For Home and Abroad: A Century of Chinese-Australian Diaspora Educational Philanthropy in Zhongshan

Christopher Cheng

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Christopher Cheng (PhD candidate)
Institute for Culture and Society (ICS) & Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture (IAC), Western Sydney University

This article concerns pre-tertiary schools financed by the diaspora originating from Zhongshan county. Through a longitudinal analysis of over 30 modern school buildings between 1911 and 2021, it chronicles homeland educational philanthropy over the past century. It establishes that the development of diaspora-initiated educational philanthropy in their ancestral home reflects social and political changes in China and in the residential orientation of the Zhongshan diaspora in Australia. In the transforming landscape of educational philanthropy, the transition from sojourner to settler and homecoming descendant over the past century has resulted in three discrete and successive outcomes: first, creating a new future; second, improving educational prospects; and finally, leaving behind a legacy. As a result of these changes, the article provides a reference point for future research on diaspora educational philanthropy directed at southern China and beyond.

Keywords: Diaspora philanthropy, modern schools, Pearl River Delta, Chinese Australians, *qiaoxiang*

In a reprint of an Australian newspaper article "Chinese shops" (1913, 1917, 1919), *ch'ien* (錢), or money in Cantonese, was described as the only pursuit of the Chinese: "money was a subject that their hearts were full of, but rarely

Christopher Cheng knows firsthand the double pains of being disconnected from his Chinese roots, while not being firmly grounded in his parents' country of immigration, Australia. After completing higher education in Australia, he has been privileged to further his education in Guangzhou (mainland China) and Hong Kong. He is currently completing his doctoral studies in Australia. When Christopher isn't publishing his research, he dreams of revisiting the ancestral home villages in southern China. He is reachable at: christopher.cheng@westernsydney.edu.au

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enough." But behind the seemingly solitary emphasis on work and wealth creation, Chinese immigrants' contributions to public welfare remain poorly understood. One reason for this is culture: a tradition of humility means that donors rarely brag about their deeds (Chau & Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 21). Only recently have scholars in the field of migration history concluded that Chinese immigrants were not only profit-oriented, but also public-minded (Fitzgerald, 2020); moreover, "charity begins at home" (Benton & Liu, 2018, p. 150). Here, "home" specifically refers to an ancestral locale in China.

In the United States, Paula Johnson (2007) noted that although the Chinese invested in commercial ventures in the homeland, they also were enthusiastic contributors to the educational sector in China believing that it was the best way to give back to their community and country (Johnson, 2007, p. 7). This two-pronged approach emphasizes the dual commercial and social aspirations of Chinese immigrants in America. Yin (2004, p. 73) noticed that Chinese immigrants to the United States are more willing to do business outside their ancestral locality in China but still eager to take part in charitable work in their ancestral home. Their behavior can be understood through comparative research. In a study on how Asian-Australian philanthropists give, why they give, where they give, and what kinds of causes they support, researchers found that whether in historical or modern times, the relationship between lineage or hometown and the diaspora was crucial (Chau & Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 8). This may be because persistent deprivation in the place of origin had created a niche for charities to flourish and, more importantly, provided overseas diasporas with a window for intervention (Chau & Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 12).

In a recent study on the so-called "charitable second-generation" (善二代 *shan'erdai*) in China, Xing & Gan (2019) show how attitudes towards giving changed over two generations of Chinese-born philanthropists. They found that the nouveaux riche were often unsophisticated in their distribution of money compared to their highly educated children, who often had the fortune of studying abroad as well as the philanthropic experience of their parents. Thus, rather than making one-off, large-sum donations, later generations tended to be more ambitious about how capital was distributed. Rather than disaster relief and contributions to health and education (which were the priority of their parents' generation), the *shan'erdai* (charitable second-generation) was more willing to be hands-on and to dedicate their talent and time to collaborative and experimental partnerships that they considered to be socially beneficial. Such generational change is also found among the Zhongshan-Australian diaspora philanthropists I discuss in this article.

In general, the variable nature of giving means that diaspora philanthropy rarely conforms to established models (Espinosa, 2016, p. 366). Due to its evolving nature, diaspora philanthropy is one of the least understood as well as the least documented facets of the philanthropic landscape (Baker & Mascitelli, 2011, p. 30; Johnson, 2007, p. 44); it has even been described by Espinosa as "a blank slate" (2016, p. 366). Research on the topic can therefore potentially reveal

the interests, attitudes, and aspirations of migrant contributors (Johnson, 2007, p. 44). In the first issue of *Philanthropy & Education*, the editor Noah Drezner encouraged "comparative questions regarding the movement of practices across borders and within different contexts" (2017, p. vii). This objective runs counter to the predominant focus of educational philanthropy in the United States and United Kingdom, especially in the field of higher education (Proper, 2009; Shaker & Borden, 2020). Seeking to transcend existing scholarship in the Anglosphere, this article presents an original non-Western case study of diaspora educational philanthropy. Here, educational philanthropy refers to those preschools, primary schools, and secondary schools funded by diaspora in the ancestral villages and towns of Zhongshan in southern China.

In China, the first recorded case of an emigrant-funded school occurred in 1872, when the school benefactor YUNG Wing (1828–1912)[1] donated 500 silver taels to fund Zhenxian School in his Pearl River Delta hometown of Heung San County (Yin, 2004, p. 68). Another famous school funded by the diaspora in Guangdong Province was Taishan Number One Middle School (est. 1909). Historian John Fitzgerald (2020) described it as:

> a remarkable testament to the generosity and professionalism of early Chinese Canadian donors working within hometown traditions to achieve something that had never been accomplished on that scale to that time (p. 207).

More than one hundred years later, many schools in the Pearl River Delta, such as Taishan Number One Middle School and Zhenxian School, still stand as material remnants of another era. Many schools like these remain in use, despite them being the product of a bygone collective vision for an alternative future for China. To understand the involvement of the diaspora over the past century, my study provides a case study of how Chinese Australians from Zhongshan county have engaged with educational philanthropy in their native home in the Pearl River Delta. Data collection occurred between 2017 and 2021, in China and Australia, including on-site documentation in China, interviews, library and archival research, as well as photographic analysis. The study analyzes over 30 school buildings in Zhongshan County, Guangdong, to illustrate the changing nature of Chinese-Australian educational philanthropy since the beginning of the twentieth century.

This article postulates that changes in diaspora-initiated educational philanthropy in the *qiaoxiang* (僑鄉 remittance-built localities) in southern China correspond to three distinct phases of Chinese migration. Over the past century, diaspora-initiated educational philanthropy had three distinct phases: first, as a step towards creating a new future that honors the past; secondly, to continue a local tradition while diversifying educational needs; and thirdly, to leave a legacy that may illuminate future generations of school students. The first two phases involved intensive school building activities in the early and late twentieth century. This occurred when emigrant-sojourners (華僑 *huaqiao* in Mandarin), from geographically split households, were expected by those they left behind in

China to make money abroad to improve their lives. The second phase involved settlers (海外華人 *haiwai huaren* in Mandarin), who returned to their ancestral home after China re-opened its borders in 1978. The final phase is taking place in this twenty-first century when the contributions of the benefactors' descendants (華裔 *huayi* in Mandarin) can no longer be quantified in material terms. Together, these three phases show how a non-western diasporic group has reformed the educational needs of their native place over the past century.

CREATING A NEW FUTURE IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

One of the most extraordinary social developments of the early twentieth century was the transformation of a cohort of illiterate peasant emigrants from southern China into school builders. Through overseas emigration, former Chinese peasants became "a dispensable, exportable commodity" abroad (McKeown 2011, p. 66). In addition to bringing muscle overseas, the Cantonese immigrants in Australia also imported an array of age-old skills, including water management, which served them well on the goldfields and the market gardens that they dominated after the gold rush subsided (Boileau, 2017, pp. 60–61). Clearly, they were not simply importers, they also created a new "Chinese-Australian culture," introducing new crops, demonstrating the value of intensive agriculture, and re-organizing themselves to work effectively with European farmers and investors (Frost, 2002). Migration clearly enriched the cultural repertoire of heritage in Australia (Armstrong, 2004, p. 241). Yet, cultural transfers were not unidirectional. The accumulation of new skills abroad, economic capital, and new ideas also transformed southern China, their home country (Cheng, 2019).

Backbreaking labor laid an economic foundation for career transformation. Historians have long noted that for the upwardly mobile, market gardening served as a "springboard for entry into other small businesses" (Boileau, 2017, p. 128; May, 1984, p. 72). Capital accumulation ultimately led to stable businesses such as shopkeeping. In the twentieth century, this was a common phenomenon in many parts of Australia (Wilton, 2019, p. 59). The late Stanley Hunt, a former president of the Chung Shan (Zhongshan) Society of Australia, noted that many shops in New South Wales had been operated by members of his native place (Hunt, 2009, p. 36). In Australia, the Zhongshan folk provide a distinctive case illustrating the transition from migrant laborers to entrepreneurs and eventually school builders.

A Newfound Desire for Popularizing Education

Due to their struggles, many early Chinese migrants in Australia realized how they were handicapped by being unschooled. They understood that practical literacy and numeracy were essential to keep abreast with business as well as to correspond with their families in the home country. Due to low levels of literacy, letters that reached their native homes in China were rarely penned by the migrant

authors themselves (Benton & Liu, 2018, p. 9), and when there were responses, few recipients could read them. The literate few, working in the remittance agencies in the hometown or as scribes in country shops in Australia, were called upon to read and to write these letters. An eighty-five-year-old that I interviewed in Chuk Sau Yuen village of Zhongshan explained why many emigrant-benefactors enthusiastically contributed to education:

> Even though some became rich, they still had a challenging time signing their own names. Even those big bosses, their hands shook whenever they were given a pen. Keep in mind that many never had the chance to go to school and had trouble writing [even in Chinese].[2]

At the time, funding a new school did not entail erecting a new building. Early modern schools were often no different from traditional schools housed in ancestral halls (Borthwick, 1983, p. 35; Ming, 1996); some were in converted houses or church buildings.[3] This situation changed in the early twentieth century as the Kuomintang (Nationalist party) Government implemented a modern system of primary school education (Hsiao, 1935, p. 28). Among the diaspora, overseas donations were then often directed towards fulfilling a general desire to build new schools in the place of origin.

These initiatives were primarily led by self-made men—Chinese sojourners, who, in a single generation or two, had risen from agricultural or laboring backgrounds to become merchants. They owned shops or engaged in trade in regional Queensland and New South Wales or were shareholders of modern department stores in Hong Kong and other Chinese cities in the early twentieth century. In many cases, donors often came from humble origins and felt the importance of education, because without it, they knew that they could never rise above the hardships of the laboring class.

MA Ying-piu (1864–1944), a notable philanthropist, made his "first bucket of gold" in Australia from trading bananas. He believed that children were the future of society (Tam, 1999, p. 143), and commented: "If we have schools for boys, girls cannot go without" (Li, 2008, p. 58). He understood that girls would eventually become mothers and that mothers were the backbone of society. So, breaking from a tradition that reserved educational resources only for boys, he built new schools for women and children in his home village of Sha Chung, today's South District of Zhongshan (Liu, 2014, p. 38).

Considering that tens of thousands of children across China were missing the opportunity for education because they had to work to support their families, Ma envisioned eradicating illiteracy nationwide (Liu, 2014, pp. 61–62). In 1914, he produced a five-thousand-character reader as a self-help guide to promote literacy. While the standard Chinese dictionary contains fifty-thousand Chinese characters, only one tenth are frequently used, hence his choice of a five-thousand-character reader (Tam, 1999, p. 139). After publishing this book, Ma encouraged the staff of his Hong Kong company, Sincere department store, telling them that, after learning to read newspapers, writing and making records

would no longer be an insurmountable feat, and literate staff might even be promoted (Tam, 1999, p. 138). Commercial and social aspirations went hand in hand.

Schools as Lasting Contributions

Having discussed the desire of the diaspora for universal education, I now look at the modern school buildings that they funded in southern China. Often these buildings were high-quality structures, even though they were deep in the countryside. When asked about the school project that his wife's Chinese Australian grandfather initiated, Howard Wilson articulated the aspirations of the school's founder, James CHOY Hing (1870–1957), "May it [the school] last for a thousand years!"[4] Figure 1 shows the remarkably modern Western appearance of the school. Its non-Chinese aesthetic may be attributed to the cosmopolitanism of its founders, men who were also at the forefront of China's commercial scene (Chan, 1999, p. 36). Such schools often represent the donor's wish to make solid and lasting contributions to the native home. Some school donors recalled how their agricultural livelihoods were insecure and how they themselves had experienced being devastated by torrential rains and widespread flooding (Norton, c.1970, p. 27). Having seen such misfortunes, they were unwilling to accept anything less than a sturdy building when they built new schools. Emigration thus not only provided the funds for the construction of modern schools in the countryside, but also introduced new materials that ordinary farming families could not afford (Cheng, 2020, p. 149; *cf.* Aguilar, 2009, pp. 99–100).

Built of reinforced concrete, multi-storied school buildings made the new-style schools more inclusive than in the past because they were substantially larger, with a student capacity of a few hundred, whereas old-style schools (ancestral halls or *sishu* 私塾) could only accommodate a few dozen (Ming, 1996, p. 30). The new-style schools in Dai Leng village (est. 1911) and Sha Chung village (est. 1923) had 300 students each, while the 5.5 story Lai Wor School (est. 1930) accommodated 400 students in its 1,000 square meter building. In China's post-1978 reform era, diaspora-funded schools welcomed even more students. Ma Shan School (est. 1983), for example, accommodated over 800 students in its two-story (1,800 square meter) school building. The greater number meant that children from neighboring villages could attend as well as those from the village where the school was situated. After graduation, some students went on to succeed their fathers or uncles in their businesses overseas, while others were recruited by department stores in the Chinese cities (Liao, 2018, p. 105–106, 112). Those who stayed in the countryside became teachers in other newly established schools. Yet not all outcomes were positive. Driven by an economy dependent on remittances, some graduates continued the ill habits, such as opium, prostitution, and gambling, which education was intended to alleviate (Benton and Liu, 2018, p. 140). According to Michael Williams (2018), this was not only because education did not always provide an alternative career pathway, but also because, for some young men, returning to farming was "a disgrace" (p. 93) that their families would not

Figure 1. Howard Wilson at an exhibition concerning Lai Wor School in Zhuhai. This school was erected in 1930 by James CHOY Hing, who was a co-founder of The Sun Department Store in the early 20th century. Photograph by Kate Bagnall (2017), Chinese Australian Hometown Heritage Tour.

accept. Clearly, both positively and negatively, the diaspora altered the destinies of the next generation and in the process also transformed their own statuses as emigrant-donors, as outlined below.

Remembering the Donors

Although Cho Bin School (est. 1929) no longer functions as a school today, the names of its founders—men who operated shops in regional Queensland—remain visibly inscribed in stone (Figure 2). This finding is consistent with previous research on schools dating from the early twentieth century elsewhere in the Pearl River Delta (e.g., Yu, 1983, pp. 57–58). It is evident that, despite the benefactors' long absence overseas, due to their working life abroad, in the pre-Communist phase (before 1949), it was still considered important that they be recognized for their philanthropic deeds.

At Chuk Sau Yuen School (est. 1932), many donor portraits were hung inside the assembly hall (Figure 3). The school was a coordinated effort by Wing On Department Store, which combined the contributions of more than 150 individual contributors (Liao, 2018, p. 113). The widespread support for the school can be summed up in the words of one fundraiser who presided over the opening of the school. “When I asked those around me in Shanghai, not one person opposed building a brand-new school in our village” (Li, 2008, p. 59).

The evidence presented so far suggests that in the first phase of this educational philanthropy, diasporic accumulation of wealth and contact

Figure 2. Names of Cho Bin clansmen who migrated to Queensland and became school donors can be found carved in stone next to the classroom doors at Cho Bin School in present-day South District of Zhongshan. The classrooms shown in this first floor image were originally behind the doors on either side of the open room. Photograph by Denis Byrne (2018).

with the outside world exacerbated the desire to create an alternative future through education in the native home. In turn, the once unschooled migrant-laborers transformed themselves into school benefactors, and their names were immortalized on the school fabric in China. Decades later, these pioneering efforts provided a model for later generations to follow and improve, as described below.

DIVERSIFYING EDUCATIONAL PHILANTHROPY IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Following the economic reforms of the 1980s, it is evident from the *qiaoxiang* (remittance reconfigured ancestral locality) that the diaspora revived their enthusiasm for educational philanthropy. The reason for this was that many villages in the early reform period still had inadequate facilities.[5] After a decade when travel back to China had not been possible, restrictions were relaxed and many *haiwai huaren* (Chinese settled abroad) revisited their native villages. After heavy rain (a frequent occurrence in southern China), for instance, the sight of school desks and chairs semi-submerged in floodwater disheartened these returnees so that they felt compelled to contribute to the building of new schools. Such spur-of-the-moment fundraising activity was fondly described by a former officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (僑辦 *qiaoban*), who recalled that:

Figure 3. The school principal, Mr. Li, narrates the history of Chuk Sau Yuen School to its current students (Zhongshan Broadcasting & Television Station, 2020).

> After the reform and opening up, every time compatriots returned to [Zhongshan] China, I saw how fundraising for a new school occurred. For example, one person [after seeing the neglected conditions of the village] puts in $1000, another [overseas Chinese] chips in $1500, soon tens of thousands were gathered—a sum that could go a long way. I imagined the spirit at the time was like that of those who contributed to Dr. SUN [Yet-sen]'s revolution. The overseas Chinese led the way.[6]

Accounts by the Australian diaspora however sometimes reveal a less enthusiastic response. Potential benefactors had by now settled permanently in Australia, some having established grocery stores while others ran restaurants, but after the atrocities of the decade-long Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), many families were reluctant to return, let alone contribute to rebuilding China. In one interview I conducted with the daughter of a school donor, Mrs. Felicia Seeto recounted the experience of her late father, LEUNG Man Hon (1916–2001). In the late 1970s, he was one of the first to return to his native Zhongshan village of Cho Bin. "Like everyone else, he was afraid, yet he had adored his village and dearly missed friends and relatives there, some of whom he had managed to stay in touch with."[7] His safe return, along with that of the first returnees to other villages, bolstered the confidence of other homecoming diaspora, leading to the regeneration of the ancestral home.

Having fond childhood memories of the villages where they had grown up as children of Australian immigrants meant that even in their busy adult lives they had not forgotten about their ancestral native villages. LEUNG Man Hon ran a restaurant in Milton, Brisbane, while his childhood friend Philip Leong (1917–1999), also from Cho Bin village, operated a supermarket chain in Townsville. After hearing from Man Hon about the condition of their home village, Philip

Figure 4. Chinese-Australian donor families from Queensland, Australia visit the new kindergarten (est. 1987) in Cho Bin village, Zhongshan (Source: Dr. Joe Leong (1988), private family collection, taken 10 April 1988).

paid to install a village gate, pave roads, shelter the marketplace, and erect a factory that would collect rent to support the village school. A kindergarten building was also collectively funded, mainly by Townsville-based compatriots (see Figure 4). These projects were initiated by these two former village boys who had cultivated a lasting friendship due to their privileged status as left-behind children supported by remittances from Queensland, Australia.

Unlike half a century earlier, when families had been primarily based in China, the situation had changed by the 1980s, and as a result the Chinese settlers in Australia (*haiwai huaren*) were less forthcoming with contributions. Some families preferred to set aside their hard-earned savings for other purposes, such as new cars, children's home deposits, or as inheritances for the next generation.[8] These competing "family scripts" (Salaff, Wong & Greve, 2010, p. 11) created new "conversations" about whether it was worth contributing to a far-away, former home. Felicia Seeto remembers her mother yelling at her father: "Don't you feel like a beggar going around asking for donations all the time?!"[9] In 1987, a donation of HK$10,000 earnt the donor immortality.[10] Some potential donors snapped at LEUNG Man Hon: "I have already donated a few hundred *mu* (Chinese acre) of land [to the Communists], isn't that enough?" [11] Felicia explained the irony of the word "donated."

> You must understand there was a class known as landlords who made their money overseas, buying lots of land and properties, shops to collect rent, etc.[12] After the liberation [in 1949], these people were tortured, their houses and properties confiscated. So, when dad asked for donations, some families were reminded of what they had lost.[13]

One historian described the former Chinese Land Reforms (1950–1953) as a government-initiated property distribution campaign that had specifically "attacked the foundations of the transnational family as an institution for generating wealth" (Peterson, 2007, p. 34). Considering what China had been through and how by the 1980s every family was oriented differently, there were greater excuses to say "No" to donation requests. This response is more striking when compared to half a century earlier; in the early twentieth century, immigrant businesses in China were boycotted if it was found that the owners had failed to contribute to new school projects (Yu, 1983, p. 60; Liao, 2018, p. 103).

One incentive introduced from the mid-1980s onwards was to put projects under a "matching funds" scheme (Zhu & Jing, 2019, p. 302) whereby local authorities guaranteed to match overseas donations. For instance, between 1987 and 1994, Stanley Yee of Sydney teamed up with other Tai Chung clansmen in Fiji, Hong Kong, and Macao to fund Cheuk Shan Middle School. The migrant donors amassed over 6 million yuan for a school project of 12.3 million yuan (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs, 2013, p. 366). Through this scheme, the government demonstrated its commitment to partnering with migrant donors to fund new school projects. As a result, the *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities) saw a revival of school construction activity in the 1980s and 1990s.[14]

Responding to a New Era

The Post-Mao reforms in the 1980s changed the nature and expectations of education in China. In this period, the diaspora not only funded the expansion of primary schools, but also commissioned new kindergartens and middle schools in the *qiaoxiang.* In the pre-1949 period, there were 41 new schools in Zhongshan, most of them primary schools (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs, 2013, pp. 349–350). After 1978, there were 49 new kindergartens, 91 new primary school buildings, and 33 new middle school buildings funded by the worldwide Zhongshan diaspora (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs, 2013, pp. 359–367).

According to one donor, the reason for building a kindergarten was to increase household income. Mrs. Eileen Lai told me during our interview in North Sydney that her decision to build a kindergarten in her natal village (Figure 5) was not only because she had grown up without much education, but also because a childcare facility such as was widely available in Australia would free village women from parental duties. Allowing mothers to work in the many new factories that were springing up in southern China would provide households with extra income.[15] Mrs. Lai recalled that after she and her late husband Alen Lai returned to China in 1979, Mr. Lai told her:

> Eileen, we saw that people in China were very poor. My dream and I hope you agree with me, making it our dream [. . .]. I want to build a school, a kindergarten in your village, in memory of your father and mother . . . [16]

Figure 5. Mrs. Eileen Lai (middle) and her two Australia-born children visiting their kindergarten project in Chung Tau village in Zhongshan's Shaxi Town, for the first time after it was built in the late 1980s. Portraits of Eileen, her late husband and her parents hang in the reception foyer of the kindergarten (Courtesy of Mrs. Eileen Lai (n.d.), private family collection).

Eileen agreed. After returning to Australia, the couple ran two restaurants in Sydney's Chinatown and started other businesses as they endeavored to make more money to finance their new project.[17]

Other Zhongshan-Australian families had similarly noble missions, each building schools in their own ancestral villages (Giese, 1997, pp. 177–178; Hunt, 2009, pp. 183–186). Intergenerational businesses, such as Sincere and Wing On department stores in Hong Kong earned reputations for their corporate social responsibility due to their continuing investment in homeland education.[18] One of the most impressive contributions was from Ms. CHENG Wai Kwan who single-handedly funded Bok Oi Middle School, a one-million-yuan project, in her native Sanxiang hometown in 1983 (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs, 2013, p. 366).

Fostering Specialized Learning

In general, China's reform period education system was defined by children starting school at an earlier age and ending later, and by a greater emphasis on a diverse range of specialized learning. The latter was evidenced in the *qiaoxiang* schools by the variety of equipment donated by the diaspora and the suite of new specialist rooms: for example, music rooms, audio-visual (probably TV) rooms, art studios, science labs, and computer rooms.[19] One middle school even had a

swimming pool. Another defining feature of this era was the diversity of school equipment donated when donors and their descendants visited, including new library books, musical instruments, sports equipment, and electronic goods. These gifts ensured that the schools in China remained well-equipped.

When I interviewed the village chief of Sha Chung village, MA Kit-Leung, he said that he felt his elementary school was exceptional.[20] Due to the generous support of the diaspora (mainly through the Hong Kong Sincere Department Store), he said that when he attended Sincere School in the 1990s, "We were the only primary school [at the time] in Zhongshan to have computers!" Ma continued to recall this special experience: "After turning on the computer, I wanted to know how it worked. I sat there [in front of the computer] exploring away, with a cool, gentle breeze from the [electric] fan blowing onto me."[21] In earlier years, Zhongshan villagers who came of age under the People's Republic of China remembered sitting outside their village houses on sweltering summer evenings, with only handheld foldable paper or peach-shaped bamboo fans to stir a gentle breeze.[22] Electric fans, like computers, were luxury, futuristic products that made their debut appearance in diaspora-funded schools of Zhongshan in the 1980s and 1990s.

In a walking interview with the headmaster of Cheung Kok Primary School, Mr. Yeung, he pointed out the value of having specialized equipment.

> Before 1985, the old school didn't have any electricity, definitely no pianos, no art studios, no computers . . . no technology whatsoever. Take for example a [performing arts] stage, without it, how could students learn about and exhibit their talents? Having it allows them to sing, dance, and show off their skills in public, which would also increase their confidence.[23]

In short, the second stage of diaspora educational philanthropy, like the first, followed a period of severe shortages in China. Turmoil during the period of high socialism also created some resentment amongst potential overseas donors. Nevertheless, some continued to diversify their educational offerings, supporting a wider range of initiatives that were aimed at broadening the horizons of children in the ancestral home.

ILLUMINATING FUTURE GENERATIONS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Since the 2010s, the Chinese government has built new schools in honor of the original school founders. One approach was to build new buildings on existing campuses, including those of some diaspora-funded schools. After 2011, following the Wenchuan (Sichuan) Earthquake of 2008, school buildings across China that failed to meet revised structural requirements were progressively demolished and new buildings erected on their sites.[24] Larger diaspora-funded schools, like Cheuk Shan Middle School in Dachong (Tai Chung) Town, underwent multistage safety reconstruction. The headmaster recalls how it was implemented:

Figure 6. The Lihe Primary School (est. 2017), Zhuhai (Photograph by Christopher Cheng, taken 29 November 2018)

> At one point, our campus was a construction site due to constant reconstruction. Buildings that did not meet the safety standards were demolished and rebuilt, one by one. This began in 2011 and ended in 2015. We did this in stages so the school could continue to operate.[25]

Cheuk Shan Middle School was originally built in 1987 and progressively elaborated until 1994 through the contributions of diasporic associations like the Hong Kong Chung Shan Lung Chan Clan Association, and wealthy individuals from Australia, including Stanley Yee. When I met the headmaster, he pointed out that one limitation of building on an existing site was land constraints.

One approach to overcoming the issue of insufficient land has been to erect schools on new sites. This is what happened in Zhuhai. Built 3 km away from the original diaspora-funded school in Ngoi Sha village on land recently reclaimed from the Delta water, was the new Lai Wor School, which, to facilitate differentiation, I have named "Lihe School." From its façade (compare Figure 1 and Figure 6), it is noticeable that the new Lihe School (est. 2017) is an abstraction of the former Lai Wor School (est. 1930).[26] The new school embraces a modernist design: the classroom block is raised up off the ground to provide an underneath outdoor activity area for rainy days. Inside classrooms, digital whiteboards are connected to computers, providing a twenty-first century learning experience.

The new school implements a model of commemoration that is relevant to the diaspora.[27] Descendants of the original school's benefactor James CHOY Hing (1870—1957) are formal patrons of the new school.[28] The new roles of the benefactor's daughter, grandson, and grandson-in-law validate their ancestor's efforts and make the school relevant to the contemporary diaspora (Newland & Taylor, 2010, p. 4). Through the financial initiative of the government and the continued involvement of the diaspora, the good name of the school founder CHOY Hing (in various formulations)[29] will long be remembered. As David Eagleman (2009, p. 23) stated, people die three times:

> The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time.

Through continuing the good name of the school's founder in the establishment of a new school (in its various formulations from Lai Wor to Lihe), CHOY Hing will likely be remembered well into the future. It should be noted that he particularly wished to be remembered. This can be gleaned from the fact that the old school would have been completed two years earlier than the actual date of 1930, but the building project was extended by adding an additional two stories to the original four-story plan to ensure the building would remain the tallest in town (see Figure 1).[30] Besides being a visible landmark in the locality, the school's name was also the alias of the benefactor. Furthermore, by making the descendants of the original benefactor of the old school patrons of the new school, the diaspora continues to be involved and valued alongside their ancestor's pioneering efforts. The establishment of Lihe School (Figure 6) builds on Lai Wor's history to create a new legacy.

Continuing the Spirit of Diaspora Philanthropy

Since the 2010s, China has been no longer financially dependent on its diaspora, and consequently the traditional forms of diaspora philanthropy, such as creating institutions, are falling out of favor and a new landscape is emerging. An example of this is the direct transfer of expertise and skills (Johnson, 2007, p. 45). Despite being in her 90s, the granddaughter of MA Ying Piu, Dr. MA Pui Han has been returning to her ancestral home from Hong Kong every year.[31] As an award-winning photographer, Dr. Ma has reproduced her photographs for the current children of Sha Chung village. Like her Chinese-Australian migrant grandfather, who built a school in his native village a century ago, in her own way, Dr. Ma continues to bring "the outside world" back to the village through her photography.

The above account implies that ongoing contributions should not simply be counted in economic or material remittances, but should also include the immaterial, or "social remittances" that of ideas, meanings, and practices (Cingolani & Vietti, 2020, pp. 1098–1099). This shift is emerging at a time when China's relationship with the diaspora has evolved, and as the lifestyles, preferences, behaviors, and experiences of the ongoing diaspora are nurturing educational development in China in new ways. According to Stuart Hall (1990), diasporas are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p. 235). In the current case, the returning diaspora will most likely continue to contribute to the homeland by way of their linguistic skills, contacts, and expertise (Newland & Taylor, 2010, p. 14) and, in the process, they may feel that they have been empowered by their ability to continually make a difference.

A Sense of History, a Sense of Modernity

As shown so far, diaspora-funded schools can usually influence the diversification of learning opportunities. This feature continues into the twenty-first century. Former students and current staff have confirmed a direct link between

diasporic ties and school excursions. One reason for this is that heritage sites in the native home, elsewhere in China, or even overseas, are deemed significant to the school. The headmaster of Chuk Sau Yuen School mentioned that "re-telling history benefits from context," as he elaborated on his plans to take his students to Nanking Road where the school's founders established their flagship Wing On department store in Republican Shanghai. Furthermore, it is worth noting that diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan were not only connected to multiple sites through migration or business, but even more through financial sponsorship, and this also has established new connections. As a former student who attended the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School in Shekki in the first decade of the twentieth century recalled,

> Because of the school donor's overseas connections, there were subsidized overseas exchange programs to Japan and South Korea [. . .]. Of course, we still had to pay, [. . .], but [because of his connections] it provided more chances for us to travel.[32]

A teacher at that school confirmed this was the case because their patron had funded science centers, museums, and research institutes throughout East Asia.[33] Thus, "the lines between things international, or global, or external, on the one hand, and things 'Chinese' on the other hand," according to William Kirby (2006), "are in many realms nearly impossible to draw" (p. 4). All these factors contribute to contemporary schools in the *qiaoxiang* maintaining a sense of diasporic history while stimulating a newfound global modernity. Hence, the foundations of the migration continue to be a resource to be tapped, giving meaning to the present and informing the future.

A CENTURY OF DIASPORA EDUCATIONAL PHILANTHROPY IN CHINA

Through analyzing the material heritage of the school (donor plaques and photographs), some observations can be made. The earlier phase of emigration—the pre-Communist era schools—were financed by a coalition of sojourning men. By the end of the twentieth century, the donor family had settled overseas, and this situation changed. Schools built in the latter part of the century included a coalescence of husband and wives and/or siblings and cousins. These schools were dedicated to the memory of the parents of migrants, rather than to individual migrants, which was common in the earlier era.

An unanticipated finding of this study was that gender equality in the donor pool increased over time. It must be remembered that in traditional society Chinese women did not have a name and voice: they listened to their fathers, husbands (and when widowed), their sons. Yet, as women migrated in greater numbers, they also became active advocates for improving education in the homeland, reminiscent of the earlier generation of sojourning men. Beginning in the 1980s, women's names appeared on plaques and their portraits were proudly hung at schools in their natal or their husbands' ancestral homes. This observation does not differ somewhat from the findings of Francie Ostrower's study in New York. She once asked why women donated to schools:

> [One participant remarked that] he could not imagine contributing to a school other than his own unless he were married, in which case he would also support his wife's alma mater. Expressing a similar sentiment, one woman said, 'I don't think anyone gives to a school they didn't go to unless they have some family connection, or enormous amounts of money to throw away (Ostrower, 1997, p. 89).'

Unlike the situation in New York, the emergence of Chinese women overseas as lone contributors and partners in philanthropic projects is obviously related to the rising status of women in the transnational business community.

From a broader perspective, it is important to understand the context of diaspora philanthropy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, China considered education as a necessary condition for "national salvation" (Peterson & Hayhoe, 2001, p. 1). Behind the rebuilding of the ancestral home through education, there was an intensive desire to overcome a marginal self-image at home and abroad (Yen, 1981). Although new schools became symbols of the newfound importance of education, they were equally meaningful to migrant-donors; through philanthropy, these people became community leaders in and beyond their native homes, so that their contribution could be classified as a tradition within a tradition: financing schools in the native home honored a patrilineal tradition stretching back to imperial times and was comparable to the ancestral and study halls funded by the imperial gentry.

At the same time, educational philanthropy transcends tradition. After all, diaspora-funded schools depend in the long run on at least a two-way connection for new ideas, goods (school equipment), and practices (from agriculture to cooking in Australia and to school building technology and pedagogy in China). The enduring legacy is not only between Zhongshan and Sydney or Townsville; it also includes other "in-between places" (Sinn, 2012, p. 9) where the donor's family transited or worked or where the diaspora now lives, such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, or San Francisco (*cf.* Boccagni & Erdal, 2021). Put differently, the schools that materialized in Zhongshan before 1949 eventually groomed a new generation of business leaders in the diaspora. These beneficiaries became the future Chinese-Australian business community (Robb, 2019, p. 192; Wilton, 2019, p. 59). My data confirms Philip Huang's (2000, p. 9) finding that Pacific Rim children were brought up to expand the commercial interests of their predecessors. Therefore, if the ancestral locality in southern China was once figuratively described as "schools for emigrants" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 47), the actual schools financed by emigrants were not merely places of socialization but were also central to the long-term survival of the Cantonese both at home in China and abroad (Yu, 1983, p. 55; Benton and Liu, 2018, p. 140).

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

For a long time, Cantonese immigrants to Australia have been depicted as stuck in a routine of endless work. Frost (2002) noted that market gardeners

worked "from dawn to dusk" (p. 123). A member of a shopkeeping family similarly reported that they worked "seven days a week and long hours each day" (Loy-Wilson, 2014, p. 419). While these claims seem true, Shelly Chan (2018) reminds us that in actuality this was a synchronic snapshot of a moment in "diaspora time" (p. 13). Less apparent were the aspirations of the migrants. This study has shown that, away from home, Chinese immigrants translated their invisible baggage of debt and familial obligations into intensive labor in a foreign land. Accumulation of capital and upward mobility ultimately resulted in participation in diaspora philanthropy. The construction of new schools in the *qiaoxiang* provides an alternative narrative to conventional Western scholarship through focusing on pre-tertiary education and an untold story of how migrants created an "alternative history" and hence a different future for the homeland in southern China (Yu, 2018, p. 195; also see, Byrne, 2021, p. 27). The futuring narrative in the *qiaoxiang* complements the "Australian narrative," which is about endless work—and is often misinterpreted as the sole narrative of Chinese immigrants.

Over the past century, among the Chinese-Australian diaspora from Zhongshan, educational philanthropy transformed from honoring a tradition, to diversifying local needs, and finally to illuminating future generations. Initially, emigrants altered the ancestral localities by erecting new-style school buildings where there previously were none. Following in the footsteps of their predecessors, in the latter part of the twentieth century, the successors continued to maintain existing facilities and even funded newer buildings, which in turn diversified the educational offer. Since the emergence of an economically developed China, the role of diaspora has become supplementary. In other words, the continued contributions of the ongoing diaspora in the twenty-first century are more about preserving a sense of history and heritage.

Further research is warranted as the transnational space occupied by diaspora educational philanthropy is likely to change. This is particularly pertinent when some benefactors are transnational subjects, contributing to multiple localities, so how different systems of philanthropy interact and compete deserves investigation.

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Notes

1. The conventions of English names and Chinese names are different and have been a source of great confusion. In Chinese, the surname comes first, while in English, it is at the end. To alleviate confusion, I have capitalised the surname whenever a person's full name appears in the text.

2. Interview with KWOK Lai-mun, 4 December 2018.

3. For example, Dai Leng Primary School (est. 1911); Sai Kwong Girls' School (est. 1915); Owe Lerng Missionary School (est. 1918), also see Liao (2018, p.121).

4. Interview with Howard Wilson (family historian) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne and Alexandra Wong in Sydney, 15 February 2019.

5. Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020, and telephone interview with Billy Lee (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 82, 25 October 2021.

6. Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu, 19 November 2020.

7. Interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto of Brisbane (Zhongshan-born descendant of an Australian school donor), 28 June 2020.

8. Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (Zhongshan historian), 3 December 2018.

9. Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto, 5 August 2020.

10. According to an interview with Mrs. Wenney Leong in Townsville (17 April 2018), the names of donors were permanently inscribed in Chinese beside the doors of the new school block, not dissimilar to Figure 2.

11. A measure of land, 100 mu, 6.67 hectares, or 16.47 acres.

12. A land tenure survey conducted during the Land Reform (around the 1950s) indicates that the size of land ownership of emigrant families can be up to ten times that of non-emigrant families. Peterson (2011, p. 44) noted that migrant families in Guangdong Province own 0.5 and 3.2 acres of land, while non-emigrant families own 0.2 and 0.3 acres.

13. Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto, 5 August 2020.

14. Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020.

15. Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), Sydney, 24 April 2018.

16. Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai, 24 April 2018.

17. Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai, 24 April 2018.

18. Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

19. Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu, 3 December 2018.

20. Interview with MA Kit-Leung (former Sincere School student), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018.

21. Interview with MA Kit-Leung (former Sincere School student), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018.

22. Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto (former resident of Cho Bin village), 74, 20 October 2020.

23. Interview with Mr. Yeung (headmaster of Cheung Kok School), Zhongshan, 27 December 2017.

24. Walking interviews with Mr. Huang (headmaster at Ma Shan School), Zhuhai, 18 December 2017; Mr. Cheng (headmaster at Cheuk Shan Middle School), 21 December 2017.

25. Walking interviews with Mr. Cheng (headmaster at Cheuk Shan Middle School), 21 December 2017.

26. To differentiate the two schools, I have used the Cantonese romanization as the name of the former school (Lai Wor) and Mandarin spelling for the later school (Lihe). This name choice aligns to the language commonly spoken by teachers and students who attended the schools in different eras.

27. Similar findings of acknowledging the previous donors' contributions have been reported at other new schools such as Antang Primary School (est. 2020) (Correspondence with Douglas Lam of Sydney, 23 December 2020) and Ma Shan School (Interview with principal, Mr. Huang, Zhuhai, 18 December 2017).

28. Email correspondence with Howard Wilson of Canberra, 31 December 2017.

29. CHOY Hing was also known as Lai Wor in Cantonese, which was also the name of the 1930 school in Ngoi Sha (Waisha) Village. Lihe, pronounced lee-her in Mandarin, is the name of the new school. The surname Choy is based on Cantonese pronunciation, but when rendered in Mandarin, it becomes Cai.

30. Personal communication with JIM Wah-hing (village chief of Ngoi Sha, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai), 70, 7 November 2021.

31. Interview with Ms. Shen (director of Sha Chung Kindergarten in Zhongshan), 12 June 2018.

32. Interview with Miss. Wong (former student of Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School), 15 December 2017.

33. Interview with Mr. Xie (teacher of Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School), 11 June 2018.

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APPENDIX

Research Participants

Billy Lee, Zhongshan.
Ms. CHEN Diqiu, Zhongshan.
Mr. Cheng, Cheuk Shan Middle School, Zhongshan.
Douglas Lam, Sydney.
Mrs. Eileen Lai, Sydney.
Mrs. Felicia Seeto, Brisbane.
Howard Wilson, Canberra.
Mr. Huang, Ma Shan School, Zhuhai.
JIM Wah-hing, Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai.
KWOK Lai-mun, Chuk Sau Yuen village, Zhongshan.
MA Kit-Leung, Sha Chung village, Zhongshan.
MA Yin-chiu, Sha Chung village, Zhongshan.
Ms. Shen, Sha Chung Kindergarten, Zhongshan.
Mrs. Wenney Leong, Townsville.
Miss. Wong, Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School, Zhongshan.
Mr. Xie, Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School, Zhongshan.
Mr. Yeung, Cheung Kok School, Zhongshan.