, the number of post-war immigrants within the Chinese community was also expanding, as seen in Figure 2. In comparison to the older generation, the younger post-1947 immigrants “usually had a better Chinese education, more urban experience in China and Hong Kong prior to their arrival, and higher expectations concerning their futures in Canada.”¹⁷ Therefore, the older, more established Chinatown associations, such as the CBA and the Chinese Freemasons

¹⁶ Ng, 41.
¹⁷ Ibid., 29.
maintained their role within Chinatown affairs, but by the 1950s Canadian-born and post-war immigrants were slow to join.\textsuperscript{18}

Figure 1

![Graph showing the ratio of Canadian-born Chinese within Canada's total population 1931-1961.]


The post-war immigrants and the \textit{tusheng} did not become involved in each other's activities. Post-war immigrants instead established organizations that focused on arts, culture, athletics, and recreation. The Hai Fung Club, established in 1956 and active until the 1970s, promoted "higher entertainment" such as music, literature, photography, painting and table tennis. The Chinese Youth Association, established in 1954, exhibited a leftist ideology.\textsuperscript{19} It supported Mainland China and the communist system, much to the dismay of other ethnic Chinese. Many other short-lived

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 33-37.
organizations were established in the 1950s to capture and reflect the interests of the post-war immigrants as distinct from both the older generation and the *tusheng*.

Figure 2

![Estimated population percentage of three groups within Vancouver's Chinese Community](image)


Similar to the post-war immigrants, the *tusheng* also created new associations and clubs. In contrast to first-generation and post-war immigrants, the *tusheng* emphasized their "Canadian" or dual identity. Examples include the Chinese Veterans Association and the Chinatown Lions Club, two of the earliest Chinese Canadian associations. The Chinese Veterans Association consisted of Chinese WW II soldiers, while members of the Chinese Lions Club came from professional and business backgrounds.\(^\text{20}\) The younger *tusheng* generation also participated in the Chinese Varsity

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 45.
Club at UBC and the YMCA. Younger *tusheng* expressed their views through the *Chinatown News*, a local Chinatown publication of English speaking Chinese.21 Editorial throughout the 1950s and 1960s in *Chinatown News* reflected the changing cultural identity of the Canadian-born Chinese and their opinions on how of the Chinese community should relate to Canadian society.

Canadian-born Chinese were beginning to feel that “the opportunity for Chinese to become an integrated part of the community [was] more visible than ever before,” and that it was “up to [them] take every advantage of it.”22 They did not want cultural differences to be completely ignored, but advocated “an attitude of looking at [themselves] as individuals similar to others in this intermingled Canadian society.”23 The *tusheng*’s ability to integrate into Canadian mainstream, however, was far greater than that of their parents or those newly immigrated. The language skills that the *tusheng* possessed, their familiarity and comfort with Canadian ways in addition to the higher education that many were obtaining, made it easier for them to successfully adopt “Canadian” customs than their contemporaries.

Since the 1950s, Strathcona, the neighbourhood adjacent to Chinatown, became the target for revitalization efforts by the City of Vancouver.24 Large parts of Strathcona were marked for demolition while other parts were described as being in need of “upgrading” and extensive renovations. Fearing the effect such redevelopment might have on the Chinese living in the Strathcona area, the Chinese Benevolent

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21 Ibid., 47-49.
22 *Chinatown News*, June 18, 1954.
23 Ibid.
24 City of Vancouver, Planning Department for the Housing Research Committee, *Vancouver Redevelopment Study*, 1957.
Association (CBA) along with other concerned individuals and organizations established the Chinese Property Owners Association (CPOA). The association, however, failed in its efforts to prevent the destruction of Strathcona homes. Fifteen blocks of houses were demolished. Interestingly, Chinatown News supported the City’s decision to revitalize the neighbourhood. It claimed that the “ethnic enclave” had fulfilled a necessary function during the time of exclusion but now the time had come for the neighbourhood to “progress.” It was not until the late 1960s with the formation of the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association (SPOTA) that efforts to thwart city redevelopment plans succeeded. By that time, Chinatown News had ceased its outspoken support in favour of the City. In 1969, SPOTA managed to save the last phase of neighbourhood homes set to be demolished. At this time, the City also projected a highway through the heart of Chinatown. Chinatown merchants, concerned about the effect a highway would have on commerce strongly opposed the plans. After a bitter struggle, and with outside help from lawyers, architects, academics and community workers, Chinatown was spared the highway.

The area re-emerged from this decade long struggle rejuvenated. Chinatown had become a place of value to not only the Chinese who worked and lived in the area and its surrounding neighbourhoods, but also to people of non-ethnic Chinese origin who began to see the area not only for its visitor appeal, but also as a unique space within the city; a place with its own, district tradition and distinction. It was at this time, against the background of the Strathcona struggles and Trudeau's multiculturalism agenda that

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26 Ng, 99.
27 Ibid., 50.
28 Anderson, 206.
29 Ibid., 206.
the preservation of the area as a historical site began to take root. Chinatown stopped being solely a place where people worked and lived, and became a place of pride, a place in time, the space in which battles were fought and won, representing the community's history and its ability to prevail against immense difficulties.

The Chinese Cultural Centre commenced its fundraising activities at this time. From the beginning, it was moulded by events in Chinatown and the larger Chinese community. Chinatown was still seen as the voice of the Chinese Canadian community in Vancouver. Even those who did not live in Chinatown often returned to the area because it was still the focal point for the Chinese community; it was where people did their grocery shopping, where organizations operated, and where many ethnic Chinese ran their businesses. Internal disputes and cultural politics were temporarily put aside while the community united together in the interest of preserving and protecting the area.

The Chinese Cultural Centre acted in many ways as a community centre rather than purely a cultural institution. Along with the Chinese Benevolent Association, the CCC became a representative for the Chinese community. Not only did it stage exhibits and cultural events, it also became involved in educational seminars and classes. Unlike many of the organizations formed in the 1950s and 1960s that focused primarily on the interests of one group or another, the Chinese Cultural Centre had a mandate to operate in the interest of all community members.
The Chinese Cultural Centre

Located on Pender Street at the corner of Carroll on the west side of Chinatown, the Chinese Cultural Centre is a large concrete structure built on land leased from the City of Vancouver. The first phase of development, the Community Service Offices, cost one million dollars. This number does not include costs for the construction of the Multi-Purpose Hall, constructed in 1986, or the Museum and Archives, constructed in 1998. The land on which the Centre resides is symbolic of the community's victories over city developers in the 1960s. It had been designated by the City to be redeveloped into a highway bypass connecting into downtown Vancouver; its location is thus symbolic of the community's victories over city developers in the 1960s. To build the Cultural Centre on this land "represent[ed] a total reversal from the decade before when the political system wanted Chinatown overrun with freeways, to a Chinatown valued for its cultural heritage;"30 at the same time, it safeguarded the community against future redevelopment initiatives. In the same block, adjacent to the Centre, is the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden. Constructed in 1986, the Garden is independent from the Centre, but the idea for its creation stemmed from the same politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Originally included in the 1972 plans of the CCC, the Garden later split off from the Chinese Cultural Centre due to controversies over funding issues.

The Centre's self-professed mandate was to promote understanding and friendship between the Chinese community and other cultural groups, to interpret and

communicate Chinese culture, to promote and foster Chinese culture and art within the Chinese community, and to help Chinese immigrants adjust to the culture, heritage and lifestyle in Canada. From the beginning, therefore, the CCC has aimed not only to reflect, but actively construct a Chinese Canadian identity. As a mediator between the Chinese community and larger society, the Chinese Cultural Centre attempts to explain Chineseness and Chinese Canadian culture to others, actively battling against the old stereotype of the Chinese as rootless sojourners, while simultaneously creating what it believes to be an acceptable shared Chinese Canadian identity.

Even today, daily operations are overseen primarily by individuals who were involved in establishing the Centre. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the Centre was being led by both the tusheng and post-war immigrants. This was an obvious influence on the Centre’s activities, which include language classes, seminars, children’s camps and classes and historical exhibits. Mainland Chinese culture figures prominently in all aspects of the Centre’s activities, with much less attention granted to Chinese culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Centre fit with the Canadian government’s multi-culturalism initiative to promote ethnic minority culture, and was therefore able to receive government funding. It was a place where those who wished to promote “Chinese” culture could do so along side those who desired to endorse a “Chinese Canadian” perspective. However, amongst all the support the CCC received from the Chinese community, one

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32 1971 multiculturalism became an official Canadian policy under the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau.
group from the very beginning did not endorse the venture: the Chinese Benevolent Association.

The CBA, which had traditionally represented the interests of the Chinese community, challenged the CCC’s right to speak for the interests of the Chinese Canadian community. Opposed to the CCC and its patronage of Chinese culture from the Mainland, the CBA launched a similar venture, the Chinese Canadian Activity Centre Society, to compete for the same government funding.\(^{34}\) By the late 1970s the CBA’s role within the Chinese Canadian community had largely diminished due to its more overt involvement in overseas politics. Closely intertwined with the Kuomintang in Taiwan (the CBA constitution required one of its three chairmen to be a representative of the Kuomintang), the organization attempted to sabotage the funding efforts of the Chinese Cultural Centre by spreading rumours that it was organized by communist sympathizers. The CCC responded to the CBA by accusing it of “abdicating its responsibilities in Chinatown affairs since the late 1960s.”\(^{35}\) In the end, the CCC won the support of the Canadian government, which by that time had ceased to recognize the Taiwan government as the sole representative of China and had established diplomatic relations with Beijing; and the CBA, through a court injunction, was forced to call an open election for a new executive committee, resulting in all former members being replaced by new community representatives.\(^{36}\) Although the CCC aimed at inclusiveness, from the beginning it found itself challenged. This is not surprising if one remembers how diverse and segmented the community was already in the 1970s. No single organization could represent the entire Chinese community.

\(^{34}\) Ng, 115.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 116.
The announcement that Hong Kong would be handed back to Mainland China in 1997 created an influx of Chinese immigrants to Canada. Already in 1958, Hong Kong surpassed China as the self-reported country of last permanent residence for incoming Chinese to Canada.37 This was, however, due to Canadian immigration rules that stipulated that Chinese immigrants wishing to enter Canada had to have some years of residence in Hong Kong before entering the country. Many Chinese, therefore, left Mainland China for Hong Kong before coming to Canada. This inevitably caused the numbers of immigrants coming from Hong Kong to rise, even though those entering Canada were not originally from Hong Kong. It was not until the 1980s that long-term Hong Kong residents began to enter the country in large numbers. Figure 3 represents the change that took place in immigration to Canada since the 1970s. The Canadian government, taking advantage of the fact that many Hong Kong Chinese were worried about the handover changed Canada's immigration policy to allow for the immigration of persons with a net worth of $500,000 and the ability to invest a specified amount into a Canadian business venture—a policy that continues today.38 As illustrated in more detail below, the new immigrants were often perceived as callous nouveaux riches with little respect for Canadian norms and values. Perhaps overtly racist, these were opinions

37 Ibid., 90.
publicly voiced at neighbourhood meetings and expressed in Vancouver newspaper. What is more interesting in the context of this project is how the “established Chinese Canadians” (the term incorporates both post-war immigrants and tusheng as one group) received the Hong Kong Chinese amidst all the fuss.

In 1988, eighty-two hectares of land along False Creek, the site of Expo’86, was sold to Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing. The sale of this land, along with the purchase of 216 luxury condominiums in a three-hour span and the purchase of character homes in Vancouver’s prestigious Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale neighbourhoods by Hong Kong buyers, provoked a great deal of outcry from Vancouverites and the media.\textsuperscript{39} Some were concerned with foreign investment and its effects on Canadians; others, such as the residents of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale, felt uneasy about the transformation of their “white” upper class neighbourhoods. On occasion, when Hong Kong immigrants purchased property in these neighbourhoods, some chose to demolish the existing structure and rebuild a brand new house that better represented their ideal home. The neighborhood’s newest residents tended to build large brick houses; the gardens were replaced with concrete and the trees removed. Many older residents interpreted this as an arrogant display of disrespect.\textsuperscript{40} In addition, rumours of Hong Kong immigrants giving their children expensive cars, vacations and other gadgets only fuelled Vancouverites’ anger.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
When discussing the issues that troubled them, observers did not always make a distinction between wealthy Hong Kong Chinese immigrants and other Chinese Canadians. Commenting on the changes in her Kerrisdale neighbourhood, one woman asserted that, "their way of life is so totally different." Although local newspapers articles in the *Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* referred to the new wealthy immigrants as "Hong Kong Chinese," as opposed to simply "Chinese immigrants," it is unclear if other Vancouverites made this distinction. Racist or racialized, concerns about "culture" remained at the forefront of this matter, and it was from this issue that established Chinese Canadians begun publicly defining themselves in contrast to the new Hong Kong Chinese.

The impact and effect of Hong Kong Chinese immigration to Canada provoked the most publicity in British Columbia; however, Chinese Canadians across the country

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41 Ibid.
commented on the issue. Asked what she thought of “the new wave of immigration from Hong Kong,” Jean Lamb, a community spokesperson for the community, replied:

It’s been good for Canada to have all these newcomers, but I’m afraid there might be a backlash. There’s going to be too much money put into areas where possibly it’s going to affect people’s jobs or positions. I don’t know...I’m a little scared of it being too powerful...It used to be said that my children would walk on the street and everyone would know who they are because they look like me. That’s the way it was. But today, if we go into a restaurant, we don’t see a familiar face. I think earlier my main concern was to be accepted into this Canada...being a Canadian. And I feel we succeeded without really pushing to get where we are. They say they’ll push for everything they want. They don’t care. They’ll speak up and there’s not that same type of getting along.42

The source material from Jean Lamb’s interview is taken from a compilation titled Chinese Canadians: Voices from a Community in which the authors Evelyn Huang and Lawrence Jeffery set out to illustrate the personal experience and history of the Chinese in Canada during the twentieth century. At the time of the interviews, criticism of immigration from Hong Kong was rampant in the media, and as a result it is not surprising that the topic surfaced during discussions. What is interesting to consider is why Chinese Canadians who had no direct relation to the new Hong Kong immigrants were concerned about what was happening. Possibly, Jean Lamb cared about the issue not only because of the racist sentiments that the issue aroused, but also because as a person of Chinese descent she could easily be mistaken for or grouped together with the Hong Kong Chinese. This would be especially damaging knowing the history and the battles that were fought and won by the Chinese community, in which Jean Lamb was personally involved. Being seen as “Canadian” and acting in ways that were considered

“Canadian” therefore became central to the identity of already established Chinese Canadians.

Speaking in a 1990 CBC interview with Peter Gzowski, journalist Colleen Leung from Vancouver, a Chinese Canadian and one of the early volunteers of the Chinese Cultural Centre, discussed the issue of Hong Kong Chinese immigration to Canada. Leung observed that non-Asian Canadians are bothered by the “conspicuous consumption” of the Hong Kong Chinese, which in turn, makes “people like [herself] self-conscious” due to the backlash it created against all Chinese. While critical of the public opinion she deems racist, Leung also places responsibility on the Hong Kong Chinese for the erupting tensions:

The Chinese in a way are not blameless either for bringing this on themselves because some are arrogant. I talked about conspicuous consumption. It is not a good idea in Canada to buy your teenage son, who is in grade eleven, a BMW. Like why don’t you buy him a domestic car? It’s not as conspicuous. It’s not a good idea to send the kid to Hawaii every break he gets so that he can brag to his friends that he has gone here there and everywhere because Canadians are very sensitive to that. They work very hard for their money in Canada. They are very proud of the work they do and the generations of Canadianhood that they have in their backgrounds and then to have these new people come in and usurp their positions in society who can afford more for their family, have more money, and with their money seem to be gaining political clout, it disturbs people. It disturbs Canadians who are not Asian.43

Leung is particularly adamant about there being a tangible Canadian identity which the Hong Kong Chinese immigrants were failing to conform to. By stating and believing this, Leung is asserting that she herself is “Canadian”, and more Canadian than the Hong Kong Chinese. Leung is not alone. Many others in the Chinese community made similar statements when asked for their opinions on the issue.

When speaking about nationality, older Chinese Canadians who were either born in Canada or who immigrated in the post war years are adamant about their identity as Canadian first and foremost. “No, I am not Chinese, I’m Canadian,” are the words Dock Yip, a Chinese Canadian born in Vancouver’s Chinatown in 1906 used to describe himself.\(^{44}\) Bob Lee, born in Vancouver’s Chinatown, agrees: “I was born here, so I’m a Canadian first. Secondly I’m Chinese, and if I want to follow traditions, fine. But I have to be a Canadian first.”\(^{45}\) In a 1989 interview, Bing Thom, a Vancouver architect with ties to the Chinese Cultural Centre, called himself a “true-blooded, third generation Canadian” and admitted that he is “getting the uncomfortable feeling now that, because [he] is of Chinese heritage, [he] is looked upon as an immigrant again.”\(^{46}\) In the midst of the Hong Kong Chinese “invasion,” being looked upon as Canadian and not an immigrant became very important to those of the Chinese community who were beginning to feel threatened and who were becoming very “concerned about a possible backlash.”\(^{47}\)

Bob Lee, a prominent Vancouver business man and son of Lee Bick, a highly distinguished early Chinese immigrant, was one of several Chinese Canadians supportive of the idea to provide a video about Canada and Canadian social customs to immigrating Hong Kong Chinese. “[Lee] said to David Lam [BC’s Lieutenant-Governor] that hopefully they’ll make a tape for all the new immigrants and even show it in Hong Kong and the Far East to show how Canadians live.”\(^{48}\) Such a tape was in fact made and presented in Hong Kong at weekly seminars for residents who were

\(^{44}\) Haung and Jeffery, 7.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 57
\(^{46}\) *Calgary Herald*, “Hong Kong immigrants face resentment,” A5, June 9, 1989.
\(^{47}\) Ibid.
\(^{48}\) Haung and Jeffery, 54.
planning on immigrating to Canada. The video featured David Lam, himself an immigrant from Hong Kong, advising soon-to-be Chinese Canadians that they should not “step on two boats at the same time,” implying that those immigrating should refrain from jetting back and forth between Canada and Hong Kong. In addition to detailed information on Canada’s education system, taxes, and career opportunities, the film focused primarily on Canadian social customs and values. When organizers of the film were asked why they were lecturing Hong Kong people on how to behave, they denied that they promoted assimilation over the retention of Chinese culture and pointed out that they had “good coverage in the Chinese language press.”

It is not surprising that the older established Chinese Canadians were actively involved in creating and promoting a video for Chinese newcomers. They too were once on the margins of Canadian society. Although multi-culturalism was an established policy and growing numbers of Canadians were willing to embrace the notion of a Canada of many different cultures by the time Hong Kong people began immigrating to Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, earlier Chinese immigrants and Canadian-born Chinese were not so fortunate. Assimilation and integration into Canadian society and culture were absolutely necessary if one wanted to survive and “get ahead.” It is therefore understandable that established Chinese Canadians would expect the same to be required for Chinese newcomers. By creating, in conjunction with other Canadians, a video specifically aimed at Hong Kong Chinese immigrants, established Chinese Canadians were asserting their authority and power over the

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
incoming Hong Kong immigrants, while simultaneously proving themselves
“Canadian.”

Speaking in an interview for the *Vancouver Sun*’s Asia Pacific Report, David
Lam, British Columbia’s Lieutenant-Governor and a personal supporter and financial
contributor to the Chinese Cultural Centre, discusses his message to Canadian
newcomers. His message in the interview was similar to that in the video he helped to
produce: newcomers should “be sensitive to Canadian values...learn to speak the
English language...make a commitment to be Canadian first [and] without forgetting or
denying your origins don’t be bound to them.”

At the time of these ongoing public
discussions, the Chinese Cultural Centre, representing the interests of the Chinese
community, began promoting an agenda that emphasized Canadian culture and the
Chinese experience in Canada more than ever before. Assimilation of the new
immigrants into Canadian society became immensely important to older immigrants and
Canadian-born Chinese, who themselves once had been under strong pressure to become
“more white than [white]...in order to survive socially [and] economically.”

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The Chinese Cultural Centre and the Hong Kong Chinese

Established Chinese Canadians began to contrast their own “Canadian” identity with the “not yet Canadian” Hong Kong Chinese. The term “Chinese Canadian” became the means by which established Canadians of Chinese descent claimed the right to represent and speak for the newly immigrated Hong Kong Chinese within the existing Chinese community. Chinatown, although no longer figuring as prominently in the lives of many Chinese as it once did, still housed the Chinese Cultural Centre, one of the main venues available for established Chinese Canadians to exhibit their identity. In the wake of mainstream society’s hostility to the new immigrants, the Centre became a place to communicate the dual identity of Chinese Canadians as “Chinese” and “Canadian,” a definition that underlined the contrast between the established Chinese Canadians and the Hong Kong Chinese.

In a ten year period from 1981 to 1991, three exhibits pertaining to the history and culture of the Chinese in Canada were produced. The first was An historical look at Chinese Canadians in B.C. in 1983; the second, Gum San (Gold Mountain) in 1985; and the third, the largest and most celebrated, Saltwater City, prepared for Vancouver’s Centennial in 1986. From 1991 to 1995, however, the amount of exhibits on Chinese history in Canada doubled from the previous decade. They included topics on identity, Canadian history and multi-culturalism. Self Not Whole (1991) focused on the identity
of Chinese Canadian artists as both Chinese and Canadian.\textsuperscript{54} \textit{A Look at Early Central Richmond} (1991), held at the Richmond Chinese Cultural Centre office in conjunction with the Richmond Museum, focused on early settlement and land use in Richmond; a topic relevant to the Hong Kong immigrants who were chose to settle in the Richmond area. \textit{Chinese Canadiana} (1992) was an exhibition of photographs representing Chinese Canadians and depicting the heritage and history of the community. The initiative was undertaken by the Chinese Canadian community with the hope to stir "a new renaissance within [the community] to seek answers to questions that [they] face as a community."\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Being Canadian-Active Participation} (1995), co-sponsored by Vancouver's Multi-cultural Society, also included a forum on "Solution to Multiculturalism in Vancouver." \textit{In Search of a Solution} (1995) and \textit{Gold Mountain Celebration} (1995) encouraged awareness of Chinese art, history, and culture and honoured Chinese Canadian contributions to British Columbia.

When Canadian born Chinese and long-time immigrants, such as Jean Lamb, Colleen Leung and Bing Thom, began raising concerns about the possibility of a backlash against the Chinese community in the wake of anti-Chinese feelings in the early 1990s, it is not surprising that the established Chinese Canadians who wielded control over the Centre began placing more emphasis on Canadian content in an attempt to show non-Chinese Canadians that Vancouver's Chinese community was in fact "Canadian" and understood "Canadian" values. Paul Yueng, the current Curator at the Centre acknowledged that during the 1990s the CCC did in fact have such an agenda.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} Chinatown News, V. 39 No.1 (Feb. 3, 1992), 33.
\textsuperscript{56} December 4, 2004 interview with Paul Yeung, Chinese Cultural Centre, Curator.
Board members such as Henry Tsang and Karen Lee had a strong interest in Canadian matters, and as a result that agenda was promoted during their time with the Centre. Hence, there is a direct co-relation between members of the Chinese community voicing concerns about the negative effects of Hong Kong immigration and the Chinese Cultural Centre revamping its cultural programs. That the Centre acted this way in the 1990s when the Chinese community was under fire from irate Vancouverites, and that the agenda fell to the wayside by end of the 1990s, is understandable considering that by the end of the decade there was no longer any overt hostility to Hong Kong immigrants.

The rate at which the established Chinese Canadians were able to propagate a "Chinese Canadian" identity and "educate" new Hong Kong immigrants about "Canadian" values through the use of media and institutions like the Chinese Cultural Centre is difficult to determine. Yet, success is perhaps irrelevant to the larger issues of authority and legitimacy. During the 1980s and 1990s the CCC acted on what it believed was its rightful authority to speak for Chinese Canadians. The history of the community, its triumphs and hardships, appeared to legitimize its right to speak for and to Chinese Canadians. Its authority, however, appears to be self granted. In essence, what went on between the Hong Kong immigrants and the established Chinese community was a struggle for power and recognition on behalf of the more rooted Chinese community as the "true Chinese Canadians." The struggle symbolizes the continuing shift in the identity of Chinese Canadians. Those who themselves were once outsiders were forced to adjust and adapt and expected those who came after to have to do the same.

The Hong Kong Chinese came to Canada under very different time and under
different circumstances. Their identity and right to the title of "Chinese Canadian" has inevitably grouped them together with all other Chinese Canadians in the eyes of non-Chinese. When the established Chinese Canadians attempted to help the Hong Kong immigrants understand Canadian culture and lifestyles, the Hong Kong Chinese did not respond. There was no reason to do so since they were wealthy, established and distinguished professionals. They entered Canada as professionals and investors, bringing with them substantial wealth. Furthermore, they came from one of the most dynamic parts of the world economy and immigrated into Canada by explicit invitation from both Canadian federal and provincial governments. They were as wealthy and as modern (however one defines the term) as other Canadians.
Conclusion

Vancouver’s Chinese Canadian community is a mixture of persons and groups who either consciously adopt or are forced to identify with the term “Chinese Canadian.” The term, however, encompasses many different identities. In the 1970s, Vancouver’s Chinese community was diverse, but with the introduction of multiculturalism and a “Chinese Canadian” identity, the community became momentarily unified in ways which it never had before. Conflicts over cultural identity between tusheng and post-war immigrants ceased and opportunities were seized. In the 1970s, after decades of racial discrimination and prejudice, multiculturalism offered a way in which Canadians of Chinese descent could openly recognize both their “Chinese” and “Canadian” identity without fear of reprisal from either Canadian society or the Chinese community. The decade represented the beginning of a new orthodoxy of Chinese Canadianness that later was enforced on others.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, Vancouver’s established Chinese community identified itself as distinctly “Chinese-Canadian” in opposition to the newly arrived Hong Kong Chinese. The established community saw itself as representing a combination of Canadianness and Chineseness that in their view the Hong Kong immigrants had to copy. What this shows is how cultural negotiations between migrant groups and the mainstream society are displaced. “Chinese Canadian” identity was negotiated not between host and migrant but in the heart of the migrant community,
between Chinese who saw themselves as “Canadianized” and self-consciously adopted the values of the mainstream, and the “unreformed” recent Hong Kong migrants.

In contrast to the situation in the 1970s, when the shared experience of discrimination, struggle, and recognition enabled Vancouver’s Chinese community to unify under the term “Chinese Canadian,” the established Chinese community in the 1980s refused to accept the Hong Kong immigrants. Rather than rallying around a shared identity, the established community consciously used real or perceived cultural differences between itself and the newcomers as markers to underline their own group identity. They identified themselves in contrast to the Hong Kong immigrants by articulating their “Canadian” identity.

Yet amidst these negotiations, the Hong Kong Chinese always maintained a right to call themselves “Chinese Canadian,” regardless of the objections raised by the older Chinese community. Although established Chinese Canadians claimed the term for themselves, it continues to remain open to all Canadians of Chinese descent. The Hong Kong immigrants’ refusal to respond to the well-intended advice of the existing Chinese community does not mean that they refused to interact with and adapt to Canadian society in general. Rather, it shows how that they did not feel a need to adapt to a narrowly defined “Chinese Canadian” identity that was the product of particular historical processes of which that they were not a part. Instead of integrating into the established community, the new immigrants carved a separate path for themselves creating new “Chinatowns” in the outlying cities of Richmond and Burnaby, with little resemblance to the older Vancouver Chinatown.
Bibliography


