

Contesting White Supremacy

School Segregation, Anti-Racism,
and the Making of Chinese
Canadians

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To Ann and Norman,

WHOSE LOVE SHOWED THAT RACISM IS ALWAYS A LIE

Now I hear what you cannot hear; the hearts of greedy gamblers, the pulse of petty thieves. I hear the game coins rattle under the brass cup, and the unique sound that each combination makes. I hear everything.

– Paul Yee, ‘Gambler’s Eyes,’ *Tales from Gold Mountain: Stories of the Chinese in the New World.*

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Note on Chinese Terminology

During the period covered by this book, Cantonese was the principal language of migrants from China living in British Columbia. Accordingly, for the names of people, places, and organizations, I have followed local usages insofar as I have been able to establish what these usages were. However, to be consistent with scholars of China, I have rendered Chinese characters in Mandarin using the Pinyin Romanization. All reference material is cited in Pinyin. I commonly give both the local usage and the Mandarin Pinyin when a term is first mentioned in the text.

Chinese surnames present other difficulties. In traditional Chinese usage, the surname appears first, followed by the personal name. Usage in British Columbia varied, and it was not usual for a parent's personal name to become his or her BC-born child's surname. This is explained at the excellent website of the Vancouver Public Library, "Chinese Names in Canada," at <http://www.vpl.ca/>. Contemporary Chinese names can follow either westernized or traditional Chinese forms and may be romanized in either Pinyin or the older Wade-Giles system. To take the case of my own name in Chinese, I can variously be Timothy Shi, T'ien-li Shi or Tianli Shi, Shih T'ien-li or Shi Tianli. All would be correct, with Shi in Pinyin or Shih in Wade-Giles as the surname. Since there is no one acceptable method for handling this, I have tried to use the system preferred by the person involved.

Introduction: Questioning the Existence of the World

*As real and untouchable an element in their lives as the rules
of arithmetic.*

– Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

On September 5, 1922, shortly after classes began in the new school year of the Victoria, British Columbia, School District, the principals of seven of the district's elementary schools called certain students out of their classes, lined them up, and marched them down the road. The principals were putting into effect a school board order to segregate these children from their peers.¹ The board had spent much of the summer arranging the move: approving a plan for accommodating these students, building a 'new' school, negotiating with the city for the purchase and servicing of a school site, and hiring additional teachers and another principal.² According to the plan, an estimated seventy-one second and first reader pupils (that is, grades three and four today), previously at Quadra Primary and North Ward schools, were to be sent to the old King's Road School, a school that had once been condemned by the provincial school inspector as having 'quite possibly the worst physical conditions of any school in the province.'³ Over the years, the building had sunk into its foundations as the surrounding streets had been built up, with the result that much of the school was actually below ground level.⁴ A third classroom was now being opened in the school for

thirty-seven primary pupils, aged six to ten. Thirty-seven other primary pupils, aged eleven to fourteen, were being relocated to the old Rock Bay School, a school that during the previous ten years had been closed as often as open. Seventy-seven advanced third and junior fourth reader pupils (that is, grades five and six) were being accommodated in two classes at the newly established Railway Street School. This school was made out of two wooden huts relocated from the now closed Fernwood School. The last of these huts had been delivered to the site only the Friday before the start of classes, at which time a Victoria newspaper reported, 'A certain amount of rock will have to be blasted and plumbing will have to be done to make the schools [sic] ready for occupancy.' Years later, parents and their children would less than fondly remember Railway Street as the 'Chicken Coop School.'⁶

Although the school board trustees alleged that segregation would be 'of great advantage' to the children involved, 'as special stress could be put on [the] subjects most needed by them, such as English, etc.,'⁷ the trustees' actions were easy politics, popular with their electorate. Most residents of Victoria saw these children and their adult guardians as aliens who did not really belong in British Columbia, let alone in its provincially controlled schools alongside their own children. Many claimed that those being segregated were so different from themselves, morally, intellectually, and socially, that their mere presence threatened the educational progress and the physical and moral well-being of their own children. They even saw the older boys as a sexual menace to their children of tender years. Meanwhile, in January 1922, the most important official of the Victoria School District, the Municipal School Inspector George H. Deane, had urged the segregation of all of these students for 'sanitary' reasons.⁸ Meanwhile, respectable groups, including the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, the Retail Merchants Association, and the Great War Veterans' Association, had long been calling for the segregation of these children.⁹ For their part, the parents and adult guardians of the children being segregated were barred from voting in any of the Canadian state's elections in British Columbia, including those for the school board. As one trustee had put it a year earlier, school segregation was 'a method well calculated to meet a difficult situation.'¹⁰

After all their careful planning, the trustees and school officials expected segregation to go smoothly. However, they had not reckoned with the people to whom the segregation order applied. Far from needing special instruction, many of the children spoke English as their first and only language. Far from retarding others' academic progress, most were

performing above their class averages.¹¹ Far from being aliens, the majority were Canadian-born British subjects and, in the case of at least one affected family, the children were third-generation residents of Victoria, a claim to roots in the city that few other than the members of the Songhees First Nation could match.¹² Those being segregated were at most one or two years older than their former classmates, something not unusual in a school system where grading by student reader level (first primer, second primer, first reader, second reader, and so on) commonly produced multi-aged classrooms. The sexual menace of older boys, if it had ever existed, was already contained, or had been until segregation would once again place younger children in the same school. First in 1915 and continuously since 1919, boys more than two years older than the average for their grade level had attended special classes at the Rock Bay School where, before this segregation plan, they had little contact with other students.¹³ In fact, the only thing that the children being marched down the street had in common was that English-language discourse widely racialized them as members of the same group. And although the school board claimed that it never intended to single out this group specifically, its measure applied to all children from this group who were below the entrance class to high school (grade seven) and only to children from this group.¹⁴ Indeed, the school board's minutes repeatedly refer to those being segregated and their segregated classes and schools in racialized terms, and on September 5, several students were allowed to return to their classes after they explained that they were Japanese and thus not part of the racialized group to which the segregation order applied.¹⁵

Although less polite terms were also used, those being segregated were usually referred to as 'the Chinese.' This term referred to people who spoke different languages (four mutually unintelligible dialects of Cantonese, as well as Hakka, Mandarin, English, and Chinook), people of various citizenships (Chinese, naturalized British, and native-born British), and multiple ethnicities (primarily Cantonese and Hakka). It referred to first-generation resettlers and the fourth generation locally born, to those who had been in the territory since the Fraser River gold rush of 1858, and to those who had only recently arrived. Like migrants from Upper Canada, Britain, and the United States, people from China had resettled in British Columbia within living memory, displacing the First Nations, who were the original settlers. Like almost all other Victoria residents in the era before automation, 'the Chinese' worked hard – children as well as adults, women more so than men. Like other migrants, the first generation had brought their parental languages, their cultural practices, and hopes and

dreams with them. Most of the adults had chosen to come to Canada, whereas the children (as with those of other groups) were involuntary migrants. As with most resettlers, men migrated first, intending either to return to the old country once they had made fame and fortune or to send for their families once established. Like their counterparts of European origins, they practised patriarchy, a system of masculine dominance maintained through a gendered division of family roles, of work, and of control over property and public institutions. Like Victoria residents of European origins, those of Chinese origins took their religious beliefs seriously and were not prepared to give them up just because they were proselytized or another religion promised a better life. Like almost all other first-generation resettlers, those who had migrated from China had not entirely abandoned the old country but lived in constant hope of news from home and the possibility of returning. Like resettlers from Britain and Old Canada, those from China were part of a larger transnational cultural community: the educated among them closely following the political news from home and from the other places where 'their people' had resettled. As with others, both educated and uneducated alike were actively involved in helping relatives and friends make their way in the world, including in some cases migrating to Canada. Meanwhile, for the members of the second and later generations, as with other locally born people, return to the old country was their parents' dream. Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, was their place. 'The Chinese' too had made Victoria with their sweat, their talent, and their wealth. Above all, they were no different from any other sample of humanity, people of multiple and complex moral qualities.¹⁶ Indeed, except for their racialization, 'the Chinese' were not so different from other Victoria residents.

Those being segregated were neither aliens to British Columbia nor prepared to become such. According to the *Victoria Daily Times*, when Major Jeffree A. Cunningham, the principal of Boys' Central School, and his charges reached the segregated King's Road School, 'a Chinese boy holding the reputation of being the quietest and most studious in the class shouted something in the Oriental lingo, and like a flash the parade disbanded, leaving Principal Cunningham in the middle of the roadway and wondering how he could overcome the difficulties of the situation.' Similar events unfolded with the students from the George Jay School.¹⁷ To pressure the school board into allowing the segregated students to return to their former classes, the affected community had organized a students' strike against the Victoria school system. Despite various attempts at resolution, the strike continued for the entire school year.¹⁸ The annual

report of the superintendent of education of the Province of British Columbia recorded that, in contrast to the 216 'Chinese' students enrolled in the Victoria District the previous year, 'less than six' attended in 1922-23.¹⁹

The 1922-23 students' strike dramatically illustrates the active role of people from China and their locally born descendants in British Columbia's past, including in its histories of racisms. To understand these histories, this activity must be taken into account (as indeed in the end must that of other excluded groups). As people variously resisted, accommodated, or circumvented particular racist measures as they challenged, internalized, or ignored racist representations, anti-Chinese racism and its constituent ideologies, practices, and patterns also changed. These changes in turn shaped what they were able to do, and where and with whom they were able to do it, variously expanding and contracting their terrains of action, who was included in these terrains, and who was not. As the terrains of 'the Chinese' shifted, so too did those of other people living in British Columbia. Thus, anti-Chinese racism was a dynamic social relation in which people racialized as Chinese were active, if unequal, participants. Along with other racisms, in particular those directed at First Nations, Africans, and other Asians, along with gender, social class, sexuality, and disability/ability, it fundamentally structured the everyday lives of all people living in British Columbia. Anti-Chinese racism shaped more than the popular prejudices or public policies of the dominant group; it shaped the very categories of popular and public, determining who was included in these categories and who was not.²⁰

In the pages that follow, I document how anti-Chinese racism in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British Columbia became part of what in a different context the political philosopher Hannah Arendt called 'a texture of life.' Writing about Nazi Germany, Arendt noted what she called 'the organization of an entire texture of life according to an ideology,' an organization through which Nazi ideas were factored into myriad day-to-day interactions and practices. Within this organization, the fictions generated by propaganda were 'no longer an objective issue about which people may have opinions, but had become as real and un-touchable an element in their lives as the rules of arithmetic. In Nazi Germany,' she wrote, 'questioning the validity of racism and antisemitism when nothing mattered but race origin, when a career depended upon an "Aryan" physiognomy (Himmler used to select the applicants for the SS from photographs) and the amount of food upon the number of one's Jewish grandparents, was like questioning the existence of the world.'²¹ In drawing on Arendt, I do not intend to in any way suggest that racist

projects in British Columbia ever approached the degree of ruthlessness evident in Nazi Europe.²² Nor do I wish to suggest that the experiences of any people, whether of Chinese origins or not, can be reduced to the experience of racism alone. However, it is my intention to trouble understandings of racism that take for granted racist ideas, practices, and representations as if they were indeed like the rules of arithmetic. As Arendt documented, ideas can and do get organized into social practices and material arrangements, which in turn make the logics of these ideas appear all the more convincing and self-evident. These logics can be long-lived. This is what Foucault and other scholars have called discursive formations, but discourse here needs to be understood as including material consequences and arrangements as well as symbolic processes of representation and the circulation of meanings.²³ Thus, my project is to make visible a taken-for-granted pattern of racism in British Columbia and to demonstrate that it constituted a texture of life.

This is a book about racism, not 'race.' Where much scholarship, including historical scholarship, has focused on 'race' and its associated inequalities, the perspective of this book is that it is not human differences per se that make racisms but racisms that make 'race.'²⁴ It is racism that makes particular differences (both real and imagined) count in specific times and places, that is, that signifies them.²⁵ Among other things, this means that I do not see racisms only as individual prejudices or discriminatory acts against people because of their so-called race. Although I do not deny that racist prejudice exists and can have consequences, I see racisms as historical phenomena that lead people to believe that racial categories are meaningful and that enact consequences on people based on the categories into which they are placed. As such, racism is not the inevitable outcome of human difference. It is one of the things that make particular real or imagined difference important and that in turn shape how people interact with each other based on these alleged differences. Thus, it is racism, not 'race,' that structures contemporary societies.²⁶

I have organized this book around three perspectives on racism and anti-racism.²⁷ The first perspective is that there are racisms in the plural. Rather than take one essential form, there are many different racisms, each with its own histories, manifestations, and consequences. There is nothing inevitable about racisms. Racisms do not have fixed essences, but change with time and place. Thus, racism is not a singular phenomenon. For example, anti-Semitism in Canada has had a different history than racism directed against First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people.²⁸ Racisms change with time, with place and through their intersection with other factors,

most especially with gender, age, social class, sexuality, and ability/disability. As they are contested, particular racisms change over time, becoming more intense in one context and less intense in another. They are enacted in one aspect of social life one moment and in another aspect the next moment. Even racist individuals are not locked into unchanging essences. People may practice racism towards the members of one group and anti-racism towards the members of another. Even the most committed of racists can make exceptions for the individuals he or she personally knows. Meanwhile, the actual practices of racists can and do change over time. Just as people learn racisms, so too they unlearn them. Thus, in one moment in one location a particular racism may be at play, in another moment a different racism can be, and in still a third moment one racism can be enacted along with, or even through, another. Meanwhile, in a location nearby, another set of racisms may be at work.²⁹ Nothing about racism is inevitable or is a necessary outcome of human difference.

This suggests that how a racism comes to be is an important historical question, and understanding this history is a key issue for anti-racism education.³⁰ If racism is not an inevitable outcome of human difference, it is the outcome of human action. As such, the development of a particular racism should be traceable over time. In this respect, British Columbia is the ideal location to trace a history of anti-Chinese racism. People from China first entered the territory in significant numbers during precisely the same period that a significant number of English-speaking people of European origins first arrived. Because of the scale of Chinese resettlement, parts of British Columbia were 'Chinese' territories before they were 'Canadian' ones.³¹ Still, by the 1920s, people racialized as Chinese were vilified and excluded. In addition, the instruments of colonial power that took years, even centuries, to develop elsewhere appeared fully formed in British Columbia, the last British colony of resettlement. As questions of colonialism tend to be immediate in British Columbia, post-colonial scholarship tends to be more developed there.³² This too makes it an ideal location for a study of this nature.

Tracing the history of a racism presupposes a solid analytic framework for determining what is and what is not racism. This leads to the second perspective that frames this study: historic racisms can be meaningfully analyzed and differentiated from other phenomena insofar as they meet three conditions: (1) they involve racialization, (2) these racializations are organized into exclusions, and (3) the resulting racialized exclusions enact significant negative consequences for the racialized and excluded. Each of these three conditions is a necessary but not sufficient condition for

something to be a racism. Every historic racism has exhibited all three.³³ As David Theo Goldberg notes, ‘Racisms are sets of conditions’ and ‘conditions may exist whether named or not.’³⁴ Each condition has implications for the approaches of this book. Racialization is the first condition for racisms. Racialized differences can appear to be naturally occurring, immutable, and self-evident, but they in fact change with time, place, and circumstance. What to one person in one time and place is an obvious and fundamental difference is simply invisible to another in a different time and place. This is not to say that how people are seen in terms of racialized difference is unimportant; indeed, it can be a matter of life and death. It is to say that race differences are made through social processes, rather than natural or biological ones.³⁵ ‘Racialization’ is the term for these processes. Racializations involve patterns of cultural representation, knowledge production, and social organization that give meaning to what the British sociologist Robert Miles has aptly called ‘socially imagined’ difference, specifically differences attributed to supposedly innate and unchanging phenotypical or cultural characteristics.³⁶ It is these patterns that make ‘race’ differences appear self-evident. Although there are myriad differences between people – for example, shoe size, length of eye lashes, and lactose tolerance or intolerance, which end of a soft-boiled egg they crack to open – only certain phenotypical or cultural differences (skin colour, ethnicity, religion, language, place of origin, and various combinations of these) have historically been made to stand for the essences of persons. Racializations do not come out of thin air or suddenly fall from the sky; they are historically produced. Racialized categories and their contents are invented and popularized over time. A series of statements or utterances and their material effects (that is, a discourse) make knowledge of racialized groups. This knowledge determines each group’s allegedly fixed characteristics and how individuals are sorted into the resulting groupings.³⁷ Put differently, language does not reflect race, it makes it. Language about racial difference does not record or document an external, objective reality of real biological, social, or cultural difference; rather, it creates the idea of such difference, and what appears absolute and natural in one context, even a matter of life and death, is at best silly in another.

Rather than being idiosyncratic practices, representations of racialized differences depend on socially and culturally available repertoires for representing difference. I can racialize someone only because I live in a context in which such racialization is socially meaningful and I have a vocabulary with which to do it. Among other things, this means that representations of racialized difference racialize; that is, they make ‘race,’

rather than record objective or natural differences. Fixing a group through racialization establishes its boundaries, marking its members as those with alleged characteristic X. This marking is necessarily also fixed in relation to at least one other group that is marked as allegedly being not-X. Thus, racializations are always relational: one group is always racialized in relation to another.³⁸

Recognizing that racialization and not 'race' is what is at play in racism leads me to read my historical sources differently from many other historians. Although I share with other historians the objective of documenting and understanding a real past, I see the relationship between my sources and historical reality somewhat differently.³⁹ The great tradition of historical research is to read documents not just as artifacts but as windows on the past, in effect, to read through the document to an external reality. Historians have demonstrated great ingenuity in finding documents, in overcoming their incompleteness, and in constructing the lenses of context that allow them to see the real past through documents, but they have often not seen the representations within historical documents themselves as constitutive of reality – and not just for the historian looking back but for the people who produced the documents in the first place. In contrast, I read my documents as actively trying to fix and refix meanings that were slipping at the time the documents were produced. For example, I see the statements of the Victoria School Board justifying segregation as also trying to fix the meaning of 'Chinese,' to fix who was included in the category and who was not, and at the same time trying to fix the unnamed categories of 'Canadian' and 'white.' School trustees may not have been the inventors of these categories, and their representations certainly employed a historically specific repertoire, but they would not have needed to fix these meanings in the first place if the meanings themselves had not begun to slip. The resulting reading highlights the racializing nature of statements such as those of school officials.⁴⁰

My approach to reading sources builds on Stuart Hall's analysis of the role of representation in cultural systems. Representations are the signs, symbols, words, phrases, and sounds that communicate meanings. It is only in and through representation that human beings can know the real world. As Hall admits, this does not mean that there is nothing outside of discourse, that is, outside of representation. It does mean that things can be known or have meaning only through discourse. As he also notes, the meanings associated with a particular representation are not fixed but shift as they enter into circulation as people take them up and remake them for their own purposes. Because of their social nature, human beings

interact with others, and when left to their own devices take up and remake the representations of others. As a result, the originally attached meanings change and with time even essentialized categories slip.⁴¹ What Arendt called common sense, the shared sense that arises from the experience of being in the world in everyday contact with other human beings, tends to rub away the sharp edges of essentialist understandings.⁴² As both Hall and Arendt have noted, power intervenes to refix meanings and to break this shared sense of the world.

The organization of racializations into exclusions is the second condition for racisms. Like other forms of cultural representations, once they enter into circulation and are remade by people for their own purposes, racializations should also slip over time. If people are left to their own devices, their day-to-day interactions and roles in the cycle of cultural production and reproduction should cause even racialized meanings to slip. Yet, racialized representations are relatively long-lived; they have a habit of returning, often in new dress. This refixing of meaning points to the operations of power that make racializations into multiple exclusions, which, among other things, make racializations appear natural and unproblematic. The organization of exclusions is purposive and relatively objective in nature. They are matter-of-fact. People are either excluded or they are not.⁴³ Exclusions are something that one human being (or a group of human beings) does to another (or others) whether deliberately and consciously or out of habit and thoughtless practice; that is, they do not merely occur but are organized, sometimes purposefully, sometimes not. Whether someone is excluded is independent of the intentions of the person doing the excluding.⁴⁴ Racialized exclusions take many forms. They can be material: exclusions from particular territories, spaces, institutions; from access to social wealth, material goods, and services; or from life itself. They can be social: exclusions from particular social statuses, or networks or institutional roles; or from access to political rights. They can be symbolic: exclusion from being represented in particular ways or exclusion from having one's self-representations engaged or taken seriously. Although racisms always begin in the first instance with the racialization and exclusion of a particular group, racialized exclusions inevitably involve equally racialized inclusions.⁴⁵ If someone is being excluded, someone else is concomitantly being included. If someone is being oppressed, someone else is being privileged. If someone is being exploited, someone else is profiting. Thus, racialized exclusions, like racializations themselves, are always relational.

It takes power to organize exclusions. Organizing exclusions into a texture of life requires the efforts of multiple individuals all more or less

headed in the same direction. Although it is not the only basis of power, government is a major source of such power. This in turn points to the importance of state formation.⁴⁶ The institutions, rituals, and players at work in the 1922-23 students' strike were all products of a largely cultural process through which people from Britain and old Canada had established the dominance of their languages, their political arrangements, and their ways of being within the territory that came to be called British Columbia. Establishing this hegemony very much involved the creation of a particular state formation that harmonized these diverse actors and their actions while at the same time making their actions appear both morally correct, normal, taken for granted as merely the way things were, rather than as being things in need of explanation. Following the historical sociologists Philip Abrams and most especially Bruce Curtis, I understand state formation as consisting of two interrelated phenomena. At its most basic level, state formation is the state system, that is, the institutions of government and the agents who populate them, institutions that have definite material manifestations and empirically verifiable interrelations. In Canada, and indeed in other successful nation states, the state system includes such things as school boards, trustees, principals, students, and provincial departments and superintendents of education. In a somewhat more complex sense, state formation is made up of state projects – the multiple, complex, and at times contradictory projects that people bring to government and that in turn justify the activities of government agents, including masking or hiding the violence in which they often engage. Indeed, the capacity of state systems to organize violence is the ultimate pillar on which they rest. State projects are engaged in not only by the direct agents of the state system; ordinary people also join in them, thus establishing the hegemony of a particular state system. For example, schools may be financed by governments to form citizens or to train a workforce, but many individual families also rely on them as a source of free and relatively safe child care. Understood in this way, state formation – the operations of the state system and justificatory state projects – can be empirically investigated, as can its role in anti-Chinese racism.⁴⁷

However, an anti-essentialist approach to state formation also requires both avoiding reification and questioning the justificatory claims of particular state formations. Common figures of speech notwithstanding, states, nations, and even school boards are not historical actors. Human beings are. Human beings might be limited in terms of their choices, or may have no choice at all in their actions, but it is always human beings who act. Where possible, it is important to pay attention to who is doing

what to whom. An anti-essentialist approach to state formation cannot take the justificatory claims of a particular state system at face value, and most especially the claims of its agents to absolute jurisdiction and control over a particular territory and its inhabitants. As with other forms of social enactment, people can and do participate simultaneously in different, even competing, state formations. They move back and forth between state formations, just as they do all other boundaries. Indeed, I shall show that the BC/Canadian state system to which the Victoria School District belonged was not the only one operating in the area. A Chinese nationalist state formation also existed in British Columbia and was implicated in the students' strike. It was the product of local conditions in British Columbia as much as, if not more so than, in China. This formation was as much part of the territory that became British Columbia as that of the Victoria/BC/Canadian/British imperial state formation usually recognized. The public schools of British Columbia included Chinese-controlled public schools as well as those controlled by the BC government.⁴⁸

The third condition for racism is that racialized exclusions must have significant consequences for those racialized and excluded. Thinking of racism as racialized exclusions (and racialized inclusions) can be useful analytically, but it is important to remember that, historically, the members of groups subject to racialized exclusion have found it necessary to come together separately from members of dominant groups to organize struggles against exclusion. Sometimes it has even been important for oppressed groups to organize their resistance along exclusively racialized lines.⁴⁹ As with other scholars, I am reluctant to call such actions racist.⁵⁰ Thus, the third condition for racism is that racialized exclusions must have significant negative consequences for the members of the excluded group, what has been called 'non-trivial consequences.'⁵¹ Determining whether consequences are non-trivial necessarily requires taking seriously the self-representations of the excluded. Indeed, to fail to do so is to enact a form of racialized exclusion, which would have the non-trivial consequence of denying the humanity of the excluded as beings whose meanings are worthy of engagement; that is, it would be to enact racism. This in turn calls for an anti-racist project of finding and engaging the meanings of the racialized and excluded.

The effect of the last condition for a historical project on anti-Chinese racism is that it must take into account the effects of racist exclusion on those racialized as Chinese. This means that the project must necessarily find and bring into analysis their self-representations and, in turn, calls for attention to primary sources they controlled. I have accordingly drawn

on Chinese-language sources as well as the self-representations of those racialized as Chinese whenever they have appeared in the English-language record. This gives rise to a very different reading of the history of racism in British Columbia than that produced to date by other scholars.⁵² Where others have built on discourse *about* 'the Chinese,' my analysis draws on the discourses *of* people from China and of their BC-born descendants themselves. Indeed, through a kind of historical affirmative action program, I have weighted the latter sources more strongly than my other sources, even when they contradict myriad sources that allegedly describe 'the Chinese.'⁵³ There is always a danger in doing this, especially when these sources occur only in single or isolated instances. However, for the period I am considering, because of the paucity of Chinese-language sources and the rarity of the statements of self-identified Chinese in the English-language sources, giving them this weighting is unavoidable. For example, the single most important source for the period I am considering is *Tai-Hon Kung Pao (Dahan Gongbao)* or the *Chinese Times*, a daily newspaper published in Vancouver and associated with the Chee Kung Tong (CKT). This newspaper followed the CKT's political perspectives and hence was biased towards certain points of view and against others.⁵⁴ Full understanding of these biases can be achieved only by looking at other Chinese-language newspapers as well. However, at the time of writing, this is the only complete Chinese-language newspaper in Canada available for the period under consideration, and even here it is available only from 1915 on.⁵⁵ Thus, although I have made every effort to keep its particular biases in mind, this source is invaluable for highlighting the biases and silences of the English-language newspapers that other scholars of racism in British Columbia have relied on.

While looking for the sources of those racialized as Chinese, I have resisted using the much more developed scholarship on Asian Americans to fill in gaps in knowledge of the experiences of racialized Chinese people in Canada. Although there are important continuities between these experiences, which I am careful to highlight, there are also important discontinuities. For example, political groups such as the CKT straddled the Canada-US border and indeed other parts of the Chinese diaspora and China itself. The same forms of community organization, in particular clan associations and the Chinese Benevolent Associations, were common in both places. Even people's origins in much the same parts of China and their transnational lives were similar. In terms of discontinuities, Chinese American communities were significantly larger and more diverse than their counterparts in Canada. The gender imbalances of the Chinese

Canadian communities were significantly greater than those in the United States. By the twentieth century, the second generation constituted a sizable proportion of the Chinese American population, whereas the second generation in Canada was minuscule.⁵⁶ Further, the racism that is my ultimate concern arose out of local factors that differed in British Columbia from locations in the United States such as California. In certain respects, it was more intense in Canada than in the United States, and in other respects more intense in the United States. For example, in the United States, racist violence may have been more significant, whereas in Canada, the denial of political rights was more extensive. It remains a matter of empirical verification whether the lives of racialized Chinese people in Canada were similar to or different from those of the lives of racialized Chinese in the United States.⁵⁷ Indeed, as I shall show, the essentialist assumption that all 'Chinese' are alike, whether in Canada, in the United States, or in China, was in the first instance the creation of white supremacist discourse. Anti-racist scholars need to be careful about reproducing such assumptions.

This understanding that racisms are multiple and yet meet three conditions also frames my understanding of anti-racism. The third perspective that consequently frames the book is that, just as there are *racisms*, so too are there *anti-racisms*. Just as racisms have no essential form, so too anti-racisms take many forms and have different effects. Even people actively promoting particular racisms can have their anti-racist moments, and anti-racists their racist ones. Each of the conditions for racisms identified above can also be a basis for anti-racism. If racisms racialize, anti-racisms trouble racializations. If racisms organize racialized exclusions, anti-racisms promote deracialized inclusions. If racisms have negative consequences, anti-racisms try to mitigate these consequences. Indeed, particular anti-racist movements or actions can take place along any one of these dimensions or on any combination of them.

The analysis that follows elaborates on each of these points. Following my narrative chapter on the students' strike, analytic chapters focus by turn on racisms, on racialization, on the organization of racialized exclusions, and on the consequence of racialized exclusion. The chapter on racisms examines connections between anti-Chinese racism and anti-First Nations racism in British Columbia. The chapter on racialization documents the simultaneous invention of the racialized categories of Chinese and Canadian. The chapter on the organization of racialized exclusion discusses the role of Canadian state formation in the organization of the

racialized exclusion of people of Chinese origins from much of the territory of British Columbia and from the institutions of the BC and Canadian governments. The next chapter documents the toll that exclusion exacted on the lives of those racialized as Chinese. Chapters focusing on anti-racism follow. First is a chapter on how the locally born resisted racialized understandings of what it was to be Chinese and to be Canadian, inventing the new category of Chinese Canadians. I follow this with chapters on the role of Chinese nationalism in making a non-racialized inclusion in the face of racialized exclusions and on the role of Chinese nationalist schooling in mitigating the consequences of racist exclusions. The last chapter highlights the anti-racism of those who were not themselves racialized as Chinese. Finally, in the Conclusion I return to the implications of my analysis for the history of British Columbia, for the writing of history more generally, and for anti-racism theory and education.

The result of all of this is what I have called an anti-racist history.⁵⁸ I hope this history actively contributes to contemporary struggles against racism. By this, I do not mean merely that people need to know the past in order to avoid repeating it, nor that the past provides models and best practices for how to proceed in the present. Rather, examination of the past provides a basis for critical reflection on the present and for better understanding the complexities and possibilities of today. It is possible to see dynamic systems in operation in the past in ways that are impossible to see in the present. The assumptions, taken-for-granted perspectives, and biases of people in the past are always easier to see than those of people in the present. In addition, in a historical study, we know more or less how things turn out, something we can never know in the present. Meanwhile, understanding change over time also allows us to understand the constructed nature of seemingly permanent categories. Thus, I hope that this study provides contemporary anti-racist activists and educators a perspective from which we can better engage and understand the racisms of our own times.

This is also an anti-racist history that contributes to developing a language that admits the reality of racist injury without reproducing the categories that are part of the problem. Thus, disrupting taken-for-granted processes of racialization is an important part of my project. Repertoires of representation in modern English do not readily lend themselves to a vocabulary of disruption, and racializing terminology often slips back and forth between different categories. The term 'Chinese' can

variously refer to a civilization or a language, to a nationalism, an ethnicity, or a racialization. It can be used in ways equivalent to 'Mayan' or 'Esperanto,' to 'American,' 'Scottish,' or 'white.' However, how the category is being used usually goes unmarked in everyday usage. The resulting slipperiness of meaning allows the term 'Chinese' to fulfill different purposes and produce different effects.⁵⁹ It is further complicated by the fact that during the nineteenth century, the term 'Chinese' was an ascribed identity that, as we shall see in Chapter 5, had little meaning for the people it was applied to. An important part of my anti-racist strategy is to disrupt racializations by indicating clearly whenever they occur in the text. Thus, except when citing an original source or in a non-racialized usage, I signify a racialized term, for example, by referring to 'people racialized as Chinese' (or 'racialized Chinese' for short), or putting the word 'Chinese' in quotation marks. Equally difficult is the term 'white.' This racialization refers to people from Europe, especially northern Europe, and their descendants in the Americas one or more generations removed. There is no easy terminology that replaces it. Since the term refers to people from the United States and from what is today eastern Canada, as well as to people born in British Columbia, it makes little sense to refer to this group as racialized Europeans. Instead, I refer to 'people racialized as white,' or I place the terms 'white' and 'whites' in quotation marks. Similarly, I put the word 'Canadian' in quotation marks whenever I use the term in its racialized sense. For similar reasons, I place 'race' in quotation marks to signify that it is a social construction and not a natural phenomenon.

The resulting formulations may be a bit awkward and tiresome at times, but this seems the best strategy for acknowledging the realities of racisms and their consequences without re-inscribing the categories that are part of the problem to begin with. As often as not, I have found that I do not need to mark racialized categories at all. For example, rather than referring to 'the "Chinese" students being segregated,' I use the phrase 'the students being segregated.'

A third sense in which this is an anti-racist history is its deliberate focus on racism. This represents what George Sefa Dei has called a political choice to place racism as the primary category of analysis.⁶⁰ This is not to say that other categories are not important, or that racist social relations get enacted separately from any other social relations. Human beings are many different things all at once: they are racialized and gendered, sexualized and aged, and classed and constructed in terms of ability and disability. All of these take place together at the same time, even if in one particular moment one dimension of experience might be more important

than another, or one academic analysis chooses to privilege a particular dimension. Although I have attempted to document the operations of other categories of experience and of other systems of oppression as they intersect with those of racisms, they have not been my focus.

One effect of racist exclusions is that the self-representations of the excluded are not preserved, even in comparison to those of other marginalized groups. Some discourse about racialized Chinese women appears in English-language records, but most often as the objects of a prurient heterosexist gaze; these women's self-representations are simply absent in English before the students' strike.⁶¹ The racist exclusion of women racialized as Chinese from British Columbia was the main purpose of the 1885 immigration head tax on racialized Chinese workers and their families, and few women from China were able to come to British Columbia to begin with. The Chinese-language record is little better. Only a handful of Chinese-language sources exist, and those that do were produced by, and are about, men. The handful of women's self-representations in Chinese prior to the strike stress the importance of trans-Pacific gender and family relations (which I discuss below) but do not directly articulate women's experience of racism in Canada. Such is the case with a collection of letters in the Yip Family and Yip Sang Ltd. Papers of the City of Vancouver Archives. These are letters that Yip was asked to forward to people in Jinshan, but who were never located. They include several letters from women in China – wives, mothers, and sisters – to men in the Americas.⁶² Denise Chong, Woon Yuen-fong, and the contributors to the Finding Memories, Tracing Routes project have shown that it is possible to trace trans-Pacific links for later periods through a combination of family and oral histories; it would be impossible for the period I am considering.⁶³ Thus, although I can and do point to the masculinist nature of the discourses that I examine, and highlight the significance of gender and racism in trans-Pacific family relations, a full exploration of the articulations of racisms and gender is simply beyond the scope of this study.⁶⁴

In what follows, I argue that, by the 1920s in British Columbia, anti-Chinese racism shaped the lives of people racialized as Chinese and those of all others living in British Columbia. In conjunction with other racisms, it shaped where and with whom people could live, where and with whom they could work, where and with whom they could go to school, and what the content of that schooling would be. It shaped whether people could be married and whether they could live with their partners. It shaped whether an individual had political, civil, or democratic rights and what those rights could be. Along with social class, gender, sexuality, ability/



FIGURE 1 The Chinese Canadian Club soccer team, 1929

This group of locally born young men initiated the students' strike and were the first to use publicly the term 'Chinese Canadian' to describe themselves. Originally a social club, by 1922 the club's members had become politically active. *Source:* Stuart Thomson Photo, Vancouver Public Library, VPL 11801

disability, and age, it determined people's relationships to the people they encountered in their day-to-day lives and also shaped their relationships to the institutions of the Canadian state and whether those institutions were on their side. It even shaped what happened to their bodies when they died. This shaping had been the result of a purposive project with explicitly articulated goals. It emerged, in the first place, out of the masculinist project of men of European and especially British origins who sought to create their dominance not only over all women but over all other men in British Columbia as well.⁶⁵ Yet, by the 1920s, to most British Columbians this organization had become invisible, like the rules of arithmetic, simply the way things were, a matter of common sense that could be taken for granted, even forgotten. However, there were people

in British Columbia to whom this organization was all too evident, to whom it was self-evidently a matter of artifice and not nature, and who sought ways to undo it. Some of these people even thought that unfettered access to government-controlled schooling was a key to its undoing, believing that this schooling could provide them with the habits, dispositions, and knowledges that would allow them to erase this organization and its effects on their lives. By 1922, in Arendt's terms, they were prepared to question the existence of the world. For these people, the students' strike would be their first major test.

I

The 1922-23 Students' Strike

No Longer 'Public Schools.'

– Ma Gungru

The students' strike was born in the heart of Victoria's Chinatown at 608 ½ Cormorant Street. Here, the Chinese Canadian Club maintained what a 1924 visitor described as 'quite a pleasant club room.' It was amid their 'very good and complete library of the best English authors, including the entire works of Jane Austen' that the group of young men came up with the idea of the school boycott.¹ As a group, they were all too well aware both of their marginalization from the dominant society and of the necessity of an English-language education to ensure their futures in British Columbia (discussed in Chapter 6), and they had the confidence, the will power, and the resources to resist further segregation. The group brought together considerable social and cultural capital. The skewed demographics of the first-generation Guangdong migrant community arising from the immigration head tax on workers and their families meant that two-thirds of the locally born were the children of the merchants and professional elite. Almost all the club members had attended the Victoria School Board schools, several had graduated high school, and at least one had attended university. Many had also attended Victoria's Chinese-language schools, and some may have had a complete elementary education in Chinese. The club president, Joe Hope (a.k.a. Low Kwong Joe or Liu Guangzu in Mandarin Pinyin romanization) had been sent to

China for at least part of his education.² Although individual club members may have been less literate in Chinese than others, and some better educated in English, between them, their collective fluency in both Chinese and English ensured that they were well aware of segregation and its consequences, as well as of the potential for student activism. Chinese-language newspapers had also reported on the events of the May Fourth Movement in China, and club members would have been aware of the central role of students and educated young people in the growing popular nationalist movement there. Even the idea of the students' strike itself likely came from these cultural connections: in 1920, the *Chinese Times* reported on a students' strike in Canton, organized to protest the local warlord government's diversion of tax revenues from schools to the military.³ Meanwhile, the *Chinese Times* had reported on the efforts of the overseas Chinese community in Mississippi to fight the state government's 1921 decision to impose school segregation on racialized Chinese students there.⁴ In addition, the group's schooling in the provincial government-controlled schools meant they were well acquainted with the functioning of the Canadian state system. Although initially a social group, they had become politically active by 1919, even spearheading an unsuccessful campaign for voting rights for both the locally born and returned veterans.⁵ By 1922, many club members were launching their adult lives, finding employment in the professions and semi-professions, some with clients of European origins, and they were beginning to establish families of their own, in some cases producing fourth-generation offspring.

Unsurprisingly, Joe Hope and other locally born people were the first to protest when Municipal School Inspector George H. Deane proposed the segregation of all racialized Chinese in January 1922. Since September 1919, the old Rock Bay School had been used for segregated instruction of immigrants from China, mainly boys, who spoke little or no English and who were usually two or more years older than other students at their reader level. The annual reports of the Department of Education show a steady rise in enrolments at the school – from one division with forty-three boys and one girl in 1919-20 to three divisions, one of sixty-six boys, another of fifty-nine boys and one girl, and a third of forty-two boys in 1921-22.⁶ Deane was reporting on the unexpectedly large attendance of older boys from China at the Rock Bay School and was also concerned about discipline at the school.⁷ The Rock Bay students were certainly unruly. In 1921, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), the principal governing and defence organization of the Victoria community, took the extraordinary step of warning the parents and guardians of the school's

students to ensure that they followed the school rules. Meanwhile, a young Chinese Canadian woman, Lavina Dickman, who had been hired to teach at the school, would ultimately not have her contract renewed on the grounds that she was unable to control her class.⁸ Although Deane may have been commenting on conditions at this school in particular, the *Daily Colonist* reported him as warning that the 'mingling of Chinese with white boys and girls' constituted 'a growing menace' and as calling for placing all racialized Chinese pupils in one school on the grounds that 'there is a danger in these Chinese boys, many of whom cannot even speak English, coming from their insanitary living quarters downtown, and mixing with other children with no attempt at segregation ... We know that it is not only a tendency for the Chinese to live in insanitary quarters, but a practice.'⁹

No doubt even more disturbing to the Chinese Canadian Club were the reported comments of the trustees in reaction to Deane's comments. The *Victoria Daily Times* quoted Trustee John L. Beckwith as expressing concern over the rapidly increasing school population: 'If accommodations were provided for the Chinese, say at Rock Bay School, it might be possible to find room for the growing white school population in the schools.' Trustee Walter Walker charged that officials were derelict in their duty if they were allowing sixteen-year-old boys who did not understand English into the schools. When Trustee Cecilia Spofford expressed incredulity that 'so many of the Chinese students are said to be natives of Victoria, and yet cannot speak English,' board chair and long-time trustee George Jay replied that this was because the students attended schools in Chinatown, where they spoke only Chinese. He suggested that the board return to its 1907 policy that 'no Chinese be admitted to the schools unless they know English sufficient to make them amenable to ordinary class room discipline.'¹⁰

Chinese Canadian Club members would have been well aware of the opinions of those trustees who favoured segregation. Chairman Jay had long made his career by advocating segregation and had in fact helped develop the 1907 policy. Meanwhile, Trustee Beckwith, the co-owner of the Clayoquot Sound Canning Company, a long-time member of the city council, and former mayor of Victoria, had stated two months earlier that 'the mixture of whites and Chinese in the public schools is abominable.'¹¹ Beckwith was speaking as a member of a subcommittee of the Victoria Chamber of Commerce chaired by mill owner J.D. O'Connell. The committee brought in a proposal for a number of restrictive measures on racialized Chinese, including school segregation. Trustee Christian Sivertz

had also been a member of this committee. Sivertz was a prominent trade unionist who had been president of the BC Federation of Labor, secretary-treasurer of the Victoria Trades and Labor Council, and president of the Victoria Postal Workers Union. Most trade unionists of European origins during this era favoured restrictions on Asians.¹² Although Sivertz dissented from the committee's call for a ban on 'Oriental' land ownership, he called its proposals on school segregation 'a method well calculated to meet a difficult situation.'¹³ The school board election in January had returned Percy R. Brown, a prominent insurance broker and another member of the chamber of commerce.¹⁴ Trustee Spofford, the founder and principal organizer of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in British Columbia, had also been one of the leaders of the campaign for women's suffrage in the province. However, like many other first-wave feminists, she did not support expanded rights for racialized minorities.¹⁵ She and Trustee Walter Walker repeatedly expressed support for segregation.¹⁶ Although she became less involved in the issue during the summer and early autumn of 1922, the seventh trustee, Bertha P. Andrews, was active in many of the board's discussions in January, variously moving and seconding several motions relating to racialized Chinese pupils.¹⁷

Chinese Canadian Club members reacted quickly to these calls for segregation by petitioning the very next board meeting. However, their intervention did not stop the trustees from barring entry to all students sixteen years of age and older who had not as yet graduated from the fourth reader, except for those who had special permission from the board. This thinly veiled attack on older students from China brought a formal protest from the CCBA. Although the school board does not appear to have reacted to the Chinese Canadian Club petition, it did react to the CCBA, instructing board secretary W.C. Pope to send 'a suitable reply,' one 'pointing out in particular that there is no intention on the part of the Board to discriminate against Chinese children.'¹⁸ Indeed, when the measure was introduced, although Inspector Deane specifically referred to the Chinese pupils over the age of sixteen, the resolution adopted by the board did not refer to any specific group. When Pope's letter was finally sent on February 10, he assured the association that the board had no intention of discriminating against anyone 'except with a due regard to their best interests and the interests of the schools in general.' Pope pointed out that the newspaper reports on the board meetings 'are not always accurate and do not always convey the true meaning intended by the speaker.' He justified the board's action in banning the older students on the grounds that it would end overcrowding at Rock Bay, which meant

that the teachers could better 'do justice' to the students. He clarified Deane's comments, pointing out that the inspector never intended that boys living 'at a distant point' be required to attend 'a Chinese school' provided they were 'of the usual school age and could speak English.' He concluded by 'regretting very much the evident dissatisfaction which the report of the school board meeting in question created in the minds of a large number of Chinese residents.'¹⁹

There the matter stood for several months, as the trustees had a more pressing financial and political issue to deal with. The newly elected mayor and council of the City of Victoria had run on an austerity ticket. Once in office, they proceeded to carry out their agenda of cutting the size of the municipal government, scaling back the salaries of municipal employees, and reducing taxes. During this era, school taxes were combined with the municipal property taxes. Even though the school board had an independent authority to set its own tax rates, it was the municipality that collected the taxes. Thus, the municipal council bore the political heat for property taxes without being able to directly control a sizable proportion of them. The council accordingly called on the school trustees to effect economies. One of the reasons that the older students were banned from board schools was that it would have been politically difficult for the trustees to justify hiring additional teachers in the face of this pressure. The only way that trustees could effect economies was either to lower teachers' salaries or to increase class sizes. However, they were locked into collective agreements with their teachers, who refused their overtures to reopen negotiations. The market for high school teachers was also particularly competitive. As most of the schools were already at capacity, their efforts at major cost-cutting proved fruitless. This drew considerable criticism of the trustees in the English-language papers.²⁰ In July, fuel was added to the fire by a report on the City of Victoria's finances by Dr. Adam Shortt, an economic historian from Queen's University. Although Shortt admitted that the Victoria School Board was far from the most extravagant, he launched a scathing attack on the system of centrally controlled public education, questioning whether it had in fact raised people's educational levels since a half-century earlier and attacking the curricular control of the Department of Education. He also launched a survey of high school students to see whether they were getting value for their money. A copy of his report was distributed to every household in the city.²¹

A controversy also erupted between Chairman Jay and Trustee Andrews. The core of the dispute centred on the disciplining of a group of high school boys who had responded in an 'inappropriate' verbal manner after

two high school teachers told them that the tennis courts were closed, only to proceed to play tennis themselves. Trustee Andrews defended the boys, whereas Jay supported the teachers. The matter became so heated that Jay withdrew from the board meetings, until Mrs. Andrews left the city on vacation. Much of the July 3, 1922, meeting that voted for segregation was taken up by the other trustees urging Mrs. Andrews to apologize to the absent Chairman Jay. This controversy was widely reported in the press, which as a result paid little attention to the board's decision at the same meeting to segregate all racialized Chinese pupils.

In this atmosphere, the trustees needed to show that they were doing something to ensure the efficiency of the schools. If salaries could not be cut, more students could be admitted to the schools by removing students over the age of fifteen, the age of compulsory attendance. Care, however, had to be taken to not exclude students who were attending or who might attend the high school. The other solution was to relocate some children to the old schools at Rock Bay and King's Road, both in the North Ward district that surrounded Chinatown. Such a relocation, however, needed to be justified on educational, rather than financial and political, grounds. 'Chinese' pupils provided the solution for both the pupils to be excluded and those to be relocated. In effect, the solution was to ban the older pupils among them from the schools and to move the younger ones into segregated racialized-Chinese-only schools near Chinatown.

At their July 3 meeting, the trustees moved to segregate all racialized Chinese pupils. Inspector Deane called for the exclusion of all pupils who had reached age seventeen and of all primary pupils who were age twelve or older, except for those with special permissions. This effectively barred from the schools teenaged children from China who were recent immigrants, leaving existing high school students unaffected. Deane then reported on 'the classification by ages and by grades of the Chinese pupils attending the public schools.' He stated that their attendance tended to produce what the school board minutes called 'retardation of the class as a whole' and 'that the segregation of the Chinese pupils would be of great advantage to them as special stress could be put on subjects most needed by them, such as English, etc.' He proposed a detailed plan for the students' relocation. Trustee Beckwith, seconded by Trustee Spofford, moved that the plan be put into effect, reserving the board's right to grant special exemptions from the policy. The motion was duly carried, and the board spent much of the rest of the summer organizing the school buildings and hiring teachers and a principal for the new racialized-Chinese-only school, which would consist of three sites: Rock Bay, King's Road, and, once the

relocated structure was finished, Railway Street.²² In contrast to the Jay-Andrews controversy and the Shortt report, these actions did not draw much press attention. However, as the board's plans became public, they drew protests from residents neighbouring the Railway Street site and, shortly after, those near the King's Road School. These residents argued that a racialized-Chinese-only school would lower their property values and that such a school should be in Chinatown, a call favoured by the editorialists of the English-language dailies. The residents petitioned the board, held rallies, and even threatened a lawsuit. But the board stood firm in its plans and towards the end of August affirmed that it would proceed with segregation as planned.²³

The long lead-up to actual segregation allowed the members of the Chinese Canadian Club to develop a three-pronged plan for resistance. First, even though segregation mainly affected the locally born, they sought to unite all the major overseas Chinese organizations against segregation. This required working with and through the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Second, they organized community support to maintain the solidarity of the strikers. Third, they organized a campaign of publicly challenging the school board and its claims in the English-language newspapers, as well as directly to the board itself.

On the Friday evening before the start of classes, the board received a petition from 'Chinese merchants and ratepayers' and a statement of protest from the Chinese Canadian Club. But the board was much more concerned about the threatened lawsuit from opponents to the location of the Railway Street School and received a delegation of Ward Two ratepayers on the matter. In the end, the board decided to proceed with its plan, a decision announced in the English-language newspapers the following day. On September 4, the day before classes began, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association called a meeting to discuss the situation. The association's directors agreed that they would call on the Chinese government to intervene in the matter and retain a lawyer to fight the measure. They also called for the legal fees to be covered by both voluntary contributions and compulsory contributions of two dollars per affected student.²⁴ It is also likely that at this meeting it was agreed to proceed with the strike. Thus, the events of September 5 were not acts of truancy but part of a planned and coordinated response, sanctioned by the leading community organization. At a second meeting on September 5, the CCBA formally established a Kangzheng Fenxiao Tuanti Hui or a Fight School Segregation Association to lead the campaign against segregation.²⁵ It affirmed the leadership of the Chinese Canadian Club by

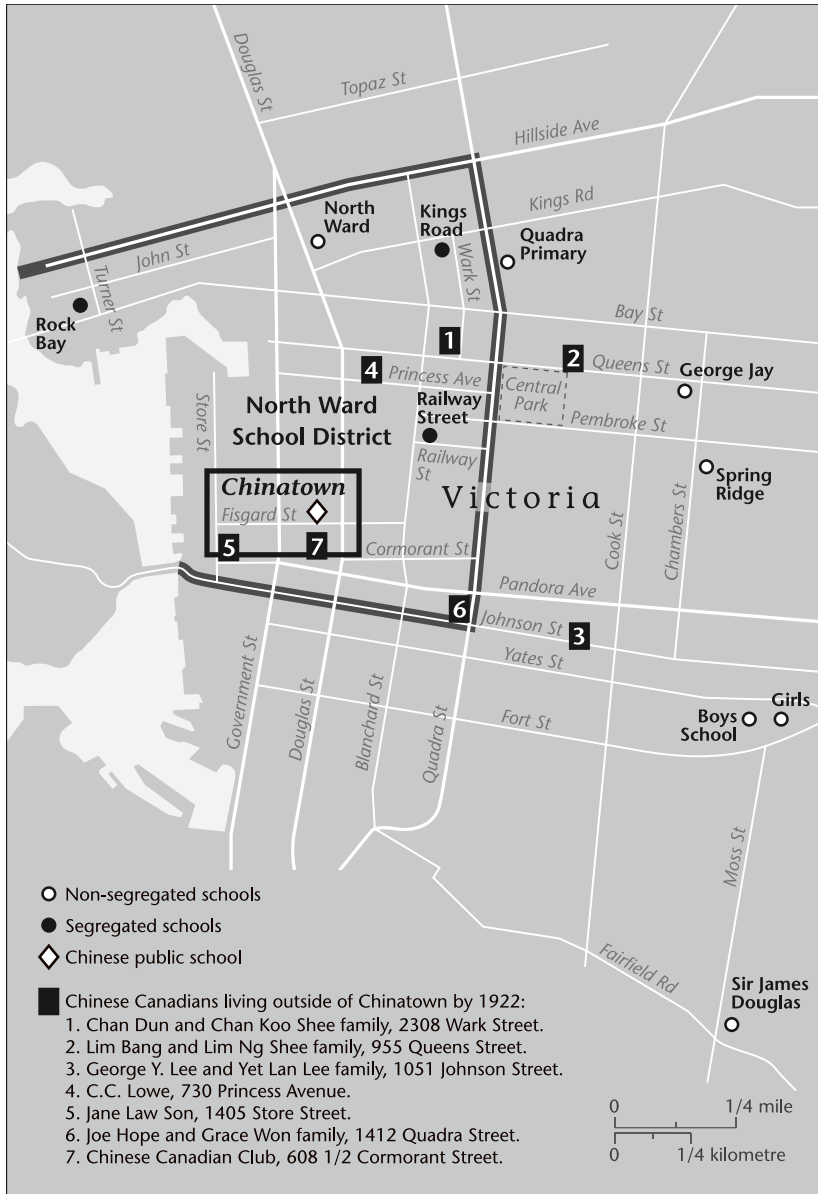


FIGURE 2 Victoria's Chinatown, surrounding schools, and Chinese Canadian households, 1922

appointing Joe Hope as the president of the new association. The committee then sent a letter to the Chinese embassy in Ottawa requesting that the Chinese government intervene in the dispute.²⁶

The strike appears to have caught the school board off guard. Indeed, the day of the strike, its only action seems to have been to send a letter to the CCBA in answer to the protests of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Chinese Canadian Club, and the CCBA. The letter claimed, 'The Board of School Trustees of Victoria is convinced that the best educational interests of the chinese [sic] pupils demand that they be segregated up to the Senior Fourth grades.'²⁷ The strike was so unexpected that the *Daily Colonist* even reported that segregation had gone ahead.²⁸ Two days after the strike began, the *Daily Colonist* editorialized that the whole matter was a misunderstanding and suggested that the school board had the best interests of all parties at heart: 'The Oriental, if his feelings could be analyzed, probably would be found to be as sensitive in certain respects as his Occidental cousin, and he objects to anything indicative of a design to stamp him as of an inferior order.' It concluded by pointing out that 'even children of the Chinese are peculiar. A school strike would be productive of great joy in the heart of an Occidental child; the Oriental youth, thirsting for knowledge, would prefer to be at work in preparation for the battle of life.'²⁹ Meanwhile, the *Toronto Globe* had recorded the strike on September 8 and noted the following day that the strike was failing, a claim that several English-language papers were to mistakenly also make during the first few weeks of the strike.³⁰

The Chinese Canadian Club campaign to explain the reasons for the strike to the English-language public became evident within days of its beginning. Several letters to the editor from self-identified graduates of the public school system, almost certainly second- or third-generation residents, explained the reasons for opposing the board's actions. G. Won pointed out that the overwhelming majority of school principals in Vancouver, 'a city with five times the more population in Chinese students than Victoria,' had voted against segregation. After calling for the return of all students to the previous classes, the writer concluded: 'As the evidence shows one cannot come to any conclusion other than that the attitude of the Victoria Board of School Trustees is one of discrimination.'³¹ Quon Y. Yen, a Victoria merchant, questioned the reasons for the school board's actions. Pointing out that it could not be motivated by sanitary issues, as ethnic Chinese children were clean, nor academic ones, as many were at the top of their classes, he asked, 'Why select the Chinese and not discriminate against the other nationalities? These children are British born

and are here to stay and become citizens of Canada.' He suggested that it was segregation that created prejudice and concluded by asking, 'Surely [the trustees] are not moved to act simply out of racial prejudice?'³² A third letter, signed by 'Kwong Joe,' almost certainly Joe Hope, dismissed the board's claim that segregation was in the best interests of the students themselves as a 'smokescreen' covering the 'sinister purposes' behind its 'prejudiced actions.' He claimed, 'The Chinese residents cannot but come to the conclusion that the School Board in taking this action were under the unholy influence of the [anti-]Oriental agitators, who either have forgotten or did not possess the virtues of the teachings of the Christian religion, virtues to make what is known as the brotherhood of men no matter what race or from what class he may spring.' He then sarcastically pointed out that people of Chinese origins had been resident of Victoria and had consequently enjoyed the benefits of a superior civilization for only fifty years, whereas the trustees had received this benefit for eighteen hundred years and must therefore all be honourable men.³³

Throughout the following months, whenever the comments of trustees were reported or others expressed support for the trustees, the members and supporters of the Chinese Canadian Club responded directly. The result is the largest archive of texts written by second- and third-generation people before the Second World War that records their understandings of their position in Canadian society. Letter writers articulated the reasons for the strike: experience had shown that segregated schooling meant inferior education, whereas integrated instruction meant successful education in English and in 'Canadian ways.' Partial segregation of students who were significantly older than their classmates and who spoke little or no English could be accepted, provided the quality of instruction in segregated schools was improved, but locally born people needed unfettered access to English-language schools to ensure their integration into Canadian society. The strike supporters noted that, as British subjects and ratepayers, they were entitled to equality of educational opportunity and 'fair play,' and they accused the trustees of acting for no reason other than racial prejudice, as segregation in practice singled out racialized Chinese pupils and not those who might in fact need special instruction in English.³⁴

Significantly, the letter writers characterize the school board's action as motivated by 'race prejudice' rather than by 'racism.' The latter term and its cognates did not come into existence in the English language until the 1930s, when they were first used to apply to the 'scientific racism' of the Nazi Party in Germany. During and after the Second World War, it was extended to refer to the segregation of African Americans and to other

cases of racialized discrimination. Thus, by accusing the trustees of practising race prejudice, the letter writers were charging them with the modern equivalent of racism.

In mid-September, letters such as these led the *Victoria Daily Times* to editorialize in support of the school board. It rejected out of hand the claim that the board was un-Christian in its actions and posited instead its responsibility for the 'maintenance of all round efficiency and the preservation of harmony in the schools.' Although admitting that there were risks in segregation, these were necessary 'if the contact of two totally different temperaments and characteristics jeopardizes harmony and threaten efficiency in the schools.' It further claimed, 'Discord and the possibilities of racial trouble might have resulted' from the previous arrangements.³⁵ In the face of the letter writers' demonstration that their cultural knowledge was no different from that of other Victoria residents, the newspaper reasserted fundamental difference.

However, editorial opinion in British Columbia was not unanimous in supporting the school board. The *Chinese Times* editorialized that 'the ignorant among the white people of British Columbia harbour feelings of racial prejudice: they would abandon and destroy international friendship, they promote the idea of restricting China and the Chinese and have established an association to expel Asian people from the province.' According to the paper, Canadian government officials turned a blind eye to the activities of the exclusionists and then implemented measures that ordinary people would not dare to. Such was the case with the Victoria school board and its segregation of racialized Chinese students. After rejecting the board's arguments over sanitation and grade retardation, the editorial pointed out that 'the segregation of Chinese children is a harsh precedent that could be extended to other restrictions on the Chinese.' Accordingly, the paper urged all 'overseas Chinese' to pay close attention to the issues involved and called on the Chinese ambassador to intervene. It also called on the CCBA to hire lawyers who could negotiate with the board and urged other newspapers to spread news of these events to important people in China.³⁶

For their part, the majority of school board trustees appear to have been both surprised by the strike and stung by the suggestion that they were motivated by racial prejudice. The trustees reacted to the strike and the resulting public controversy by adopting a motion on September 13 that was intended 'to correct any misunderstandings which may prevail' and to clarify their policy. The motion, unlike the original segregation order, was careful not to mention 'the Chinese' at all, stating only that special

schools would contain 'all pupils whose limited knowledge of the English Language is causing retardation to themselves as well as interfering with the satisfactory progress of other pupils in the same class.' The motion also specifically assigned to the King's Road and Railway Street schools 'pupils who reside within a reasonable distance of these schools' whom the board judges 'will benefit the most' from 'special emphasis ... to the teaching of English.'³⁷ Although their July 1922 imposition of segregation had referred only to 'Chinese pupils,' the trustees maintained the position throughout the strike that they were motivated by educational considerations alone and in no way by racial ones.

Thus, within a week of the strike starting, positions had hardened. On the one hand, the school board and Victoria's English-language newspapers were claiming that the board was justified in its actions. On the other hand, the affected community was critiquing the board as racist and as entirely unjustified in its actions. Meanwhile, the trustees were affirming that they were acting in the interests of educational efficiency and in the interests of the children involved. However, as a letter from Mrs. A. Maude Burnell showed, the Chinese Canadian Club letter-writing campaign was beginning to win over the larger community. Although not explicitly condemning the school board, Mrs. Burnell noted, 'I have been impressed with the correspondence re the Chinese.' She condemned racial prejudice and called for 'mercy and justice.'³⁸ By mid-September, English-language newspapers were reporting that support for the strike was diminishing and that 'Chinese pupils' were slowly returning to classes, twenty according to the *Daily Colonist*, while eleven had been given special permits to attend 'the white schools,' according to the *Victoria Daily Times*.³⁹ Rather than representing significant numbers of students breaking the strike, these reports may well have reflected wishful thinking on the part of school officials. The meticulously collected attendance figures of the Department of Education's annual report show 'less than six' racialized Chinese pupils as attending during the entire school year.⁴⁰ However, it appears that similar reports were reaching the Fight School Segregation Association. Historical geographer David Chuen-yan Lai, who had access to the minutes of the CCBA for this era, reports that on September 16 the Fight School Segregation Association denounced parents who were sending their children to the schools. The association also decided to send a circular to all parents of racialized Chinese pupils calling on them to continue the strike. It also formed two 'vigilance teams' to enforce the strike.⁴¹ An English-language newspaper report on this well-attended meeting suggests that the community expressed strong opposition to the board and was

under no illusion that 'while the Board's resolution does not mention any specific nationality it is aimed directly at the Chinese.' At the meeting, the association denounced the proposed language test as a blind that would 'eventually lead to total segregation of the Chinese pupils,' and called on parents to continue to oppose segregation.⁴²

The remarkable solidarity of the strikers built on more than threats from the Fight School Segregation Association and the sense among second- and third-generation residents that they had very little to lose by opposing segregated schooling. It built actively on the sense of imagined community, or Chinese nationalism, that had been instilled in the first-generation migrant community over the previous fifty years. In February 1922, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association had warned that segregation would be opposed 'by the whole of the Chinese people.'⁴³ At its September 16 meeting, the association gave form to this statement by deciding to write to other communities in Canada with the prescient warning that if school segregation was allowed to stand, more severe consequences would follow. It also wrote to major newspapers and leaders in China calling for the support of all members of the Chinese nation everywhere.⁴⁴ At its September 24 rally in support of the strike, CCBA spokesperson Ma Gungru denounced potential strikebreakers as 'the public enemies of the overseas Chinese' and 'criminals against our country.'⁴⁵ In face of such statements, it is perhaps not surprising that the trustees failed to buy off the community leadership with individual exceptions. Through long-established policy, such exceptions had allowed community leaders to escape discriminatory measures. For example, in 1909, Lee Mong Kow, the chief interpreter for the immigration department, applied for and received a permit for his three children to attend an unsegregated school even though the board was segregating other children.⁴⁶ The July 1922 segregation order reserved the right of the board to make individual exceptions and, within a week of the start of the strike, Joseph Wong, an insurance agent who had been born in the city in 1891 and whose father had naturalized in 1892, sought special permission for his daughter to attend an unsegregated school.⁴⁷ As the strike went on, the board issued more and more special permits exempting families from its segregation regulations. According to one source, exemptions were eventually given to 96 of the 240 striking students.⁴⁸ However, despite the board's granting of more and more exemptions, few of the exempted students attended the schools, and the strike continued to hold.

In mid-September, the first of a series of people who tried to mediate the dispute entered into the strike. Harry Hastings was a businessman,

importer-exporter, Chinese-English translator, reputed Oxbridge graduate, and international law expert, by all accounts urbane, cosmopolitan, and an established public controversialist.⁴⁹ Hastings was also a strong anti-racist. Although Hastings would later represent himself as the leader of the strike, it is clear that the strike had started before he became involved, as had the campaign of the Chinese Canadian Club and that, at least initially, Hastings saw himself as explaining the motives of the strikers to the trustees and the larger community, that is, as playing the role of cultural interpreter.⁵⁰ As he himself explained in his first public comment on the strike, 'There are enough well-educated Chinese in our midst who should fight their own battles.'⁵¹ But as the strike continued, Hastings became a strong advocate for the strikers, playing a key role in broadening the campaign to gain support in the dominant community, as well as in publicly exposing the school board and its manoeuvres. This latter role brought him into direct and increasingly antagonist conflict with most of the trustees. He could have played these roles only with the active collaboration of the community. He certainly became the board's principal opponent in the English-language press. He was uniquely positioned to play these roles. The son of a father from England and a mother from China, the Taiwanese-born Hastings was fluent in Cantonese and was certainly well informed about developments within the Guangdong migrant community of British Columbia. At the same time, he was more closely integrated into the dominant society. In comparison to the Chinese Canadian Club and its members, he had considerable worldly experience, having lived in China, Hong Kong, and England, and having seen several popular struggles first-hand.

Hastings seems to have had a moderating effect on the strikers themselves. As he explained to Winifred Raushenbush, the researcher for the 1924 Survey of Race Relations, he got involved when 'the Chinese were seeing red' and 'young hot heads from Chicago, Columbia and Magill [sic] were writing letters and they wanted to turn everything upside down.' Feelings were running so strongly against the architects of segregation that, at one point in the strike, an older member of the community apparently approached Hastings to organize a strike of the ethnic Chinese workers at the mill whose owner was the head of the chamber of commerce's exclusion committee that had recommended segregation the year before. Hastings refused, later telling Raushenbush that he remembered too well the Hong Kong dock workers' strike.⁵²

Hastings was also keenly aware of the need to win allies. His many public interventions explained the concerns of the strikers and argued

against the positions of the board. His first letter to the editor on the subject explained that, until 1919, the students in the Victoria schools had all either been locally born or were naturalized Canadians. Since 1919, there had been a migration of older boys fleeing the chaos of South China, and these boys were the ones causing the difficulty. 'The Chinese' felt that only those boys who did not speak any English and possibly 'boys over 14 who are below the third grade, provided not Canadian born,' could be segregated. They also felt that students recommended for promotion at the end of the year should not be segregated. He concluded, 'The Chinese are correct in their attitude,' and warned that segregation might produce a backlash in Asia that 'the Canadian "white"' would live to regret.⁵³

Hastings also helped build a coalition that broadened the support for the strikers. On September 29, the Fight School Segregation Association asked him to represent the parents and to try to negotiate with the board.⁵⁴ Sources agree that it was Hastings who led a delegation of community representatives and missionaries that met with the school board on October 2, 1922. Not only did Joe Hope introduce him as being authorized to speak for the parents, but it is likely that Hastings had assembled the delegation. Hastings' parents had been missionaries, and he would have known that missionaries from the dominant group were likely to at least be listened to in ways that racialized Chinese spokespeople would not. Having missionaries tell the board that segregation was making it impossible for them to win converts challenged the board on its own terms. Far from 'Canadianizing' (read 'Christianizing') racialized Chinese, segregation was maintaining and increasing their difference. This tactic does not appear to have originated with the members of the Chinese Canadian Club, who in mid-September had engaged in a sharp and public exchange with a local Christian minister who had defended the school board's actions.⁵⁵ Hastings showed a shrewd understanding of the cultural politics of resettlement by bringing Won Alexander Cumyow over from Vancouver to speak for the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. In 1922, there were other members of the CCBA who could and did represent it in dealing with trustees, but Cumyow was the one representative of the racialized Chinese community who was unassailably Canadian and widely known to be such. A founder of the CCBA in 1884 and its first English-language secretary, Cumyow was a well-known court interpreter and entrepreneur, the original Chinese Canadian and one of the oldest locally born non-First Nations people in the province. In 1922, resettled British Columbia was still a small enough place for this to be generally known. The missionaries told the board that they were 'in sympathy with the Chinese on

this question,' and Cumyow explained that segregation would 'widen the breach [between racialized Chinese and racialized Europeans] to the detriment of the Chinese in Canadian life.'⁵⁶

The trustees responded to these representations by affirming their segregation decision and by issuing an ultimatum: either the strikers attended the segregated school or the schools put aside for them would be closed. This drew an angry reaction from the strikers and their supporters, and the community began to plan for a long-term continuation of the strike.⁵⁷ The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Chinese Canadian Club, and 'a large number of the guardians and parents of Chinese students' wrote to the board a few days later proposing an alternate plan. The writers noted that they had 'the strongest possible objection to the principle of segregation,' as the experience at the Rock Bay School had shown that segregation did not allow their children to adequately learn English; that the current plan 'will mean wasting the best school years of the lives of our children.' After expressing a willingness to cooperate with the board, they noted, 'We are bitterly conscious of our helplessness so far as legal and constitutional redress are concerned, and we can only invoke the world reputation earned by the British Empire for justice and "fair play," and the close friendship which has existed for many years between the British Empire and China.' The writers then suggested a modified plan in which most children would be allowed to return to their previous schools, but those four or five years older than their class averages would be segregated at Rock Bay, with improved instruction.⁵⁸ The board rejected the plan and reaffirmed its ultimatum. On October 9, the schools set aside for 'the Chinese' stood open. Only five boys, all belonging to the same family, showed up at the King's Road School. None of the twenty or so students who had been granted special permits to attend the regular schools because they spoke English showed up for classes either. The *Victoria Daily Times* reported that two or three older boys were picketing the schools to block students from attending, something Hope later explicitly denied. The five boys who did show up at King's Road had their names taken down and then were allowed to enter the school. As the rest of the schools remained empty, the board declared them closed that afternoon, while the five boys continued to receive special instruction at King's Road, a school that was also closed a few days later.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the Chinese Canadian Club and Harry Hastings were continuing their campaign in the English-language newspapers. Hastings' comments and the official statements of the Chinese Canadian Club and

the CCBA were now being published in the newspapers as part of their reporting on the impasse. Some reports identified Hastings as 'spokesman for the Chinese residents of Victoria,' and many quoted him extensively, even reproducing his letters to the board.⁶⁰ Hastings published numerous point-by-point rebuttals of the reported comments of school board members, including an extended analysis of the dispute. Published on the eve of the ultimatum taking effect, the analysis noted that the community had fully answered each of the board's accusations, whether that of the health threat, the retarding of the progress of others, or the need for special instruction. He included the class standings, ages, sex, and countries of birth of 155 of the strikers, showing that 97 of them were native born. He also forcefully condemned the board's position as racist, noting that 'the idea of segregation originated from Mr. Deane who allowed his personal animosity against the Chinese to influence him in making wild statements without taking the trouble first to satisfy himself as to the facts.' Hastings claimed that Deane 'is more determined than ever to let his race prejudice have sway, and that the School Board were carried away by Mr. Deane's personal opinions.' He added, 'In a word, the whole matter is one of pure race discrimination, which the subsequent amended resolutions, basing segregation upon a satisfactory test in English, have been unable to remove.'⁶¹ Hope, writing on behalf of the Chinese Canadian Club, echoed Hastings' allegations of racial prejudice. He reiterated that segregated instruction had proven that students did not learn English, that it would bar students from access to high school, and that the community had answered the board's claims. He even asked whether the board was deliberately imposing segregation to prevent them from assimilating. He concluded by appealing to 'the citizens who have children to put themselves in our place and ask themselves if they would have accepted the edict of the School Board.'⁶²

The board's October 11 meeting began with a petition from ninety-two parents of the segregated children. In the face of this public agitation, Trustee Andrews dramatically broke with her fellow trustees. In what was reported as a broken voice, Mrs. Andrews read a written statement into the record in which she noted that she had not participated in previous discussions, as she had been out of the city when the issue of segregation first arose, and that she had been silently 'hoping in the meantime that some amicable settlement might be reached.' She called the board's actions 'a violation of the fundamental principles of British justice and even a greater violation of the basic principles of our Christian religion.' She then proposed that racialized Chinese students be placed in separate classes in

otherwise empty classrooms in various schools, including Boys' Central, Girls' Central, and South Park. Her comments drew sharp responses from the other trustees in attendance. Trustee Brown expressed his surprise, saying that he had 'gone thoroughly into this matter,' and claimed 'Mrs. Andrews walked out of the room and asked to be excused every time this matter came up.' Chairman of the board George Jay stated a 'firm stand' had been taken, and Trustee Cecilia Spofford asserted that the board had been sincere in its desire to take care of both 'the Chinese and white pupils.' The trustees decided to postpone further discussion until all trustees could be present.⁶³

In the end, the board affirmed its policy and took the extraordinary step of directly responding to criticisms in the English-language newspapers by issuing a public statement on the dispute. According to this statement, the board had adopted its segregation policy in the first place 'in the interests of increased economy and efficiency' and affirmed that 'the board has put into effect no policy based on racial segregation.' Rather, the trustees claimed that they were merely asking 'junior and intermediate grade pupils of foreign extraction' in need of special instruction in English to attend special schools where such instruction could be provided. It concluded by regretting the decision of 'certain parents' to withdraw their children from the schools.⁶⁴

For their part, the 'certain parents' were making plans to maintain the strike on a long-term basis. Popular and institutional support was increasing within the first-generation Guangdong migrant community. For example, the CCBA's September rally against segregation was addressed by representatives of twelve organizations, including rival political parties and the Chinese Canadian Club.⁶⁵ The Chinese Benevolent Association in Vancouver had established its own Fight School Segregation Support Association, which would eventually send \$1,000 to support the struggle, while support also came in from the Chinese Benevolent Association in New Westminster and workers on the Empress of Asia steamship.⁶⁶ After the school board issued its ultimatum to the strikers at the beginning of October, the CCBA began to organize a school of its own for the striking students. The Zhonghua Yixue or Chinese Free School, which started offering classes on November 15, 1922, was housed in the CCBA building, financed by voluntary contributions, and offered a Chinese nationalist curriculum in Chinese.⁶⁷ It seems that if school segregation meant that racialized Chinese could not be 'Canadian,' they were prepared to be 'Chinese.' Certainly, the community could have organized an English-language school had it so chosen. A handful of community members were

graduates of the Provincial Normal School. According to Hastings, several Victoria School District teachers had offered to tutor the striking students, but he explained that not only did the community feel that it was already paying for English-language schooling through the school tax but also 'it would no doubt suit the majority in the School Board very well if the Chinese are ... compelled to establish their own educational institutions, thereby relieving the School Board, who would have the spending of the money contributed by the Chinese.'⁶⁸

Financing a free Chinese-language school suggests an unprecedented level of community support, a level again shown on November 19 when a rally filled the Empire Theatre to overflowing. Despite pouring rain, people arrived as much as two hours before the rally began to ensure that they got seats. Speeches and musical performances all had nationalist Chinese flavours. In effect, the struggle of the local community in Victoria had been successfully positioned as part of the larger struggle of 'the Chinese people' against oppression and for national salvation.⁶⁹

In this context, the Chinese Canadian Club rejected the school board's October statement in the most forceful of terms. Noting that the statement was now advancing a new reason for segregation, that of economy, the club pointed out, 'The Chinese too are taxpayers, and they contribute in the school tax more than the costs of educating their children, yet they are picked out to practice economy upon.' The letter concluded: 'The Chinese charge that the board only dared to take this action of singling them out because they have not the vote and the whole process is one of rank discrimination and racial prejudice.'⁷⁰ Towards the end of November, the Chinese Canadian Club completely debunked the claims of the school board that racialized Chinese pupils in the unsegregated graded schools were holding back the progress of others. It published a list of the 112 children who had been enrolled in the non-segregated schools before the strike. The list included their names, ages, standings, and rank, along with the number of students in the classes. It showed that 95 of the students were above the middle of their classes in their standing and noted that of the 17 students below the average for their classes most were two years or so older than their peers, suggesting that they 'might be classed as "backward,"' that is, as students who were slow learners rather than the stereotypic older boy/recent immigrant who spoke no English.⁷¹

About the same time that the Chinese Canadian Club was rejecting the school board's justifications of segregation, representatives of the Victoria Ministerial Association approached the board. At an in-camera meeting at the end of November, they offered their services to try to reach

a compromise.⁷² In mid-December, the board voted that, although it could not alter its decision, it would be willing to consider any suggestions that the association might have.⁷³

In the December school board elections, George Jay was re-elected; Bertha Andrews and Cecilia Spofford were defeated. On January 2, 1923, the new board held a special meeting to receive a proposal from the Ministerial Association, which suggested that all pupils be allowed back at their former schools and that special provision be made for 'any Chinese, Japanese or pupil of any other nationality' if the school's principal determines that he or she is retarding others in the class. This resulted in Trustee Christian Sivertz, seconded by newly elected Trustee Alexander Smith, moving that all Chinese pupils be invited to attend the schools they live the closest to, 'on the understanding that those of them who are found, after examination, to be deficient in the knowledge of the English language will be sent to a Special School.' Although the motion was defeated and the board's existing policy was affirmed, two trustees now seemed interested in settling the dispute. A motion to the effect that the strikers should attend when schools opened on January 8 was also adopted, but the schools once again remained empty.⁷⁴

The Ministerial Association's intervention appears to have represented an emerging consensus on the part of Victoria's Protestant clergy in support of the strike. Several Protestant missionaries had supported the strikers from fairly early on. As early as September 14, a letter from Presbyterian missionary W.E. Perry had denounced the allegation that racialized Chinese children were not clean as 'pure unadulterated bunkum' and affirmed the equality of all in the eyes of Christ.⁷⁵ The head of Anglican missions in British Columbia, Neville Lascelles-Ward, expressed similar support in a letter to the editor published on Christmas Eve urging the board to rethink its position.⁷⁶

At the end of January, the Chinese consul general to Canada, Dr. Chilean Tsur, intervened in the dispute after returning to Canada following consultations in Beijing. As the highest-ranking Chinese diplomat in Canada, Tsur had considerable prominence but little power. He was the representative of the northern warlord government, which was recognized by the Western powers and Canada. As many first-generation Guangdong migrants favoured instead the revolutionary government of Sun Yat-sen in Canton, settling the dispute would have been quite a coup for the northern government. Tsur told the English-language newspapers that he had been instructed to take up the matter, and accordingly sought meetings with city and school board officials. He was also invited to address

the Kumtuks Club. In his meeting with officials, Tsur linked his campaign against segregation to trade and property issues between Canada and China, pointing out that if Canadians wished to own land in China, it would be necessary for Chinese to own land in Canada.⁷⁷ Tsur's comments to the *Chinese Times*, which as the pro-Chee Kung Tong newspaper supported the warlord government, were even more blunt. He claimed that officials in Beijing were extremely angry and that 'the people of the whole country are already indignant at this injustice,' warning that 'if the matter is not resolved, our people will boycott the imports of Canadians.'⁷⁸ Tsur's criticism was rejected by the *Victoria Daily Times*: 'The Consul-General's complaint presents very much the case of a molehill being made into a mountain.' The editorial claimed that what it called Chinese children were not being segregated 'as a race,' since all those in the higher grade could attend regular classes. Rather, the paper claimed, the issue was one of language and suggested that the same measure would be applied to 'any other non-English-speaking nationality' so as to avoid 'handicapping our own children.'⁷⁹

The same night as the trustees met Tsur, board Chairman Jay addressed a High School Parent Teachers' Association meeting. He reiterated that the board's policy had come about when Inspector Deane, 'a very keen and energetic man,' had discovered that racialized Chinese students in the primary and intermediate grades of the elementary schools caused a certain amount of retardation in the progress of their classes. The resulting policy was 'mistakenly' referred to as one of segregation, but it was not: 'The Board's intention was to assist the Chinese as well as "our" children, giving them a special course of study.'⁸⁰

The broader community was beginning to question segregation; this was at least in part because of the efforts of the affected community itself. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association archives contain a copy of a petition to the board from 'rate payers, Property Owners and Civic Voters.' The petitioners noted segregation was unjustified to begin with, as there had been 'no complaints from any body of the Teaching Staff' about the previously existing system of 'intermingling.' They pointed out that there were only 240 Chinese children in a school system with six thousand students: 'We are informed, and verily believe that 85 percent of the Chinese children are Canadian-born' – as were many of their parents. These people were therefore 'Canadian subjects, and, as such, they should, in accordance with the fundamental principles of building up the Canadian Nation, be given every opportunity to learn Canadian Customs and Language, and this can best be done by intermingling.' 'The Chinese

Citizens of the City of Victoria' contributed \$100,000 a year in taxes to the city, the petition claimed, but the education of their children cost only \$13,650. The petition further affirmed, 'The only "Melting Pot," under which Assimilation can be fostered and Canadian customs and Ideals learnt is through the Public Schools and we believe that the Segregation of any particular race defeats that object.' It then noted that 'the Principle of Segregation is contrary to all British Ideals of Justice [and] Fair Play and if persisted may eventually result in a good deal of injury to Canada.'⁸¹ Regardless of whether this petition was ever sent to the board, that it was designed to be signed by property owners, whether or not racialized as Chinese, suggests the sophistication with which the opponents of segregation were approaching the struggle. Their Canadian nationalist arguments also show a high degree of cultural literacy in the mythologies of English Canadian state formation. Where the English-language newspapers and school board officials were repeatedly asserting Canadian and Chinese difference, the so-called Chinese were eliding the difference.

In February, with the strike now in its sixth month, trustees seized on the idea that the whole matter was a misunderstanding. At the February 15 board meeting, Trustee Henry O. Litchfield, who had been recently elected to the board, suggested that mistakes had been made on both sides: 'I don't think anyone on the Board intended that Parents should so construe the action of the Board that they would keep their children away from school.' He acknowledged that many of the students involved were Canadian-born and the board had a responsibility to provide for their education.⁸² Trustee Sivertz moved that the board invite the parents to a meeting, as 'the continued absence of Chinese pupils up to the Junior fourth grades gives the Board cause for belief that some misapprehension exists in respect of the various rulings of the Board.'⁸³ The board wrote to the CCBA on February 20 requesting a meeting with parents. The CCBA replied on March 5 that the parents would be pleased to meet in the hope that 'the board will come to the meeting with all ideas of segregation expunged from their minds, and that all parties will approach the matter with the sole idea of finding a solution that is fair to all, and that is in accordance with the fundamental principles of British justice and fair play, the sole object being the welfare of the children.'⁸⁴

On March 28, the Victoria School Board finally met with a delegation of parents and community representatives. All trustees were present except Trustee Walker. Harry Hastings was excluded from the meeting, apparently at the board's insistence.⁸⁵ The community delegation consisted of twelve people, including five 'youths' and someone the newspapers described

as 'a girl.' Chairman Jay began the meeting by noting that the board had been guided by two paramount considerations: the available space in the district and the educational welfare of the children concerned. He then called on Inspector Deane to describe the board's current plan, specifically that all pupils in the junior grades who had passed their tenth birthday and pupils up to and including those on the second reader be assigned to a division of the North Ward School, to be located at Rock Bay; that all third reader pupils who had 'passed the normal age for that grade' and beginners be assigned to another division of the North Ward School, to be located at King's Road School; and finally, that all other Chinese children attend 'the main school' in the districts in which they lived.⁸⁶ Newspaper accounts give a rather different version of the board's proposal. Both the *Victoria Daily Times* and the *Daily Colonist* quote Deane as saying that 148 of the 232 students involved would return to the schools they had attended the previous year, and the remaining 84 students would be accommodated in special divisions of the North Ward School at Railway Street and Rock Bay. Pupils in the junior grades who were over the age of ten and who were 'without proper knowledge of English' would be accommodated at Rock Bay. Railway Street would include a class for 'retarded children' and students from Spring Ridge and Quadra Primary who could not be accommodated there because of overcrowding.⁸⁷ Hope asked for several clarifications and pointed out that Railway Street was a racialized-Chinese-only institution. Cecil Lee, a locally born banker and Chinese Canadian Club activist, noted that his community had always been sensitive to the existence of racialized-Chinese-only institutions. To these concerns, Trustee Beckworth and Inspector Deane both said that the school was intended to accommodate those of 'foreign nationality' who did not speak adequate English.⁸⁸ In the end, the delegation agreed to consider the board's position.

The delegation's response came when the board next met on April 4. In a letter to the board, Hope proposed that all students on strike who had proven themselves eligible for promotion be allowed to return to their former classes, and that those over the average age of their classmates be allowed to withdraw from school and be educated privately. After considerable discussion, the board sidestepped Hope's proposal and voted to open the King's Road and Rock Bay schools on the following Monday (April 9). The *Daily Colonist* editorialized on April 6 for an end to the dispute, pointing out that the board's original position was much amended, in that it appeared the segregated schools would be used for all foreign nationals

who did not speak English. The editorial also hinted that segregation may not be the best policy, as it would lead to 'racial animosity.'⁸⁹ The day before the school openings, the English-language newspapers published a statement by Mr. Marchan, the president of the CCBA, taking exception to the board's proposal. He observed that of the 148 students slated to attend regular classes, 48 would have to attend 'the Special Schools for Aliens' until such time as room could be found for them in the regular schools: 'As the Chinese parents see it, the precedent that the Chinese children are only to be admitted into the "public schools" when there is room implied that these schools are no longer "public schools" but only schools expressly for non-Chinese students, and the Chinese children are only acceptable subject to the first call of non-Chinese.' Marchan concluded by requesting that the board reconsider its policies so that racialized Chinese children would be 'placed on exactly the same basis as all other children, and that the Board ... accord full equality of treatment to all pupils irrespective of race, creed or color.'⁹⁰ On April 9, the schools once again remained empty; indeed, some students who had been attending school on special permits stayed home.⁹¹ At its April 11 meeting, the board reiterated that it 'has always endeavored to administer the Public Schools of the City of Victoria in the best way possible to secure efficiency in education and at no time has race, creed or color influenced them in determining upon a policy.'⁹² Trustee Beckwith, apparently speaking for the other trustees, said that he believed that the school board had gone as far as it could.⁹³

In May 1923, the strikers and their supporters received news of a greater disaster than school segregation. The federal government had introduced legislation that would not only end all immigration from China (with the exception of the very wealthiest of commercial representatives) but also require all those of 'Chinese race' in Canada to register with the federal government. Moreover, those illiterate in English would face deportation. After lobbying by representatives of Chinese communities across Canada, including Joe Hope, the Senate version of the bill forced the government to drop the literacy requirements. However, the act still required all those of 'Chinese race' living in Canada to register with the federal government and to obtain special residency permits, and it made those who failed to do so subject to fines, imprisonment, and deportation. Until its repeal in 1947, the Chinese Immigration Act effectively ended the immigration of racialized Chinese people. Completely without irony, the measure came into effect on July 1, 1923, Canada's national day.⁹⁴ The

federal government had legislated what the Victoria School Board could not: racialized Chinese people were now indeed aliens who were not and never could be Canadians.

Thus, it was a rather sober community that confronted the beginning of a second year for the strike. In August, the CCBA began planning to continue the school for the strikers.⁹⁵ At the end of August, Inspector Deane told the board that the strikers had approached him with a view to securing 'the same terms as granted last Easter.' Deane stated that he thought he could offer them slightly better terms still. Trustees voted to leave it to him to secure the students' return.⁹⁶ All students were allowed to return to their original schools, while racialized Chinese beginning students would be sent to the Rock Bay School until they had graduated from the second reader (that is, grade four), and a special class for seventeen students who spoke little or no English was created at the King's Road School. Teachers and the principal had been instructed to immediately send these students to the regular schools once it had been determined that their English was sufficient. The CCBA had spent \$14,520 out of the \$16,430 it had raised to fight segregation. It voted to use the remaining funds to provide additional English classes for the seventeen students.

The King's Road class was still in operation in 1926. The segregation of beginning students continued at the Rock Bay School until the late 1920s when the class was moved to Railway Street School, where it operated until after the Second World War.⁹⁷ By September 1, 1923, the strike was officially over. In a world lacking good news, the *Chinese Times* headline proclaimed, 'Fight against School Segregation Achieves Victory.'⁹⁸

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