

Preface

I came to Canada from Hong Kong as a landed immigrant in the summer of 1968. By chance I came across Alan Phillips' article "The Criminal Society that Dominates the Chinese in Canada," published on 7 April 1962 in *Maclean's*, a popular Canadian magazine. Phillips wrote that

Canada's Chinese are controlled by a group which by our standards is criminal ... Chinatown is not merely a tourist trap baited with Canton's exotic food. It's a genuine fragment of pre-Communist China, a China that will never be again. Behind the bamboo screen of our Chinese ghettos, behind the bland closed faces and the incomprehensible language, the clannish culture of ancient China persist ... They (the Chinese) have their own civil service, foreign office, spies, and axes and, most important, their own law ... They pay lip service to our government but it is their own they obey, their local Chinese government, the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA)...The law of the CBA takes precedence over Canada's courts ... The power of CBA spokesmen is well known to police ... They (the CBA leaders) subvert our legal system... bribe our politicians. The CBA will continue its underground war against the government.

This article was the first piece I read about Chinatowns and Chinese Benevolent Associations (CBAs). I soon discovered that what I experienced in Chinatowns and CBAs was different from what had been portrayed by

Phillips and other writers, especially the journalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Western society did not understand how CBAs were structured and operated and so judged them inaccurately. Most newspaper reports about the Chinese communities and Chinatowns were either biased or distorted. In many cases, there was no truth in reports about how CBAs functioned. That might partly have been due to racial prejudice and partly misunderstanding or ignorance about Chinese culture and society in Canada. Because of their reticence, Chinatowns and their institutions were vaguely known or unknown not only to Westerners in the past but also to post-1960s Chinese immigrants. For example, many Hong Kong and Taiwan immigrants are still bewildered by Chinatowns and their organizations. Because of this situation, I wanted to rewrite the history of Chinatowns from an impartial perspective, dispel myths about them, and integrate them into the urban fabric of Canadian cities. To achieve these objectives, pure academic research seemed insufficient because insights into the inner dynamic of a Chinatown cannot be gained without active participation in its activities. Hence the seeds of my involvement in community work and research into Chinatown organizations and activities were sown three years after I landed in Victoria.

During the twenty years since my arrival, I have intermittently surveyed more than thirty Chinatowns across North America and interviewed many Chinese community leaders. My laborious study of Canadian Chinatowns resulted in the publication of *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* in 1988 and *The Forbidden City within Victoria: Myth, Symbol and Streetscape of Canada's Earliest Chinatown* in 1991. Both volumes emphasize the origins, functions, townscapes, internal structures, and urban problems of Canadian Chinatowns at different stages of development. The present book complements the previous publications. It presents in-depth research on the CBA in the City of Victoria as a case study of the Chinese community leadership in Chinatown, and the operation of a Chinatown government within a municipal government in Canada. Readers should not be misled by the title of the book. It not only examines the evolution of a Chinese association leadership in a Canadian Chinatown but also reflects the history of the socio-economic and political activities of Chinese in Canada before the turn of the twentieth century.

In the past, a CBA in a Chinatown was an overall organization of Chinese social and economic associations. It was at the top of the Chinatown power

structure and exercised power over its Chinese residents; the president was occasionally nicknamed the “mayor of Chinatown.” Before the 1950s, city and provincial governments had little or no interest in what was going on inside Chinatown, and what the CBA was doing so long as the decision of this “Chinatown government” did not affect the city and the community. Hence, the CBA was virtually an *imperium in imperia*. In some Chinatowns today, the CBA still represents the Chinese community. Knowledge of its organization, functions, and leadership patterns is essential to the study of the Chinatown power structure. Such a study will not only help municipal governments understand Chinatown problems, but also will help town planners adopt appropriate approaches to community planning.

The CBA in Victoria, established in 1884, is called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). I chose it for a detailed study for five reasons. First, CCBA was an official voice for all Chinese across Canada for twenty-five years (1884–1909) before the Chinese Consulate-General was established in Ottawa in 1909. A study of the work of CCBA reflects the early history of Chinese in Canada.

Second, CCBA is the only CBA in Canada that preserves records of its constitutions, routine meetings, circulars, notices, donation receipts, correspondences, newspaper clippings, posters, old photographs, and a great variety of other historical documents. In September 1970, I discovered cardboard boxes of these archival materials in the association’s unheated and dusty basement. I was permitted by Sam Lum, CCBA President, to browse through the materials. Some go back to the 1880s. Indeed, no other CBAs in Canada has maintained their vitality and kept records of its work for more than a century as has Victoria’s CCBA. The archival materials are indispensable in the study of the association’s development and the early history of Chinese in Canada. To do this work, I received a grant from the Social Science Research Centre of the University of Victoria from 1970 to 1972, and was given permission by Augustine Low, CCBA President in 1971, to do a preliminary catalogue of the archival materials. Study of CCBA archives will not only lead to an insight into the operation of Victoria’s CCBA but also lead to the discovery of many events in other Chinatowns which have been unknown to the public. This book taps a rich vein of data in a selection of hitherto unpublished records held by CCBA. It includes, for the first time, a pristine reproduction of the most important documents from the association’s archives. I have selected some important

documents and translated the text into English. I vacillated between a word-by-word translation and the translation of only the main idea of the text. I decided on the latter.

Third, Augustine Low invited me in 1972 to be an Honorary Advisor of CCBA and assist the association in looking after the archives and organizing the transfer of them to the university library for preservation. Most are preserved in the library of the University of Victoria; some have been digitized for public use. As CCBA's Honorary Advisor, I am trusted as an insider. I attend its meetings and participate in discussion on important issues, and can plough through documents in the association's archives. Historical research into CCBA's minutes and other documents has caused a substantial revision about its internal structure, and the image of reticence and appeasement that had generally been accepted by Western society. CCBA's activities and personalities still echo in the present in haunting ways. I am a good friend of many CCBA directors who represent various Chinese social and economic associations. With their help, I have been able to study their archives and find additional information on Chinatown's leadership pattern and power structure.

Fourth, in terms of the size of the Chinese population and its businesses, Victoria's Chinatown was unequivocally the largest in Canada for fifty years before it was overtaken by Vancouver's in the 1910s. It held second place for thirty years before dropping to third place after Vancouver's and Toronto's Chinatown in the 1940s. In the past three decades, Victoria, unlike other metropolitan cities, did not have a great influx of new Chinese immigrants. The 2006 census reveals that Canada had a Chinese population of 1,346,510: Metropolitan Areas of Toronto (537,060), Vancouver (402,000), Montreal (82,665), Calgary (75,410), Edmonton (53,670), Ottawa-Hull (36,605), Winnipeg (16,695), Hamilton (13,600), Victoria (13,550), Kitchener (10,970), Windsor (8,830), and other cities and towns (95,455). In term of population size, Metropolitan Victoria was in the ninth place, but it has the oldest surviving Chinatown in Canada which still retains its nineteenth-century townscape. It is the only Chinatown in Canada that has a complete history of a functioning Chinatown dating back from the first Chinese arrival in Canada in 1858 to the present. It was designated in December 1995 as a National Historic District by the Government of Canada. For nearly thirty years before the trans-continental Canadian Pacific Railway was completed, Victoria was the first port of entry of nearly all Chinese

immigrants from China to Canada. No one can study the history of Chinese in Canada without reference to Victoria, and no descendants of Chinese immigrants entering Canada before the 1890s can trace their roots without returning to Victoria's Chinatown.

Finally, Victoria has been my home since I landed in Canada. I know the Chinese community and its history very well. I have become a collector of Chinese archival materials about Chinese voluntary associations across Canada. In this book I have utilized all the available Chinese documents extensively as a way to analyze CCBA's leadership and many historic events.

There are different methods of transliterating for Chinese names: the traditional postal office Romanization, the Wade-Giles system, and the Hanyu Pinyin System. In addition, many transliterations are based on Cantonese, Taishan, or other dialects. A Chinese surname can be transliterated into different English spellings. For example, the surname Mar, Mah, and Marr are different spellings of the surname Ma, which is a Hanyu Pinyin System. For consistency, if people, associations, and historical names are already well known in their dialect-based forms, and have been made popular by general usage in Canada, these forms are used because changes to the Pinyin system in spelling may cause confusion. For example, Lee Mong Kow is used instead of Li Mengjiu, Hakka instead of Kejia, Chee Kung Tong instead of Zhigongtang, and Hook Sin Tong instead of Fushantang. However, except for established spellings of Chinese place names such as Hong Kong, spellings of place names will follow the Pinyin system, such as Taishan instead of Hoy Sun or Toi Shan. I also use the Pinyin system when the names of persons and associations do not have a conventional English name, or a generally accepted local spelling. In Appendix A, the English names of important persons, companies, associations, and others are listed with their Chinese names. In Appendix B, CCBA presidents are listed both in Chinese and English, and years of their service.