Are you who you think you are?
A study of Chinese Canadian name forms

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Emigrants from China took with them identities and values they had acquired and networks they had built before leaving their motherland. Chinese names are intricate expressions of lineage, family values, and individuality. Name changes, “gai ming huan xin” in Chinese, whether voluntary or otherwise, often carry negative connotations. However, by tracing and analysing the changing name forms of Chinese emigrants in Canada, it is hoped that a new framework may be established for the study of the experiences of the Chinese diaspora and indeed of the multicultural society of Canada.

Based on this study of personal names, a matrix of its commonly adapted forms may be developed and referenced to facilitate studies of overseas Chinese. Given the changes of geographical names in the 20th century, e.g., Toishan was called Xinning before 1914, while Zhongshan was called Xiangshan before 1925, the thesaurus of names should include place names as well.

Chinese settlers changed and adapted their names to integrate into and be accepted by Canadian society. The overarching factors driving the changes of the naming practices before the 1980s were shaped by the powerful and the wealthy. Parallel to this, the prevailing ethos of interpersonal relationship in the Chinese community helped ensure a certain level of adherence to the traditional naming system. Before 1967, the different patterns of the names adapted, carried, and recognized in the major waves of immigration reflected the day-to-day and institutionalized discrimination inherent in the immigration policies, the social status, and the public persona of this highly diverse ethnic group. Since then, Chinese have been encouraged to call Canada home on account of their
much-needed professional expertise and resources. In 1988, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* received Royal Assent, and Canada was officially affirmed as a multicultural nation. Chinese Canadians now freely register themselves under names which hitherto were unheard of in the Chinese community. Some avail themselves of the name change procedures to adopt new names for personal advancement and affirmation. In British Columbia, landmarks named in memory of ethnic Chinese are numerous: Ahban Creek, Ah Clem Creek, Ah Lock Lake, Mount Ho, Louie Lake, and Lee Mong Kow Way, to name just a few.

Chinese people started to play a part in the history of British Columbia with the 70 carpenters and artisans who came with John Meares in 1788. There was no documented resistance from the Chinese when their given names were registered as family names in conformance with the western name style in official records and social interactions. To them, it was a price to pay for a better and stable life and, later on, upward social mobility. Over time, however, the structure and values embedded in the Chinese personal names weakened in the face of social and political oppression largely brought about by immigration policies. The situation changed when the Multiculturalism Policy was adopted in 1971 following the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1966-69). The concept was further validated in the anti-discrimination provisions of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). To a great extent, Canada’s diplomatic and economic relations with the immigrants’ last places of domicile and indeed the globalization of Canada itself helped shape the life of Chinese Canadians. Major political, social, and economic events in their motherland had their impact on the manner in which ethnic Chinese wished to be identified in Canada. Insofar as names are statements of identities, Chinese Canadian names often carry cultural overtones and represent aspired family virtues. “Chineseness” as well as the diaspora experiences permeated the naming system. Individuality and self-expression embedded in a personal name were grossly encroached upon in Canada, a
hostile foreign host country until the early 1980s, when name changes were often
motivated by the prospect of modernity or upward social mobility.¹

Traditionally, sharing a common surname and tracing descent from a common ancestor is
a pillar of Chinese values. At birth, a name is bestowed and used in childhood. New
names are assigned again to mark the beginning of school, marriage, or a distinguished
career. This was practiced in the first part of the 20th century in China and among some
Chinese who were able to establish themselves in Canada. A case in point: In keeping
with the Chinese tradition, the offspring of the Reverend Shiu of New Westminster who
was ordained in 1928 in Hamilton were given names including the generation names of
“guo 輪” meaning female head-dress for girls and “dao 道” meaning the way for boys.
The generation name, one of the characters in a two-character given name, is symbolic of
the lineage that ties members of a common ancestry together. In some cases, generation
names are assigned to inspire the descendants of certain virtues they are expected to
champion and exemplify. For prestigious families, generation names are often derived
from well-quoted texts so that the moral and the ideal may be carried on from one
generation to another. Well-recognized Chinese people such as Won Alexander Cumyow,
Yip Sang, Bing Thom, Wong Gong Gam, Bick Lee, Quon Yen or Yen Quon, Wayson
Choy, Tong Louie, and Wong Foon Sien kept their family names intact as inherited. Even
as early as 1860, the January 28 issue of the Colonist ran a story on Lywing 李榮 who
bought with him $5,000 worth of gold to New Westminster. Successful merchants such
as Lee Chong 李祥 of Kwong Lee & Co. and Tong Fat 董发 of Tai Soong & Co were also
addressed by their Chinese names without modification. In the case of families in the
lowest social spectrum, whose descendants might have remained illiterate for generations,
the members sometimes kept the “milk names” given to them as infants, with no
generation names (or any other names for that matter) throughout their life.

Burdened by prolonged depravation and war, the destitute gradually relaxed their respect
of the law, resulting in the flourishing of “paper sons” and sometimes “paper daughters.”

¹ Robbie B. H. Goh and Shawn Wong, (eds.), Asian Diasporas: Cultures, Identities, Representations (Hong
Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).
Chinese in southern Guangdong realized that family lineage of the right kind could open windows to opportunities and better lives in Canada. Head tax papers were sold and the affiliation to a family with a foothold in Canada translated into the right of abode in Canada until the period 1923–1947; this was the period during which ethnic Chinese were denied entry except for the spouses or dependents of diplomats, businessmen, and students. In 1952, a new Immigration Act gave the Governor-in-Council unlimited power to exclude people based on their ethnicity, or on their assumed inability to assimilate. This fuelled irregular attempts to enter Canada. At the time, it was very common for labour contractors from the same county as would-be immigrants to be involved in the activities. By 1959, the federal government decided to step up the checking of the authentication of the head tax certificates. Often, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers checked Chinese pedestrians on the street to verify their identities. In 1960, Douglas Jung, City Councillor and the first ethnic Chinese Member of Parliament, introduced the Chinese Adjustment Statement Program. During this amnesty, 11,569 persons reclaimed their true identities and names. For example, Zhao Jia Yuan 赵家源 adopted his younger brother’s name so that he could use his head tax certificate bearing the name of Wu Jia Yuan 伍家源 when he was sponsored by his father to arrive in Canada in 1951 at the age of 18, so that it matched the name his father assumed in Canada. As a result, he had to use different names between 1951 and 1960. He did not resume his original name Zhao Guo Yuan 赵国源 until the 1960s. Interestingly, the generation names “Jia” meaning family or home and “Guo” meaning country were used as part of both his real and adopted names. Despite the oppressive Canadian immigration policies at the time, Chinese Canadians still cherished their family values when naming their offspring. Zhao’s father paid the head tax and acquired four head tax certificates for the children he claimed to be raising in China. He cashed in his entitlement, selling two for $1,000 each.

Between 1947 and 1965, the “Differentiated Quota System” was in place, restricting the number of Chinese entering Canada. It was stipulated that only those who were direct family members of Chinese residing in Canada were qualified to enter the country. During these years, the price of the head tax certificates continued to rise and the
identities of some newcomers were masked by counterfeit documents. The marginalization of the Chinese Canadians affected the name forms and the identities of newcomers as well as old-timers. In many intricate situations, successful merchants sponsored “sons and relatives” of their countrymen as “merchant sons” who otherwise might not be able to come to Canada. For example, from 1900 to 1923 Low Sue, Chair of the Cumberland Chinese Benevolent Association, helped bring many of his relatives to British Columbia.²

To many baffled researchers and frustrated descendants of pioneer families, the “Chinese Family Trees, 1949–1972” kept at Libraries and Archives Canada is an important source of paper family history. It charts the family trees of those who were under investigation for possible involvement in irregular or illegal immigration activities and cross-references “true” and “paper” family relationships with references to relevant documents and files.

Although 81,000 persons paid the head tax between 1885 and 1923, only a few thousand remained alive in the mid 1980s. The practices of “paper boy” or “merchant’s son” naming system discouraged them from disclosing their given names and even family names at home. To this day, the authentication of tax payers in the Redress Project remains a challenge. The English-Chinese online contact form of the B.C. Coalition of Head Tax Payers, Spouses and Descendants hosted by the University of British Columbia Library includes fields for names, other names in English and Chinese, as well as a choice of eight counties of origin.

References to the Chinese Immigration Act registration certificates was frequently made to identify Chinese Canadians born before 1947 who were required to register under the Act which includes the statement “This certificate does not establish legal status in Canada.” The difficulty in identifying a Chinese Canadian before this awkward documentation system ended in 1947 was compounded by the options of access to the registers. The passenger lists (RG 76) held at Library and Archives Canada serve as the

² Philip C. P. Low, Memories of Cumberland Chinatown (P.C.P. Low, 1993).
Eleanor Yuen, *Are you who you think you are? A study of Chinese Canadian name forms*

Official immigration documents from 1865 to 1935. They include the name, age, county of origin, occupation, and destination of each passenger. As the lists are filed by port of entry and date, except for those from 1919 to 1924, establishing the year and date of entry and the transliterated names is the prerequisite for tracing a Chinese Canadian during that period. Library and Archives Canada also holds the General Registers of Chinese Immigration, 1885–1949 (RG 76 D2a). The entries are arranged by serial and declaration numbers, in approximate chronological order. The register contains information such as the age, birthplace, occupation, date and place of arrival in Canada, and head tax paid. Again, identifying the year of entry and the transliterated name form is pivotal to accessing an entry.³

Institutionalized discrimination and social injustice played a pivotal role in transforming the name forms and the identities of Chinese Canadians after they arrived at the Fraser River gold mines in 1858. The crude methodology in the documentation of Chinese migration unwittingly contributed to the disfigurement of the name forms.

First settlers such as Chang Tsoo 张佐 and Ah Hong left China before the 1858 edict that legalized the right of Chinese to leave the country freely. As illegal emigrants, they were expected to fend for their own rights in the hostile Canadian society.⁴

When the head tax was initially collected in 1885, the Customs officers in the port offices acted as Controllers of Chinese Immigration and reported to the Chief Controller of Chinese Immigration in Ottawa who maintained a General Register of all Chinese immigrants entering Canada. Each controller would maintain a register recording among other details the payment of or exemption from the head tax. All immigrants would receive identifying certificates on arrival to Canada, or a replacement document when the original certificate was reported lost.


The penmanship and the ability of the controllers responsible for transcribing the data provided orally to records in the Registers varied. As a result, the level of accuracy and thoroughness recorded was very inconsistent. For example, in 1892, all 23 records running from #5852 through 5874 registered at the Port of New Westminster documented names in full, country of origin, as well as physical marks or peculiarities in great detail, compared to entries made in September and December 1891 and January 1892 which contained 17 generic names starting with “Ah” out of a total of 30 entries. A customs officer and an interpreter were appointed to execute the legislation and collate the register. In the 1880s, Lee Mong Kow arrived in Victoria in 1883 and was hired by Canada Customs as an interpreter to work with hundreds of Chinese immigrants who made their way via Victoria. He continued his work when the government created a separate Department of Immigration. The presence of a bilingual officer such as Lee helped to ensure the accuracy of the records.

Chinese immigrants who were identified and greeted by generic names starting with “Ah” or given names mistaken as the family names had little choice but to live with the new names. C.D. Hoy, a famous merchant and a photographer who arrived in British Columbia in 1902 originally bore the family name “Chow” and given names “Dong Hoy.” He is to this day listed in Canadian official records and publications as C.D. Hoy. Sixteen entries on him are not retrievable by either Chow Dong Hoy or Dong Hoy Chow.

The father of Charles Lee of Kamloops arrived in B.C. for the Fraser River Gold Rush in the 1860s. He actually bore the family name “Leung,” also spelled “Liang” or “Leong.” Leung Chong Lee, the father, was employed as an operator of one of the mining companies who brought in their own coolie workers from Sun Wei (Xin Hui), Guangdong. He was also known as “Ah Loy” and “John Chinaman” while working as a house boy and a cook of the Hudson’s Bay Company in Kamloops. This was only one of the numerous cases where a Chinese Canadian’s given name was mistaken for its last name and the “victim” did not correct the employer.\(^5\)

Charles Lee, the first Chinese child born in Kamloops in 1889 was recorded in the 1891 Census as Charles Lee though his Chinese name was Leung Kwong Fat. From then on, the family name was changed to Lee. Charles Lee was a court interpreter and a trusted figure in both the Chinese and mainstream community. His brothers and father were all bilingual. Yet, they did nothing to reclaim their original family name.

In some glaring cases of mass character assassination, derogatory forms of recording Chinese workers were used by Canadian employers in late 19th Century. Philip C.P. Low noted in “Memories of Cumberland Chinatown” (1993) that “[The] main work force of the Union Colliery company in Cumberland during 1880s and 1890s consisted of Chinese immigrants.” Later, this company was known as Canadian Collieries. Chinese miners and workers were used as ciphers and paid wages half as much as their occidental employees. On its payroll, Chinese workers were only recorded as “Chink No. 1, Chink No. 2, etc.”

At times, discrimination turned physical and violent in the form of numerous assaults of the Chinese and their properties in Vancouver’s Chinatown, which finally cumulated in the 1907 riot. The Chinese bachelor community sought refuge, support and work from the First Nations families on the reserve lands – a passive response to racial discrimination. Following the path of the seventy Chinese artisans and carpenters who came in 1788 and were left behind in the west coast, some married Aboriginal women.

Stories of Chinese–Aboriginal relations documented in the 2006 Carrall Street Greenway project illustrated how Chinese names were given up or adapted when the Chinese fathered children on the native reserve. A total of 23 people from the Chinatown Team and the Musqueam Indian Band launched the Storyscapes Chinatown exhibition in July 2006. Rhonda Larrabee, Chief of the Qayqayt Nation, is the daughter of Arthur Lee, an ethnic Chinese and Marie, a Native woman. She grew up in the Chinatown area without knowing the ethnicity of her mother until she was twenty-four. Dorothy Christian of the

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Okanagan and Secwepemc Nations of the British Columbia Interior region was brought up as an Aboriginal and claimed her Chinese ancestry only recently.\textsuperscript{7}

In a unique case, Bing Wong and his family withstood the inroads made to Chinese family values in spite of a very harsh environment. His father established himself as a businessman and moved his family to Alert Bay to express his resentment of the discrimination at the time. He was the singular force that carried the family name to the current generation. Bing was born in Chinatown and grew up in a Native village in Alert Bay, where his father moved in 1935 when Bing was ten. He worked closely with the Native veterans in the army and witnessed the strong bonds between the two ethnic groups, that grew out of the discrimination both suffered.\textsuperscript{8} Gloria May Liang, born on the Musqueam Indian reserve in 1936 was put in different Chinese foster homes because her father wanted a Chinese upbringing for his daughter. To this day, she is still welcomed by the Musqueam Band.\textsuperscript{9} Helen Grant, formerly known as Hong Yet Hang, Howard Grant (Hong Mon Hing), Larry Grant (Hong Lai Hing) and Gordon Grant (Hong Goon Hing) have used their Musqueam names, Chinese names, and Canadian names interchangeably throughout their lives. Up until 1980, Larry still went by his Chinese name. They used to stay with their mother at Musqueam while their father “lived” in another house because the Indian Act did not allow non-Aboriginals, including common-law spouses, to live in Aboriginal homes. Chinese-Indian families on the reserve were numerous and the Chinese market gardens on the reserve helped feed the native community. In spite of their emotional attachment to the Chinese culture, many identify themselves as Natives and are entitled to the rights and privileges of First Nations members.

In R. Balf’s Kamloops: A History of the District up to 1914 (1969), Jessie Hing, Charles Lee’s mother and her sisters, were recorded to have mingled with Indian children and women and spoke several Indian dialects. Trade and marriage between the Aboriginals and the Chinese also took place. A concerned group has been helping the First Nation

\textsuperscript{7} “Storyscapes Chinatown,” Story 6.
\textsuperscript{8} “Storyscapes Chinatown,” Story 3.
\textsuperscript{9} “Storyscapes Chinatown,” Story 10.
Eleanor Yuen,  *Are you who you think you are? A study of Chinese Canadian name forms*

spouses of Chinese head tax payers to claim the $20,000 redress fund since July 2006. More stories of mixed common-law marriages will soon be brought to light.

The lineage and values attached to family names was eroded significantly by Canadian government policies that prohibited ethnic Chinese laborers and artisans from not only bringing their families to Canada but marrying non-Chinese. Without offspring and other family members to attend the funerals and burials, many tombstones in Chinese cemeteries in Kamloops, Barkerville, and across the province of British Columbia bear no names. In Kamloops, most of the Chinese tombstones are inscribed “shen zhong zhui yuan” (慎终追远), a Chinese idiom meaning “remembering the ancestors.” Compared to these very unfortunate souls, successful Chinese such as Low Sue, one of the pioneers of Cumberland Chinatown, was remembered with a tombstone erected in Cumberland in 1948 bearing “Low Hock Shun,” his literary name that identified his ancestral lineage. He was also widely known as Lai Yuen, the name of his first store in Cumberland. In the news about his funeral on 3 May 1948 in the *Comox District Free Press*, he was named “Mr. Lai Yuen.” Success in economic activities often brought acceptance by Canadian society. Mrs. Chong who arrived in 1860, was the wife of a prominent businessman. She was referred to by the English language press as “Mrs. Kwong Lee,” her husband’s business rather than Mrs. Chong Lee 李祥, her husband’s personal name.

After World War 1, numerous second-generation Chinese Canadians, including successful civil servants and veterans adopted name forms compatible with the western naming system. Some gave up their inherited Chinese family name altogether. The adapted names helped the bearers to blend in the mainstream society. Some well-known examples are Peter Wing 吴荣天 (Wu Yongtian), the first Chinese Canadian mayor of Kamloops (1965–1971) and Kam Len Douglas Sam, born in Victoria in 1918. Douglas Sam was the most decorated, highest-ranking Chinese Canadian officer. Cumyow, Won Alexander 温金友 (Wen Jinyou), another distinguished ethnic Chinese born in British Columbia, was also known by his given name turned into a family name. “Joe” is commonly used for Chow and Chou 周, “Lamb” for Lam, and Lum 林 and “Young” for
Yeung 杨. Tom Lock, Toronto’s first pharmacist and a member of the elite Canadian unit operating under the code name “Operation Oblivion” in World War II, actually bore the Chinese family name Lok 骆.

Amidst oppression and hostility in the mainstream Canadian society, the traditional interpersonal relations founded on family and native regions affiliations took on different manifestations. The disfiguration of personal names appearing in English contrasted starkly with the flourishing of the buildings named after the families and clans. Powerful family associations erected buildings in Vancouver Chinatown, which functioned as the meeting hall, office, and temporary shelter for the newcomers, room and board for the members and corresponding address for remittances. They underpinned the continuous efforts of the Chinese immigrants in nurturing the trans-Pacific ties. To date, the Lim Sai Hor Association, Shon Yee Benevolent Association, Yue Shan Society, Li Si Gong Suo and others are all preserved as heritage buildings. Very often, the family organizations and their buildings are named after the family’s original native district in China. For example, Chen, the surname, is followed by Yingchuan, the original district; Wong is followed by Jiangxia, Lee by Longxi, Lin by Xihe. This value was commonly shared by Chinese Canadians as well as Chinese overseas in other countries. Him Mark Lai provided the background on the lineage that ties overseas Chinese families, villages, districts together under the association of a family name:

“A surname or clan association, more familiarly known as clan or family association, is an extension of the concept of the ancestral hall in a single lineage village. Due to the immigrants’ need to socialize as well as to mutually aid each other, they naturally tend to consort with others of the same lineage from the same village or area. Such informal grouping is known as fang (fong) have existed since the early days of Chinese settlement in California. However, in any one locality, emigrants from the same village or area were comparatively few. Following the same logic that motivated expansion of the district or locality associations to encompass membership beyond the local village, surname or family associations among the Chinese abroad went beyond the limits of the clan-village to enroll membership on the basis of having surnames in common. The sole criteria is
descent from an alleged common ancestor, with no limitation on the locality of origin.”

“In order to have the capability of countering the power of clans with large populations, some clans with smaller population banded together to gain collective strength, using as rationale some alleged common ancestor, or event in Chinese mythology, folklore or history. One well-known association of this type is Longgang Qinyi Gongsuo (Lung Kong Tin Yee Associations), so-called Four Brothers Association, which enrolls members from four different surnames: Liu (Lau, Lew), Guan (Kwan, Quan), Zhang (Cheung, Jeung), and Zhao (Chiu, Jew). Although such organization did not exist in China, the concept is alleged to have originated in Kaiping, based on the anecdote from the novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Immigrants took this concept with them when they went abroad, and as early as 1827, members of the four clans were known to be in alliance in Singapore”.10

Family associations such as the Chan Family Association (Chan Wing Chuen Tsung Tong ) includes the Chen, Hu, Yao, Yu, Yuan and Tian families which all belong to the same family tree; the Lee Family (Lee Si Tsung Kong Soo), the Cheng family (Yong Yang Tang Zheng Shi Gong Hui) all reflect the traditional village life in China where mutual support is vital for thriving or even existence.

Before 1947, most of the Chinese came from Sze-yap (Siyi), i.e., the four counties of Sunwui, Toisan, Hoiping and Yanping ( Xinhui, Taishan, Kaiping and Enping in Pinyin). The top ten family names which made up about 50% of the population in Guangdong and Fujian were Chen, Li, Huang, Zhang, Liang, Lin, Liu, Wu, Luo and Xu.11


The variant and inconsistent forms of romanization and transliteration of personal and place names adopted officially by the Canadian and Chinese governments were neither shared nor understood by most Chinese Canadians. Among the “Finding Aids” of the Department of Immigration kept at Library and Archives Canada (RG 76, FA76-51, Part 7) is a list of “Variant Transliterations of Chinese Names” with listing under “Variant form,” “Wade-Giles,” and “Possible county of origin.” Consider the following sample entries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variant form</th>
<th>Wade-Giles</th>
<th>Possible county of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bih</td>
<td>Pi</td>
<td>Kwangtung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bim</td>
<td>Ping</td>
<td>Toyshan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boon</td>
<td>Pen, Wen</td>
<td>Fukien, Toyshan, Kwangtung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bue</td>
<td>Mei</td>
<td>Hoinan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can</td>
<td>Kwang</td>
<td>Canton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chae</td>
<td>Chai, Chi</td>
<td>Fukien</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Wade-Giles system of romanization, which was developed by Thomas Francis Wade and Herbert Allen Giles while they were in China in the 1870s, was inadequate in transcribing the names communicated in distinctive Southern China accents spoken by almost all Chinese Canadians at the time. In the gold rush era of the late 1850s, 90% of the Chinese who settled along the Fraser River were from Toishan. In the 1880s about 60% of Chinese Canadians were from Wuyi (“the five counties”) and among them, 60% were from Toishan. Again, more than 60% of Chinese in Quesnel Mouth were from Kaiping and 50% of Chinese in Lytton were from Kaiping.12

Namhoi (Nanhai) and Punyu (Panyu) are located in the southwest and northwest of Canton and are two of the wealthiest counties in the province. Some of the wealthy merchants in B.C. were from these two counties. The top 10 family names in Guangdong

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and Fujian are Chen, Li, Huang, Zhang, Liang, Lin, Liu, Wu, Luo, Xu. Together they made up about 50% of the population.\(^{13}\)

There was very little consistency in the romanization system until 1978 when Pinyin was officially recognized as the only romanization scheme for Chinese personal and place names in the People’s Republic of China as well as overseas.

Incidents of variant family name forms that were sustained through different romanization schemes or other circumstances were numerous. For example, Chang was used for the Chen families, Lum for Lin; Martin Lee’s Chinese name is Zhang; Whalen was used for Wong, and Philip C. P. Low’s name in Pinyin would be Liu Zhongping; Lei or Li for Lee, Tom or Taam for 谭 Lum, Lien and Lin for林, Liang and Leung for 梁, Quock for 郭, Loo for 庐, Hall, Haw or Ho for 何, Dong for 邓, Jung and Chang for 张, Quan for 关, Lou for 刘, Gee, Tsang and Jan for 曾.\(^{14}\)

The kaleidoscope of Chinese Canadian names was complicated and enriched in 1967 when the Immigration Act (1952) was amended: immigrants including Chinese and other Asians were accepted based on their education, job qualifications, experience, and proficiency in English or French. The new “points system” attracted ethnic Chinese emigrants from different parts of the world. It was also the year of the Communist confrontation in Hong Kong which prompted many to emigrate from the colony. Over time, the Chinese Canadian community grew more diverse and heterogeneous. Changes in name forms were evident as immigrants from Hong Kong spoke metropolitan Cantonese and widely adopted English names as part of the British colonial culture. Meanwhile, emigration from Guangdong continued. Between 1978 and 1996, a total of 9,263 persons emigrated from Kaiping to Canada, many of them bearing the last name Guan, Yu, Tan, or Feng.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{13}\)Yuan Yida, Zhang Cheng. 2002.


Between 1980 and 1990, ethnic Chinese from Indonesia arrived in Canada by the hundreds, many keeping their Indonesian or Middle Eastern names. The Chinese diaspora from Indonesia and the spread of Islam produced fascinating Sino adaptations and Muslim variations of personal names in Southeast Asia. In 1967, the Indonesian government allowed its citizens to change their names by civic procedures. Many ethnic Chinese changed their Chinese names such as “Goh” or “Gho” to “Hardy,” “Tadjo to “Tay” or “Salim,” a Middle Eastern name so that they would integrate into Indonesian society. They felt that bearing a Chinese name might incur resentment and discrimination in Indonesia. When becoming Canadians after 1967, some chose to keep their Caucasian/Indonesian names with the guarded mentality of a visible minority ethnic group. Others re-adopted their Chinese names. Examples of ethnic Chinese families who opted to be identified by their Indonesian chosen names are common: the Yap family registered as Hilwan; Tanoto for Tan; Halim for Lim; Katili for Lie, and Angkiriwang for Ang.

In 1969, a total of 8,382 ethnic Chinese arrived in Canada from India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Peru, the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, the United States, mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Many brought with them western-style given names and even family names. Another influx started in 1975, when huge numbers of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Lao Chinese fled to Canada for refuge. Typically, they speak Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien or Minnan and follow unique name systems and romanization schemes.

The Caribbean Chinese in Canada, mainly Hakka by origin registered by names such as Winston Loui, George Phang-Lyn, George Hoo Sue, Elizabeth Lue, and Herman Lyn. Many of them do not speak Chinese, never visited China and identify with the western culture. They are merchants, businessmen, and academics; many practice Christianity and are very different from the rest of Chinese Canadian society. Most of them came in the 1970s.
When challenged by sporadic discrimination such as the Anti-W5 campaign, the community formed the Chinese Canadian National Council in 1979 in protest. But passive responses, including changing personal names to mask one’s individuality, and ethnicity was no longer widespread.

After Tiananmen 1989, several thousand Chinese were allowed to settle in Canada, mainly in Toronto, Vancouver and (since late 1990s) in Montreal as well. This group speaks mainly Putonghua as well as dialects of regions north of Guangdong and Fujian, Shanghainese being one of the commonly recognized accents in the community. Immigrants from mainland China registered in the phone directories of 2000 onward tend to use single character given names more often than the 200,000 Hong Kong or Taiwanese immigrants that populated the 1980–1997 telephone directories. It is interesting to note that with the adoption of the “One Child” policy in China in 1979, the single descendent of the family is often given a one-character name with no generation name to mark his/her place in the lineage.

By 2005, ethnic Chinese in Canada exceeded 1,115,000. Chinese Canada was thoroughly global and multidimensional, a nation populated by entrepreneurs, professionals, artisans, intellectuals, and investors; many of them “observed a Confucian-based value system of ‘trans-Pacific’ family and business relationships.”16 It is argued that the values inherent in the family names are still observed by many Chinese Canadians in the post-1976 era.

A much-cited example is the Man family, who still nurture the lineage by maintaining the contact as the descendents of “Man Sai-go,” their founding ancestor. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Mans organized or revived overseas clan associations and updated genealogies. Many of them moved to Canada in the 1980s and engaged in property developments in Canada as a clan. They spoke Cantonese and English but also read and wrote Chinese. The information network linked all “Man,” including the sons-in-law and

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the matrilineal relatives. Any Man formally expelled from the lineage because of grave misconduct would have his name struck from the Man genealogy and removed from the roster of recipients of annual stipends from the Man ancestral estates. Today, however, third- and fourth-generation Mans have lost much of the family bondage and “Chineseness.”

Efforts to assimilate Canadian lifestyles have continued to impact the name forms to this date. For example, Vancouver’s 2006 New Year’s Baby of Chinese heritage was named Natalie Sofia Wan by her parents. She was also given a Chinese name. Many married Chinese women have added their husbands’ family names in front of their own, compared to the western way of simply adopting their husband’s family names.

This paper has outlined some of the historical and cultural background to the myriad name changes that Chinese emigrants to Canada have made from 1788 up to the present day. During this period we have also witnessed changes not only in the attitudes of Chinese Canadian families to name change, but also in the stance of the Canadian government towards a multicultural society that respects the values of all immigrant cultures. It is an appropriate time in history to develop a reliable framework for tracing the pathways of Chinese Canadian name forms.

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FURTHER REFERENCES


