

# Australian Migrant Heritage in South China:

## The Legacy of Diaspora-Funded Schools in Twentieth Century Zhongshan

Christopher Cheng

BDesSt. & MPhil (Anthropology)

Doctor of Philosophy  
Institute for Culture and Society  
Western Sydney University

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To the children of the Chinese-Australian diaspora

## Preface and Acknowledgments

One of the great blessings for a researcher is to explore an unfamiliar territory. Now, upon completion of such a research project, it is appropriate to count the many blessings, acknowledging those who made this path possible.

Years before I began my doctoral research, I was asked by a Cairns-based researcher to help her to trace the Chinese ancestry of Andrew Leon (c.1840–1920), a prominent leader of the Chinese community in Cairns and the manager of the pioneering Hap Wah (合華) sugar enterprise (1878–1886), which was established two years after the founding of Cairns. In 1878, Andrew's son, William, was sent back to China, possibly to study in Heung San (Zhongshan), supposedly his native home. While I was unable to locate where Andrew was born and where William was sent, my search and email interaction with Julia Volkmar helped me think through many issues that would be useful when I commenced my PhD.

Then, in the summer of 2016 in Hong Kong, shortly after visiting the migrant-built localities of southern China (*qiaoxiang*), I had been thinking about how to better protect the heritage of overseas Chinese migrants. By the end of that year, historian Dr. Michael Williams (Sydney) shared with me an advertisement for a doctoral position scholarship at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, to research the transnational heritage of Chinese migration to Australia. This scholarship was funded by the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture at the same university. I applied for and won this position. Family and friends encouraged me to pursue it. Janet Liu-Terry (Cairns) told me that more research was needed by somebody proficient at carrying out research in Chinese and English. My cousin, Andy Huang (Zhongshan), brought news about a proposed Overseas Chinese Museum in Shekki, making me realise the level of

interest there was within China in the heritage of overseas migration. I was beginning to envisage a research career traversing China and Australia, particularly documenting Australian Chinese heritage located in China—in which my education in architecture and anthropology would converge.

I am extremely grateful to Professor Denis Byrne and Distinguished Professor Ien Ang of the Institute for Culture and Society at WSU for conceiving the China–Australia Heritage Project. This Australian Research Council-funded Discovery Project (DP170101200) laid the foundation upon which this doctoral research developed. I am also grateful to Professor Jocelyn Chey, of the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture. They have been dedicated supervisors and have crucially contributed to my intellectual development. From the beginning, Professor Byrne’s own work has been a guiding example, demonstrating how a master hones his craft from field research to oral presentations and writing. His meticulous reading of my drafts has been admirable. Professor Ang’s supervisory experience and ever-encouraging words have only been surpassed by her advice on conceptual clarity, which has been welcome throughout my candidature. Professor Chey not only maintained her supervisory role after retirement but was most generous with her comments, offering a wealth of expert knowledge and insight into many areas of Chinese history and culture that have profoundly enriched the development of this thesis.

Outside of Australia, this research benefited from the office space provided to me by Hong Kong Baptist University through Professor John Erni. This space allowed me to process my data between trips to Zhongshan and various libraries in Hong Kong during the first years of my candidature. In Zhongshan, I thank the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, particularly CHOW King and Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian), for assisting with my research on diaspora-funded schools. Similarly, I appreciate the help of King FONG (Sydney), Dr. Joe (retired medical practitioner) and Judy Leong (Townsville), Daphne Lowe Kelley (Sydney), and Mary Low (Cairns) for assisting with tracking down research participants in Australia. A special thanks to the many participants in my research, including those who agreed to be interviewed for the project, for sharing their time and precious memories with me (Appendix B contains a list of their names). I benefited from the interest in and advice of some

research participants—the descendants of Chinese-Australian migrants—which continued after my interviews with them.

I also must thank those who agreed to verify excerpts of my drafts for accuracy. Thank you very much “Amanda”, Dr. Joe and Judy Leong, Gary Leong, Ronald Choy, Lance Lai who translated excerpts for his mother Elieen Lai (school donor), Janet Wang, Howard Wilson, Dr. CHEN Ju-Chen (anthropologist), and Professor PENG Changxin (architectural historian). A special mention goes to Dr. Michael Williams (historian), an unofficial advisor, who not only offered sound advice on my research in Zhongshan but also provided invaluable suggestions on writing my thesis.

I also must thank the many people at ICS. I appreciate the administrative staff there for being so accommodating, especially during the pandemic, in making special arrangements that allowed me to continue working on campus and then provided additional assistance to facilitate my transition to working from home. I also acknowledge the First Nations people of Australia as traditional owners of this land, the Dharug people on whose land this thesis was conceived and completed.

Throughout this PhD, I continued to enjoy the collegiate support of my peers at Western Sydney, especially Vanicka, Ha, Amrita, Kiu-Wai, Kate, Francesca, Karen, Alex, Jasbeer and Isaac, when researching overseas, and upon my return. Having like-minded peers has made the long journey less lonely. I also want to thank my friends and family outside of university, particularly Uncle Joseph and Auntie Cindy (Hong Kong), Uncle Colin (Cairns), Sandi Robb (Townsville), and Cecil Law (Sydney). Above all, I thank my wife, Kiko, whose patience, faith, and initiative has been unwavering throughout my PhD, which has often made a huge demand on that most precious commodity: time.

It is impossible for me to forget all those people who have gone out of their way to enable the completion of this project. I am incredibly grateful for the tremendous support, inspiration, and encouragement I have received from so many.

## Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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(Signature)

# Declarations

This thesis has been professionally edited by Christopher Marcatili of *Ellipsis Editing* (Sydney).

## Abstract

This interdisciplinary study addresses a problem of intellectual concern at the intersection of the scholarly fields of heritage studies and migration history: How to recognise and manage the heritage of a shared past beyond the boundaries of the nation-state? Existing research and conservation practice on sites of migrant heritage in Australia conventionally considers events and places related to the immigrant experience after they arrive in Australia, but not their continuing links to migrant places of origin overseas. An exception to this is the China–Australia Heritage Corridor project—an Australian Research Council-funded Discovery Project initiated by researchers at the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University to document the diasporic dimension of Chinese migrant heritage to Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Under the umbrella of the China–Australia Heritage Corridor project, this doctoral thesis specifically explores the social and architectural dimension of the Chinese diaspora’s educational philanthropy in the period from the early twentieth century until the present. It helps reveal how Chinese migration to Australia ultimately resulted in the socio-material transformation of the native home of migrants in the Pearl River Delta of China’s Guangdong Province, specifically in relation to the construction and operation of modern schools there. The following interrelated research questions are posed: How was this twentieth-century diasporic educational philanthropy organised? How did diaspora-funded schools engender new ways of being modern in rural China? What role do diaspora-funded school buildings assume once they cease functioning as schools? And, ultimately, how do Chinese Australians reclaim or reconnect with their heritage in China generation after generation?



Data collection was conducted between 2017 and 2021 in the *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities) of Zhongshan (China), and in Sydney and Townsville (Australia). Fieldwork included locating and photographically documenting Australian-funded schools in Zhongshan, archival and library research, and the recording of firsthand oral accounts by school donors, donor descendants, and former pupils of the schools.

This thesis presents a dual—*qiaoxiang* and diaspora—perspective that disrupts the conventional understanding of migrant heritage as defined by the nation-state. The study is the first of its kind to examine how the Chinese diaspora relates to the material heritage of the diaspora-funded school setting in China. Diaspora-funded schools were unique socio-material assemblages that first emerged in southern China in the early twentieth century. This thesis reveals how the modern school shaped a new way of life and future for the *qiaoxiang*. The socio-material legacies of the diaspora-funded school buildings are a testimony to the generosity of the donors, but the schools may also become a burden for donors and their descendants, requiring maintenance and continuous improvement. Since the 1980s, Chinese migrants in Australia (and their descendants) continued the tradition of erecting new schools and renovating old ones as a way to contribute to the *qiaoxiang*'s future. But this second wave of construction only lasted until the turn of the twentieth-first century, after which China no longer depended on the diaspora as a funding source for schools.

The thesis concludes that Chinese-Australian migrant heritage in China remains relevant to both China and Australia. It testifies to the history of their mutual entanglement and place-based attachment, as well as improving intergenerational relationships. It also has potential to strengthen the transnational ties established by the history of diaspora philanthropy.

## 論文摘要

本跨學科研究探討在文化遺產研究與移民歷史交匯下的關注點：如何識別和管理跨民族國家邊界遺產的共同過去？澳洲現時對移民遺產的遺址研究和保育，大多是圍繞移民抵達澳洲後的相關事件、移居地和生活經驗，而非他們與海外移民原居地的持續聯繫。由澳洲研究議會「探索發展項目」資助，西雪梨大學文化與社會研究院策展的「中澳承傳長廊」卻是一個特例，此計劃旨在記錄十九和二十世紀僑民的跨國遺產。

在「中澳承傳長廊」的計劃下，本博士論文專門探索從二十世紀初到現在，由僑民發起的教育慈善事業的社會和建築面向。這有助揭示僑民如何最終促使其故鄉珠江三角洲，特別是與現代學校的建設和營運有關的社會物質轉型。以下為相關的研究問題：二十世紀僑民教育慈善事業是如何組織的？僑捐學校如何促成中國農村的現代化？在僑捐學校的建築物停止運作後，它們扮演什麼角色？以及澳洲華人如何一代又一代地與中國遺產恢復或重新連繫？

資料收集於二零一七至二零二一年期間，在廣東中山的僑鄉以及澳洲雪梨和湯斯維爾進行。田野考察工作包括定位和拍攝位於中山的澳洲僑捐學校、檔案和圖書館研究、並記錄學校捐贈者、捐贈者後代和舊生的第一手口頭陳述。

本論文提出了一個僑鄉和海外華人的雙重視角，打破了以民族國家來定義移民遺產的傳統理解。本研究是同類研究中的先河，研究僑民與中國學校環境的物質遺產之間的關係。僑捐學校是二十世紀初首次在南中國出現的獨特社會物資聚合 (socio-material assemblages)。本論文揭示了現代學校如何塑造僑鄉在二十世紀早期和晚期的新生活方式和未來展望。僑捐學校建築的社會物質遺產見證捐助者的慷慨，但其後持續維修和優化工程卻成為捐贈者及其後代的負擔。自一九八零年代以來，澳洲華人（及其後代）延續了建設新校和翻新舊校的傳統，以貢獻僑鄉的未來。然而，這第二波的建設只持續到廿一世紀之初，其後中國已不再需要倚賴僑民的捐獻。

本論文提出的結論是，在中國的中澳移民遺產，依然與中國和澳洲息息相關。這見證了兩者纏結的關係和對地方依戀的歷史，以及改善中的代際關係。本研究並期望能加強僑民慈善歷史所建立的跨國聯繫。

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# Introduction

## Schools Built by Chinese Australians in Zhongshan<sup>1</sup>

### The Transnational Heritage Linking Australia and China

Australian politician Tim Watts (2019) states in his book, *The Golden Country: Australia's Changing Identity*, that Australia is blessed with three distinct cultural traditions that make us Australians: ancient Indigenous heritage, Anglo-British institutions, and the gift of multicultural migration. This categorisation is a useful one, but it points to the fact that the predominant story of Australian heritage is incomplete. What is missing from the story is precisely the heritage that has emanated from “the gift of multicultural migration”, including the legacy of Chinese and other non-Anglo cultural traditions that migrants have brought with them. An extra “gift” is the cross-border connectivity that migration has lent Australia, and this gift includes heritage sites and objects of significance to Australia’s history of migration that are located both in Australia and in migrant-sending countries, sites listed on the “List of Overseas Places of Historic Significance to Australia”,<sup>2</sup> and items of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage in overseas collections.<sup>3</sup> Repatriation of the latter is—as the Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt

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<sup>1</sup> Zhongshan (中山) is the Mandarinised version of the Cantonese name Chung Shan.

<sup>2</sup> The List of Overseas Places of Historic Significance to Australia was endorsed by the Australian government in 2007. On the list were sites linked to warfare and the personal achievements of extraordinary Australians outside Australia’s borders: Anzac Cove in Turkey, the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea, and Howard Florey’s Laboratory in the UK (Clarke 2017; Logan 2007; Waterton and Dittmer 2016). The Australian National Memorial at the Villers-Bretonneux Cemetery in France was considered but ultimately not gazetted (Clarke 2017).

<sup>3</sup> The Return of Cultural Heritage Initiative was established in 2018 to identify and liaise with overseas institutes and private collectors to repatriate items of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage held overseas (Morris 2021; Canales 2020). Since then, researchers at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) have identified more than 100,000 items of historical and cultural significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in public overseas collections. In 2020, an additional \$10 million was injected to extend the initiative until 2024.

put it—important for spiritual “healing, truth-telling and reconciliation” among First Nations people.<sup>4</sup>

While Australia has embraced multiculturalism since the 1970s, overseas migrant heritage has not yet been considered part of the national patrimony. Ien Ang notes that migrant histories and heritage are often viewed as complementary, rather than integral, to Australia’s history and heritage (2003: 33). This could be attributed to the lingering effect of the “White Australia” policies, which propagated exclusionary views about what constitutes being Australian. While the overseas heritage of Anglo-British Australians and First Nations peoples is recognised to a limited degree, it is a glaring omission that forms of overseas migrant heritage in this multicultural migrant-settler nation have been overlooked. Ghassan Hage (2002: 12), a Lebanese-Australian professor who studied emigrant villages in Lebanon, has rhetorically asked: “What is more part of Australia’s multicultural heritage than the many villages and towns from which Australia’s migrant population has originated?” Much of the migrant heritage located beyond Australian territorial boundaries came into existence because of migrants remitting funds or returning to invest in their homelands after their arrival in Australia.

The China–Australia Heritage Corridor Project (2017–2021) was conceived to address this omission. This research project occurs at a time when methodological nationalism implicitly underlies the common approach to documenting and conserving the heritage of migration (Byrne 2016a, 2016b, 2021). In social science research, methodological nationalism refers to the tendency to default to the nation-state as the unit of analysis. In empirical research on migration, this has resulted in research being limited solely to investigating the migrant destination country (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2003). Existing research and conservation practice in the field of migrant heritage in Australia has conventionally considered events and places related to the experience of immigrants after their arrival in Australia (Armstrong 2004), but not their ongoing links to their places of origin. To include these links would be to recognise that migrant heritage is not bound by national borders but is fundamentally transnational.

In China over the past decade, the material heritage related to the Chinese diaspora has gained considerable attention, in parallel with Australia’s focus on that part of migrant heritage contained

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2020).

within the nation. In particular, the watchtowers (碉樓 *diaolou*) of emigrant villages in Kaiping, as well as remittance-bearing letters (僑批 *qiaopi*), have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2007 and 2013 respectively (Guo 2012; Zhang 2005; Benton and Liu 2018). The objects of this study—the modern early and late twentieth-century schools built by migrants to Australia in their ancestral villages and towns in China—are arguably as socially and historically significant as *qiaopi* or *diaolou*. After all, the modern education offered by these schools promised long-term consequences for those in largely illiterate agrarian communities with or without overseas connections.

My study, under the umbrella of the China–Australia Heritage Corridor Project, addresses a problem of intellectual concern at the intersection of migration history and heritage studies: How to identify and protect a shared past whose material record is distributed beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. My contribution specifically focuses on the significance of diaspora-funded schools and education in China as elements of Australian migrant heritage. Migrant transnational heritage is distinct in that it is related to interactions between the migrant destination and the home country, so identifying the diasporic heritage of Chinese Australians has the potential to give recognition to Australia’s long-standing connectivity with China, as well as its connected future in the Indo-Pacific region.

## **Why Have I Studied Diaspora-funded Schools?**

One challenge in studying the heritage of migration is that many important sites and the practices relating to them are only known within particular cultural or ethnic groups (Armstrong 1997: 60). Knowledge of these may only be held by the migrating generation who still speak the language of their country of origin. The children of immigrant parents, such as those raised as Australians, tend to primarily speak English, and thus may have little knowledge of their parents’ former countries (Matheson 2020: 169).

Aside from this language barrier, another challenge for my research was a generational barrier. For example, although Philip Leong (梁華立 born LEONG Wah Lup, 1917–1999) was the most



notable benefactor of Cho Bin<sup>5</sup> (曹邊),<sup>6</sup> his native village (located 13km from Shekki (石岐), the urban centre of Zhongshan), his eldest daughter, Phyllis, told me that “Dad never told us anything.”<sup>7</sup> His second Australian-born daughter, Janet, remarked that her late father said to her: “You don’t need to know. It’s not important,”<sup>8</sup> dismissing inquiries she made to him about his investments as she grew up in the Far North Queensland city of Townsville, where Philip was a household name in the local supermarket industry. This attitude of parents not wanting to pass on knowledge about connections to the ancestral home is very common in migrant families for reasons that will be elaborated later in the thesis (Chapter 7).



**Figure 0.1** A shelter for the marketplace of Cho Bin village was built by Cho Bin emigrant and Townsville resident Philip Leong. The four-storey building, established in 1993 (the one with round windows behind the basketball court), was another of Philip’s initiatives. It was leased as a factory to provide long-term financial support to families left in the village. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 2 December 2018.)

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<sup>5</sup> The Mandarin version of the Cantonese village name is Caobian.

<sup>6</sup> Based on interviews with Mrs. Janet Wang (Australian-born descendant of school donor), Sydney, 31 January 2020, and Anthony Leong (historian and village chief of Cho Bin), 68, Zhongshan, 25 December 2017), we know that since the 1980s, Philip Leong has significantly improved his ancestral village through his involvement in public welfare. An incomplete list of his contributions includes roofing the village marketplace (Figure 0.1); installing the ceremonial village gate; and redeveloping the village’s roads. Moreover, according to the *Zhongshan City South District Gazetteer* (2017), Philip led the major renovation of the primary school in Cho Bin in 1985 and was responsible for building a pavilion and village *pai fong* (牌坊 ceremonial gate) in 1986. He also established a scholarship fund and set up a middle school for Cho Bin in 1987, and has contributed to the expansion of Liang Du Middle School and to hospitals and homes for the elderly (*Zhongshan City South District Gazetteer Committee* 2017: 445).

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mrs. Phyllis Rainford (Australian-born descendant of school donor), 72, Townsville, 19 April 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mrs. Janet Wang (Australian-born descendant of school donor), Sydney, 31 January 2020.

In a telephone interview with Tony Mooney, a former Townsville mayor who nominated Philip Leong as Townsville's "Citizen of the Century," he remarked, "In his quietly spoken approach, Philip was not a man who bragged about his [good] deeds."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Chau and Fitzgerald (2018: 21) suggest that it may be because of cultural norms such as humility that Asian donors in Australia rarely speak about their philanthropic or charitable works. Reflecting on my relationship with my Chinese immigrant parents (Cheng 2016) and the parental relationships of other second-generation Chinese Australians who grew up in Australia's multicultural era in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Alice Pung (2006, 2008) and Benjamin Law (2010), I consider there may also be other factors at stake in terms of knowledge of China not being passed on to the second generation. These include the limited English vocabulary of the parents, their lack of time and patience, and a persistent cultural habit of instructing children rather than explaining things to them (Matheson 2020: 169). Unlike Western parents, first-generation overseas Chinese parents, often socially trapped in occupationally segregated niches, tend to replicate the authoritarian hierarchy to which they were accustomed in their former lives. Rather than explaining matters of cultural background and tradition to their children, Chinese immigrant parents would therefore often simply ignore their offsprings' questions or instruct them to do as they are told (Lam 2007).<sup>10</sup> The result was anything but an egalitarian relationship. It was defined by a lack of mutual understanding, ultimately leading to losses in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Lowenthal (1990: 15) has noted that the heritage of Anglo settlers in Australia was less about "generational continuity" than a "tableaux of discrete moments." This certainly seems to be the case for Chinese-Australian families.

My personal journey overseas also reveals how this discontinuity was eventually bridged. In 2015, I was taking a tour guide course in Hong Kong, and one of the many sites we visited during our familiarisation trips was King Yin Lei, a mansion on the Mid-levels on Hong Kong Island. I was intrigued to learn that this mansion was built by a Chinese Australian in 1937. The owner, SHAM Yat-chor (岑日初),<sup>11</sup> had been to California before embarking on a successful Chinese herbalist practice in Victoria, Australia. His mansion was the first material evidence of a China–Australia

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<sup>9</sup> Telephone interview with Tony Mooney (former Mayor of Townsville), 30 October 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Many immigrant parents come from a generation whose actions speak louder than words. If their children were fed and clothed and their school fees were paid, then that was how they expressed their love.

<sup>11</sup> The conventions of English names and Chinese names are different and have been a source of great confusion. In Chinese, the surname comes at the beginning, while in English, it is at the end. To alleviate confusion, I have adopted a system of capitalising the Chinese surnames when a person's full Chinese name appears in the text.

connection that I had encountered in Hong Kong after leaving Australia, my birth country, seven years earlier.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure. 0.2** My uncle, Colin Cheng (right), with his grandson, Leon Cheng (left), reminisces about his childhood in Wan Shing (present-day South District), outside Chuk Sau Yuen School, Zhongshan, China. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 5 April 2016.)

After this revelation, in the following year, I visited my ancestral home in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province, a place where I had heard that many Chinese Australians originated (Appendix D). Although it was not my first visit to Zhongshan, this time I was with my uncle, Colin Cheng (鄭志剛), from Cairns, who had also taken his son and grandson back to visit his many childhood homes in Zhongshan’s South District (Figure 0.2).<sup>13</sup> There, my uncle enthusiastically pointed out as we passed the various houses built by Australian *wab-kiu* (華僑 *buaqiao*), fellow Chinese immigrants in North Queensland. On that trip, I encountered for the first time what I identify in this dissertation as “diaspora-funded schools” (僑捐學校). I learned during

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<sup>12</sup> I left Australia in January 2008 after feeling disconnected as a second-generation Australian in a new country. My parents, who only spoke Cantonese, settled down in Cairns a few years before I was born. At the time, national heritage in Australia was predominantly Anglo-Australian, and I constantly felt out of place, navigating an unfamiliar culture and a foreign language in a “new world” far from my ancestral roots. In 2008, I decided to move to Hong Kong, the city where my parents had resided before relocating to Australia. Another factor was the Indigenous Australians I met in remote Queensland and the Northern Territory in 2007, who taught me about the importance of their Country to them and aroused my interest in my own roots (see Cheng 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Today’s South District (since 1998) is still known to some emigrants as Wan Shing (環城), its former name from 1959, and by historians as Liang Du (良都), as it was known from 1381, in the Ming dynasty (Liu 2014a: 5–6).

that trip that my uncle and his siblings (including my father) had attended at least one such school, the Chuk Sau Yuen School (竹秀園學校) in Wan Shing.

My fascination with the ancestral homeland grew, and later that year I embarked upon my own expedition to uncover the heritage of migration in the ancestral home-places of overseas Chinese. In mid-2016, I teamed up with a former colleague<sup>14</sup> and we spent almost three weeks visiting various *qiaoxiang* (僑鄉 remittance-built localities) in Fujian and Guangdong Provinces—the major centres of emigration in southern China. One of the lessons we learned from that trip was that any locality with a significant emigrant population almost certainly also had a school funded by its diaspora, and that these schools were among the most impressive buildings in the locality.

In 2017, when an opportunity arose to embark on a doctoral research project, I returned to Australia after almost a decade in Hong Kong. A group of researchers from the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University had recently been awarded an Australian Research Council grant.<sup>15</sup> That project, known as the “China–Australia Heritage Corridor,” aimed to document the heritage of transnational migratory flows between China and Australia, overcoming the nation-bounded approach that in Australia has long characterised the management of migrant heritage (Byrne 2016a, 2016b). Realising that important work needed to be done to research places in China of significance in Australia’s migration history, I was delighted to be selected and eager to join a multidisciplinary team of researchers to unravel the historical roots and ongoing connections that Chinese-Australian immigrants have with their places of origin.

Due to my Chinese-Australian ancestry and my tertiary training in architecture at the University of Queensland in Australia and in anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (see Appendix E), it seemed logical for me to pursue a qualitative, transnational study on the built heritage of Chinese-Australian migrants in the ancestral locale of Zhongshan in China. Before first leaving Australia in 2008 for Hong Kong, I had worked as an architectural assistant, preparing design and construction drawings of new school buildings in Brisbane. It was therefore natural for me to focus on school architecture in migrant-sending villages in China; and it is the creation,

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<sup>14</sup> My former colleague in the South China Research Center at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Frances Lo (盧惠玲), was trained in history and anthropology and had years of experience documenting the heritage of traditional Hong Kong.

<sup>15</sup> The research team consisted of Professor Denis Byrne (heritage studies), Professor Ien Ang (cultural studies), Dr. Michael Williams (history), and Dr. Alexandra Wong (urban studies).

maintenance, and preservation of this form of transnational migrant heritage that has become the focus of this research project.

My interdisciplinary study investigates modern schools in China that were funded and built by Chinese migrants to Australia. It does so by treating modern diaspora-funded schools as a socio-material manifestation of diaspora philanthropy in the China–Australia Heritage Corridor. In this approach, schools funded in the *qiaoxiang* by the diaspora are not seen as stable or static entities disconnected from their donors and pupils or from their descendants of each. Rather, it considers the gamut of participants to be enmeshed in the changing presence and life of the schools as institutions and architectural phenomena. As objects of desire, sites of modernity, or sites of remembrance, the significance of the schools lies in their character as socio-material assemblages whose narratives inform and enrich Chinese-Australian migration history while also expanding our thinking about the transnational legacy of the migrant heritage of both Australia and China.

## Chinese-Australian Diaspora-funded Schools in Zhongshan



**Figure 0.3** Cho Bin school in the South District of Zhongshan (on the right) is a two-story concrete structure that towers over a traditional single-story temple building (on the left). The school is in a prominent position, facing the open village square, circa 2016. (Source: Chen 2017.)

The significance of diaspora-funded schools as part of the China-situated heritage of Chinese Australians is revealed in both the observations of scholars and the comments of members of the diaspora in Australia. From an architectural point of view, a Chinese historian noted that diaspora-

funded primary and middle schools were the most prominent features of the built environment of *qiaoxiang* in Guangdong Province (Liu 2002: 266). A heritage scholar from Australia has noted that the prominent location and the sheer scale of some modern diaspora-funded schools, such as the school in the “Australian village”<sup>16</sup> of Cho Bin in Zhongshan’s South District (Figure 0.3), show the “centrality of education in the quest for modernity” among the diaspora (Byrne 2016a: 273). An Australian school-donor’s family member, Pamala CON FOO, a descendant of Zhongshan-born Darwin merchant YUEN Yet Hing (阮溢卿 1853–1916), has described “their” school as the most substantial building in their home township in China, and stated that “from its roof you can survey the whole village” (Giese 1997: 177), indicating the importance of such schools in the cultural landscape of the village. Similarly, according to an oral historian working with post-war Chinese in Australia, the Yuen Yat Hing school building represented “a tangible symbol of the endurance of Chinese-Australian links to the homeland” (Giese 1997: 177). The above descriptions of the schools are indicative of their importance in the history of not just present-day Zhongshan, but the Pearl River Delta and the southern Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Fujian in general—regions where the *qiaoxiang* are replete with an enormous range of diaspora-funded schools (Zheng 1996).<sup>17</sup>

Until I began my research, no list of Chinese-Australian schools in present-day Zhongshan and Zhuhai (both formerly part of Heung San)<sup>18</sup> had ever been compiled (Appendix 1). Michael Williams, a historian specialising in overseas migration from Zhongshan, found no specific study had been done on the diaspora-funded schools of Zhongshan County (Williams 2018: 83). During my study, I also found that no previous research has been published in English, although an

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<sup>16</sup> It may be necessary to clarify the meaning of the term “Australian village.” Due to the process of “chain migration” (Chan 1997) in which numerous males from a village in Zhongshan migrated to Australia, these villages were thought of by the people of Zhongshan as “Australian villages,” and émigrés returning from Australia were identified by fellow local villagers as “Australians.” Something similar is seen in the way that certain houses in rural Mexico are referred to as “California houses,” (Lopez 2015) or houses in the New Territories of Hong Kong as “Sterling Houses” (Watson 1975). Some villages in rural Guangdong are known as “Panama villages” (Zhang 2017). This shows the influence of what Levitt (1998) calls “social remittances”—ideas and values from overseas that shape migrant-sending localities. Diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan are arguably by and large a hybrid “Chinese-Australian heritage” or “Australian heritage” in China. Recognising that, this study examines the emergence and evolution of modern diaspora-funded village schools as a form of rural modernity and transnational Australian migrant heritage of twentieth-century southern China.

<sup>17</sup> The wider literature also mentions various diaspora-funded schools in the *qiaoxiang* of Taishan (Yu 1983; Hsu 2000a), Kaiping (Woon 1989: 337; Tan 2013: 175–176), Xinhui (Bagnall 2013: 11, 13), Zengcheng (Chan 2007b: 8–9), Guangzhou (Wang 2007), Shunde (Zhu and Jing 2019); Chaozhou (Wang 2021: 133), and Xiamen (Tan 1994; Cook 2000).

<sup>18</sup> My study site is situated in the hinterland region of Macao, formerly known as Heung San County (香山縣) or “fragrant mountain.” Territorially, it once covered the present-day jurisdictions of Macao, Zhuhai and Zhongshan (a prefecture level city), which is considered by contemporary historians to be “Greater Heung San” (大香山) (Zheng 2007). The county’s name changed to Zhongshan in 1925, in memory of the founding father of the Republic of China, Dr. SUN Yat-sen (1866–1925). In 1980, Zhuhai became a Special Economic Zone as part of DENG Xiaoping’s economic reform policy. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I will mostly refer to my study region as Zhongshan throughout this thesis.

academic article written in Chinese was discovered on the topic of schools funded by the Zhongshan diaspora from the late Qing to the Republican period by LI Aihui (李愛慧) (2008). Piecing together various sources (Chapter 1), I identified over thirty school buildings in the villages and towns of Zhongshan and Zhuhai that were major initiatives of Chinese-Australian benefactors. The above number does not consider minor—but no less significant—donations to projects in home villages that were not Chinese-Australian initiated. Taken together, these schools provide enough of a sample to understand the diversity of educational practices and the typologies of modern school building across time, as well as to compare socio-material features within the sample. A conservative estimate is that there were a few hundred active Chinese-Australian donors to education funds or contributors to the funding of schools in Zhongshan during the time that many schools were established in the Republican period (until 1949) and the post-1978 reform period. This means that, with the passage of time, thousands of Australian families with Chinese ancestry have had links to diaspora-funded schools in the Pearl River Delta.

Perhaps more important than the number of Chinese-Australian benefactors were the beneficiaries of the new schools in the *qiaoxiang*. Although the number is impossible to quantify, beneficiaries included those rural-born children in the *qiaoxiang* both with and without emigrant connections and those sent from or brought back from Australia in the early twentieth century for education in China. Michael Williams (2018: 82) hence considers that education was by far the greatest long-term impact of overseas Chinese investment in the *qiaoxiang*. As he explains:

The contributions of the *huaqiao* took many forms, ranging from supplying the money to enable more children, including girls to attend school to building new schools and incorporating traditional one-teacher village schools into a more “modern” education system. In the year that followed China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895), the desire to modernise and strengthen China swept the country and the keenness of *huaqiao* to contribute to education was a part of this. When the traditional examination system was abolished in 1905 in order to allow for the development of new schools capable of teaching modern subjects, the opportunity for those with an education in these subjects greatly expanded. (Williams 2018: 82)

The memories related to education in the ancestral home are as complex as they are diverse. Since few oral histories have ever been recorded on this subject, it is not surprising that an Australian historian commented that there is little knowledge of the kind of education that the children were exposed to in the ancestral home in China (Bagnall 2018a: 93). My study brings together years of family history and previously unrecorded living memories in the Chinese-Australian community, along with those of Australian descendants in China. Of particular interest to my thesis is the social

dimension of the schools as examples of migrant “built heritage,” including how people desired, experienced, and remembered them.

## The Thesis and Its Contributions

This thesis examines how Chinese emigration to Australia and Chinese Australians’ subsequent engagement in philanthropic projects to aid their place of origin resulted in the socio-material transformation of their home villages in the Pearl River Delta.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, this philanthropy relates to schools and education in the villages and towns of what was formerly known as Heung San, including the present-day cities of Zhongshan and Zhuhai in Guangdong Province. This homeplace was both historically and numerically significant to Chinese in New South Wales<sup>20</sup> and North Queensland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>21</sup>

Zhongshan County is situated in the hinterland of the oldest European trading port in China, Macao, and close to other enclaves in Guangdong, Canton (now Guangzhou) and Hong Kong.<sup>22</sup> It was also where the first diaspora-funded school appeared, in Nanping town (南屏鎮) in 1872, founded by a Chinese-American migrant. Moreover, this mostly Cantonese-speaking region is well known for producing a long line of revolutionaries and reformers.<sup>23</sup> Due to its geographic location in the Pearl River Delta, this county was arguably, more than any other place in China, influenced by the early connections to its outside world (Zheng 2007). While not the sole contributors, Chinese Australians were among the wealthiest and earliest patrons of modern diaspora-funded

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<sup>19</sup> Historically, in Australia, the so-called “New Gold Mountain” (新金山), Chinese migrants on the nineteenth-century goldfields were predominantly Cantonese-speaking and mostly originated from one of thirteen counties in the Pearl River Delta (Yong 1977: 1). Before the discovery of gold in Australia in 1851, there were 120 Chinese workers who originated from Xiamen (Amoy), Fujian Province. Between the 1840s and 1890s (the peak of Chinese immigration), over 100,000 Chinese entered Australia; almost all were Cantonese, except for the agricultural labourers from Fujian who had stayed on (Wang 2001: 197).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, S. Fitzgerald [1997] 2008; Jones 2003; Hunt 2009; Wilton 1998, 2004; J. Fitzgerald 2007; O’Neill 2014; Williams 2018; Liao 2018.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, May 1984; Robb 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Zhongshan lies about 85km south of Guangzhou and 40km north of Macao and is on the opposite side of the Pearl River Delta to Hong Kong.

<sup>23</sup> These include ZHENG Guanying (鄭觀應), Dr. SUN Yat-sen (孫逸仙), YUNG Wing (容閔), and MA Ying-piu (馬應彪), to name a few.



schools in this county. These donors included the founders of China's four premier department stores in the pre-Communist era.<sup>24</sup>

To appreciate how modern educational philanthropy transformed the ancestral locale (*qiaoxiang*), I researched numerous schools in Zhongshan that were funded by Chinese Australians. These schools were mainly from two periods: the early (pre-1949) and late (post-1980) twentieth century. In bringing the social and material world of these schools together, the following interrelated questions about the transnational legacy of diaspora-funded schools are addressed:

- 1) How was twentieth-century transnational educational philanthropy directed to southern China organised? (Chapter 4)
- 2) How did diaspora-funded schools engender new ways of being modern in rural China? (Chapter 5)
- 3) What roles do diaspora-funded school buildings assume once they cease to function as schools? (Chapter 6)
- 4) How do Chinese Australians reclaim or reconnect with their heritage in China generation after generation? (Chapter 7)

To examine how emigration to Australia resulted in the Chinese diaspora contributing to educational philanthropy in the ancestral home, a multi-sited study was conducted encompassing data collection in China (mainly in Zhongshan, Zhuhai, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong) and Australia (mainly in Sydney and Townsville). This included a mixed methods research approach that consisted of visiting archives and libraries, conducting on-site observation and photographic documentation of material heritage (such as school buildings), and participating in semi-structured multilingual interviews (in Cantonese, English, and Mandarin), all conducted between 2017 and 2021. Thus, the first contribution of my study is that it presents an innovative, transdisciplinary

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<sup>24</sup> Most donors from the beginning of the twentieth century were based in Sydney. They included the four premier department store owners and their managing directors, such as: MA Ying-piu, of Sincere; the Kwok brothers—James Gocklock (郭樂) and Philip Gockchin (郭泉), of Wing On; and James CHOY Hing (蔡興), of Sincere and The Sun. Contemporary donors also tracing their ancestry back to Zhongshan include Chinese-Australian businessmen, such as Stanley Yee (余金晃 born YEE Kum Fung), Stanley Hunt (陳沛德 born CHAN Pui-Tak), and Philip Leong (梁華立 born LEONG Wah Lup).

methodology for studying diasporic heritage (Chapter 1). More specifically, it adds to our knowledge of Chinese-Australian diasporic heritage in China using diaspora-funded schools as a case study.

Second, my study introduces an approach to analysing the built heritage of the schools that is sensitive to the way that heritage has changed over time. My thesis argues that the appearance of modern buildings in rural China stimulated new kinds of experience and lifestyle in the countryside, providing evidence of how they exerted multiple influences on people around them, including the desire and inspiration to build future schools. Chapter 2 integrates a range of theoretical perspectives and concepts from archaeology, migration studies, architecture, and anthropology to introduce an interdisciplinary framework for the research behind this contribution.

My third contribution is to historically contextualise Chinese diaspora philanthropy in the historiography of modern education in China. This is important because heritage sites cannot be understood independent of their social history. Chapter 3 provides this historical context, directing attention to the changing political landscape that influenced the development of modern education in China from the late nineteenth century on. This development involved a shift from traditional education to missionary education in the late nineteenth century, then to what I call “early modern” education in the late Qing, then to “modern” education in Republican China, and finally to new forms of education under Communism before and after the economic reforms of the 1980s. By chronicling the evolving political landscape, Chapter 3 demonstrates the shifting aspirations for education. A recurring theme in the chapter is the ongoing shortcomings of state financial provisions for education, which provides a background to the integral role of the diaspora in the realisation of modern education in the *qiaoxiang* regions of China.

Chapter 4 constructs a narrative of how diaspora-funded schools were financed and built across the twentieth century by synthesising the existing literature on Chinese migration. It demonstrates that diaspora-funded schools in the southern Chinese *qiaoxiang* comprised a unique socio-material assemblage that combined both material components (letters, remittances, magazines, and the built fabric of the schools) and social components (the activities of migrant-donors, builders, architects, teachers, and students). The chapter shows how the establishment of modern schools in the homeland became a central aspiration of overseas emigrants.

Today, some of the diaspora-funded schools look dilapidated or neglected. Another contribution of the thesis is its exploration of what the schools were like, and what their influences were, when they were in their prime. Chapter 5 explores how Chinese migration to Australia generated, for those in the village, new ways of being modern in the ancestral locality. Drawing mainly on photographic and written documentation of surviving early twentieth-century schools and oral history interviews with many now-elderly former students, including the first members of families to receive a formal education, the chapter provides a glimpse of how these students encountered a new educational milieu in the early twentieth century. It also illustrates how the school environment helped create a new future for the *qiaoxiang*, including by introducing changes to the built environment, influencing new gender realities, and ultimately engendering a new lifestyle for students beyond the rice paddies. The last part of the chapter examines the continuities and innovations of China's post-Mao era (i.e., post-1978). Overall, the chapter argues that the modern diaspora-funded schools were beacons of modernity that pioneered many new experiences in the Chinese countryside.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, in an economically emergent China, the diaspora-funded schools of the twentieth century have come to be regarded as a form of heritage. While these modern schools were once the centrepiece of the *qiaoxiang*, they were by no means timeless, static entities. Chapter 6 shows that from the early twentieth century to the present, school buildings have undergone a cycle of growth, decline, death, and rebirth. In reviewing the transformation of the emigrant communities and their schools, especially in certain periods in the twentieth century when the diaspora was conspicuously absent (such as during the Maoist era), this thesis shows how twentieth century school buildings were inherited. They became assets to be “recycled” or repurposed under Mao, while, in the reform era, schools were an inherited debt that the successive generations of donor families and other Chinese-Australian families were expected to maintain. Thus, Chapter 6 provides an updated chronology of the afterlives of school buildings until the second decade of the twenty-first century. The multitude of roles that school buildings played once they ceased to function as schools is also revealed, with the aid of historic photographs and oral accounts.

Chapter 7, the penultimate chapter, explores how generation after generation of Chinese Australians (now often identifying simply as Australians) have reclaimed their heritage in China. It examines how ties with their ancestral villages have been maintained, particularly but not solely through return visits. For many returnees, the schools are emotional sites filled with many stories,

memories, and associations. There has sometimes been dissonance in their return experience, such as feelings of pride at their forebears' philanthropy but also dismay at the poor state of the schools. While diasporic heritage can positively foster greater self-understanding and place-based attachment to the ancestral land, as well as improving intergenerational relationships, at the same time it can have detrimental outcomes, such as the ancestral home becoming a site with which the descendants of school founders no longer want to be associated.

The concluding chapter reiterates the aim of this thesis, which is to present a case study of migrant heritage that extends beyond the nation-state. The recording and conservation of such heritage can potentially help immigrant groups and their descendants in Australia feel more connected to their origin countries. More radically, research on the heritage of Chinese Australians that is located in their ancestral home, such as diaspora-funded schools, could in the long run also enhance diplomatic ties between Australia and China. This is because this diasporic heritage, as a form of transnational heritage, is fundamentally based on enduring bonds that transcend national boundaries and are sustained by continuing diaspora connectivity that is mutually beneficial to both China and Australia. Its significance lies in part in how it both bolsters Australia's recognition that it has an extraterritorial heritage and captures the complexity of immigrants' lifeworlds beyond Australia's national borders. The Conclusions also shows how the social and material histories of the schools in the past inform their present and future trajectories, demonstrating the long-term relevance of diaspora-funded schools to both the homeland and the diaspora. The thesis ends with a discussion of its limitations and the prospects for further research within and beyond the China–Australia Heritage Corridor.

# Chapter 1

## Researching the Heritage of Diaspora-Funded Schools

Migrant heritage places help tell the story of Australia's history of migration. Helen Armstrong notes that some of these places are obvious to all Australians, but others are only known to migrant groups themselves. She refers to the latter as "hidden places" because their significance is only known to some communities (Armstrong 1997: 59; Armstrong 1998: 47). Yet, since Australia boasts of being a model multicultural society, there is reason to broaden the understanding of these places and what they represent. More research is needed, not just on the materiality of these places by archaeologists and heritage experts; documentary records of the material culture of migration have also been under-researched (Darian-Smith and Hamilton 2019: 2). Moreover, since these places lie outside the sphere of mainstream histories, they are often not listed on official heritage inventories and are thus not properly protected. For my own project, as explained in this chapter, I have adopted an approach that attends both to the material record and the documentary record.

Diasporic heritage involves identification that extends beyond a single homeland (Nikielska-Sekula 2019: 1115). As a consequence, researching it is an endeavour that has often been hampered by a lack of resources and expertise (S. Jones 2017: 33). Language barriers pose particularly serious challenges for many researchers in the fields of migrant history and heritage (Couchman 2021). Hiring interpreters and translators can create its own set of problems, especially when interpreters are not properly trained and, as a result, interpretation lacks depth and usefulness (Armstrong 1997: 61). In the subfield of Chinese-Australian history, these limitations have meant that rather than consulting and integrating both Chinese and English sources, many researchers have primarily carried out research in Australia with English-medium sources only (Chan 2001: 7). Furthermore, since the process of Chinese migration to Australia has involved a transnationally distributed network of actors, as explained elsewhere in this thesis, including migrants in Australia and family

members based in the villages of emigrant areas like Zhongshan County, both the material and documentary record of this process is similarly located both in Australia and China. A leading scholar of overseas Chinese argued that Chinese immigrants inhabit and draw upon two worlds (Li 1999). Only by researching in both arenas—China and Australia—and by reading material in the Sinosphere, can an integrated picture be achieved, and the interconnectedness between the two worlds be fully understood (Fitzgerald 2007; Loy-Wilson 2017; Bagnall 2013, 2018a; Williams 2018).

To understand the history of diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan, the study involved interviewing people both in Australia and Zhongshan, including Chinese-Australian school benefactors and their descendants, and former pupils of the schools. In Australia, the interviewees were concentrated in Sydney and Far North Queensland (Townsville and Cairns). Interviews were also conducted with Zhongshan people in their home villages in the Pearl River Delta for an insight into how former students experienced modern education in the *qiaoxiang*.



**Figure 1.1** Christopher Cheng (front right) photographing the architecture of Lai Wor School in Ngoi Sha (Waisha) village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai. (Photo by JIM Wah-hing, 29 November 2018.)

This project takes a multi-method, or “broad-based” strategy (Grimwade 2008) to research, due to the fragmented data spread across the China–Australia Heritage Corridor. Also, given my training as an architect in Australia and as an anthropologist in Hong Kong (see Appendix E), the research approach involves a cross-fertilisation of both disciplines. My methodology included

analysing school architecture through onsite observations of surviving diaspora-funded schools, analysis of historic photographs, as well as conducting oral-history interviews and consulting published and unpublished texts relevant to the schools. By these means, a rich body of descriptive data was built up that was based on photographic and written observations, precise locational data on schools and related buildings and villages (Figure 1.1, Appendix A, and Appendix D). Detailed descriptive data was gathered during fieldwork of the landscape setting of schools, their architectural elements, and their current state of repair and current use, in addition to what was known from textual sources about the history of each school.

## **How was the Research Conducted?**

### *Background Research*

My research began while I was based in Hong Kong, in the months prior to formally beginning my PhD, and it involved perusing literature relating to overseas Chinese migration and migration heritage. At this stage it was important to read the secondary materials to understand the work of other scholars and authors before I started my field research. My position as a Research Associate at the Chinese University of Hong Kong granted me access to resources at all major universities in that city. I also benefited from watching documentaries (in Cantonese) on a variety of aspects related to Zhongshan local history, culture, and overseas migration (Zhongshan Broadcasting & Television Station 2004, 2010).

### *Rapport Building*

Throughout the course of this research, I benefited from my existing networks of people with experience and knowledge relevant to my topic and broadened it through “snowballing.” This means one person introduced another, who introduced another, and this has occurred since mid-2017 when I began attending events that attracted the interest of potential participants in the Chinese-Australian community in Sydney and North Queensland. These events ranged from (in-person) lectures on Chinese history and heritage in Australia, to workshops and conferences on family history, and Chinese New Year banquets and Ching Ming (ancestral worship) ceremonies.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The organisations included Chinese Heritage in North Australia Inc (CHINA Inc), based in north Queensland, and in Sydney, Chinese Australian Historical Society (CAHS), Chinese Heritage Association of Australia (CHAA), and Chung Shan (Zhongshan) Society of Australia (澳洲中山同鄉會).

Participation in such events meant I could meet potential research participants or gather the names of potential participants recommended to me.

Appropriate participants in this research included Chinese-Australian people who had attended or donated to a diaspora-funded school in Zhongshan. After identifying potential participants, relevant information about my project was sent to these contacts to solicit participation.<sup>26</sup> Here it is worth noting my own “identity” as a researcher: being a Chinese-Australian person of Zhongshan descent myself, I was considered an “insider” of the group I studied. My command of a common ancestral language (Cantonese) and knowledge of my family migration experience in China and Australia (see Cheng 2016) meant having common ground with many participants and this helped build rapport.

During my research in China, I benefited from the support of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, a Chinese state agency, which opened “gates” to the many diaspora-funded schools surveyed in this study. I am also indebted to Michael Williams, an Australian historian, who provided me with introductions to a number of Zhongshan-based people, including other historians, such as Ms. CHEN Diqu (陳迪秋),<sup>27</sup> a retired liaison officer at the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, and Anthony Leong (梁正衡), village chief of Cho Bin.<sup>28</sup> Ms. Chen and Mr. Leong not only undertook a series of interviews for this project themselves, but also recommended other knowledgeable research participants. Among those they recommended were MA Yin-Chiu (馬彥昭) from Sha Chung village, and Mrs. Felicia Seeto (梁淑彥), born in Cho Bin village, now residing in Brisbane. Both Mr. Ma and Mrs. Seeto are descended from Chinese-Australian migrants in North Queensland, had attended diaspora-funded schools in their Zhongshan villages, and were either from a school donor family (Mrs. Seeto), or were in close contact with contemporary descendants of school donors (Mr. Ma). It was fortuitous for this project that both the Sha Chung and Cho Bin schools were, in different ways, “pioneers” of Zhongshan diaspora education, and the memories of Mr. Ma and Mrs. Seeto, as well as those who recommended them, Ms. Chen and Mr. Leong, loom large in this study.

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<sup>26</sup> For my project flyer in simplified and traditional Chinese and English, see Appendix C.

<sup>27</sup> Ms Chen was introduced to me as “Aunty Qiu” (秋姑), so I called her that too.

<sup>28</sup> Williams’ own doctoral research was also focused on emigration from Zhongshan since the nineteenth century (see Williams 2018).



In this project I have followed the advice of the late Australian historian Henry Chan by striving to nurture an ethnographic eye and a Sinologically tuned ear to study Chinese migration (Chan 2001). Although Chan did not specifically define what he had meant by an ethnographic eye and a Sinologically turned ear, it can be inferred that he was referring to mastering the Chinese language and conducting fieldwork with the Chinese community in Australia and in the homeland in southern China. This approach informed my decision to conduct on-site observations, walking interviews, oral history recordings in English and Chinese, and photo elicitation (these methods are detailed below) to reveal the layers of meaning of the schools and the nature of attachment to them on the part of donors, donor descendants and former pupils in China and Australia. This attachment can be understood under the category of “social value” (S. Jones 2017: 26) that underpins Australian diaspora-built heritage in China.

### *On-site Observations and Walking Interviews*

Inspired by academics who have examined the social and educational significance of school buildings (e.g., Bengtsson 2011; Hohr 2011; Gitz-Johanson, Kampmann and Kirbery 2011), my study combined a range of methods (participant observation, walking interviews, photo elicitation and oral history) to examine how students experienced the diaspora-funded schools as embodied spaces. School buildings have been considered as participating in a “kind of socialisation” (Hohr 2011: 106). Building elements involved in such “socialisation” may include classroom windows, which in Bengtsson’s (2011: 7–8) terminology, are involved in the “silent education of school buildings” because pupils can be observed and subjected to surveillance by teachers looking through classroom windows from the outside. Thus, even in the absence of a class teacher, the potential for windows to provide surveillance “teaches” the students about classroom and study discipline. Other “socialising dimensions” of schools are stairs. By controlling the way students walk up and down stairs, multistorey school buildings condition certain bodily postures at school (Hohr 2011: 99). Also, the pupils’ sensory experience of the school buildings informs the production of the meaning of school to them, as well as their memories and identities (S. Jones 2017: 25; Bjerg and Rasmussen 2012: 91).

In Zhongshan, interviews with the younger, physically mobile former students often took the form of a “walking interview” (Evans and Jones 2011) or a “go-along” during visits to their old schools (Kusenbach 2003). Observing alumni at their alma mater allowed me to witness their verbal and emotional response to being at the school site and gain insight into what the school had meant to them in the way their lives developed. The everyday lived and embodied experience of pupils at

school speaks volumes about a collective experience that shaped an era of modern students. Moreover, since this research involved elderly participants, many of whom were unfit for a walking interview, my research also involved oral history interviews at their homes, sometimes using photographs as memory prompts.

### *Photo elicitation*

When the interview could not be conducted on-site, “photo elicitation” (Tinkler 2013), or the use of photographs as a memory prompt was an alternative strategy. This applied to many interviews I conducted in Sydney and Townsville, and it involved showing participants photographs of schools or of details of their architecture. Photographs were also used as discussion prompts when interviewing a leading authority on the modernisation of architecture in the Pearl River Delta region.<sup>29</sup> Rather than requiring the expert to accompany me on a “school hopping” excursion, I showed them photographs instead.<sup>30</sup> In both cases, photographs were an important stimulus for engaging participants in thinking about and discussing the schools.

### *Oral History*

More than any other technique employed by social scientists, in-depth interviewing, for example in the context of oral history recording, has the power to shed light on events in the past that occurred out of public sight (Weiss 2004: 45). The method allows for the discussion of subjective experiences during shifting historical periods. The method is excellent for accessing a range of the interviewee’s experiences, ideas, and feelings (Leavy 2011: 13). Yet, successfully conducting in-depth interviews requires more than being a good listener. Weiss (2004: 44) advises researchers to select participants carefully and encourage them to provide specific details, as good interviews can provide a rich and compelling understanding of people’s lives. Such interviews are also generally an excellent way to reach those who are underrepresented and whose perspectives have been silenced or left out of the historical records (Leavy 2011: 18; McConville and Bryson 2013: 7). This was certainly the case of Cantonese-speaking Australians in my study (see Couchman 2021).

Heritage places in China of significance to Chinese-Australian people have tended to lack visibility in Australia’s heritage record and remain largely unknown to Australians more generally (Byrne

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.

<sup>30</sup> In our interview, Professor Peng revealed he had visited some of the schools I surveyed in Zhongshan.

2016a; Couchman and Bagnall 2019).<sup>31</sup> As one Australian historian has acknowledged, “Few have done any oral histories in the home villages [of Zhongshan]” (Williams 1999: 20). This was still the case when I began my study. By working closely with the memories of the transnational Chinese-Australian community, I have attempted to provide an understanding—not previously available in the literature—of the perspective of the Australian migrant donors, many of whom are more comfortable speaking to the researcher in Cantonese, and of former students of diaspora-funded schools, both in China and Australia, who likewise prefer communicating in Cantonese.

In this research, many of my interviews were conducted in Cantonese and done without interpreters. With the permission of my participants, interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The structure of the interviews depended on the researcher’s prior knowledge of the school. As a consequence, early interviews tend to be more exploratory and often informal or semi-structured, while later follow-up interviews were often more organised and structured. The earlier interviews were almost all face-to-face and conducted at the interviewees’ home or former school, while follow-up inquiries were mostly made over the telephone or through WeChat. A list of transcribed interviews (Appendix B) indicates that this project involved 87 individual interviewees, with 60% male and 40% women. A majority (about 75%) of these interviews were conducted in Cantonese (n = 64), while about 20% were in English (n = 18) and the rest (around 5%, or n = 5) were conducted in Mandarin.<sup>32</sup> In addition to Australian school donors and their descendants, I conducted interviews in China with former and current school principals, village leaders and former students, former and current Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau Officers, a builder, and an architectural historian (for a complete list of individuals, see Appendix B).

In Australia, Zhongshan immigrants were primarily concentrated in New South Wales and Queensland. Some of their descendants later moved elsewhere, including other parts of Australia, Hong Kong, and even back to Zhongshan. I chose to interview members of the families who were school donors, as well as some former students at the schools, now residing in Australia, who were

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<sup>31</sup> The lack of recognition of transnational heritage linking Australia to Chinese sites need not apply to other migrant groups to be significant. The thesis does not, however, claim the Chinese were exceptional. The lack of acknowledgement of transnational connectivity in Australian heritage practice also applies to non-Chinese immigrant groups in Australia, such as Greek, Italian, Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Vietnamese.

<sup>32</sup> All the Australian school benefactors interviewed spoke Cantonese (n = 4), even though most were conversant in English (n = 3). Descendants of migrant donors (n = 13), mostly in Australia, were interviewed in English (n = 8), with those born in Zhongshan or Hong Kong conversing in Cantonese (n = 5). When I was unable to interview donors directly (as they had already passed away), sometimes friends (n = 5) spoke on their behalf. In Australia, such interviews were conducted in English (n = 3), with one interview taking place in Hong Kong in Cantonese (n = 1). Cantonese was the language chosen by all former students (n = 28), and most of the teachers and principals interviewed in Cantonese (n = 13), the rest spoke Mandarin (n = 3).

typically middle-aged or elderly. In Zhongshan, my interviewees were schoolteachers, alumni, village representatives and *qiaoban* officers. The age of most participants in Zhongshan ranged from 20 to 70 years. Some alumni were in their eighties, and the eldest participant was ninety-five years old. Current students of diaspora-funded schools were not interviewed.

### *Library Materials and Other Records*

In addition to interviews, this study also depended on textual material. This was mostly in the form of published materials found available online or in library collections in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Australia. In Australia, relevant books and articles were sourced through my university libraries or the interlibrary “document delivery” system. Copies of many early Chinese newspapers published in Australia are now available online from the National Library of Australia’s TROVE digital database.<sup>33</sup> Old Chinese-medium newspapers either accessed online, or through in-person visits to the State Library of New South Wales (in Sydney), provided insight on how schools might have been funded and who were their contributors (see Chapter 4).

While resident in Hong Kong during 2018 and 2019 (see below), I was attached to Hong Kong Baptist University and had library access there, in addition to having alumni borrowing privileges at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. This provided me with access to materials in Chinese and English. In China, I visited the Zhongshan City Archives (中山市檔案館) and the Guangdong Provincial Archives (廣東省檔案館) in Guangzhou.<sup>34</sup> These repositories primarily contained materials in Chinese. In Zhongshan, the resources I consulted included locally published material, including “local gazetteers” (地方志 *difangzhi*),<sup>35</sup> and “overseas Chinese magazines” (僑刊 *qiaokan*), while in Guangzhou I consulted provincial-level publications, such as 《廣東省志 華僑志》 [The Guangdong Province Annals: Overseas Chinese Annals] (Guangdong Province Local Gazetteers Committee 1996), 《廣東省教育志》 [The Guangdong Annals of Education] (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995), and the 《珠江志》 [Pearl River Gazetteer] (Pearl River Ministry of

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<sup>33</sup> This includes, for example, *Tung Wah Times* 《東華新報》 (1901–1936), *Chinese Republic News* 《民國報》 (1914–1937), and the *Chinese Times* 《愛國報》 (1902–1922).

<sup>34</sup> In both cases access was made possible through letters of recommendation. The Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs provided a letter for me to visit the Zhongshan archives, while Professor PENG Changxin of South China University of Technology prepared a letter stating I was a visiting scholar at his university. In Zhongshan photocopies were made freely, while in Guangzhou, I had typed notes into my smartphone which I saved onto email. On both occasions, I had the fortune of being in the company of my Hong Kong-born girlfriend, a native reader of Chinese, which made it quicker for me to peruse through the corpus of materials.

<sup>35</sup> The primary purpose of this government-sponsored record has been to provide an immediate reference for cadres to understand local conditions.

Water Resources Committee 1991). Some of these texts were found to contain information about villages in Zhongshan, such as references to influential emigrants, including Chinese-Australian people who contributed to local educational projects. One of the most valuable sources was 《中山市華僑志》 [*The Annals of Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs*] (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013). Another useful resource was the commemorative magazines (校刊) produced by diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan to mark their anniversaries, and when there were spare copies, they were presented to me during my visits to the schools.

### *Fieldwork*

My first stint of fieldwork occurred in Sydney in the second half of 2017 in the form of my participation in interviews conducted for the China–Australia Heritage Corridor project by the research team of which I was a member (my PhD scholarship was provided as part of this project).<sup>36</sup> These interviews culminated in a research trip by the team to Zhongshan, that took place from 11 to 22 December 2017, in which I participated.<sup>37</sup> For my own project, I continued interviewing Zhongshan-born Australian migrant school donors and their Australian family members upon returning to Australia in the first half of 2018. These interviews were conducted by myself alone in Sydney and Townsville, rather than with the team.<sup>38</sup> From May 2018 and March 2019, I relocated to Hong Kong (one hour by ferry to Zhongshan) as a base for my research, and from there made several fieldwork trips to Zhongshan (my field site). These trips to Zhongshan enabled me to address questions that emerged for me during my transcribing and translating into English of my interviews and during ongoing library research in Hong Kong. A total of five trips to Zhongshan were made. I made subsequent trips to Zhongshan, including from Sydney, including ones on which I was accompanied by others.<sup>39</sup> A total of forty-four days were spent in Zhongshan during my research.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interviews for the project were conducted in a group by Denis Byrne, Ien Ang, Alexandra Wong and myself. It included, for instance, interviewing school donors, Stanley Hunt and Stanley Yee, and a descendant of a school donor, Jonathon Yee.

<sup>37</sup> The research team consisted of Denis Byrne, Ien Ang, Michael Williams, Alexandra Wong, and Christopher Cheng.

<sup>38</sup> These included, for example, interviewing: school donor Eileen Lai; past students Cynthia Hing Fay, Dr. Joe Leong, and Paul Liang; and descendants and other family members of donors, including Phyllis Rainford, Dr. Joe Leong, Beverly Osborn, Wenney Leong, Evon Liang, “Amanda”, and Lance Lai.

<sup>39</sup> These people include my supervisor (Denis Byrne), other researchers (Sandi Robb and Jan Wagner), and friends and family (my father, uncle, my cousins, and my then girlfriend, now wife, Kiko Ko).

<sup>40</sup> As mentioned above, the first trip occurred in December 2017. After it ended, I stayed on for a few extra days until 27 December in 2017 (total fieldwork: 16 days). Subsequent trips occurred on 8 to 14 May 2018 (7 days), 10 to 12 June 2018 (3 days), 28 November to 7 December (10 days), and 2 to 9 January 2019 (8 days).

Since returning to Australia in April 2019, and after the global pandemic outbreak in 2020, face-to-face meetings were no longer possible. Instead, I conducted follow-up inquiries and interviews with participants intermittently through email, WeChat (text messaging and pre-recorded voice and video), phone calls, and Zoom (live video interviews). These were often with participants I had interviewed already, but also with new participants. The latter occurred when participants felt they had failed to provide adequate answers to my questions and recommended somebody in their network who they considered were in a better position to respond.

In the end, my project covered thirty Chinese-Australian sponsored school buildings in Zhongshan.<sup>41</sup> This number is estimated to account for around 15% of the total 200 odd diaspora-funded schools, including those contributed by the Zhongshan diaspora such as in Hawaii, California, and Canada, surveyed and inventoried by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in Zhongshan.<sup>42</sup>

## **Piecing Together Transnational Histories**

To illustrate how research was conducted, I now describe my approach in relation to two diaspora-funded schools and one kindergarten in Zhongshan. The first school—Cheung Kok—came to my attention through a book produced by an oral historian in Australia. The second—Chung Tau Kindergarten—was identified in a survey prepared by the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. The third case—Lai Wor School—was recommended to me by an Australian historian familiar with the *qiaoxiang* in the Pearl River Delta.

### *Yuen Yet Loong School/Cheung Kok School*

Cheung Kok School came to my attention through the book, *Astronauts, Lost Souls & Dragons: Voices of Today's Chinese Australians* (Giese 1997).<sup>43</sup> The school was built by descendants of YUEN Yet Hing (also known as YUEN Yet Loong), a Heung San (Zhongshan) native, to commemorate him. He was a businessman who left China in the 1870s for the embryonic town in Australia's

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<sup>41</sup> They include twenty-two primary schools, four middle schools, and six kindergartens (this number includes a few schools that were once primary schools).

<sup>42</sup> In the pre-1949 period, the number of diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan was forty-one. After 1978, there were forty-nine kindergartens, ninety-one primary schools and thirty-three middle schools. This means there were a total of 214 diaspora-funded schools recorded in Zhongshan.

<sup>43</sup> I first read the book in Hong Kong. Then, in Australia, I ordered transcripts and recordings through inter-library loan. The original source is kept at the National Library of Australia.

Northern Territory that was later known as Darwin (Giese 1997: 177).<sup>44</sup> Pamela CON FOO, a descendant of Yuen, in an interview by Diana Giese, explained the family's involvement in building the school. Yet part of the challenge for me was to locate the school on the ground from the inconsistent and incomplete information available from Giese's book. Specifically, the text and photo captions in English referred to "Yuen Yet Loong School," but the Chinese signage on the school building, as shown in a photo in the book, did not match this (Giese 1997: 177, 179). Instead, the Chinese text on the sign reads, "Yuen Yet Hing Building" 阮溢卿大樓 (Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.5). I contacted Diana Giese via email and she informed me that her main contact, Pamela CON FOO, had passed away.<sup>45</sup> All I could do was hold onto the information until more leads surfaced. Still, I recognised that my most valuable clue was the name of the school building as it appeared on the sign in the photo that was originally supplied by the now-deceased Pamela CON FOO.



**Figure 1.2** The Chinese characters on the building reads "Yuen Yet Hing Building" 阮溢卿大樓 differing from the English caption indicating "Yuen Yet Loong School" (Source: Giese 1997: 179; also see Figure 1.5)

On my first research trip to China, I discovered what I was looking for. The name of the school and its donors were provided in a publication in Chinese by the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (2013: 362). This publication's source was the 2013 edition of the *Annals of Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs*, a 926-page tome, in Chinese, edited by historian Ms. CHEN Diqui of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. Based on this lead, I was also able to find an article in *Zhongshan Qiaokan* (a magazine produced by the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs) and confirm the location of the school on the ground (see Chen 1985). The school's actual name was Cheung Kok School (象角學校), and its location was in Cheung Kok village, Shaxi town (沙溪

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<sup>44</sup> The date in Giese's book was 1876 (Giese 1997: 177), but other dates appear elsewhere. In another book, supposedly written by Yuen's descendant, the dates 1877 and 1878 appear (Yee 2006: 12), and the year 1879 appears in Chinese sources (Leung and Zheng 1992: 20; Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 86).

<sup>45</sup> The oral history interview with Pamela CON FOO by Diana Giese for the Post-war Chinese Australians Oral History Project was recorded on 20 December 1994. According to the National Library of Australia catalogue, Pamela CON FOO passed away in 2009. Email correspondence with Diana Giese (Australian oral historian), 26 September 2017.

鎮), Zhongshan. The only piece of information in English about the school, its name—Yuen Yet Loong School—was incorrect.<sup>46</sup> Here, it is worth mentioning Barbara Little’s (2013: 423) caution that just because something has been published does not mean that it is reliable.

A visit to Cheung Kok School was scheduled through the liaison assistance provided by Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office.<sup>47</sup> On 27 December 2017, my girlfriend and I arrived at the village after a bus ride from Shekki (Zhongshan’s city). The headmaster, Mr. Yeung, greeted us at the gate. As he guided us around, he explained how the school had been improved over the past few decades, before taking us to his office for further discussion. With permission, I recorded our conversation.



**Figure 1.3** Mr. Yeung (headmaster) shows an in-house school textbook and the commemorative school pamphlet (shown on the left). My photocopies and sound recorder are also seen on his coffee table. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 27 December 2017.)

Our discussion revolved around the school’s origins—from the days of inhabiting an ancestral hall in 1932 to the current school (est. 1985) funded by Robert Yuen (阮祖裕) and his family across Australia and Hong Kong—during which we each referred to the material in our possession (Figure 1.3). I retrieved the photocopies of Diana Giese’s book—printed in English—from my backpack, while Mr. Yeung took down printed Chinese material from his bookshelf: a

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<sup>46</sup> YUEN Yat Loong (阮日隆) is an alias of YUEN Yat Hing (阮溢卿).

<sup>47</sup> My research in Zhongshan benefited from the ongoing liaison support provided by CHOW King of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (*qiaoban*).



commemorative pamphlet and copies of a textbook produced by the school that I could take home with me after the meeting. In return, I left him with my photocopies of Diana Giese's book.



**Figure 1.4** Mr. Yeung, the headmaster at Cheung Kok School in Shaxi town, Zhongshan, introduces the school's patrons as shown on the ceramic tile donor board. In the middle of the top row, the school building's namesake, YUEN Yet Hing, appears in his ranking official garb. Immediately to his right (above Mr. Yeung's finger) is his youngest son, Robert Yuen, the main contributor to the school, in a Western suit. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 27 December 2017.)

After this, Mr. Yeung again took us on a tour of the school. This time he took us to inspect the computer rooms, science labs, and the roof-top terrace—the school's most impressive facilities, and I took many photographs.<sup>48</sup> We also spent time at the school's donor board at the entrance of the main building (Figure 1.4), where Mr. Yeung called a long-serving teacher out of her class to meet us. That teacher recounted a visit from descendants of the Australian donor family (her account appears in Chapter 7). Before leaving, a photo was taken of us with Mr. Yeung in front of the main building. It was in fact in the exact location where Pamela CON FOO stood with her relatives decades before my visit (Figure 1.5).

In Australia, although I was unable to locate the descendants of the Yuen family, I learned more about the school's main donor. Past President of the Chung Shan Society of Australia King FONG knew the Darwin-born Robert Yuen (阮祖裕). According to King, they were both shop owners in Dixon Street, in Sydney's Chinatown. King elaborated that Robert never married and had already died.<sup>49</sup> Hearing this confirmed what I had come to know: this research would involve

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<sup>48</sup> Photographs taken during my school visits appear in the following chapters of my thesis.

<sup>49</sup> Correspondence with King FONG of Sydney, assisted by Kim Leung LUI, 22 June 2018.

piecing together multiple strands of fragmented data to reconstruct a narrative that was distributed in China and Australia.



**Figure 1.5** On the left, a photocopy of a photograph provided by Pamela CON FOO appearing in *Astronauts, Lost Souls & Dragons*, circa 1990s. Note the English caption says, “Yuen Yet Loong School” (Source: Giese 1997: 179). The photo on the right shows headmaster Mr. Yeung (middle) with Christopher Cheng and Kiko Ko, at Cheung Kok School 象角學校 in Shaxi town, Zhongshan. (Source: Christopher Cheng, 27 December 2017.)

### *Chung Tau Kindergarten*

Also, on the first research trip in China, perusing through the *Annals of Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs* (2013), I found another Australian school of interest. On page 539, the names of two Australian school donors, 黎錦鴻 and 李杏華 (husband and wife, LAI Kum Hung and LAI (née LEE) Hing Wah), are given for the Chung Tau Kindergarten (沙溪鎮涌頭幼兒園), founded in 1986. With the help of one of my contacts in Sydney, King FONG, I contacted one of the donors who had become known in Australia as Mrs. Eileen Lai (this is the name I have used in this thesis). I suggested to Mrs. Lai that we meet at a public venue near her Sydney home, but she proposed meeting in her son’s office in North Sydney instead.

At her son’s office, Mrs. Lai recounted in Cantonese her family’s multigenerational presence in Australia, her childhood in Zhongshan, her working life in Sydney’s Chinatown, her return visits to China, and her involvement in philanthropy, such as donations made to St. Vincent’s Hospital

in Sydney, and a kindergarten in Zhongshan, China.<sup>50</sup> After a long interview, her son, Lance Lai (whose arm is visible in Figure 1.6), also recounted his own story, but this time in English. Lance spoke of his upbringing in Australia, his global exposure, his successful career in finance, and the significance of his parents' kindergarten to him (see Chapter 7).



**Figure 1.6** Lance Lai pointing to significant photographs on the wall of his North Sydney office as he told his own story. Here, he is pointing to his late father, Alen Lai (黎錦鴻 “LAI Kum Hung”), who had devoted himself to a life of business and community service in Sydney and abroad. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 24 April 2018.)

Within a month after meeting Lance and Eileen, my thesis supervisor, Denis Byrne, and I were in Zhongshan.<sup>51</sup> As we walked through Chung Tau village in Shaxi town, we stumbled across the kindergarten on top of the hill that I had heard so much about. Although we arrived unannounced and found the kindergarten dormant, as children were taking their afternoon nap, we were fortunate that we did not have to wait long for the gate to open (Figure 1.7).<sup>52</sup> One of the teachers noticed us and, before the gates opened, the staff had notified the village leader, who then contacted the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (*qiaoban*) to verify who we were and the purpose of our visit.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 77, Sydney, 24 April 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Denis Byrne had come to study remittance houses in Zhongshan for the China–Australia Heritage Corridor (see Byrne 2020a). His visits to the schools, or in this case kindergarten, were merely as a spectator.

<sup>52</sup> The visit to Chung Tau occurred unplanned because we had extra time one afternoon and decided to wander around this village accompanied by village representatives and the local *qiaoban* (Overseas Chinese Affairs Office).



**Figure 1.7** The gate of Chung Tau village Kindergarten, Shaxi town, Zhongshan. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 12 May 2018.)



**Figure 1.8** Christopher Cheng and Denis Byrne (both wearing hats) with the senior teachers (all female), from left to right: Ms. Ng, Ms. Lee and Ms Cheung, and their former student, Mr. Cheung (village leader) at Chung Tau Kindergarten. (Source: Christopher Cheng, 12 May 2018.)

After admittance, the senior staff showed us around the kindergarten. Like at other schools and kindergartens I visited, they eagerly pointed out the latest upgrades and acknowledged where the funds had come from. Then, in the staff office, we sipped the bottled water the staff gave us as they continued to recount the evolution of the kindergarten from its makeshift origins before “Wah-je” (華姐 literally “sister Wah,” as Mrs. Lai was affectionately known to the staff in fictive kinship terms) contributed to new premises in 1986. During our discussion, one of the teachers

called the village leader to join so that I could hear the perspective of a former pupil of the kindergarten as well. Such spur of the moment introductions occurred commonly during my fieldwork in China. Later, when we said our goodbyes, I was asked to send my regards to the donor family in Australia, which I did. After the trip, I emailed Lance, attaching some photographs, including this one with the kindergarten teachers and village representative (Figure 1.8), and I related to him what I had heard and seen during my visit. As it turns out, being bilingual, and metaphorically having a foot in China and another in Australia, during my research I became a point of communication between many members of the diaspora who I interacted with and the *qiaoxiang*, bridging the cultural and linguistic gap between China and Australia.<sup>53</sup>

### *Lai Wor School and Lihe School*

It was not long after my project's focus was decided that Australian historian, Kate Bagnall, recommended I study Lai Wor School (禮和學校).<sup>54</sup> Unlike the previous two schools discussed so far, I was oblivious to this school's history when I visited it for the first time, since the family connection in Australia did not materialise until after visiting Ngoi Sha (Waisha) village (外沙村) in Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai, where the school is located. During my visit, accompanied by the Heritage Corridor research team, the village representative there introduced us to her grandmother (蔡珠). During a short conversation outside her home, "Grandma Choy" said she felt her few months of schooling made it a challenge for her to properly respond to the many questions I asked her.<sup>55</sup> She led us to the community centre and there introduced us to another elderly woman named SHENG Lai Kum (盛麗金), also in her 80s (Figure 1.9). In this and later interviews with Ms. Sheng, she shared that she had finished her primary schooling, which allowed her to cultivate a lifelong passion for reading. Clearly both these attributes made her an ideal participant for my research. Her experience at Lai Wor School, as related to me, along with the experience of other students of diaspora-funded school in Zhongshan, informs the writing of Chapter 5, which is on the modern school experience.

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<sup>53</sup> This occurred, for instance, when village leaders in Zhongshan were tracing "lost" descendants of Chinese Australians, or when descendants of Chinese-Australian people who have not returned to China in decades had planned a return trip and needed contacts and guidance in Zhongshan (also see Bagnall 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Email correspondence with Kate Bagnall (Australian historian), 1 September 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Ms. CHOY Chu (former student of Lai Wor School), 80s, Zhuhai, 18 December 2017.



**Figure 1.9** The China–Australia Heritage Corridor Research Team consisting of (from left to right) Alexandra Wong, Denis Byrne, Christopher Cheng, Ien Ang and Michael Williams at the village community centre in Ngoi Sha (Waisha) village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai, with two “old girls” of Lai Wor School: Ms. SHENG Lai Kum (盛麗金) (centre) and “Grandma Choy” (蔡珠) (right). (Source: Christopher Cheng, 18 December 2017.)

After the visit, it was suggested by the village leader that I contact Ronald Choy (蔡旭光), a descendant of the early twentieth-century Chinese-Australian donor of Lai Wor School, CHOY Hing. During my fieldwork in China, the phone numbers and WeChat contacts<sup>56</sup> of other knowledge-holders were often provided to me by research participants I met in the villages where schools were located, or they were sent on to me soon after the visit. My interview with Ronald Choy occurred in Zhongshan later in December 2017. I interviewed him again in November 2018, when I met him at the newly built Lihe School (est. 2017), which was the successor of the Lai Wor School. Before Ronald arrived at Lihe School to meet me, the Mandarin-speaking headmistress showed me (in the company of Denis Byrne) around, accompanied by a Cantonese-speaking teacher, Mr. Chen (Figure 1.10). In a seated discussion, the school headmistresses narrated the school’s origins and then engaged us in a brainstorming session on the future of the new school, including a discussion of the possible revitalisation of the former Lai Wor school in Ngoi Sha village.

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<sup>56</sup> WeChat (微信, literally “micro-message”) is a popular social media platform used in China with functions like its Western counterparts, Facebook and WhatsApp.



**Figure 1.10** Ms. Yao (姚校長), the headmistress and a teacher Mr. Chen (陳老師) showing us the way around Lihe School. (Source: Lihe School collection, 29 November 2018.)

Meanwhile, in Australia, Howard Wilson, of Canberra (Ronald's cousin-in-law), expressed his interest in my project. I was not able to schedule a meeting with him, but the Heritage Corridor team interviewed him in Sydney in February 2019 and provided me with access to the transcript.<sup>57</sup> Although not a member of the Choy lineage by birth, Howard acquired specialist knowledge of the Choy family through his late mother-in-law after his marriage in 1974.<sup>58</sup> In his free time, Howard conscientiously supplemented oral reminiscences with his own archival, library and online research. His interest in Choy family history became useful for preserving intergenerational memories, which many other Choy descendants would later forget, including the name of the ancestral village and the narratives surrounding the long-discontinued Lai Wor School.<sup>59</sup> Through my own fieldwork in China, and later an exchange of emails with Howard, it became clear that the long-closed Lai Wor School had fortuitously been “reborn” in the form of the newly built Lihe School (est. 2017), in part a reflection of China's increased affluence after 2010 (the school was funded by the government), and partly due to Howard Wilson's initiative, as narrated in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Howard Wilson (family historian and descendant of a school donor family through marriage) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne and Alexandra Wong in Sydney, 15 February 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Howard's mother-in-law, Amy CHOY Nim-chi (蔡念慈 1922–2014), is CHOY Hing's sixth daughter. Email correspondence with Howard Wilson, 10 December 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Email correspondence with Howard Wilson, 12 and 13 December 2021.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

I had four main types of data for my project: material objects (school building), participant interviews (memories), images (photographs), and texts (publications and archival documents). My main task was to devise a method to properly analyse and interpret this diverse data material.

### *School Buildings*

Visiting thirty diaspora-funded school buildings associated with Australian founders provided me with enough information to observe the evolution of modern school architecture in Zhongshan across the twentieth century and to compare architectural elements at different schools within this sample. The present status of each building (demolished, in continuous use as a school, or adaptively reused for another purpose) was recorded (see Appendix A), along with their locality, architectural typology and style, and the material technology present at them. The grammar of styles, from Chinese modernism to the “international style”, was determined by my reference to relevant books and by talking to those who specialise in the history of modern architecture in China.<sup>60</sup> In *How to Read Modern Buildings: A Crash Course in Architecture of the Modern Era*, Will Jones (2017: 8) notes that modern architecture consists of more than flat roofs, but that identifying a building’s style can often be tricky because architectural history is replete with stylistic revivals.

Apart from analysis of the buildings’ architecture, I also explored the everyday life of schools from the perspective of former students as related to me in interviews. The design of the schools’ architecture was found to have had considerable influence on their behaviour and daily life at school, as has been documented in the case of schools elsewhere (Gitz-Johanson, Kampmann and Kirbery 2011: 49). For instance, as mentioned above, stairs and windows are known to have a “silent” but significant influence in promoting certain behaviours among pupils (Bengtsson 2011: 25). My analysis of school buildings was not only about the material fabric but also about how schools were experienced and what they represented for those who spent considerable time in these buildings (see Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6). The latter was gleaned through on-site observations and through analysing the content of walking interviews with former student-research participants.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.



### *Interviews*

I transcribed my own interview recordings. Since the language of the thesis is English, transcription involved translation from Chinese. Non-verbal responses, including silences and my observations of the interviewees' dispositions, as noted by me during the interviews, were also noted in the transcripts. My analysis of the interviews involved closely reading the transcripts, sometimes repeatedly. Only after a period of immersion did coding begin, in which data was grouped into different categories or themes. This approach made it easier to compare material from the interviews with documentary evidence relating to the same themes.

### *Documentary Evidence*

The documentary evidence I drew upon included historical records, photographs (both historical and those produced during this research), newspaper accounts and local histories. The different data sources helped clarify inconsistencies. A key point here was to explore the macro and micro linkages by constantly referring to the secondary literature (Leavy 2011: 133). By going back and forth, not only is the best evidence found, but interpretations can be refined over time. Frequent re-examination of sources was undertaken, not only because qualitative research is an iterative process, but also because some "facts" that had been provided in sources sometimes turned out to be erroneous, as shown in the mistaken translations of Yuen Yet Loong School (actually Cheung Kok School), discussed earlier.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Producing a valid and credible piece of research depends on the accuracy of data. In this study I relied on the following to determine accuracy: (1) checking against my prior knowledge and knowledge from prolonged immersion in the subject, (2) data saturation and triangulation, and (3) peer review and participant validation.

### *Prior Knowledge and Prolonged Immersion*

Prolonged immersion in the subject began long before the project was conceived. As the PhD project was related to my personal background—I am a second-generation Chinese-Australian of Zhongshan descent—I already knew a certain amount about the history of Chinese migration. Also valuable was my existing knowledge and experience in qualitative research in the ethnographic tradition, especially as related to Chinese communities, gained during and after my Master of

Philosophy degree in Anthropology (2009–2012) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>61</sup> This experience helped ensure the data produced from interviews in Chinese was often vivid and dense in detail. Additionally, the extended research period of my PhD, from 2017 to 2021, has enabled ample time for me to consolidate my thinking, identify connections between my data, and publish existing research, and also to conduct follow-up research. Prolonged immersion also allowed methodological saturation and triangulation to occur.

### *Data Saturation and Triangulation*

Data saturation occurs when a similar data result recurs, confirming a high likelihood of the data's validity. Triangulation happens when multiple sources of evidence in my case, interviews, ethnographic observations, analysis of the material heritage and textual materials—confirm the research findings (Leavy 2011: 149). Sometimes clarifications were made during follow-up inquiries.

### *Peer Review and Participant Validation*

This study benefited from peer input. This took place in the form of academic posters, conference presentations<sup>62</sup> and publications I prepared during my PhD.<sup>63</sup> Also beneficial was informal discussions with peer scholars on topics related to Chinese migration, modern architecture in China, and Chinese-Australian history and heritage. This led me to several works that touch on various Zhongshan-Australian connections.<sup>64</sup> Besides the views of so-called “experts,” my research participants were also invaluable. A smaller portion of younger participants—mainly based in Australia, capable of reading in English, and computer-literate—were sent drafts of my findings so they could perform “member checking” (Birt et al. 2016), that is, they checked the contents and interpretations for accuracy.

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<sup>61</sup> This includes research on Hong Kong society, Chinese migration, and transnational heritage (see Cheng 2012, 2013a, 2013b, Chan and Cheng 2016; Cheng 2016; Cheng 2019a; Patchell and Cheng 2019), and research in or related to Zhongshan (Cheng 2013b; Cheng 2016).

<sup>62</sup> Knowledge gained from this research was disseminated at various events, including a poster presentation at the Western Sydney University Higher Degree Research Showcase at Parramatta Campus in 2017, the Biannual Qiaoxiang Studies conference at Wuyi University in 2018, and the Critical Heritage Studies conference in Hangzhou in 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Publications included peer review journal papers as well as other outlets (see Cheng 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020).

<sup>64</sup> These works include Su (2011), Loy-Wilson (2017), Williams (2018), Liao (2018), Robb (2019), Byrne (2021).

## Human Ethics and Data Management

Human ethics considerations dictated how the study was conducted. To ensure the research was conducted in a dignified and responsible way, below I describe how the research participants were approached and how their data and the researcher were protected. The research was carried out in accord with my approved Human Research Ethics application from Western Sydney University.



**Figure 1.11** Christopher Cheng presenting Ronald Choy with information sheets about our research project. (Source: Lihe School collection, 29 November 2018.)

Before the interviews, research participants were provided with an information sheet describing the research (see Figure 1.11, also see Appendix C). During the interview, I explained the project and the interview questions to the participant and answered all questions they had in relation to the project. Consent sheets were signed ahead of interviews in Australia.<sup>65</sup> Participants in China were given an option of giving verbal consent, should they not wish to sign the consent form due to cultural reasons. Those who specified that they did not wish to have their names included in this study were given pseudonyms. Also, when participants supplied data that they did not want the public to know about, that data was not included in the study.

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<sup>65</sup> Two versions of the consent form (in both Chinese and English) were provided to participants: the first version is a general consent form for participating in the interview and/or being recorded during the interview; the second version is a consent form for using and releasing their photographs, letters, or other archive materials for this project.

To protect the researcher, my PhD supervisors and my family were informed of my whereabouts before and during fieldwork. Interviews often occurred in public spaces. When that was not possible, for personal safety I brought along appropriate ID. But often I was accompanied by others, contributing to “safety in numbers.”

In terms of data management, all field data, including images, interviews, and historical materials (textual information and copies of old photographs), were stored on the researcher’s personal computer and systematically backed up online via a secure password-access cloud storage supported by the researcher’s university. On completion of the project, the data will be archived in a separate secure space maintained by the university.

## **Conclusion: An Innovative Research Approach to Diaspora Heritage**

The nature of public remembrance is bound to a significant extent by the nation-state and the interests of the local community (Wüstenberg 2019: 371). This, in the context of my research topic, meant that “heritage beyond borders”—that part of the heritage of Chinese migration that exists in China—remained largely undescribed. What’s more, in the sub-field of Chinese migration studies in Australia, a lack of transnational perspective has been recognised (Chan 2001; Bagnall 2013; Liu-Terry 2015; Byrne 2016a). In recent years, however, Chinese-Australian history has expanded beyond Australia into the Sinosphere. For example, Sophie Loy-Wilson (2017) shows how Australians, including Chinese Australians, lived transnationally in the 1920s, moving between Australia and China, as their lives criss-crossed between Sydney and Shanghai. The work of Kate Bagnall (2013) presents a shared history belonging both to China and Australia based on the research of many family historians in Australia. Bagnall (2018a: 111), citing John Fitzgerald (2007: x), even argues that for some children like Charles Allen, it was “possible to be both Chinese and Australian before the advent of multicultural Australia.” Michael Williams (2018) similarly turns away from the one-way assimilation paradigm to consider the long-neglected relationship that pre-1949 Chinese immigrants in the Pacific rim continued to have with the native place in China. Taken together, not only do these studies demonstrate that researchers are now writing a transnational narrative of Chinese-Australian history, but they also show that an integration of disparate source materials from China (mostly in Chinese) can inform novel interpretations of an

interconnected past.<sup>66</sup> Although an increasingly wider variety of Chinese-language sources has also been incorporated into their analyses, since historians still tend to favour written records due to their disciplinary training. The lack of alternative sources other than text remains one of the challenges which I aim to overcome in my thesis. My research approach adopts a multi-method strategy that integrates alternative sources such as oral testimonies and the material and built heritage with written records to allow new insights into the diasporic legacy of Chinese migration to Australia through a multidisciplinary analysis of diaspora-funded schools.

Sadly, during the project I learned about many missed opportunities. “If only you had begun earlier,” one participant said, “you could have interviewed my late husband, who died (a year) before your visit [to Townsville].”<sup>67</sup> A similar passing comment was made by Zhongshan historian Ms. CHEN Diqui in 2018 in relation to people who had recently passed away who would otherwise have been able to help with the project. These episodes reminded me that I was in a race against time to rescue memories of a quickly disappearing past. This point was further reinforced when two knowledgeable research participants passed away before I had a chance to arrange follow-up interviews.<sup>68</sup> In the face of rapid decline, this project continues the tradition of “salvage ethnography” (Clifford 1989), a last attempt to rescue “authentic” systems of knowledge and practices lost due to widespread societal change and the passing of time.

Still, by carrying out research between China and Australia and translating my findings in a way that is accessible to academic (see Cheng 2019a, 2020) and lay readers (see Cheng 2018, Cheng 2019b) of Chinese (see Cheng 2018, 2019b) and English (see Cheng 2019a, 2019b, 2020), I feel I have started to bridge a long-standing chasm in Chinese migration history and heritage studies in Australia. As noted, my research methodology has drawn both on my upbringing and academic

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<sup>66</sup> In addition to English-language newspapers and immigration records in Australia, scholars have consulted Chinese-language newspapers in Australia (Kuo 2013), police and company records in China (Loy-Wilson 2017), newspapers and *qiaokan* (僑刊 overseas Chinese magazines), *wenshi* (文史 local cultural history) found in the *qiaoxiang* (Williams 2018), as well as memoirs and personal letters in Chinese (Kuo 2013; Kuo and Fitzgerald 2016; Loy-Wilson 2017; Bagnall 2018a; Williams 2018). While oral histories in Chinese have been attempted (Williams 2018), its rich first-hand data remains largely underused because of issues around time, cost, language and historical knowledge competency (Couchman 2021). These factors all play a part in complicating Chinese-English simultaneous interpretation processes or translation of verbatim transcripts from Chinese to English after the interview. For example, interviews conducted in Chinese with the assistance of a Chinese-English interpreter are usually only half as long as those conducted in a single language, since interpretation consumes interview time, limiting the interviewer’s ability to clarify and ask more follow-up questions.

<sup>67</sup> According to his wife, Derrick Leong (died 2017) belonged to the older generation and, having grown up in the village, knew the history of Cho Bin village and the contributions of its overseas migrants. Interview with Mrs. Wenney Leong (partner of a Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), Townsville, 17 April 2018.

<sup>68</sup> In China, the village scribe of Dai Leng village in Zhongshan, AU-YEUNG Chow, died several months after I met him for an interview in December 2017. In Australia, school donor Stanley Hunt of Sydney died two years after our research team interviewed him in 2017.

training, which has enabled me to painstakingly identify and document the transnational heritage of Chinese migration to Australia, as it relates to school-building projects in China.

## Chapter 2

# Conceptualising Diaspora-Funded Schools: An Interdisciplinary Framework

The phenomenon of diaspora-funded schools (僑捐學校) is a topic of interest to historians and architects studying emigration from southern China. Yet the mention of these schools in works on the history of Chinese architecture and Chinese migration is either brief or the information provided is narrowly factual.<sup>69</sup> What is lacking is a holistic understanding of how people desired, built, and associated themselves with these schools as sites of transnational heritage in the Chinese–Australian migration corridor.

Since their emergence in the early and late twentieth century, diaspora-funded schools were often the most impressive buildings in the villages of rural China (Chan 2007b: 8–9; Giese 1997: 177). Due to their novelty, I am interested in how these structures stimulated fresh experiences and changes in the way of life in the countryside (*cf.* Grosvenor 2017). As physical entities, I am interested in how they were maintained over the years. To capture the historical, social, and material complexity of diaspora-funded schools, this interdisciplinary heritage study draws on theoretical approaches and concepts from a variety of fields—including architecture, anthropology, archaeology, migration studies, and cultural studies—to transcend the conventional understanding of diaspora-funded schools.

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<sup>69</sup> For example, schools are often mentioned only briefly in the business histories and personal narratives of the migrant donors (Hunt 2009; Tan 1994; Tan 1999). An exception to this is Yu's (1983) study on the social history of diaspora-funded schools by Taishanese-Americans. Meanwhile, architectural accounts often focus on the building fabric, design features, and explore the possible design influences (Jiang, Jiang and Cai 2012; Zheng 2003). Local histories provide a variety of information on when schools were built, names of main donors, facilities funded, subjects taught, the number of students during their enrolment peak, as well as, for those schools that have ceased, duration of operation (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013; Li 2008; Zheng 1996).

This chapter introduces the idea that modern diaspora-funded schools are socio-material assemblages. It then discusses the subject of educational philanthropy, highlighting the role of the Chinese diaspora in financing modern schools in the ancestral home. Next, it delves into how *qiaoxiang* modernity was a product of diaspora-funded schools being transnational entities, specifically in this case, entities that linked China to Australia. Finally, it explores the legacy of the diaspora-funded schools as they are remembered and interpreted by the twenty-first century diaspora. Overall, this chapter offers a synthesised conceptualisation of diaspora-funded schools.

## **A Socio-material Perspective of Diaspora-Funded School Buildings**

This section examines what made the schools a modern phenomenon. It then explores how school buildings are both produced and consumed. Finally, drawing on the scholarship of archaeologists, anthropologists, and material cultural scholars, I show how the socio-material perspective, particularly in regard to assemblage theory, is useful for investigating diaspora-funded schools as transnational phenomena.

### *Modern Schools*

Educational historians have described modern schools as markers of progress, statements of hope, or beacons of civilisation (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 11, 189; Lawn 2017: 20; Lawn and Grosvenor 2005: 7). As early as 1850, Henry Barnard, writing about the improvement of schoolhouses in the United States, advocated the need for adequate natural lighting and ventilation (Willis 2017: 2). In line with this, educational historians argue that the development of school architecture was best understood through the history of fenestration (Burke 2005: 126). Catherine Burke considers windows “an essential feature of the school,” arguing that “the school window has never been a neutral space in the history of education, but rather of fundamental importance in school design” (Burke 2005: 133). Natural light contributed to the “modernity and progress” of the school (Lawn and Grosvenor 2005: 14–15).

The educational requirements of modern schools greatly influenced their appearance (Willis 2017: 2). Grosvenor and Burke (2008: 59) argue that school buildings should be as compact as possible because too many “essential features,” such as excess entrances, stairwells, and corridors, make them significantly less accessible, and also contribute to the cost of construction. All these factors have led to modern schools being architecturally distinctive buildings that are rarely confused with



anything else (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 7; Hille 2011: 13). Observers of school architecture have noted that while the design of school buildings has changed, many features have been remarkably consistent over time (Willis 2017: 3).

Modern schools were built for the modern age to address modern needs (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 65). They typically consist of customised buildings that include a series of classrooms, an auditorium, and a playground. The modern school originated in the West and was related to the rise of Western modernity. Essentially, it provides a place to teach reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as teaching a common national language.<sup>70</sup> In Europe and North America, the modern school appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, corresponding with the expansion of compulsory education (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 65).

Before the advent of mass schooling around the world, education tended not to be accommodated in specially designed buildings; rather, it occurred in places of worship, production, or residence (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 11, 13). Only with the advent of modern schooling did education take place in purpose-built spaces. When it comes to the basics, a school consists of a meeting place, where a teacher and their students convene (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 13). Socially, the school is an extension of the community, and, in the same way, the community becomes an extension of the school (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 121). Schools were thus an important hub in the heart of the community (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 146; Willis 2017: 1).

Writing of the history of modern schools in the West, Grosvenor and Burke (2008: 48) emphasise that schools need to instil certain values and equip individuals with life skills. Put differently, school buildings not only support teaching but also allow for modern forms of socialisation, as they facilitate “knowledge exchange” (Grosvenor 2017: 17). For example, the school bells regulate learning *time*—they tell children that it is time to queue for class, time to play, time to leave (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 51). The organisation of space in modern schools can be studied to understand the emergence of a new societal order. For instance, access to or denial of access to certain parts of the school, such as the rooftop terrace, as discussed in Chapter 5, can be crucial in determining whether a new social order emerged, or if a pre-existing pattern, based on the persistence of Confucian hierarchies, was reinforced. Following the inspiration of Tilley (2006: 2),

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<sup>70</sup> A common language is often deemed necessary to unite a nation, especially when multiple languages are used in one country (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 65).

this thesis explores the extent to which the materiality of the modern school infrastructure creates the modern student, as discussed in Chapter 5.

So far, this section has focused on what modern schools are. Next, I will move on to briefly discuss how buildings in general are produced and consumed. After understanding this dynamic, it is important to consider how cultural value accrues in a building over time, as later chapters in the thesis reveal schools as built heritage.

### *Consuming Architecture*

Architectural studies tend to be concerned with the creation of buildings: their design, materials, and technology (Baker 1996 [1989]; Leatherbarrow 1993; Unwin 2014 [1997]). Unsurprisingly, the role of the architect is celebrated in the discipline for his or her production of the building. But scholars like Maudlin and Vellinga (2014) point out that this is a one-sided view, and that architecture is not only produced but consumed. In fact, they argued that architecture is “inhabited, converted, vacated, filmed, written about, abandoned, reused, represented, appropriated, finally demolished and forgotten” (Maudlin and Vellinga 2014: 4). In considering the “biography” or “careers” of school buildings there is a compelling case for conceiving buildings as entities in a state of flux (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 62; Latour and Yaneva 2008: 59; Patel and Tutt 2018). For instance, in Birmingham, the Sherbourne Road Board School opened in 1889 and closed in 1933, later becoming a school clinic and youth centre (Grosvenor and Burke 2008: 60–61). Having discussed how buildings are both produced and consumed over their lifetime, it will be useful at this point to introduce the socio-material perspective.

### *Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Socio-Material Assemblage*

The concept of socio-material assemblage refers to the entanglement of humans and the material world and challenges the idea that the social can be empirically or analytically disentangled from the material (Law 1999). Notable thinkers in the field include Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, the pioneers of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), affiliated with Science and Technology Studies, as well as philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Manuel DeLanda, who pioneered assemblage thinking. ANT and assemblage thinking are related; as Müller and Schurr (2016: 217) commented, they both emphasise the contingent interaction of social and material agents, where “the whole is more than the sum of its parts.” Inspired by this thinking, Chapter 4 describes how diaspora-funded schools are socio-material assemblages of an array of human and non-human actors.

The point is that material things are important to humans because things are not passive objects, but rather perform an active role in social contexts; they are non-human actors. At school, material objects such as textbooks exert a force; they can, among other possibilities, limit or expand the teacher's control of the curriculum, or impact students' household budgets (Fenwick, Edwards and Sawchuk 2011: 4). Simply put, socio-material assemblages are a complex of relationships created by heterogeneous social and material entities coming together (Müller and Schurr 2016: 219; Fenwick and Dahlgren 2015: 361). To track these relations, and noting that assemblages do not remain permanent, we must observe how things influence and alter each other in ways that constantly create new possibilities.

Assemblage thinking reveals the transformative potential of reassembling and disassembling. For example, when actors (or actants) in the network change, the assemblage is reconfigured accordingly. Bijker (1995: 50) advises focusing on the problems that assemblages solve for various social groups because they allow researchers to identify the hidden properties and processes that keep the system together or not. Understanding the processes behind why material maintenance of schools was not possible over the tumultuous twentieth century, such as under the Japanese invasion or during the Maoist period (Chapter 6), enables us to see why schools have always been precarious socio-material assemblages on the verge of transformation. Clearly, the focus on socio-material assemblages opens analytical possibilities for examining the continuing role of material fabric in the ongoing production of social life in the *qiaoxiang*.

To examine how the built heritage undergoes change, I will now focus on how buildings are conceived as a material culture (Miller 2005). Studies in material culture show that all things are prone to transform, grow, crumble, or die. As Appadurai (1986) put it, they undergo "a social life." Relationships with things work in two ways: people make things, but once made, things influence and make demands on people; in other words, they exercise a counter-agency. In his widely cited book, *Entangled*, Ian Hodder provides an example of an unfired adobe structure that initially appears to be very stable, having a solid and timeless appearance (Hodder 2012: 68). But the structure is prone to the vagaries of the weather and threatens to collapse. Preventing its collapse is an endless endeavour in which the structure demands ongoing resources that include building materials, tools, expertise, and the commitment of the labourer. Thus, Hodder argues, humans are entrapped in an elaborate network of entanglements with things (including buildings). Likewise, this thesis shows that diaspora-funded schools can be considered elaborate socio-material

assemblages that may entrap the offspring of benefactors in a duty of care that requires them to maintain the material condition of the school.

This duty of care arises from the fact that the school buildings were initially “gifts” to the ancestral village in which the school is located. School buildings gifted to a village and letters or photographs that circulate about them have associated histories and memories that can create lasting bonds and responsibilities between people. Like art, the value of the gift lies outside its production and circulation: new regimes of value materialise from the act of gift giving (Myers 2001: 4; Trabert 2020; Mauss 2016 [1925]). These bonds and responsibilities may be inherited by the descendants of the original giver of the school, since diaspora-funded schools were equally significant to their benefactors and their descendants (Chapter 4 and Chapter 7). Yet for the modern-day descendants, ongoing duties of maintaining a heritage school founded by an ancestor may be an unwanted challenge. This is not only because educational reforms in post-reform China were frequent but because they involved upgrading the buildings. The inherited school can thus become an economic and sometimes emotional burden for the descendants of the founders (Myers 2001: 3; Smith 2020). Confucian values of filial piety and respect for ancestors, which would make villagers feel that they, instead of descendants of the school founders, had to shoulder such a responsibility, have been eroded in recent decades to the point where they are no longer leading determinants of community action.

At this point, it would be useful to consider how assemblages are simultaneously shaped by desire and affect. Deleuze and Guattari (1983: 6) considered affect to be the *tertium quid* (hidden third) that makes the socio-material assemblage hold together (Müller 2015: 36). In the case of financing new schools in the *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities), their initial completion contributed to a new future, generating a sense of pride among overseas donors (Chapter 4). However, the lofty status earned from diaspora philanthropy when China was poor would eventually no longer sustain. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 show that since the turn of the twenty-first century, when some donors and their offspring saw or heard what the schools had become, they felt their efforts had become futile. Hence, the initial hope and pride associated with doing good resulted in a dissonance of expectations, demonstrating that the affective dimension of schools was an integral component of the socio-material assemblage.

## Emigration, Diaspora Philanthropy, and School Building

While most schools are perceived as national entities, diaspora-funded schools clearly transcended this categorisation in China. Migration created new conditions for the construction of a new style of school. These schools, with their close links to their sponsors in the diaspora, can be thought of as transnational institutions (Chapter 4). So, by presenting the diaspora-funded school as an example of transnational migrant heritage, I debunk the conventional idea of schools as essentially national institutions.

Since the 1990s, through adoption of a transnational approach by migration scholars, researchers have begun analysing the flow of ideas, goods, money, and engagement along migration corridors (Portes 2003; Vertovec 2003). These advances impact how we conceptualise diaspora-funded schools. Next, I discuss how the diaspora is understood, as it is important for much of the conceptualisation that follows.

### *The Chinese Diaspora*

The phenomenon of diaspora was understood to relate to “expatriate minority communities,” as William Safran, one of the first authors to be published in the journal *Diaspora*, put it (Safran 1991: 83–84). Voss and her colleagues (2018: 408) recently described diasporas as dispersed populations “from a small homeland, resettled in multiple international locations, and linked by a same sense of identity maintained in reference to their former homeland.” But the Chinese diaspora is much more than expatriate minority communities with a strong emotional linkage to the motherland. In fact, the centuries-old history of Chinese migration has produced its own set of historically specific terminology.

Today, in English, the term “overseas Chinese” refers to a broad spectrum of people of Chinese descent living in foreign countries. This term is often translated into Chinese as *haiwai huaren* (海外華人) and is associated with the Chinese phrase that, in turn, translates into English as “growing roots where you land” (落地生根), or *huaqiao* (華僑), associated with the phrase “falling leaves return to their root” (落葉歸根) (Huang 2010: 10; Benton and Liu 2018: 2). The term *huaqiao* is common in everyday parlance and is loosely translated as “overseas Chinese,” but according to Professor WANG Gungwu, the doyen of studies of overseas Chinese, *huaqiao* should be taken as strictly referring to the “Chinese sojourner” (Wang 1981: 119–120). Wang views *huaqiao* as an

elegant term describing the loyal Chinese sojourner abroad, who was expected to aid China's development, especially after the Qing monarchy lifted its ban on overseas travel in 1893 (G. Wang 2003: 59).<sup>71</sup> Chinese sojourning, therefore, was the convention until 1949 and referred to the desire to return to the homeland to retire after working abroad (Williams 2018), although in many cases those who began as sojourners ended up putting down roots and staying in the destination country.

Different types of sojourners include the *bua shang* (華商) and the *bua gong* (華工). At the top rung, the *bua shang* (Chinese traders or merchants) served as community leaders; below them were the *bua gong* (the Chinese workers and artisans) (Wang 2000: 46–47). Some scholars have expressed discomfort in using these terms because they are too divisive, as the boundaries between trade and non-trade, sojourning and settling were often blurred (Suryadinata 2007: 65–68). My study supports this point of view. For example, within a single sojourn, MA Wing Charn (馬永燦 1863–1938), the benefactor of several Zhongshan schools in the early twentieth century, was socially mobile: arriving in Australia as a gold miner, Ma became a labourer and left Australia years later as an extraordinarily successful fruit merchant (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 558–559). Depending on the context, my study uses the terms *buaqiao* and Chinese sojourner interchangeably. It uses the term “overseas Chinese,” or more specifically “Chinese Australian,” to refer to those who have settled, or have been naturalised in Australia. The career trajectories of these individuals will also be provided briefly, when required.

Chinese migration to Australia was notably a gendered phenomenon. Historically, Chinese emigration up until the early twentieth century was a mass exodus of men; the emigration rate of Chinese women was among the lowest of any emigrant-sending country at the time (McKeown 2010: 112). This led to a divided household arrangement in which women stayed behind in China, supported by her husband or sons overseas sending home remittances.<sup>72</sup> In China, besides farming, looking after children, and tending to the elderly (Shen 2012), my project found that the left-behind mothers and wives of donors in the *qiaoxiang* also served as supervisors on school building sites (Chapter 4). Many stopped supervising building sites when women began emigrating in the last years before the Communist Revolution in 1949, but in the decade before that, constructing new

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<sup>71</sup> HUANG Zunxian (Huang Tsun-hsien 黃遵憲 1848–1905) was responsible for a petition to the emperor to remove the ban on emigrants returning to China.

<sup>72</sup> The complexities of such family arrangements feature dramatically in the first Chinese-language novel published in Australia in the first decade of the twentieth century, see WONG Shee-Ping's (2019) 《多妻毒》 *The Poison of Polygamy*.

schools had already come to a standstill due to the Japanese invasion of the late 1930s and 1940s. The donor base of new diaspora-funded schools in the 1980s reform would reflect this change: a shift from the pre-1949 era of primarily male donors to an era of the involvement of Chinese families located overseas. The latter included husbands and wives, siblings, and cousins. My study also shows that the presence of female donors, female descendants, and partners of Chinese-Australian donors helped to diversify the nature of diaspora philanthropy in Zhongshan's educational scene (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

### *Diaspora Philanthropy*

Unlike remittances—the money sent by migrants to relatives who stay at home—diaspora philanthropy is directed to public causes and could be regarded as “collective remittances” (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 13). It includes both monetary and non-monetary contributions. Examples of the latter include social capital, such as contacts and personal connections, technical knowledge and experience and ideas (Zhu and Jing 2019: 285; also see “social remittance” in the section below). While diaspora philanthropy and remittances are certainly not synonymous, they occupy a shared transnational space (Johnson 2007: 44). Besides donating to the homeland, immigrant communities often contribute to their present place of residence. Examples of this are the nursing homes or hospitals established by Chinese migrants in Australia and the United States (Chau and Fitzgerald 2018: 9; Risse 2011).

In her pioneering research, Paula Johnson (2007: 14) comments on the “staying power” of diaspora philanthropy. Not only has it the potential to garner more resources than can be obtained locally in the home country, due to the diaspora's “buffer of distance,” diaspora philanthropy can also address controversial issues that are not addressed by local interventions (Johnson 2007: 14). For example, in a study by Chau and Fitzgerald (2018) on how Asian-Australian philanthropists give, why they give, where they give, and what kinds of causes they support, researchers found that Asia's past and present diasporic communities in Australia contributed because of the ineffectiveness of governments in the home country in providing social welfare or disaster relief. Sustained deprivation created a niche for the diaspora to intervene (Chau and Fitzgerald 2018: 12).

Scholars have indicated that the flexible nature of diaspora philanthropy makes it worthy of our attention. The highly variable and ever-evolving nature of this form of giving means it rarely fits established models, which is why diaspora philanthropy remains one of the least understood and least documented facets of the philanthropic landscape (Espinosa 2016: 366; Baker and Mascitelli

2011: 30; Johnson 2007: 44). In a study of a Guangdong *qiaoxiang*, Zhu and Jing found that early twentieth-century overseas Chinese philanthropists were initially motivated to donate by the expectation that they would return to their native home and thus had a vested interest in it—as *fallen leaves return to their roots*—while in the latter part of the twentieth century, their counterpart benefactors were not planning to return, but were driven by a sense of emotional affinity to their ancestral home, as they *grew roots where they landed* (Zhu and Jing 2019: 295). In my research, I compare the intergenerational dynamics between school donors and philanthropic descendants (*cf.* Xing and Gan 2019),<sup>73</sup> as the evolving transnational space of diaspora philanthropy remains a largely unexplored phenomenon. Thus, new research, such as my study, has the capacity to reveal much about the interests, attitudes, and aspirations of migrant contributors (Johnson 2007: 44). These matters are addressed in Chapter 4, Chapter 6, Chapter 7, and the Conclusions of this thesis and can help us understand how educational philanthropy initiated by the diaspora and directed towards southern China was organised and evolved, as well as its ongoing trajectory.

### *Educational Philanthropy and the Chinese Diaspora*

From the nineteenth century gold rush onward, Cantonese sojourners championed a variety of modern infrastructure and public projects like hospitals, railways, and schools in the Pearl River Delta (Williams 2018: 84; Cheng, Liu and Zheng 1982; Wang 2007; Sinn 2003). In the United States, the Chinese have been avid contributors to China's educational landscape as well as investing in commercial ventures in the homeland, believing it was the best way to give back to their origin community and country (Johnson 2007: 7; Yin 2004: 73). This two-pronged approach emphasises the dual commercial and social aspirations of overseas Chinese in America. But Yin (2004: 73) warns that there is a fine line between benefiting and exploiting fellow countrymen; and this line concerned loyalty to place, clan, and kin. These overseas Chinese investors preferred to conduct business outside their ancestral locality in China, but they were very willing to contribute to their ancestral home (Chau and Fitzgerald 2018: 8).

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<sup>73</sup> In a recent study on the “charitable second-generation” (善二代 *shan'er dai*), Xing and Gan (2019) show how attitudes towards giving changed over two generations of Chinese-born philanthropists in China. They found that the nouveaux riches 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 simply making a one-off, large-sum donation, later generations tend to be more ambitious about how capital is distributed. Rather than disaster relief and contributions to health and education (which were the priority of their parents' generation), the *shan'er dai* is more willing to be hands-on and dedicate their talent and time to collaborative and experimental partnerships that they consider socially beneficial and sustainable. Such generational change may also be found among diaspora philanthropists, as I show in Chapter 7 of the thesis.



Other explanations for the prevalence of migrants on the Pacific littoral contributing to hometown charities among Cantonese are described in the recent book, *Chinese Diaspora Charity and the Cantonese Pacific, 1850–1949*, edited by John Fitzgerald and YIP Hon-ming (2020). Following Francis Fukuyama’s (1995) proposition that low-trust societies exhibited a lack of trust outside their own kin, Fitzgerald (2020: 196) argues that the existence of a low-trust society in imperial China influenced the way kinship ties were important in the Cantonese charities that were organised abroad. Sinn (2020) argues that for overseas Chinese, charity was a marker of trust and worthiness among merchants—a form of social insurance for ordinary overseas kinsmen. For the same reasons, overseas Chinese also contributed substantially to local charities and public causes in the countries to which they had emigrated. Charitable work showed that wealthy overseas merchants worked for a common good (公益) as well as for private gains (私益), which ultimately helped merchants raise their profile as creators of “associational life” often benefiting their kin and those from the same native place (Fitzgerald 2020: 196).

Today in China, many diaspora-funded schools in the Pearl River Delta are over a hundred years old, or close to it. For example, YUNG Wing’s Zhenxian School (est. 1872), Taishan Number One Middle School (est. 1909), and Chuk Sau Yuen School (est. 1932)—to name some of the most prominent schools in Guangdong—were a product of a vision of an alternative future for China.<sup>74</sup> Yu (2018) posits that while the pre-1949 Chinese sojourners in the “Gold Mountains” were physically based in the gold rush destinations of America, Australia and Canada, they did not live out their lives in the present time of their respective destinations; rather, they dreamt of their lives in the future of their Pearl River Delta homeland. In accord with this, I describe in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 how, when diaspora-funded school buildings were new, they were not only symbols of modernity, but were designed to prepare the next generation for a life beyond the village. Knowing that their contributions were shaping the future, the new schools brought a sense of pride and accomplishment to their donors.

Today, these schools remain as material remnants of another era. Some schools, like those mentioned above, are still in use in present-day Zhongshan and, more significantly, can be considered part of the heritage of Chinese emigration. Such heritage represents an exciting opportunity for two associated countries, such as China and the United States, or China and

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<sup>74</sup> These schools are elaborated upon in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. The idea of such a vision is based on Yu’s (2018) study of the Cantonese in the Pacific.

Canada, or—in the case of my study—China and Australia, to recognise their shared heritage and collaborate in its conservation, as discussed in the Conclusions of this thesis. In essence, the schools built by the returning migrants are socio-material reminders of changing lifestyles and values brought into the village as part of the transnational legacy of migration.

## **Transnational Heritage and Bringing Modernity into the *Qiaoxiang***

Moving abroad can be disruptive and psychologically challenging, particularly in the early years of migration. Immigrants often experience marginalisation, discrimination, and social exclusion in the host society (Klingenberg, Luetz and Crawford 2021: 458). Yet this is only one side of the story. If we simultaneously study both the destination country and the home country, a view which counterbalances that of the migrant as victim emerges, namely that migrants often achieve a level of wealth abroad that would have been impossible at home, though they may remain “poor” or “simple” in lifestyle in the destination country because their wealth flows homeward. For example, Sarah Lopez reveals that in 2012, once-poor Mexican immigrants in the United States sent over \$20 billion back to Mexico each year—one of the largest remittance flows in the world (Lopez 2015: 6). Mexican migrants have created a construction boom in their hometowns that physically transformed the rural landscapes of Mexico, producing a remittance landscape. The term “remittance landscape” is relatively new, and according to Lopez (2015: 1), refers to those

distinct elements of the built environment constructed and altered with migrant dollars [...] These remittance spaces span international boundaries and are produced by migrants’ grassroots practice of sending cash to hometowns, as well as the government structures and policies that shape migration and the economy today.

In China, researchers have made similar observations, that nouveau riche Chinese migrants from Guangdong erected an array of eclectic dwellings in the emigrant villages and towns across that province in the early twentieth century (Zheng 2003; Byrne 2020a; Cheng 2019a: 241). Zheng (2003: 34) and Yu (2018: 201) have explained that as Chinese migrants experienced discrimination in the countries they emigrated to, they were also reluctant to want to establish a home abroad, but returned to their origins, where they felt safe and respected.<sup>75</sup> Upon their return, some Chinese migrants introduced not only new architectural design, but also modern construction materials,

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<sup>75</sup> Comparative research suggests that this phenomenon not only applied to Chinese migrants (Lozanovska 2019: 5).

such as steel-reinforced concrete (Byrne 2020a: 178; Zheng 2003: 39). These precedent-setting studies demonstrate how cross-disciplinary research at the nexus of architecture and migration studies can produce an alternative narrative of migration.

What distinguishes a transnational study of migrant heritage from traditional studies of immigration carried out in a single site (e.g., the migrant experience in Australia)? By integrating both homeland (*qiaoxiang*) and diaspora perspectives, the complexity of migrant behaviours can be appropriately contextualised to demonstrate the positive impacts that migrants have on the cross-border worlds to which they belong. My study of diasporic engagement in homeland education recognises how transnational heritage research is mutually beneficial for both ends of the China–Australia Heritage Corridor. By recounting the history of modern diaspora-funded schools in rural China, from their origins to their ongoing relationship with the Chinese–Australian diaspora, my research shows that these schools were once sites of modernity in the *qiaoxiang* that eventually became heritage and pilgrimage sites for the ongoing diaspora.

The pioneering work of the Australian heritage scholar Denis Byrne (2016a, 2016b, 2021) has established that the heritage of migrants in Australia is generally framed within nation-states. This framing relates to the depiction of immigration as a one-way journey, with the heritage of migration being confined to the theme of the settlement and adaptation of migrants to Australia. The heritage of Chinese immigrants in Australia has come to be represented by temples (Penny 2008; Chang 1999; Grimwade 1995), shops (Loy-Wilson 2014a, 2014b; Wilton 1998, 2000), and market gardens (Boileau 2017; James 2016), all located in Australia, as well as by the intangible heritage of items like events and festivals (Tsai 2016), food culture (Leong-Salobir 2019) and heritage languages<sup>76</sup> spoken in Australia (Mu 2014). In a study of Chinese market gardeners in Australia, Frost (2002) argues that these gardeners not only imported, but also created a new Chinese–Australian culture as they introduced new crops, demonstrated the value of intensive agriculture, and reorganised themselves to work effectively with European farmers and investors. Migration clearly enriches Australia’s repertoire of cultural heritage (Armstrong 2004: 241), but these cultural transfers were not unidirectional; instead, they were a heritage of transnational scope. Byrne (2016a, 2016b, 2021) suggests that immigrant heritage transcends the migrant-receiving country (e.g., Australia) and connects it back to the places of origin of immigrants (e.g., the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong

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<sup>76</sup> This refers to speaking the language of the place of origin.

Province), disrupting what has hitherto been the conventional nation-bound understanding of migrant heritage.

### *The China–Australia Heritage Corridor*

Considering the material traces of migration both in the destination country and in the *qiaoxiang*, Byrne proposes the “heritage corridor” concept to illuminate how the bidirectional flow of ideas and influences that link (at least) two places produce heritage sites that are transnationally “stretched” (Byrne 2016a, 2016b, 2021). In the case of the China–America heritage corridor, the creation of the first Chinese hospital in America—the Tung Wah Dispensary in San Francisco (est. 1900)—was a product of having “one foot still firmly planted in the homeland’s cultural and national heritage” (Risse 2011: 414), and “the other [...] taking root on American soil,” which effectively allowed “a more unfettered, transnational ‘way of seeing’ receptive to the fruits of Western modernity” (Risse 2011: 414).

Another example of the transnationalisation of place has been found in the home villages of Zhongshanese-Australians. During a research trip made in the 1990s, Sydney-based historian Shirley Fitzgerald observed how the built heritage of such villages was inseparable from the lives of Chinese immigrants in Sydney.

In Chung Shan (Zhongshan), an area of Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province from which many of Sydney’s Chinese originated, men who made their money in the fruit and vegetable markets of Sydney built mansions which carry the unmistakable stamp of Sydney influences. Ma Ying-Piu was one of the several founders of Wing Sang and Company, banana wholesalers, who traded between Fiji and Sydney from 1899. Behind the traditional Chinese compound wall, the houses which Ma’s money built in Sha Chung village would not look out of place in the well-heeled eastern suburbs of Sydney. The three-story Kwok mansion down the road in Huancheng is more eclectic, but the art nouveau stained glass windows and the “Western” bathroom, circa World War I, tell the same story of cultural mix. The Kwoks were involved with the worldwide Wing On and Company, which also had its origins in a Sydney Chinese fruit store established in the 1890s. Standing outside this house, I am told that thanks to Sydney-generated wealth the whole village had electricity and tap water before anywhere else in the region, and the road we are standing on was first sealed in the 1920s, using state-of-the-art Sydney technology. (Fitzgerald [1997] 2008: 16)

Fitzgerald also noted that since their arrival in Australia, Chinese migrants have generally maintained a transnational back-and-forth relationship with their ancestral home. This is exemplified by the way in which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sojourners, like MA Ying-piu, the Kwok brothers, and their counterparts in the late twentieth century, such as Cliff Lee, lived in “two worlds.” As Fitzgerald writes of her experience at the Kwok mansion:

Standing there, I mull over the question “Whose heritage is this anyway?” with Cliff Lee. Lee was born nearby about sixty years ago, but at the age of twelve, he came to Sydney to live with his father. His life has involved endless oscillations between the two places. Now he spends a great deal of time in China, where he is involved in construction, but the business card he offers me there in the village roadway gives a good north shore Sydney address. In Sydney, he had been active in the local Chung Shan Society which, among other activities, arranges tours to this region of China from which many of the original Sydney Chinese came. (Fitzgerald [1997] 2008: 17)

As seen above, the built environment created by migration is “not merely distributed or situated transnationally but is orientated that way” (Byrne 2016b: 2361). A transnational orientation is seen, for example, in the way Zhongshanese banana wholesalers load and unload crates of bananas in Sydney for redistribution, during which they might be daydreaming of rebuilding their ancestral home in China (Byrne 2020a). This dual orientation—working in Australia, daydreaming about projects in China—that characterised transnational Chinese migration, is also concisely captured by Madeline Hsu (2000a) in her book title, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*.<sup>77</sup> This dual orientation leads us to the notion of the heritage corridor, which embodies the idea of an interconnected coalescence of transnationally distributed heritage objects and places. The concept of the corridor is helpful to evaluate how the built heritage of Chinese migration to Australia reflects key themes in the transnational experience of migrants. One of those themes is how migrants were proponents of transmitting novel ideas between the destination and the homeland.

### *Social Remittances*

Philip Kuhn (2008) describes in his influential study, *Chinese Among Others*, how the diaspora metaphorically inhabits a corridor, which consists of resources and information exchanged between the sending and receiving communities. This interconnecting social space of flow is facilitated by a long-term, highly transnational dispersal of Chinese migrants (McKeown 2001). These exchanges occur when migrants return to live in or visit their communities of origin, when relatives from “home” visit their migrant family overseas, or when other forms of long-distance communications take place along migration corridors (Levitt 1998: 936). For instance, a letter received in the home locale from an emigrant, when read aloud to neighbours by a literate villager, could bring innovative ideas (Waldinger 2015: 42). Examples of exported ideas and behaviours may include information on the type of school buildings that children attended abroad, or the nature of education abroad. “Social remittance,” then, according to Peggy Levitt (1998, 2011), who coined the term, draws attention to the fact that, besides money, migrants exported ideas and

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<sup>77</sup> Hsu’s (2000a) book focuses on Taishanese immigration from the Pearl River Delta to the United States.

behaviours back to their migrant-sending communities. These migration-driven forms of cultural diffusion included the transmission of innovative ideas, norms, expectations, and skills (Waldinger 2013: 768).

Historically, Chinese immigration to Australia has both sustained and challenged economic and social conditions back home in China (Wilton 2019: 50). Contemporary research shows that social remittances do not necessarily have a positive effect. The extravagant remittance homes built in many migrant-sending communities are a typical example, and not only in China. In her study of Mexicans from a rural background in the United States, Sarah Lopez found that a paradoxical outcome of migration occurred when those who had built new houses in their native villages in Mexico could hardly enjoy their residences, as “living in a remittance house year-round would mean losing the ability to maintain it” by working abroad (Lopez 2015: 67), and ultimately the “price of improving the domestic dwelling is abandoning it” (Lopez 2015: 38). Besides housing, in the long run, migration is likely to generate income for education in the origin place, as generally children of rural migrant families around the world are more likely to stay in school longer than those children of non-migrant backgrounds (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011: 5). But as a study in China has shown, it also meant that there was a temptation for children living in the homeland in a remittance economy to drop out of school and migrate abroad to maintain the higher standard of living to which they had become accustomed, thus perpetuating the migration cycle (Benton and Liu 2018: 134).

The interdisciplinary scholar James Clifford notes that diaspora subjects live “distinctive versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience” (Clifford 1994: 319). Whether expressed in the form of a new home in the village or in the capacity to send the entire population of village children to school, the experience, and expectations of the families of migrants who have “stayed behind” often puts them into a category of their own. These expectations and new experiences are likely to be specific to the conditions of their time (as shown in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). In the case of Chinese migration, they have also tended to be part of an embracing of modernity by migrants.

### *Modernity in China*

To address the issue of modernity as an aspect of diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan, as discussed later in Chapter 5, I now provide background to the way modernity was perceived and experienced in China. At the turn of the twentieth century, the city of Shanghai was regarded by the Chinese as a key site of modernity. As the hub of print culture, shopping, and new forms of

consumption, Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999), an influential commentator of modern China, declares Shanghai a place of both real and imagined modernity. The Nanjing Road department stores, built mainly by returned Chinese migrants from Australia in the early twentieth century, epitomised modern consumption (Chan 1999). Night-time greyhound racing, with bright electric lights, made the racetracks a part of the city's nightlife. Chang (2006: 154) noted that the greyhound racetrack was featured in many novels and magazines of the early decades of the twentieth century, stirring the modern imagination. Scholars of modern China have mostly conceived the concept of modernity as an urban experience (Ip, Hon and Lee 2003: 503). Yet the process of China's modernisation was uneven. Not only was there a substantial difference between the "advanced" coastal cities and the "backward" inland regions of China in the first half of the twentieth century. As Klein (2014: 285) puts it, not all urban dwellers shared the same "blessing of modern life." Moreover, this preoccupation with urban life ignores the fact that the majority of Chinese in the early twentieth century were rural dwellers.

David Strand (1989) recognised that no feature of urban life embodied the paradoxical tensions of modernity more than the rickshaw. In an era of increasing motorisation and modern technology, the most archaic form of propulsion imaginable, the rickshaw, persisted. The continued existence of rickshaws, operating alongside motorised cars and buses on macadamised or tarmacked roads, provided employment for the single largest category of rural-to-urban workers, mostly men from the lower strata of society (Strand 1989: 29). At a time when the toothbrush was new to China, a foreign visitor to the villages outside of Beijing in the 1920s noticed that a rickshaw puller kept a toothbrush under the flap hanging from the cushioned seat of the rickshaw (Dikötter 2006: 210). Although we may never know how the rickshaw puller felt when he first cleaned his teeth, Ruth Rogaski (author of the 2014 book *Hygienic Modernity*) reveals that the contradictions in how individuals experienced, internalised, and even resisted innovative ideas and policies on hygiene since the late nineteenth century were inherent to the modern Chinese condition more generally (also see Klein 2014: 275). Not only did tradition co-exist with modernity, but, as Leo Lee argues, "tradition [occurred] within modernity" (Yeh 2000: 6).

In addition to the contradictory tensions inherent in Chinese modernity, Ban Wang has noted there have been three discrete periods of modernity in modern China. The first phase, nationalistic modernity (1840–1949), occurred when China tried to maintain its integrity against the imperialist powers (Wang 2004: 19). The second phase, socialist modernity (1949–1976), occurred after the Communist Revolution; this phase emphasised equality and collective mobilisation (Wang 2004:

131). The third phase, capitalist modernity (1976 to present), is marked by the expansion of market capital and characterised by individualism and new forms of consumption. Recent changes, such as car ownership (Zhang 2019), private education accompanied by a variety of extracurricular activities (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 334), and the option to study abroad (Fong 2011) have created a more colourful and competitive life in contemporary China, as an alternative to the rather black-and-white narrative of China's immediate socialist past. The development of education in modern China in relation to these periods will be the central theme of the next chapter.

A significant aspect of Chinese modernity was that it was not uniform but took on many forms, encapsulating the tenet of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000). In *Everyday Modernity in China*, the editors Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua Goldstein (2006) supported the above point of view, commenting that one should not seek a sweeping force of modern transformation in China since the country is not only enormous but also culturally diverse and historically complex. Foreign influences in modernising China included those from Japan<sup>78</sup> during the late imperial and early republican period, and the Soviet Union during the socialist era. The impact of these countries on China's educational reform will be briefly discussed in the next chapter.

A variety of foreign influences evidently coalesced to contribute to a pluralised version of Chinese modernity. As we will see below, this applies to the *qiaoxiang* regions of southern China, which experienced a distinctive form of modernity because of their diaspora connections.

### *Qiaoxiang Modernity as a “Structure of Feeling”*

Low-skilled labour emigration since the mid-nineteenth century transformed the ancestral home from which many emigrants from southern China originated. It changed specific home localities (故鄉 *guxiang*) into a *qiaoxiang* (僑鄉)—a remittance-built locality (Sinn 2020; Yow 2013), where modern culture and ways of being modern were introduced (Zheng 2003; Cheng 2019a). For example, in the late 1890s, when kerosene lamps were still being used in neighbouring areas, a Hawaiian Chinese entrepreneur named CHEN Fong (陳芳 1825–1906) installed artificial lights in his Heung San (Zhongshan) village (Yin 2004: 66). Besides appreciating pleasant things and enjoying material comfort, Bastid-Bruguere (1996: 13) suggests that a characteristic of Cantonese

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<sup>78</sup> Meiji Japan is a prime example of a fully modernised Asian country that maintained a discrete version of modernity dissimilar to that of the West (Wong 2006: 24).



modernity was the conspicuous display of novelty. At a deeper level, transnational practices could change value systems and everyday ways of life cumulatively. Alejandro Portes, a sociologist of migration, notes that:

While from an individual perspective, the act of sending remittances, buying a house in the migrant's hometown, or travelling there on occasion have purely personal consequences, in the aggregate they can modify the fortunes and the culture of these towns and even of the countries of which they were part. (Portes 2003: 877–878; also see Vertovec 2003: 875)

As newfound material wealth from migration gives rise to new buildings, these changes in turn progressively transform the look and feel of the local surroundings. As a result, the *qiaoxiang* in Guangdong Province were a forerunner in the modernisation of rural China more generally (Zheng 2003: 19). I have made a similar remark, positing that the *qiaoxiang* serves as a reminder of the history of modernity in rural China (Cheng 2019a).

In a study of migration from Xiamen, in southern Fujian, Cook (2006) described how the Chinese in Nanyang (South-East Asia) became “bridges to modernity” in the early twentieth century. Their exposure to modernisation in colonial South-East Asia meant that the Nanyang *huaqiao* knew how to modernise China (Cook 2006: 160). In the 1920s, they returned to develop urban Xiamen, with the *qilou* (騎樓), the two-or-more-storied arcaded shop house, being the most materially striking of the transpositions from South-East Asia to Xiamen (Cook 2006: 173). Similar traces of Nanyang migration were evident in Zhongshan, particularly in old-town Shekki.<sup>79</sup>

My study looks beyond the situation in towns and cities to consider how modernity transpired in the native home villages of emigrants. My understanding of rural *qiaoxiang* modernity extends Denis Byrne’s idea of “aspirational modernity” (2016a: 270), which primarily concerns how remittance houses in Zhongshan were distinguished from the vernacular houses of the past through the introduction of new styles and materials. I am more interested in the affective dimension of cultural change. My published work so far (Cheng 2019a; Cheng 2020) shows that recording people’s memories in the *qiaoxiang*, including those of their school experiences, helps to capture the freshness of their experience many decades ago. The works of contemporary

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<sup>79</sup> Interviews with TAM Man Fai (Director of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Shekki, 12 December 2017, and GAN Jianbo (former Curator of the Zhongshan Museum), Shekki, 9 May 2018, reveals that the old commercial centre in Shekki—Sun Wen West Road [孫文西路], which was last redeveloped in 1926 and is now pedestrianised—resembles the urban streetscape of colonial Singapore and Malaysia.

archaeologists, like Hamilakis (2014), support a “multi-sensory” approach to the material remains of the past; after all, an attention to affectivity and modernity as a “structure of feeling” (see below) helps reveal that modern schools were not simply material structures disconnected from their users and occupants, but were enmeshed in their experience of daily life.

Since my interest lies in reconstructing how the new school buildings were experienced when they first appeared, I am influenced by the notion of a “structure of feeling.” Raymond Williams (1978: 310) stipulates that this notion relates to a “particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period”. My interviews with village elders (former students of diaspora-funded schools) consisted of asking how they reacted when they first set their eyes on a modern school, or how they felt as they first stepped inside the new school. By superimposing affect on the now historic material fabric, alternative ways of feeling and being are re-illuminated (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015: 3; Müller 2015: 36). The freshness of their personal and individual accounts, as detailed in Chapter 5, shapes a collective experience of place. These experiences suggest how new diaspora-funded schools made students modern, and their distinct situated experiences may over time be seen as “heritage-making” (Muzaini 2017; Robertson 2016).

## **The Legacy of Diaspora-Funded Schools: Heritage, Memory, and Return**

The next section considers how diaspora-funded schools in the ancestral homeland became fixtures within the locale. It also considers how emigration eventually changed both the lives of those left at home and those in the destination country, and how memories of previous generations eventually influenced later generations’ views of the homeland and the schools they funded or attended.

### *Return Trips to Diaspora Tourism*

Diasporic returns occur for a combination of reasons: to maintain social connections, such as visiting friends and relatives, to introduce overseas-born offspring to their pre-migration past, including places of significance to them in their native place, or to pursue business interests (Maruyama and Stronza 2010; Li, McKercher and Chan 2020; Duval 2003: 285).

In the period up to 1949, many Chinese sojourners aspired to “return home with glory” (榮歸故里) (Williams 2018).<sup>80</sup> During the twentieth century, the rupture of the Japanese war in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by the closure of China during the Maoist era (1949–1978), resulted in migrants being restricted in their ability to return (Peterson 2011: 27). The overseas Chinese tended to become settlers rather than sojourners, but continued to visit China, when it was possible to do so (P. Yang 2012). Previous research suggested that diaspora-funded schools were potential anchors in “return mobilities” (Byrne 2016a: 273).

The point is that overseas descendants, out of filial duty to parents and ancestors, were expected to return to rediscover their heritage (Maruyama and Stronza 2010; Louie 2004). Although expectations were often high upon return, disappointments were frequent (Li et al. 2020: 2117–2118). Discontent is often the result of visiting the wrong sites due to a paucity of updated information (Alexander, Bryce and Murdy 2017: 550). Still, regardless of their experience, most root-seekers often end their visits to the old country with new understandings of what life could have been like if their ancestors had not emigrated (Marschall 2019: 1665).

Beyond the visual, the visitors’ ability to immerse themselves physically in an ancestral setting allows them to reinterpret a possible pre-migration past (Matheson 2020: 168). Studies have shown that Chinese personal identity is linked to locality through its distinct language, customs, and deities, *fengshui*, and the ways ancestral spirits exert a spiritual influence through clan temples (Kuah-Pearce 2010). For many returnees, the now old schools are experienced as emotional sites filled with potentially positive memories and associations. But schools can also create divisions among the returning diaspora if there is dissonance in the expectations, such as when diaspora-funded schools are discovered to be in a poor condition, as shown in Chapter 7.

Besides personal initiative, since 1978, the Chinese government has strategically encouraged the diaspora to return to China. Slogans like “love your country, love your hometown” (愛國愛鄉) were conceived to rebuild rapport with overseas Chinese (Zhu and Jing 2019: 289). Other means of soliciting rapport included: a restitution campaign to return properties forfeited after 1949 to the descendants of former owners after 1982 (Cao 1995); allowing ancestor worship (Kuah-Pearce

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<sup>80</sup> This may mean, for example, dressing in proverbial silk robes, showering their relatives and friends with gifts, and dreaming of one-day retirement in the native place, where they had built a remittance house.

2010); and providing preferential treatment to the overseas Chinese, including, for example, making provisions for tax concessions and rebates to encourage foreign direct investment (Bolt 1996; Kuah-Pearce 2008: 124). Since the reform, the local Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (僑務辦 *qiaowuban*, or simply 僑辦 *qiaoban*)<sup>81</sup> has also been co-ordinating with the diaspora to revive homeland philanthropic initiatives. As seen in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6, the result was a school construction boom in the *qiaoxiang* regions in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

### *Intersocial Relations*

As discussed earlier, the process of immigration, both historically and currently, tends to marginalise migrants. Roger Waldinger, an eminent sociologist of migration, notes that migrants in different parts of the world found themselves in a situation where they were not yet locals in their destination country, but gradually became foreign in their former homes (Waldinger 2015: 41). At the heart of the migrant experience is a duality: an immigrant is also an emigrant.

In a new country, immigrants are more likely to rely on networks in their home country to help them solve their everyday problems. This is a point supported by the anthropologist Sarah Trabert (2020: 99), who found that numerous ethnographies have shown that the adaptation and success of migrants abroad depends upon kinship and friendship networks linked to the country of origin. Thus, the phenomenon of “intersocial convergence” (Waldinger 2015: 40) occurs when resources from the home society are transposed onto the receiving society, eventually creating a new community in the destination country that, while new, is a hybrid of both places.

Although emigrants may insist that they, like their compatriots at home, have become different, having absorbed new tastes and preferences, and acquired new experiences and behaviours in the destination locale (Waldinger 2013: 463; Waldinger 2015: 45). At the same time, those who stay at home may have moved on too. Their lives, in the absence of their emigrant partners and relatives, have been altered by migration and other changes in the locality that may result in a lifestyle fundamentally different from that remembered by the emigrants. This was very prevalent during China’s Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976), when the families of overseas school donors often lost connections with the ancestral home (Peterson 2007, 2011). Furthermore, emigrants

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<sup>81</sup> This government office was established in Guangdong and Fujian provinces—corresponding with the locations of the traditional *qiaoxiang*—to support diasporic communities through a variety of programs and events, such as specialised media (*qiaokan*), ‘roots-seeking’ tours, special business opportunities and, most of all, facilitating diaspora philanthropy in the homeland.

returning to visit China in the late 1970s and early 1980s tended not to know what to expect as the country had been substantially re-defined by the socio-political campaigns of the Maoist era (Khu 2001; Yow 2005; Cheng 2019a: 248). Although migrants may generally continue to visit their former home or send remittances there, inevitably, as immigrants, they are remaking themselves anew in their destination countries. Over time, they gradually drift apart from their compatriots at home and become more like the people in their destination country with whom they habitually interact, causing “intersocial divergence” from the folk at home (Waldinger 2015: 43). Therefore, transnational relations become more difficult to maintain, and some even break down.

These divisions are further accentuated between generations and are relevant for understanding the contemporary diaspora’s ability to associate with their ancestral heritage in the homeland. For instance, while the first generation is often adamant about retaining the mother tongue and can still communicate in it after many decades abroad, this is a liberty their foreign-born children rarely share (Leeds-Hurwitz 2006). In contrast, by growing up “outside,” where the heritage language is not dominant or may be rarely spoken, migrant offspring may only ever acquire “kitchen-level proficiency” (Waldinger 2015: 45). The underlying factor is that sustained absence cannot be adequately compensated for, as research on the second and subsequent generations born overseas has consistently shown (Lee 2007; Leeds-Hurwitz 2006). In this way, how the descendants of emigrants think of the homeland can be regarded as “a fragmented imaginary” (Kusumaningtyas and Cohen 2020: 157), since later generations may only acquire selectively transmitted memories of their migrating ancestors’ former lives (Cingolani and Vietti 2020: 1098). Papers in an edited volume dealing with “difficult heritage” (Logan and Reeves 2008) indicate that inheriting always involves a more or less conscious appropriation, a decision either to embrace or to react against what has been conveyed. Returning to the matter of diaspora-funded schools, the way that Chinese migrant descendants in Australia “remember” and imagine the Chinese “homeland” has an impact, as indicated in Chapter 7, on the way they perceive the schools their ancestors funded in China and the possibilities of their involvement with the schools. A desire of the younger generation to retain fluency in their ancestral language and dialect has often led to overseas Chinese sending their children or grandchildren back to China or to their villages.

### *Diasporic Memories: From Migration History to Heritage Schools*

The offspring of migrant donors may experience their first “memories” of diaspora-funded schools before returning to China. Following the argument that migration “leaves a trail” of collective memories of sites (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1989: i), my study found descendants

often have “secondary experiences” of the schools based on the stories or photographs available to them. In this way, remembering is an active engagement with the past, as memories are often created in the present, through narration, reading, or observation, rather than being something simply transmitted from the past unchanged (Lalich 2008: 53). Instead of being something stable or fixed, memories are not only inherited, but also recalled and (re)constructed (Lalich 2008: 53).

Certain sites associated with key memories can be called “sites of memory,” a concept coined by the French historian Pierre Nora, who studied cemeteries, monuments, and commemorative celebrations. Such sites create a link between history and memory, as Nora (1989: 9) puts it, “memory is blind to all but the group it binds.” In Australia, places of significance to Chinese immigrants may include, for example, a shop (run by immigrants), temples, or community centres (Lalich 2008). Examination of these physical sites provides visible clues about the settlement community in a destination country (Lalich 2008: 52). Meanwhile, places in the migrants’ country of origin, such as a diaspora-funded school in the ancestral village, provide similar clues about the transnational community. Clearly, physical settings can be conceived as “tangible assets” that are important for people to remember the past (Lalich 2008: 55).

Heritage buildings and objects can actively trigger memories (Bloomer and Moore 1977). In an article on Hong Kong and Bali in the 1960s, Byrne (2013) describes how the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage are inseparable, and that mundane structures, such as stairs or gateways, can evoke love, pain, or loss. Besides the physical setting, artefacts can also help us reconstruct the course of past events, leading us to an understanding of the present. During her research in Copenhagen, Lisa Rosén Rasmussen noted that former school students found it difficult to recount their previous school experiences. In response, she used “memory objects” as a catalyst (Rasmussen 2012: 122). Physical remnants of their school’s past, such as everyday classroom objects (now heritage objects), for example school furniture, helped former students to effectively conjure the immaterial: memories, sensations, and moods (Rasmussen 2012: 123–124). Memories of ink pens, for instance, evoked a feeling of loss, as assorted brands of ballpoint pens made them obsolete (Rasmussen 2012: 119). The above studies demonstrate that material culture in schools as well as the built heritage itself are active in triggering not standalone memories, but connected “biographies of other objects” (Hodder 2012: 32).

My study confirms that diaspora-funded schools can also trigger many memories that enable overseas returnees to make sense of the present. This is because the social and material context of

various people's lives associated with diaspora-funded schools give substance to the school as built heritage. So, following the suggestion of Olick (1999: 382), the relationship between past and present is one of accumulation and "on-going constitution and reconstruction." Thus, my interdisciplinary research contributes to the study of transnational heritage by illustrating the multifaceted and inherent complexities that lie in the memories associated with diaspora philanthropy, the histories of modern education in China, and Chinese-Australian migration.

## Conceptualising Diaspora-Funded Schools

It is now clear that conceptualising the legacy of diaspora-funded schools involves a diversity of disciplines and thematic perspectives. By integrating knowledge from a range of fields, the most important advance this chapter makes is the provision of an interdisciplinary framework that supports the rest of this thesis, while enriching the history of Chinese-Australian migration and broadening our understanding of the transnational migrant heritage that connects Australia and China.

By depicting a diaspora-funded school as a socio-material assemblage, this interdisciplinary study is sensitive to how built heritage changes over time. It considers diaspora-funded schools as architectural sites that are simultaneously produced and consumed, where the forgotten or overlooked dimension of material entanglement associated with the social lives of schools is brought to the fore.

The organisational and performative implications of the schools as mutable socio-material assemblages will be evident in the following chapters. For instance, modern schools that were desired by the diaspora (Chapter 4) became beacons of modernity in the *qiaoxiang* (Chapter 5). Some schools have then been re-used and misused (Chapter 6), sometimes making the returning diaspora ambivalent about their heritage (Chapter 7). Before fully exploring how the past and present are mutually constituted in the coming chapters, the next chapter reviews how modern education has emerged and evolved in China since the end of the imperial period and describes the place of diaspora-funded schools within this development.

# Chapter 3

## Diaspora-Funded Schools in Modern Chinese History

In seeking to establish the place of diaspora-funded schools in modern Chinese history, I have discovered that scholars of Chinese migration (e.g., Hsu 2000a; Yow 2013; Williams 2018) whose work focuses on the *qiaoxiang*—the localities where emigrants originated and subsequently transformed—tend either to overlook the history of these schools or overlook their broader historical context in the nation’s rapidly transforming educational scene during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the same time, historians of modern China (e.g., Borthwick 1983; Pepper 1990, 1996; VanderVen 2012; Vickers and Zeng 2017) have tended to overlook the significant role of emigration in educational development in rural emigrant areas of China. The incompleteness of these historiographies in contextualising the place of diaspora-funded schools in the history of modern China means the extent to which modern education has benefited from overseas Chinese migration remains unclear. Given that understanding this historical context is essential for answering the questions posed in this study, the main aim of this chapter is to offer a historical background that brings together the histories of Chinese migration and modern education in China.

A *longue durée* approach (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009) is adopted in this chapter, mostly by synthesising secondary material to review educational development in China from the onslaught of Western imperialism in the nineteenth century to the present day. Six phases of educational development are examined—traditional, missionary, early modern, late imperial and early



republican, socialist, and post-reform—in terms of their objectives, means, and legacies.<sup>82</sup> In essence, this chapter provides a broad sweep of the development of Chinese education from pre-modernist times to the present. But the reader should bear in mind that due to the study's specific focus on diaspora-funded schools, the current chapter is unable to provide a comprehensive review of each historical period in the development of education in China.

Perhaps the most widely accepted view held by historians is that, since China's direct encounter with Western imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century, educational reform in China has been framed as a project of “national salvation” (教育救國) (Peterson and Hayhoe 2001: 1). Much of the literature on modern education in China throughout the twentieth century has emphasised how successive regimes have optimistically vouched for the “omnipotence of education” (救國萬能) in solving a myriad of problems (Peterson and Hayhoe 2001: 1). Yet many scholars regard modern education in China as an unfulfilled promise (Biggerstaff 1961; Borthwick 1983; Unger 1984; Vickers and Zeng 2017). In this chapter, I argue that educational reform in modern China, rather than being a failure, was an uneven success. The intervention of the diaspora, particularly in the rural emigrant localities of southern China, arguably make up for many shortcomings.

## 1. Traditional Schools of Imperial China

The foundation of education in imperial China was the civil-service examination system. Although it underwent gradual refinement throughout its thousand-year lifespan, the system's endurance has largely been attributed to the empire's stability, so much so that it has been regarded by later commentators as the cornerstone of Chinese culture and imperial life (Sun and Johnson 1990: 210). Although the exams were designed to select the best candidates to govern the empire, surprisingly the curriculum was not specifically geared towards administration; instead, it focused

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<sup>82</sup> The terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ are shorthand references. Modern does not refer to the present-day but to what could be considered modern in 1900s China.

on classical texts, many inspired by Confucian thought.<sup>83</sup> This pre-modern system indoctrinated would-be scholar-officials into a traditional Confucian mould.<sup>84</sup>

The exams were essentially open to everyone; yet the actual number of viable candidates was low—a staggering 90% of the population from artisan, peasant, and trader backgrounds were not eligible contenders (Cheng 2009: 405). Cultural and literacy barriers (or lack of resources) reproduced huge social inequality in imperial China. Hence, only the upper echelons were able to benefit from the system long-term (Elman 2000). Limited social mobility meant that only after multi-generational residence in one village or town could a clan accumulate sufficient wealth and status to support a successful candidate for officialdom (Ho 1962).



**Figure 3.1** An ancestral hall in Oo Shek village (烏石村), Sanxiang Town, Zhongshan, circa 1930s. (Source: Brad Powe, private family collection.)

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<sup>83</sup> Confucius (551–479 BCE) was the most influential patron of education in China. As an original thinker, he established private schools, where he taught some 3,000 students and mentored 70 disciplines (Deng 1997: 2). Confucius taught that education should not only be practical but also cultivate the moral self. He emphasised the kind of relationships and role models needed to ensure social stability; his teachings were not only popular in China but also influenced many other East Asian countries.

<sup>84</sup> Historian Joseph Levenson (1968) used the term “culturalism” to describe the pre-modern condition of China. Dominant cultural values included practices of obedience, loyalty, and collectivity—all of these were inspired by the teachings of Confucius. Well-known among them is the idea of filial piety. A classic on this subject, *The Twenty-four Paragons of Filial Piety* 《二十四孝》, reveals that an unfilial son could face corporal punishment, expulsion from the clan, or worse, death (Yen 1995: 7). Filial piety was also manifested in Chinese grave rituals and mourning practices as well as veneration of the dead. Often it affected (and continues to affect) Chinese behaviour. An extension of this distinctive worldview is that there is an insoluble link that ties a person to her or his ancestral place.

In the Pearl River Delta, a distinction between two types of communities is worth noting to illustrate this point. The first community originated from northern China and progressively migrated southwards during the Song, Yuan, and Qing dynasties before settling in the Delta. This was a land-based, “cultured” population, possessing many ancestral halls that also served as study halls. Voluntary donations and collective income from agriculture paid for the construction of these halls and the recruitment of tutors. In Heung San, halls of this kind, as shown in Figure 3.1, date back to the Song Dynasty (Gan 2004: 79). The second community were an “uncultured,” water-dwelling fisher-people who built rudimentary huts on the shore or farmed reclaimed mudflats to start a more sedentary lifestyle (He and Faure 2016). Due to the relative difficulties in sustaining a livelihood, besides the administrative restrictions imposed on the waterborne population, the latter community not only failed to have their own ancestral halls or written histories but also lacked the means to take part in the imperial examinations because of administrative-cultural restrictions (Puk 2009).

While study halls, or *sishu* (私塾 “private schools”), were purpose-built schools, the venues for traditional schools in late imperial China varied from place to place. In the New Territories of Hong Kong, they ranged from a temple to a village office to an ancestral hall (Ming 1996: 30). Study halls, or more frequently makeshift schools inside ancestral halls, were for most rural communities in Guangdong Province the first educational institutions they possessed. Faure (1989), cited in Peterson (1997: 23), described the role of lineages during imperial times in the Pearl River Delta as basic organisations for “the spread of literacy and the literate ideal.” Surviving plaques and images of meritorious ancestors in official regalia can still be found inside some of these halls, and their success in the imperial examinations was also recorded for posterity in genealogies (Ming 1996: 12). Writing about the New Territories, Siu (2008: 73) suggested that the construction of lineage halls, such as study halls and ancestral halls, was a sign that a once mobile population had achieved permanent settlement.

While *sishu* existed in a variety of forms, their interiors were remarkably similar: crude and sparsely furnished, as shown in Figure 3.2. Upon entering the schoolroom, a pupil habitually prostrated himself in front of an image of Confucius, then bowed to his tutor (Ming 1996: 45). Pupils took turns to offer joss sticks to the image. Consistent with the Confucian worldview, demonstration of social discipline was an essential part of traditional education and was enacted in daily ritual practices that preceded classes, reinforcing the teacher–pupil, elder–younger social hierarchy (Hayes 1984: 576–577; Leung 1994: 399). On the pupils’ desks lay writing materials, such as

brushes, India ink, and inkwells made of slate (Lee 2006 [1887]: 16). On the tutor's desk was a rattan stick for beating pupils who failed to recite classical verses correctly. The stringent, authoritarian style of instruction transformed the schools into what Elman (2000: xxxix) terms “cultural prisons”. Yet rewards were also distributed to those who could memorise copious quantities of text quickly. These included gifts of calligraphy brushes, paper, ink slabs, and paper fans (Ayers 1971: 20; Leung 1994: 399). It was well known—even taken for granted—that parents would make considerable sacrifices to ensure their children's success. The father of the famous nineteenth-century statesman ZHANG Zhidong (張之洞 CHANG Chih-tung 1837–1909) was no exception (Ayers 1971: 20).



**Figure 3.2** The setting of a typical village school (sishu) in late Imperial China. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, The Hakka Museum, Meizhou, Guangdong, 13 August 2016.)

The students were typically male, as all parents wished their sons receive “a little schooling” (Rawski 1979: 28), while very few girls received any education (Ming 1996: 46). Educating a girl was considered “weeding the field of some other man” (Rawski 1979: 8). Besides being seen as a waste of resources, it was commonly believed that “ignorance is a woman's virtue,” hence education of women was not provided for before the twentieth century (Rawski 1979: 6). Although traditional China did not have the concept of mass literacy and the ideal of universal education did not emerge until the early twentieth century, sons from poor households did not necessarily miss out on learning. Public and clan-funded charitable village schools (義學) were established for this purpose by the imperial scholar-gentry, later assisted by funds remitted home by emigrants (Rawski

1979: 28; Yu 1983: 48–49). Thus, traditional education remained largely unmodified for several centuries: it consisted of a class of boys taught by a single tutor.

As there was no fixed timetable or prescribed study duration, the tutor determined the pace of his classes (Ming 1996: 41; Borthwick 1983: 17; Lee 2006 [1887]: 16; Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 41). The tutor was sometimes a potential or failed candidate in the civil-service examinations.<sup>85</sup> If he was absent, an older pupil led the class (Borthwick 1983: 36). Lessons in the countryside were seasonally interrupted by harvest and festivals (Borthwick 1983: 35).

Another important aspect of traditional education was that it largely revolved around imitation and repetition, as found in the practice of calligraphy, and learning by rote (Dikötter 2006: 38). Rote memorisation involved students shouting aloud, repeatedly, in a “sing-song” tone (Ball 1911: 269).<sup>86</sup> In his memoir, LEE Yan Phou (李恩富 1861–1938), a Heung San native, recalled how the louder the pupils shrieked, the more credit they received, and the more that tutors could make sure that they were concentrating (Lee 2006 [1887]: 17). To this end, the Confucian scholar would commit all his classics to memory (Ball 1911: 270; Biggerstaff 1961: 9).<sup>87</sup>

There were two streams of traditional schools in nineteenth-century China. Formal education was pursued by those anticipating the imperial examination route. After a few years of rudimentary instruction, if the lineage (or parents) decided to continue investing in the child’s education, the pupil progressed to the district academy (書院). This was where he learned poetry, calligraphy,

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<sup>85</sup> Those who failed had a few choices: either to re-sit the exams or, in many cases, be relegated to the countryside to tutor the next generation of candidates. During late imperial China, other options surfaced. Would-be scholar-officials, like ZHENG Guanying (鄭觀應 1842–1922), began to turn to commerce or became intellectual reformers outside officialdom like LIANG Qichao (梁啟超 1873–1929).

<sup>86</sup> Cantonese speakers also called these kinds of schools “bok bok chai” (卜卜齋), a name alluding to the sound that tutors make when striking wooden blocks in accompaniment to the students’ recitation of verses (Ming 1996: 15).

<sup>87</sup> Since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the three most popular primers were: *The Trimetrical Classic* (三字經); *One Hundred Surnames* (百家姓); and *One Thousand Characters* (千字文). Collectively abbreviated as “three hundred thousand” (三百千), these texts were all used for learning Chinese characters. Their content was all produced before the Song Dynasty (960–1279 A.D) (Bai 2001: 133). During the late Qing, an elementary curriculum would consist of *The Trimetrical Classic* and the *One Thousand Characters*; at the intermediate level, *One Hundred Surnames* and Tang Dynasty poems (唐詩); at the advanced stage, the *Four Books and Five Classics* (四書五經). The *Four Books* included *Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, and *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Five Classics* included *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. William Ayers noted that the curriculum for the imperial examinations underwent gradual refinement, with the Han Dynasty contributing to the classics, while the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) contributed to poetry (Ayers 1971: xiii); and the Ming (1368–1644), to the so-called “eight-legged essays” (see next footnote). A specialist commented that without Western incursion, traditional educational practices in China would only have undergone “change within tradition” (Klein 2014: 214).

philosophy, and eight-legged essays,<sup>88</sup> all of which were key to priming candidates for the imperial examinations.

Since not everybody would sit the imperial examinations, popular education was available at public and clan-funded charitable village schools (義學) at a time when traditional China did not have a concept of mass literacy. Popular education also served another function: baptising pupils into Confucian culture (Leung 1994: 382). Beyond moral education, there were also practical reasons for developing some literacy skills, as Evelyn Rawski's classic study, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*, indicated. One was to gain the ability to read newspapers and books, another was "to avoid being cheated,"<sup>89</sup> but more significantly, many wanted to be educated because they wanted to write letters and to keep financial records (Rawski 1979: 21). Given its many real-world benefits, traditional education continued to be favoured through much of the nineteenth century, including by those thinking of emigrating.

Nonetheless, this did not mean there were no adverse implications of the traditional educational system. Late imperial reformers who went through the traditional system, like LIANG Qichao, complained that the school was like a prison and its pupils were its prisoners (Bai 2001: 141). In hindsight, its most fatal feature was the indoctrination of Confucian learning over many generations, which reinforced China's stagnant position (Ball 1911: 262). Furthermore, rote memorisation arguably impeded intellectual development, producing literati whose only "weapons" against the Western invaders were their eight-legged essays (Bai 2001: 135). Liang critiqued "unqualified teachers" whom he considered the "epitome of traditional Chinese education as a whole" (Bai 2001: 135). The system's preoccupation with mechanical memorisation of outdated knowledge hampered any real learning, as a former student reminisced:

I just finished the three primers in about a year, not knowing what I was studying. The spoken language of China has outgrown the written; that is, we no longer speak as we write. The difference is like that between the English of today and that of Chaucer's time. (Lee 2006 [1887]: 16)

The lack of room for innovation eventually led to the decline of the imperial education system and ultimately the decline of the empire. Despite a thousand-year long history, traditional learning was

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<sup>88</sup> The eight-legged essays (八股文) were a formalistic structure of prose or argumentative essay that had to be composed and written during the imperial exams.

<sup>89</sup> Inability to read meant that sometimes documents were signed by illiterate people without knowing their conditions.

not only considered by late imperial reformers to be detrimental to the physical development of students but to be intellectually and psychologically paralysing for them (Bai 2001: 141). The stifling conformism of traditional education and the examination system left little room for individual expression (Ball 1911: 262). The system experienced a protracted decline, especially in the late Qing era, before new life was breathed into China's education scene in the early twentieth century. Yet throughout the millennia of its existence, the traditional school system was regarded with a great deal of respect as a form of education, and future generations were inspired to seek it. Another indirect legacy was that the diaspora was motivated to support the construction of new schools in emigrant regions.

## 2. Western Missionary Schools in Late Imperial China

The Jesuits were the first recorded Christian missionaries in China. Upon arriving in the sixteenth century, they played a significant role in cultural exchange and introduced scientific knowledge to imperial China (Laven 2011). Missionary schools first appeared in the 1840s—after the British defeated China in the First Opium War (1839–1842). From this time, and particularly between 1860 and 1895, missionary institutions, such as hospitals and schools, began to emerge in great numbers in the treaty ports in China (Bays 2009: 614).

Western missionaries had focused their activities on the treaty ports in China (Peng 2012: 257).<sup>90</sup> They disseminated biblical knowledge and the catechism among the Chinese by translating them into written Chinese. Following the footsteps of the Jesuits, learning the local language was deemed critical for nineteenth-century missionaries. In Guangzhou, the first missionary school for boys appeared in 1850, and three years later a private school for girls was opened (Peng and Deng 2002: 11). The famous Pui Ying School (培英學校) was established in Guangzhou in 1879 by Protestant missionary-doctor, Henry V. Noyes (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 48–49). Later branches of this Guangzhou-based school appeared in several places, including Jiangmen, Taishan,<sup>91</sup> Hong Kong, and Macao. Shamian<sup>92</sup> was also a popular site in which many missionary

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<sup>90</sup> In the 1920s, the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Shandong had mainly Protestant schools, while Catholic schools were found in Zhili, Jiangsu and Hupei (Wiest 2011).

<sup>91</sup> While Taishan and Jiangmen became well-known *qiaoxiang* regions of the Pearl River Delta, with many diaspora-funded schools in the early twentieth century (see, for example, Yu 1983), it is unclear whether these branches were supported by emigrant funding.

<sup>92</sup> Shamian 沙面島 was a sandbank foreign concession island in Guangzhou.

schools were established due to its large Western resident population (Peng and Deng 2002: 12). In Fuzhou (a treaty port of Fujian), the Anglo-Chinese College (ACC) was founded in 1881 by an American Methodist missionary. Schools established by American missionaries naturally adopted a distinctly American flavour, partly because their teaching materials were originally designed for American students (Peng and Deng 2002: 12). According to Dunch (2001a, 2001b), the ACC—a Protestant establishment—became the largest missionary school in China, as well as the largest school of any kind in Fujian Province at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Schools operated by missionaries provided a pedagogic style and curriculum that was distinct from traditional (Confucian) education. Unlike the authoritarian style of traditional schools, foreign teachers were, by comparison, spirited; they taught by playing sports, games, and organised activities, drawing examples from the Bible and history, as well as singing hymns and other songs in English (Ch'en 1979: 122). Western Protestant organisations, like the Young Men's Christian Association, were a "hotbed for basketball", with the first public matches being reported as early as 1896 (Mechikoff and Estes 2002: 260). Christian colleges in China were considered by a contemporary commentator to be a "small oasis of modern learning in a vast desert of scientific illiteracy" (Deng 1997: 69), despite not necessarily meeting the standards of the Western world at the time. Regardless, these schools were precursors of modernity in China. When Chinese emigrants began building modern schools in their ancestral home decades later as part of their judicious embrace of modernity, as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, they would favour the style of schools originated by the missionaries.

While acting as something of a cradle of Western civilisation in China, missionary schools remained a less preferred option to traditional education in the nineteenth century (Ch'en 1979: 122). Most Chinese missionaries were perceived to be softly spoken "foreign devils" (洋鬼子); their presence in China represented "warts of colonisation" (Deng 1997: 73). Ch'en (1979: 122) believed that missionary schools only attracted those "who would otherwise have had no education at all," such as extremely poor urban boys and destitute, orphan girls (Ch'en 1979: 122). This perception dates to the mid-nineteenth century, when missionaries established orphan homes for abandoned girl babies. Hence, missionary schools initially experienced difficulties in being socially and culturally accepted.



Free tuition, books, lunch, and clothes, as well as scholarships, were gimmicks used to entice their first students (Deng 1997: 34) and everyday missionary school activities, such as Bible reading, physical exercise and singing,<sup>93</sup> failed to be taken seriously by most Chinese (Ch'en 1979: 122; Borthwick 1983: 81, 136, 114). Thus, missionary schools continued to have very little influence on the mainstream population until after the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), when Western knowledge began to be recognised as vital for China's survival. In the first half of the twentieth century, missionary schooling was seen as complementary to, rather than in competition with, traditional instruction.

From the 1880s onward, many parents in the upper echelons of society began sending their children to missionary schools to keep them ahead of their peers. This trend grew in the twentieth century when more urban families with a commercial background noticed the value of foreign language acquisition. For example, at McTyeire School (est. 1892) in Republican Shanghai, the daughters of the Kwok family (founders of the Wing On department stores) attended the same American Methodist missionary school as the famous Soong sisters (Loy-Wilson 2017: 6). As will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, proficiency in English created opportunities in the business world both in China and abroad and was thus of considerable interest to emigrant families (Ch'en 1979: 123; Deng 1997: 33; A. Li 2008: 59). In colonial Hong Kong, English was the *lingua franca* of economic and political power; it helped to sustain government and commercial interests of the colony (Sinn 2012: 34). Elizabeth Sinn showed that missionary schools played a crucial role in the creation of Hong Kong as an important node between the villages in the Pearl River Delta and California during the nineteenth-century gold rush (Sinn 2012: 34). In this role it supported the growth of the Cantonese diaspora in the Pacific littorals (Yu 2018; Williams 2018), including in Australia, and the subsequent transformation of the ancestral home in the Pearl River Delta into a remittance landscape (Bagnall 2013; Yow 2013; Cheng 2019a), in which diaspora-funded schools featured prominently (see Cheng 2020).

Missionary schools were officially recognised by the Ministry of Education in 1906 (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 48; Ch'en 1979: 122). Although they were exempted from registration and hence could operate, the imperial government did not have the means to financially support them (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 48). And since the

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<sup>93</sup> Traditionally, singing, particularly singing girls, was associated with immorality (Borthwick 1983: 81).

deficiencies of governmental schools were too dire to ignore, missionary school admissions grew. By 1911, they attracted students who desired to master foreign languages and wealthier families treated them as stepping-stones for their children’s further studies abroad (Sun and Johnson 1990: 211; Ch’en 1979: 124–125).

Despite thousands of Chinese parents willing to enrol their students in missionary schools, nationalist supporters perceived them as “slave factories” that transformed “Chinese youth into obedient puppets” (Dunch 2001b: 114), or as “the running dogs” of the expansionist Western imperialist powers (Lutz 1976: 407). During the 1920s and the 1930s, missionary schools in China faced secularisation by the nationalist government (Lutz 1976: 396). Regulations requiring the removal of religious texts and motifs from the schools as well as a ban of Sunday service inevitably made missionaries question their continued relevance in China (Deng 1997: 80). During the anti-Christian Movement in the 1920s, Christian religion became a problem. The anti-imperialists regarded it as teaching “men obedience, which is the moral code of slaves” and saw Christian practices as “superstitions [that] hinder the search for [intellectual and scientific] truth” (Lutz 1976: 400).



**Figure 3.3** Zhenxian School (甄賢社學), the first school funded by an overseas Chinese in China (est. 1872) in Nanping town, present-day Xiangzhou District, Zhuhai. (Source: Zhuhai Municipal Government 2020.)

Despite widespread disapproval by Chinese nationalists, there were many beneficiaries of missionary schools. These included notable figures like WANG Tao (王韜 1828–1897), Dr. SUN Yat-sen (1866–1925), and YUNG Wing (1828–1912). Yung would not have been educated had it not been for missionaries in Macao, whose school he attended from the age of seven (Yung 2006 [1909]: 1; Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 546).<sup>94</sup> In 1847, Yung, a Heung San native, was sent to America by missionaries and in 1854 he graduated from Yale University as the first Chinese graduate in American history, later leading a transnational life between America and China (Yin 2004: 68). Furthermore, Yung is credited as establishing Zhenxian School, the first modern diaspora-funded school in his native home in 1872 (Yin 2004: 68; Peterson 2011: 14).<sup>95</sup> Figure 3.3 shows that although Yung must have seen alternative school-building traditions in America, his school in Nanping (南屏) town, Heung San, was surprisingly not at all foreign looking. Instead, the single-storey grey-brick structure, supposedly made of the best materials of the time (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 345), was not unlike other premodern structures found throughout southern China, such as study halls and temples.

Many graduates of missionary schools in China found satisfactory employment in the treaty ports where their competence in English and familiarity with Western mores was valued (Lutz 1976: 404). For example, many found employment in missionary schools, hospitals, and churches. The ACC in Fuzhou attributed its low completion rates to the relative ease with which students could get high-paying positions even before graduation. Combined mastery of English and classical Chinese resulted in employment opportunities for many former mission school students in foreign firms, customs offices, and postal services (Ch'en 1979: 123; Dunch 2001b: 117). With regard to female graduates, whose schooling reflected the missionary aspiration of educating girls, many, in Ch'en's (1979: 123) words, became "intelligent Christian wives and mothers renewing the Christians of the next generation." Influenced by biblical teachings, graduates from missionary schools such as the Anglo-Chinese College in Fuzhou, sought to bring "light to the world" through a life of service (Dunch 2001b: 110).

Despite the opposition of nationalist reformers, mentioned above, missionary education can be argued to have been an important catalyst for reforming China. It confronted many aspects of

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<sup>94</sup> Macao is 4km from Nanping town, Yung Wing's home village.

<sup>95</sup> The school's name 甄賢社學 literally means "Moulding Virtuous Individuals."

traditional culture (Deng 1997: 31). For example, missionaries established schools and colleges for Chinese women in China (Deng 1997: 70). Beyond that, missionary education was both a pioneer of Western learning in China and one of the earliest contributors to China's gradual modernisation. When the imperial journalist and reformer LIANG Qichao (1873–1929) wrote his serialised article “General Discussion on Reform” (變法通議), which he wrote from 1896 to 1899 in a premier Shanghai newspaper he founded (Bai 2001: 124; Sun 2002: 33),<sup>96</sup> he most likely based his knowledge of Western education on missionary schools in China, since at that time he had not travelled abroad (Bai 2001: 126). Although the missionaries had probably not considered nurturing emigration to overseas locations, they inadvertently assisted China in the transition to the modern world by imparting knowledge that made it easier for potential *huaqiao* to venture abroad. In turn, this escalated the pace of change that led southern China into the twentieth century as members of the diaspora began founding modern schools in their native places.

### 3. Early Modern Schools in Late Imperial China

The imperial court reacted to the territorial aggression of Western powers partly through a program of educational modernisation, yet their response was different to the modern education offered by the missionaries. After successive defeats in the Opium Wars, the imperial government decided that Western learning, especially that which related to improvement in operating military technology, was desirable. This next phase could be described as China's own foray into Western modernity.

During the First Opium War (1839–1842), Commissioner LIN Zexu (林則徐 1785–1850)—who was assigned to eradicate the opium trade in Canton, and whose actions in 1839–1840 precipitated the Opium War—was dumbstruck by the technological superiority of the British (Faure 2009: 492). Following the conflict, he embarked on a program to gather reliable information about the modern world outside China. One of the legacies of this time was the *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* 《海國圖誌》—the first major geopolitical study in Chinese, compiled by the Confucian scholar-official WEI Yuan (魏源 1794–1857) (Leonard 1984: 92). Before its publication

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<sup>96</sup> The newspaper that Liang Qichao founded in Shanghai in 1896, *Shinwu bao* 《時務報》, has been translated into various English titles, including *Chinese Progress* (Zurndorfer 2008: 29) and *Current Affairs* (Bai 2001: 124).

in 1843, China's knowledge of the outside world was minimal. In 1894, the English Reverend John Arthur Turner wrote:

The Geography of the Chinese is of a very rudimentary kind, and the native maps betray a profound ignorance of the size, portions, and situation of the various countries. America and Africa are omitted altogether; China is surrounded by water, while England, France, India, etc., are arranged as headlands and islands along the western coast of the Middle Kingdom. Some parts are supposed to be inhabited by fabulous animals and men. (Turner 1982 [1894]: 161)

The *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* has been considered the foremost work in cartography of the maritime world during the Qing period (Leonard 1984); its circulation had a profound impact on those who could access it. A historian of modern Chinese history has described it as “the first influential Chinese work to warn of the growth of Western commercial and naval power in maritime Asia (Nanyang)” (Leonard 2009: 67). Successive generations of reformers, like ZHENG Guanying and ZHANG Zhidong, read this seminal work covering world geography, history, politics, religion, modern science, and technology and were intrigued with its contents. Yet there were no immediate wider consequences, as cultural pride still dictated that the empire was uninterested in new knowledge, a belief that was maintained until after the “Self-Strengthening Movement” (1860–1894) ended (Biggerstaff 1961: 4–5).<sup>97</sup>

Despite the recognised need to quickly modernise imperial China, during the time of the Self-Strengthening Movement it was recognised that China was deficient in modern technological knowledge and general knowledge and competency in Western languages. While some foreigners were able to communicate in Chinese and even read classical texts, as historian Knight Biggerstaff (1961: 13) noted, even educated Chinese knew little about the West and most could not speak in any European language. So, from 1860 to 1894, specialised schools for teaching foreign languages, military and technical knowledge, were established throughout China (Biggerstaff 1961). These specialist schools were established to train translators and diplomats, technical and military personnel, as well as to modernise military training (including in navigation and mapping). The spirit of the campaign was epitomised by the Chinese national reformer ZHANG Zhidong's famous phrase, “Chinese learning for essence and Western knowledge for practical application.”

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<sup>97</sup> This period of modernisation was later known in the West as the “Self-Strengthening Movement” (自強運動), whereas in China it was called “Westernisation Movement” or “Western Affairs Movement” (洋務運動).

(中學為體，西學為用). The ultimate purpose of the Self-Strengthening Movement was to supplement the deficiencies of the existing imperial educational system, rather than replace it.

These early modern institutes were plagued by problems. The budget for Fujian Arsenal Academy (船政學堂), for example, was considered “liberal” at the time of its opening in 1866 but, a year after its inception, unforeseen financial troubles arose that continued for a decade (Pong 1987: 148). Despite the high wages offered for teachers, occasionally the lack of expertise in recruitment resulted in hiring incompetent foreign experts, some of whom were not skilled teachers; moreover, some died or left before their tenure expired, leaving a void that could not be filled (Biggerstaff 1961: 50, 52, 72). Also, initial budget overruns meant that further expansion was comprised or prematurely curtailed (Pong 1987: 121; Elman 2004: 301).

Besides the above problems, early modern schools aimed at primary or secondary-aged students remained unpopular for cultural reasons. A historian of modern Chinese education noted that “neither the conservative gentry or unlettered masses had a high opinion of the new schools” (Borthwick 1983: 63). There was the mistaken belief that Western learning could be acquired quickly and easily—and done so within months—but if done too early in life, it could hamper the learning of Chinese (Borthwick 1983: 59). Moreover, there was general mistrust in Western teachers, many Chinese suspecting they would not disclose their superior knowledge and military technology to China (Biggerstaff 1961: 72). In the 1880s, a minister in the Chinese imperial government told a friend that “no gentleman with a sense of honour cared to learn about foreign affairs” (Biggerstaff 1961: 71). Furthermore, some students of foreign languages reported that they were labelled as “traitors” (Biggerstaff 1961: 71). Thus, the Tongwen Guan (同文館) (est. 1861)—the first language school in Beijing—not only had trouble recruiting promising students and retaining foreign teachers but also in placing its graduates in positions of influence (Biggerstaff 1961: 32, 41, 140).

The problem with recruitment was that although high stipends were offered to students and these government schools supposedly promised an easier path into the bureaucracy, only those boys who were considered too lazy or stupid for other careers, or whose families no longer held positions of influence, enrolled in the modern government schools (Biggerstaff 1961: 140; Borthwick 1983: 63). Since the imperial examination system continued during the entire period of the existence of these early modern schools, the traditional route to bureaucracy continued to be

preferred. Biggerstaff (1961: 21) pointed out that, “in spite of the Imperial endorsement, [nobody] would risk jeopardising his career by pursuing a course that departed from tradition.” Besides receiving high stipends for their Western studies, some students continued to study for the imperial exams and conveniently left their Western studies whenever a better opportunity presented itself. This led to a constant feeling of inferiority in these early modern schools that shattered the students’ morale (Biggerstaff 1961: 210; Elman 2004: 283).



**Figure 3.4** Guangya Academy (廣雅書院), est. 1888 in Guangzhou (Source: Tencent 2014.)

Besides the modern government training schools mentioned so far, a new type of school that was transitional between the traditional and the modern was also emerging. Turning more specifically to modernising trends in the region of this study area, one of the most significant establishments in this period was the Guangya Academy, founded in 1888. Breaking the tradition of establishing academies in urban centres, a spacious site 5 *li* (approx. 2.5km)<sup>98</sup> northwest of Canton was selected for the campus (Peng 2015: 67, 68; Ho 2005: 11). The main building, as shown in Figure 3.4, was a two-storey structure that offered cross-ventilation and natural lighting, features that were considered conducive to learning (Peng 2015: 71). Around the campus, a high perimeter wall was built to remove students from all possible distractions (Peng 2015: 73). In the centre of the academy was a ceremonial hall to honour notable ancestors, connecting students who were the

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<sup>98</sup> The *li* 里 is also known as the Chinese mile. It varied in measurement over time but was about a third of an English mile.

academy's future with esteemed educators from the past (Peng 2015: 70). History shows that Guangya Academy would become the premier middle school of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, and a forerunner of the modern secondary school system in China (Liu 2015: 95; Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 43)

Guangya Academy was a new type of school that amalgamated traditional and modern learning. Its campus housed a relatively large residential intake for the year of its establishment of 200 students, with a hundred originating from Guangdong Province and another hundred from Guangxi Province. In the mind of ZHANG Zhidong, the founder, was the idea that communal living meant teachers could easily discipline students and students could inspire and compete with their peers (Ayers 1971: 58). The students there studied both new and old subjects. Western-inspired courses included those on science and technology subjects, but pupils were also expected to learn the classics. The school had its own printing press, the Guangya Printing Office (廣雅書局), which opened in the same year as the academy and remained operational until 1908 (Ayers 1971: 59–60). The printing office facilitated the publication of historical works and classical commentaries, yet it remains unclear whether modern works were also published.

While the Self-Strengthening Movement lasted three decades (1860–1894), it produced limited results. The early government schools were not considered an integral part of China's development as they did not provide mass education. Nor did the Movement completely reform the educational system.<sup>99</sup> Its partial impact was limited to the several hundred students involved, a rather insufficient figure considering that the entire country needed to be modernised (Deng 1997: 20). However, some progress was made. The early modern schools, instead of training scientists and engineers, were notable for training Chinese translators whose work would propagate modern ideas (Elman 2004: 290; Biggerstaff 1961: 153) such as, for example, YAN Fu (嚴復 1853–1921), who became an accomplished translator after studying at the Fujian Arsenal Academy and then in the United Kingdom (Doar 2009). He is credited with publishing on a variety of modern topics, including Darwin's paradigm-shifting theory of natural selection. As foreign language graduates

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<sup>99</sup> In 1887, foreign learning was incorporated into the civil service examinations, although only as an optional component (Biggerstaff 1961: 28).



translated and published Western science, technical papers, and international law, they laid the foundations for an upcoming intellectual revolution (Biggerstaff 1961: 147, 152).

Another legacy of this period was that these schools paved the way for diaspora philanthropy. During the 1877–1878 famine in North China, the statesman LI Hongzhang (李鴻章 1823–1901) approached Chinese merchants abroad for relief aid (Peterson 2005: 94). Chinese *huaqiao* merchants in the British and Dutch colonies of Southeast Asia responded favourably (Peterson 2005: 94, 100). As emigration was not sanctioned by the imperial government at that time, philanthropic activities were a way for these emigrants to reorientate their wealth towards the public good, inverting the image of the overseas Chinese as a traitor and showing him to be a loyal subject of the imperial court (Peterson 2005: 93). Goodman (1995: 119–120) suggests that this moment was the first occasion in modern Chinese history when national co-operation occurred between reformist officials and overseas Chinese merchants, overcoming their ideological differences as respectively Confucianist and modernist. This early evidence of diaspora philanthropy could be viewed as the first instance of international co-operation, galvanised around China's national concerns.

The Self-Strengthening Movement ended when the empire was put to the test again, this time against the Japanese navy in 1894. The dire results of that conflict, and the events it triggered, such as the Hundred Days Reforms in 1898 and the Boxer Rebellion in 1899–1901, were not only the decline of the empire but also a complete overhaul of an outdated educational system at the turn of the twentieth century. At last, the late imperial government agreed that unless the examination system was abolished and a comprehensive educational reform occurred, China was doomed. The idea now circulated that improving weapons should be secondary to improving people; after all, it was people, both women and men, who made powerful weapons, and who could be more powerful than armaments (Shi 2016: 214).

In hindsight, one of the main things undermining the Self-Strengthening Movement's success was the treatment of Western learning as a mere add-on. Modern government schools of the time were a half-hearted attempt to modernise China, flawed because it was impossible to “Westernise halfway” (Rowe and Kuan 2002: 7). Furthermore, as Biggerstaff (1961: 62) pointed out, Western military training “could not be mastered without a command of Western languages.” The issue here was that most Chinese students had no knowledge of any foreign language, and beyond that,

they lacked understanding of affairs outside China, which made it impossible for them to properly defend China (Biggerstaff 1961: 62, 75).

#### 4. New-Style Schools in Late Imperial and Early Republican China

It was not until 1898 that major changes occurred in the Chinese educational scene. During the Hundred Days Reform of that year, Emperor Guangxu (光緒帝 1871–1908) issued roughly 200 decrees (Wu 2010:71), one of which concerned converting the district academies (書院) into new schools (學堂), in line with a new curriculum that was practical, Western, and where learning Chinese classics was unnecessary (Hsiao 1935: 23; Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 52; Ding 2001: 166).

The most influential work to emerge at the time was written by the diplomat, HUANG Zunxian (黃遵憲 1848–1905), whose first post was to China's first embassy in Tokyo (1877–1882). As Huang was China's leading Japanese specialist, Chey (1968–1969: 28) considered that “if Japan was to be their beacon on the road to reform, Huang was the experienced guide to lead them.” Huang penned a pioneering treatise about Japan's modernisation, the *Annals of Japan* 《日本國志》 in 1887 (Kamachi 1981). China's choice of Japan as a model for the transition to modernity was sensible. As a strong uncolonised nation-state in Asia, it was the first East Asian state to modernise without being Westernised; moreover, Japan had a long history of Chinese (specifically Confucian) influence (Bai 2001: 126; Mitchell 2000a: xi; Chey 1968–1969: 28). In terms of education, in the wake of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan had demonstrated that it was possible to rapidly improve the quality of education, especially in the areas of science and technology.

Although the *Annals of Japan* provided much-needed inspiration for China's reform, it was decades before it was widely read. Specifically, this text contributed towards the establishment of early Western-style education—a type of education that was based on a Japanese model, whose own precedents were from France (since 1872) and the United States (post-1879) (Chou 2014: 94). In other words, Japanese education reform during the Meiji period had an enormous influence on reform policies in China in the 1890s (Chey 1968–1969). Yet it was only after the Sino–Japanese War (1894–1895) that late Qing reformers, such as KANG Youwei (康有為 1858–1927) and

LIANG Qichao (梁啟超 1873–1929), presented reform proposals to the imperial court. Despite their initial successes, Empress Dowager Cixi (慈禧太后 1861–1908) rescinded these changes in 1900. But two years later, a decree for modern public education was again announced and a modern public-school system was established in 1902 (Peterson and Hayhoe 2001: 1).

Besides Kang and Liang, another reformer was ZHENG Guanying (1842–1922). Inspired by Western educational practices and the work of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Zheng advocated that the purpose of modern education was “to encourage students’ interests in learning, to achieve enlightenment, instead of making them suffer” (Wu 2010: 199). Zheng’s curriculum emphasised the expression of ideas concretely, not merely copying the ancients as had been customarily practised (Wu 2010: 200). He also advocated the importance of physical training. From the 1910s, callisthenics and military drills, as practised in Japan, were a characteristic of the school physical education program (Morris 2004: 71). In 1907, it was agreed that if China were to modernise, it would certainly depend on educating women; since that time, girls could formally be enrolled in schools (Bailey 2001).

In the early 1920s, influences from outside Japan became more apparent. American educator John Dewey (1859–1952), who visited China in May 1919, spent two years lecturing across the country (Reynolds 2001: 24). Breaking with the traditional authoritarian model of education, Dewey advocated a democratic relationship between students and teachers as well as a nurturing of the individual mind (Ding 2001: 166). His most important pedagogical theories included the promotion of creativity and child-centred education. Soviet influences also appeared in the 1920s, including in the areas of physical fitness, hygiene, and the instilling of national identity. At this point, the desire to create a new universal citizen (新民) for the new nation-state would come hand in hand with the maturation of China’s nationalist modernity that was embryonic under the Self-Strengthening Movement but had full support under the new educational reforms.

The new educational system of the early twentieth century espoused extra requirements. First, in the first decade, the Qing Ministry of Education required a school in every village (VanderVen 2005: 209). It also specified that purpose-built premises were needed for schooling (the relevance of which to the development of new schools in Zhongshan will be covered in the following chapters). Second, the new curriculum was fixed: it adopted a fixed period of study and annual promotion from one grade to another, depending on marks obtained in examinations—elements

that were absent in the previous system (Borthwick 1983: 41). Third, the new curriculum taught new knowledge of all kinds, from history to geography, the sciences and physical education. Physical education was deemed necessary for helping children to be strong and healthy, qualities associated with the ideal of the new Chinese citizen (Morris 2004: 76). Thus, one requirement for new-style schools was a sports field (操場) large enough for thirty active children to run around, perform callisthenics and conduct marching drills (VanderVen 2005: 209). Given these requirements, ideally, a new school would be built from scratch, which was what the diaspora ultimately did, as elaborated in Chapter 4. Yet, most rural communities lacked the funds, so there was considerable variation across China in terms of complying with the new educational demands.

Historian Elizabeth VanderVen noted that while all villages wanted schools, the expense of building one often placed heavy burdens on community reserves (2005: 98, 206). Rural areas often carried the double burden of paying taxes to support schools in the towns and cities, while bearing the entire cost of their own schools (VanderVen 2005: 229). This meant that a school in every village was both a financial and tax burden (Chauncey 1992: 210). Even if the community could not afford a new school, they were often very willing to collectively mobilise the combined resources of two villages, for example, to build a school situated between them. The result was not always convenient, as some students might have had to walk four *li* (approx. 2km) to school; when it rained, floodwaters in the summer terrified them (VanderVen 2005: 225). Another consequence was that existing structures, like temples, ancestral halls, or private dwellings and shops, were often converted for school use (VanderVen 2005: 209). In the emigrant localities, such as Zhongshan (as shown in the next two chapters), diaspora-funded schools tended to be much closer to achieving the aspirations of the reformers than rural schools elsewhere.

In the early twentieth century, the best-endowed schools were regarded as “trophy of modernity” (Chauncey 1992: 210). They featured classrooms with glass windows, playgrounds, art supplies, and scientific laboratory equipment. In her history of Nantong (南通 a city on the Yangtze River), SHAO Qin argued that the new school was where many new activities first took hold, including sports meets, excursions, and public-speaking events (Shao 2004: 160). A local city newspaper reported “students walking in neat lines, singing along the way with good spirit and that the onlookers gave them ‘warm applause’” (Shao 2004: 161). While parents may have considered these novel components frivolous, Shao (2004: 161) argued that such informal displays of “exhibitory modernity” were “the very essence of modern education.” Clearly, education was being

modernised incrementally and most palpably in those better-endowed schools, such as in Nantong. Meanwhile, many less-endowed schools struggled with the basics, since many issues could not be easily resolved, such as the hiring of teachers and the purchase of textbooks, clocks, charts and maps, and blackboards (Chauncey 1992: 208). Although tables and chairs could be manufactured locally, it was more difficult to get specialised items outside the treaty ports (Borthwick 1983: 124). Furthermore, subjects like foreign languages, science and physical education were frequently omitted from the curriculum (Borthwick 1983: 126; Ho 1991: 95). Thus, the modern educational experience varied considerably across the country. The specific experience of modern schooling in Zhongshan will be the focus of Chapter 5.

Aside from the funding difficulties, some communities felt alienated by the new curriculum. Many parents thought that the introduction of physical education was a disguise for military conscription (Borthwick 1983: 126). Besides, physical activity in China was commonly associated with the work of servants or peasants. Some parents also felt that new schools were “not for the likes of us” as they were against their children learning foreign habits, such as singing or playing games, or thought that wearing school uniforms was unnecessary (Borthwick 1983: 81). One *sisbu* tutor stubbornly rejected teaching geography, stating that “he had not converted to the foreign religion” (Borthwick 1983: 64). In 1938, some peasants who had an affinity with the old system were spotted purchasing copies of the old “three hundred thousand” (Borthwick 1983: 123). Some parents even believed that the civil-service exams would someday return and that the *sisbu* would prepare students for the future, whenever it returned, rather than the fancy new subjects (Borthwick 1983: 81). These developments resulted in the emergence of a “two-tiered education system” (VanderVen 2012: 58), one tier consisting of the new-style schools, the other consisting of the reformed *sisbu*. The latter innovatively synthesised elements of tradition and modernity, the old and the new, Chinese and Western, while addressing the needs of the poor and conservative, who found solace in the more familiar *sisbu* that was not only culturally familiar but also cheaper. They also thought that there was no need for school uniforms or fancy subjects involving extra expenses, including the need to buy modern textbooks (Borthwick 1983: 80–81). So, the days of *sisbu* were over in name, but not in fact. This was the case in Zhongshan, where “old schools” continued to predominate until new schools were built.

Another impediment to educational reform was the shortage of qualified teachers. The most viable teachers were graduates of missionary schools, but demand for them far exceeded supply (Edmunds 1919: 76). These deficiencies meant that having girls’ schools run by female staff, as

proposed in the reforms, was mostly unviable (McElroy 2001: 356). Some schools continued to hire conservative, old-style Confucian tutors, who may have been substandard (VanderVen 2005: 226; Borthwick 1983: 126). In 1903, it was proposed that teaching credentials were needed for primary school teachers. Before this, it was assumed that secondary school graduation was the only prerequisite for primary school instruction (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 50). “Normal Colleges,” as they were known in China, emerged as specialised institutions to train new teachers. In 1905, one such college enrolled 240 Guangdong and Guangxi students aspiring to be primary school teachers in a 1.5-year course (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 50). But upon completion of their studies, these students were unlikely to pursue poorly paid teaching positions (Thøgersen 2001: 243). This likewise happened in southern Fujian, resulting in the Singaporean Chinese migrant TAN Kah Kee (CHEN Jiageng 陳嘉庚 1874–1961) taking the initiative to research establishing a normal college in Xiamen in 1914 to train poor local children who were regarded as more likely to pursue a teaching career, rather than the usual candidates, such as sons of the gentry or merchants who often bribed admission (Tan 1994: 13–19).

In 1919 and the years after, the May Fourth Movement favoured the use of the modern vernacular over classical Chinese—a shift that benefited the 80% of the population who had no use for the former (Ding 2001: 171). Although popular magazines and newspapers began to adopt modern vernacular Chinese, due to the widespread illiteracy their circulation was limited (Biggerstaff 1966: 616). For unimpeded access to reading modern materials, knowledge of an estimated four to seven thousand Chinese characters was deemed necessary (Peterson 1997: 10). By 1922, all primary school textbooks were published in vernacular Chinese (Ding 2001: 171). Being a “feature of modern culture” (Zarrow 2015: 5), the new textbooks introduced novel terms and concepts, such as patriotism (愛國), railroads (鐵路), telephones (電話), commercial companies (公司), museums (博物館), and parks (公園) (Culp 2008: 10). These new terms reflected the large-scale changes in society during the late Qing and early Republican era. Beyond that, printed culture helped create what Anderson (2016 [1983]) describes as the “imagined community” of the modern nation-state.

While the Nationalist government, formed in 1911, had successfully removed an outdated educational system and empire, rapid social changes left a void that could not be easily filled in the dawn of a new era. Curran (2005) notes that a dilemma was that graduates were no longer well-versed in the Confucian classics, nor were they technically sophisticated enough to be leaders of

the nation's commercial and industrial frontier. As a result, graduates tended to either be unemployed or to find jobs irrelevant to their education.

Since the main beneficiaries of the educational reform were urban residents, the reform did little for the countryside (Edmunds 1919: 78; Stapleton 2000: 117; Ho 2005: 11), with emigrant areas such as Zhongshan being an exception. In the rural parts of the Pearl River Delta—where overseas emigration was prominent—the lack of educational progress created an opportunity for the diaspora to demonstrate their patriotism. As examined in the following chapter, the Zhongshan diaspora in Australia greatly contributed to the tremendous school-building frenzy that occurred in the ancestral towns and villages of Zhongshan in the 1920s and 1930s.

## 5. Community-Run (*Minban*) Schools in the People's Republic

Before the proclamation of the People's Republic in 1949, very few children in rural areas had the opportunity to attend a functioning primary school, much less complete secondary schooling (Davis-Friedmann 1984: 213). To counter the rising social inequality, after the Revolution, Chairman of the Communist Party MAO Zedong (1893–1976) proclaimed that the collective spirit should rise over individual expression in education (Unger 1984: 95; Cleverley 1985: 51); his proletarian viewpoint reflected a unique brand of revolutionary modernity that was orientated towards the countryside (Sun and Johnson 1990: 212). Influenced by the Soviet Union, the Communist Revolution aimed to flatten the educational pyramid by eradicating class differences and increasing opportunities for the poor (Unger 1984: 94).

The “wipe out illiteracy” campaigns in the 1950s were, however, unrealistic (Peterson 1997: 85–102). A major issue was that before the revolution, China's impoverished villagers had generally never attended school. This made basic literacy, not to mention universal education, “an extremely ambitious goal” (Davis-Friedmann 1984: 213). Besides this, the non-alphabetic nature of the Chinese language made it impractical to adopt Soviet literacy plans (Peterson 1997: 109–110; Ding 2001: 168). The script represented an almost insurmountable barrier for most Chinese peasants, who had neither money nor time required to memorise the characters (Peterson 1997: 7–8). To resolve widespread illiteracy, a state-sanctioned linguistic engineering program was adopted (Ji 2004). It included the introduction of simplified characters, the adoption of the Beijing dialect of Mandarin as the national standard spoken language (*Putonghua*) and the use of a new phonetic

system for transcription, known as Pinyin. Despite these efforts, up until the end of the Mao era (1976), the new regime was never successful in reducing the “two-line struggle,” with enduring fault lines persisting between the elite and the masses, the city and the countryside, and the coastal area and the hinterland (Pepper 1990: 187–188), although these gaps were smaller than in the decades before 1949 (Davis-Friedmann 1984: 219).

After 1952, funding shortfalls further restricted educational subsidies to city schools, meaning rural education became a lower priority for the government (Peterson 1994: 116–117). Yet, the diaspora continued to provide limited support for education in the early years of Communist China (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 300). According to a Zhongshan-based historian interviewed for this study, the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School, founded in Shekki in 1954, was one of the few schools to be created by the diaspora at this time. This school was for the most part established by Nanyang (South-East Asian) Chinese who had returned to live in China for their own children, with a small number of retirees from Australia living in Zhongshan’s South District also contributing.<sup>100</sup> Overall, though, diaspora philanthropy declined dramatically after the founding of the People’s Republic, especially during the Cultural Revolution period from 1966 until the commencement of the economic reform period in 1978.

Besides the limited diaspora support,<sup>101</sup> in the mid-1950s, *minban* (民辦) or “community-run” schools began to supplement the limited number of state-run schools. These makeshift schools were far from ideal. Peterson describes them as “built of nothing,” resulting in a common complaint that countryside schools were “not like real schools” (Peterson 1994: 85). *Minban* schools reported high absenteeism, not only because students tended to show less interest but also because they knew in advance that they had fewer prospects than their urban counterparts, partly because new government policies meant that movement from rural to urban areas was strictly limited. Many *minban* schools in the countryside were short-lived and some closed less than a year after their founding (Peterson 1997: 33).

One of the most visible Soviet influences on China’s socialist education was the part-work-part-study program. It notably condensed formal learning in the classroom while narrowing the gap

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (historian), Zhongshan, 8 August 2018.

<sup>101</sup> After 1949, strict controls on entry and exit of people and capital meant the “unbounded movement [that the *huaqiao* once enjoyed] had come to an end” (Peterson 2011: 27).



between manual and mental labour (Sun and Johnson 1990: 213; Peterson 1994: 117; Murphy 2004: 6). In integrating productive labour into the curriculum, Mao condemned the traditional divide between mental and manual labour, particularly the traditional Chinese disdain for manual work (Peterson 1997: 180). Rather than treating the classroom as the only place of learning, as in the past (Figure 3.5) learning was considered boundless and progressively more society-centred (Chen 1981: 98–99). The factory and the farm were where students met other kinds of experienced “teachers” (who were not necessarily trained as teachers per se). As agricultural production was partly mechanised and modernised, students learned to repair combustion engines and grow new varieties of crops (Han 2001: 74). The emphasis of learning shifted to focus on identifying and solving real-world problems.



**Figure 3.5** During the 1960s and 1970s, participation in agriculture was part and parcel of school life in China (Source: *Cheung Kok Village School's School History Booklet, 1930–2011*, p.17).

The early phase of the Cultural Revolution saw the closure of all schools in 1966. Primary and secondary education was re-established after two or three years, with higher learning institutes resuming between 1970 and 1972 (Christie and Chey 1972: 90; Sun and Johnson 1990: 212–213). After the schools resumed, the total length of schooling (primary and secondary) shrank from twelve to nine or ten years (Chen 1981: 223; Sun and Johnson 1990: 213). The extensive expansion of *minban* primary and secondary schools helped flatten the education pyramid (Pepper 1980: 2, 7; Peterson 1994: 116). Figure 3.6 shows the type of *minban* schools that farmers built in the villages of Zhongshan in the 1970s. Yet the rapid mass expansion of education came at the expense of quality. Later commentators described the ill-conceived reform as a “decade of turmoil” (Deng

1997: 112) that produced a so-called “lost generation” of students (Chen 1981: 206, 223; Han 2001: 59).



**Figure 3.6** A communal hall and minban school built in the 1970s in Duntou village (敦陶村), Shaxi township, Zhongshan. Now it is in a state of disrepair, awaiting demolition. (Photo by Denis Byrne, 21 December 2017.)

Although the outcome was generally negative during the Cultural Revolution, as education in the cities went backwards, some changes took place in the less developed areas, such as the countryside. Between 1968 and 1975, an estimated twelve to seventeen million secondary school graduates from the cities were assigned to (or “sent down” to) the countryside to work regardless of their school performance (see, for example, Bernstein 1977; Xu 2019). The purpose has been described as aiming to ease widespread urban unemployment and to defuse the bigotry and disorder caused by student-led Red Guards, as well as to reduce the urban-rural gap and to re-educate urban youth who had been “contaminated” by bourgeois thinking (Rosen 1981, 1982; Chan 1985). In one reported case, these “children of Mao” missed out on college but enabled their rural cousins to get an opportunity they would never otherwise have had: to complete secondary school (Han 2001: 67). Many students, both from rural and urban origins, had lamented at this time that studying was useless (Unger 1984: 96). Unsurprisingly, many senior students from urban areas lost interest in their studies; some began to chat or sleep during class, or deliberately sabotaged their classes to vent their frustrations (Unger 1984: 96–97). Still, educational

developments under Mao broke new ground. China's primary school system expanded enormously, with nearly 400 million graduating between 1949 and 1982. Besides this, secondary education became easier to attain than in the past (Peterson 1994: 120). In 1974, China's educational program was, according to Pepper (1996: 1), "the closest to the World Bank's model program for a developing country."

However, an unintended legacy of the era was an intense desire on the part of students to escape the authoritarian regime. At the height of the infamous Cultural Revolution, hundreds of thousands of youths in the Pearl River Delta region, including local-born and those "sent down," attempted to flee from the harsh realities of the countryside (Yu 2020). The issue was that policies were at odds with the expectations of the Chinese population. Since the days of the imperial examinations, education had been associated with the prospect of social advancement, which for many meant the chance to leave the countryside for better opportunities in the cities. The idea that more education was expected to make peasants better farmers did not resonate well (Peterson 1994: 119). In the minds of peasants, education should lead to upward mobility, not restrict it, and certainly not lead to downward mobility (such as in the case of "sent-down" youth). Schooling was, in other words, a means to "jump over the village gate" (跳出農門) (Peterson 1994: 119). Some boarded fishing vessels as stowaways, others became "freedom swimmers," undertaking a perilous four-to-eight-hour swim, braving danger, hunger, and possible death, to the colonial enclaves of Macao and Hong Kong, which were "safe havens" in the Pearl River Delta (Chen 1981: 199; Chim 2016).<sup>102</sup> Their actions were the cumulative result of a series of unpopular government campaigns.

While education may have generally improved under Mao, this was not necessarily the case in the *qiaoxiang* regions. As will be shown in the upcoming chapters, overseas Chinese funds resulted in education in the pre-1949 *qiaoxiang* being far superior to other rural regions of China. But the diminished economic capital from overseas after the Revolution meant the older schools funded by the diaspora were neglected; some were even repurposed for other uses (Chapter 6). The particularities and shortcomings of this period meant that when members of the diaspora were

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<sup>102</sup> Between 1961 and 1971, the Hong Kong government adopted a "touch base" policy to absorb the massive number of "refugees" and illegal migrants into Hong Kong from the mainland. Those who evaded capture and reached urban areas in Hong Kong, could register for an identity card with the help of relatives. That meant they could gain immunity from repatriation. Under this lenient policy, the number of legalised migrants was 57,524 (Wu and Inglis 1992: 604). Most came by land, but some attempted to swim down the Pearl River. Not all "freedom swimmers" survived. The policy was formally abolished in 1980.

able to return after Mao's death in 1976, the educational needs of their ancestral homes were very clear to them. When Zhongshan folk in Australia who were interviewed for this project, like Stanley Hunt (also see Hunt 2009: 183–186), returned to their ancestral villages in Zhongshan in the last two decades of the twentieth century, they felt compelled to build new schools.

## 6. Priority Schools and Their Counterparts in Post-Mao China

After Mao's death in 1976, the government, headed by de facto leader DENG Xiaoping (鄧小平 1904–1997), led the nation to focus on economic development (Vogel 2011). Deng initiated an “Open Door” Policy in 1978 to open China's doors as widely as possible, so that it could learn from other countries and encourage those who had left to return and reinvest in China's future (Bolt 1996). After the “useless” learning of the repressive Cultural Revolution decade, education in post-Mao China became a new force for change (X. Wang 2003: 12). During the reform period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, rapid economic growth provided more resources for education but also produced a demand for education that served economic development.

Also, during this period, new knowledge and skills were required that had been unknown or unheard of in the past. Despite financial constraints due to a lack of foreign investment at the time, in 1977 Deng instructed that US\$100,000 was to be spent on purchasing contemporary teaching and learning materials from the United States, Britain, Germany, and Japan (Gu 2001c: 115). Many educators took advantage of the country's opening to international travel to go overseas in search of inspiration to redesign the curriculum (Hayhoe 2001: 20). In the mid-1990s, schools saw a shift from “one syllabus, one textbook” to “one syllabus, multiple textbooks” (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 124). As these practices show, educational reform became a key component of Deng's “Four Modernisations” (Sun and Johnson 1990: 213; Vickers and Zeng 2017: 15).<sup>103</sup> Deng also promoted science and technology, making selected prominent Chinese scientists national role models. The featuring of certain scientists in school textbooks reinforced his 1983 slogan that “education must face modernisation, the world, and the future” (教育要面向現代化, 面向世界, 面向未來) (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 112, 138). This mantra was particularly significant to a country that was aspiring to win its first Nobel Prize as a milestone for the new era (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 124).

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<sup>103</sup> The four fields of modernisation (四個現代化) were agriculture, industry, defence, and science and technology.

Besides renewing the pre-1949 emphasis on nurturing talented individuals, professionals who had been ostracised under Mao felt reassured by having a new chance to offer their expertise to modernise their country (Chen 1981: 203).

After China opened to the outside world, it immediately began to learn from other countries (Chen 1981: 196). In the realm of education, this took the form of foreign language acquisition and eventually studying abroad. After the visit of US President Nixon in 1972, English language instruction experienced a surge across China (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 140). Mastering English provided many urban youths with a skill needed to study abroad (Fong 2011). But it also meant students in China were able to absorb information about new developments in the West, following scientific and technological developments there (Gu 2001a: 49-50). Unsurprisingly, English has become a core subject in the school curriculum, alongside Chinese and mathematics (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 130). The effect of this emphasis was most profoundly felt along China's south-eastern coast, where there were already strong links with the diaspora, encouraging local students to think about going offshore for education (Fong 2011; Vickers and Zeng 2017: 200).

To promote economic reform, Deng famously campaigned under the maxim that whether a cat was black or white, so long as it could catch mice it was good enough. He promoted a policy to “let some people get rich first” (Connelly 2009: 410) in line with his pragmatic approach to finding the fastest route to modernisation. In a similar vein, the reformed education allowed some students to get ahead first. Thus, the most remarkable change in the field of education during the early reform era was the concentration of state resources on a few selected “priority (or key-point) schools” (*zhongdian xuexiao* 重點學校). While the aim of achieving excellence quickly by providing greater resources for several schools may sound outlandish, the rationale was that it was justifiable given China's chronic economic situation, as we have seen thus far (Chandra 1987: 131). For the sake of comparison, during 1978–1979, in northern China, a priority school received government subsidies of over 40,000 RMB, a figure that was over eight times that of a regular school at that time (Rosen 1984: 85–86).

These better-endowed priority schools were in high demand. Not only was the quality of teaching higher, but the ratio of teachers to students was also higher (Chandra 1987: 131). Students there could also receive early instruction in English taught by native-speaking expatriate teachers and attend a lavish array of in-class and extracurricular activities, such as computer classes, professional

gymnastics, and athletics (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 208). In Guangdong Province, priority schools established benchmarks that many diaspora-funded schools tried to emulate. Several diaspora-funded schools became exceptional by the standards of the time, and some even became priority schools (Figure 3.7). For example, due to its all-round excellence in education, sports, and the arts, the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School in Shekki (est. 1954) sequentially improved largely with contributions from Hong Kong after the economic reform period.<sup>104</sup> In 1987, it became a “priority middle school” of Zhongshan City (Guangdong Province Regional History Bureau 1995: 302).



**Figure 3.7** The Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School Campus in Shekki after its expansion in 1999. (Source: Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School.)

The pursuit of quality education in the reform period was associated with two major changes. First, the shift to smaller families, and second, the new priority of increasing education levels (Murphy 2004: 8). The amorphous Chinese discourse known as *suzhi* (素質), often translated as “quality,” emerged in the 1980s and was concerned with human quality or quality education, which emphasised holistic personal development (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 8). After the one-child policy was announced in 1978 (Fong 2004), slogans propagated the idea that “Nine years of hardship for parents is a lifetime of happiness for a child” (Murphy 2004: 8). A quality education was a means to securing a good job, a high salary, a better life, and ultimately social mobility in a knowledge economy. Reduced family sizes under the family planning policy intensified these cultural expectations of spending on the single child as an investment in the future of the entire family (Fong 2004, 2011; Vickers and Zeng 2017: 213–214).

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<sup>104</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqu (Zhongshan historian), 19 November 2020.

This intensive capital-driven investment in education, seen in both urban and rural China, disadvantaged families who could not pay. Parents willingly made greater sacrifices in their household expenses to provide for their children (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 210; Chan, Madsen and Unger 2009 [1984]: 370). For example, urban parents were likely to put their children in private tutoring and extracurricular activities, not in the interest of the child's wellbeing or holistic development but to make them more competitive in school (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 334). Meanwhile, many rural children were sent to preschool prematurely, as parents anticipated that their child might need to repeat classes, and it was better to do it earlier than later (Murphy 2004: 16). Reform period development strategically shifted education from an egalitarian emphasis that once aspired to reduce the gap between the countryside and the city to a new focus on quality and competition (Pepper 1990: 2). All this further stratified China. The widening gap put further pressure on the diaspora to constantly upgrade their schools so that they remained superior, but this was not always possible. As discussed in Chapter 6, these expectations arising during a period of aggressive economic growth had an immediate impact on the sustainability and future occupation of Zhongshan diaspora-funded schools.

In the early reform era, persistent lack of government subsidies led to the proliferation of *minban* (community-run) schools (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 204). In fact, Vickers and Zeng (2017: 211) note that capital marketisation resulted in the worst-endowed community-run schools being found in rural areas. In poorly equipped schools, 75% of teachers were locally hired by the people's communes (Pepper 1990: 8). From the early 1990s, however, local governments began to publicly subsidise *minban* schools in order to expand cheap education (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 206, 211). In parallel, many new private schools began to open in the 1990s under the influence of the neoliberal Chinese economy. If an older or less-resourced school closed, students from these schools were redistributed to better-resourced schools, further from home (Murphy 2004: 10–11; Chan, Madsen and Unger 2009 [1984]: 371). This would be the case for several diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan (Chapter 6). By contrast, new boarding-equipped schools allowed children to enjoy learning alongside their peers in larger classrooms that had a range of modern facilities.<sup>105</sup> Yet not everyone appreciated this. Rather than focusing on organised activities, a Chinese educator

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<sup>105</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (Zhongshan historian), 19 November 2020.

who had spent a lifetime in comparative education<sup>106</sup> recommended that students should also have ample time to develop their own interests outside a structured setting (Gu 2001b: 73).

The development of modern education in the final decades of the twentieth century was much faster than it had been in the pre-reform period. In fact, since economic growth demanded a new workforce that had greater skills and knowledge, educational development was comparatively much higher than in other developing countries (Gu 2001a: 38, 41). In the long run, re-education, self-study, and lifelong education were all deemed necessary to maintain the long-term goals of the Four Modernisations (Gu 2001a: 48). Reform-period commercialisation meant that, reminiscent of the Republican period, it was acceptable for those who had enjoyed some financial success, either in China or abroad, to give back to society. Following the tradition of an earlier era, diaspora-funded schools saw a resurgence in the reform period. But some of these schools were short-lived, as will be shown in Chapter 6. Decades later, some of those schools were abandoned or oftentimes converted to other purposes before being reconverted again for a new generation of immigrant children, as in Zhongshan.

Evidently, the race for better educational opportunities generally privileges those already better off. As a result, the offspring of a non-native resident migrant labour force<sup>107</sup> that emerged immediately after the dissolution of the communes in the 1980s were among the biggest losers in China's quickly shifting educational scene (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 218). China in many ways reverted to a hierarchical, meritocratic system, like the pre-modern system described at the beginning of this chapter. This means that modern education in China has come full circle. Meanwhile, the first decade of the twenty-first century marked the end of an era for diaspora-funded schools, as a Zhongshan historian specialising in Overseas Chinese history commented, "There is neither sufficient land in the ancestral village to build suitably large schools nor, in a more prosperous China, the expectation for the diaspora to finance education anymore."<sup>108</sup> Hence,

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<sup>106</sup> Born in 1929, early in life, Professor GU Mingyuan was educated in an old-fashioned private school (*sishu*). He was later selected to study in the Soviet Union, where he spent five years. After the 1980s economic reform, Gu became head of the Department of Education at Beijing Normal University and was then appointed Vice President and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies (Hayhoe 2001: 5–24).

<sup>107</sup> The labour surplus and land shortage in the countryside, in parallel with relaxed travel restrictions and the booming urban economy, spurred one of the largest migrations in Chinese history (Davin 2009). The large-scale rural-to-urban migration of an apparently unlimited supply of cheap migratory labour needed to satisfy the demands for the service sector and assembly line in China produced the so-called "floating population" (流動人口).

<sup>108</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqu (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020.



the arrival of the twenty-first century was also effectively the end of an era for diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan.

## **Conclusion: The Place of Diaspora-Funded Schools in Modern China**

The historiography of modern China has long described the transition to modern education in rather negative terms (Biggerstaff 1961; Borthwick 1983; Unger 1984; Vickers and Zeng 2017). The conventional view of modern education in China has generally been that it has been a failure, involving an unresolved confrontation between the elites and the poor common people, between men and women, between the city and the countryside, and between the outward-looking coastal areas and the inward-looking hinterlands. Yet this chapter has argued that the development of modern education was uneven. Given the presence of diaspora-funded schools, at least in the rural southern *qiaoxiang* regions of China, it was rather successful.

The chapter has shown that, unlike other countries, especially those in the West, China—in common with most non-Western countries—was never in a position of sufficient wealth to pursue major educational reforms (Gao 2015). Despite the government's firm belief in education throughout the twentieth century, the meagre funds available meant the development of modern education was in a constant state of crisis. The effort to advance modern education often prioritised coastal or urban areas, leaving a conspicuous void in the rural and inland areas. Left to their own devices, many rural areas capitalised on the solidarity of kinship, locality, and lineage networks to foster resources for education. In the southern Chinese localities associated with overseas emigration, such as the Pearl River Delta, villagers turned to diasporic networks to mobilise external funds to construct new schools.

In the early years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949–1976), there was a deliberate attempt to develop rural education. Education became more readily available to the masses than before, but the diffusion of educational resources meant that the quality of schooling degraded to the point that both rural and urban students equally felt the system was ineffective. Thus, the chapter has shown that despite the socialist ideal of universal education and a desire to flatten the educational pyramid, there was a continued neglect of education that meant the “children of Mao” became a “lost generation” who suffered a lifetime of reduced opportunities (Chen 1981: 206).

The above point brings us to the most significant finding that emerges from this chapter: the continuing insufficiency of education in twentieth-century China meant that when the country was accessible to the free flow of ideas, funds, and technologies from outside China, new schools were constructed in the *qiaoxiang* areas of southern China. The intervention of the Chinese diaspora resulted in the establishment of new-style schools in ancestral localities in two periods—the early and the late twentieth century—that made an indisputable contribution to modern education in rural China. The construction of these schools would have a major impact on the nature and future of the local society as well as on the diaspora, as addressed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### The Making of Diaspora-Funded Schools



**Figure 4.1** Charlie Hong's name in Chinese (LEONG Jui Jung 梁瑞榮) inscribed in stone next to a first-floor classroom at the 1929 Cho Bin School. (Source: Zhongshan South District Overseas Chinese Affairs, 2019.)

Since the establishment of the first diaspora-funded school in Zhongshan in the 1870s, overseas Chinese from across the globe have donated to schools in southern China (Yu 1983 Zheng 1996; Cheng 2020). Despite the prevalence of educational philanthropy in the ancestral homeland, how and why schools materialised in the twentieth century *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities) has, for some, become a mystery. During an interview in 2018, Dr. Joe Leong (梁子謙), a retired medical practitioner of Townsville, showed me a photograph of a stone plaque dedicated to his grandfather, Charlie Hong (1882–1943) at the 1920s school in Cho Bin village (like Figure 4.1). He then showed me another photograph acknowledging his father, William John Leong's (梁門教 1905–1992) contribution to the 1980s school building in the same village. Despite a family tradition of educational philanthropy, when I asked Dr. Leong, a fourth-generation Chinese-Australian, about how diaspora-funded schools were financed, he would not be the only person to

acknowledge that he did not know.<sup>109</sup> Intergenerational discontinuities meant for some descendants losing the names of their ancestral village, and for others it meant a decrease in knowledge of their forebears' lifestyles and deeds with the passing of time (Bagnall 2013; Couchman and Bagnall 2019). Ultimately, future generations of Australians from immigrant households eventually lost the opportunity to belong to the larger world of two discrete cultural traditions that their predecessors embodied (Wong Hoy 2005: 12; Leeds-Hurwitz 2006: 1, 3).

As previously mentioned, scholars have noted that diaspora philanthropy is one of the least understood and least documented facets of the philanthropic landscape; yet, what makes it considerably worthy of our attention is its highly variable and quickly evolving nature (Johnson 2007: 44; Baker and Mascitelli 2011: 30; Espinosa 2016: 366). Research is therefore needed to reveal the interests, attitudes, and aspirations of migrant contributors (Johnson 2007: 44).

Since late imperial times, among modern Chinese emigrants philanthropic activities have been a way of inverting the mainland domestic “traitor” image of the overseas Chinese (Goodman 1995: 119–120; Peterson 2005: 93).<sup>110</sup> In other words, directing wealth towards the public good was a means for overseas Chinese to express loyalty to the late imperial empire and negotiate their Chinese citizenship (Fitzgerald and Kuo 2017: 76). This occurred when both China and Australia underwent sweeping political changes. In Australia, prior to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, or the so-called “White Australia Policy”, the Chinese were already experiencing institutional racism (Williams 2021). In China, the fall of the Manchu empire and the rise of a constitutional government also showed that China itself was undergoing radical change (Fitzgerald 1996; Fitzgerald 2007: 84; Kuo 2013). As noted in the previous chapter, persistent funding shortages have, in turn, made overseas Chinese de facto partners in China’s revitalization.

Changes occurring in China politicised much of the Chinese population at home and abroad and led to a partisan patriotism in the diaspora. In the late nineteenth century, Kang Youwei’s Chinese Empire Reform Association (保皇會) and Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s Republican movement (興中會 Revive China Society) in the early twentieth century allowed the loyal Chinese nationalists and

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Dr. Joe Leong (Australian descendant of two generations of school donors), 84, Townsville, 18 April 2018.

<sup>110</sup> According to Yen (1981: 267–268), the term “traitor” was first used before the Opium War to describe those Cantonese that co-operated with the British to smuggle opium into China. The term has also been used more generally to describe overseas Chinese, along with other negative appellations, such as “deserters” and “criminals,” to describe those who gave up their life in China for a livelihood abroad, especially before the lifting of the overseas travel ban in 1893 (G. Wang 2003: 59; Yen 1981: 261).

overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) to contribute financially to the future of their motherland (Liu 1989: 178–179). At that time, both in Australia and China, Chinese-language newspapers were part of a strategy towards Chinese modernisation and a “westernised China” (Kuo 2013: 83). Articles and newspaper reports showed that investments and donations directed to the homeland soared after the emergence of the Republic in 1911. This was primarily because those Chinese living abroad were susceptible to the nation-building rhetoric of the Nationalist leader SUN Yat-sen (1866–1925). Sun sympathetically described his compatriots abroad as vulnerable “overseas orphans,” with the potential to become “mothers of the Revolution” (Peterson 2011: 16).<sup>111</sup> Again, China would draw on the patriotic support of its compatriots, including Chinese Australians, during World War II, in the Chinese the war of resistance against Japan from 1937 and 1945 (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 324; Au 2007). Chinese emigrants were no longer solely attached to a native place, be it a village, town, or county; they were accepting the idea of China as a new nation-state. The idea of China being a nation-state was clearly being reinforced by events both within China and abroad (Miles 2020: 137).

In addition to political reform and wartime relief, overseas investment in China was most visible in the *qiaoxiang*. In Fujian and Guangdong provinces, where most overseas Chinese originated, many emigrants contributed to building bridges and paving roads, as well as improving community facilities such as healthcare and education (Chen 1940; Williams 2018). All these activities were expressions of patriotism towards the home country, with education being a priority, as will be seen in the rest of the chapter. The “golden period” of school building in Zhongshan was between 1920 and 1937. But this surge of school building was interrupted by the Japanese invasion, civil wars, and the events of 1949, which curtailed mobility and the flow of capital until 1978.<sup>112</sup> Modern schools funded by the diaspora in Australia were a unique intervention in the hometowns and villages of overseas Chinese and where children experienced the modernization of the motherland firsthand, as elaborated in the following chapter.

To understand the processes behind the making of diaspora-funded schools, this chapter reconstructs their history in the twentieth century. It begins with a brief discussion of why education was a preferred form of investment in the homeland, and where the wealth came from

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<sup>111</sup> Although overseas Chinese were mostly men, Dr. Sun Yat-sen specifically used the female term “mother” to highlight the exceptionally supportive role that overseas Chinese played, especially in making economic sacrifices to finance the birth of the modern Republic in China.

<sup>112</sup> The rapid rise of China in the reform period on educational philanthropy will be discussed in Chapter 6.

to make this investment possible. It then describes the human and non-human actors<sup>113</sup> involved in the making of diaspora-funded schools: from how they were envisaged, particularly why emigration sparked a newfound desire in educational philanthropy; then how they were funded; how they were built; and finally, how they were inhabited once finished. This chapter shows that twentieth-century schools in the *qiaoxiang* were transnational socio-material assemblages that crystallised the desires and hopes of the Chinese-Australian community. It ends with a discussion of the rewards of educational philanthropy for the donors through their immortalisation in the material fabric of the schools themselves.

## Education as the Preferred Form of Investment in the Homeland

### *Overcoming a Marginal Status*

The desire to invest in homeland education is related to the self-perception of overseas Chinese. Many began their overseas journeys as marginal subjects, reluctant to leave home but forced to do so to make a living elsewhere to support their families at home. For example, James Gocklock (郭樂 1874–1956)—later affiliated with the well-known Wing On department store—left Heung San in 1890 when widespread floods destroyed his family’s livelihood (Norton c.1970: 27; Yen 1998: 49). Aside from being debt-ridden and occupying the lowest stratum in their adopted land, another reason for a desire to invest in education was due to unschooled emigrants bringing with them their handicaps abroad. The first generation of immigrants often had “no time, no chance, and no facility for learning” (Yu 1992: 25). These villagers had limited faculties for English and emigration displaced them into a new world where many realised that lack of education was an obstacle to advancement, so they urged youngsters to study before contemplating emigration (Chen 1940: 152).

In a new country like Australia, the Christian church and its teachings allowed many immigrants to better integrate into their new society. Beginning in the late nineteenth-century, regular Chinese churchgoers not only began to adopt Anglicised (Christian) names, but also became more progressive and enlightened (Yong 1977: 225–226). Denise Austin (2011) suggests that the convergence of Confucianism and Christianity provided additional reasons for migrant

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<sup>113</sup> By non-human actors I mean material things, including objects and non-human species, whose agency often interacts with human agency.

entrepreneurs to contribute to homeland charity and philanthropy.<sup>114</sup> This seemed to be the case for James Gocklock's brother, Philip Gockchin (郭泉 1875–1966). As one of the foundation donors of the Chuk Sau Yuen School, Gockchin acknowledged the mentorship of his Sydney pastor John Young Wai (周容威 1847–1930) and his wife Sarah, which he spent a lifetime repaying through philanthropy (Fitzgerald 2007: 207).<sup>115</sup> Half a century later, the typically hard-working Sydney Chinatown businessman Stanley Yee was also influenced by Christian teachings. In Zhongshan, a former student of Chuen Luk School, repeated the biblical quotation of his school donor to me: “It's more of a blessing to give than to receive” (施比受有福). Here we find that Stanley's charitable vision was influenced by Christianity (*Acts* 20: 35), which may have been learned when he was a student of de la Salle College—a Catholic high school in Sydney—in the 1960s.<sup>116</sup>

The preference for educational philanthropy among the first generations of emigrant Chinese is primarily associated with acquiring a new identity. Many left home as ill-equipped subjects due to their lack of education, and consequently suffered because of these limitations. The aspiration to improve the prospects of those left behind often occurred once they began their mercantile careers. In sum, educational philanthropy emerged among Zhongshan migrant entrepreneurs in the early twentieth century due to a convergence of Confucian and Christian influences at a time of growing Nationalist sentiment.

Protestant influence helped Chinese-Australian migrant donors contribute to and transcend ties to clan and native place (Austin 2011: 107; Kuo 2013). This is evident when we consider that the first batch of Australian-funded schools in Zhongshan, whether located in urban Shekki (e.g., Sai Kwong School) or rural Liang Du (e.g., Owe Lerng School), were all Protestant mission schools (see Appendix A).<sup>117</sup> The same group of Australian Zhongshan donors also built schools elsewhere in Guangdong, such as the Canton Christian College in Guangzhou (Wang 2007), and proceeded

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<sup>114</sup> Here Confucianism relates to a sense of duty to one's family, kin and, broadly speaking, native place.

<sup>115</sup> After Philip's wife prematurely died, his pastor John and Sarah volunteered to look after his son so that Philip could concentrate on making a living in Sydney.

<sup>116</sup> The China–Australia Heritage Corridor. 2019. “Stanley Yee.” <[www.heritagecorridor.org.au/people/stanley-yee](http://www.heritagecorridor.org.au/people/stanley-yee)> (accessed 5 October 2021).

<sup>117</sup> Interview with LI Xiangping (headmaster at Chuk Sau Yuen School), Zhongshan, 15 December 2017; Kuo (2013: 49–50).

to build secular schools in their respective villages, such as Sha Chung and Chuk Sau Yuen, and upgraded them as they accumulated additional funds.

It should be remembered that a preference for their native place underlines the Confucian obligation to clan and family. Dr. SUN Yat-sen believed primordial ties were not incompatible with nation-building especially in a nation of peasants. He insisted these connections could help serve the nation (Fitzgerald 1996: 85; Liao 2018: 108). Historians have noted similarly that it was much easier to cultivate pre-existing local allegiance based on common origins and surname via magazine subscriptions (*qiaokan*), than to cultivate an abstract notion of a modern Chinese nation-state (Hsu 2000b; also see Szonyi 2001: 96). Still, Michael Szonyi (2001: 95) recognised that among some overseas Chinese, wealth enabled them to fulfil traditional ideals, such as installing elaborate graves, that may not have been possible when they were once poor peasants, and therefore the nouveau riche Chinese may be part of the problem, rather than the solution. On the other hand, as shown above, exposure to Christianity in Australia did enable some Zhongshan emigrants to contribute to their homeland as well as to transcend parochial ties.

The new schools were evidently influenced by a range of factors. From their first appearance, as elaborated in Chapter 5, the buildings were modern and Western in conception. But if one looks inside the school, Chinese traditions also make their mark. Following the ancient system of honouring ancestors and benefactors, plaques, like those found in imperial era ancestral halls and temples, were installed inside new Republican-era schools. Beyond the architecture, modern school-based activities, like organised sports and athletics competitions, regularly brought together schoolchildren who previously did not know each other (Cheng 2020: 153–154). Aside from improving fitness, these activities, along with classroom lessons in history and geography, as elaborated in Chapter 5, helped the students to develop a sense of belonging outside of their clan and locality, to the new nation-state (Shao 2004: 160; Morris 2004; Zarrow 2006: 7). Hence, the new Republican-era schools not only conceptually embraced Western ideals and Chinese traditions, but also introduced students to the modern idea of a Chinese nation.

### *Creating an Alternative Future*

The disparity between the imagination of the emigrants about what the homeland should be like and the situation they encountered when they returned was another reason for improving



education.<sup>118</sup> In the early twentieth century, returnees were shocked to find children in their villages naked, or adults pursuing unhealthy habits, like gambling, visiting prostitutes, or smoking opium (Zhongshan East District Overseas Chinese Association 1999; Benton and Liu 2018: 140; Hsu 2000b: 311; Szonyi 2005; Tan 1994: 13). In the late twentieth century, conditions did not seem to have improved much. Stanley Hunt recalls visiting his ancestral village of Ma Shan in Doumen in 1979 and seeing children rearing ducks instead of going to school (Hunt 2009: 183). Dismayed by a lack of initiative in their villages, some migrant returnees thought that if no measures were taken, their clan could perish, so they began to invest in the homeland (Yu 1983: 55; Benton and Liu 2018: 140). Consequently, reading rooms, clan libraries, and new schools were established in the early twentieth century, alongside sporting facilities, such as basketball or volleyball courts (Benton and Liu 2018: 140; Zheng 1996: 41). When one village began to improve its facilities, its neighbours often followed suit.<sup>119</sup> It can be said that the presence of new facilities provoked a friendly rivalry, which encouraged nearby villages to outdo each other.<sup>120</sup> Unlike the West, where contributions usually benefitted those unfamiliar to the donors, in the *qiaoxiang* charity clearly “began at home” (Benton and Liu 2018: 150).

For many migrant donors, diaspora-funded education did not mean becoming literally well-educated. Unlike the traditional idea of education, it meant becoming practically equipped for a career in business. This was common among the Nanyang *buaqiao* from southern Fujian, as well as Chinese Australians from Zhongshan (Chen 1940: 151; Austin 2011: 116). A school archivist I interviewed also endorsed this idea by stating that overseas Chinese saw “practicality above all else” (使用為先).<sup>121</sup> Thus, subjects deemed useful to a business career were commonly taught at diaspora-funded schools (Austin 2011: 82–83; Cook 2000: 14; Zheng 1996: 41).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian and retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 9 May 2018.

<sup>119</sup> *Tung Wab Times*, 5 January 1907, p.6 stated that unlike the neighbouring Kwok-family village of Chuk Sau Yuen and Ma-family village of Sha Chung, the Lee-family village of Heng Mei lacked a school; it continued to encourage the several hundred Lees of Heng Mei in Australia to follow the example set by the Kwoks and Mas by raising funds to establish one.

<sup>120</sup> Mr. Ma recalled that in South District, his village Sha Chung was constantly in competition with its neighbours—Chuk Sau Yuen and Heng Mei. Interview with MA Yin-chiu (former Sha Chung School student and village elder), 79, 2 January 2019. A similar case was found in southern Fujian (Kuah-Pearce 2010: 116).

<sup>121</sup> Interview with LU Jian (archivist of Heng Mei School), Zhongshan, 25 December 2017.

<sup>122</sup> Practical subjects included Chinese comprehension, Chinese calligraphy, abacus, letter-writing, and English. In upper grades, students attended classes in history, geography, and science (Interview with SHENG Lai Kum, Lai Wor School, 84, Ngoi Sha Village, Zhuhai, 29 November 2018; Field c.1991: 32; *Chinese Times*, 5 June 1909, p.2). Students also reported participating in music (singing) and physical education classes (sports and athletics). Bible studies were likely only available at Christian missionary schools, such as Sai Kwong in Shekki and Owe Lerng in Liang Du. It was unclear whether subjects like world history were taught, so future research analysing the availability of textbooks and teacher qualifications may reveal more about the curricula at that time.

Yet not all *hnaqiao* were supportive of the business-oriented route. One explanation was that some unschooled migrants had already succeeded without schooling, while those who performed well at school did not necessarily fare well in business overseas (Chen 1940: 156). Another reason was that some returnees did not encourage emigration but instead hoped their descendants would not follow them abroad by becoming “slaves” in a foreign country (Yu 1983: 53). While I cannot establish if Raymond’s grandfather—a returning shopkeeper from Townsville, Queensland—thought that the imperial examinations would resume, it was known that after his sojourn, he was unsupportive of emigration. Instead of supporting a Western education, he advocated the traditional educational system (also see, Borthwick 1983: 64, 81).

Post-Mao reforms changed the opportunities for women in the *qiaoxiang*. According to a donor who contributed in 1986, the reason for building a kindergarten was to improve household incomes. During our interview, Mrs. Eileen Lai told me the intention to build a kindergarten in her native village was not simply because she grew up without much education, but more because having a childcare facility—as was widely available in Australia—would liberate many village women from parental duties.<sup>123</sup> Allowing low-skilled mothers from the village to work in the many “Made in China” factories that emerged after the reform allowed the households to generate additional income.

In short, since the early twentieth century educational diaspora philanthropy can be seen as an investment motivated by a desire to create an alternative future for the villagers at home. While non-migrant villages also invested, they generally had less capital to do so because rural localities associated with emigration could draw on foreign investment (Cook 2000: 15; Chen 1940: 154). For example, in 1931 almost all schools in Taishan (99.2%, n = 1,113 of 1,122 schools) were privately funded, almost certainly by the diaspora (Yu 1983: 55). The investment of the diaspora generally relates to how emigrants envisioned the future of their native home. For some in the early twentieth century, it meant cultivating healthier habits and honing the skills needed for an entrepreneurial career, while for others it meant a continuation of Confucian learning. In the later part of the century, it primarily meant improving household income.

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 77, Sydney, 24 April 2018.

### *Participating in Diaspora Philanthropy*

Educational philanthropy was not just motivated by idealism and a good heart about the future of the village, it also had pragmatic motivations related to business considerations, as well as social pressure. An additional reason for the prevalence of homeland philanthropy among emigrants was that among local villagers it was considered inappropriate for overseas kinsmen to conduct business in the ancestral home. Specifically, there was a fine line between benefiting and exploiting fellow kinsmen.<sup>124</sup> To avoid such conflation, profitable enterprises, for instance factories, were generally established in somebody else's homeland—in another part of China, such as in another village or town (Yin 2004: 73); meanwhile, in the ancestral locale, such as in the villages of Zhongshan, non-profit activities revolved around healthcare, elderly care, and, most important of all, education.<sup>125</sup> For example, William “Billy” Lee contributed to a primary school in his native home of Ma Leng village in South District, while he owns a garment factory in Shaxi town, another part of Zhongshan.<sup>126</sup> These non-economic activities enabled migrant entrepreneurs to convert their economic gains into symbolic capital, such as prestige and fame (Liu 1998). Beyond that, it helped philanthropists to draw on their village kin “to recruit loyal managers and other employees and establish a trusted business network” (Choi 2019: 51). John Fitzgerald (2020) points out that the initiative to engage in philanthropy arises because Chinese immigrants came from a “low-trust society.”<sup>127</sup> Participating in community projects was hence a means of proving that a business was not only trustworthy (as will be demonstrated in the next section), but more importantly, that funds had not been misappropriated (Fitzgerald 2020: 196). Those unwilling to support such endeavours would not only lose face, but their businesses would lose patronage as well (Liao 2018: 103; Williams 2018: 133–139; Yu 1983: 60). Given the social pressure, it is unsurprising why migrant entrepreneurs were not only profit-orientated, but also public-minded, as Fitzgerald (2020) argues.

Due to a myriad of factors, education became the preferred form of investment in the homeland. Emigration made migrating peasants aware of the long-term consequences of deficiencies of education in rural China. Since many were challenged by their marginal status, there was a strong aspiration to be socially mobile. Not unlike those who had left home to sit the imperial exams,

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (historian and retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 9 May 2018.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu, 9 May 2018.

<sup>126</sup> Personal communication with Ms. LUM Muk-na (village representative of South District's Ma Leng village), 25 October 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Fukuyama (1995) states that low-trust societies were characterised by close social ties, such as those bounded by native place or familial ties because there was typically a lack of trust outside one's kinship or place-based network.

improving education in the ancestral home was a means for migrants to “return home with glory” (Williams 2018). Education has always been at the heart of Confucian ideology, since Confucius himself taught that it was the means of social and personal improvement and transformation. Finally, popularising education was not only important to the future of the homeland, but also for the succession of businesses in the diaspora.

## The Role of Migrant Business

I turn now to describe the type of Chinese-Australian migrant businesses associated with diaspora-funded schools and analyse the roles that these businesses played in homeland educational philanthropy. After all, it was the wealth generated from their entrepreneurial activities that laid the foundation for educational philanthropy in both early and late twentieth-century Zhongshan.

Schools funded in the early twentieth century were associated with the wealth generated by overseas Chinese general (grocery) stores, wholesale markets, and department stores. The most significant of these, which contributed to the bulk of the schools, were the “four premier department stores” (Liao 2018; Cheng 2019b). Inspired by the success of Anthony Hordern & Sons department store in downtown Sydney, these Zhongshan-Australian department stores were founded outside Australia, in the cities of Hong Kong, Canton, and Shanghai (Fitzgerald 2007: 194; Zhongshan Broadcasting & Television Station 2020). On the Australian front, the most notable contributions came from Sydney fruit wholesalers, such as Wing Sang and Wing On (Yong 1977: 48), and Queensland general stores, such as Tip Hop & Co. (Hughenden) and Houng Yuen & Co. (洪源) (Ingham).<sup>128</sup>

The so-called “gold mountain firms,” (金山莊) as they were often known in English-language scholarship (Hsu 2005),<sup>129</sup> were another category of migrant-related trading and remittance

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<sup>128</sup> Interviews with Anthony Leong (village chief and historian of Cho Bin village), 59, Zhongshan, 2 December 2018; Dr. Joe Leong (Australian descendant of two-generations of school donors), 84, 18 April 2018; Gary Leong (Australian descendant of two-generation of school donors), 8 March 2021; and Sandi Robb of Townsville (Queensland-based historian specialising in Chinese families), Zhongshan, 2 December 2018.

<sup>129</sup> Contrary to the widespread circulated translation of 金山莊 as “gold mountain firm,” Ely Finch, an Australian-based translator and linguist specialising in historical Chinese text suggests that a more appropriate rendering is “goldfield agency.” Finch’s interpretation alludes to the fact that these businesses were established in the nineteenth century to facilitate the trans-Pacific passage of gold prospectors (see Wong 2019: 419).

business that were once significant in the funding of early twentieth-century schools. Although largely forgotten today, these companies once connected legions of Chinese migrant businesses in Pacific destinations, such as Australia or America, with companies in Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang* through personalised, integrated postage and remittance services (Hsu 2005: 22, 29). If such services were unavailable, Chinese immigrants were known to have stashed their savings in old clothes or in the walls of their work or residential buildings, which were at risk of theft or fire (Yu 1992: 25). Thus, most immigrants “appreciated the convenient and flexible service” (Kuo 2018: 164) that a one-stop remittance service offered. It showed that, regardless of how independently successful many migrant businesses were, they often collaborated. While elite merchants like MA Ying-piu established Sha Chung Kindergarten (1921) and the Women and Children’s Centre (1932) of his own accord, most schools built in the same early twentieth-century period were collaborative projects between multiple donors, as for instance was the case with the Chuk Sau Yuen, Sai Kwong, Sha Chung, and Cho Bin schools (A. Li 2008: 59, 61; Liao 2018: 110–111).

In the late twentieth century, the school donors were Chinese Australians who owned restaurants, shops, motels, and supermarkets. Each school donor had their own funding strategy. For example, Stanley Hunt, the Sydney-based shop owner turned motelier, almost single-handedly funded Ma Shan School (Hunt 2009: 183)—a thirty-year commitment that included a series of renovations and expansions.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile, Philip Leong, the Townsville supermarket visionary, helped to realise the construction of a new two-storey kindergarten at Cho Bin village by soliciting contributions from others, when lesser “donations of ten thousand Hong Kong dollars (in the 1980s) was enough to earn a name on one of the (eight) new classrooms.”<sup>131</sup> Philip and his wife Betty also contributed a four-storey rental factory building, which paid for the school’s long-term maintenance.<sup>132</sup> While Leong and Hunt primarily supported education in their respective ancestral villages, the philanthropic activities of Stanley Yee, associated with the Sydney Chinatown Emperor’s Garden empire, had a wider geographical coverage. Yee contributed to primary schools

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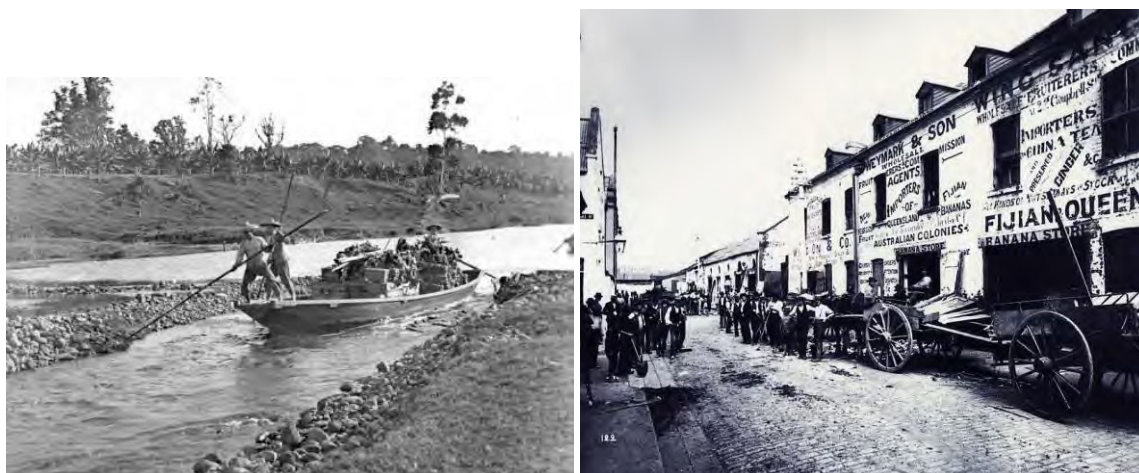
<sup>130</sup> Interview with Stanley Hunt (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne, Alexandra Wong, Christopher Cheng in Sydney, 6 October 2017. I acknowledge Sydney-based Chinese community leaders, Daphne Lowe Kelley (President of Chinese Australian Historical Society), Albert Fung (FUNG Yautak 馮有德 1934–2021, President of Chung Shan Society of Australia) and King FONG (past President of Chinese Australian Historical Society and past President of Chung Shan Society of Australia) for recommending and introducing Stanley Hunt.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Mrs. Wenney Leong (partner of a Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), Townsville, 17 April 2018.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Anthony Leong (village chief and historian of Cho Bin village), 68, Zhongshan, 25 December 2017. A similar occurrence is mentioned by Hsu (2000a: 46) suggesting that Taishanese migrants buy rental properties in Guangzhou and Hong to maintain the school revenue.

in Chuen Luk (1991), his father’s village, On Tong (1987–1995), his mother’s village, as well as several other schools in Tai Chung (Dachong) township, such as Dip Shek School (1983), Cheuk Shan Middle School (1987–1994), Nam Tsuen School (1993), and Tai Chung Central Kindergarten (1995) (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 360–366).

Through their businesses, migrant entrepreneurs played an important leadership role in homeland philanthropy. They were both initiators of new projects and collaborators, since they also implemented and promoted projects that their fellow villagers began.<sup>133</sup> For example, a 1906 article in the *Tung Wah Times* reported that donations for a new school in On Tong village could be deposited in designated North Queensland stores in Cairns or Innisfail (formerly Geraldton) operated by members of the Lum clan.<sup>134</sup> In the same newspaper, a year later, it was reported that Wing Sang & Co. (永生果欄)—a banana wholesaler in Sydney (Figure 4.2)<sup>135</sup>—was responsible for collecting donations for a new school in Sha Chung village.<sup>136</sup>



**Figure 4.2** On the left, Cantonese banana traders in punts in north Queensland. (Source: John Oxley Library. Image 60933, no date.) On the right, Zhongshan wholesale fruit markets in Sydney, circa 1900–1902. (Source: State Library of NSW, courtesy of Howard Wilson.)

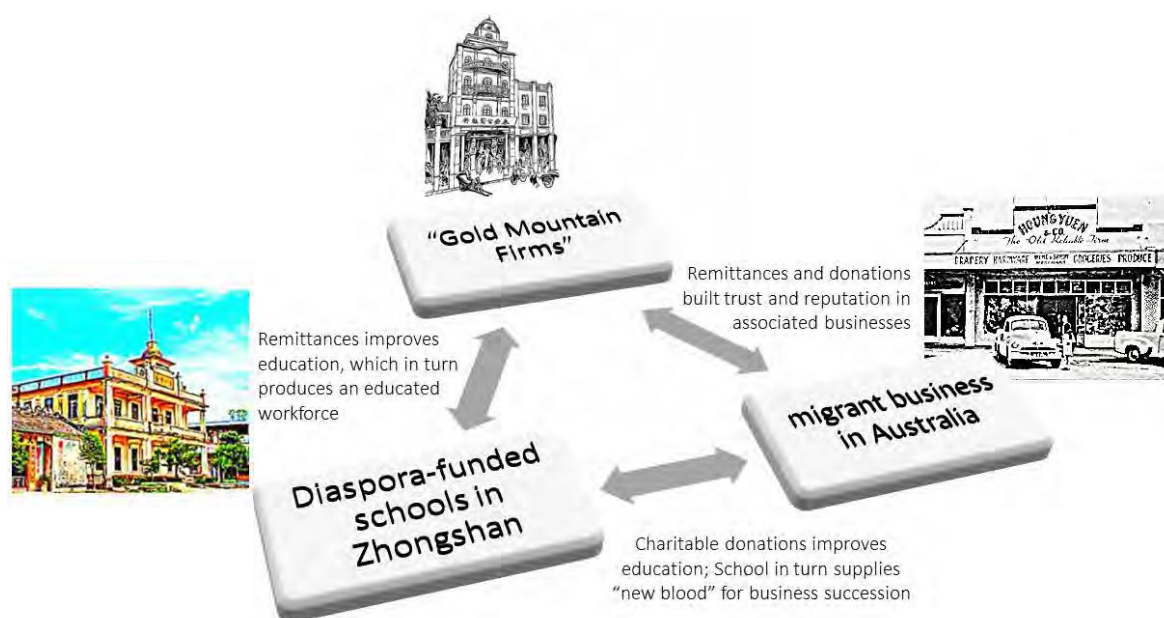
<sup>133</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020, and telephone interview with SU Mingxian (historian), 23 November 2021.

<sup>134</sup> *Tung Wah News*, 26 May 1906, p.5.

<sup>135</sup> From the late nineteenth century onwards, the Sydney dwellers from Zhongshan participated in a flourishing banana trade with their compatriots in north Queensland and Fiji (Cheng 2019b). Their shared enterprise and home connection in the Pearl River Delta resulted in the wholesale fruit business in Sydney doubling up as remittance agencies for Zhongshan migrants in Australia (Kuo 2018: 170). Following the usual practice, the emigrants remitted the “fruits of their industry” (money implied here) instead of spending them where they were acquired (Kuhn 2003: 133). Since letters passed through trade networks, some were imprinted with dead fruit fly residue and juice stains when they were retrieved from crates (Wilton 2004: 57; Loy-Wilson 2014b: 417).

<sup>136</sup> *Tung Wah Times*, 4 May 1907, p.8.

The wider Australian community who patronised these migrant businesses also inadvertently supported the philanthropic endeavours of their owners. For example, those in the early twentieth century who purchased Wing Sang or Wing On bananas (Cheng 2019b; Yong 1977: 48, 51), potatoes from Stanley Hunt’s shop (Hunt 2009: 157), rotisserie chickens from Philip Leong’s store,<sup>137</sup> “long and short soup”<sup>138</sup> at Lean Sun Lowe (聯新樓), or “Emperor’s (cream) puffs” (Anderson et al. 2019: 123–124), and tofu from Stanley Yee’s shops in Sydney’s Chinatown in the late twentieth century,<sup>139</sup> all to some extent supported what could become funds for a new school, or the renovation of an existing one. School building activities in Zhongshan thus depended in part on the success of Chinese-Australian migrant enterprises (*cf.* Byrne 2016a: 269).



**Figure 4.3** The integrated overseas Chinese business and education cycle associated with schools in the China-Australia migration corridor in the early twentieth century. (Diagram compiled by Christopher Cheng.)

The schools that materialised in Zhongshan before 1949 eventually groomed a new generation of business leaders in the diaspora, as shown in Figure 4.3. The beneficiaries of diaspora-funded education in Zhongshan in other words became the future of the Chinese-Australian business community (Robb 2019: 192; Wilton 2019: 59). Being more accustomed to trade (Lee 1991; Zheng 2007), Zhongshan folk tended to be comparatively more entrepreneurial than their Cantonese

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Mrs. Phyllis Rainford (Australian-born descendant of school donor), Townsville, 19 April 2017.

<sup>138</sup> Long and short soup refers to wonton (Chinese dumpling) and noodles. (Interview with King FONG by Christopher Cheng for the State Library of New South Wales Oral History Collection, Sydney, 28 November 2020).

<sup>139</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Lam (Zhongshan-born Sydney resident), 71, 16 September 2017.

counterparts in Australia at the time (Chan 2007a: 161).<sup>140</sup> By inheriting a business, or beginning a new one, the next generation of business elites perpetuated the sense of responsibility that past migrant entrepreneurs showed towards their fellow compatriots by contributing to a new round of educational philanthropy in Zhongshan in the post-reform period.<sup>141</sup>

Having described the role of migrant businesses in the financing of new schools, now I turn to illustrate how various human and non-human actors played their part in the making of diaspora-funded schools.

## Envisaging a Literate Future

For immigrants of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, letter writing was the most direct lifeline to combat homesickness. Yet many abroad were illiterate. One Zhongshan village elder said: “Some could not even recognise the simplest characters, such as 丁 (*dīng*) [目不識丁], not to mention their [Chinese] names, or any English.”<sup>142</sup> SUN Yat-sen (1866–1925) once lamented, “When people have been deprived of education for a long time, men who cannot recognise the simplest characters number seven or eight out of ten. Women who can read were one in a hundred” (A. Li 2008: 58). The remarks of an Australian historian who examined immigration records in the archives suggests that the early Chinese had trouble signing their names in any language, let alone dealing with the burden of paperwork (May 1984: 82).

Given widespread illiteracy among the immigrants, emigration signified a new change in attitude towards education. Often migrant letters to China came with money; they were literally “a thousand pieces of gold,”<sup>143</sup> because the customary practice was “if there’s a letter, there’s bound to be money; if there’s money, there’s bound to be a letter” (Benton and Liu 2018: 7).<sup>144</sup> The

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<sup>140</sup> The enduring success of Zhongshan folk in commercial activities could be attributed to the geographical position of Zhongshan in Pearl River Delta: being close to Macao, Canton, and Hong Kong—the three commercial hubs in the region. Much has been written about the entrepreneurial aspirations as well as the successes of Zhongshan migrants in Australia, many of whom had within a single generation risen from humble origins to become merchants (Wilton 2019: 59; Hunt 2009: 36; Chan 2007a: 161). See, for example, rural shops in NSW (Wilton 2013) or department stores in Hong Kong and Shanghai (Chan 1996, 1999; Fitzgerald 2007).

<sup>141</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto (former student of Cho Bin School), 74, 28 June 2020.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018; cited in Cheng (2020: 143).

<sup>143</sup> The remittance-bearing-letters were known by different names depending on the linguistic region of origin of the emigrants in China. They include *qiaopi* (橋批), *yinxin* (銀信), or *jinxin* (金信) (Benton and Liu 2018; Kuo 2018).

<sup>144</sup> Exceptions included an oral message rather than a written one (Benton and Liu 2018: 7).



messages that often accompanied the remittances were advice on how to spend the payments. Recently, researchers confirmed that the most common topic mentioned in money-bearing letters of migrants to China was education.<sup>145</sup>



**Figure 4.4** The demand for transcription services arose due to the high level of illiteracy in the *qiaoxiang*. This undated photo of a scribe with his client was taken in Shekki, Zhongshan. (Zhongshan History and Culture Series Committee 2002: 76.)

Some messages specified a desire to educate women as well as men. This was because women were usually left behind in the native home due to the split household arrangement of pre-1949 Chinese migration. Without assistance, or until members of the household became literate, the family in China were likely as clueless about the contents of the letters as the migrant-senders. Such feeling of inadequateness must have repeatedly challenged the illiterate receiver, echoing the sentiment of the equally illiterate sender, as most migrants were “able to do little more than fill in the amount and date,” when sending remittances home to China (Benton and Liu 2018: 9). This handicap provided a supplemental income source for scribes, who wrote letters on behalf of their illiterate compatriots (Figure 4.4; Benton and Liu 2018: 9). Hence, there was a practical desire to educate sisters, wives, daughters and even daughters-in-law of migrants (Benton and Liu 2018: 136; Kuo and Fitzgerald 2016: 270).

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<sup>145</sup> Benton and Liu (2018: 136) found after analysing 114 *qiaopi* from a single lineage that 86% had discussed education.

Prior to the twentieth century, the emphasis among diaspora Chinese was to envisage a literate future for themselves and their families, rather than to build schools. Before migration there was no great desire for education; since in a stable environment, like a rural society, anything a peasant wanted to know could simply be learned by asking a more senior person (Fei 1992: 53). Besides these very practical considerations, the difficulty of mastering non-alphabetic script represented an almost insurmountable barrier for most peasants, who had neither money nor time to memorise the characters (Fairbank 1983: 43; Peterson 1997: 7–8). But the earliest immigrants were not only challenged by written Chinese; they were also unlikely to be literate in any language. Education, specifically literacy, was hence valued for its practicality. Madeline Hsu draws on the work of LAU Wing Fong (1986: 48), to note that “those who went abroad to work told those at home that they had to learn the rudiments of reading and writing, for the sake of earning a living and keeping in touch with relatives” (quoted in Hsu 2000a: 45). Hence, not only had the shortcoming of being uneducated been amplified through emigration, but migration clearly ushered in an alternative future, where money spent back home paved the way for change, including individual and collective efforts to reform education.

## Funding New Schools

To eradicate illiteracy, individual migrants began not only to finance the education of their own family but, with other immigrants, to collectively finance new schools. Printed media was one means of facilitating the recruitment of donors for the co-funding of new schools. Newspapers and other printed materials, known in Chinese as *qiaokan* (僑刊),<sup>146</sup> appeared in the transnational space to satisfy this need. Despite the growing need to improve education, why then did it take four decades before Chinese newspapers and even longer before *qiaokan* were printed?

Chinese-language newspapers first appeared in Australia in the 1890s.<sup>147</sup> Paul Macgregor (2001: 43) has noted that after the 1880s, communication and transportation vastly improved in Australia, which reduced the cost of printing and made widespread distribution affordable. An additional factor was that it only made sense to produce a newspaper when the literacy rate increased,

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<sup>146</sup> Collective term for overseas Chinese magazines, newsletters, and bulletins.

<sup>147</sup> In 1894, the first Chinese-language newspaper in Australia, *The Chinese Australian Herald* 廣益華報, appeared; the second newspaper, *Tung Wah Times* 東華報 (initially *Tung Wah News* 東華新報), appeared in 1898.

meaning that only when remittances began to improve education in the *qiaoxiang* and the next generation of emigrants began to arrive in Australia would there be a considerable readership.<sup>148</sup> Thus, I suggest that the establishment of Chinese newspapers in Australia coincided with the emergence of better educated immigrants, as well as the presence in Australia of already literate political exiles fleeing violent incidents in China, such as the Taiping Rebellion of 1850 to 1864 (Pan 1998: 56).<sup>149</sup> Likewise, the *qiaokan* (overseas Chinese magazines published in China) began to emerge when overseas Chinese communities were literate and had reached a sufficient size (Kuhn 2008: 139).<sup>150</sup>

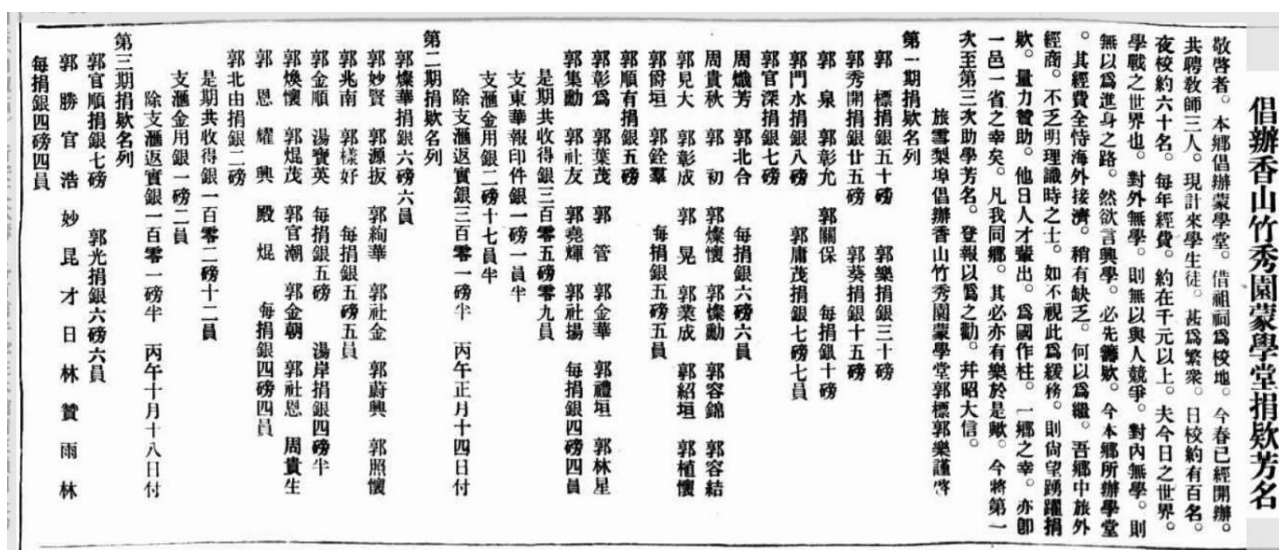


Figure 4.5 This newspaper article proposes the installation of a commemorative plaque for the donors associated with Chuk Sau Yuen school in Zhongshan. It contains the names of 70 individual donors, mainly from the Kwok/Gock clan. (Source: *Tung Wah Times*, 22 June 1907, p.7.)

After the imperial examinations in China ended, Chinese newspapers in Australia immediately reported that China was modernising through the intensive school building frenzy in the ancestral home. In the *Tung Wah Times* in 1905, Chinese in Australia began to “champion modern education

<sup>148</sup> Comparative data for Pacific destinations show that a relatively higher level of literacy among both males and females from the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province appeared in the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, after a period of emigration. For example, according to historian YU Renqiu (1983: 48–49), by the 1910s, 90% of males in Taishan were more or less literate because they had attended schools funded by the diaspora. Meanwhile, the 1896 census statistics showed that among Cantonese migrants in Hawaii, 35% of the female immigrants were literate (Rawski 1979: 6–7).

<sup>149</sup> In his research on the inscriptions on gravestones at Beechworth, Victoria, Kok (2004) concluded that from the deliberately encoded, highly sophisticated triad patriotic messages that the engraver and probably the deceased migrant were literate persons whose residence in Australia was probably due more to evade the Qing authorities and to raise money for the cause of overthrowing the Qing government than to escape poverty.

<sup>150</sup> The oldest known *qiaokan* that originated in Taishan dates to 1909 (Sinn 2020: 28). A decade later, *Chuk Sau Yuen Monthly* appeared as one of the first *qiaokan* in Zhongshan (Liao 2018: 113). It was founded in September 1920 after ten founding members, including some from Wing On department store, contributed ten yuan each (Liao 2018: 115). Some 200 issues of *Chuk Sau Yuen Monthly* were published before it was discontinued in the 1930s (Liao 2018: 113).

in Sydney and their homeland” (Kuo 2013: 158). In 1906 the Ma and Kwok clans from Zhongshan contributed £412 and £439 to establish elementary schools in their respective villages (Kuo 2013: 158). By 1907, lists of donors begun appearing in newspapers showing that the Ma/Mar (馬) clan of Sha Chung village and the Kwok/Gock (郭) clan of Chuk Sau Yuen village had gained the support of 67 and 70 donors for their respective village schools (Figure 4.5).<sup>151</sup> Ultimately, over 150 donors would contribute funds for Chuk Sau Yuen School. It is estimated that over the twentieth century, a thousand diaspora families were involved in funding schools in Zhongshan.

The vast number of donations can be attributed to the perceived urgency of education in the home villages. Articles that appear in the *qiaokan* both implicitly or explicitly report the difficulties and, therefore, the need to fund education. For example, in 1920, the disturbing impact of a remittance economy in Zhongshan was lamented in the *Chuk Sau Yuen Monthly* (良都竹秀園月報) 1920(4): 8–9):

In the past, life in Chuk Sau Yuen centred on farming, and people rarely travelled abroad. Life was very simple. There was once a clear division of labour. During the low season, men collected firewood and became itinerant hawkers; and women wove and made clothes. Everyone understood their roles. These practices can no longer continue. The men ventured overseas; women have given up farming. Households idly wait for remittances. Nobody works anymore. As disposable incomes increase, gambling has become a habit... (Quoted in Wang 2006: 13)

The above depiction of the ancestral land laying barren, the villagers becoming idle and the adoption of unhealthy practices, led to the realisation that if the diaspora did not promptly intervene, the homeland was doomed.<sup>152</sup> Other articles compared the educational progress made by nearby villages, and criticised those who opposed educational reform (Yu 1983: 57). It is clear that the articles were written to elicit financial support. Scholars in fact have argued that the development of the *qiaokan* was to foster national loyalty, especially by encouraging migrants to contribute to homeland educational development (Hsu 2000a; Yu 1983: 57; Liao 2018: 115–116).

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<sup>151</sup> *Tung Wah News*, 4 May 1907, p.8; *Tung Wah Times*, 22 June 1907, p.7.

<sup>152</sup> This was a broader phenomenon than in Zhongshan. According to the *Taishan Country Gazetteer* in 1893, the fields in Taishan have become “infertile and cannot be restored to their original state” of productivity. Therefore, Hsu (2000b: 311) argued that migration eventually led to a reliance on a remittance economy, as not enough rice could be produced locally.

In the post-Mao reform period, the intervention of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (*qiaoban*) made it much easier to contribute.<sup>153</sup> The *qiaoban* not only coordinated projects, but they also provided incentives for doing so. Before then, particularly in the early 1980s, new schools were not always directly supported by a transfer of funds. Chinatown restaurateur Eileen Lai recounted how Chung Tau Kindergarten (1986) was built with profits made by trading cars in China.<sup>154</sup>

If I remember correctly, I bought some new cars and told people in my village [in Zhongshan] that I wanted to sell those cars and all the money I made from them [...] I forgot how much it was, they can use it on building a kindergarten. And if that's still not enough, I'll save up some more and send them the rest.

Through the *qiaoban*, a “matching funds” scheme was established (Zhu and Jing 2019: 302).<sup>155</sup> Between 1987 and 1994, for example, Stanley Yee teamed up with other Tai Chung clansmen in Fiji, Hong Kong, and Macao to fund Cheuk Shan Middle School (卓山中學). The donors amassed over RMB 6 million for a school project of RMB 12.3 million (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 366). Through this scheme, the government demonstrated its commitment to partner with migrant donors to fund new school projects (Zhu and Jing 2019: 302). As a result, the *qiaoxiang* saw a revival of school construction activity in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>156</sup>

As an incentive to encourage donation, the names of donors and the amount contributed continued to be published in the *qiaokan* and newspapers. Significant sponsors even received “the additional honour of six-inch portraits to accompany their names in print” (Hsu 2004: 132). Even among the illiterate, printed images enabled the wider community to instantly recognise and admire their affluent yet generous kinsmen. Printed media circulating in the transnational space clearly nurtured a new identity for migrant donors that was visibly stratified based on their ability to contribute.

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<sup>153</sup> Activities related to the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (僑辦 *qiaoban*) began to emerge in China in the 1950s, but policies constantly fluctuated between the 1950s and 1960s (To 2014: 9; FitzGerald 1972: 54). According to a retired officer, the Zhongshan branch of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office was initially established as an administrative unit in August 1950, then expanded into a division in 1973, becoming a fully-fledged a Bureau office in 1976 (personal communication with Ms. CHEN Diqiu, 12 October 2021). After the economic reform in the late 1970s, a more co-operative role began to emerge as return visits were encouraged (Zhu and Jing 2019: 298).

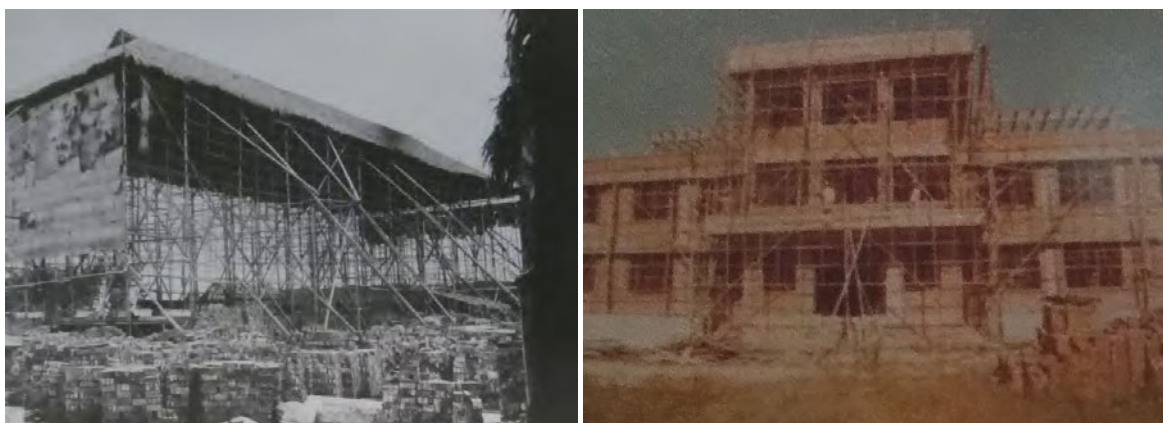
<sup>154</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 77, Sydney, 24 April 2018.

<sup>155</sup> The *qiaoban* is a government office that was established under the People's Republic of China to liaise with overseas Chinese. Since the 1980s, it has superseded the role of the “gold mountain firms” in the repatriation of funds for philanthropy.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 19 November 2020.

## Building New Schools

Modern purpose-built schools mandated expertise uncommon in the past (Peng 2012: 294). This was because they involved a distinct set of building materials. Besides importing building fabric, oral accounts suggest that these schools could not have been erected without the involvement of expertise beyond the village.<sup>157</sup> Architects and builders were sourced from Hong Kong, Macao, and Canton (Guangzhou). These people likely moved in and out of the Pearl River Delta cities and their hometowns wherever work was available.<sup>158</sup> Hence, the new-style schools (新式學堂) in the *qiaoxiang* looked very different from the rammed earth, stone and wooden dynastic buildings of the imperial past.



**Figure 4.6** (Left) The early stages of constructing Martin Hall, Canton Christian College (predecessor of Lingnan University), Canton's first reinforced concrete school structure. The building was designed by Arthur Purnell and built circa 1905. (Source: S. Li 2008: 168; photo by Purnell). (Right) Cheung Kok School in Shaxi town of Zhongshan, under construction in the 1980s. (Source: *Cheung Kok Village School's School History Booklet, 1930–2011*, p.25)

The construction of the new schools saw the emergence of building experts, yet the traditional local workforce most likely continued their practices unabated (Slaton 2003: 1; Pan and Campbell 2018). Behind Western façades, traditional craftsmen continued to toil with familiar tools.<sup>159</sup> Put differently, “Western” buildings were created with Chinese tools and work processes (Tan 2013: 235; Pan and Campbell 2018: 187). Photographic evidence of steel-reinforced concrete school

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<sup>157</sup> Interviews with GAN Jianbo (former Curator of the Zhongshan Museum), 9 May 2018; MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), Zhongshan, 79, 2 January 2019.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.

<sup>159</sup> So far, I have found little written about how the new and old systems of building knowledge interacted. This could be a topic of further inquiry.

buildings from two different eras indicates the persistence of traditional practices, such as bamboo scaffolding, in the Pearl River Delta (Figure 4.6).

Besides the proliferation of outside experts and technical labour, village women were also often seen on a construction site. In the absence of men, the unskilled wives and mothers of local school donors served as site supervisors.<sup>160</sup> They often oversaw the daily construction work of new village schools before 1949.

Construction materials were non-human actors that can be considered equally significant as human participants in contributing to the socio-material assemblage of modern schools. After all, some donors only considered the “highest quality materials” and “best construction techniques” adequate for their projects.<sup>161</sup> Yet modern Western materials, such as red brick, Birmingham steel, and Portland cement, were not readily accessible in rural down-in-the-Delta regions like Zhongshan. An elder from Sha Chung village reminisced about how such materials may have arrived in Zhongshan:<sup>162</sup>

Most likely, roads were being laid as the materials were transported by foot into the village. China was far behind at the time. She could not even produce her own galvanised nails or make (red) bricks, so construction materials came from Hong Kong [...] the whole batch arrived by boat [...] Elders recounted that those shipments arrived at Shekki River [岐江河], and then the laborious task of unloading cargo into hand-pushed trolleys to be transported to the village began [...] That’s why it took so long [to build everything].<sup>163</sup>

A consequence of importing construction materials meant new pre-1949 steel-reinforced concrete schools were more durable than structures of the past (Peng 2012: 259; Liu 2002: 416). Yet due to the constant material shortages, accessibility issues (impassable roads during rainy seasons), plus the labour-intensity of transporting materials, modern schools often “combined the new and old, or Western and indigenous products” (Cheng 2020: 148). For example, the shortage of new products, such as “rebar” (steel-reinforcing) or red-brick led some modern structures to resort to

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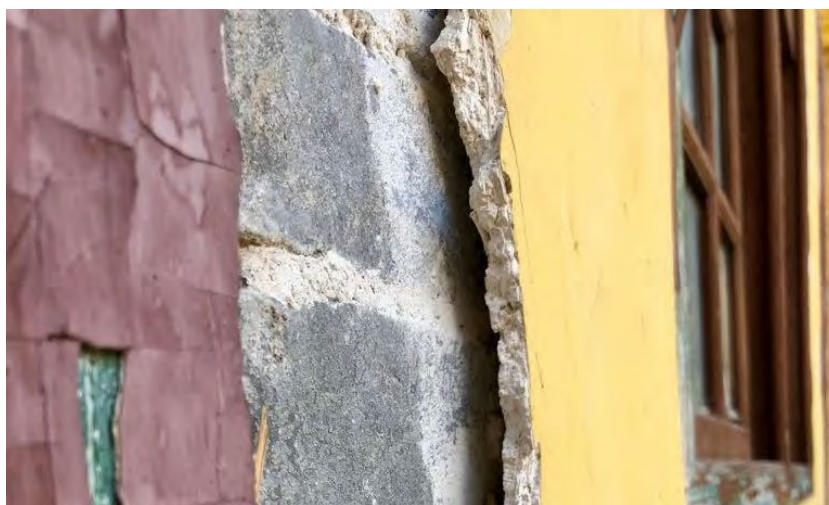
<sup>160</sup> Interview with Anthony Leong (village chief and historian of Cho Bin village), 69, Zhongshan, 2 December 2018. A similar scenario was reported at Lai Wor School in Zhuhai, based on an interview with Howard Wilson (family historian) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne and Alexandra Wong in Sydney, 15 February 2019. Worthy of further study, possibly through timely oral history, is a recount of the actual observations as schools were being built and how women in the village participated in the process.

<sup>161</sup> According to Howard Wilson, CHOY Hing was described as both a patriot (who hired Chinese designers) and internationalist (who was eager to adopt the best techniques from the West).

<sup>162</sup> Modern Portland cement was variously known in the Chinese vernacular as “red-haired man’s mud” (紅毛泥) “foreign mud,” (洋泥) or “water mud” (水泥). In its application, concrete could be considered a futuristic material.

<sup>163</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (former student of Sha Chung School), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019; also cited in Cheng (2020: 148).

traditional adaptations, such as grey brick, in inconspicuous positions (Shu 2018: 102; Figure 4.7). The mixing-and-matching of traditional and modern construction materials also applied to the non-structural interior walls of Sha Chung School, where concrete was reinforced with bamboo, a cheaper and readily available substitute for ferro-concrete.<sup>164</sup> While importing materials obviously added to the construction bill, it also contributed to the novelty of the school. For example, after Sha Chung School was completed in 1923, many who visited the village could not fathom how an architectural marvel had emerged in the countryside.<sup>165</sup>



**Figure 4.7** Behind the exfoliating cement plaster of Cho Bin School, the grey brick structure of the building is exposed. (Photo by Denis Byrne, 2 December 2018.)

I asked how villagers reacted to the new school. My informant relayed what his elders in Sha Chung had once told him, upon seeing the first Chinese-Australian purpose-built school in Zhongshan:

My Sha Chung elders shared their concerns: Without roof rafters, they worried the new [concrete] roof would collapse any second. But MA Ying-piu, MA Wing Charn and other returning *wab-kiu* (overseas Chinese) assured them it wouldn't collapse. Hearing that, those elders started praising the new school. They rejoiced with vanity, realising that their village had profited from the latest advances in construction technology, and Sha Chung was a forerunner [in Zhongshan].<sup>166</sup>

Due to the use of innovative materials, the new-style school architecture was unlike the buildings of the past. The village elders at the time were undoubtedly proud and optimistic about their new school. Once they were built, neighbouring villages most likely resented their triumph.

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<sup>164</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 January 2019.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 January 2019.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 17 September 2020.



Unsurprisingly, earlier-built schools became the subject of imitation. From analysing their designs, Sha Chung School (built 1920–1923) evidently inspired the design of Cho Bin School. Then, Cho Bin School (built 1927–1929) inspired another, Ha Zhat School (下澤學校 built 1931–1932).<sup>167</sup> Although the village schools in Cho Bin and Ha Zhat were located 10km apart, one on each side of the Shekki River, the similar façade and 回-shaped courtyard suggests that imitation was undoubtedly the sincerest form of appreciation (Bosker 2013).

Diaspora-funded schools generally demonstrated what historian John Fitzgerald (2020: 207) noted about one of the best-known schools funded by the Chinese diaspora—Taishan Number One Middle School (est. 1909)—that the Canadian diaspora allowed the homeland “to achieve something that had never been accomplished on that scale to that time.” Overseas funds and networks resulted in a new building and an influx of architects to builders that worked in the company and gaze of unskilled village women. As a result, the schools generated a sense of novelty, pride, and hope for residents of the *qiaoxiang*, while at the same time being a source of envy for their poorer neighbours.<sup>168</sup>

## Inhabiting New Schools

The new-style schools were far more inclusive than those of the past. This is because they were substantially larger and had a school population capacity of a few hundred, whereas old-style schools (*sishu*) could only accommodate a few dozen (Ming 1996: 30; Figure 4.8). The new schools were in Dai Leng village (est. 1911) and Sha Chung village (est. 1923), and both had 300 students,<sup>169</sup> while the 5.5 storey Lai Wor School (est. 1930) accommodated 400 students in its 1,000m<sup>2</sup> building. In the post-1978 reform era, schools welcomed even more students. Ma Shan School (est. 1983),

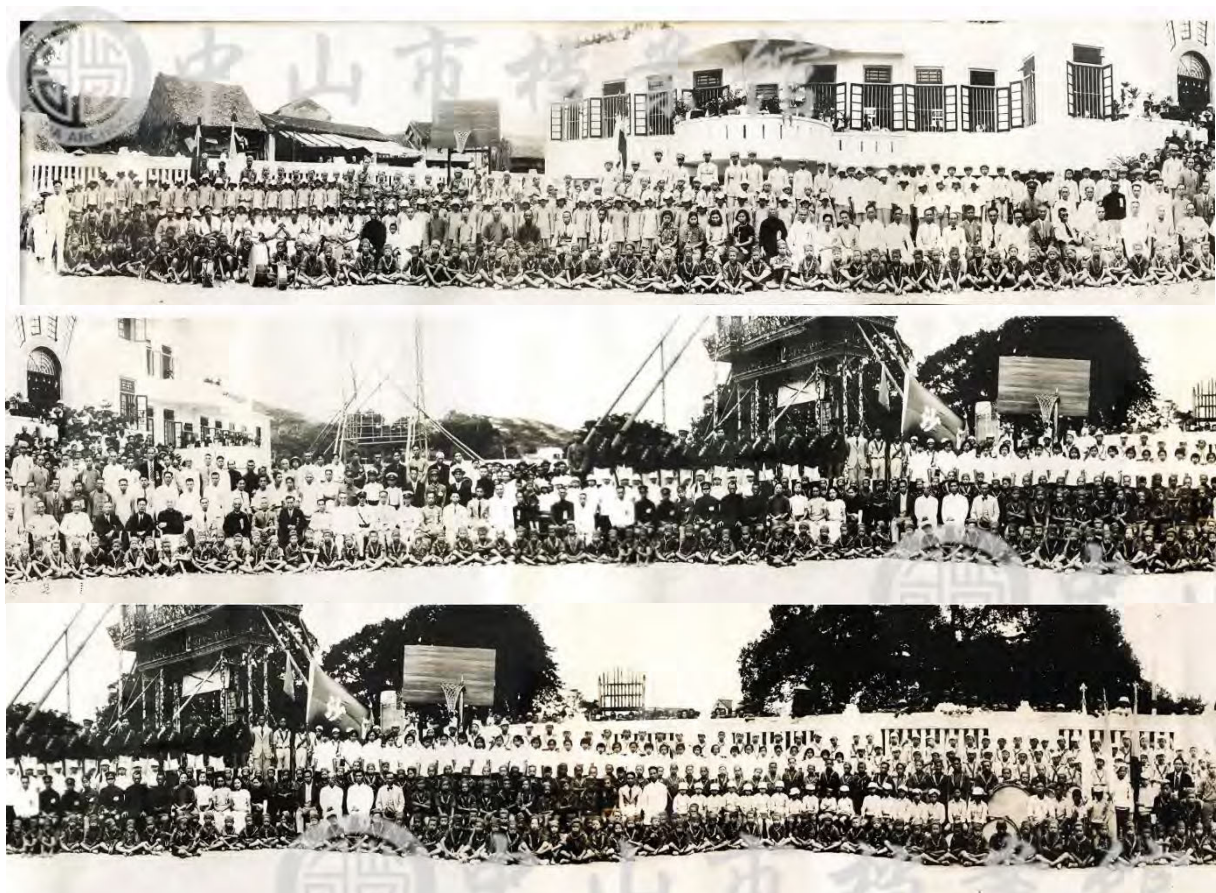
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<sup>167</sup> The old Ha Zhat School (from the 1930s) has not survived. When I visited the village in late 2017, I saw and heard that a new four-storey school had been constructed on the site of the old school since 1993. Apparently, former students of Ha Zhat Village visit Cho Bin School from time to time to relive their old school days (Telephone interview with Anthony Leong (village chief and historian of Cho Bin village), 68, Zhongshan, 19 December 2017; School tour with Miss Chen (former student and current headteacher of Ha Zhat Village School), Zhongshan, 27 December 2017).

<sup>168</sup> It is worth noting that not all localities with *huaqiao* (overseas) ties could afford new schools right away. Sometimes, more pressing local concerns, like flooding for instance, required more urgent temporary relief, which was likely to take precedence over the long-term investment in education.

<sup>169</sup> While the area of Dai Leng is unknown, the two-storied Sha Chung School is 730m<sup>2</sup> (excluding the roof terrace).

for example, accommodated over 800 students annually in its two-storey (1,800m<sup>2</sup>) school building.<sup>170</sup>



**Figure 4.8** A commemorative photograph taken in 1935 to mark the opening of Heng Mei School in Zhongshan's South District.<sup>171</sup> (Source: Chen 2021.)

Not only were new-style schools larger; there were other benefits too. Village children who once had no future, for instance, could finally attend school. The majority of them were most likely locals, either from the village where the school was situated or from neighbouring villages.<sup>172</sup> In addition to children “sent home” from Australia in the early twentieth century (Bagnall 2018a: 93; Yong 1977: 211), the modern classrooms would also have their first female students. An “old girl” from Lai Wor School (previously in Zhongshan, now Zhuhai) pointed out that without the

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<sup>170</sup> See Hunt (2009: 183); *Voice of Doumen*, July 1984, p.5.

<sup>171</sup> Due to the length of the image, I have divided it into 3 parts, so it can be displayed at a reasonable size on a single page.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (former Sha Chung School student and village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018.

generosity of free education provided by CHOY Hing, of The Sun department store, her family circumstances could not otherwise afford the school fees.<sup>173</sup>

I began school when I was nine [...] and [attended] until my teenage years. At the time, it was good that I finished primary school, especially given my background. My father died when I was four and the family solely relied on my mother's income. There was a younger brother to support as well as the in-laws [...]. My mother planted rice to support us. I felt privileged to finish primary school.

MA Ying-piu, a leading Zhongshan educational philanthropist, recognised that “if there are schools for boys, girls cannot go without” (A. Li 2008: 58). He initiated Sai Kwong Girls' School in Shekki in 1915 (Liao 2018: 21)<sup>175</sup> and, in his ancestral home, Sha Chung, a Women and Children's Centre in 1932. In 1925, the *Chinese Republic News* reported that over 80 students started school at Sai Kwong that spring; most of them were children from overseas households.<sup>176</sup> Meanwhile, in the countryside in Sha Chung village, a separate dormitory building was established for girls. This two-storey red-brick edifice allowed “up to 20 or 30 girls to live together, 4 per room,”<sup>177</sup> so “those girls who were already living alone, or who had too far to walk from Sha Chung could benefit [from education] as well.”<sup>178</sup> Still, gender biases within the household meant that school-aged village girls missed out on education. Grandma Choy recalled that as a girl she was expected to remain at home to help with household chores and take care of younger siblings.<sup>179</sup>

Diaspora-funded schools were usually better resourced. In the pre-1949 era, they already had musical instruments, sporting equipment, scientific equipment, maps, and charts. In the post-reform era, Sincere School in Sha Chung village (est. 1983), for example, had audio-visual rooms, with televisions and several computers. “These features were rare in Zhongshan and made Sha Chung (village) a forerunner in the education scene.”<sup>180</sup> The frequent homecoming donations

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with SHENG Lai Kum (former student of Lai Wor School), 84, Ngoi Sha village, Zhuhai, 29 November 2018.

<sup>175</sup> The fundraising of Sai Kwong school was notably led by Sincere Co. founders, MA Ying-piu and MA Wing Charn, who were responsible for buying an old house in Shekki and transforming it into a school. This school was originally housed in a traditional ancestral hall-like building, purchased by Ma Wing Charn, located beside the present-day Tai Ping Church 太平堂. The funding involved the support of other department store founders as well as Australian returnees who were part of the Sydney-Hong Kong-Zhongshan congregation, including James Gocklock, Philip Gockchin, Gockshun, KWOK Chiu, Paul Gock Quay and Owe Lerng (Based on records at Gaojiaji Primary School 高家基小學—the site of the former Sai Kwong Girls' School, Shekki, Zhongshan, 11 June 2018).

<sup>176</sup> *Chinese Republic News*, 28 March 1925, p.7.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020

<sup>178</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 December 2018

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Ms. CHOY Chu (former student of Lai Wor School), 80s, Zhuhai, 18 December 2017.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 13 November 2020

meant each school was unlike any other.<sup>181</sup> More importantly, they ultimately provided a new horizon of learning opportunities for their students, as will be discussed in the next chapter.



**Figure 4.9** A newly equipped classroom in the early 1990s (Source: *Zhongsan Chuen Luk School Magazine: Inauguration Edition 1992*, p.33).

Diaspora-funded schools also had better-quality teachers. At a time when old-time Confucian scholars continued to operate in ancestral halls, migrant-benefactors of some pre-1949 schools, like Lai Wor School, were handpicking the best teachers from Canton and Hong Kong.<sup>182</sup> In the reform era, better-endowed schools appointed expatriate teachers; Sincere School, for instance, recruited two native English-speaking staff from Canada.<sup>183</sup>

Clearly, diaspora-funded schools were inevitably a sign of progress in the *qiaoxiang*. The new schools were socially more inclusive than in the past as they enrolled a greater number and a broader range of students. Given the facilities and teaching staff, diaspora-funded schools were thus also educationally superior. Students naturally felt privileged to be affiliated with such well-endowed facilities.

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<sup>181</sup> Telephone interview with Raymond Leong (Zhongshan-born descendant of an Australian school donor), 85, 18 April 2018; also see Giese (1997: 178).

<sup>182</sup> *Zhubai Special Zone News*, 13 May 2010, p.1. Correspondence with Howard Wilson (family historian), 18 December 2017.

<sup>183</sup> Based on an interview with MA Yin-chiu, 11 November 2020. I was told that once these expatriate teachers resigned their positions remained unfilled.

## Immortalising the Contributions of Migrant Donors

As seen so far, a new school brought together people from divergent backgrounds: to design it, build it, teach in it, and finally, to study there. Besides the student beneficiaries, the establishment of new schools had the greatest transformation on the school benefactors. For example, before financing a new school in Zhongshan, Darwin-born school donor Robert Yuen was told, “If you build a school in the village your name will be there forever” (Giese 1997: 178).<sup>184</sup> Generally, it was through spending, donating, and investing in the homeland that overseas Chinese allowed their wealth to be amplified and the traditional rural hierarchies to be transcended (Benton and Liu 2018: 134; Hsu 2000a: 89). This was the transformative potential of homeland diaspora philanthropy.

Although school donors became prominent names in the ancestral home due to their contributions, they were not necessarily viewed in the same light in Australia. As we know, Chinese immigrants in Australia have mostly been portrayed as having simple lifestyles: toiling day and night in market gardens, shops, or restaurants (Frost 2002: 123; Loy-Wilson 2014b: 419; Lu and Gao 2010: 41). Although these representations seem real, they provide only a synchronous snapshot of “diasporic time” (S. Chan 2018).<sup>185</sup> Henry Yu (2018) notes that the aspirations of these migrants were usually less clear and can only be understood by capturing the broader narratives of the migrants’ lives. The construction of schools in the *qiaoxiang* tells the previously untold story of peasant-migrants’ journeys to riches—a narrative that complements the “Australian narrative” of many migrants which tends to be about endless work—and is often misinterpreted as the sole narrative of Chinese immigrants.

Waldinger (2015: 41) reminds us, however, that immigrants are also emigrants. Upon returning home to China, migrants were motivated by the thought of “returning home with glory” (Williams 2018). Those who contributed to new schools also allowed their statuses to be catapulted even higher (Benton and Liu 2018: 134). During my fieldwork in Zhongshan, I was able to bathe in the glowing words of admiration that beneficiaries had for school founders before I even told them

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<sup>184</sup> In the end, the school building was dedicated to the memory of YUEN Yet Hing (1853–1916), Robert’s late father (Giese 1997: 178).

<sup>185</sup> Shelly Chan makes a temporal distinction between Chinese migrants overseas and at home in China. Time ordinarily spent at the destination country is considered “diasporic time”, while the irregular encounters they have with the home country are considered “diasporic moments.”

that I was not a donor or a relative of a benefactor, and what the actual purpose of my visit was. This happened when one of the Dip Shek School teachers, who volunteered to show us around, expressed how grateful they were for our donations.<sup>186</sup> The teacher indicated how much the school meant to them—the students and the village—and that it would not have been possible to finance the school without all the sacrifices that the overseas donors made. The genuine appreciation of a non-native Zhongshan teacher who spoke to me in a non-local tongue (Mandarin)<sup>187</sup> as he beckoned us to the donor board enabled me to get a glimpse of how some schools continue to value the contributions of their benefactors decades after they were founded, and why a so-called “red-carpet” treatment was commonplace for the true VIPs (Figure 4.10).



**Figure 4.10** Students at Ma Shan School in Doumen, Zhuhai, form a guard-of-honour to welcome back their school donor, Stanley Hunt, and his family from Australia in the 1980s. (Source: *Voice of Doumen*, July 1984 (7): cover image.)

The timing of my field research did not coincide, as far as I know, with visits to the schools in Zhongshan by Australian donors. Yet, from an interview with a descendant of a donor, I can imagine the celebrity-like statuses of donors whenever they returned. In an interview at the

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<sup>186</sup> Denis Byrne and I participated in a walking tour with a Mandarin-speaking teacher (from Hubei Province) at Dip Shek School, Zhongshan, 28 November 2018.

<sup>187</sup> Since the economic reform, more and more teachers have come to work in Guangdong Province from elsewhere in China. This transition is also reflected in the student cohort, where many pupils are not native to Zhongshan either; their parents had migrated to the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong Province, where new opportunities for low-skilled labourers, for instance in factories, opened after the de-collectivisation of the communes in the 1980s.

Townsville Philip Leong Library, Philip Leong’s eldest daughter, Mrs. Phyllis Rainford, recounted a vivid scene of her father’s homecoming to Cho Bin delivered by former Townsville mayor Tony Mooney in his eulogy to Philip at his funeral on 23 June 1999 at St. James Cathedral in Townsville.<sup>188</sup>

When we arrived in Zhongshan we were greeted by a full police escort, flags flying and sirens blaring. It didn’t take long to realise that the red-carpet treatment was really for Philip who just happened to have the mayor of Townsville as one of his many friends.



**Figure 4.11** (Top) Stanley Yee, Zhongshan-born Sydney-based school donor, inspecting the newly built Chuen Luk School in Dachong town (Source: *Zhongshan Chuen Luk School Magazine: Inauguration Edition 1992*, p.35). (Bottom) Philip Leong, Zhongshan-born Townsville-based school donor, delivering a speech at Cho Bin School (Source: Anthony Leong, circa 1980); Philip Leong’s Townsville-born daughter, Janet Wang, (seated front left) at a school assembly in Cho Bin School in Zhongshan. (Source: Janet Wang, private family collection, April 1987.)

Also, from browsing through the photographic records, I can imagine the elevated statuses of donors whenever they returned. Images in the *qiaokan* or in old photographs kept at the school

<sup>188</sup> Interview with Mrs. Phyllis Rainford (Australian-born descendant of a school donor), 72, Townsville, 19 April 2017. Based on a telephone interview with Tony Mooney, 30 October 2019, he told me that his visit to Cho Bin village in Zhongshan occurred in the early 1990s, during his tenure as Mayor of Townsville. Townsville then hoped to establish a sister city relationship with China (an agreement was finally reached with Changshu—a city in Suzhou in 1995). During Tony’s time in China, Philip Leong took the initiative to show him Zhongshan and took him to visit his ancestral village on that trip.

showed students forming guards-of-honour to welcome their school's founders (Figure 4.10). Other photographs depicted returning school benefactors being escorted around a new school, or standing behind lecterns, presumably as guest speakers, addressing school assemblies (Figure 4.11). And when a donor passed away, the village customarily organised tributes that were well attended by current students as well as past beneficiaries.<sup>189</sup>

During fieldwork I noticed that the contributions of migrant donors were generally immortalised literally in stone and concrete. In some century-old schools, I found their commemorative features were still intact. Portraits of donors appeared on memorial walls, in halls of fame, or inside the assembly halls (Figure 4.12). These portraits resemble a format seen in the *qiaokan* (magazine) during the fundraising phase (Hsu 2004: 132; Yu 1983: 58). In other schools, commemorative features were cemented in stone and placed beside classrooms, or a list of donors appeared on an honour roll plaque in a prominent location inside the school. Beyond acknowledgement, these seemingly indestructible etchings can be seen as the material essence of tradition—an indigenous system of maintaining credibility, which survived long after all other media had deteriorated (Wissler 2013; Figure 4.12).<sup>190</sup>

Besides their permanent commemorative features, diaspora-funded schools were generally well-built structures that transformed otherwise unremarkable agrarian villages in southern China into prestigious locales with transnational connections (Byrne 2016a: 275). With the passage of time, these schools opened the ancestral home to the wider world. As a “permanent monument to the ancestor” in the village (Giese 1997: 177), they became anchors for the worldwide diaspora to learn about their ancestral roots and routes (Reed 2015; Louie 2004). It is not difficult to understand why commemorative features, such as a stone tablet with the name of Dr. Leong's grandfather inscribed on it (Figure 4.1, at the beginning of this chapter), or portraits of the Kwok/Gock donors

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<sup>189</sup> In an interview, Ms. LEON Siu-en, a former student of Cho Bin school, recalled attending the funeral of “LEONG Goon Jew” (梁官招, likely known as “Leong Jew” in Australia), the initiator and founding benefactor of the school in Cho Bin. She recalls that he had never married and could afford to donate his life savings to fund a new school. (Interviews with Ms. LEON Siu-en, former student of Cho Bin school, 95, Zhongshan 25 December 2017; Anthony Leong, Cho Bin village historian, 69, Zhongshan, 2 December 2018). During a trip to Xiamen in 2016, I heard that both past and current beneficiaries of the schools funded by TAN Kah Kee (1874–1961)—a well-known Singaporean-Chinese educational philanthropist who supported schools in South-East Asia and Xiamen—return to his home village each year to pay their tributes.

<sup>190</sup> Less durable were printed records, including newspapers and magazines, the pages of which easily stuck together due to damp weather, spoilt by mildew after the wet and humid seasons, or were eroded by silverfish infestations. A homespun remedy of protecting important documents in Zhongshan was placing a set of firecrackers alongside important documents, because sulphur leakage prevents insects from devouring the paper. Obviously, no continuous care was taken when it came to the 85-year-old school magazine, resulting in its deteriorated state, as shown in Figure 4.12 (Correspondence with Anthony Leong, 72, Cho Bin village historian, 21 July 2021).



as displayed in the assembly hall of Chuk Sau Yuen School (Figure 4.12), were indispensable to diaspora-funded schools. Conversely, if these features were missing or damaged, the village might seem less important in the eyes of the ongoing diaspora, indicating that their ancestors' deeds were not dutifully respected. The presence of these commemorative features ensures that a school continues to honour the founding benefactors as well as make it a pilgrimage site for the ongoing diaspora, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.



**Figure 4.12** (Top left) A “Hall of Fame” at Chuen Luk School (Source: *Zhongshan Chuen Luk School Magazine: Inauguration Edition* 1992, p.32); (Bottom left) The school headmaster, Mr. Li, narrates the history of Chuk Sau Yuen School to its current students by referring to the portraits of the school’s donors inside the school hall. (Source: *Zhongshan Broadcasting & Television Station* 2020.); (Right) A salvaged copy of the 1936 *Cho Bin School Magazine*. It is worth noting that the article printed on page 13 was penned by LEONG Wei Gei (梁偉基), the son of the village chief at the time, emphasising the importance of education for education’s sake. (Source: Anthony Leong.)

## Conclusion: Schools as Sources of Desire and Hope

Diaspora-funded schools crystallised the desires and hopes of a transnational Chinese-Australian community. Upon their completion, school benefactors gained a newfound sense of pride. Asian donors in Australia are unlikely to brag about their philanthropic activities (Chau and Fitzgerald 2018: 21). However, in a rare account by an Australian donor, Stanley Hunt claimed that this was

the reason his father, who was typical of Chinese men who “simply do not know how to say nice things,” said, “I’m very proud of you, Stanley,” after attending the inauguration of Ma Shan School in 1983 (Hunt 2009: 183). Two years later, when a library was built, Stanley again wrote in his memoir, “I could see that [Dad] was beaming with pride and joy” (Hunt 2009: 184). Although he did not say so, it was possible that his father’s smile came from imagining that the improved amenities would have a positive impact on the homeland’s future.<sup>191</sup>

To understand how the presence of new schools ensured a bright future for the village, I interviewed locals in the Pearl River Delta about the impact of diaspora-funded schools. A former Overseas Chinese Affairs liaison officer in Zhongshan commented on how donors felt: “In the donors’ mind, the new schools were the most beautiful thing. They could imagine children going to school every day and doing so safely.”<sup>192</sup> Providing a former students’ perspective, Mr. Lee, a representative of Larm Ha village in Zhongshan, helped me understand why there was an emphasis on safety. He explained that as a child, he had to walk to the neighbouring village because his village did not have a school. The way to Cheung Kok (象角) was a ten-minute walk (850m each way) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Mr. Lee explains:

It wasn’t a difficult distance, but it wasn’t convenient either. Most of us went barefoot, since we couldn’t afford shoes, not even thongs! (laughter) It was all dirt roads. There were no concrete pavements. It was especially difficult during the rainy seasons, when the dirt roads became sticky, sometimes we got bogged, our legs were splattered in mud.<sup>193</sup>

In another “Australian village” in Guangdong, an elder village woman sympathised with the plight of the students before Sydney kinsmen donated a village school in 1985:

Those poor children had to walk a long way on a dirt road [the main thoroughfare out of the village] to school... and it was dangerous for them as they had to [constantly] watch for traffic [coming in both directions].<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> In fact, how Stanley Hunt’s father responded was not dissimilar to the reaction of elders in Sha Chung half a century earlier, when a new village school was completed in Sha Chung village in 1923. Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 17 September 2020.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqu (historian and retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 9 May 2018.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Mr. Lee (village chief of Larm Ha village 嵐霞) Zhongshan, 6 December 2018.

<sup>194</sup> Interview with Mrs. Lee (resident of Chenghu 澄湖 village of Hui Long Town 迴龍鎮), Ko Yiu 高要, 79, 28 December 2018.

These experiences were like those mentioned in the previous chapter: the lives of unfortunate children were in danger when they came to and from school (VanderVen 2005: 225).

The construction of new schools often led to associated construction projects.<sup>195</sup> Once they were built, the diaspora also contributed to laying a pathway of stone slabs leading to the school (Figure 4.13).<sup>196</sup> Both improvements ushered a future for the home village where the well-being of children and villagers in general were cared for.<sup>197</sup> Therefore, diaspora-funded schools promised an “alternative history” for the ancestral home, as Yu (2018: 195) posited when referring to the contributions of the Cantonese-Pacific migrants. The alternative future of the students in the *qiaoxiang* is the central theme of the next chapter.



**Figure 4.13** Stone slab pathway in Cho Bin village of South District in Zhongshan, circa 1980s. (Source: Anthony Leong, private collection.)

In recounting the making of diaspora-funded schools, this chapter demonstrates that diaspora-funded schools embodied a unique transnational socio-material assemblages of the twentieth century *qiaoxiang*. These assemblages consisted of both material (letters and remittances, magazines and newspapers, the built fabric and classroom objects) and social components (overseas donors, architects, builders, teachers, and students). Beyond their emergence, schools funded by the

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<sup>195</sup> Interview with Stanley Hunt (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne, Alexandra Wong, Christopher Cheng in Sydney, 6 October 2017. At Ma Shan School, this specifically meant putting up a new gate, teacher’s dormitory, as well as successive upgrades to the school facilities over time (Hunt 2009: 184–186).

<sup>196</sup> Interview MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 80, Zhongshan, 17 September 2020.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with KWOK Lai-mun (Chuk Sau Yuen village elder), 85, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018; also see, Cheng (2019a: 242).

diaspora represented an alternative vision of the homeland. The new-style schools showed not only how migrant donors rose to the challenge of conquering widespread illiteracy, poverty, and idleness in the homeland. Once these schools were built in the Republican and the post-Mao periods, they became the pride of the diaspora as well as a source of well-being and hope for the homeland.

# Chapter 5

## New Schools for a Modern Future

In 1911, David O’Young (歐陽民慶 1866–1932)<sup>198</sup> converted his Western-style remittance mansion in Dai Leng (大嶺) village into a new-style school (新式學堂), ushering in a new era for Chinese-Australian diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan. AU-YEUNG Chow (歐陽洲), who was once a student at that school and later became the village scribe, told me in an interview:

It was not a purpose-built [primary] school, but a grand, two-storey Western home built by a migrant who had “made it” and then turned it into a school. Unfortunately, the building has not survived, and no photographs can be uncovered.<sup>199</sup>

Modern diaspora-funded schools, like the one in Dai Leng village, were like other new schools elsewhere: they were harbingers of the future. In early twentieth-century China, they were socio-material assemblages that were clearly different from the educational facilities of the imperial past. They were where Chinese students in the twentieth century encountered all things modern (Dikötter 2006: 122). While scholars of modern China have mostly seen modernity as an urban experience (Ip, Hon and Lee 2003: 503; Esherick 2002), modernisation did not only occur in “advanced” coastal cities but also in rural areas. As we will see in this chapter, the *qiaoxiang* regions of southern China did experience a distinctive form of modernity because of their diasporic connections. Influenced by the nationalist rhetoric promoting a “westernised China”, as noted in the previous chapter, in certain towns and cities, the overseas Chinese were depicted as “bridges

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<sup>198</sup> David O’Young first came to Australia on a student visa in 1875 (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 564). Later, he and other Zhongshan immigrants worked in the Sydney wholesale fruit market. This mercantile group returned to China in the early twentieth century and established a chain of department stores called “Wing On,” with David running the Shanghai store (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 564). It was well known that the welfare of his village had depended on successful people like him to provide for his home community.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with AU-YEUNG Chow (scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017. Further descriptions of the school appear later in chapter.

to modernity” (Cook 2006). Denis Byrne notes, for example, how remittance houses built by Zhongshan emigrants in the early twentieth century were expressions of “aspirational modernity” (2016a: 270).

My research extends beyond the urban sphere and the analysis of building styles and construction materials in the village to consider how modernity unfolded as an everyday experience of the reconfigured native home of emigrants. In this chapter, this encounter especially refers to a distinct new mode of being—what Raymond Williams (1978: 310) calls a “structure of feeling.” Rather than describing a feeling per se, the term specifically captures the “affective elements of consciousness and relationships” (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015: 5) that accompanied the experience of modernity and gives a defining turning point or sense of generation. For many students in the early and late twentieth century, the modern schools funded by the diaspora represented a foray into the future. As the educational historian Ian Grosvenor noted, “When we look at school buildings [we must] recognize that we are looking at what was the future” (Grosvenor 2017: 16). Therefore, the experiences I focus on in this chapter convey an affective dimension that helps us to capture the experiential freshness of the students encounter with the new modern schools many decades ago. These experiences suggest how new diaspora-funded schools made students and their home localities modern. The distinct situated experiences of the former students at school may also be remembered as a distinctive form of “heritage-making” in the twentieth century *qiaoxiang* (Cheng 2019).

Due to a paucity of research on modern schooling in the *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities), the experience of students attending modern schools there remains largely undescribed. Those modern schools, for instance those appearing in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe and North America, were known as “catalogues of the future” (Lundahl and Lawn 2015: 320), but over time they have come to be like museums of what was once regarded as the future (Lawn and Grosvenor 2005: 7; Lawn 2005: 145). In southern China, like other surviving remittance buildings in the emigrant villages, the schools are like laboratories where researchers such as myself can return to investigate how the future was once embraced by rural dwellers (Zheng 2003: 35; Cheng 2019a). Scholars who have researched overseas Chinese or remittance architecture in the *qiaoxiang* often conclude that diaspora-funded schools were landmarks in the countryside (Liu 2002: 266; Jiang, Jiang and Cai. 2012). Yet, they were clearly more than just landmarks; they were inhabited and “alive” (Maudlin and Vellinga 2014; Long 2016). In this chapter, I will focus on the

architecture of the new schools, as well as the “interior” experiences of their main beneficiaries—the students, who were regular users of school buildings.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, it leads readers on a “tour” of the now-historic school architecture that was funded by the Chinese-Australian diaspora. Here, some changing patterns across the twentieth century in Zhongshan are identified. Then, it turns to the experience of former students to provide situated reflections. By conveying the sentiments and sensations such students experienced, relayed to me mainly through a series of oral history and walking interviews, the chapter offers a glimpse of how the schools’ earliest students felt when interacting with novel spaces and a new material world. It posits that modern diaspora-funded schools co-constituted the existence of the modern student and suggests how modern diaspora-funded education formatively shaped the lives and future careers of rural graduates, many of whom jumped over the proverbial village gate (跳出農門), leaving behind them an agrarian past for an urban or even transnational future.<sup>200</sup> And in doing so, these schools were not only a tour de force in the modernisation of rural China, but they were the epitome of *qiaoxiang* modernism in twentieth-century China.

## New School Architecture

When new schools mushroomed in the villages of Zhongshan in the early twentieth century, they were relatively insignificant structures in the eyes of urban Chinese.<sup>201</sup> Yet a former Guangzhou resident, whose late husband was from Zhongshan, commented to me that compared to some pre-1949 Guangzhou schools, the school her husband attended in Cho Bin village, South District, was one of extraordinary quality and scale.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Along the same lines, there was a similarly famous Chinese saying in imperial times, “The carp jumps over the dragon’s gate” (鯉魚跳龍門), to indicate that a candidate has successfully completed his civil-service examinations.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Dr. Joe Leong (Hong Kong-raised Australian descendant of two-generations of school donors), 84, Townsville, 18 April 2018; and email correspondence with Anthony Leong (Shanghai youth “sent down” to Cho Bin village in 1969), 71, 14 January 2021.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Mrs. Wenney Leong (spouse of a Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), Townsville, 17 April 2018.

When I spoke to those who grew up in Cho Bin,<sup>203</sup> the significance of the school’s architecture was further highlighted. Cynthia Hing Fay, an 83-year-old “old girl” I interviewed, recalls that her alma mater was far better constructed than those one-story schools in the vicinity,<sup>204</sup> and she explained that:

The school architecture, compared to other villages, was very attractive. Buck Toy, [the village] next door, only had a small school, inside an ancestral hall. Cho Bin School was enormous; there were four classrooms, a [designated] ground for sports, and a roof terrace.<sup>205</sup>

When I first visited that village in 2017, I noticed that the 1920s school was at least twice as high as the village temple beside it, and many times wider and deeper (Figure 5.1). These observations were broadly in line with Cynthia’s comments that her alma mater was better and larger than other schools in the area.



**Figure 5.1** Cho Bin school (on the right) in the Zhongshan’s South District is a double-storied structure that towers above a traditional single-storey temple building (on its left). (Source: Cho Bin Village Collection, circa 1979.)

Another resident expressed what he felt when he first saw Cho Bin School as a kindergarten-aged child in the late 1970s: “That school was like a high-rise to me. I was very small, and it [the building] was humongous. It was a thrill to see it.”<sup>206</sup> Both Denis Byrne, an Australia heritage scholar

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<sup>203</sup> I acknowledge Michael Williams (Australian historian) for drawing this school to my attention, and for introducing me to Anthony Leong (historian of Cho Bin village). I am also grateful to Dr. Joe and Judy Leong for kindly introducing me to many of Cho Bin kinsfolk in Townsville and beyond.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Mrs. Cynthia Hing Fay (former student at Cho Bin school), 83, Townsville, 17 April 2018.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with Mrs. Cynthia Hing Fay, 17 April 2018. There were eight classrooms (at least five dedicated to each of the major donors), but it is possible that only four were in use due to a chronic shortage of teachers in the school’s early years.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with LEONG Chi-kwok (current Cho Bin village representative), 1 June 2020.



researching remittance architecture in Zhongshan and, PENG Changxin, a Guangzhou-based architectural historian studying the modernisation of architecture in Canton, made similar remarks after visiting Cho Bin school, that the sheer scale of the school reflected the newfound emphasis and pride in modern education in the ancestral locality.<sup>207</sup> However, before describing what a single modern school was like in Zhongshan, it is first necessary to elaborate on the type of buildings that they replaced and how school designs in the *qiaoxiang* evolved across the twentieth century.

### *Modern Education in Ancient Ancestral Halls*

Before purpose-built schools were established, many villages converted centuries-old ancestral halls into modern schools. Since the cost of such conversions had generally been beyond the capacity of ordinary peasants before emigration occurred, they depended on the scholar-gentry. Later, in the early twentieth century, villages sought the support of the overseas diaspora. The first modern schools in Zhongshan funded by Australian Chinese immigrants were located inside pre-existing ancestral halls. After the widespread promotion of modern schooling by the imperial government in 1905, makeshift modern schools in ancestral halls appeared in several Zhongshan villages, including Sha Chung, Chuk Sau Yuen, Dai Leng, and Ching Keung.<sup>208</sup> But since these buildings were not designed with modern education in mind, they proved to be of limited suitability.

Limited space meant that students often took turns attending ancestral hall schools, each spending half a day of school there.<sup>209</sup> Depending on their location in the village, this could mean there was no space for exercise or organised sports, prerequisites of the modern curriculum (VanderVen 2005: 209). An informant mentioned the limitations of using the ancestral hall as a modern school:

Those villages without [modern purpose-built] schools occupied ancestral halls. Their classes were not organised by grades, students were divided into two: a junior and a senior class. [...] Usually one teacher handled everything and because of insufficient facilities, they generally couldn't follow the [national] syllabus. And [due to its open courtyard] classes were suspended when it rained.<sup>210</sup>

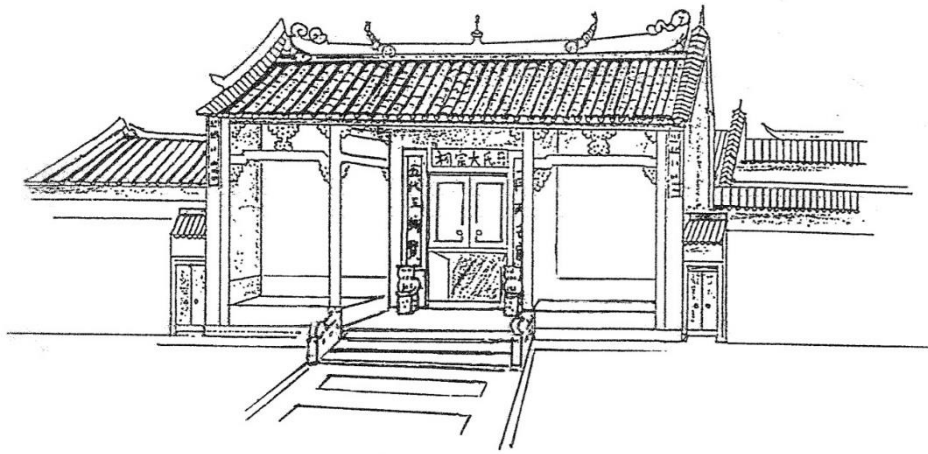
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<sup>207</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018. Also see Byrne (2016a: 273).

<sup>208</sup> Interviews with AU-YEUNG Chow (scribe and former student of Dai Leng School), 87, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017, and MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019; also see Kuo (2013: 158) and A. Li (2008: 59).

<sup>209</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

<sup>210</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto (former resident of Cho Bin village, Zhongshan), 74, 20 October 2020.



**Figure 5.2** A sketch of the Ma Ancestral Hall (now demolished) in Sha Chung, South District, Zhongshan. (Source: Association of Ma Clansmen of Sar Chung Limited (Hong Kong) 1997: n.p.).

The ancestral hall schools, as shown in Figure 5.2, obviously failed to meet the needs of modern education. In the next few decades, after 1905, new purpose-built structures gradually emerged in Zhongshan.

### *Nascent Modern Schools*

The schools that appeared in Republican Zhongshan from the 1910s to the 1920s could be classified as “transitional buildings” in that they were interim structures until something more permanent could be built. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the first known transitional school was a Western-style remittance mansion in Dai Leng village. That schoolhouse was established when David O’Young converted his home into a school in 1911. AU-YEUNG Chow,<sup>211</sup> a knowledgeable elder from that village, described his former school as a six-room mansion with a garden, and in an interview with me recalled that:

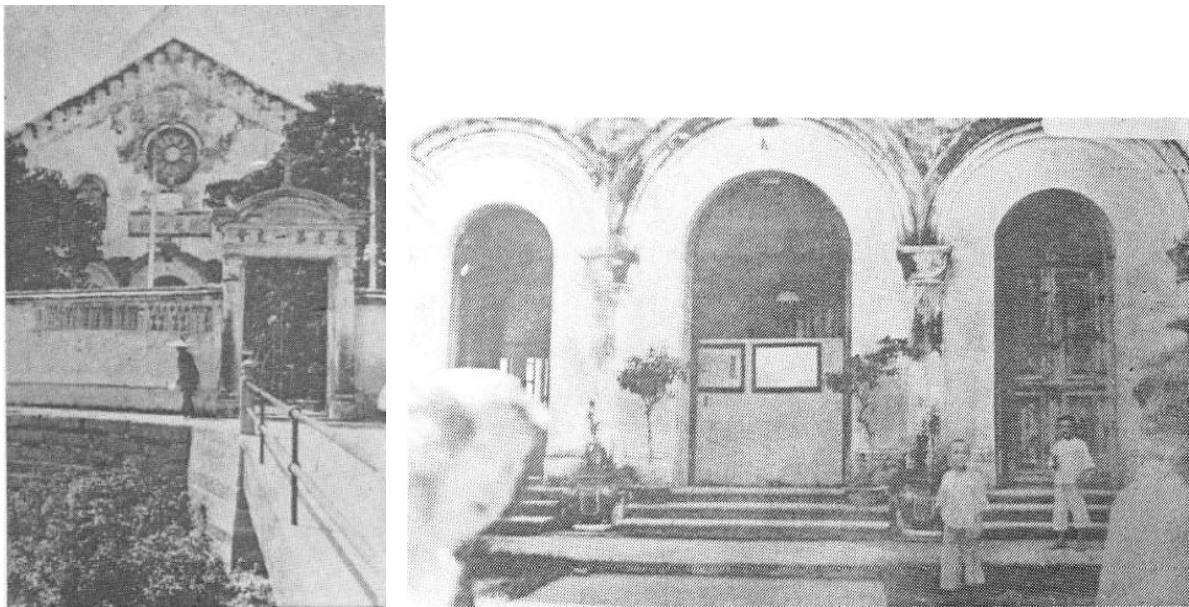
The schoolhouse was not only many times larger than an ordinary farming family’s house, but it also had a garden. The mansion was double storied with elevated walkways around its perimeter that contributed to better ventilation and commanding views, and it had a school bell that could be heard far and wide, drawing 200 to 300 students from our village and other nearby villages.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> He was a past student of Dai Leng School and is honourably known to his fellow villages as “headmaster” (校長). After retiring early from the position of headmaster at a nearby village school due to health reasons, AU-YEUNG Chow lived off superannuation. He spent eight years of his retirement updating the Au-Yeung (O’Young) genealogy. Then, after 300–400 letters were exchanged with the overseas diaspora, he spent three years compiling Dai Leng village’s history of overseas ties.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with AU-YEUNG Chow (scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

Another example of a Western transitional building was the Owe Lerng Missionary School (歐亮福音堂學校).<sup>213</sup> This was founded in 1918 within a church in Liang Du District (良都堂). The building was designed for a religious function, as was the case with the ancestral hall, but with the additional function of education. The upper floor was a chapel, while the ground floor was the school (Sohu 2019). But in contrast to the imperial-palatial architecture of the old-style ancestral halls, the style of the church was distinctly Western (Figure 5.3). The church structure was fully enclosed under a pitched roof. But over time, the form, style, and function of the building would change.<sup>214</sup> These two transitional schools show that, at least from the first decade of the twentieth century onwards, modern schools were becoming recognisably Western structures.



**Figure 5.3** Owe Lerng Missionary School (歐亮福音堂學校, est. 1918) in Liang Du District, Zhongshan County. Photo circa 1920s. (Source: Field c.1991: 31)

### *Neoclassical (or Nanyang-style) Schools in the 1920s*

The transitional school building phase ended when new purpose-built schools appeared. Starting in the 1920s, many new schoolhouses were influenced by neoclassical design—or what Zhongshan locals call “Nanyang architecture.” These purpose-built schools featured the hallmarks of European neoclassical architecture: columns, or portico-balconies, generally like neoclassical

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<sup>213</sup> I am grateful to Julia Volkmar, a Cairns-based researcher, for drawing my attention to this school.

<sup>214</sup> From looking at the old photographs shown in Figure 5.3, I initially failed to recognise that I had previously visited the building site. Communication with a builder responsible for maintaining the churches in Zhongshan revealed that the Owe Lerng School had once occupied the same site of present-day Liang Du Christian Church (Personal correspondence with LIU Jianneng, 26 June 2020).

buildings found in colonial South-East Asia, which broadly represents the influence of the former British imperial colonies across South and East Asia.<sup>215</sup> It is worth noting that these schools were strikingly different from the architecture of China’s imperial past, and they also presumably responded better to the local climate. As a novel design feature associated with “Nanyang architecture” in China, the colonial veranda helped the new buildings better respond to the humid and hot climate of Southern China (Peng 2008: 63; Farris 2016: 26). The distinctive “Nanyang” features of new 1920s schools in Zhongshan were likely inspired by the design of early missionary schools (Figure 5.4), built decades earlier in the treaty ports.



**Figure 5.4** Pui Ching Boys’ School (培正男學堂) in Canton was built in 1907 and later became Pui Ching Middle School. (Source: South China Historical Trail 2019.)

Denis Byrne, who has studied Chinese-Australian remittance houses in Zhongshan, suggests that these early twentieth-century buildings were modern in the sense that they had departed from traditional architecture, rather than that they were influenced by the *modernist* architectural movements in the West, such as the Bauhaus (Byrne 2020a: 190). The neoclassical style of many modern buildings in China in this period coincided with the return of the first batch of Chinese architects trained in the West, as one architectural historian noted:

the timing of their education coincided with the last gasp of Beaux-Arts neoclassicism in Europe and the United States and that upon their return they transplanted Beaux-Arts back to China just before it fell out of favor elsewhere, leaving it to languish on its own over subsequent decades as China stood in isolation. (Kuan 2011: 169)

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<sup>215</sup> While Nanyang architecture was popular in the 1920s, it may be worthwhile exploring further why an equivalent “Gum San” (金山, literally “Gold Mountain”) style from the Cantonese-Pacific goldrush destinations did not also emerge.

Around the first decade of the twentieth century, the neoclassical was being challenged in the West by the pioneers of European modernist architecture who contended that ornament was criminal and degenerate.<sup>216</sup> As a result, European neoclassicism, while new in China, progressively fell out of fashion outside it.

When examining the appearance of schools (Figure 5.5), I found two early schools that look remarkably similar. Both are in Liang Du District (present-day South District of Zhongshan). Sha Chung School was the first purpose-built school (built between 1920 and 1923); the second school, Cho Bin School, was built between 1927 and 1929.<sup>217</sup> The two schools are symmetrical in design, double storied, feature colonnaded porticos and balconies, and have an open cupola centrally positioned on the roof, behind the school sign on the parapet wall. Given that the two schools are only 6km apart, it is highly likely that the design of the first school inspired that of the second school.<sup>218</sup>



1920–1923 Sha Chung School



1927–1929 Cho Bin School

**Figure 5.5** Neoclassical or “Nanyang-style” schools have appeared in Zhongshan since the 1920s. (Source: refer to Appendix A.)

One of the most iconic schools of this period was Cho Bin School (Figure 5.5). Although, from the façade, the school appears Western, except for the sign with the school’s name in Chinese,

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<sup>216</sup> The reason for declaring ornamentation a crime is not only that smooth and clean surfaces were simpler, but that ornamentation was a waste of material, time, and money. The modernist architect Adolf Loos (1870–1933) refers to ornamentation in a pre-modern building as an outdated practice similar to tattoos on savage tribal people (Long 2009: 207–208).

<sup>217</sup> It might be worth pointing out that while Cho Bin School was completed by the late 1920s, it was first conceived as early as a decade prior to this. In 1919, LEONG Goon Jew (perhaps known as “Leong Jew” in Australia and associated with Tie Hop and Co. in Hughenden, Queensland) proposed a new school for Cho Bin. He initiated a fundraising drive by contributing 100 Australian pounds, equivalent to approximately 1,600 silver taels, to a school that eventually cost 22,500 silver taels. (Interview with Anthony Leong (Zhongshan historian), 69, and Sandi Robb (Queensland historian), Cho Bin village, Zhongshan, 2 December 2018).

<sup>218</sup> The two schools are within an hour walking distance of each other. At the time, when cars were not common in Zhongshan, it was reachable by foot, bus, or bicycle (Phone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto, 74, 28 June 2020). It so happens that Mrs. Seeto’s mother was from Sha Chung village and her father was from Cho Bin village.

read right to left: 校學邊曹,<sup>219</sup> visitors would notice a brightly lit central courtyard after passing through the entrance (Figure 5.6). The courtyard is reminiscent of the courtyard house (四合院) typical of Beijing, or like the open “heavenly well” (天井) of ancestral halls and temple buildings found in Zhongshan. According to Professor PENG Changxin, a leading authority of modern architecture in the Canton region, Cho Bin School uses an uncommon design for that period in southern China.<sup>220</sup> As with much other diaspora-funded architecture in China, the school was constructed according to a hybridised “East meets West” (中西合璧) design (Zheng 2003: 38). In that respect, the school embodies the tensions between modern innovation and the pre-modern vernacular.



**Figure 5.6** Behind a Western façade, the classrooms of Cho Bin School are organised around a courtyard. (Photos by Denis Byrne, 2 December 2018 (on the left), 17 November 2015 (on the right).)

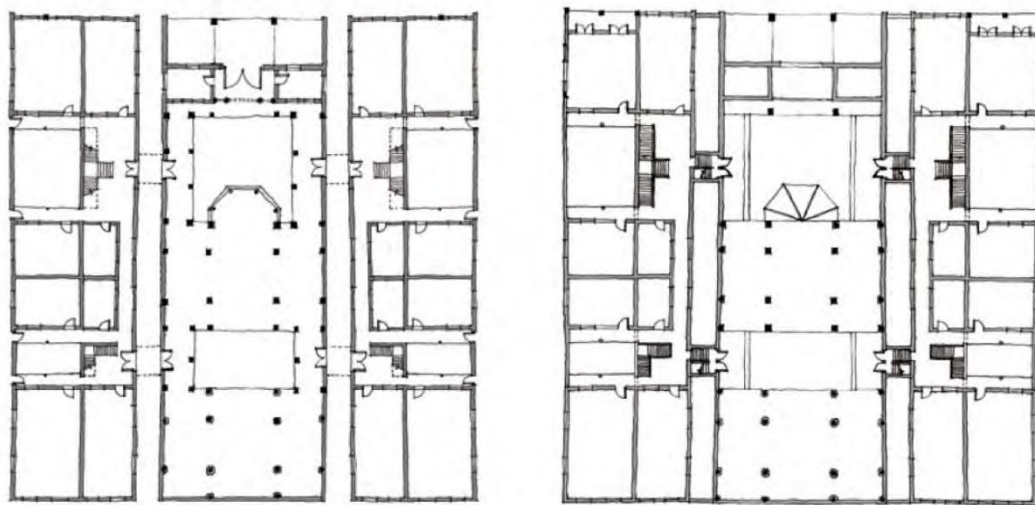
The uniqueness of Cho Bin School’s architectural typology can be contextualised historically by considering the hybridised vernacular-modern school architecture that appeared elsewhere in the Pearl River Delta. For example, a decade earlier, schools in the *qiaoxiang* of Sze Yup (the “Four

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<sup>219</sup> The characters in traditional Chinese indicate the school’s name and are read right to left, which was standard practice at the time.

<sup>220</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.

Counties”)<sup>221</sup> began merging the ancestral hall (an imperial-style building) and the modern school into a single building. The “Fong Choi Tong” (風采堂), built between 1906 and 1914 (Figure 5.7), survives as an illuminating syncretism that reflects the dual aspiration of the transnational migrant community at the time: to bring glory to the homeland, while expressing patriotism to an emergent Chinese nation (Jiang, Jiang and Cai 2012: 169–170). The schools in Sze Yup provide a wider historical and geographic context for the Zhongshan schools, such as the Cho Bin School, which were shaped by similar dynamics.



**Figure 5.7** Ground floor (left) and first floor (right) plans of the double-storied “Fong Choi Tong” (風采堂), a building that combines ancestral hall and modern school, built from 1906 to 1914 in Kaiping County. (Source: Jiang, Jiang and Cai 2012: 169)

### *Amorphous Modern Schools of the 1930s*



1923–1933 Women and Children’s Centre



1932 Chuk Sau Yuen School



1935 Heng Mei School

**Figure 5.8** Amorphous modern-style schools of the 1930s. (Source: refer to Appendix A.)

<sup>221</sup> Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang* of Sze Yup (四邑, literally “Four Counties”) lies adjacent to Zhongshan County; it has a diasporic presence in America, Canada, and in Victoria, Australia.

Over the next decade, newer schools began to embrace the International Style (a post-neoclassical, “streamlined” design trend originating from Europe in the 1920s). Figure 5.8 shows the Women and Children’s Centre (later Sincere School and Sha Chung Kindergarten, as described in the next chapter) in Sha Chung village of South District, as an example of a transitional school building that harmoniously exhibits neoclassical and International Style elements.<sup>222</sup> The clean and smooth exterior wall surfaces gave the school a post-neoclassical appearance, yet surprisingly the neoclassical pediment and the columns on the top floor balcony survived.<sup>223</sup>

The school buildings of the 1930s increasingly aspired to be like modern machines. According to locals in Zhongshan,<sup>224</sup> the schools were inspired by the design of aeroplanes.<sup>225</sup> The concept behind the design was “take-off,” this was because “modern education was expected to uplift many [students].”<sup>226</sup> The symbolism of new-style Zhongshan schools in the 1930s resonated with the way European modernist architects thought about functionalist buildings. According to the influential Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier (1877–1965), modern buildings are “machines to live in” (Le Corbusier 1985 [1931]: 4, 95, 279). Machines that inspired modern designs of his time were products of the modern age: ocean liners, aeroplanes, and automobiles (Le Corbusier 1985 [1931]).

The Heng Mei School, completed in 1935, notably embraced these international trends. This German-designed school building has a striking sunburst motif on the façade, which is clearly influenced by the Art Deco movement that began in Europe in 1920 (Figure 5.9).<sup>227</sup> The school building stood on *pilotis* (reinforced concrete pylons), analogous with International Style design trends of the time.<sup>228</sup> A consequence of lifting the building off the ground was that Heng Mei

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<sup>222</sup> Based on an interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 80, Zhongshan, 27 May 2019, that school building was built by a Hong Kong construction company. It was part of three substantial multistoreyed buildings in the Ma mansion compound in Sha Chung Village. The construction commenced in 1923 and was completed in 1933.

<sup>223</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.

<sup>224</sup> Interviews with LI Xiangping (headmaster at Chuk Sau Yuen School), Zhongshan, 15 December 2017, and LU Jian (archivist of Heng Mei School), Zhongshan, 19 December 2017.

<sup>225</sup> The aeroplane was invented in 1903 by the Wright brothers: Wilbur and Orville. In China, the aeroplane is associated with the pioneering work of FENG Ru (馮如 1883–1912), who built and flew China’s first aeroplane.

<sup>226</sup> Interview with LI Xiangping, 15 December 2017.

<sup>227</sup> Interview with LU Jian (archivist of Heng Mei School), Zhongshan, 19 December 2017.

<sup>228</sup> In response to the rising popularity of the car in the early twenty century, Le Corbusier pragmatically accommodated street-level parking beneath the building, as illustrated in his well-studied and much-admired Villa Savoye in Poissy, France (built 1928–1931).



School had an undercover space large enough for hundreds of active schoolchildren to play or exercise on rainy days.<sup>229</sup>



**Figure 5.9** The Art Deco façade of Heng Mei School in South District, Zhongshan (est. 1935). (Source: LU Jian, circa 2015.)



**Figure 5.10** A classroom at Chuk Sau Yuen School (est. 1932) showing its large windows. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 15 December 2017.)

Another common design feature of the modern school was the increased size of windows. According to Burke (2005: 133), fenestration was an essential element in the design of modern

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<sup>229</sup> Interview with LU Jian, 19 December 2017, and a go-along interview with Colin Cheng (former student of Heng Mei School), 71, in South District, Zhongshan, 6 January 2019.

schools; they afforded natural light and ventilation. This was necessary, especially during winter, when daylight was poorer, before the widespread availability of artificial lighting (Burke 2005: 136; Hörnqvist 2011: 88). When I visited Chuk Sau Yuen School, in Zhongshan’s South District, the proud headmaster, Mr. Li, said: “Although [our school] is almost a hundred years old, its state-of-the-art qualities have stood the test of time. Ample natural lighting means in the event of a power outage, classes can continue without interruption.”<sup>230</sup> Modern diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan had clearly departed from the inwardly looking traditional Chinese architecture. In common with their counterparts in Australia, and missionary schools in the treaty ports in China, the modern schools I surveyed in Zhongshan had many windows and were also more externally oriented than buildings of the past (Zheng 1996: 41; Knapp 1986: 59; Ruan 2016).



**Figure 5.11** A bird’s eye view of the village from an upper floor terrace of Lai Wor School in Ngoi Sha (Waisha) village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai. (Photo by John Choy, 5 May 2017.)

Another characteristic of the modern diaspora-funded schools in rural China was that, like their missionary school predecessors in the treaty ports, they were often located on large parcels of land. Missionary schools in Guangzhou, for instance, had sporting grounds, lush green gardens, and ample space for future expansion (Peng and Deng 2002: 13). At McTyeire, a missionary school in Shanghai, a schoolgirl of the 1930s fondly recalled that “the lawn was so big and green,” and “when I was bored in class, I would glance at the lawn. Then my heart flew out of the window and my worries were gone” (Qiao 2017). Turning to diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan, a former

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<sup>230</sup> Interview with LI Xiangping (headmaster at Chuk Sau Yuen School), Zhongshan, 15 December 2017.

student of Cho Bin School, Paul Liang, remembers peeping out of the school windows while he was daydreaming in class.<sup>231</sup> Nevertheless, typically students were not only learning more about the world than their predecessors, but in a multistorey building, their elevated views out of their classrooms meant that they also ordinarily saw further across the local landscape than their ancestors did on a daily basis (Figure 5.11).

The modern school construction boom before 1949 was sporadic, however; it ended soon after its 1930s peak when China fell into turmoil with the onset of the war with Japan.<sup>232</sup> Yet within the preceding two decades—1920s and 1930s—the new schools had distinguished themselves radically from the imperial past.

### *Modern ‘Chinese’ Schools in the 1980s and 1990s*



1982 Chuk Sau Yuen School



1983 Ma Shan Primary School



1983 Bok Oi Middle School

**Figure 5.12** Modern Chinese schools of the early Reform period. (Source: refer to Appendix A.)

In the 1980s reform era, schools continued to follow the International Style. Figure 5.12 shows that many schools were remarkably similar in form and design. Besides being constructed from the same inventory of modern materials, such as reinforced concrete and glass, another characteristic of these 1980s schools was that they were subtly Chinese. For example, from a distance Ma Shan School in Zhuhai appears to be an ordinary modern Western building. Up close, it reveals a “hint” of Chinese aesthetics. Chinese gargoyles appear on the school façade (Figure 5.13). These auspicious “fish-out-of-water” (鰲魚) rainwater spouts pragmatically responded to the geographic “wetness” of the region in southern China (Zheng 2003: 39–40). The fish-like

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<sup>231</sup> Interview with Paul Liang of Townsville (former student of Cho Bin School), 17 April 2018.

<sup>232</sup> This is due to a period of interruption of the Second Sino–Japanese War (1937–1945), only to be followed by a protracted Chinese civil war (1945–1949).

ornament once signified excellent results in the imperial examinations.<sup>233</sup> Although the school donor, Stanley Hunt, pointed out retrospectively that there was a lack of quality building materials available in China when the school was being erected in the early 1980s (Hunt 2009: 186), the aesthetic detail shows that it was possible for a reform-era school to be both modern and subtly Chinese at the same time.



**Figure 5.13** Façade of Sung-Sun Hall of Learning at Ma Shan School in Doumen, Zhuhai. (Photo by Denis Byrne, 18 December 2017.) On the right, a close-up image of the “fish-out-of-water” (鰲魚) rainwater sprout. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 18 December 2017.)



**Figure 5.14** Reform-era schools of the mid-1980s and early 1990s. (Source: refer to Appendix A.)

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<sup>233</sup> Based on communication with GAN Jianbo (former Curator of the Zhongshan Museum), 9 May 2018, and Ely Finch (Australian translator and linguist specialised in historical Chinese text), 16 September 2018. The Chinese symbolism behind the waterspout stems from the common idiom “of standing lonely on the fish’s head,” meaning to take first place, scholastically (獨佔鰲頭). It has traditionally been used in reference to the most successful candidate of the imperial examination.

In less than a decade, however, diaspora-funded schools began to appear in Zhongshan which, in contrast to the inconspicuous Chinese detailing in the Ma Shan school, adopted a much more noticeably “Chinese” aesthetic (Figure 5.14). From the mid-1980s, the façades of Australian-funded schools in Zhongshan began to resemble the architectural style of contemporary Chinatowns in the cities of the diaspora. The timing of the new schools reflected that a certain architectural “Chineseness” was emerging in both China and abroad. “Made in China” products (clothing, footwear, and electronics) had become common worldwide, and the Pearl River Delta was the new production centre (Pun 2005; Sun, Qiu and Li 2006).<sup>234</sup> At the same time, in Australia burgeoning multiculturalism resulted in the promotion of an orientalist “Chinese” identity. In Sydney, ornamental “Chinese” motifs first appeared in Chinatown in the 1980s (Anderson et al. 2019: 27–28). This matched the style of school architecture seen in the late 1980s and early 1990s *qiaoxiang*, as visibly shown in Figure 5.15. More than that, it was reminiscent of an architectural movement in China half a century earlier.<sup>235</sup> Importantly, since the second half of the 1980s, these modern Zhongshan schools reflected a greater desire to exhibit cultural pride in “Chineseness.”



**Figure 5.15** View from Chuen Luk village to its hillside Chuen Luk School (Source: *Zhongsan Chuen Luk School Magazine: Inauguration Edition* 1992, p.42).

<sup>234</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, 13 November 2020.

<sup>235</sup> During that time, at the height of Chinese nationalism, the style was known variously as Chinese Renaissance or adaptive architecture (Cody 2001; Farris 2016: 228; Lee and Distefano 2016). This movement was initiated by the first batch of Western-trained Chinese architects in the early twentieth century. Characteristically, the style combined a Western structural frame (e.g., concrete construction) with a distinctive cultural flavour, featuring classic glazed tiles (Rowe and Kuan 2004; Musgrove 2013). In Imperial China, the colour of roof tiles was strictly regulated. Green roofs were reserved for temples and official offices and yellow only for imperial court buildings.

Diaspora-funded school architecture in Zhongshan showed that new-style schools were initially modern because they were different from the architecture of the past. While the schools of the 1920s and 1930s were distinctively modern and Western, by the reform era of the 1980s and 1990s, Zhongshan schools continued to be modern, but with Chinese characteristics. The transition from a Western to a Chinese aesthetic is due to a constellation of factors. First, a switch in the residential orientation of the migrant donors (P. Yang 2012) from Chinese sojourners introducing the modern West to their ancestral locality in the early twentieth century, to returnees already settled abroad who were increasingly proud of their Chineseness and returning to visit a rising China in the later part of the twentieth century. At the same time, it also reflected a change in attitude among those Chinese in China. In the early twentieth century, they were as curious as they were eager to readily embrace the so-called exotic or foreign commodities from the modern West, as an observer in 1920s China commented that “almost everything foreign is becoming fashionable” Dikötter (2006: 1). But in the reform era, Chinese nationals began to take pride in locally made Chinese products, including certain traditional building products that were used for constructing new schools.<sup>236</sup>

### *Risk-Averse Modern Schools*

Another important aspect of modern schools was that they were better at managing risk. Anthony Giddens pointed out that risk management is one of the hallmarks of modern society (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 101). As discussed in the previous chapter, migration not only heightened the desire for education, but was conceived as a “risk management” strategy (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 17). This kind of thinking was not at odds with prevailing attitudes in imperial China, since whereas occasional crop failure was considered inevitable, education promised relatively less risky prospects because “there were no such things as bad ink slates” (Smith 1970 [1899]: 51).

New diaspora-funded schools effectively managed modern “risk” in several ways. For instance, the rise of steps and the maximum number of steps of new schools were likely considered in their design.<sup>237</sup> This was unlike the towers and temples in imperial China, where such regulations were not applied, making ascent and descent often quite risky.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, handrails and balustrades

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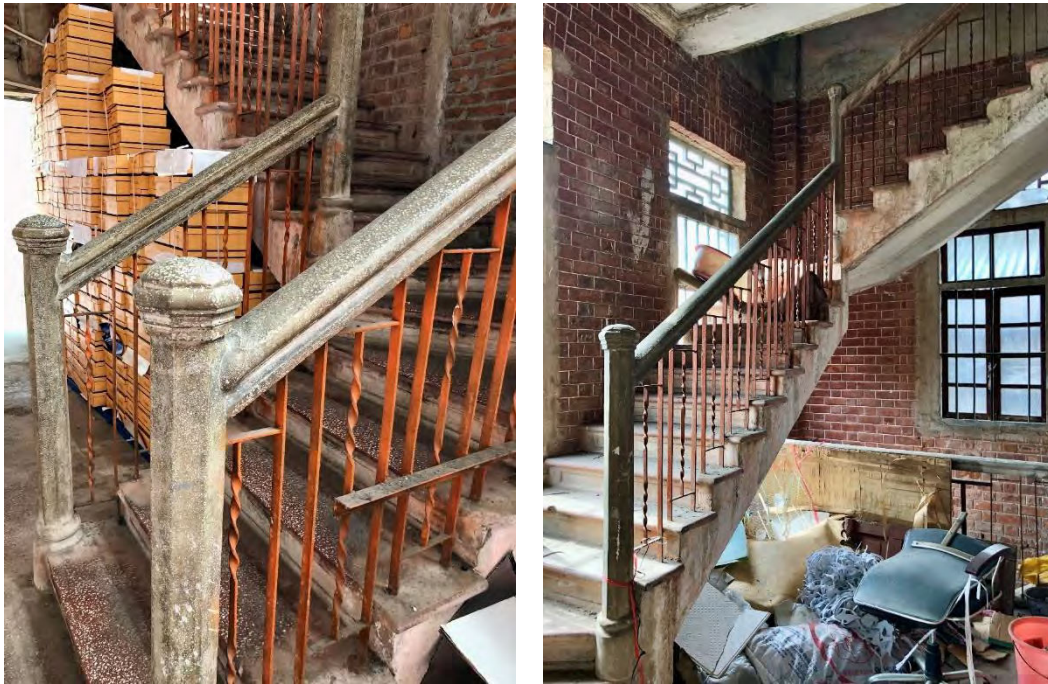
<sup>236</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, 13 November 2020.

<sup>237</sup> Interviews with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.

<sup>238</sup> Personal communication with Jocelyn Chey (former Australian diplomat who spent most of her adult life in China), 22 October 2021.

(Figure 5.16) were an added safety feature of many multistorey schools.<sup>239</sup> An alumnus of Sha Chung School remembers his teacher introducing the protocol of using stairs on his first day of school:

You shall not run on the stairs. When going down, keep to the right. When going up, keep right. Staying on the right all the time, you'll never bump into anyone. There will be no collisions, and you should never ever chase after your classmates either up or downstairs.<sup>240</sup>



**Figure 5.16** The two interior staircases inside Sha Chung School in South District, Zhongshan. (Photo by Denis Byrne, 1 December 2018.)

Such words of caution and the additional safety features were obviously unnecessary in single-story buildings. Based on fieldwork in the Pearl River Delta and interviews, before and during this study, handrails and balustrades were present in modern schools but notoriously absent in many multi-storied domestic buildings, even in some overseas funded houses.<sup>241</sup> By comparing the safety of houses with schools, evidently it was the latter that prioritised safety. Professor Peng agreed with this point by proposing that *buaqiao* were likely more accustomed to international “standards,” but equally aware of how clever design could benefit the safety of children.<sup>242</sup> An architectural

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<sup>239</sup> Multi-story buildings were, in themselves, something very new for the villagers, most of whom lived their entire lives in single-story homes. If they had upper floors, perhaps these were lofts only accessed by ladders, usually serving as additional storage.

<sup>240</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019; also cited in Cheng (2020: 150).

<sup>241</sup> Interviews with PENG Changxin, 25 December 2018; Mrs. Janet Wang (Australian-born descendant of school donor), Sydney, 31 January 2020.

<sup>242</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin, 25 December 2018; also cited in Cheng (2020: 150).

expert on staircase history and design has noted that inherent dangers associated with using stairs, such as slips, trips, and falls, can be prevented through clever design (Templer 1992).

Besides averting accidents, another distinctive feature of modern schools was durability. For example, when asked about Lai Wor School (est. 1930), Howard Wilson articulated the aspirations of the school founder James CHOY Hing (蔡興 1869–1957): “May [the school] last for a thousand years!”<sup>243</sup> Considering that some families (such as the Kwoks) had suffered the consequences of devastating floods, both in China and Australia, the desire for permanence in buildings was justified.<sup>244</sup> So, when new schools were built, school donors were likely conscious of the periodic floods and typhoons in their ancestral home, and therefore opted for a type of building technology that could withstand these recurring disasters (Cheng 2020: 149; Chan-Yeung 2017: 26). Since steel-reinforced concrete buildings were sturdy, durable, and fire resilient, that construction technology was generally favoured by the migrant donors.

In addition, the design of modern schools was also geared towards risk management. Raised off the ground, Heng Mei School was a manifestation of how modern design had innovatively overcome mother nature in the form of floods; as well as providing an added utility of a covered activity space (Figure 5.17).<sup>245</sup> At the same time, lightning rods were installed in early modern Zhongshan schools.<sup>246</sup> The point was that modern diaspora-funded schools were designed to last longer than many of the vernacular local buildings, such as those with rammed earth walls.<sup>247</sup> In fact, the new-style school buildings reflected one of the aspirations of modern education itself,

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<sup>243</sup> Interview with Howard Wilson (family historian) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne and Alexandra Wong in Sydney, 15 February 2019.

<sup>244</sup> In Australia’s Far North Queensland, for example, due to extreme weather like tropical cyclones and floods, reinforced concrete started to boom in the 1920s. In Innisfail, the See Poys constructed a new department store with flood-resistant doors after the 1934 flood (Dusting and Robb 2007: 5–7). Water remains an integral part of Lingnan culture, the geographic region to which the Pearl River Delta belongs. It is both a livelihood necessity and risk, thus a source of joy and fear (Lu 2005: 48). While people depend on it for irrigation, they are also afraid of floods. According to the *Pearl River Gazetteer*, floods were the most common natural disaster in the region (Pearl River Ministry of Water Resources Committee 1991: 202). As a result, various temples in the Pearl River Delta region are dedicated to water gods (Lu 2005: 48). Among the most numerous temples in the region were those dedicated to Tin Hau (天后) the “Empress of Heaven,” or its alternative name, Mazu (馬祖), for whom the Portuguese mistakenly named their entrepôt “Macao”.

<sup>245</sup> Interviews with LU Jian (archivist of Heng Mei School), Zhongshan, 19 December 2017. A go-along interview with Cairns resident Colin Cheng (former student of Heng Mei School), 71, in South District, Zhongshan, 6 January 2019).

<sup>246</sup> As a boy, Paul remembers listening to elders in Cho Bin village tell stories under the banyan tree. One day, he learnt that his forebears were impressed that the school had lightning rods installed. The metal rod extended from the top of the school all the way to the ground (Communication with former Cho Bin resident Paul Liang, 19 March 2020).

<sup>247</sup> Based on my fieldwork in Zhongshan in 2017 and remote villages in Hong Kong’s New Territories in 2016, rammed earth structures can still be found. While they appear sturdy, these structures are known to dissolve during intensive downpours (Knapp 1986: 56–57; Chan-Yeung 2017: 26). Interview with LIU Jianneng (builder in Zhongshan), 8 September 2021 reveals that the better alternatives predating steel-reinforced concrete technology were the grey-brick and timber structures. However, the buildings’ wooden components were easily engulfed by fire (Gan 2004: 80) or termites (Byrne 2020b: 864–867).



which was to overcome risk. Beyond managing risk, the novel building provided a material foundation for nurturing a modern school experience.



**Figure 5.17** Heng Mei School in Zhongshan's South District was raised off the ground, creating a vast undercover activity space for its students. (Photo by Denis Byrne, 19 December 2017.)

## The Experience of Modern Education

After reviewing the twentieth-century development of school architecture in Zhongshan, the next section recapitulates how the materiality of modern schools stimulated fresh experiences in the rural *qiaoxiang*. Drawing on a series of interviews and field observations, it explores how the material realities of modern schools stimulated fresh experiences for the schools' first students, thus forging a historically distinct moment in Chinese-Australian history. In other words, it illustrates how Chinese migration to Australia spawned lifestyle changes, or specifically new ways of being modern, in the early and late twentieth century back in the rural *qiaoxiang*.

### *A New Order*

Before students stepped into the new schools, the reverberation of school bells created a disruptive rhythm, signifying a new order in the *qiaoxiang*. Several village elders recalled that the school bells were the loudest sounds in the village and were synonymous with the sight of children heading to

school.<sup>248</sup> AU-YEUNG Chow, who started school aged six in 1937, later recalled that his school had two floors, with a cast bronze bell on the second floor. “When it rang, *dang, dang, dang*, it was telling us it was class time. The ringing could be heard as far as Cheung Kar Bin [張家邊 about 3km away].”<sup>249</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Ma,<sup>250</sup> who attended the same school in Sha Chung, recalled a similar phenomenon. Speaking of the bell tower on top of their school, Mr. Ma spread his hands to indicate an invisible bell over half a meter in diameter.<sup>251</sup> At Lai Wor School, the bell rang ten minutes prior to class. Latecomers were punished and had to stand up for the entire lesson.<sup>252</sup> No wonder a fourth-grade schoolboy at Cho Bin School wrote, “I was at school one day, and when I heard the bell ring, I ran to class and tripped.”<sup>253</sup> According to Shackel (1993: 131), life after the adoption of clock time was more calibrated, refined, and structured. From the above accounts, the school bell created a modern “time discipline” for school children in the village

Inside the classroom, behaviour was also highly regimented, much like the new temporal regime. Classroom control was maintained through gender-based seating and corporal punishment. Since in the early twentieth century, boys tended to be more mischievous around each other, but surprisingly shy around girls. The schoolteachers controlled the classroom through gender-based seating arrangements. The taller students were placed at the rear,<sup>254</sup> and male students sat beside female students to ensure they would not talk, fight, or fiddle during class. A former student of Chuk Sau Yuen School recalled: “Unlike boys and girls of today who casually chat with each other, back then, we were bashful. When boys were placed beside girls.”<sup>255</sup> Before he had finished speaking, Mr. Kwok had hugged himself in his seat, replicating the posture he adopted some seventy years ago.<sup>256</sup> In relation to the period before 1949, many students remembered that in the new-style schools they attended, although their teachers were strict, they were still revered by their

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<sup>248</sup> Unlike the past, when school bells were noisy, I found contemporary schools had soothing music, such as Beethoven’s *Fur Elise* to signal the commencement of classes (field observations at the current school on the site of the former Sai Kwong (present-day Gaojiaji) School, Shekki, 11 June 2018).

<sup>249</sup> Interview with AU-YEUNG Chow (scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

<sup>250</sup> Mrs. Ma (née Lee 李氏) was a native of the neighbouring village, Heng Mei 恒美.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (former student of Sha Chung School), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019. In a later interview on 13 November 2020, MA Yin-chiu added that his elders in Sha Chung had told him that the bell was made in Australia and brought back to Sha Chung village by Ma clansmen via Hong Kong.

<sup>252</sup> Interview with SHENG Lai Kum (former student of Lai Wor School), 84, Ngoi Sha Village, Zhuhai, 29 November 2018.

<sup>253</sup> LEONG Sek Tao 梁錫濤 in the 1936 edition of *Cho Bin School Magazine*, p.18.

<sup>254</sup> Beginning school in 1936, aged 13, LEON Siu-en was older than most students at Cao Bin School and remembers sitting at the back from the very first day of school. This was because students started school at different ages and there were insufficient teachers, when the school began, so many classes were composite. (Interview with Ms. LEON Siu-en, 95, Zhongshan, 25 December 2017). Note, the spelling of my informant’s name is likely to be influenced by Spanish Romanisation, since her father went to Peru.

<sup>255</sup> Interview with KWOK Lai-mun (former student of Chuk Sau Yuen School), 85, Zhongshan 4 December 2018.

<sup>256</sup> Observation during the interview with KWOK Lai-mun, 85, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018.

students; this was no different from the way Chinese traditionally treated seniority. Teachers, like parents of the day, did not hesitate to hit students for misbehaviour or poor performance.<sup>257</sup> This implied that even when the school experience was in many ways reformed in these modern schools, some behaviours remained unchanged since the days of the now old-fashioned *sisbu*.

### *Heightened Experiences*



**Figure 5.18** A view on the stairs at Cho Bin School in South District, Zhongshan. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 1 January 2019.)

The new multistorey reinforced concrete schools introduced fresh sensations, such as a fear of heights. At a time when many rural students still had lived their entire lives in single-storey houses, climbing up stairs and looking down from the first or higher floors was an unnerving experience for some. A former student remembered how terrifying it was for her when she first climbed the stairs at Lai Wor School when she was nine years old. “I had never been to such a high building before. I was frightened. My heart pounded as I ascended. Looking back, it was probably a fear of heights, but I didn’t know at the time what the feeling was.”<sup>258</sup> At Cho Bin School, a former female

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<sup>257</sup> Interviews with MA Yin-chiu (former student of Sha Chung School), 79, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018, and Mrs. Felicia Seeto (third generation of a Chinese Australian family born in Zhongshan), 74, 28 June 2020.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with Ms. SHENG Lai Kum (former student of Lai Wor School), 84, Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay Zhuhai, 29 November 2018.

student recounted how she tried to be obedient at school because she had grown up in an environment where she was afraid of being scolded.

I dared not climb to the top [of the school], I worried the teachers would be upset [Figure 5.18]. I was very obedient and afraid of authority. Everybody was very strict. People were still conservative, expecting girls to remain at home, sit still, and not muck around.<sup>259</sup>

That former student, the oldest participant I interviewed for this research (aged 95 in 2017), confided in me that she was raised in a strict “parents talked, and I listened” household.<sup>260</sup> It appears that schoolgirls of the pre-1949 era abided by Confucian orthodoxy. Yet, they were not the only ones. Boys continued to embrace some of these pre-modernist ideals as well. When I showed him photographs of his alma mater, Dr. Joe Leong (aged 84 when I interviewed him in 2018) remembered that as a boy he and his older brother fought on the first-level balcony of Cho Bin school, around the central courtyard.

I never fought with my elder brother, and I usually had a deep respect for him, but that day I was fighting like mad with him... Now, I cannot remember what it was about... But I usually have a deep respect for him.<sup>261</sup>

Leong emphasised twice the respect he had for his brother, reinforcing the persistence of staunch Confucian hierarchies based on seniority. Experiences situated at the modern school showed how a pre-existing pattern, based on the persistence of traditional hierarchies, was reinforced. At the same time, the school architecture was a “kind of socialisation” (Hohr 2011: 106) that reminded students how they should behave. Still, the new schools also provided a horizon of novel experiences.

Flat roofs, verandas, and balconies were all new platforms associated with the early twentieth-century modern school. Most of these spaces, however, remained off-limits unless students were supervised.<sup>262</sup> Whenever access was permitted, these new platforms enabled students to survey village life and the rural landscape from above (*cf.* Byrne 2020a: 184). Half a century later, a Chinese-Australian returnee whose family donated to a school in Cheung Kok village recalled in the 1980s, “From its roof, you can survey the whole village” (Giese 1997: 178). The new visual

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<sup>259</sup> Interview with Ms. LEON Siu-en (former student of Caobain School), 95, Zhongshan, 25 December 2017.

<sup>260</sup> A similar sentiment was revealed in an interview with Ms. SHENG Lai Kum, 84, 29 November 2018.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Dr. Joe Leong (former student of Cho Bin school), 84, Townsville, 18 April 2018.

<sup>262</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

experience afforded by a rooftop terrace, of an uninterrupted panoramic vista, suggests that the traditional village community had been reformed by migration. A similar phenomenon occurs at the bell tower of Saint Bogorodica Church, Zavoj, in Macedonia. Sited on the highest point of the site, climbers who reach the top of the bell tower similarly enjoy a survey of the surrounding landscape. That heightened perspective represents the “formation of the new form of community,” which has been cumulatively reconfigured by emigration and investment (Lozanovska 2019: 186).



**Figure 5.19** View from the roof terrace of Sha Chung School, South District, Zhongshan. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 1 December 2018.)

The new platforms also provided space for the invention of new traditions. A former student of Sha Chung School noted that only two or three times a year was the rooftop at his school accessible to students (Figure 5.19).<sup>263</sup> One of these occasions took place during the Mid-Autumn Festival (中秋節), when the moon is brightest and students gathered with their families to celebrate the evening; another was Chung Yeung (重陽), when families pay homage to their deceased ancestors. Instead of visiting the hillside graveyard, teachers took classes to the highest point of the village, which was the roof terrace of the school, to appreciate the mountainscape and to fulfil the significance of the festival, which commemorates how people escaped from floods by climbing to

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<sup>263</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 January 2019.

a high point.<sup>264</sup> This suggests that while many traditions were old, sometimes new ones emerged or, according to Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983: 1), were “invented.” Despite the rapid development in educational modernisation after the imperial reforms, certain traditions continued to find a place at new schools, but often in modified form. In this way, a hallmark of the pre-1949 period was a comfortable co-existence of “tradition within modernity” (Yeh 2000: 7). Thus, tradition survives even in modern schools—modernity was not something adopted wholesale but indigenised by adapting modern elements to pre-existing Chinese structures.

### *Expanded Horizons*

Apart from experiencing new heights and panoramic views, more generally, new diaspora-funded schools visually broadened the students’ horizons. Large paper maps and charts were commonly found in the well-endowed schools across China (Dikötter 2006: 122). Like the introduction of bells, which introduced the notion of punctuality and time discipline, in the modern classrooms of the 1920s and 1930s, world maps helped create a modern sensibility by teaching geographic accuracy with maps where the modern world was depicted by a precise measurement of space and time (Mitchell 2000b: 18; Borthwick 1983: 15). The demand for more reliable information about the world had steadily grown, especially after China’s defeat in the First Opium War in 1839–1842 (Yee 1994: 192). Modern maps were like stairs and windows of new-style schools in that they helped students to reorientate themselves to a larger, better-connected world. As a visual aid, maps helped the students to position their ancestral home in relation to the nearest city, other nations, and the wider world, including the various countries that were once designated by the “Nanyang”<sup>265</sup> and “Gum San”<sup>266</sup> appellations, where their forebears may have sojourned (Cheng 2019: 245).

Here, it is worth noting that before scientific understanding of the world came to China through modern education, metaphorical ideas prevailed. These included superseded notions that were once widespread, like “China is the centre of the world” (Ball 1991: 265), “the heaven is round, the earth is square”<sup>267</sup> or “all under heaven.”<sup>268</sup> By 1911, geographic accuracy became paramount in China when the modern idea of the nation-state (國家) began to supersede indigenous ideas of

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<sup>264</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 January 2019.

<sup>265</sup> *Nanyang* 南洋 refers to maritime South-East Asia.

<sup>266</sup> In Cantonese, “Gum San” 金山 refers to the nineteenth century gold rush destinations in the Pacific that were dominated by Cantonese migration, namely the United States, Australia, and Canada.

<sup>267</sup> Literally “Heaven a circle and the earth’s a square” 天圓地方.

<sup>268</sup> *Tianxia* 天下 is a Chinese-centric view that “all under the heavens” belongs to the imperial empire.

a “boundless imperial universe” (Tang 1996: 14). Yet similarly vague indigenous notions of places, like Nanyang and Gum San, have astonishingly survived in everyday village parlance in Zhongshan. This indicates how geographic knowledge would equip modern graduates of diaspora-funded schools for their transnational mercantile careers (Zheng 1996: 41).

At Lai Wor School in Ngoi Sha (Waisha) village (previously in Zhongshan, now Zhuhai) in the 1940s, a former student recalled, “I didn’t know the world was so big until I saw the map of the world for the first time.”<sup>269</sup> This indicates how modern maps visually created a new spatial reality that had an “immediate impact” (Anderson 2016 [1983]: 173). As an image, they were as powerful as Bentham’s Panopticon, providing “total surveyability” (Anderson 2016 [1983]: 184). Beyond that, in presenting both the physical geography and political divisions of the world (Tang 1996: 13), maps signified a massive leap in the production of knowledge, where accuracy aligned closely with modern governmentality and the emergence of the nation-state (Mitchell 2000b: 7).

With the emergence of modern ideas like nationhood, the relative size of maps in the classroom can be interpreted as significant. In fourth grade, SHENG Lai Kum recalled seeing two maps hung side by side in her classroom. “One was of the world, the other of China. The map of China was much larger than that of the world.”<sup>270</sup> In effect, in a modern classroom, maps were a “visual production of nationalism” (Batuman 2010). They placed China in world-space at a critical period when new textbooks on geography and world history helped students to transition from living in an empire to belonging to a nation-state (Zarrow 2006: 7).

### *Conditioning the Body*

Physical education was another way modern schools fostered nationhood. Traditionally, physical exercise in China was associated with low-status activities like working in the fields, and directly countered imperial lifestyle ideals (Speak 1999: 77). But by the turn of the twentieth century, physical education became a prerequisite in all schools (Shao 2004: 161; Speak 1999: 76). Its emergence coincided with a growing nationalism in China in which self-discipline and physical strength were deemed essential for the nation’s survival and to eradicate the stigma of the “sick man of Asia” (Morris 2000: 890; Bai 2001: 140–141). Underlining the conditioning of modern,

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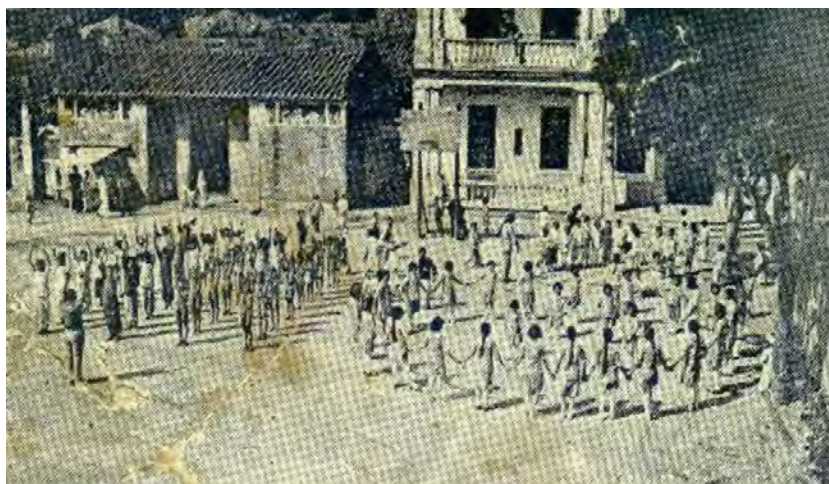
<sup>269</sup> Interview with Ms. SHENG Lai Kum (former student of Lai Wor School), 86, assisted by the village chief JIM Wah-hing of Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai, 29 May 2020.

<sup>270</sup> Interview with Ms. SHENG Lai Kum, 29 May 2020.

healthy bodies was the rhetoric that only by mimicking the ways that foreigners exercise could China protect itself from further invasion (Hwang 2006: 183). Thus, physical exercise was vital to good health, self-discipline, as well as a strong modern nation (Willis 2017: 2; Ho 1991: 95).

Military drills were the most pervasive form of physical education. Students all over China participated (Shao 2004: 168; Cook 2000: 19). As well as improving health and well-being, the physical indoctrination of the body was political. Practising marching drills was a tangible representation of cohesion that instilled values of loyalty and discipline (Shao 2004: 164; Borthwick 1983: 129). Given this, it was not unexpected that a former student who attended school in the 1940s recalled how intensively students marched around in their cadet uniforms after school:

Military drills took place every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, from 4 to 5pm. With energetic boys and girls routinely parading in cadet uniforms, they didn't need to sprinkle white lining powder to mark [the boundaries of] the [basketball] courts because our routine stomping created a trail where no grass could grow.<sup>271</sup>



**Figure 5.22** School children performing calisthenic routines (Source: *Cho Bin School Magazine* 1936). Note the basketball hoop and backboard in the upper middle frame.

Despite widespread participation, physical education was not solely about demanding military drills. Since 1895, missionary education, particularly through YMCA, incorporated songs and drama into physical education (Morris 2000: 889; Ferlanti 2010: 972). During my field visit to Dai Leng village, I was stunned when my ailing elderly research participant (aged 86 in 2017) suddenly burst into a series of calisthenic movements as he chanted a tune that he learnt as a six-year-old

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<sup>271</sup> Interview with Ms. SHENG Lai Kum (former student of Lai Wor School), 84, Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai, 29 November 2018; cited in Cheng (2020: 154).



student at Dai Leng School.<sup>272</sup> At around the same time, students from another Zhongshan school did similar exercises (Figure 5.22). Based on my observations of photographs taken in the early 1990s (Figure 5.23) and during fieldwork in 2018, that type of training continues in schools today.<sup>273</sup>



**Figure 5.23** Primary school students exercising outdoors at Chuen Luk School, Dachong town, Zhongshan (Source: *Zhongshan Chuen Luk School Magazine: Inauguration Edition 1992*, p.37).

Western-style athletics and organised sports also featured prominently in diaspora-funded education. New facilities, such as basketball courts (Figure 5.22) and athletic fields, made modern Zhongshan schools a nursery for cultivating talent and nurturing interest in organised sports. Research in other parts of China demonstrates that sport facilities were funded as a remedy for a relentless life of indulgence, vice, and idleness that, for example, in the *qiaoxiang* had regrettably emerged from an economic transition from agriculture to an economy dependent on foreign remittances (Morris 2004: 66; Benton and Liu 2018: 141). Therefore, the facilities of better-endowed rural schools, like diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan, were sometimes superior to some urban schools, as, for example, those schools in Guangzhou in the 1930s that could not afford sports venues and equipment (Ho 1991: 95).

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<sup>272</sup> Interview with AU-YEUNG Chow (village scribe and former student of Dai Leng School), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

<sup>273</sup> During an afternoon visit to Chung Tau Kindergarten, I saw toddlers guided by their teachers performing stretching routines after their nap accompanied by music. (Field observations at Chung Tau Kindergarten, Zhongshan, 12 May 2018.)

In the *qiaoxiang*, schoolteachers played a crucial role in cultivating healthy habits that children might maintain beyond their formative years.<sup>274</sup> Just like the festive volleyball competitions at an emigrant town in Kai Ping (a county to the west of Zhongshan), where every evening was “filled with noise and excitement” from the matches (Tan 2013: 187). Basketball had been a novel sensation in Sha Chung village in Zhongshan in the early decades of the twentieth century. “At first, they played barefoot on dirt courts. What more could you expect from a bunch of farmers’ kids!? They played inter-village competitions in our park until more basketball courts were built elsewhere.”<sup>275</sup> Basketball in Zhongshan nurtured a culture of its own. On the court, players readily adopted English terms like “shoot” and “out.”<sup>276</sup> During my interviews, I also learned that competitions between nearby and not-so-close villagers involved bicycle trips—usually two persons per bicycle, bearing pots and pans to boil drinking water.<sup>277</sup> These competitions, of course, led to making new friendships and enmities. Overseas sponsorship and donations provided funds for new basketballs and the new jerseys awarded to winning teams (Shi 2017).



**Figure 5.24** Students of Bok Oi Middle School in Sanxiang Town, Zhongshan, playing basketball (Source: *Sanxiang Qiaokan* February 1986, p.41).

Before 1949, village basketball was often played on dirt courts outside diaspora-funded schools. Looking at the photographs published in the *qiaokan* (overseas Chinese magazine), this was still the case in the 1980s (Figure 5.24). Felicia Seeto recalled in an interview, that in the 1950s “the

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<sup>274</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

<sup>275</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 January 2019.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with CHOW King (liaison officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 15 December 2018. The Cantonese habit of peppering foreign words into everyday speech was common because it demonstrated knowledge of a foreign language and was perceived as a “yardstick of educational level, social status, and intellectual capacity” (Ho 1991: 104).

<sup>277</sup> Interview with Miss Chen (teacher of Xiaze School), Zhongshan, 27 December 2018.

boys constantly fought over the court and the girls didn't stand a chance. As the boys played, they kicked up a storm from running across the sandy court."<sup>278</sup>

But for some people, like Philip Leong (1917–1999), who also came from Cho Bin village, basketball did not end at school, or the village. It continued overseas to far-flung destinations, like Townsville in Queensland, where he spent the remainder of his adult life. Relayed to me by Townsville City Library staff, Philip recalled that after the Second World War, some US troops remained in north Queensland; those troops were believed to have introduced the pastime of basketball to the city of Townsville; however, their claim to fame ended there (Figure 5.25). In 1948, the American Legion team lost to their only true competitors, the Townsville Phoenix: a local team comprising Chinese-Australians, including young men from Zhongshan diaspora-funded schools like Philip himself. As the tallest person on the team, Philip had been a star player of his school in Zhongshan before emigrating to Australia, and his nimble fingers, talent, and enthusiasm for the sport helped win championships (Zhongshan South District Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese 2020: 156).



**Figure 5.25** The basketball team of Cho Bin School (on the left), in South District, Zhongshan (Source: *Cho Bin School Magazine* 1936). Team 'Phoenix' (on the right), the 1948 Townsville basketball champions (Source: Philip Leong Collection, Townsville City Library).

Like many aspects of modern learning, physical exercise that occurred in school years had a lifelong impact. But the modern Chinese individuals' enthusiasm for physical exercise did not have a long history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, WU Tingfang (伍廷芳 1842–1922), a Qing dynasty diplomat, observed with fascination how Americans appreciated sports: they were not

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<sup>278</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto (former student of Cho Bin School), 74, 28 June 2020.

merely players but also spectators. Wu remarked in his biography that his own people were very different and not suited to sports.

The Chinese would never think of assembling in thousands just to see a game played. We are not modernised enough to care to spend half a day watching others play [...]. Western sports have been introduced into some mission and other schools in China, but I much doubt if they will ever be really popular among my people. They are too violent, and from the oriental standpoint, lacking in dignity. (Wu 1914: 257–258)

In a dramatic turnaround, physical education had not only gained a permanent place in the school curriculum in Zhongshan by the 1920s, but the diaspora made it possible to hold competitions locally, and for some, like Philip Leong, to even compete on an “international” stage. The marriage of a reformed syllabus and a new school infrastructure eventually overturned traditional ideals that had once prevented people from becoming modern individuals.

### *A New Age*



**Figure 5.26** Students on new computers at Sincere Primary School in Sha Chung, Zhongshan’s South District, circa 1990s. (Source: Sha Chung Kindergarten Collection.)

After a hiatus between 1949 and 1978, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, diaspora-funded schools were again more comfortable and better equipped than other schools in Zhongshan. Since the 1980s reforms, the renewed contributions from the diaspora fostered a gamut of novel experiences. MA Kit-leung, the village chief of Sha Chung village, felt his school

was exceptionally well endowed. Thanks to the generous support of the diaspora,<sup>279</sup> when he attended Sincere School in the 1990s “we were the only primary school [at the time] in Zhongshan to have computers!” Kit-Leung exclaimed, as he recounted this special experience to me: “After turning on the computer, I really 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.”<sup>280</sup> In earlier years, Zhongshan villagers who came of age under the People’s Republic of China remembered sitting outside their village houses in the evening, with handheld foldable paper and peach-shaped bamboo fans during the summer.<sup>281</sup> Electric fans, like the computer, 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 pointed out the educational value of having specialised 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 can also enhance their confidence.<sup>282</sup>

Yet development in the *qiaoxiang* was uneven. This was evident in the remarks of a graduate of Chuen Luk School (est. 1991) in Dachong Town. Rather than talking about novel features (flat rooftops, stairs, or windows), or other material modernities (bells, maps, computers, or electric fans), a past student of Chuen Luk School surprisingly told me how her first experience of farming occurred at school in the 1990s. I queried why that had a lasting impression on her, to which she replied: “Our teachers brought students out of the classrooms to get a taste of rural life [...] That was the only time in my entire life that I ever did any farming. We planted pumpkins.”<sup>283</sup> Here, the novelty of returning to a “past way of life” demonstrates how “modernity” had advanced in the *qiaoxiang*. Although the student’s family lived in a rapidly modernising part of a still rural Zhongshan, her family was no longer bound to the land, and she was not expected to return to farming after her studies. Compared to the China of Mao’s lifetime, China after the 1980s was

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<sup>279</sup> Implicitly, this refers to the descendants associated with the Sincere Company, who continued to operate a department store in Hong Kong. Details of the resurgence of homeland educational philanthropy in the 1980s are elaborated in the next chapter.

<sup>280</sup> Interview with MA Kit-leung (former student of Sincere School), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018.

<sup>281</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto of Brisbane (former resident of Cho Bin village), 74, 20 October 2020.

<sup>282</sup> Interview with Mr. Yeung (headmaster at Cheung Kok School), Zhongshan, 27 December 2017.

<sup>283</sup> Correspondence with Ms. LIANG Haochi (former student of Chuen Luk School), Zhongshan, 13 February 2019.

more socially and economically stratified and this was so even within villages in the Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang*.

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that diaspora-funded schools represented a materially different reality to China's past. In fact, for many students they represented a formative foray into the future. The diversity of learning experiences had groomed individuals for a life beyond the rice fields.

## Life Beyond the Rice Fields

Because of a mismatch between the skills and knowledge of graduates and available employment, Curran (2005) contended that many Republican-era graduates in China failed to find suitable work. But my study found that this was not generally the case among graduates of Chinese-Australian diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan. In the early twentieth century, many indeed followed their migrant fathers' footsteps overseas, where the education they had received in China was helpful in enhancing the family businesses.<sup>284</sup> Australia was not the only destination. For those with existing connections, the United States was also a popular choice for young people in Zhongshan.<sup>285</sup> In fact, my data confirms Philip Huang's finding that Pacific Rim children were brought up to expand the commercial interests of their predecessors (Huang 2000: 9).

One opportunity for those who did not go abroad was to join the staff of the burgeoning department stores established by Zhongshan-Australian returnees. In an interview with a Chuk Sau Yuen elder, KWOK Lai-mun, indicated that employment at Wing On department store depended on "connections" (*guanxi*),<sup>286</sup> and "[school] grades."<sup>287</sup> Wellington Chan similarly noted that those with "appropriate levels of formal education" found employment at the Sincere

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<sup>284</sup> Based on a series of interviews with Dr. Joe Leong (Australian descendant of two generations of school donors), 84, Townsville, 18 April 2018; Mrs. Phyllis Rainford (Australian-born descendant of school donor), Townsville, 19 April 2017; Mrs. Beverly Osborn (Australian-born descendant of school donor), Townsville, 19 April 2017; Keith Hing Fay, 83, Townsville, 17 April 2018. My research chronicled the lives of several Zhongshan-born migrants, such as Philip Leong (1917–1999), William John Leong (梁門教 LEONG Moon Gow 1905–1992), and Keith Hing Fay, all of whom eventually carried on their father's businesses in Queensland; also see Robb (2019: 192); Su (2011: 4–5); Robb and Leong (2016: 2); Wilton (2019: 59).

<sup>285</sup> Interview with AU-YEUNG Chow (scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

<sup>286</sup> These included familial connections and, in a broader sense, kinship and place-based networks.

<sup>287</sup> Interview with KWOK Lai-mun (former student of Chuk Sau Yuen School), 85, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018.

department store (Chan 2009: 78).<sup>288</sup> Some educated women found work as sales assistants at the “Four Premier Department Stores,”<sup>289</sup> while other women, especially from Sai Kwong Girls’ School in Shekki, entered modern vocations like engineering, science, or academia (Tam 1999: 84–86, 146). Therefore, although diaspora-funded education prepared many students for a life of business abroad, not everybody ended up in business-orientated vocations. Some diaspora-funded school students’ early exposure to typewriters and computers resulted in them securing satisfying work in offices and as hotel receptionists in the post-Mao Zhongshan.<sup>290</sup>

The point is that even those who remained in Zhongshan did not necessarily return to farming after school. Some became teachers in newly established schools.<sup>291</sup> This was common throughout the existence of diaspora-funded schools in the early and late twentieth century. However, some graduates of diaspora-funded schools in southern China regrettably continued the ill habits, such as opium, gambling, and prostitution, that education was supposed to remedy (Williams 2018: 93). In fact, this was not only because more education did not always provide an alternative career pathway, but also because, for some young men, returning to agriculture was “a disgrace” that the family would not accept (Williams 2018: 93) and this meant they were left without an occupation. In any case, graduates of diaspora-funded schools were destined for a future other than toiling the ancestral land.

## **Conclusion: Towards a Modern Future**

This chapter argues that the emergence of modern diaspora-funded schools co-constituted modern students. Put differently, modern diaspora-funded schools, because of their novel designs and features, allowed students to imagine and participate in the modern world beyond the boundaries of their ancestral home. This contrasted with their farming predecessors, who lived in a comparatively undisturbed environment that resulted, according to some, in a serious underutilisation of their brains (Fei 1992: 53; Ho 2005: 29). Hence, diaspora-funded schools

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<sup>288</sup> According to the records of a Shanghai-based Zhongshan hometown association, in 1936 there were 2,315 people affiliated to that association and 25% were working in a department store. The Sincere department store employed 103 people; Wing On 178 people; The Sun 141 people; and Sun Sun 177 people (Song 2007: 39). Besides working in department stores, other Zhongshan people also worked at Western-trading companies, and in finance, real estate, shipping, wharfs, and warehouses.

<sup>289</sup> Phone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, 13 November 2020.

<sup>290</sup> Interview with Mr. Xie (archivist of Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School), Shekki, 11 June 2018.

<sup>291</sup> Interview with LEONG Cheuk Kun (former student of Cho Bin village), 55, Zhongshan, December 25, 2017.

provided an alternative history and could be regarded as the epitome of *qiaoxiang* modernism in twentieth-century China.

These modern diaspora-funded schools were “beacons of modernity” in the countryside that helped graduates to be better equipped to leave behind an agrarian past (Cheng 2020: 158). More than any other entities or institutions in rural China, these “educational wonderlands” (Cheng 2020: 158) nurtured students with new skills and behaviours for an outward future orientation that transcended geographic and nation-state boundaries, such as those between China and Australia, and within China itself between the village and the city. The schools enabled a shift from a life working outside in the sun, to one that was primarily inside such as at modern department stores. In that sense, diaspora-funded schools were “in-between” places of flow (Sinn 2012), assisting the transition to a life beyond the village where many graduates ultimately lived and found employment. These schools clearly did not only stimulate a new desire for physical mobility, but they also facilitated social mobility.

Since their emergence in the early twentieth century, the new schools in the *qiaoxiang* represented a tour de force in the modernisation of rural China. Besides simultaneously moulding the life and outlook of modern students, their emergence had a more permanent visible impact than other products of educational modernity in the *qiaoxiang* in southern China. Modern education benefited greatly from the flourishing print-mediated modernity that produced modern maps (Dikötter 2006: 122) and an impressive array of new textbooks—the most common “thing” associated with modern education (Lee 1999: 52; Zarrow 2015); however, textbooks were frequently superseded. In contrast, much like the department stores that were landmarks in the Chinese cities, schools were more permanent landmarks in the village, as they were likely to be used over many decades. As built objects, school buildings were all but immutable entities in the village landscape. The following chapter turns to discuss their post-educational lives.



## Chapter 6

### The Afterlives of Schools in the *Qiaoxiang*



**Figure 6.1** The entrance to the library of On Tong School in Dachong, Zhongshan, damaged by vandals. (Photo by Douglas Lam, 2013.)

In May 1907, Chinese-Australian donors to the school in Ching Keung (present-day Qinggang 青崗) village were enraged when they heard that ten days before the opening of a new school—situated inside the existing, recently renovated Wong ancestral hall—it had been ransacked by vandals.<sup>292</sup> The Sydney Zhongshan merchants who had donated to the school submitted an impassioned letter to the Heung San government, and sent a duplicate to *Tung Wah Times*—a

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<sup>292</sup> *Tung Wah Times*, 25 May 1907, p.7. Thanks to historian Michael Williams for drawing my attention to this incident, and to Ely Finch for sending me a translated summary of the article in English.

Chinese newspaper in Australia—suggesting that the culprits, who were most likely disaffected youths, should be brought to justice lest similar events ever occur again. This was perhaps the first instance of deliberate vandalism of diaspora-funded schools, yet it would not be the last. In 2017, the second month of this research, I was shocked to receive photographs (such as Figure 6.1) of a 1980s diaspora-funded school in ruins. From the photographs, On Tong School had been broken into, looted, and vandalised, much like the Wong Ancestral Hall in Zhongshan more than a century earlier.<sup>293</sup> Disturbingly enough, the Wong ancestral hall raid marked the beginning of a trend that would perpetuate throughout the entire twentieth century. As my research progressed, I noticed that in the history of diaspora-funded schools, they were often short-lived initiatives whose purposes were repeatedly superseded. While the previous chapter portrays diaspora-funded schools of the early and late twentieth century as novel fixtures that facilitated radical social change in the *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities), that chapter only provided a snapshot of school buildings at a particular moment of time. Yet, as history unfolded, schools inevitably transformed. Thus, a *longue durée* perspective is needed (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009), sensitive to change (Smith and Akagawa 2009: 2; S. Jones 2017: 33).

Among the diaspora these days there is generally curiosity but insufficient understanding of what has happened when school buildings stopped functioning as schools. For example, during an interview, “Amanda,” a descendant of an Australian school donor, asked me what became of the schools I have been studying, as she last heard her father’s school was no longer a school. Her family had not been back to Zhongshan in decades and so they were curious.<sup>294</sup> In fact, as I will show, much has changed in a few decades in China, to the extent that some historians view twentieth-century China as a “laboratory of rich human experience” (Shao and Dikötter 2017: 169). Rather than merely recounting the changing uses of school buildings and the fate of those that have fallen out of use, this chapter also considers how Zhongshan residents experienced China’s momentous change.

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<sup>293</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Lam of Sydney (Zhongshan-born Australian), 71, 16 September 2017.

<sup>294</sup> Interview with “Amanda” (Australian-born descendant of a school donor family), Sydney, 30 April 2018. I have adopted the pseudonym “Amanda” as this research participant wished to remain anonymous for reasons that will be clear in the next chapter.

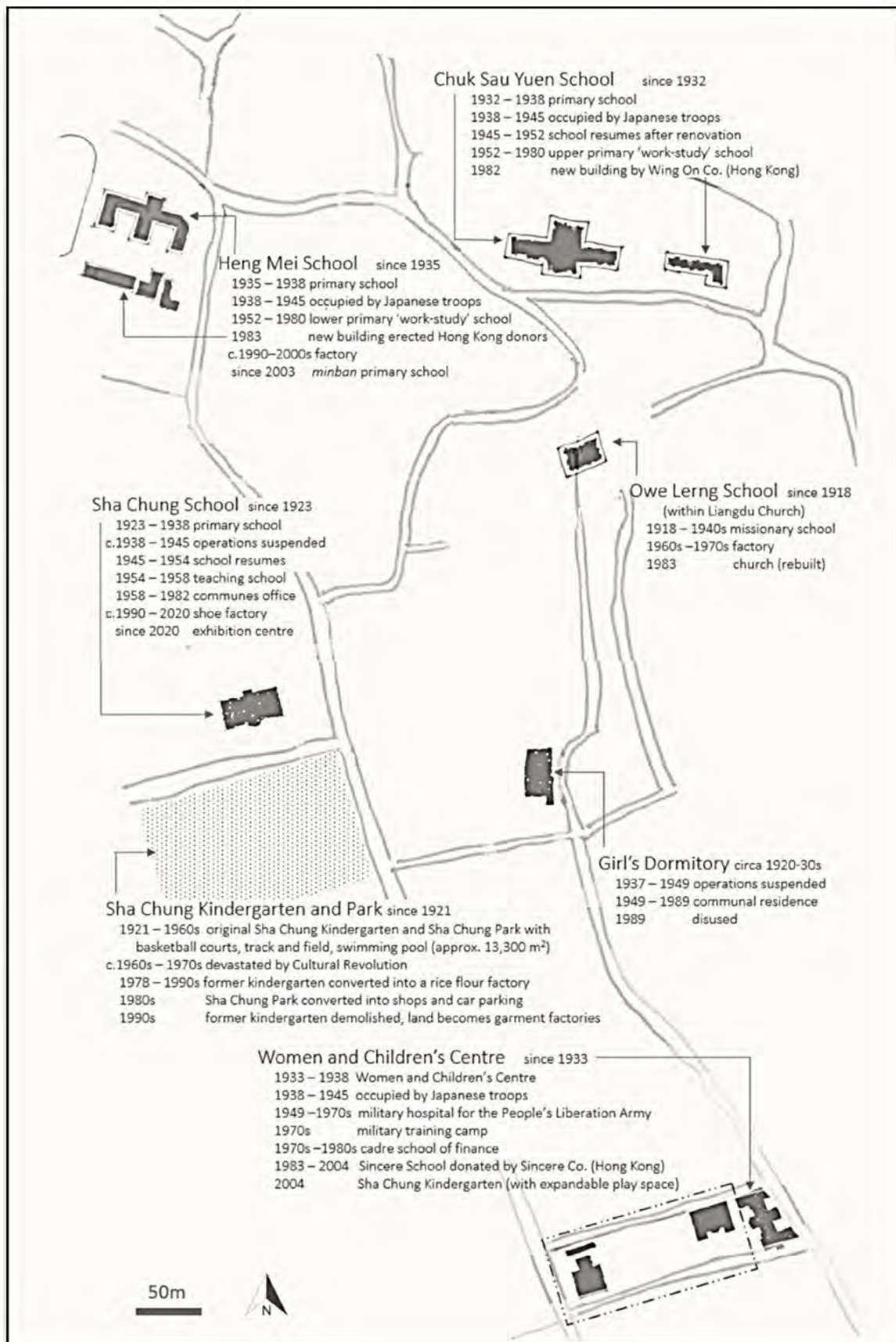


Figure 6.2 Evolution of diaspora-funded schools in Sha Chung village and South District precinct, Zhongshan. (Drawn by Christopher Cheng.)

While chronicling the afterlives of diaspora-funded schools (Figure 6.2), I discovered that schools were like all buildings: throughout their lifespan, they were (re)produced as well as consumed and reinterpreted by a diversity of users and occupants (Maudlin and Vellinga 2014). Thus, the current chapter charts the complex life trajectories of school buildings through their various stages, as buildings repurpose, decompose, and recycle. The use or “consumption” of buildings means they eventually deteriorate, and perhaps will be demolished one day. The process of decay sometimes leads to unexpected or innovative uses being made of former school buildings and their contents.

From analysing how schools transform and eventually fall apart, this chapter seeks to identify, in Wiebe Bijker’s (1995: 50) terms, the “hidden properties and processes” that once held diaspora-funded schools together. It considers how the school buildings as socio-material assemblages once shaped and stabilised life in the *qiaoxiang* (Gieryn 2002: 35; Were 2019). In sum, the chapter is structured chronologically, providing a historiography of the myriad usages of former diaspora-funded school buildings—an account that encapsulates a diversity of voices and subjective interpretations of people, mostly former students, affiliated with these schools. In doing so, it offers an alternative perspective on the ever-changing “remittance landscape” (Lopez 2015) in southern China that has been outlined by historians (Yow 2013) and geographers (Knapp 1992). Yet, in their writing, there are rarely detailed insider accounts of actual changes to individual school buildings in the *qiaoxiang*, especially from the perspectives of past occupants (Maudlin and Vellinga 2014: 110). In the material that follows, I filled that gap, drawing mainly from oral history interviews to show that school buildings and their furnishings were not fixed, changeless entities.

## **Birth, Growth, Death and Decline of Pre-1949 Diaspora-Funded Schools**

The pre-1949 diaspora-funded schools underwent protracted growth from their birth in 1872 through to the golden era of the 1920s and 1930s. This was because the diaspora needed time to accumulate funds abroad that they could contribute for the completion or elaboration of schools. They also faced the inconveniences of long-distance travel and poor communications, which hindered their management of construction, as well as a shortage of modern Western construction materials.<sup>295</sup> But when they finally appeared in the early twentieth century in their complete form—

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<sup>295</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqu (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020; also see Chapter 4.

at a time when neighbouring villages were still schooling in ancestral halls—the new schools certainly stood out as “exquisite Western structures.”<sup>296</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, the modern schools featured school bells, staircases, large windows, and flat-roof terraces. Even though the first half of the twentieth century was a time of political chaos and economic crisis across China, somehow the *qiaoxiang* did not suffer greatly and even perhaps had heightened prestige because they were relatively isolated from national politics. But following the arrival of Japanese invasion forces and, after the war, the 1949 Communist Revolution led by Mao Zedong, these schools were damaged or gradually deteriorated, as was also the image of modernity in the *qiaoxiang* they once represented.

### *The Devastation Caused by the Japanese Occupation (1938–1945)*

As the Japanese troops reached Guangdong Province in the latter half of 1938, they commandeered more buildings. In countryside areas like Zhongshan, some diaspora-funded schools, for instance, Lai Wor, Ha Zhat, Heng Mei, and Chuk Sau Yuen, became enemy headquarters. Meanwhile, in the nearby city of Hong Kong, the finest hotels, like the Peninsula, served similarly as enemy bases after the British colony was invaded in 1941. It can be concluded that the Japanese military desired well-built structures to serve as their bases. In the countryside of southern China, these turned out to be diaspora-funded schools. Hence, the first large-scale instance of adaptive re-use of schools in the *qiaoxiang* occurred involuntarily during the Japanese occupation of Guangdong.

Under the occupation, schooling was suspended, and school property was ravaged. There was a critical shortage of coal and other fuel in southern China, leading to the wholesale harvesting of trees for their timber and the burning of household wooden objects. One school in Longdu (Ha Zhat School) reported that “the desks of teachers and students were used as firewood, and 40,000 books were burned to ashes” (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 205). According to this account, “transforming a good school into ruins was a sight that would immediately draw tears” (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 206; also see Williams 2018: 94). In another village, according to a family historian, it was unclear whether it was desperate villagers during the war or the Japanese army who “raided the beautiful teak wood staircase on the upper floors of the school, and burned it for fuel, to cook their rice.”<sup>297</sup> Another interpretation, provided by villagers in Ngoi

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<sup>296</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui, 19 November 2020.

<sup>297</sup> Interview with Howard Wilson (family historian) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne and Alexandra Wong, Sydney, 15 February 2019.

Sha, was that the staircase was not damaged, but the teak staircase handrail was ravaged in the 1970s and replaced in the 1990s (Figure 6.3).<sup>298</sup> In the end, the outcome was nevertheless the same: the school was in a shambles.



**Figure 6.3** The new steel-tube handrails to the upper stories of Lai Wor School in Ngoi Sha village, Zhuhai, were reinstalled in the 1990s. (Source: Howard Wilson, private collection.)

### *Disrupted Schooling as a Consequences of War*

Schooling was disrupted during these turbulent times. For instance, out of fear of the crimes that the Japanese army might commit against women, in Sha Chung village both the Girls' Dormitory and the Women and Children's Centre were closed.<sup>299</sup> A daughter of a Chinese-Australian, whose family had already been in Australia for two generations and who would later become a school donor herself, said she only completed elementary school in Shekki at age seventeen "because of the Second World War," implying that her education was interrupted.<sup>300</sup> While in Cho Bin village, a resident reported that family circumstances during the war, coupled with a lack of initiative, meant that his father's education was discontinued. "He barely had a few years of schooling."<sup>301</sup> In general, when the remittance economy collapsed during the war, diaspora-funded schools began to close (Zheng 1996: 40). When funds were inadequate, some schools began charging fees to rural

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<sup>298</sup> Personal communication with JIM Wah-hing (village chief of Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai), 70, 7 November 2021.

<sup>299</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

<sup>300</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 77, Sydney, 24 April 2018.

<sup>301</sup> Interview with LEONG Cheuk Kun (Cho Bin resident), 55, Zhongshan, December 25, 2017.

families, often paid in the form of harvest, but most likely families were either unable or unwilling to pay, resulting in the school's eventual dissolution.

During the war, for some families, the village was a place to abandon; for others, it was a refuge. While some families left Zhongshan via Macao for Hong Kong, others moved in the opposite direction: returning to Zhongshan from Hong Kong.<sup>302</sup> One student attended three different schools—first in Dai Leng village, then Sai Ya village (also in Zhongshan), then Chin San (in present-day Zhuhai)—as a fleeing “student refugee,” evacuating his village of Dai Leng en route to Hong Kong, via Macao, before schooling was suspended altogether.<sup>303</sup> On the other hand, Dr. Joe Leong remembers returning to Cho Bin village in Zhongshan from Hong Kong once his father's remittance payments from Queensland stopped.<sup>304</sup> In the village, his family lived off sweet potatoes and rice, the latter coming in the form of rent for the land which his grandfather had acquired from money made in Australia (Robb and Leong 2016: 3). The constant back and forth traffic between Zhongshan and Hong Kong occurred as desperate Zhongshan families tried to evade the war. Inescapably, the schooling of many children was disrupted.

By the end of the war in 1945, many schools had survived, but not all.<sup>305</sup> Those that recovered were assisted in some cases by migrants who had returned to their families in Zhongshan and begun to rebuild their homes (Williams 2018: 64; Zhongshan East District Overseas Chinese Association 1999). In other cases, the Kwoks, led by Gockshun (郭順) of Wing On Department Store, for instance, led a campaign that involved overseas donors who collectively contributed to the restoration of their village school in Chuk Sau Yuen (A. Li 2008: 60). Besides making schooling free, the funds collected were to reduce the economic burden on families, some of whom had lost their sole breadwinners during the war by providing free tuition, uniforms, and rice rations (A. Li 2008: 60). But not all schools had access to resources. The shortfall of funds led to the voluntary liquidation of some schools. Lai Wor School in Ngoi Sha village (Zhuhai) was one such example. It was unable to continue because its benefactor, CHOY Hing, was elderly—75 at the time—and

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<sup>302</sup> Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese for three years and eight months from 25 December 1941. The Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945.

<sup>303</sup> Interview with AU-YEUNG Chow (village scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

<sup>304</sup> Interview with Dr. Joe Leong (Hong Kong-born Australian descendant of two generations of school donors), 84, Townsville, 18 April 2018.

<sup>305</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020.

his business in Canton, The Sun Department Store, had been devastated beyond recovery by fire.<sup>306</sup> Likewise, in Sha Chung village of Zhongshan's South District, the Girls' Dormitory and the Women and Children's Centre failed to recover.<sup>307</sup>

The decline of diaspora-funded schools, with the onset of the war, began a pattern of decline that was not arrested until the reform era (beginning in 1978). After the Japanese war, schools like Cho Bin and Owe Lerng reported problems with teacher retention.<sup>308</sup> Owe Lerng School (Liang Du Church) dissolved after its second headmaster, Pastor LEE Cheuk Tsuen (李卓存牧師)—appointed in 1945—left Zhongshan for Jiangmen (Sohu 2019). The subsequent events (China's civil war followed by the Communist Revolution) caused many overseas families (僑屬) to flee from China (Williams 2018: 64). The neglect of schools became clear in 1948 and 1949 as student numbers fell and funding dwindled (Zhongshan East District Overseas Chinese Association 1999). For those recounting what had transpired it was an unsettling experience, and even I as the researcher experienced second-hand the feeling of grief or loss (*cf.* Lynch and LeDrew 2020: 11; Pascoe Leahy 2021: 995). Writing of school closures in general, educational historian Martin Lawn (2017: 21) noted, "School closures are dramatic" events. In contrast to the initial aspirations of improvement and development associated with school openings, school closure, decline, and decay symbolise "the end of a vision" (Lawn 2017: 21).

## **"Recycled" Schools in the People's Republic (1949–1978)**

After the Communist Revolution in 1949, privately funded schools, like those diaspora-funded schools in the *qiaoxiang*, came under state control (Kwong 1997: 224). At the same time, educational policies were based on notions of social class that distinguished the rural peasants and the urban bourgeoisie. By the 1960s, a proliferation of new elite schools occurred in the cities, preparing some students for university, while the masses in the countryside mostly attended "work-study" schools that, because of limited funds, had little prospect of offering a good education (Tsang 2000: 589). Schools that the diaspora had previously funded, which had equipped students for upwardly mobile business careers, were in a sense sending school-leavers back to a

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<sup>306</sup> Interviews with Ms. SHENG Lai Kum (former student of Lai Wor School), 84, Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai, 29 November 2018; Howard Wilson (family historian) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne and Alexandra Wong, Sydney, 15 February 2019.

<sup>307</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

<sup>308</sup> Interview with Anthony Leong (historian and village chief of Cho Bin), 68, Zhongshan, December 25, 2017.



past way of life—farming. Because of different educational priorities during the 1949–1978 Mao era, the assets that once distinguished diaspora-funded schools eventually diminished.

### *The Futility of Education for the Rural-Bound Masses*

Life under the People’s Republic in the 1949–1978 period was characterised by many shortcomings and economic deficiencies in education. Many schools were chronically under-resourced: teacher salaries were low, school equipment was inadequate, and many buildings were in disrepair (Pepper 1996: 306; Vickers and Zeng 2017: 205). One way of overcoming deficiency while flattening the educational pyramid was to crowd the classrooms. A former student in the South District of Zhongshan remembers that in the late 1950s, “There were between forty and fifty (students) in a class. During first and second grade there were seven classes [of students], but by grades 5 and 6, it was only two classes.”<sup>309</sup> This happened after 1952, when schools, such as the diaspora-funded Sha Chung School, had closed and the student population was consolidated into a few selected state schools, which in the South District included Chuk Sau Yuen and Heng Mei schools (both former diaspora-funded schools), and schools based in a handful of ancestral halls.<sup>310</sup> The compromise that privileged quantity over quality, led to poor prospects coupled with intergenerational poverty, school completion being generally neither possible nor encouraged by struggling families (Pepper 1996: 415; Davis-Friedmann 1984: 215; Kwong 1997: 224).

Despite such circumstances, many villages had ample human power. Influenced by the Soviet model, the new curriculum emphasised productive labour (Peterson 1997: 180). Mrs Felicia Seeto, a former resident of Cho Bin village, recalls how, throughout her school years in the 1950s and 1960s, the government exploited anything considered a resource, including student labour:

The severe shortage meant that students had to do everything: We had to farm one or two days a week, often in the afternoons. We weeded and watered, especially during the dry seasons. Schooling was suspended during the harvest season. We also paved roads, whatever needed to be completed, we were involved. Children weren’t as precious as they are now. Fortunately, students [in China] today no longer need to do this.<sup>311</sup>

In the 1960s, Felicia recalls, she and her classmates built their own middle school. They spent several days, each day walking some 10km one way from Shekki (the county centre) to Buck Toy

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<sup>309</sup> A go-along interview with Cairns resident Colin Cheng (former student of Heng Mei School), 71, Zhongshan, 6 January 2019.

<sup>310</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), Zhongshan, 81, 13 November 2020, and a go-along interview with Cairns resident Colin Cheng (former student of Heng Mei School) 71, South District, Zhongshan, 6 January 2019.

<sup>311</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto (former student of Cho Bin School), 74, 20 October 2020.

(北台)—the village where the school was being built in South District—then she and her classmates carried bricks, tables, and chairs back from Shekki to the village to build the school, before any learning occurred. The rudimentary conditions of her 1960s school were described to me:

That school had a concrete floor, ceramic tile roofs, no different from a typical village house. It accommodated three or four rows of students. Those seated in the centre of class might have trouble seeing the blackboard on an overcast day because there was no [electric] lighting. Windows on the two sides [of the building] may have provided inadequate natural lighting. Still, we must bear in mind, the children’s eyesight was generally better because they were young.<sup>312</sup>

According to her description, the quality and scale of *minban* (民辦, literally “community-run”) schools were generally inadequate educational facilities, when compared to diaspora-funded schools, such as Cho Bin School in the next village, built three decades before in the Republican period. Without the availability of funds, *minban* schools were of varying quality (Peterson 1994: 85; Deng 1997: 91–116). Insufficient resources ultimately affected the school experience for pupils.

In a vastly different sociopolitical milieu, Chinese youth became socially useful and indispensable to society by being morally, intellectually, and physically fit (Carey and McCarthy 1972: 80). The People’s Republic of China experimented with productive labour and incorporated it into school curricula at all levels (Lucas 1976: 58). Colin Cheng remembers that his primary school was among the cleanest places he visited in Zhongshan. He explained that all the cleaning was done by students.<sup>313</sup> A similar phenomenon certainly continues today, as mops and brooms were observed inside each classroom of a primary school built in 2017.<sup>314</sup> In practice, however, many students found that “learning by doing” was futile. In an interview, Paul Liang, a former Cho Bin resident who now lives in Townsville, repeatedly stated that the part-work-part-study program of the 1970s was nothing more than a waste of his school days.

(Sigh) What a waste of time! We passed many [school] days without doing much. For example, we spent two weeks on the fields, two weeks at a factory, and two weeks on a military camp. It was such a waste of time. What can we learn from manufacturing industrial clothing and fertilisers, and repairing tractors [...] In the fields, what did we learn? What can you really learn from using a shovel? Our

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<sup>312</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto, 5 August 2020.

<sup>313</sup> Telephone interview Colin Cheng of Cairns (former student of Heng Mei School), 72, 6 June 2020.

<sup>314</sup> Seeing mops and brooms inside each classroom may indicate that students took turns in keeping their school clean, rather than hiring a cleaner to do it (field observation at Lihe School, Zhuhai, China, 29 November 2018).

generation wasted a lot of time. (Paul chuckles) No wonder, there was hardly a university student to be found in my generation.<sup>315</sup>

In the countryside, the work-study program mandated by the central government would certainly not improve the future status of rural students, so there was little initiative for them to pursue their studies.<sup>316</sup> A researcher who interviewed former students and high school teachers from the Pearl River Delta who had fled to Hong Kong, reached the same conclusions (Unger 1984: 97). High absenteeism was common in the Delta region of mainland China as students felt their education would not assist their careers nor allow them to transition beyond an agrarian lifestyle. The common expression of the time was, “From the communes, back to the communes” (從農村來, 返農村去).<sup>317</sup> Regardless of their education, most rural students would remain rural bound. Yet they were not the only ones destined for a life in the countryside.

### *Redistributed Labour: “Sent-Down” Youths*

The peasants were expected to educate the sent-down youth in wholesome philosophy and work ethic. Mao believed that the peasants were somehow “pure” by nature compared to the city folk, who had absorbed pernicious foreign ideas. Thus, another hallmark of the Maoist era was the rustication of millions of educated urbanites (知青) (Bernstein 1977). Between 1968 to 1975, during the time of the Cultural Revolution, some of Shekki’s best teachers, including those from diaspora-funded high schools in urban Zhongshan, were “sent down” to the Zhongshan countryside.<sup>318</sup>

Resettlement was generally neither welcomed by those who had to relocate, nor by the rural communities that received those sent down, although the move transformed some previously disadvantaged localities that lacked schools into educationally superior hubs.<sup>319</sup> The resettlement was viewed by many locals as a replacement for those who had died, especially because the rustication campaign<sup>320</sup> occurred shortly after the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), which

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<sup>315</sup> Telephone interview with Paul Liang (former student of Cho Bin School), 19 November 2020.

<sup>316</sup> Interview with LEONG Cheuk Kun (former student of Cho Bin School), 55, Zhongshan, 25 December 2017.

<sup>317</sup> Telephone interview with Paul Liang, 19 November 2020.

<sup>318</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqu (Zhongshan historian), 19 November 2020.

<sup>319</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqu, 19 November 2020.

<sup>320</sup> This campaign, also known as “Up to the mountains, down to the villages” (上山下鄉) was designed to reduce urban unemployment, reform youths in Communist ideology and assist rural development and ease the mayhem created by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution (Bernstein 1977: 33).

resulted in widespread famine (J. Yang 2012).<sup>321</sup> As a result, students from the city of Canton lost interest in their studies because many knew their fates were predestined for a rural future, regardless of their achievements in school (Unger 1984: 96). The consensus of both teachers and students was that education had become a futile endeavour (Bernstein 1977: 202; Davis-Friedmann 1984: 215).



**Figure 6.4** (On left) Mechanised farming with tractors in Zhongshan, Guangdong in 1956. (Source: *Ancestral Home Web* 2011.) (On right) Sons of Cho Bin village, Zhongshan, predestined to be lifelong farmers, circa 1970. (Courtesy of Anthony Leong, private collection.)

In the countryside, most “sent-down” youths preferred agricultural work to teaching. Not only was teaching ideologically constrained to the rhetoric of the time, but teachers faced a double burden of meeting harvest (production) quotas in addition to teaching (Davis-Friedmann 1984: 215). Many urbanites initially found rural life boring and their education practically useless as they performed basic agricultural tasks, such as operating tractors and repairing agricultural machinery (Figure 6.4; Pepper 1996: 394; Han 2001: 74). Anthony Leong (Figure 6.4) recalled being “sent down” to Zhongshan from Shanghai as a twenty-year-old lad in 1969, and accepted his fate that “I was destined to be a farmer for life.”<sup>322</sup> Other “Shanghai lads” (上海仔, as the “sent-down”

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<sup>321</sup> An estimated 70 million perished during this time. The brute fact was that the countryside starved to feed the city.

<sup>322</sup> Email correspondence with Anthony Leong (“sent-down” youth), 71, 14 January 2021.

group were known in Cho Bin village) shared this view; however, those unfit for full-time farm work were relegated to the supposedly “lighter load of teaching,” besides providing farm labour.<sup>323</sup>

Having discussed the characteristics of redistributed labour in Maoist China and the agricultural activities that were undertaken at former diaspora-funded schools, I next turn to explore the afterlives of the schools themselves.

### *Schools Reappropriated and Buildings Disassembled*

Due to incessant shortage of resources, educational buildings were often unceremoniously repurposed. For example, the Girls’ Dormitories in Sha Chung village, which had been vacant since the inception of the Japanese occupation, were converted into communal housing.<sup>324</sup> During fieldwork in Zhongshan, I initially found that access to the former dormitory site was blocked. I gained entry by being invited to walk right through the house of its neighbour, Ms. Ching, who told me that her family had once resided in the former dormitory. “My family shared the top floor with another family. Each floor of the [double-storied] building had three rooms; each floor had a bathroom.”<sup>325</sup>

Ms. Ching lamented the conditions of the old dormitory building. “It was a nuisance to live there as particles kept flaking from the ceiling.”<sup>326</sup> According to the book, *How Buildings Learn*, to ensure their long-term survival buildings require substantial maintenance every eleven to twenty-five years (Brand 1994: 112). As Ms. Ching also expressed her concerns about the building’s structural integrity when living there, it is clear that the routine, preventative maintenance that had kept buildings safe and clean had stopped by the time she moved in. The dormitory building was vacated in the late 1930s—during the Japanese occupation—and it seems that no maintenance had been done since. In 1989, her family was evicted when the property was returned to its former overseas owners and, subsequently, she and her husband built a house next door (shown in Figure 6.5), as well as conveniently appropriating the front garden of the Girls’ Dormitory by building a

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<sup>323</sup> Email correspondence with Anthony Leong, 14 January 2021.

<sup>324</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

<sup>325</sup> Interview with Ms. Ching (former resident of the communal housing that replaced the Girls’ Dormitory in Sha Chung), Zhongshan, 4 December 2018.

<sup>326</sup> Interview with Ms. Ching (former resident of the communal housing that replaced the girls’ dormitory), Sha Chung, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018.

high perimeter wall enclosing it as part of their own yard. Since Ms. Ching moved out, the dormitory “has undergone nothing but further deterioration.”<sup>327</sup>



**Figure 6.5** The researcher, Christopher Cheng (right), in front of the long-abandoned former Girls’ Dormitory in South District’s Sha Chung village, and (left) Ms. Ching (程女士), a former post-1949 occupant. (Photo by Sandi Robb, 4 December 2018.)

In addition to converting former educational buildings into residences, other former schools have found alternative uses. For instance, also in Sha Chung village, after the closure of the Women and Children’s Centre, it and the two other buildings also built by MA Ying-piu were reopened in 1949 as a military hospital of the People’s Liberation Army.<sup>328</sup> Referring to Figure 6.6, the three stately buildings include the Ma Mansion (南源堂), Ma Family (Reception) Hall (一元堂) and the Women and Children’s Centre (婦兒院), which were converted into a doctors’ residence, military general residence, and casualty ward, respectively, and continued to be used as such until the 1970s. The site was subsequently converted into a military training camp, which operated for two years.<sup>329</sup> Then, it became a cadre school, teaching finance and commerce, before the site was finally returned to its owners in the reform era (as discussed later in this chapter). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Owe Leng School (Liang Du Church), another school building to which many Chinese-Australians contributed, including the original shareholders of department stores, became a factory.<sup>330</sup>

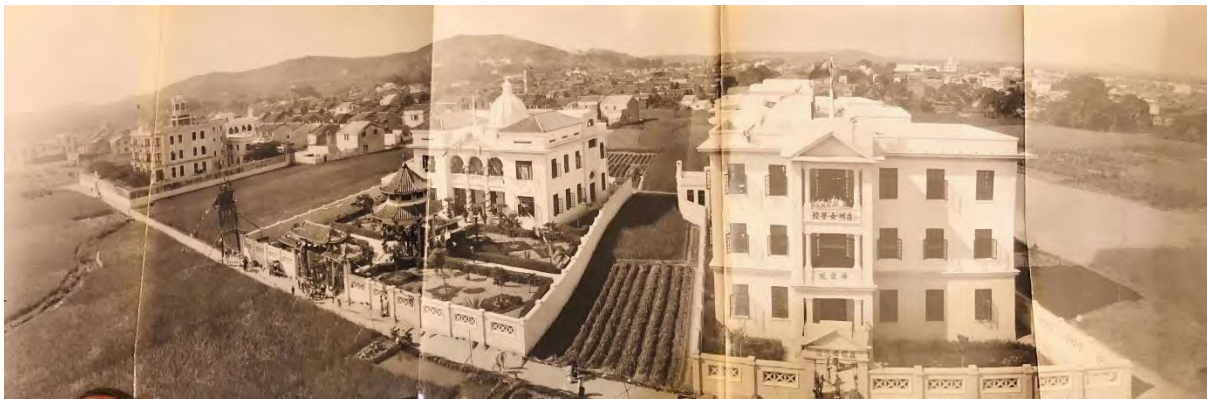
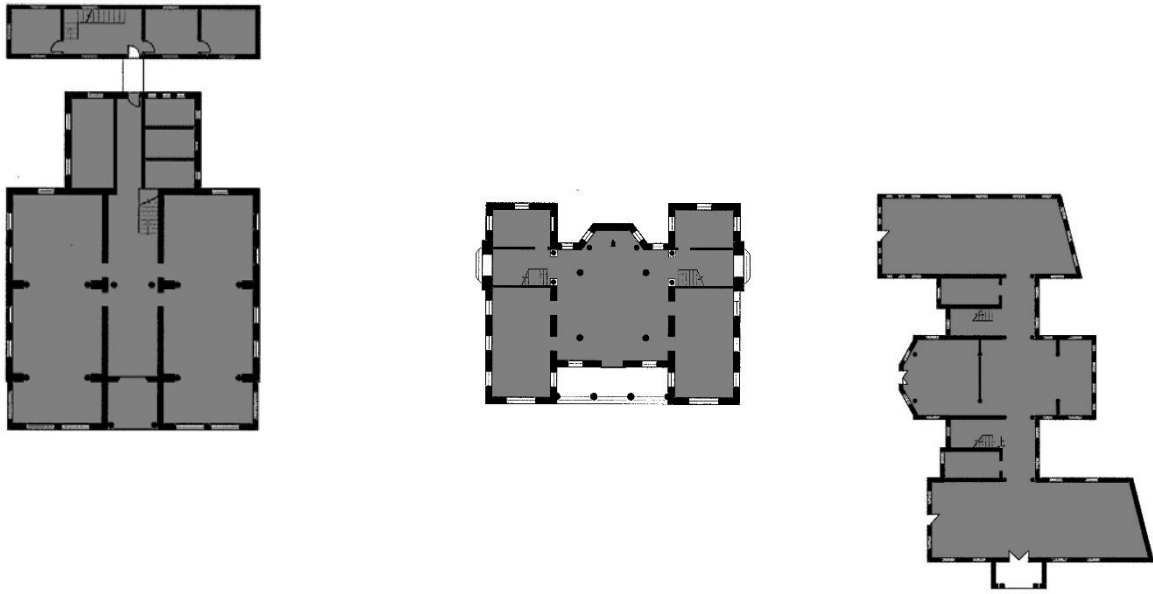
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<sup>327</sup> Interview with Ms. Ching, 4 December 2018.

<sup>328</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

<sup>329</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu, 13 November 2020.

<sup>330</sup> Interview with CHENG Kalok (Liang Du Christian Church worker), Zhongshan, 15 December 2017.



**Figure 6.6** Plans (above, from left to right) of the Ma Mansion (南源堂), Ma Family (Reception) Hall (一元堂) and Women and Children's Centre (婦兒院). (Source: Zhongshan Culture, Broadcasting, Press and Publication Bureau 2012.) A historic photograph of MA Ying-piu's three stately buildings in Sha Chung village, Zhongshan, circa 1930s. (Courtesy of South District Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and the descendants of MA Ying-piu.)

Other school buildings also had complex afterlives. Some became mixed-use buildings. The Sha Chung School (est. 1923), for example, closed by 1954 and soon after became a training school for teachers (教師進修學校).<sup>331</sup> There, the new teachers spent up to half a year with seasoned educators who taught them how to interact with students and organise classroom activities, including singing children's songs.<sup>332</sup> Under its new educational function, the school furniture

<sup>331</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

<sup>332</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu, 13 November 2020.

remained unchanged. But after four years of operation, the training school was relocated to make way for a new commune office.<sup>333</sup>



**Figure 6.7** Villagers laying unhusked rice grains to sun-dry on the former basketball courts of Cho Bin School in South District, Zhongshan. (Photo by LEONG Chi-kwok, 1 January 2018.)

Apart from being repurposed for new uses post-1949, former school buildings had another function: the processing of agricultural crops, especially during the wet season. My informant MA Yin-Chiu remembers farmers carrying their harvest up many flights of stairs to the roof of his old school. “It was a messy and tiresome chore, but there wasn’t any choice. Besides the flat-roof terrace [of the old school], there weren’t other suitable sites to sun-dry our harvest.”<sup>334</sup> A similar phenomenon was reported in relation to Cho Bin village (Figure 6.7) by a Shanghai resident who was “sent down” to his native home when he was twenty years old. Anthony Leong recalls, in the 1970s, sun-drying peanuts and rice grains on the rooftop terrace during the day, while classes continued as normal in the building below. When night fell, he slept under the cupola on top of the school roof.<sup>335</sup> Being a well-built public structure, the school also functioned as a village warehouse during the typhoon and wet season; the large multistorey school building kept the

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<sup>333</sup> People’s Communes were introduced in 1958 as collective agricultural administrative units and operated until 1983. Personal communication with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 82, Zhongshan, 8 October 2021.

<sup>334</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

<sup>335</sup> Email correspondence with Anthony Leong (“sent-down” youth), 71, 14 January 2021. Anthony also appears in the “Cho Bin” [Caobian] episode of the Zhongshan Broadcasting & Television Station production “*Zhongshan Story*” 《中山故事》—a televised series on local culture and history. The episode was filmed in 2009, broadcasted in Zhongshan in 2010, and is available on YouTube in Cantonese.



harvest dry, whereas many residents lived in single-story dwellings that were prone to flooding.<sup>336</sup> Clearly, former school buildings found a gamut of new uses over time.



**Figure 6.8** The cupola, where the school bell once hung, on the flat rooftop of Sha Chung School South District, Zhongshan. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 2 December 2018.)

In addition to the repurposing of former school buildings, some features (artefacts) of the schools were also repurposed. One such example of this is the school bell from Sha Chung School (Figure 6.8). During the collectivisation era, the 100kg bronze school bell was removed, but not to be melted down during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) in backyard a furnace, which I at first thought might have been the case during my interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder). Instead, it was taken to Sheung Tong (上塘) village—a neighbouring village in the modern-day South District—where it was struck to mark the start and end of the workday. Other than signalling work times, the bell had an extra function as a village fire alarm.<sup>337</sup> It turns out that what had once signalled a new purpose and rhythm in the lives of pupils in the *qiaoxiang* found renewed significance in a society that prioritised collective work (agriculture) over schooling. Indeed, the

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<sup>336</sup> Interviews with Paul Liang of Townsville (former student of Cho Bin School), 17 April 2018, and Mrs. Felicia Seeto (former resident of Cho Bin village, Zhongshan), 74, 20 October 2020.

<sup>337</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

school's closure was an opportunity to innovatively harness the myriad of material assets that were once associated with the old building (*cf.* Lynch and LeDrew 2020).

This chapter has shown thus far how deficiency relentlessly plagued schools during the entire Maoist period. Stretched to the limit, old schools were constantly repurposed, while some of their most distinguishing moveable features were recycled. But this was not at odds with other practices in a country where recycling had long been practiced (Dikötter 2006: 14). Elsewhere, in another *qiaoxiang* in Pearl River Delta, a university researcher interviewed a school principal in Taishan about the impact of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and was told that “many Western-style buildings were seriously damaged during the Great Leap Forward drive to make steel in 1958, and all the windows, doors, and handrails of these buildings were removed” (Chiang 2021: 30). Another continuation of historical processes was that, in some cases, not long after their construction, many modern pre-1949 diaspora-funded schools had their educational function cut short. They were dismantled and misappropriated, initially by the Japanese, then in more diverse ways during the Maoist period. This prematurely ended the idealised visions that had motivated the diaspora to fund new schools in the *qiaoxiang*. As Unger (1982: 217) writes when describing education in Canton under Mao, by the reform era “China was back to square one,” and, in many ways, by then, “if anything, the problems are greater.”

### **A Short-lived Revival in the Post-Mao *Qiaoxiang* (1980s–2010s)**

Following the economic reforms of the 1980s, it seemed, at least from the *qiaoxiang* perspective, that the diaspora was enthusiastic about reviving educational philanthropy. The reason was that many villages in the early reform period still used ancestral halls as schools, while others had inadequate facilities.<sup>338</sup> For instance, the sight of school desks and chairs semi-submerged in floodwater after heavy rain disheartened returnees and made them feel compelled to contribute to the building of a new school. Such spur-of-the-moment fundraising activity was fondly mentioned by a former officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, who recalled that:<sup>339</sup>

After the reform and opening, every time compatriots returned [to Zhongshan] I saw how fundraising for a new school occurred. For example, one person [after seeing the neglected conditions of the

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<sup>338</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (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.

<sup>339</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui, 19 November 2020.

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’s revolution. The overseas Chinese led the way for change.

Yet, accounts by the diaspora themselves reveal a less than enthusiastic response. Due to the particular circumstances of the Maoist period, requests for the diaspora to fund new schools were sometimes met with resistance. Mrs. Felicia Seeto repeated the words of a potential donor who snapped at her father’s request for donations. “I have already donated a few hundred *mu* [Chinese acre] of land [to the Communists],<sup>340</sup> isn’t that enough?” Felicia explained to me the irony in the words “donated”:

You must understand there was a class known as landlords, who made a lot of money overseas. They bought lots of land and properties, shops to collect rent, etc.<sup>341</sup> After the liberation [in 1949], these people were tortured, their houses and properties confiscated. So, when my dad asked for donations, some families remembered what they had lost.<sup>342</sup>

One historian described the Land Reforms (1950–1953) as a government-initiated property distribution that had “attacked the foundations of the transnational family as an institution for generating wealth” (Peterson 2007: 34). Sometimes tensions flared between husbands and wives of donors situated in Australia. This was especially the case when the husband was trying to recruit other donors in Australia to contribute to a new school, while the wife thought his campaigning ventures were seen to be causing trouble. Mrs. Felicia Seeto remembers, for instance, her mother yelling at her father, “Don’t you feel like a beggar going around asking for donations all the time?!”<sup>343</sup> Although no evidence from the pre-1949 period has emerged from my research, it may have been less of a problem when sojourning husbands were separated from their wives, who were based in the ancestral home villages, where most of the funds went.

Unlike half a century earlier, when the family members of emigrants were primarily based in China, by the 1980s whole families had migrated and settled abroad as foreign nationals, and this complicated decisions about contributing to the ancestral homeland. Hence, the reform-era rejuvenation of the homeland did not happen immediately. Personal observation of my own

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<sup>340</sup> A measure of land, 100 *mu* (畝), 6.67 hectares, or 16.47 acres.

<sup>341</sup> 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: 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.

<sup>342</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto (a Zhongshan-born descendant of an Australian school donor), 74, 5 August 2020.

<sup>343</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. Felicia Seeto, 5 August 2020.

relatives in Zhongshan suggests that there were often unrealistic expectations of overseas Chinese from “Gum San”<sup>344</sup> bringing unlimited bags of gold—that is money—back to Zhongshan (Cheng 2016: 72). Louie (2004: 153) found that the prevalence of this attitude made some emigrant families reluctant to return, as they feared that their poor mainland relatives would ask them for money or strip them of their possessions. Some Chinese-Australian families who had settled abroad preferred, for example, to set aside their hard-earned savings for something else, like a new car, a home deposit for a child, or leaving money as an inheritance, instead of donating it to a school in China.<sup>345</sup> These competing “family scripts” (Salaff, Wong and Greve 2010: 11) created new “conversations” about whether it was worthwhile contributing to a former or distant home at all (*cf.* Chan and Cheng 2016).

The Hong Kong-based descendants of the leading pre-1949 Zhongshan-Australian philanthropist and founder of Sincere Company, MA Ying-piu, were also hesitant about renewing ties with their native villages in the 1980s. According to a Sha Chung elder, “It took some convincing” before these descendants were willing to return to reclaim their ancestral properties.<sup>346</sup> My informant, MA Yin-chiu—a son of a Chinese-Australian sojourner whose father had once worked at Sincere Co. (Hong Kong)—recalled spending an entire evening in the early 1980s talking to MA Ying-piu’s youngest son, known as “Uncle Nine,” persuading his family to reclaim their ancestral estates.<sup>347</sup> The harrowing contents of so-called “ransom letters” sent under state guidance to the diaspora by their relatives in China after the establishment of the People’s Republic included urgent pleas for assistance that left many migrant distraught by their inability to support their families at home, so it may be understandable that my informant was approached by the village representatives when letters to MA Ying-piu’s descendants went unanswered.<sup>348</sup> MA Yin-chiu related:

A descendant of MA Ying-piu was returning [to Zhongshan] and I was asked to meet him on behalf of the village. I was told that it was important that they talked to somebody they could trust, and there weren’t many they could trust. My father had previously worked in Hong Kong Sincere [department store], and Uncle Nine also went to school with my father in Sha Chung, so the village chief [at the time] said he could count on me. So, we spent the entire night together at the new Zhongshan Hot

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<sup>344</sup> In Cantonese, “Gum San” (金山, literally “Gold Mountain”) was the name by which Australia was still known long after the gold rush by the people in the *qiaoxiang*.

<sup>345</sup> Interviews with “Amanda” (Australian-born descendant of a school donating family) Sydney, 30 April 2018; Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 3 December 2018.

<sup>346</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

<sup>347</sup> MA Yin-chiu was unable to provide an exact date but recalls that the hot springs resort, where his meeting took place, was newly opened when this meeting occurred. The resort opened on 28 December 1980, and the school that emerged from the meeting was established in 1983.

<sup>348</sup> Peterson (2007: 28) describes difficult consequences, illustrating, for instance, that a 71-year-old gardener in Vancouver in 1955 committed suicide out of despair at not being able to help his family in China.

Springs Resort [...] as there were lots of misunderstandings to clear up. I first declared that what was done under Mao was wrong; that their ancestral properties were unfairly seized.<sup>349</sup>

A similar phenomenon occurred in Kaiping—another emigrants’ native home in Guangdong Province—after 1978. WOON Yuen-fong wrote:

There was a genuine attempt to favour [overseas Chinese] by giving them positive incentives to invest in and give donations to their home communities, and by returning to them the rights of ownership [產業權], and the right to use [使用權] the commercial and residential properties which had been “wrongfully seized” or “borrowed” by certain individuals and government units between 1949 and 1978 (Woon 1989: 335; also see Cao 1995 on the restitution campaign).

At the meeting MA Yin-chiu suggested turning one of the ancestral properties into a school, as Sha Chung village no longer had its own school and the village children from Sha Chung were attending schools in neighbouring villages, such as Heng Mei or Chuk Sau Yuen.<sup>350</sup> The management of Sincere department store in Hong Kong, along with MA Ying-piu’s descendants, agreed to pay for the much-needed renovation of the buildings that their forebear had erected. Thus, in 1983 the former Women and Children’s Centre was reclaimed and converted into Sincere Primary School (Figure 6.9).



**Figure 6.9** Sincere School in Sha Chung village (previously Women and Children’s Centre), Zhongshan, 1983. (Source: *Zhongshan Qiaokan* 1983, p.11.)

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<sup>349</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

<sup>350</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 January 2019.

The decision taken by many in the diaspora to reinvest in their ancestral homes demonstrated a renewed confidence in China, after decades of suspicion and avoidance (Peterson 2011; Yow 2013: 144). But the general vacillation among emigrants is striking when compared to the period before 1949. Historians have noted that in the pre-Communist era immigrant businesses were boycotted by fellow kinsmen if the owners failed to contribute to the homeland (Yu 1983: 60; Liao 2018: 103). Despite the diaspora offspring inheriting an inexhaustible duty of care to materially sustain old schools (*cf.* Hodder 2012), it is striking that, because of the enormous changes that China had been through, and because of the different orientation of most families through their settling abroad permanently (Waldinger 2015: 43; P. Yang 2012), by the 1980s there was a greater range of excuses for saying “no” to donation requests than there had been heretofore.

Once revival of diaspora-funded schools began, the post-economic reforms shepherded in a new era for educational philanthropy. It involved new categories of donors. Unlike the earlier era, when the donors were sojourning male migrants, in the reform era, whole migrant families were often involved, including a collaborative effort by husbands and wives, siblings, and cousins, all contributing to schools in their ancestral homes. For instance, Cheung Kok School, Ma Shan School, Gong Mei Tau Primary School, Fuk Chung Middle School, and Cho Bin School are all examples of schools funded by Chinese-Australian families at the time. Also, there were many intergenerational donor families, as was the case among donors to Cho Bin School, Women and Children’s Centre/Sincere School/Shu Chung Kindergarten, and Chuk Sau Yuen School. There was also a case of a school having a sole female donor in the diaspora: Ms. CHENG Wai-kwan (鄭慧君)—the contributor to Bok Oi Middle School (*Sanxiang Qiaokan* 1986, p.41; Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 366).<sup>351</sup>

Education philanthropy also became more diversified than in the pre-1949 era. Elementary education in the homeland was no longer the sole focus of educational philanthropy. The post-1978 boom in philanthropy expanded to include kindergartens and middle schools, as well as to development of existing primary schools and building of new ones.<sup>352</sup> The effect was an extension

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<sup>351</sup> The school’s name, “Bok Oi” 博愛 (Officially Romanised in Cantonese), literally means “universal love” after Dr. SUN Yat-sen’s Christianised slogan advocating equality.

<sup>352</sup> Before 1949, there were at least forty-one purpose-built diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan, most of these were primary schools (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 349–350). In the 1980s, there were forty-nine new kindergartens, ninety-one new primary school buildings and thirty-three new middle school buildings funded by the Zhongshan diaspora worldwide (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 359–367).

of formal education—beginning at an earlier age and ending later. There was also greater emphasis on diverse learning, as evidenced by the variety of equipment donated by the diaspora and the suite of specialist rooms that appeared in reform era schools: for example, music rooms, audio-visual (TV) rooms, art studios, science labs, and computer rooms.<sup>353</sup> But despite the momentous advances in educational development, many schools' fate would take an unexpected turn in the twenty-first century.

## End of an Era for Diaspora-Funded Schools

By the twenty-first century, a trend for diaspora-funded schools to be short-lived initiatives re-emerged, something that was also the case for many of the pre-1949 schools. Some, for example, lasted a decade or two, others only a few years.<sup>354</sup> The premature demise was due to an array of factors that converged around the beginning of the new millennium. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to elaborate on China's post-reform development. First, demographic changes challenged the long-term viability of diaspora-funded schools. An effect of the “single-child policy,” implemented in 1978 (Fong 2004), was that the village population across Zhongshan drastically dwindled by the 1990s.<sup>355</sup> At the same time, there was also continuous emigration, as family members left Zhongshan to reunite with their relatives who had left the village earlier for Hong Kong and beyond.<sup>356</sup> The exodus, coinciding with low birth rates, affected the viability of diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan.<sup>357</sup>

Second, amid growing affluence in China, less-endowed diaspora-funded schools became more difficult to sustain. After the introduction of state-sponsored “priority schools” (重點學校) in the

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<sup>353</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian and retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 3 December 2018.

<sup>354</sup> Interviews with Ms. CHEN Diqui, 3 December 2018; “Amanda” (Australian-born descendant of a school donating family), Sydney, 30 April 2018.

<sup>355</sup> Interviews with Paul Liang of Townsville (former student of Cho Bin School), 17 April 2018; AU-YEUNG Chow (village scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

<sup>356</sup> Interviews with “Amanda” (Australian-born descendant of a school donating family), Sydney, 30 April 2018; AU-YEUNG Chow (scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

<sup>357</sup> This may also have been the case in other parts of Pearl River Delta. But it was not the case in all southern Chinese *qiaoxiang*. Communication with a historian, who carried out research on migration on the Thai–China migration corridor revealed that the one-child policy was ineffective in the Chaoshan region of South-East Guangdong, as many families bound by tradition defied the law of the time in a quest to produce sons. Besides, the mushrooming of factories in the Pearl River Delta, because of its proximity to Hong Kong, was not a widespread influence on schools being repurposed in the Chaoshan region. (Conversation with Ms. WANG Hui (PhD student of history studying migration from Chaoshan region of Guangdong, China to Thailand), Chinese University of Hong Kong, 12 September 2018.)

reform era,<sup>358</sup> even more under the influence of the neoliberal economy of the 1990s, less-endowed diaspora-funded schools eventually became below par—in terms of facilities—and could only lower their tuition fees.<sup>359</sup> As these differences were exacerbated by these factors, schools that were already poor lagged further behind, as some were unable to generate the extra revenue needed to improve their situation. A student of the last cohort at Cho Bin School—graduating in 1999—reasoned with resignation that: “It’s too bad my school closed, but I was moving into middle school. Also, the kids after me were going to Buck Toy [Beitai], a better school anyway [Figure 6.10]. Closure was in the name of progress.”<sup>360</sup> As former diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan began to close, their students were often reassigned to better-equipped schools, even though these were sometimes further from home.<sup>361</sup>



**Figure 6.10** The establishment of a larger and better-equipped Hawaiian diaspora-funded school at Buck Toy (北台) village, South District, in 1999 saw the closure of its less well-endowed neighbouring schools, including the school in Cho Bin village. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 12 May 2018.)

Another issue was the buildings themselves. A deficiency of quality construction materials and poor workmanship made frequent repair and renovation a common occurrence.<sup>362</sup> This was an issue Sydney-based school benefactor Stanley Hunt discussed in his memoir. “After only fifteen years the building was in a shocking state. Part of the foundation had subsided, and the window frames had all warped” (Hunt 2009: 186). The frequent need to repair school buildings meant that some donors became fatigued and their long-term economic viability as donors became

<sup>358</sup> See Chapter 3, section 6: Priority Schools and Their Counterparts in Post-Mao China.

<sup>359</sup> Interview with LEONG Shao King (village representative of Fuk Chung village), Zhongshan.

<sup>360</sup> Personal communication with Ms. Carmen Xian (former student of Cho Bin School), 25 July 2021.

<sup>361</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqu (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020. Also see Murphy (2004: 10–11); Chan, Madsen and Unger (2009 [1984]: 371).

<sup>362</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.



questionable, undermining their interest in contributing, and this affected the schools' long-term sustainability.<sup>363</sup> Furthermore, as the national economy in China grew, expectation of higher quality education increased among the population and schools also became more specialised and expensive to renovate and build. Not only did building materials cost more, but labour costs also rose, in effect making it less affordable for migrants to continually commit to renovations, often despite a standing commitment and interest in education in the homeland.<sup>364</sup> Moreover, the increasing demands on schools had generally meant that older schools eventually outgrow the plots of land they had been allocated.<sup>365</sup> Without land for expansion and ongoing funding for upgrades, diaspora-funded schools prematurely closed.



**Figure 6.11** Reinforcement added to strengthen an existing floor structure of a pre-1949 building in Shekki, Zhongshan. (Photo by LIU Jianneng, 2015.)

The final blow was an earthquake that hit in 2008.<sup>366</sup> Despite the Sichuan earthquake being 1,800km away, that is, too far for it to cause any direct physical damage to schools in the Pearl River Delta, some schools were “devastated.” This was because national regulations for buildings were tightened as a safety precaution and to reduce their seismic vulnerability (Zhao, Taucer and Rossetto 2009). This required schools to reinforce their structures (Figure 6.11), or to rebuild, and

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<sup>363</sup> Interview with Stanley Hunt (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne, Alexandra Wong and Christopher Cheng, Sydney, 6 October 2017; also see Hunt (2009: 186).

<sup>364</sup> Interviews with Stanley Yee (Zhongshan-born Australian School donor) by Ien Ang, Christopher Cheng and Alexander Wong, Sydney, 15 September 2017; Mr. Xie (school archivist of Overseas Chinese Middle School), Shekki, 11 June 2018.

<sup>365</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020.

<sup>366</sup> A magnitude eight earthquake occurred in Wenchuan (Sichuan) on 12 May 2008.

this led to the demolition of several schools.<sup>367</sup> Another underlying factor was clarified for me by an architecture professor in Guangzhou, China, who pointed out that

One of the reasons why the school may be rebuilt is because of the inferior construction materials. It was common [to build with inferior construction materials] in the [19]80s as that was what we had available [at that time] since China was coming out of a difficult time. Yet, it may also be possible that by certifying a school as “unsafe,” it could pave the way for new funding [...] that could produce a better school.<sup>368</sup>

A school could also be prematurely closed due to official corruption. For instance, if the safety standards were falsified by engineers in a bogus inspection report, the schools could be shut down by the village administration. A villager, who preferred to remain anonymous, whispered that this is what happened to On Tong School (shown in Figure 6.1). Although the intention of the village leaders was to repurpose the school building, for instance, as a factory, word spread quickly that the safety inspection had been a corrupt operation, so nobody came forward to make an offer, leaving the school premises vacant. The result left a “good school” prone to vandalism and theft, prematurely robbing future generations of village children of their education.<sup>369</sup> My research participant’s account may not seem unfounded when we consider that an infamous initiative, “Project Hope,” which raised millions of dollars in the 1990s to build schools in rural areas in China from Hong Kong and overseas donors, became mired in successive corruption scandals (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 223). Returning to On Tong School, the key point is that the schools were no longer seen as significant to the village administrators, and they were tempted to repurpose the school premises or the land on which they sat for profit.

In the end, many schools in the post-reform era were short-lived. This can be attributed to several compounding factors: demographic changes, inadequacy of land size, inadequate funds for upgrades, inferior construction materials, poor workmanship, and corruption—all these factors had a role in the discontinuation of schools in the decades on both sides of the twenty-first century. Moreover, in the first decade of an affluent twenty-first century, new state provisions signified a new era for education in China and marked the end of diaspora-funded schools. As Stanley Yee, a generous Chinese-Australian school contributor stated: “I don’t think they need our money as

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<sup>367</sup> Interviews with Mr. Huang (headmaster), Ma Shan School, 18 December 2017; LIU Jianneng (builder in Zhongshan), 8 September 2021.

<sup>368</sup> Interview with PENG Changxin, (Professor of Architecture at South China University of Technology), Guangzhou, 25 December 2018.

<sup>369</sup> Personal communication with Douglas Lam (Zhongshan-born Australian resident), 71, 16 September 2017.

much as before. Before 2000, you know, they welcomed anything. These days, what we give them is peanuts compared to what they [have]. It's [very] different [now]."<sup>370</sup> Yet even before that, in the 1990s, former diaspora-funded schools underwent significant deterioration, this time in the course of being repurposed as "Made in China" factories.

### *Schools Became "Made in China" Factories*

Starting in the 1990s, the village administration converted former diaspora-funded schools that had closed for various reasons into factories overnight, or so it seemed.<sup>371</sup> To understand why this happened, it is necessary to understand that the village administrators were a product of Mao's "lost generation," who had come of age without any marketable skills.<sup>372</sup> After a lifetime of reduced opportunities, these "children of Mao" were already accustomed to recycling whatever was at their disposal and deemed reusable, into "assets" that could be used for personal or communal financial gain. A prevalent practice after the de-collectivisation of the communes in the 1980s was that the villagers of the Pearl River Delta hastily began turning farmland and other property into whatever profitable business they could find. In the early 1990s, after the recession that followed the Tiananmen Incident,<sup>373</sup> many hills in the inner Pearl River Delta villages were razed to establish "Made in China" factories (Chan, Madsen and Unger 2009 [1984]: 332). With this in mind, it is not surprising that the schools and their associated facilities, such as a deserted park, which was a facility once used by the village school in Sha Chung, discussed below, were converted to factories and other more economically productive uses.

During fieldwork in China, I discovered that some locals were clearly not proud of these developments. For example, when I visited Zhongshan in December 2017, the Heritage Corridor research team which I was part of was escorted to various sites in Sha Chung village, but somehow we were not shown Sha Chung School. It was only during my second trip, in June 2018, that I first set eyes on this diaspora-funded school that had once been a forerunner of the modern education scene in Zhongshan (Figure 6.12), but by then was a monstrosity. The veranda, portico-balcony, and windows (that faced onto the balcony space), which once allowed the school's earliest students

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<sup>370</sup> Interview with Stanley Yee (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor) and Jonathan Yee (son of Stanley Yee) by Ien Ang, Christopher Cheng and Alexander Wong, Sydney, 15 September 2017.

<sup>371</sup> From observations and interviews, some became "Made in China" factories, producing garments, shoes, and electronic goods. This transformation was likely unknown to many donor families in Australia, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>372</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (historian), 19 November 2020; also see Chen (1981: 206).

<sup>373</sup> Student protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in June 1989 were put down by Chinese army units. This led to a widespread withdrawal of foreign business and an economic downturn that lasted several years.

to look far beyond the village, had now been concealed to create more weather-proof storage space for the shoe factory the school building had become.



**Figure 6.12** The former Sha Chung School in a dilapidated state in 2018. Notice the portico-balcony has been infilled. (Photo by Denis Byrne, 2 December 2018.)



**Figure 6.13** Village elder MA Yin-chiu (left) being interviewed at his home in Sha Chung village, Zhongshan, by Christopher Cheng. (Photo by Sandi Robb, 4 December 2018.)

Even in the comfort of his living room, my informant, MA Yin-Chiu, thinking about the present state of his alma mater, shook his head from side to side (Figure 6.13).<sup>374</sup> As a past pupil, it must have been a source of disbelief for him, considering that he would later tell me that his primary school was once a “beautiful red brick building,”<sup>375</sup> which his elders proudly regarded as representing “the future of the village.”<sup>376</sup> At the time of the interview—December 2018—he considered his old school, in its then state, to be “a local eyesore.”<sup>377</sup>

When inspecting the building in December 2018, I observed that the factory building doubled as the usual residence of its workers (Figure 6.14). Beds and a kitchen were spotted inside the factory, and the roof, which had once been the home of the imported school bell, now, in the absence of the bell, had become a place for workers to dry their clothes.<sup>378</sup>



**Figure 6.14** The infilled veranda (left) serving as the factory workers’ makeshift kitchen. (Photo by Denis Byrne, 2 December 2018.) The old school cupola (right), where the school bell once hung, had become a clothesline for resident-workers. (Photo by CHAN Yik-leung, 31 March 2019.)

The relaxation of the *bukou* (residence permit) system in the 1980s allowed rural residents to migrate internally. The influx of new residents to Zhongshan (新中山人)—labour migrants from elsewhere in China—vastly improved local livelihoods of native Zhongshanese in post-reform China. The inner Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang*, including those counties closest to Hong Kong and

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<sup>374</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (village elder and former student of Sha Chung School), 79, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018.

<sup>375</sup> Personal communication with MA Yin-chiu, 27 May 2019; also see Cheng (2020: 148).

<sup>376</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 17 September 2020; also see Chapter 4.

<sup>377</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 4 December 2018.

<sup>378</sup> According to MA Yin-chiu, Sha Chung Ma-clansmen sent back a cast bell from Australia for Sha Chung School (Telephone interview, 13 November 2020).

Macao, were in Yow's (2013: 83) terms "detraditionalized," meaning that what had been areas of emigration overseas became a destination of internal immigration. During this process, a new bottom stratum of Zhongshan society came to be formed from the so-called "outsiders"—migrant former peasant workers from inland provinces, while those in the top stratum were investors and factory managers, mostly from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chan, Madsen and Unger 2009 [1984]: 376). Many native Zhongshan villagers, who were otherwise unemployed, suddenly became "middle-class," living off dividends from agricultural land and rental properties that had been converted into factories or accommodation for immigrant factory workers (Chan, Madsen and Unger 2009 [1984]: 376).



**Figure 6.15** Car parking, a strip of shops and factories (not shown above) now sit on land that was once occupied by Sha Chung Park in Zhongshan's South District. (Source: MA Yin-Chiu, 1 October 2021.)

This phenomenon of Sha Chung School's adaptive re-use was no different from the fate of the now-defunct Sha Chung Park, which the school once fronted. After Sha Chung Park—the first countryside park in Zhongshan (est. 1921)—fell into disuse in the Cultural Revolution, it was converted into space for retail, car parking, and factories (Figure 6.15).<sup>379</sup> During the early reform period, the former Sha Chung Kindergarten (located within Sha Chung Park, as shown in Figure 6.1) was converted into a rice noodle factory. The owner refused to invest in the building, leading to deterioration of the former Sha Chung Kindergarten, and ultimately its demolition in the 1990s

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<sup>379</sup> Personal communication with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 82, Zhongshan, 30 September 2021. The size of the park was approximately 20 *mu* (Chinese acres), or 1.3 hectares.

to make way for a new garment factory.<sup>380</sup> Since these conversions have occurred, my informant says he no longer has any reason to revisit these sites.

A tinge of sadness was transmitted to me as I learned, via WeChat text messaging from village elders like MA Yin-chiu, about what his former school and Sha Chung Park had become.<sup>381</sup> The sense of loss did not stem solely from the fact that the atmospheric evening basketball matches of his youth now only existed as memories of a bygone era.<sup>382</sup> Those village spaces that had once been part of local peoples' lives had been colonised by internal labour migrants (the so-called "outsiders" in Zhongshan), turning the once familiar sites into places that local people no longer wanted to see, visit, or associate with.<sup>383</sup> And with the passing of time, it is less likely that some people, such as Mr. Ma, will be able to do so. This would be particularly true as, at the time of our first interview, he shared with me that he rarely left his village home due to leg pains. Since returning to Australia, I have heard that the factories have been removed from former schools, at least in this Zhongshan village. As seen so far, change in the *qiaoxiang* is ongoing.

## **Rebirth of Schools in the Post-Millennial *Qiaoxiang* (2010s Onwards)**

The emergence of factories in the Pearl River Delta coincided with the influx of migrant workers, resulting in the death and rapid deterioration of some former diaspora-funded schools. Yet, in a twist of fate, the new Zhongshan residents, particularly the children of migrant parents born in Zhongshan, would become the ultimate saviours of the schools and, hence, would be responsible for their "rebirth." Many factories were converted back to educational use in the first decade of the millennium, becoming village kindergartens for the children of migrants from elsewhere in China, with a numerically insignificant non-migrant local population also attending; some also became primary schools for these children. Examples of other former schools that became kindergartens include Fuk Chung Middle School, Yeung Liu School in Ma Leng village, and Sincere School, all located in South District; and Dai Leng School in Torch High-Tech Industrial Development Zone. Many of these continue to be recipients of contributions from the diaspora,

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<sup>380</sup> Personal communication with MA Yin-chiu, 30 September 2021.

<sup>381</sup> Personal communication with MA Yin-chiu, (Sha Chung village elder), 82, Zhongshan, 30 September 2021.

<sup>382</sup> Sha Chung Park was one of two sites in Zhongshan where basketball competitions were played. The other site—Ha Zhat—is in Longdu district, on the opposite side of Shekki River. The popularity of basketball earned Zhongshan the nickname, "land of basketball" (籃球之鄉).

<sup>383</sup> Personal communication with MA Yin-chiu, 30 September 2021.

including the original donor families. Meanwhile, Chuen Luk School in Dachong and Heng Mei School in South District became private *minban*<sup>384</sup> primary schools catering almost exclusively to the new population of children of migrants in Zhongshan. Based on the schools I surveyed, these children of migrants first appeared in the 1990s and, between 2017 and 2019, they accounted for 70% to 95% of the school population.<sup>385</sup>

### *From Factories to Kindergartens*

The conversion of former schools to kindergartens occurred for different reasons. First, when they were no longer able to continue or resume their role as primary schools because they were too small or lacked necessary facilities, many were “demoted” to serve as kindergartens.<sup>386</sup> Second, the former schools were seen to have potential as kindergartens because they were convenient for families with young children who were living nearby and did not want to travel far for childcare.<sup>387</sup> Third, the mothers of these children could be relieved of childcare duties, allowing them to work outside their home.<sup>388</sup> Chung Tau Kindergarten, for example, operates six days a week to take care of the children of working parents, mostly migrants to Zhongshan.<sup>389</sup>

An extra reason for establishing kindergartens relates to the conditions of internal migration in China. Newcomers to Zhongshan did not usually enjoy local residency privileges and thus were ineligible for free state education. Many such parents considered their children too young to be sent back to their native homes elsewhere in China for education.<sup>390</sup> My research uncovered that those families who can afford private tuition choose to keep their children by their side in

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<sup>384</sup> Although *minban* literally means “community-run,” the school is partially privatised and partially financed with public funds.

<sup>385</sup> According to an interview with Mr. Yeung (headmaster at Cheung Kok School), Zhongshan, 27 December 2017, the ratio of local students from Cheung Kok village in Shaxi, to non-native “outsiders” was 3:7, that is, out of every three local students, there were seven students whose families were non-locals. Meanwhile, in South District’s Heng Mei School, 95% were students of non-native Zhongshan background in 2019 (Luo 2019: 54).

<sup>386</sup> A telephone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020, revealed that in Zhongshan the term “sparrow-sized schools” (麻雀學校) referred to the small size of diaspora-funded schools found in some villages. The size was, of course, comparative to larger diaspora-funded schools and those larger government schools that had land for expansion, and it was those larger and newer schools that eventually engulfed the student population of smaller schools from the 1990s and early 2000s.

<sup>387</sup> Interviews with Mr. Lee (village chief of Larm Ha village), Zhongshan, 6 December 2018; LEONG Shao King (village representative of Fuk Chung village), Zhongshan, 8 May 2018; Ms. Cheung (head teacher of Chung Tau Kindergarten), Zhongshan, 12 May 2018.

<sup>388</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 77, Sydney, 24 April 2018.

<sup>389</sup> According to an interview with Ms. Cheung (headteacher of Chung Tau Kindergarten), Zhongshan, 12 May 2018, the kindergarten was established in 1978 and is one of the oldest operating kindergartens in Shaxi town. Since 1986, it has had permanent premises thanks to funds from Sydney-based couple Eileen and Alen Lai.

<sup>390</sup> According to personal communication from Dr. CHEN Ju-chen (Taiwanese anthropologist who conducted fieldwork concerning rural to urban migrant workers in China in the early 2000s), 13 July 2018, parents are likely to send their children back to their native homes when they are older to benefit from the privilege of local (subsidised) education. For her research in Beijing, see Chen (2009).



Zhongshan. Moreover, the idea of converting a former diaspora-funded school that had been turned into a factory back into a kindergarten was generally in line with the educational ideals of the overseas school donors.<sup>391</sup> The involvement of the returning diaspora in the reconversion, including why the adaptation of schools as factories may have unsettled some donor families, will be elaborated in the next chapter.



**Figure 6.16** An enduring legacy of the diaspora’s contribution to the *qiaoxiang* is Sha Chung Kindergarten’s extendable play area. The kindergarten building appears, behind a row of trees, as a yellow-painted building. (Source: Hu 2021.)

The endowment and ongoing financial commitment of the diaspora made some kindergartens become the best of their kind in Guangdong Province. For example, when I was escorted through Sha Chung Kindergarten—a diaspora-funded primary school that had been converted into a kindergarten, sponsored by the diaspora in 2004—the headteacher Ms. Shen stated that, “When I started [in 2013], there were computers [left over] from the [Sincere] primary school [sponsored by Hong Kong’s Sincere Co.], and that made the children very happy.”<sup>392</sup> In 2016, when representatives of the provincial government visited the kindergarten, one of the inspectors

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<sup>391</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 9 May 2018.

<sup>392</sup> Interview with Ms. SHEN (head teacher of Sha Chung Kindergarten), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018. After two decades as a primary school, Sincere School closed in 2003. Again, with the financial support of Sincere Company (Hong Kong), the premises were converted into Sha Chung Kindergarten and opened in 2004. Sincere School was unusual in that it never became a factory, like many of the schools in Zhongshan. Yet, according to local villagers, those two buildings built by MA Ying-piu of the Ma Mansion compound did become a hardware factory from 1989 and operated as a factory for about four years.

remarked that Sha Chung Kindergarten was among the best they visited in Guangdong. MA Yin-chiu explained: “The facilities and teaching are on par with the best in Guangdong, what’s more in terms of site conditions [especially extendable campus], our kindergarten is superior [to anything they have seen].”<sup>393</sup> Replicating the way Sha Chung School (est. 1923) once extended into Sha Chung Park (approx. 13,300m<sup>2</sup>), Sha Chung Kindergarten similarly extends onto the grounds of MA Ying-piu’s garden-mansion compound, as shown in Figure 6.16. In effect, the children’s play space has become much larger than its own playground—a total expanded play space of approx. 8,000m<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 6.17** Sha Chung Kindergarten painted bright yellow. (Source: Hu 2021.)

One competitive advantage of Sha Chung Kindergarten over other kindergartens in Zhongshan, including those funded by less well-endowed donors, was that it continued to enjoy the financial support of the Sincere department store company (Hong Kong).<sup>394</sup> A renovation foundation was established by the Ma family, owners of the building, enabling the facilities to be maintained. For the kindergarten’s teacher-in-charge, it meant the building could be painted (Figure 6.17). “I got the building (exterior) painted bright yellow to make the ninety-year-old building look more

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<sup>393</sup> Interviews with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019; Ms. SHEN (head teacher of Sha Chung Kindergarten), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018.

<sup>394</sup> The Sincere department store (Hong Kong) had set aside a regular renovation fund to keep the building in a good state. Since 1994, due to commercialisation and market economy, all kindergartens in China were privatised, and mainly relied on tuition. While kindergarten education was no longer compulsory, they remained well-attended due to the competitive nature of the post-reform education system (Murphy 2004: 16; Li 2009: 476).

attractive, while on the interior, I used a palette of colours to make it more fun.”<sup>395</sup> Due to the maintenance fund and the quality of the kindergarten’s facilities, teachers, and site conditions, the kindergarten’s annual enrolment is extremely competitive.<sup>396</sup>

As noted earlier, at the turn of the twenty-first century, many diaspora-funded school buildings that had been converted into factories were re-converted back to educational facilities, mostly kindergartens, due to the demand for this level of education created by the boost to the local population that came with the arrival of migrants from elsewhere in China, the so-called “floating population” (流動人口) (Zhang 2001). Without this large-scale, China-wide internal migration movement—often classified as “the biggest migration in human history” (Vickers and Zeng 2017: 308)—many diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan would not have a sufficient population base to support their revival.<sup>397</sup>

### *...And Then Back to Community Buildings*

Apart from reversion to educational uses, some former schools were repurposed for community usage. This was because the rapid deterioration of the buildings made villagers aware of what they could potentially lose. From the 2010s onwards, some former school-turned-factory buildings were reclaimed and converted into village offices and museums, thus allowing private facilities, such as factories, to return as community facilities.<sup>398</sup>

The repurposing of the former factory that had been set up in Cho Bin School back into a community building is an example of this. When Australian researchers first visited Zhongshan in 2015, examining prospective field sites for what would be the China–Australia Heritage Corridor Project, they visited Cho Bin School when it was already a museum and a village administration office.<sup>399</sup> In the rooms that had become a museum, Michael Williams, a historian on the research team, immediately recognised documents from Australia on display, including “CEDT”

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<sup>395</sup> From field observation in China, there is a cultural preference for the use of bright colours for kindergarten buildings, both internal and external. Interview with Ms. SHEN (head teacher of Sha Chung Kindergarten), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018.

<sup>396</sup> Interview with Ms. SHEN (head teacher of Sha Chung Kindergarten), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018.

<sup>397</sup> Interviews with Paul Liang of Townsville (former student of Cho Bin School), 17 April 2018; AU-YEUNG Chow (village scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

<sup>398</sup> According to Ms. CHEN Diqiu (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020, some former diaspora-funded schools were converted into nursing homes. My field visits have not been able to confirm this, but it could apply to schools that were not funded by Chinese Australians, or perhaps due to limited time, or other unknown reasons, I was not informed of the full extent of usage changes that schools had undergone.

<sup>399</sup> Personal communication with Michael Williams (Australian historian), 11 October 2021.

(Certificates of Exception from the Dictation Test) documents and Certificates of Domicile.<sup>400</sup> The archaeologist on the team, Denis Byrne, was drawn to the old agricultural artefacts on display, including a disused “wooden rice-threshing machine” (Byrne 2016a: 275). During a visit in 2018, which I led,<sup>401</sup> the village representative and historian Anthony Leong pointed out the name “Cooktown” (in Chinese) inscribed on a pre-1949 manual fire-fighting machine (Figure 6.18), indicating the Cho Bin connection to that Far North Queensland town. Since its opening as a museum and village office, the former school has welcomed many local Zhongshan students, and members of the diaspora, as well as researchers of Chinese migrant heritage and history.



**Figure 6.18** The pre-1949 village fire extinguisher donated by Cho Bin kinsmen in Cooktown, Queensland, exhibited at the former Cho Bin School in Zhongshan; note disused agricultural equipment, including a rice-threshing machine and water pump in the background. (Photo by Sandi Robb, 5 December 2018.)

Museumification, however, did not occur overnight; rather, it was a reaction to what had happened a decade earlier. LEONG Chi-kwok, a village representative, recounted in 2009 that before Cho Bin School became an antique boat wood furniture workshop, around the turn of the millennium, the villagers warned the new occupants (furniture makers) about keeping the school building in

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<sup>400</sup> The dictation test was a product of the racist policies of “White Australia” (1901–1973). They were designed by the Australian government to prevent Chinese people from entering the country. The Certificate of Exception from the Dictation Test thus allowed certain individuals, such as Chinese merchants or Australian-born “Chinese,” to return to Australia after trips to China, but their re-entry was not always guaranteed (Bagnall 2003; Williams 2021)

<sup>401</sup> I served as a guide and Cantonese–English interpreter for two Queensland historians, Sandi Robb and Janice Wanger, who visited Zhongshan for a six days research expedition between 2 to 10 December 2018. The joint research trip was aimed at better understanding emigration from Zhongshan to north Queensland.

its original condition, pointing out explicitly, for example, the need to leave the chalk drawings on the blackboards intact.<sup>402</sup> As it turns out, to facilitate the building's retrofitting as a workshop, to move machinery into the building and finished furniture out of the building, in some cases upstairs, window openings were widened, and sections of walls were perforated.<sup>403</sup> The sight of the damaged historic structure enraged the community, particularly elders who had once attended the village school. Yet a representative in another village posited that had it not been for the conversion of the former school into a warehouse, the condition of the building would probably have deteriorated even more as it had long been unoccupied.<sup>404</sup>



**Figure 6.19** Mrs. Felicia Seeto from Brisbane (third from the left) standing at Cho Bin School beside a commemorative stone plaque. The sign shows the characters 維漢教室, or “Man Hong’s classroom,” in honour of Felicia’s father, LEUNG Man Hong (梁維漢 1916–2001), a former school donor. The current village representative LEONG Chi-kwok (second on the left) is present with other alumni. (Source: Paul Liang, 2016.)

So once the economic conditions were favourable, particularly after the 2010s, the village administration reclaimed their former school, converting it into a community space. An extra reason for reclaiming the property from the factory owners was to make it accessible to the diaspora—enabling returnees of both the pre-1949 and post-1978 phase of emigration to catch up with villagers and reminisce about their formative years in a familiar setting (Figure 6.19).<sup>405</sup> The

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<sup>402</sup> Personal communication with LEONG Chi-kwok (Cho Bin village representative), 7 November 2021. Also refer to the “Cho Bin” episode of *“Zhongshan Story”* (Zhongshan Broadcasting & Television Station 2010).

<sup>403</sup> Personal communication with LEONG Chi-kwok, 7 November 2021.

<sup>404</sup> Personal communication with JIM Wah-hing (village chief of Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai), 70, 7 November 2021.

<sup>405</sup> LEONG Chi-kwok, in the “Cho Bin” episode of *“Zhongshan Story”* (2010).

1920s building became a mixed-use facility with a village office and exhibition spaces, with the adjacent 1980s kindergarten building eventually becoming a library and community centre.<sup>406</sup>

Discussions about renovating individual buildings (former schools) have also taken place in other Zhongshan villages. Representatives from Sha Chung village proposed converting the shoe factory into an art gallery or photo exhibition space (Figure 6.20) as part of South District's revitalisation scheme for four contiguous historic villages: Sha Chung, Heng Mei, Chuk Sau Yuen, and Sheung Tong.<sup>407</sup> Similarly, suggestions have been raised in Ngoi Sha village, in Zhuhai, that instead of letting Lai Wor School continue to be used as a warehouse for a stationery supplier, the five-and-a-half storey old school structure should be turned into a community heritage centre that features an overseas Chinese and village history exhibition, library, and community arts centre.<sup>408</sup> The conversion of old schools into public amenities shows that a heritage movement is in full swing in the former emigrant villages of Zhongshan, rising in tandem with an increased interest and concern for community development and a desire to savour local history (Cheng 2019: 248–250).



**Figure 6.20** The former Sha Chung School under restoration (left). (Source: Xu 2021.) An almost renovated Sha Chung School (right). (Photo by MA Kit-Leung, June 2020.)

Particularly since 2010, Zhongshan village administrators have actively reclaimed former schools to breathe new life into them. Converting industrial facilities back into community facilities has been a strategic response to offset a myriad of changes, including the untoward repercussions of

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<sup>406</sup> Field observation, January 2019.

<sup>407</sup> Walking interview with MA Kit-leung (village chief of Sha Chung), Zhongshan, 12 June 2018; telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), Zhongshan, 81, 13 November 2020.

<sup>408</sup> Interviews with Ronald Choy (Hong Kong-born descendant of a Chinese-Australian school donor), Zhongshan, 22 December 2017; Ms. Yao (headmistress at Lihe School), Zhuhai, 29 November 2018.

a population surge, the transformation of China into a “world factory,” and the Pearl River Delta into a “world workshop” (Pun 2005; Sun, Qiu and Li 2006). On the one hand, the influx of migrant labour and factories has created unprecedented economic growth in the geographic area of this study; on the other hand, the population swell has, in the eyes of many long-term Zhongshan residents, displaced their long and rich local identity (though it should be noted that these residents have reaped the economic benefits of internal labour migration). In a more prosperous Zhongshan, many in the *qiaoxiang* are now keen to rejuvenate a lost connection to a transnational identity of which they are proud. That shared identity of Zhongshan’s ‘native’ residents is, at least in the villages I studied, a diasporic one, that is, one based on a connection between China and Australia. This identity is celebrated by preserving school architecture (Figure 6.20), exhibiting artefacts in museums (Figure 6.18), displaying documents relating to migrant life histories (Figure 6.21), and in recounting the memories associated with these places and objects (Figure 6.19).



**Figure 6.21** Documents and biographies relating to notable Cho Bin sons, exhibited in a former classroom at Cho Bin School in South District, Zhongshan. It features Zhongshan’s earliest known migrant to Australia “LEONG Lum Shing” (1833–1908, whose Chinese name is commonly written as 梁坤和), who arrived as an indentured labourer in 1849, and is shown on the exhibition board with his Chinese-Australian born wife Eva; and school donor Philip Leong, shown in the top right corner under his Chinese name 梁华立. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 19 December 2017.)

### *New State Schools in Memory of Old Diaspora-funded Schools*

Along with the reconversion of old school buildings for educational purposes, in an economically expanding China, new and larger school buildings were being erected by the state, particularly in the 2010s. One approach was to build new school buildings on existing campuses, including those

of some diaspora-funded schools. Most notably, from 2011, after the Wenchuan (Sichuan) earthquake in 2008, school buildings across China that failed to meet revised structural requirements began to be demolished and new buildings erected on their sites.<sup>409</sup> Larger diaspora-funded schools, like Cheuk Shan Middle School in Dachong Town (Figure 6.22), underwent a multistage safety reconstruction scheme (校安工程). The headmaster recalls how it was implemented:

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.<sup>410</sup>



**Figure 6.22** The Yee Kum Fung Building (余金晃大樓) in Cheuk Shan Middle School, rebuilt in 2014–2015, in Dachong Town, Zhongshan. The building is named after the main benefactor, Stanley Yee, a Sydney Chinatown restaurateur. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 17 December 2017.)

Cheuk Shan Middle School was originally built in 1987 and was progressively elaborated until 1994 through the contributions of diasporic associations, like the Hong Kong Chung Shan Lung Chan Clan Association (香港中山隆鎮同鄉會), and wealthy individuals from Australia, including Stanley Yee. When I met the headmaster, he noted that a limitation of building larger schools on

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<sup>409</sup> Walking interviews with Mr. Huang (headmaster at Ma Shan School), by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne, Christopher Cheng, Michael Williams and Alexander Wong, Zhuhai, 18 December 2017; Mr. Cheng (headmaster at Cheuk Shan Middle School), by Denis Byrne, Christopher Cheng and Alexander Wong, 21 December 2017.

<sup>410</sup> Walking interview with Mr. Cheng (headmaster at Cheuk Shan Middle School), 21 December 2017.



existing sites was land constraints. This was noted when he was asked about the school's future building plans, to which he responded:

We do not have much land, and we have already fully occupied it, so there won't be any newer buildings. We have reached our capacity with 1,400 students. All we can do now is to improve our standards, by ensuring that students live up to the school motto: have high morals, be healthy and responsible individuals who love their country and love their village.<sup>411</sup>

One approach to overcome the issue of insufficient land has been to erect schools on new sites. This is what happened in Zhuhai.<sup>412</sup> Built 3km 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 for ease of differentiation I have called "Lihe School" (Figure 6.23).<sup>413</sup> The erection of new schools, like Lihe (est. 2017), along with others in my study area, such as Zhuxiuyuan Central, Antang, and Ma Shan schools, shows that in 2020 the government continued to recognise the contributions of the overseas Chinese (Sina News 2020; Zhongshan's South District 2020). Since new school campuses were entirely government funded, this gesture continues a trend of increasing government participation in diaspora-funded school projects, which since the mid-1980s began with the "matching funds" scheme.<sup>414</sup> So, no matter whether new schools have been rebuilt on the same site as old diaspora-funded schools or built on new sites,<sup>415</sup> they are likely to symbolically inherit elements or draw inspiration from the former diaspora-funded school buildings they superseded.

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<sup>411</sup> Walking interview with Mr. Cheng (headmaster at Cheuk Shan Middle School), by Denis Byrne, Christopher Cheng and Alexander Wong, 21 December 2017.

<sup>412</sup> Walking interview with headmistress Ms. Yao and schoolteacher Mr. Chen at Lihe School, Zhuhai, 29 November 2018.

<sup>413</sup> The name of the former school was originally written in traditional Chinese characters and was called "Lai Wor" (禮和) by the Cantonese-speaking migrant donor family and the school's students. From observation and conversation with the teachers and headmistress at the new school, the name of the school is now written in simplified characters (礼和) and the staff operate in Mandarin, so I have chosen to use a Mandarin rendering of "Lihe" as an appropriate Anglicised name of the new school.

<sup>414</sup> The intervention of local governments means that, unlike the pre-Communist era, the partnership schemes promoted a "win-win" scenario where overseas donations were matched by the government, meaning that overseas Chinese only needed to contribute a portion of the total building amount instead of the full amount (Zhu and Jing 2019: 302). As mentioned in Chapter 4, at Cheuk Shan Middle School, the donors contributed a total of over RMB 6 million for a school project of RMB 12.3 million (Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013: 366). The local government settled the rest of the costs, while the main overseas benefactors' names continued to be published and displayed on the school buildings and in commemorative materials.

<sup>415</sup> The situation of diaspora-funded schools in the pre-1949 era depended on migrant benefactors' purchase or donation of land for school use (Lai Wor School; Sai Kwong Girls' School; and the Women and Children's Centre, Heng Mei School, and Owe Lerng Schools). Generally, in the post-Mao era, the land on which new schools were sited was owned collectively by the village. After it was set aside for school use, migrant donors collaboratively paid for the construction and school equipment, sometimes with the financial support of the local government.



**Figure 6.23** The old Lai Wor School (est. 1930) in Ngoi Sha village (外沙村) (left), previously Zhongshan (present-day Zhuhai), and the new Lai Wor (Lihe) School (right) in Zhuhai (est. 2017). (Source: Lihe School, 29 November 2018.)

During my site visit to Lihe School, the headmistress showed a documentary video and PowerPoint slide show on the history of Lai Wor School and the future development of Lihe School. In her presentation, the façade of the new school made some abstract aesthetic references to the façade of the old school, including the tower-like upper story, as shown in Figure 6.23. A permanent exhibition was also established at the new school to commemorate the historical role of the diaspora in establishing the former Lai Wor School. Also shown during my visit was a video produced by the school that portrayed the continued support of the ongoing diaspora in the establishment of the new school. Acknowledgement of the significance of historical diaspora funding has also been incorporated in the new school buildings elsewhere, including the new On Tong Primary School (which I have called Antang School), and the proposed rebuilding of Ma Shan School in Zhuhai, in situ, when I last visited in 2017.<sup>416</sup> In their commemorative role, these new schools thus become a “new heritage” in the homeland (*cf.* Chan and Cheng 2016: 8, 11), which creates a sense of intergenerational continuity. This is done by renewing collective memories and old relationships through photographic exhibitions and organising fieldtrips for the current pupils to the old schools, and cultivating new relationships with an expanded, ongoing transnational community (Figure 6.24).

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<sup>416</sup> Correspondence with Douglas Lam of Sydney (former On Tong resident), 23 December 2020, and walking interview with Mr. Huang (headmaster at Ma Shan School), Zhuhai, 18 December 2017.



**Figure 6.24** Ms. Easter Choy (top left), daughter of the original school donor CHOY Hing, was VIP at the inauguration celebrations of Lihe School in January 2018. Former students (bottom left) of Lai Wor School, now elder villagers, join the diaspora at the inauguration. (Source: Lihe School collection.) On the right, the current students and teachers return with the grandson of the original school donor, Ronald Choy (wearing hat) to Ngoi Sha village in Tangjia Bay to reminisce about the school's origins. (Source: JIM Wah-hing, circa 2018.)

The turn of the twenty-first century can be classified as the time of the “rebirth” of diaspora-funded schools. Before my investigation, historians who have studied Chinese migration have suggested that after emigration schools had the greatest impact in the *qiaoxiang* (Williams 2018: 82; Hsu 2000a: 45–47). Yet a lesser-known fact or an undocumented aspect of this history was that many diaspora-funded schools had often been short-lived initiatives. In fact, the schools surveyed in Zhongshan, as shown in this chapter, broadly followed a cycle of change that unintentionally resembled the Buddhist concept of reincarnation. Lee (2003: 134) describes the Buddhist precept as a process of “birth, growth, death and rebirth.” Now, in an economically risen China, many former diaspora-funded schools have reverted to an educational or community function, particularly after 2010, when the country was in a position to take care of its own educational development without relying on the diaspora.<sup>417</sup> Despite these advances, the creation of new schools in memory of past diaspora-funded schools in the *qiaoxiang* represents a rebirth of sorts that continues to honour past and contemporary diaspora contributions by showing that the

<sup>417</sup> Interviews with Stanley Yee (Zhongshan-born Australian School donor) by Ien Ang, Christopher Cheng and Alexander Wong, Sydney, 15 September 2017; Mrs. Felicia Seeto of Brisbane (Zhongshan-born descendant of an Australian school donor), 74, 5 August 2020; Ms. CHEN Diqiu (historian and retired officer of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), 19 November 2020; also see Yow (2013: 145), Breslin (2017), Osburg (2013).

aspirations of the diaspora are not forgotten, and that new relationships with the ongoing diaspora and the homeland are encouraged.

## **Conclusion: Afterlives and Intergenerational Continuity**

Diaspora-funded schools, as shown in this chapter, were not simply “photo finish” images that appear in the *qiaokan* (overseas Chinese magazines printed in China), when the schools were newly completed. In the words of Maudin and Vellinga (2014), these school buildings have a life of their own. With the aid of historical photographs and oral histories, this chapter has reconstructed the various trajectories of diaspora-funded school buildings over their life-course across the twentieth century. Mirroring the history of decommissioned churches in Europe (Brand 1994: 108), many schools in the *qiaoxiang* likewise had a multitude of different uses after they ceased functioning as schools. Some became enemy headquarters during the Japanese occupation, others became housing facilities, warehouses, agricultural processing sites, hospitals, or factories, only later to be restored to an educational or community capacity. While many school buildings survived as permanent fixtures in their home localities, they also transformed into non-educational facilities, often temporarily making them multifunctional, recycled buildings. This is contrary to the view depicted in the previous chapter, where diaspora-funded schools were state-of-the-art buildings. A contribution of this chapter has been to provide a chronology of the productive afterlives of school buildings across the twentieth century until the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Beyond presenting the sequential uses of former school buildings, this chapter also introduces the diverse voices and interpretations affiliated with the evolution of former school buildings. For example, let me recap an architectural element common to many of the schools: the stairs, to understand how the perspective of former students (present-day village elders) can enrich our understanding of diaspora-funded schools. As a quotidian feature that co-constitutes the making of diaspora-funded schools and the modern student, its initial appearance terrified some students while exciting others, particularly those who found, because of their novelty, they could not help but run up and down them.<sup>418</sup> During the Japanese occupation, some staircases would become fuel (firewood) and their absence thereafter was a haunting reminder of a desperate wartime era. Then,

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<sup>418</sup> See Chapter 5; interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019; also cited in Cheng (2020: 150).

in some schools whose stairs remained intact, the multiple-storey staircases were physically tiring for farmers had to continually walk up and down to transfer their harvest to sun-dry on the roof terrace.<sup>419</sup> In the reform era, as schools became factories, stairs were sometimes avoided altogether as goods and heavy machinery were lifted through expanded window and door openings. The damage thus caused to the buildings reinforced the idea that the emergence of an ever-new China was in fact a threat to the heritage of a rapidly vanishing older China.

Accounts of humble school stairs—once significant symbols of multistorey diaspora-funded school buildings—show how, over time, mundane features may be overlooked and hence why such experiences are also rarely recorded (Mauldin and Vellinga 2014: 110; Camp 2020: 118). Heritage scholars remind us that without the ongoing physical presence of buildings from the past, as a form of embodied history, it would be much harder to know, remember, feel, and belong in the world (Byrne 2013: 607; Low 2017: 288). The material traces, after all, are mnemonic anchors that, in Clara Poscoe Leahy’s words (2021: 1007), transport “us to a time, a place and a feeling,” anchoring “our emotions associated with that experience.” Individual accounts of embodiment and affective micro-histories allow us to better imagine, relive and taste the former students’ experience of the *qiaoxiang* as they witness the momentous changes that shaped the life-course of diaspora-funded schools throughout twentieth-century China.

Building on these considerations, the next chapter explores how the migrant donors and their descendants, as well as the alumni of the diaspora-funded who migrated overseas, have related to the schools when they have returned to China on visits.

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<sup>419</sup> According to local villagers, Sha Chung School was unaffected by the Japanese occupation, as the troops occupied the MA Ying-piu’s properties in Sha Chung, which included the Women and Children’s Centre.

## Chapter 7

### The Past in the Future: The Legacy of Diaspora-Funded Schools

While the diaspora may not be returning to build new schools in Zhongshan in coming years, the legacy of their past contributions is far from over. The schools they built or contributed to can be considered a form of heritage that is significant to those families who sent money home for the initial construction (Giese 1997: 177–178) and subsequent expansion and renovation (Hunt 2009: 183–186). The schools have also been of lasting importance to those who attended them as students, some of whom had been sent back from Australia (and elsewhere) to study in China; and some graduates have left a legacy in the form of letters (Bagnall 2018a), autobiographies (Field c.1991), or oral testimony, including those collected during my own research. Some former students, through their own migration, are now part of the Chinese-Australian diaspora. Furthermore, the descendants of former pupils and donors—their children and grandchildren—whether at home or away from China have, in many cases, continued to have a long-standing connection to old schools in their native place. During my research, I found some former donors and descendants who returned to Zhongshan and visited the schools every year. Others visited more often, even several times in one year. Others still visited less often, every few years, or only once or twice during their lifetime in Australia, decades after emigration. Some did not return at all. It was different for everybody. From their inception, the schools in the *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities) were both historically significant and personally relevant to many contemporary people around the world.

Schools can be regarded as sites of memory. According to Pierre Nora, a “site of memory” provides a relatively stable point of reference for individuals and communities to recall a shared past (Nora 1989). These sites can be where people search for meaning in history or connect with their family histories. For the Chinese diaspora, schools in the *qiaoxiang* have been such sites that

anchor return mobilities (Byrne 2016a: 273). Many accounts show that by the diaspora returning to the ancestral place, abstract relations to place are cemented, relations between place and people are renewed, and intergenerational relations are enhanced (Alexander, Bryce and Murdy 2017: 544; Marschall 2019: 1664, 1666; Mehtiyeva and Prince 2020: 89).<sup>420</sup> Yet, as explained in the previous chapter, school buildings in the Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang* have been materially mutable. The question addressed in the present chapter is how, given the kind of change that the schools have been through, the descendants of Chinese Australians can reclaim or reconnect with their heritage in China over generations to come.

This is a chapter about returning to schools in the ancestral place, and about the related memories and emotions of Chinese-Australian individuals and families. It consists of three parts. The first part deals with remembrance. The second considers why some schools are deliberately forgotten. The third part explores how diasporic returns play a role in renewing the schools in the *qiaoxiang*. Instead of old schools being the only source of memories per se for later generations, this chapter demonstrates how intergenerational transmission of memories is nurtured or suppressed through a combination of return visits, oral transmission, and material remnants, which are all part of the socio-material assemblage that continues to constitute the making of new meanings and memories of the diaspora-funded schools.

## Remembering the Past

As significant sites of remembrance, diaspora-funded schools allow those who have returned—former students and school donors, as well as their descendants—to actively recall the past and fathom the ever-changing present. For this reason, the survival of material school fabric makes the school a site of active remembrance that preserves the memories of migrant ancestors, both those who contributed as migrant donors and those who attended the school and later joined the diaspora.

### *Same but Different: New Memories of Old Schools*

For first-generation Chinese abroad, a return to the school in the ancestral home was about revisiting a place associated with personal memories. In the case of some diaspora-funded schools,

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<sup>420</sup> This is not specific to China but applies elsewhere in the world (Bjerg and Rasmussen 2012; Marschall 2020).

upon revisiting, the returnees found the school setting was nothing like the past. One alumnus who attended Sai Kwong Girls' (now Gaojiaji) School in Shekki commented that “everything had changed.” The current headmaster of that school noted:

When I told them [the old boys and old girls, as the successor school became co-educational] that there was a sports field on the top of the hill, they said there was nothing there in their school days. Instead, I was told there were only single-storey classroom blocks that I said have been demolished a long time ago. So, they couldn't find any vestige of their time. In the end, all that was left was an old banyan tree.<sup>421</sup>



**Figure 7.1** The former one-storey school building at the old Sai Kwong Girls' School in Shekki, with an old banyan tree shown on the hillside. (Source: Baike n.d.)

In Ngoi Sha village (previously in Zhongshan, now within the boundaries of Zhuhai), the neighbourhood of Lai Wor School has substantially changed. An alumnus noted that the school no longer stood out in the landscape in the way it previously had. “Before you could see our school from the beach. Now, with highways, reclamations, [much taller] new buildings popping up everywhere, we cannot see far beyond the village anymore.”<sup>422</sup> But in other villages, where the school setting remained intact, returnees found more tangible residues of the past. Back in 2016, upon returning to his alma mater, my uncle, Colin Cheng, an alumnus of Heng Mei School, commented in his usual mixture of village dialect and broken English that the buildings had not

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<sup>421</sup> Interview with Mr. Huang (school headmaster), Gaojiaji School (高家基小學), Shekki, Zhongshan, 11 June 2018. This school was built on the site of the former Sai Kwong Girls' School.

<sup>422</sup> Interview with Ms. SHENG Lai Kum (former student of Lai Wor School), 84, Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai, 29 November 2018.



changed much, but that there were some slight modifications. “The building [looks] all the same. Same concrete. No change... But windows have been replaced [with aluminium frames].”<sup>423</sup>



**Figure 7.2** My uncle, Colin Cheng (middle) crouches outside the school gate of Heng Mei School, in South District of Zhongshan, with Jason, his Cairns-born son (right) and Leon, his Cairns-born grandson (left). (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 5 April 2016.)

Writing about Caribbean migrants, Stuart Hall (1990: 227) described the experience of returning to places of familiarity: “to return to the Caribbean after any long absence is to experience again the shock of the ‘doubleness’ of similarity and difference.” This quote sums up the feelings of many returning students, who can spot differences amidst familiarity.

Some returnees felt alienated when they noticed the village was no longer inhabited by Zhongshan natives, as the Pearl River Delta had become a destination for internal migrants. The standardisation of Mandarin in mainstream education since Maoist China, further aggravated by intensive waves of internal migration in the later part of the twentieth century, have brought a language shift to the Pearl River Delta, where the native tongue—a localised variant of urban Cantonese—is now spoken less and less by the younger generation. As a former president of the Chung Shan (Zhongshan) Society of Australia (in Sydney), Raymond Leong (梁德仁 born LEONG Duk Yan) reportedly visited Zhongshan over forty times since emigrating to Australia.<sup>424</sup> During that time, he noticed that more and more Mandarin speakers had displaced the familiarity

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<sup>423</sup> Walking interview with Colin Cheng (former student of Heng Mei School), 68, South District, Zhongshan, 5 April 2016.

<sup>424</sup> Telephone interview with Raymond Leong (Zhongshan-born descendant of an Australian school donor), 85, 18 April 2018.

of the local vernacular—the Shekki dialect (石岐話 lingua franca of pre-Mandarin speaking Zhongshan) of his childhood. The importance of a native dialect (or accent) reminds me of the Tang Dynasty poem, *Homecoming* 《鄉偶書二首》:<sup>425</sup>

少小離家老大回，	I left home young and not till old do I come back,
鄉音無改鬢毛衰。	unchanged my accent, my hair no longer black,
兒童相見不相識，	the children whom I meet do not know who am I,
笑問客從何處來。	“Where do you come from, sir?” they ask with [a] beaming eye.

Newcomers to Zhongshan, such as officials sent there from elsewhere, often did not appreciate or know the history of the home place. Raymond elaborated: “Many places and people we [returnees] mentioned [to the government officials] did not resonate [...] It made it hard for us to have common grounds to connect.”<sup>426</sup> As a result, rather than warm feelings and instant bonding that one expects when returning to the ancestral home, there was a sense of distance. Not only were the cadre officials he encountered not locals, which meant they could not create the kind of hospitable atmosphere which returning migrants hoped for, but also the practice of rotating officials in China tended to mean they did not care about local heritage and culture but were mainly interested in career advancement, as noted by Chan and Cheng (2016: 9; see also Wu 2020: 276). This has made some returnees feel alienated in their ancestral home.

Yet not all were as concerned as Raymond about the population displacement. An “old boy” who later emigrated noted that if any people were likely and willing to accept people of diverse origins, it would be overseas Chinese. In response to his old school being converted into a *minban* school, now serving the educational needs of the internal-migrant population, LUI Chi-won said sympathetically:

Our children who are now studying overseas also face the same issue. No matter where we are, people need to feel inclusive and accept people of different origins. So [in this sense] I reckon the [Heng Mei] School is doing well. (Luo 2019: 54)

During his return visit to Zhongshan in 2017 to take part in a forty-year reunion at Heng Mei School, Lui also remarked: “Although the building has deteriorated, the campus still exists and the

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<sup>425</sup> Written by HE Zhizhang (賀知章 659–744); translated into English by XU Yuanchong (2008: 137).

<sup>426</sup> Telephone interview with Raymond Leong, 18 April 2018.

name of the school remains unchanged, and if it remains that way, it will always be my alma mater” (Luo 2019: 54). For Lui, at least, if the old school exists, its survival perpetuates an association that continues to evoke emotional connections and memories. Said another way, over time schools have become a much-anticipated destination for many members of the alumni wishing to relive old memories (*cf.* Burger 2011; Marschall 2020). Return visits are, after all, associated with rekindling old memories; and for those descendants accompanying the original alumni or donors, they provide a place to discover more about the past of their forebears and to create first impressions and new memories of China.

### *Shrines of Self: Old Schools as Sites of Discovery*

For descendants visiting the schools of their migrant forebears but lacking personal ties to the old schools, there is a shift in focus from roots to routes (Ang 2011: 92; also see, Gilroy 1993). Often what they focus on is the breadth of the forebears’ migratory trek, including their adventures and suffering upon leaving the ancestral home, memories of luck and fortune in the destination country, and ultimately their return and generous contributions to the homeland, China (Chiang 2021: 15). Hence, I argue that these schools were “shrines to self” (Basu 2007: 218, 159), where the journey of self-discovery of the migrant descendants allowed them, as root-seekers, to make the old school sites of memories their own.

For many descendants of migrants, the prospect of visiting the ancestral locality in China was filled with great anticipation. Yet, when making such a visit, there were also disappointments. One recurring problem was that the ancestral home could not be located (Alexander, Bryce and Murdy 2017: 550; Cheng 2019a: 247–248). This was the experience of Ronald Choy—the grandson of James CHOY Hing (蔡興 1869–1957), the early twentieth-century benefactor of Lai Wor School. According to Howard Wilson (Ronald’s relative in Australia), the family lost track of its village ties during the decade of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>427</sup> Not even knowing the name of his ancestral village when he first began searching for his ancestral home in 1985, Ronald Choy visited several locations, including villages in Shaxi, Zhongshan, only to find that none of them was “his” village.<sup>428</sup> Finally, Howard discovered the name of the ancestral village through an obituary of

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<sup>427</sup> Interview with Howard Wilson (family historian and descendant of a school donor family through marriage) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne and Alexandra Wong, Sydney, 15 February 2019.

<sup>428</sup> Interview with Ronald Choy (grandson of Zhongshan-born Australian-school donor), 76, Zhongshan, 24 December 2017.

CHOY Hing, published in the *South China Morning Post*.<sup>429</sup> The article mentions Ngoi Sha, an English Romanisation of the village name and, more importantly, the First Madame Sun Yat-sen, LU Muzhen (盧慕貞 1867–1952), attending school together, providing clues to pinpoint the ancestral locality.



**Figure 7.3** Howard Wilson (centre) returns to the Pearl River Delta from Australia. He is discussing his research into the Choy family history with local villagers of Ngoi Sha village, Jinding town of Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai. (Photo by Kate Bagnall, 30 March 2017.) The lofty 5.5 storey Lai Wor School (right), shown with a golden dome, was a historic landmark for the early twentieth century *qiaoxiang*. (Source: Ronald Choy, n.d.)

At his next available opportunity, which turned out to be in 2014, Howard and his wife Emily visited mainland China, staying at a hotel in Zhuhai.<sup>430</sup> Howard asked the concierge for tourist maps as they waited for Emily’s cousins, Ronald and Robert Choy, to arrive at their hotel. Howard recounted that, as the Choy family were catching up, Ronald’s partner (Ah Yung 阿容) began to study the details of the map.<sup>431</sup> Then, she suddenly exclaimed, “Look! There’s your CHOY [蔡 family] name on this map.” “CHOY Chong’s ancestral home was indicated on the map,” Ronald explained in an interview, “and since CHOY Chong (蔡昌 1877 – 1951) is CHOY Hing’s younger brother, that confirms it. We found the right village!”<sup>432</sup> Ronald also pointed out that the name of

<sup>429</sup> Email correspondence with Howard Wilson, 12 December 2021. *The South China Morning Post*, 17 April 1957, p.7.

<sup>430</sup> Email correspondence with Howard Wilson, 12 December 2021.

<sup>431</sup> Email correspondence with Howard Wilson, 12 December 2021. When providing his partner’s name in Chinese characters, Ronald Choy told a slight variation of the above story. Based on personal communication with Ronald Choy on 15 December 2021, it was not Ah Yung (王其容) who first pinpointed the location of the village on the map, but he himself.

<sup>432</sup> Interview with Ronald Choy, 24 December 2017.

the township, Jinding, meant “golden top” (金頂鎮), providing additional confirmation since, as shown in Figure 7.3, the school building that his grandfather CHOY Hing founded was the tallest in the township and had a golden dome. Upon verifying the name with the village chief, however, I was notified that the second character in the name was different (金鼎鎮), thus there was no relationship between the village school and the township.<sup>433</sup> In any case, the confusion likely occurred because the proper name of the town and Ronald’s “golden top” interpretation are homonyms; and this coincidentally applied no matter whether the speaker was conversant in Cantonese (“Gum Ding”), or Mandarin (“Jinding”).

Many root-seekers are less fortunate than Howard Wilson and Ronald Choy, as they have never succeeded in finding their ancestral home. This is partly a consequence of institutional racism and its effects on the transmission of intergenerational knowledge (Couchman and Bagnall 2019: 338). Due to the Immigration Restriction Act that came into force after 1901 (commonly known as the “White Australia policy”), when Australian policies enforced systemic institutional racism that lasted until the 1970s, evidence of Chinese ancestry in Australia was often hidden or destroyed by migrant families (Couchman and Bagnall 2019: 335). Over time, after generations of denied connections, ancestral lineage ties were often lost and the ancestral tongue and memories of the ancestral place in China were forgotten. Moreover, as Couchman and Bagnall (2019: 337) point out, the “*qiaoxiang* [...] were not mainstream tourist destinations,” meaning “guidebooks and maps were limited, if not non-existent.” Yet, even if guidebooks had existed, it is also well-known that the lengthy duration between research and publication inevitably meant that works of this nature were quickly outdated, making the internet a more reliable platform for destination information (Sorensen and Peel 2016: 411).

Descendants with the benefit of being able to access the living memories of parents or grandparents about the ancestral home could more easily trace their roots (Maruyama and Stronza 2010). Still, for these descendants, the filial return was sometimes challenged by their own loss of the ancestral language. A long-serving teacher at Cheung Kok School, for instance, recalled that:

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<sup>433</sup> Personal communication with JIM Wah-hing (village chief of Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai), 70, 7 November 2021.

Around the year 2012, I remember two women, whose great-grandfather was YUEN Yet Hing, without Chinese features at all. They looked very foreign indeed.<sup>434</sup> They couldn't speak a word of Chinese and we could only point to this and that, struggling to communicate, like a chicken talking to a duck. Their aunty living in Shekki had accompanied them to the school. Their parents could not make it back as they were too old or incapacitated.<sup>435</sup>

Such disconnect from their ancestral past often means that descendants cannot easily return to China on their own. Even when they manage to find their way back, it is often with a relative or an interpreter in tow. Apart from location, language has been the “greatest roadblock” (Couchman and Bagnall 2019: 337). As a solution, some descendants join group tours to the Pearl River Delta (Louie 2004; Couchman and Bagnall 2019).

After several return trips, some descendants had enough confidence to bring their relatives back to the village school. Such was the case with Pamala Con Foo (1936–2009), the granddaughter of Darwin's leading nineteenth-century merchant, YUEN Yet Hing (1853–1916).<sup>436</sup> For other Chinese-Australian descendants, repeated trips allowed them to discover more about their intergenerational connections. For example, as a third-generation Chinese-Australian, successive trips enabled Gary Leong to deepen his genealogical knowledge.<sup>437</sup> Gary recounted that he had visited his ancestral home in Zhongshan twice: first, in the 1990s, accompanied by his Hong Kong-based cousins; the second time, in January 2009, with his siblings and their families from Australia (Figure 7.4). The first trip helped him learn about Cho Bin village, which “by that time had very few people, mainly elderly people and very young kids” living there.<sup>438</sup> Then, on the second trip—two decades after his father had passed on, he discovered that his father, Richard Leong (LEONG Wai Cheung 梁惠祥 1919–1990), had once contributed to the kindergarten in the village.

Gary Leong and his siblings had not known that their father contributed to the fundraising campaign that LEUNG Man Hon and Philip Leong initiated in the 1980s. The survival of donor portraits in the old school enabled him to discover his father's philanthropic activities. He also remembers seeing his father's name in Chinese characters 梁惠祥 (LEONG Wai Cheung) on a

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<sup>434</sup> The teacher referred to them as “*gwei mui*” (鬼妹), which in Cantonese literally translates to “foreign devil sisters.” It is likely the women were products of intermarriage with “white” Anglo-Australians.

<sup>435</sup> Walking interview with Mr. Yeung (headmaster) and an unnamed female teacher, Cheung Kok School, Zhongshan, 27 December 2017.

<sup>436</sup> Interview with Pamala Con Foo by Diana Giese for the Post-war Chinese Australians Oral History Project, Darwin, 20 December 1994; also see Giese 1997: 177–178).

<sup>437</sup> Telephone interview with Gary Leong (Australian descendant of two-generation of school donors), 60, 8 March 2021.

<sup>438</sup> Telephone interview with Gary Leong, 8 March 2021.

donor plaque outside a classroom of the kindergarten (Figure 7.5).<sup>439</sup> Each visit led to a deeper understanding of the enduring Chinese-Australian connections that Gary's forebears had with their native home in China.



**Figure 7.4** Gary Leong (far left) with his children, his brothers and their families from Australia during a visit to the old Cho Bin School that his grandfather, George Leong, helped finance. On the back wall, donors' portraits of 1980s school benefactors include Gary's father, Richard Leong (third from the left). The central portrait is of Philip Leong and his wife Betty; to their immediate right is LEUNG Man Hon. (Source: Gary Leong, private family collection, January 2009.)



**Figure 7.5** Chinese-Australian families return to visit the new donated kindergarten at Cho Bin village. The building was opened on 10 February 1987. (Photo by Joe Leong, 10 April 1988.)

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<sup>439</sup> Telephone interview with Gary Leong, 8 March 2021.

When I was talking to Gary Leong about his grandfather, George Leong,<sup>440</sup> I was able to reveal new information to him, as he was oblivious to the fact his grandfather was a foundation donor of the original 1920s Cho Bin School that he had visited.<sup>441</sup> At the time of his latest visit, the days of it being a school had elapsed. Gary thought the building was simply a community hall, rather than a former school.

The survival of school furniture enabled one root-seeker to imagine what life would have been like if his ancestor had not emigrated from Guangdong. Albert Cheng (鄭國和), a co-founder of the “Friends of Roots” program in the United States,<sup>442</sup> visited the school that his father attended in his ancestral home, and, doing what the young adults that he brings on trips do, “sat in every chair to make sure I sat in the same chair as him” (B. Chan 2018). Albert Cheng wanted to reconnect with his forebear, that is, to come away from his home visit with a greater appreciation of his forebears’ world and times, and to feel how they may have felt. Albert reflected: “Being there, I understood life was rough and why people left. I felt, boy, if my family didn’t leave, I could have been barefoot in split pants. I could have been a farmer” (B. Chan 2018). The old schools act like living museums, where descendants return to learn about their family history (Cheng 2019a: 250; Couchman and Bagnall 2019: 337). The buildings and their setting provide a multisensory, visceral experience of what it was like for pupils attending the schools, such as what it was like to occupy a classroom seat and to be in the frame of mind of a former student in another era (Lubar and Kingery 1993; Marschall 2020: 315).

### *School as Memorials in the Remittance Landscape*

For the benefactors and their modern-day descendants, the diaspora-funded school reaffirms a particular relationship with the past. Many were permanent memorials in the remittance landscape, as a Chinese-Australian descendant once remarked (Giese 1997: 177). They were reminders of the donors’ past, were an object of many stories and could also be a symbol of devotion to elderly or deceased parents of the main benefactor (for whom the buildings were often named), embodying filial piety when migration resulted in prolonged separation (Zheng 2003: 18; Liu 2014b: 38; Liao

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<sup>440</sup> George Leong (born LEONG Yip Wing 梁業榮 1877–1950) was the founder of a long running general store in East Ingham (Queensland) “Houng Yuen & Co.” in 1922 in partnership with Charlie Hong (born LEONG Jui Jung 梁瑞榮 1882–1943), Dr. Joe Leong’s grandfather.

<sup>441</sup> Knowledge about Gary’s grandfather was provided to me by email correspondence with Anthony Leong (a historian based at Cho Bin village), 20 January 2021.

<sup>442</sup> Formerly known as “In Search of Roots,” established in the 1990s (Louie 2004).



2018: 110–111). As Confucian teaching has long emphasised, “When your parents are alive, serve them with propriety” (*Analects* II, 5), or “When parents are alive, do not travel afar” (*Analects* IV, 18). Since migration was uncustomary in Chinese history (Wang 2001), before 1949 many Chinese migrants were sojourners overseas who were expected to retire in China, even though they often did end up settling in the destination country. Since they had been absent overseas, some who had prospered abroad would dedicate a school to the memory of elderly or deceased parents to ensure a continued relationship with that person and the homeland after migration (Chiang 2021: 28–29). As a place of commemoration, the schools took on layers of meaning beyond their educational function; they were a mandatory port of call whenever migrant benefactors, or their descendants, returned. As many ancestral houses of migrant-settlers were neglected or had disappeared, diaspora-funded schools provided an alternative anchor in the village. This was the case for contemporary Chinese-Australian donors like Stanley Hunt and Stanley Yee, or the descendants of YUEN Yet Hing, such as Robert Yuen.



**Figure 7.6** The Sung-sun Hall of Learning (est. 1983) (left), in honour of Stanley Hunt’s father, Harry Hunt (陳崇信 CHAN Sung-sun 1902–1990), and the Wun-Ginn Library (est. 1985) (right), in honour of Stanley Hunt’s mother LEONG Wun-Ginn (梁雲娟 1903–1976). (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 18 December 2017.)

Until his death in 2019, Stanley Hunt annually visited his ancestral village to pay respect to his ancestors.<sup>443</sup> After his first revisit to Ma Shan village in 1979 (Hunt 2009: 183), he continued to visit his ancestral village to participate in Ching Ming (清明 ancestral veneration) ceremonies. When I first met him in 2017, Stanley commented that the classroom block he erected in Ma Shan

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<sup>443</sup> In 1939, at the age of twelve, Stanley Hunt came to Sydney from Shekki, Zhongshan. Stanley grew up in a family that owned a general store in Warialda, New South Wales, and he later became a motelier.

village in 1983 was dedicated to his father, and the library to his mother in 1985 (Figure 7.6).<sup>444</sup> I asked him if his name appeared anywhere in the school. “Oh yes!” He replied. “It’s on the school gates,” which he contributed to in 1987.



**Figure 7.7** The gates of Ma Shan School with the classroom block behind (in the distance). (Source: *Everyday News*, 7 November 2017.)

His name in Chinese, 陳沛德 (CHAN Pui-Tak in Cantonese) could indeed be found on the school gates. They were built to protect the school from intruders, including villagers who had been known to use the school grounds to stack their harvest outside school hours (Hunt 2009: 184). Thus, it was as if his name and presence protected the school, where metaphorically his parents resided (Figure 7.7). The physical survival of the school, in its entirety, is metaphorically an “idiom of kin and community ties” (Aguilar 2009: 109). In this respect, migrant-financed buildings can be regarded as material statements about the ongoing transnational connectivity of migrants to their ancestral home.

The kindergarten in Chung Tau village (est. 1986), Shaxi town, Zhongshan, was likewise erected in memory of the donors’ forebears. Yet, instead of being dedicated to the memory of the donor’s

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<sup>444</sup> Interview with Stanley Hunt (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor) by Ien Ang, Denis Byrne, Alexandra Wong and Christopher Cheng, Sydney, 6 October 2017; The China–Australia Heritage Corridor. 2019. “Stanley Hunt.” <[www.heritagecorridor.org.au/people/stanley-hunt](http://www.heritagecorridor.org.au/people/stanley-hunt)> (accessed 5 October 2021); see also Hunt (2009: 184).

parents, it was dedicated to the donor's in-laws. When recounting her return visit to China with her husband in 1979, Mrs. Lai said, after that trip, her husband Alen told her:

Eileen, we saw the people in China were extremely 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.<sup>445</sup>



**Figure 7.8** Mrs. Eileen Lai (middle) and her two Australian-born children visit the kindergarten (est. 1986) for the first time after it was built in January 1987. Portraits of Eileen, her late husband, Alen, and her parents appear in the reception foyer of the kindergarten. (Source: Mrs. Eileen Lai, private family collection.)

Eileen agreed, so after they returned to Australia, the couple ran two restaurants—Lean Sun Lowe Café (聯新樓) and Eastern Restaurant (東山酒家)—in Sydney's Chinatown, as well as other businesses, to save more money to finance their new project.<sup>446</sup> What is unusual here is that while most donors in my study were men and diaspora-funded schools were usually built in their own native homes, in this case, not only was Alen Lai not from Zhongshan—his ancestral origins were elsewhere in the Pearl River Delta (Dongguan)—but he was also contributing to his wife's native home. It appears that Alen's residency abroad in Australia had influenced his view of women, which had remarkably different gender relations to China.<sup>447</sup> The emergence of overseas Chinese women as partners in business and philanthropic projects seems related to the rising numbers and status of women and their all-round involvement in diasporic life. In fact, Robb (2019) argues that

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<sup>445</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 77, Sydney, 24 April 2018.

<sup>446</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai, 24 April 2018.

<sup>447</sup> Also see Hunt (2009: 178). For a comparative example of how migration to America had changed gender attitudes in the Dominican Republic, see Levitt (2004: 24).

it was the presence of wives in the Chinese community in Australia since the early twentieth century that enabled migrant businesses to thrive and expand. The Lai family would certainly not have made as much money if Alen had worked alone in Sydney. Thus, a kindergarten built in his wife's native home acknowledges a loving husband's devotion to his wife and, by extension, can also be treated as a token of gratitude to her late parents.<sup>448</sup>

The benefactors and descendants I interviewed also relayed the pride and respect that they had for their forebears because of their philanthropic contributions. Lance Lai, for example, takes considerable pride in acknowledging his southern Chinese, or specifically Cantonese-Australian, heritage.<sup>449</sup> When interviewing him at his North Sydney office, Lance recalled bringing two Australian friends back to Chung Tau village in Zhongshan in 2009:<sup>450</sup>

There was a wonderful reception for the three of us when we came in [to the kindergarten] and all the children had lined up, singing [for us] and there were firecrackers, it was wonderful. Richard and Philip said, "Wow!" They felt like royalty when they walked into the school. There were no Caucasians there, and they hadn't seen one for days. [...] Obviously, they are educated men, intelligent, and realised the enormity of the sacrifice that my parents went through to give this sum of money back then to China and the village. [...] We met all the teachers, the headmasters, and obviously heard about the huge impact of what Mum and Dad did to these people's lives. [My parents] had gone through [turmoil in China]<sup>451</sup> [and in Australia] it was very difficult because they didn't speak the language. [...] So, the only way they could get ahead was working their guts out. And when I say, "working their guts out," they would work literally eighteen hours a day, sometimes even twenty hours. This went on for years and years. They realised that even though they were working hard, they were still better off than the [many] poor people [they left behind] in China.

Lance's return was a time of reflection and celebration of his parents' sacrifices and triumphs. It particularly recalled their trajectory: from suffering upon leaving China, to their pathway to fortune in Sydney, and ultimately to their return and generous contributions to China (Chiang 2021: 15). Having benefited from the sacrifices of his hard-working immigrant parents, Lance was satisfied

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<sup>448</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai, 24 April 2018.

<sup>449</sup> On many occasions, Lance wrote to me after our interview to recount how particularly proud he was of his Cantonese ancestry, emphasising the hard-working Chinese immigrants of Australia's past. Lance was thinking about those he knew from his parents' and even grandparents' generations who had been in Sydney for at least the past century. These people were in stark contrast to the more recent Mandarin-speaking immigrants, who were infamous for their spending ability and disruptive behaviour. On several occasions, it deeply upset him when he found most white Australians could not tell the difference and grouped all Chinese into a catch-all, single category.

<sup>450</sup> Interview with Lance Lai (Australian-born descendant of school donating family), Sydney, 24 April 2018.

<sup>451</sup> Not knowing the correct Chinese terms, Lance had mistakenly thought his parents went through the Cultural Revolution in China, which began in 1966. Since his parents had migrated to Australia in the 1950s, it is likely his parents had instead undergone the catastrophic events that preceded the Cultural Revolution, such as the Land Reform Movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, or the Great Leap Forward famine, both of which caused major suffering and loss of life.

to see that children in China were getting off to a good start in life because they were making good use of the facilities his parents had provided.



**Figure 7.9** A shrine dedicated to David O'Young (歐陽民慶 1866–1932) at Dai Leng Village in present-day Torch Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, Zhongshan (Photo on the left by Kiko Ko, 26 December 2017; source of photo on the right: Au-Yeung 2001: 128.)

If a school no longer survives, a memorial has often been erected for the school donor on the site, such as in the case in Dai Leng village in Zhongshan, where a shrine was erected to David O'Young (歐陽民慶 1866–1932) (Figure 7.9). The shrine remains today as a substitute for the now-demolished school (see Chapter 5).<sup>452</sup> Such shrines allow returnees and village kinsmen alike to continue to pay respect to a noble ancestor. Remembrance of the past, however, also comes hand-in-hand with another dimension: forgetting. The next section explores why families may ignore or silence certain memories.

## Forgetting an Unsettled Past

This chapter has so far demonstrated that diaspora-funded schools in the *qiaoxiang* remain significant to their overseas benefactors, alumni, as well as their descendants. All these people may have expectations of how the school should be run or opinions about the future of the school. With multiple stakeholders associated with a single heritage site, divergent viewpoints are common (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; S. Jones 2017: 25). For example, when hopes and expectations

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<sup>452</sup> Interview with AU-YEUNG Chow (scribe of Dai Leng village), 86, Zhongshan, 26 December 2017.

are disappointed, especially among the diaspora, a heritage school can also become a site of contestation (Silverman and Ruggles 2007: 3). A paradoxical consequence is that the school that initially made modern-day descendants proud to return may conversely propel them away. Hence, collective memories can be as much about a “post-memory” or “absent memory” (Darian-Smith and Hamilton 2019: 6; Hirsch 2012) or forgetting and silencing the past as they are about remembering it.

### *Heartbroken Returns*

While it may seem natural for migrant families to reconnect happily with significant places and people upon their return to their ancestral home, it is clear this is not always the case. At least for “Amanda”<sup>453</sup> and her family, returning to the ancestral village was at odds with the warmth that one usually associates when thinking of returning to China. This Australian school donor family returned to Zhongshan around 2000, but the experience was an example of what Waldinger (2015: 43) describes as “intersocial divergence.” Put differently, the family learnt that their village had moved on without them. Amanda acknowledged that her Zhongshan-born father left as a teenager in the 1950s.<sup>454</sup> In his multi-decade absence, Amanda’s father missed his home terribly. Many in the diaspora were very distressed by the chaos and savagery of the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976) and any patriotic motivation was greatly diminished, but after the initiation of the Reform period, such feelings began to change (see Chapter 6). It was without hesitation that Amanda’s father then contributed finance for a new school in the 1980s. Yet when he was finally able to return, there was nobody left in the village that knew him, nor was there anybody to escort his family around the school. “The only people my father knew [from his village] emigrated to America or had died.”<sup>455</sup> Amanda explained that he was one of the youngest children in the family and, due to the “White Australia” policies, he waited more than two decades to obtain residency. Upon returning to Zhongshan, the cold reception made the family feel unwelcome and what transpired after their trip, as discussed below, meant that their single trip to Zhongshan was also the family’s last visit.

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<sup>453</sup> After hearing what transpired, it is understandable why “Amanda” did not want to be identified. To protect her identity as the descendant of a school benefactor who wished to remain anonymous, I have adopted the pseudonym “Amanda.” My informant even confirmed many times that I was not working with the Chinese government before agreeing to meet.

<sup>454</sup> Interview with “Amanda” (Australian-born descendant of a school donating family), Sydney, 30 April 2018.

<sup>455</sup> Interview with “Amanda”, 30 April 2018.

After returning to Australia, Amanda's father became distressed when he heard that his prized school had been turned into a factory without his consent.<sup>456</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, following China's rapid double-digit economic growth since the 1980s, many school buildings—some, like Amanda's father's school built in the mid-1980s, only a decade old or less—fell into disuse. From the 1990s onwards, the village administrator often decided, without consultation, to convert vacant schools into workshops and factories. This incident made some school donors, including Amanda's father, feel somewhat isolated in their decision to contribute to a school in China. According to Amanda, her father was the only person that she knew who had contributed to a school in Zhongshan. Not only were other kinsmen generally not engaged in homeland philanthropy, but they also laughed at her father for trusting China with his money. Amanda recalled, "There wasn't much support at the time. I thought most [Zhongshan] people in Australia just weren't as generous as my dad."<sup>457</sup>

The pain Amanda's family felt was greater when they found out that the school had been misused. During our interview, Amanda felt betrayed when I showed her photographs taken at the school after my first research trip to China.<sup>458</sup> Unimpressed with the photograph I had taken of the school donor board with her parents' names on it, Amanda said, "It seems like their names [in black permanent marker pen] had been smudged."<sup>459</sup> Hodder (2012) reminds us that continuous physical upkeep is needed to maintain material things, and this is obviously the case with schools. If the material fabric of the school is not taken care of, what brought the family immense pride in the beginning may later become a source of grief.

Amanda's family experience in Zhongshan is by no means unique. The sudden conversion of century-old diaspora-funded schools into factories also devastated other families of Chinese-Australian donors. Walter Ma (馬景華 MA King-wah 1930–2014), former chairman of Sincere Co. (Hong Kong) and grandson of the Chinese-Australian philanthropist MA Wing Charn (馬永燦 1863–1938), returned to Sha Chung village in the early 1990s full of glee.<sup>460</sup> This was not his first time back. On a previous visit in the late 1980s, he had taken photographs of Sha Chung

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<sup>456</sup> Interview with "Amanda", 30 April 2018.

<sup>457</sup> Interview with "Amanda", 30 April 2018.

<sup>458</sup> For the sake of protecting the family's privacy, photographs of the school and donor plaque have not been reproduced here.

<sup>459</sup> Interview with "Amanda", 30 April 2018.

<sup>460</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

School, but when the photographs were developed, he was not satisfied. My informant recounted that in the early 1990s, Walter returned to videotape his grandfather's school project:

The inscriptions on the plaque turned out to be unclear [in the photographs he took earlier]. So, this time, he was hyped, bringing his video recorder back, fully charged. Yet to his utter disappointment, he found Sha Chung School had become a factory. What's more, the stone plaque which he wished to document had been smashed and the rubble was still on the factory floor. MA King-wah approached the person in charge [of the factory] and was told that the villagers had advised the factory to open a door there, and it appears that [the placement of the opening] collided with the marble plaque [with his grandfather's name on it during the factory's retrofit]. After hearing this, MA King-wah jumped into his car and headed off to Hong Kong. He was never seen in Sha Chung again.<sup>461</sup>

Originally, Walter had returned with the hope of preserving his proud family legacy, but his gut-wrenching experience left him vowing never to associate with his ancestral home again. This had rippling consequences, as my informant told me, since, upon returning to Hong Kong, Walter ordered his family to follow his example.<sup>462</sup> This ordeal effectively terminated ties with his native home, which had stretched over more than a century, since the time of his grandfather's emigration from Sha Chung to Sydney in 1879.

A retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in Zhongshan, with whom I discussed this issue at length, understood the disappointment:

If proper consultation had taken place, explaining why the school has been discontinued and the donors were told outright the benefits of the government building new schools and if their old schools could be reused, the situation would be less traumatic.<sup>463</sup>

Over the years, in her capacity as a liaison officer, Ms. CHEN Diqiu has comforted many distraught migrant school donors who were frustrated about abrupt decisions to close diaspora-funded schools. Some even rhetorically questioned, "Why in Europe a building can last centuries, but in China, it cannot even last a decade."<sup>464</sup> From my interview with Ms. Chen, I also heard that other donor families felt as if their grandfathers' graves had been defaced as they faced the thought that there would be nothing memorable for their offspring to see if they ever came back to the ancestral village.<sup>465</sup> It is relevant to note here the high respect that Chinese people have for their

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<sup>461</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu, 2 January 2019.

<sup>462</sup> Interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 79, Zhongshan, 2 January 2019.

<sup>463</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (historian and retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 9 May 2018.

<sup>464</sup> Underlying this is a scholarly debate on the differences between East and West vis-a-vis a conservation ethic. See Byrne (2011), for example, on his research on popular temple rebuilding practices in China and Thailand.

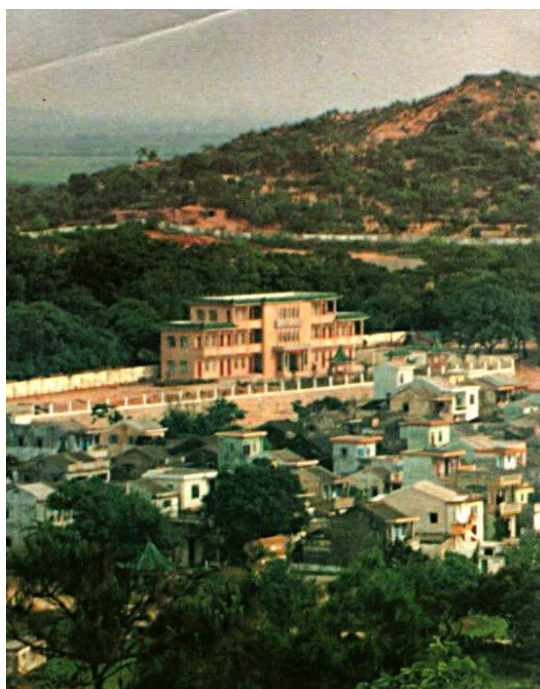
<sup>465</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu, 9 May 2018.



forebears, as is evident in the perpetuation of traditions like annual return trips for ancestral worship (Ching Ming), so that even harbouring the thought of mutilating a grave would be seen as a serious insult to a family.

### *On Not Standing the Test of Time*

One factor in the deterioration of buildings that the diaspora may be aware of is the effect of the harsh climate of southern China in degrading the material fabric of schools, including its commemorative features. For instance, the elevated position of some school locations (Figure 7.10) may have had untoward consequences. While the graduating class of students who occupy the upper storey of the school building at Chuen Luk village generally enjoy an unrestricted view over rice paddies and the West River (西江) from their classroom, at the same time, their school is also ordinarily subjected to the vagaries of humid climate.<sup>466</sup> Many donor portraits, once carefully placed on the walls inside glass cabinets in the schools' Halls of Fame, have deteriorated due to dampness.



**Figure 7.10** Chuen Luk School in Dachong, Zhongshan is located on a hillside. (Source: *Zhongshan Chuen Luk School Magazine: Inauguration Edition 1992*, back cover image.)

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<sup>466</sup> Walking interview with LIANG Jiahao (former student of Chuen Luk School), Zhongshan, 21 December 2017.

People associated with the school, such as donors, may appreciate that deterioration due to natural conditions, such as moist air, is different to human-inflicted deterioration, such as neglect or misuse (including conversion to industrial uses). The deterioration of the donor portraits in this sense is “natural” (Figure 7.11). In *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving*, Caitlin DeSilvey argues that “transformation of our relation to material past is both a necessity and an opportunity” (2017: 17). Her post-humanist stance considers decomposition not as a loss, but as a release into other states; in her analysis, embracing the state of incompleteness of crumbling structures and materials invites speculation and interpretation on the part of the beholder, opening up a new way of connecting with them (DeSilvey 2017: 187). Still, the sad truth remains that the donors’ pride in the village school may diminish with time; eventually, nobody may remember them and their role as donors, even if their portraits, often in deteriorated condition, can still be found inside the school’s Halls of Fame, if the school continues to exist. As one of my research participants, a former student of a diaspora-funded school, said to me, “We should see if we can find somebody in the diaspora who recognises these faces, since nobody in the village recognises them.”<sup>467</sup>



**Figure 7.11** High humidity has caused donors’ portraits to lose pride of place at Chuen Luk School’s Halls of Fame, Dachong Town, Zhongshan. Note that the paper on the ceiling is also peeling. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 21 December 2017.)

Finally, even if concrete structures were initially conceived of as permanent testimonies to philanthropic contributions (Chapter 4), the truth is that even concrete is unlikely to withstand the

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<sup>467</sup> Walking interview with LIANG Jiahao (former student of Chuen Luk School), Zhongshan, 21 December 2017.

test of time. At Dai Leng village in present-day Torch Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, Zhongshan, the roof of the concrete shrine structure for David O’Young showed the effects of spalling (Figure 7.12). Due to a combination of factors—inferior quality materials (reinforced steel), shoddy workmanship, and water damage—the steel reinforcing (rebar) has begun to rust, causing visible cracks in the concrete and, if left untreated, the “concrete cancer” will only get worse. Comparable damage was spotted on the portico-balcony of Sha Chung School, and on the small cupola on the rooftop of Cho Bin School (Figure 7.12; Byrne 2016a: 273).



**Figure 7.12** On the left, the concrete ceiling of the David O’Young memorial structure in Dai Leng village is spalling and the rusted steel-reinforcement is exposed. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 26 December 2017.) On the right, the concrete balustrade and rail of the small cupola on top of Cho Bin School in Zhongshan is likewise affected by weathering. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 7 January 2019.)

Clearly weathering is a culprit in building deterioration, and silently spoils diaspora-funded school buildings. Indeed, mass production of buildings and new methods of assembly have resulted in “a great degree of unpredictability in the life of buildings after construction” (Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow 1993: 6–17). As diaspora-funded schools deteriorate, however, some Australian donors, like Stanley Hunt, have been willing to donate additional funds to renovate their schools (Hunt 2009: 186). Yet not everything can be solved with additional funding, as sometimes commemorative features are damaged beyond recovery. Hence, buildings that had originally benefited the village children may one day even become a threat to public safety, should further

decay lead to structural failure. After all, as the fabric disintegrates, sections of the concrete may break loose.

### *Saving Face Through Silencing*

Having discussed some cases of ill-fated “return” experiences resulting in migrant families disowning their ancestral homes, this subsection continues my explanation of why certain memories of schools were not always transmitted from one generation onto the next. Here the Chinese cultural concept of “face,” relating to a person’s public respect and honour, is worth noting. For example, the misuse of school buildings in the ancestral homeland (such as conversion into factories), or unpleasant childhood experiences at school (such as bullying) meant that some descendants of migrant school donors or alumni were unwilling to recall or talk about the schools in order to save face. Their silences mean that inheriting memories is never a passive act. Rather, it could be a conscious reaction to a past that the migrants did not want to associate with or think that their descendants needed to know.

I personally experienced the effects of this kind of silencing in the sense that, until recently, I had little idea about how my father’s childhood school experience tainted his memory as a “difficult heritage” (Logan and Reeves 2008). Despite having visited Zhongshan several times since my first visit with him in 2003, my father never took me to the places of his childhood in the villages of present-day South District.<sup>468</sup> I later realised his avoidance to revisit his past was because it was a source of both pain and shame (*cf.* Logan and Reeves 2008: 1). Consequently, it was only a year prior to my PhD project that I first learned that my father and his siblings attended schools built by the Zhongshan-Australian diaspora.<sup>469</sup> As mentioned in the thesis introduction, it was only through my uncle, Colin Cheng, from Cairns, that I learned about their difficult childhood and particularly their schooling experience in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>470</sup>

It was very embarrassing when the class teacher asked us to stand up during class, and interrogated, “Why haven’t your school fees been paid?” [...] We all went through the same ordeal as none of our school fees were settled. Because your father felt so humiliated, after such an incident, he never returned to school, he barely finished third grade.

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<sup>468</sup> South District was not the ancestral home of the Cheng family, who were from the Longdu-speaking village of Dai Pong Tau (大龐頭) in Shaxi town, Zhongshan. My grandfather had relocated to Wan Shing (today’s South District) before 1949.

<sup>469</sup> These buildings were converted into *minban* schools during the Maoist era (Chapter 3 and Chapter 6).

<sup>470</sup> A go-along interview with Colin Cheng (uncle of researcher, now living in Cairns), 68, South District, Zhongshan, 5 April 2016.

Hearing this, it became clear why my father did not want to talk about his childhood. Rural poverty in Mao's China led to low rates of completion by school pupils.<sup>471</sup> This experience shaped his character from an early age, as he would become a no-nonsense person of few words who would devote himself non-stop to work. Possibly because of a life in which many opportunities had been denied him, he found solace in focusing on his career after he escaped Maoist China in a “freedom swim” to Hong Kong in the mid-1960s.<sup>472</sup> He was clearly not proud of his childhood and refused to remember or speak of it. According to Maggie Leung, for many migrants, “forgetting” the past creates space for new memories in a new society (Leung 2008: 182). On the other hand, although my uncle said he was reluctant to remember this episode of his past, as he cultivated a deeper relationship with his children and grandchildren and they wanted to know about his upbringing, he brought them back to revisit the homeland. Fortunately for me, I was able to meet them in Zhongshan and learn more about our family history.

While my father's and uncle's childhoods were far from pleasant, according to my uncle, there were other people worse off than them. These were some of the children sent back to China from overseas.<sup>473</sup> Despite the best of intentions, such as sending an overseas-born child home for a Chinese education (Yong 1977: 213; Liu 1989: 191; Bagnall 2018a: 92–93), sometimes not everything went as smoothly as initially envisioned.<sup>474</sup> Colin—who grew up in Zhongshan and later migrated to Australia from Hong Kong in the 1970s—remembers LEE Bak Chung, a mixed-race boy, from his primary school days in Wan Shing (today's South District), Zhongshan, in the 1950s:

He had a hard time at school, he couldn't even count [in Cantonese] 1, 2, 3, 4 etc., and kept repeating first grade. And with a pointy nose, green eyes, blonde hair, and being very short in stature, he looked different to the other kids and was constantly fighting with those who teased him... Children from Dutou [village] were particularly aggressive towards him.<sup>475</sup>

Not unlike those children of Chinese migrants who attend mainstream Australian schools and experience taunts of “Ching Chong Chinaman” (Tan 2003: 65, 103), those children sent to study in China from Australia were often subjected to equivalent ridicule (Wilton 2004: 113). For

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<sup>471</sup> A cleaner at Hong Kong Baptist University, who was from Chaozhou, Guangdong, told me a similar account of her life during my time as a visiting scholar at that university in 2018 and 2019.

<sup>472</sup> See Chapter 3 for information on freedom swimmers.

<sup>473</sup> A go-along interview with Colin Cheng (former student of Heng Mei School and Chuk Sau Yuen School), 71, South District, Zhongshan, 6 January 2019.

<sup>474</sup> Zoom interview with Vicky Lee of Hong Kong (descendant of a Eurasian Longdu-speaking family from Cairns), 7 September 2021.

<sup>475</sup> A go-along interview with Colin Cheng (former student of Heng Mei School), 71, South District, Zhongshan, 6 January 2019.

example, some children who were sent back remember the Cantonese taunts, “*Farn Gway Jay, Toe Gum Doy*” (蕃鬼仔, 搵金弟, literally “little foreign devils, little gold prospectors”) (Field c.1991: 32; Bagnall 2018b: 468). Behind the harassment was the fact that interracial relationships were generally not accepted in Chinese society. The economic rationale behind this attitude was that a Western wife in Australia, for example, was generally considered indulgent by Chinese standards, and also resulted in fewer remittances being sent back to China, so such relationships were rarely encouraged.<sup>476</sup> Therefore, children of mixed-race unions were generally hopelessly out of place in Chinese society, often eliciting much antagonism from those around them.<sup>477</sup> As a result, memories of, and continued connections to, the ancestral place in China were likely to be lost over time, should these mistreated children return to Australia. After all, they are likely to have remained silent about their past rather than share it publicly, because doing so would revisit old wounds.

To further understand how gaps in intergenerational knowledge were created, let me draw upon an interview with a descendant of a Sydney-based school donor.<sup>478</sup> In an interview with Jonathon and Stanley Yee, I asked which schools they had visited in Zhongshan. Jonathon’s response included several schools in Dachong town, but not On Tong School. This was surprising, at least to me, because it was the first school project in Zhongshan to which his father, Stanley, contributed, and the library of that school was dedicated to Jonathan’s grandmother, who was from On Tong village. As described in the previous chapter, On Tong School was allegedly “devastated” by the Sichuan earthquake (see Chapter 6). The decision to prematurely close that school afterwards may have brought immeasurable grief to all those who heard about the situation, including overseas donors like Stanley Yee.

It was likely that Stanley Yee was aware of what happened to the school that he contributed to, but at the interview he remained silent. His silence caused me to wonder whether he was unsure if it was the right time, or if there would ever be a right time, to tell what had happened to the school.<sup>479</sup> He may not have wanted his children or myself—who, like his children, are members of

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<sup>476</sup> Interview with KWOK Lai-mun (Chuk Sau Yuen village elder), 85, Zhongshan, 4 December 2018. For a comparative example of how mixed-race children were the result of Chinese fathers partnering with non-Chinese wives, in Hong Kong it was usually the case of a Chinese woman partnering with a Western man. One Hong Kong historian noted that, in the late nineteenth century, mixed-race children in Hong Kong were held to be symbols of racial degradation or impurity. They were regarded as worse than orphans, as they were a product of what were regarded as fallen women (Chiu 2011: 100).

<sup>477</sup> In the future, comparative research into those who grew up in the village and “sent-back” children who returned from abroad would be worthy, once sufficient data emerges.

<sup>478</sup> Interview with Stanley Yee (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor) and Jonathan Yee (son of Stanley Yee) by Ien Ang, Christopher Cheng and Alexander Wong, Sydney, 15 September 2017.

<sup>479</sup> Interview with Stanley Yee and Jonathan Yee, 15 September 2017.

the local-born Chinese-Australian community with ancestral connections to Zhongshan—to think adversely of his ancestral home to which he fondly returns several times each year, year after year. To save face, and possibly avoid a lengthy explanation, Stanley opted for silence. During this research, I encountered several cases where descendants of Zhongshan-Australian migrants (myself included) noted that the subject of the schools that their parents either contributed to or had attended was something they had avoided talking about. The reasons may be due to saving face or a cultural emphasis on the ethical value of humility, or to lack of time, or even to not having the right vocabulary (Lam 2007; Chau and Fitzgerald 2018: 21; Matheson 2020: 169). An additional factor is the desire for immigrant children to integrate into Australian society. In the end, regardless of why, unwillingness to share had the same effect: intergenerational decline and loss of cultural knowledge (Couchman and Bagnall 2019: 335).

As seen so far, forgetting can be as commonplace as remembering. During return visits, when diaspora-funded schools are found to be less than well-maintained, donors or their descendants may be inclined to disassociate with their ancestral home. This is not dissimilar to those parents who had fled from the Holocaust, refusing to recall the traumas of war for their descendants (Darian-Smith and Hamilton 2019: 6). From my research, I found that connection to diaspora-funded schools may be lost within a single generation if the past was traumatic or unsettled. In the long run, some diaspora-funded schools are likely to be ignored by migrants and thus forgotten by their overseas-born children.

## **Creating the Future**

Having discussed the question why the diaspora remember some schools and forget others, I next explore how a future is made by ongoing diasporic engagement with the schools in the *qiaoxiang*. Here, the idea of creating the future is analogous to the way Stanley Hunt built a new school in Ma Shan in the 1980s. According to Denis Byrne (2021: 27), Hunt was participating in a “futuring” project rather than “heritage conservation.”

### *Returning to Schools with Gifts*

Ever since Chinese migrants left China for overseas, primarily as sojourners, the ideal has been to “return home with glory” (衣錦還鄉) (Williams 2018). An important part of realising these social expectations was to return with gifts (Li 1999: 191; Cheng 2019a: 246). In fact, Louie (2004: 149)

noted that it was uncustomary for Chinese to return to meet their family and friends empty-handed, hence returning with gifts was a defining part of being an overseas Chinese returnee. Oral accounts from this project confirm that ever since the diaspora has been building schools, kinsmen have customarily been returning with gifts, especially new equipment for their village schools. Among the first such gifts I heard of was a cast bronze bell for Sha Chung School—the first Australian purpose-built diaspora-funded school in Zhongshan, established in the 1920s.<sup>480</sup> In the reform era, the diaspora returned to their ancestral home with a wider spectrum of gifts. For example, Pamela Con Foo, who was interviewed by Diana Giese in 1994, remembers regularly returning to Cheung Kok School in Shaxi town, Zhongshan, with a variety of gifts, including some items from Australia: “Each year we’ve gone back we’ve donated something—the television, the computer, the Yamaha keyboard. There’s an Australian influence—swings, see-saws and merry-go-rounds—quite unusual for that part of China.”<sup>481</sup>



**Figure 7.13** Returning to Chung Tau, Eileen Lai and family donates new electric fans, thermo flasks, and other items purchased in Hong Kong for the kindergarten in Chung Tau village, Zhongshan. (Source: Mrs. Eileen Lai, private family collection, 1987.)

The families I interviewed for this project also reported returning to their diaspora-funded school with donations. Raymond Leong recounted that his father shopped at a department store in Hong Kong before returning to the village.<sup>482</sup> Specifically, he recalled purchasing basketballs for Fuk

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<sup>480</sup> Telephone interview with MA Yin-chiu (Sha Chung village elder), 81, Zhongshan, 13 November 2020.

<sup>481</sup> Interview with Pamela Con Foo by Diana Giese for the Post-war Chinese Australians Oral History Project, Darwin, 20 December 1994; Giese 1997: 178).

<sup>482</sup> Telephone interview with Raymond Leong (Zhongshan-born descendant of an Australian school donor), 85, 18 April 2018.



Chung Middle School—the school his father, uncle, and other kinsfolk funded in the mid-1980s. Several families I interviewed, including Eileen Lai, bought a container-load of duty-free products in Hong Kong for the village.<sup>483</sup> Her gifts for Chung Tau Kindergarten included electric fans and thermo flasks from Hong Kong.<sup>484</sup> Here, gifts represented both a renewed relationship between the donors and the ancestral home, and the aspiration to make their schools state-of-the-art whenever they returned. As one descendant noted, “We like to donate things to the school that are beneficial to all the students, not for anyone in particular.”<sup>485</sup>



**Figure 7.14** On the left, Fuk Chung Middle School in South District, Zhongshan has since been converted into a private kindergarten. (Photo by Christopher Cheng, 8 May 2018.) On the right, Beverly (mistakenly identified as the Queen of England) and her husband Raymond Leong. (Source: Zhongshan South District Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, April 2019.)

Over time, donations have also become more specialised. For example, Mrs. Beverly Joyce Leong, 73, remembers that around the year 2012, when her husband Raymond Leong was president of the Chung Shan Society of Australia in Sydney, the couple often visited Zhongshan (Figure 7.14). During one such visit, she visited the school to which Raymond’s family had contributed in Fuk Chung village. There, the local children mistook her for the Queen of England:

One day, I was in the village, standing outside the school and one of the children saw me then ran away. Moments later, a crowd began to appear. Only when [my husband] Raymond returned then I

<sup>483</sup> The China Travel Service established a system whereby overseas Chinese could choose duty-free items in Hong Kong and collect their purchases on the mainland (Louie 2004: 151).

<sup>484</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eileen Lai (Zhongshan-born Australian school donor), 77, Sydney, 24 April 2018.

<sup>485</sup> Interview with Pamala Con Foo by Diana Giese for the Post-war Chinese Australians oral history project, Darwin, 20 December 1994; also see Giese 1997: 178).

learnt what had happened. The little boy thought the Queen [of England] had come to visit, so he ran home and told everyone to come out and greet her.<sup>486</sup>

Beverly is a non-Chinese woman, a rare sight in the Chinese village. Without spoken Chinese, she had trouble communicating with local villagers. At the same time, she observed the poor level of English in China, so, on their next visit, she bought CDs and textbooks for the teachers so that they could improve their English.<sup>487</sup> The rationale behind Beverly's thinking was that if teachers had a better grasp of English, so would their students. At least in the mind of the donor, the gifts would ultimately improve the quality of the students' learning.



**Figure 7.15** Children in Sha Chung village perusing Dr. MA Pui Han's photographic works (Source: Zhongshan South District Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, 2019.)

By the turn of the millennium, when China was no longer financially dependent on its diaspora for material goods, the traditional forms of diaspora educational philanthropy, such as donating material products to the school, had become unpopular and a new philanthropic landscape emerged. This involved the direct transfer of expertise and skills (Johnson 2007: 45). During fieldwork in China in 2018, I learned that a descendant of an original Chinese-Australian school benefactor has been bringing her skills back to the village. Despite being in her ninth decade, the granddaughter of MA Ying Piu, Dr. MA Pui Han (馬佩嫻, a Hong Kong-based gynaecologist) returns to her ancestral home every year. In her capacity as an award-winning photographer, Dr.

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<sup>486</sup> Interview with Beverly Leong (daughter-in-law of a school donor family), Sydney, 15 April 2017.

<sup>487</sup> Interview with Beverly Leong, 15 April 2017.

Ma has reproduced her photographs for the enjoyment of the children at Sha Chung Kindergarten (Figure 7.15). Like her Chinese-Australian migrant grandfather, who built the school (originally the Women and Children’s Centre) in his native village a century ago, in her own way, Dr. Ma continues to bring “the outside world” back to the village, in her case through her photography.

The above account implies that the ongoing and future contributions of the diaspora may be counted not simply as economic or material “remittances,” but include the immaterial, or “social remittances,” including in the form of ideas, meanings, and practices (Cingolani and Viett 2020: 1098–1099). This shift emerges at a time when China’s relationship with the diaspora has evolved, and as the lifestyles, preferences, behaviours, and experiences of the ongoing diaspora are nurturing educational development in China in new ways. Stuart Hall (1990: 235) considers that diasporas are “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference”. In the present case, the returning diaspora will most likely continue to contribute to the homeland by way of their linguistic skills, contacts, and expertise (Newland and Taylor 2010: 14) and, in the process, are likely to feel empowered by their ability to continually make a difference.

### *A Breath of New Life to Diaspora-Funded Schools*

Other notable diasporic engagements include the reconversion of a former diaspora-funded school into an educational facility, and the foundation of a new state school honouring the diasporic connection. Yeung Liu School in Ma Leng village, Zhongshan’s South District, provides a striking example of the former: the reconversion of factories to educational facilities. Founded in 1991, Yeung Liu School ceased operation as a primary school in 2003.<sup>488</sup> The premises remained vacant for several years before becoming a plastic flower workshop.<sup>489</sup> The school donor, William (“Billy”) Lee (李中屏), had heard of the change when he was in Sydney but was still in disbelief when he returned to his village in the 2010s. Even though his wife owned a factory in another part of Zhongshan, the idea of turning the school he founded into another one unsettled him

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<sup>488</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu (retired officer of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), Zhongshan, 8 August 2018; also see Zhongshan City South District Gazetteer Committee (2017: 323).

<sup>489</sup> Personal communication with Ms. LUM Muk-na (village representative of South District’s Ma Leng village), 25 October 2021.

immensely.<sup>490</sup> Speaking about the situation generally, a former liaison officer with the Zhongshan Overseas Affairs Office told me about the donor’s experience.

Not only were school donors generally not consulted before schools were converted [into factories], but what had bothered them more was that many former schools quickly deteriorated due to the industrial use of the building. Plus, because the buildings were initially free to the village, when they were leased, sometimes the rent was incredibly low. So, the village generally did not profit much from the conversion; and these issues angered some donors.<sup>491</sup>



**Figure 7.16** On the left, the foundation stone of Yeung Liu School in Ma Leng village, Zhongshan’s South District, established in February 1991, remains in situ. On the right, the Chinese inscription on the top of the school’s internal courtyard façade indicates that the primary school was built in memory of LEE Won Bo, Billy Lee’s father. Below are the Chinese characters—感恩 and Pinyin ‘gan en,’ which remind kindergarten students to be grateful. Note the bright colours considered culturally appropriate for children. (Photos by Ms. LUM Muk-na, circa 2016.)

On that trip, Billy approached the relevant authorities in Zhongshan and was consoled by people such as the Overseas Chinese Affairs liaison officer and local district representative, both of whom I interviewed for this project. In the end, the local district government agreed to convert the factory into a private kindergarten.<sup>492</sup> This occurred in 2014, about three or four years after the school first became a workshop. The reconversion provided a chance to enhance the building’s appearance by making it colourful and attractive to children (Figure 7.16). More importantly, it was another opportunity to honour both Billy’s father and Billy’s own long-standing commitment to education in Zhongshan, but this time Billy was no longer financially responsible as the local district

<sup>490</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu, 8 August 2018, and personal communication with Ms. LUM Muk-na, 25 October 2021 and 5 November 2021.

<sup>491</sup> Interview with Ms. CHEN Diqiu, 8 August 2018.

<sup>492</sup> Personal communication with Ms. LUM Muk-na, 5 November 2021.

government covered the costs.<sup>493</sup> This move was aligned with the school donor's initial purpose, which, in Billy's words, was to "improve China by providing equitable access to education."<sup>494</sup> While the kindergarten prolonged the educational ideal he had in mind, it drifted away from Billy's original plan in that attendance was no longer free, and therefore only benefited "rich families"—those with the means to send their children to a private facility.<sup>495</sup> Since the school's conversion into a kindergarten, Billy and his wife have been back to the village several times and the villagers who met them noted that they were in good spirits.<sup>496</sup>

Besides reconversions, in some cases in the first decade of the twenty-first century newly built state schools have honoured defunct diaspora-funded schools (also see Chapter 6). An example of this was the decision to give Lai Wor School—a historically significant diaspora-funded school in former Zhongshan—a new lease of life by building a new state school—Lihe School in present-day Zhuhai—in the same name. The school donor's personal name was CHOY Hing (蔡興) and his alias (號) was Lai Wor (禮和) in Cantonese, which was the name of the original (now old) school, or Lihe (礼和) in Mandarin, the name of the new school. Since the opening of Lihe School in 2017, and throughout the course of my research, the old Lai Wor school, which was founded in 1930, remained a rental property and was closed to the public. Without the new school, the name of the school donor would likely have faded into obscurity, since, as David Eagleman (2009: 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." However, through continuing the good name of the school's founder in the establishment of a new school (in its various permutations from Lai Wor to Lihe), CHOY Hing will likely be remembered well into the future. It should be noted that CHOY Hing wanted to be remembered in the first place. 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 in 1928 by adding an additional two storeys to the original four-storey plan to ensure the building would remain the tallest in town.<sup>497</sup> Besides being a visible landmark in the locality, the school's name was also the alias of the benefactor. Finally, by making the descendants of the original benefactor of the old school patrons of the new school, the

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<sup>493</sup> Personal communication with Ms. LUM Muk-na, 5 November 2021.

<sup>494</sup> Telephone interview with Billy Lee (Zhongshan-born Australian donor, now residing in Zhongshan), 82, 25 October 2021.

<sup>495</sup> Telephone interview with Billy Lee, 25 October 2021.

<sup>496</sup> Personal communication with Ms. LUM Muk-na, 5 November 2021.

<sup>497</sup> Personal communication with JIM Wah-hing (village chief of Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai), 70, 7 November 2021.

diaspora continues to be involved and valued alongside their ancestor's pioneering efforts. The establishment of Lihe School drew from Lai Wor's history to create new heritage.

During my visit to Lihe school in November 2018, Ms. Yao, the headmistress, outlined the future expansion plan of the primary school.<sup>498</sup> She noted that it would continually find ways to draw inspiration from the philosophy and legacies of its predecessor: the 1930 Lai Wor School. In fact, the approach resonated with a remark made by Ronald Choy (CHOY Hing's grandson):

I felt proud that the new school was built. I was very impressed with the setting, immaculate and the facilities, particularly the technology in the classrooms, were very advanced, and the kids are so cute and energetic. My grandfather's deeds and legacy have been respectfully honoured.<sup>499</sup>



**Figure 7.17** On the left, Lihe School headmistress Ms. Yao thanks Ronald Choy (a Hong Kong-born grandson of CHOY Hing, now living in Zhongshan) for returning to visit their school when Denis Byrne and Christopher Cheng (the researcher) visited in November 2018. (Source: Lihe School Collection, 29 November 2018.) On the right, Howard Wilson of Canberra (grandson-in-law of the school donor) was welcomed by students forming a guard-of-honour as he arrived at Lihe School on 18 January 2018 to participate in the school's inauguration ceremony. (Source: John Choy's online collection.)

As descendants returned over time, a philosophy of giving back is nurtured in the donor's family through ongoing investment in material and non-material forms (*cf.* Xing and Gan 2019). Descendants of the original founders who continue to uphold the legacy as patrons are often invited back to attend special functions (Figure 7.17). At the inauguration ceremony of Lihe School, for example, Ronald Choy dispensed valuable advice and blessings to the new students, encouraging them to take care of their health and to concentrate on their studies.<sup>500</sup> Here,

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<sup>498</sup> Interview with Ms. Yao (headmistress of Lihe School), Zhuhai, 29 November 2018.

<sup>499</sup> Interview with Ronald Choy (descendant of original school donor), 77, Zhongshan, 29 November 2018.

<sup>500</sup> Interview with Ronald Choy, Zhongshan, 29 November 2018.

descendants of the founders at the new school were regarded as equivalent to notable alumni who returned to their alma mater as role models (Marschall 2020: 313).

## **Conclusion: “The Legacy” of Diaspora-Funded Schools**

In recounting the legacy of diaspora-funded schools, this chapter demonstrates that some donor families and former pupils have fondly returned to revisit diaspora-funded schools with their children and grandchildren. This is because, over time, schools had become a memorial in the absence of an ancestral house in the village, as well as a socio-material reminder of changed lifestyles and values in the *qiaoxiang*. Therefore, diaspora-funded schools were a conduit for the diaspora to reclaim their shared Chinese-Australian identity (their roots) and to make sense of a changed and changing way of life (their routes) as they could not ordinarily do in Australia by researching family histories, archival records, or oral transmission.

At the same time, some school sites may become forgotten or silenced places of miserable childhood memories, or the return experience may yield dissonance in expectations. In the case of migrant donors, if we consider the diaspora-funded schools as initially being “gifts,” then it is understandable that reciprocal bonds were formed. According to the anthropologist Mauss (2016 [1925]), gifts create special bonds, whereby they become part of the receiver’s future. But a village administration may take a functional point of view instead of a symbolic perspective, thus overlooking the school’s value as a gift. Meanwhile, overseas donors and their modern-day descendants may have certain views on the upkeep of the schools, as they were a kind of lasting memorial site for their ancestors that was also envisioned as a long-term gift to the village community. However, as the village administration may treat the school merely as a resource to be exploited, it may become a site of contention, often propelling modern-day descendants away rather than returning with pride. The issue may be exacerbated by the fact that descendants of school donors may have only acquired second-hand memories of their migrating ancestors’ former lives, as migrant parents selectively or inadvertently transmit an incomplete version of the past onto their children (Cingolani and Vietti 2020: 1098; Kusumaningtyas and Cohen 2020: 157). In her book on communicating intergenerational identities, Leeds-Hurwitz (2006: 12), has suggested that “who we are in a large part depends on who our parents were and what elements of their identity they have chosen to pass onto us.”

Taking these ideas further, if the old schools turn potential returnees into self-exiles, it begins an almost irreversible path of abandonment that will undoubtedly reverberate across future generations, who may no longer have the choice but to accept a denied relationship with a past waiting to be forgotten. Disenfranchised alumni, such as mixed-race children, may similarly consider their old schools in Zhongshan a “difficult heritage” (Logan and Reeves 2008)—a silenced past that their offspring may never learn about. The implication of not transmitting knowledge from one generation onto the next is that future generations will eventually cease belonging to larger worlds (Leeds-Hurwitz 2006: 1, 3). The larger worlds in the context of this research encompass two discrete histories or cultures: that of the diaspora and that of China. As the late Chinese-Australian historian Kevin Wong Hoy (2005: 12) once wrote:

The Chinese in Australia have two main histories. One history that celebrates their journey becoming Chinese Australians, or just Australians. The other invites them to investigate an ancient culture, to study the nature of the Chinese diaspora as well as make connections to an ancestors’ clan name, villages, and districts.

Yet, the situation here may not be so clear-cut. Changing conditions both in the *qiaoxiang* and among the diaspora mean that the components in the socio-material assemblage of diaspora-funded schools are likely to be continually regrouped, and the new assemblage will be a catalyst for a future that awaits to unfold. This was the case of a descendant of David O’Young (歐陽民慶 1866–1932),<sup>501</sup> who has attempted to locate her ancestral locale for the past two decades.<sup>502</sup> It was through the China–Australia Heritage Corridor project website<sup>503</sup> that contact with our research team was established and our research on schools has contributed to this family’s reconnection with the school. Inevitably, the knowledge passed down over generations will be variable, much like the interests of the ongoing diaspora (Louie 2004; Maruyama and Stronza 2010). So, when conditions permit, such as when locations can be traced, and when resources are available to travel back to China (often accompanied, and with gifts), more curious children of the diaspora may trickle back to the *qiaoxiang* (cf. Khu 2001) and, when they do, the future will continue to be remade afresh. In this way, the legacy of diaspora-funded schools continues to evolve across the generations, with future returns adding to its rich history.

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<sup>501</sup> David O’Young became an early contributor to the modernisation of education in Zhongshan when he converted his home into a school in 1911 (Chapter 5).

<sup>502</sup> Email correspondence with Anita Lee (Hong Kong-based descendant), 2 September 2021.

<sup>503</sup> The China–Australia Heritage Corridor. 2019. <[www.heritagecorridor.org.au/](http://www.heritagecorridor.org.au/)>



# Conclusions

## Migrant History and Transnational Heritage

This project began with questions about how to recognise and protect the material record of a shared past, that emerged from the activities of people distributed across the boundaries of the nation-state. To investigate these questions, the study presents the case of diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan—the ancestral home of many Chinese-Australians—illustrating how the material culture of that region’s past (also known as heritage) is related to the Chinese migrant history and heritage of Australia. Despite the diaspora-funded schools in my study being located in China, I found that they were best thought of as transnational socio-material assemblages, emerging and crystallising after emigration from China to Australia emerged on a significant scale in the mid-nineteenth century. By examining the history of these schools across the twentieth century, I show how Chinese overseas migration has produced a rich material past whose significance has value for both China and Australia, and which expands the transnational heritage record of both countries.

### **Australian History Lost in China: Found in Translation and Fieldwork**

Since the early twentieth century, the Chinese-Australian diaspora have been building new schools in their ancestral homes in the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong Province in China (Kuo 2013: 158). Another aspect of diasporic involvement in the educational realm of their homeland was that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, children, often of mixed descent born in Australia, were brought back to China for education (Yong 1977: 213; May 1984: 84; Liu 1989: 191; Bagnall 2018a: 92–93). After their education, these children, and those born into Chinese-Australian migrant families in China (often living off remittances from Australia), were later expected to join their forebears (fathers and uncles) in pursuit of an entrepreneurial career in Australia (Su 2011: 4–5; Robb 2019: 192). Yet how these children of the Australian diaspora fared

in China, and what their school lives were like are questions that have been shrouded in mystery. In some cases, their unknown fate has been an agonising source of pain for their non-Chinese mothers and other immediate family members in Australia (Bagnall 2018b). Another knowledge gap that I have addressed concerns the question of what happened during a three-decade hiatus lasting from the founding of the Communist-led People's Republic of China in 1949 until the beginning of the reform era in 1978, when Chinese-Australian migrants and their descendants were generally unable to return to China to support the schools they had earlier initiated.

To address these and other knowledge gaps, this study adopted a transnational approach, incorporating field research (observation and photographic documentation) of the relevant material record in Zhongshan, including the school buildings and related artefacts. The approach also drew on English and Chinese textual material found in libraries and archives in Australia, Hong Kong, and China, and on oral histories I recorded, primarily in Cantonese, but sometimes also in English and Mandarin, from people associated with diaspora-funded schools at both ends of the migrant corridor.

The Pearl River Delta was where most Chinese migrants to Australia since the nineteenth century originated and where, throughout the twentieth century, many returned or sent money back to fund new schools, as shown throughout this thesis. Despite growing academic interest over the past two decades in the study of the *qiaoxiang* (remittance-built localities) of southern China (Hsu 2000a; Zheng 2003; Yow 2013; Williams 2018), there is little information and few maps available to aid Chinese-Australian migrant descendants visiting there for the first time. Nonetheless, the ability to learn more about their origin place has been important to many Chinese-Australian migrant descendants (*cf.* Khu 2001). Even for some of those born in China, such as Stanley Hunt (1927–2019), a one-and-a-half-generation Chinese-Australian, the desire to know more about the ancestral village can be strong. In his memoir *From Shekki to Sydney*, Hunt wrote: “Before that trip [in 1979], Ma-shan had been just a place-name in my mind. I had only been there three or four times as a child with Mum during the Qingming Festival to pay respects to our ancestors” (Hunt 2009: 183).

In my study, I have striven to follow the advice of the influential Chinese-Australian historian Henry Chan (2001), who advocated the nurturing of an ethnographic eye and a Sinologically tuned ear to study the history of Chinese migration. The dual emphasis is pertinent to my study because fieldwork in China generally remains limited among scholars of Chinese-Australian history

(exceptions include Bagnall 2013; Williams 2018; Byrne 2021) and because, due to limited facility with Chinese language, Chinese voices have fallen on deaf ears in Australia, even at institutions of Chinese-Australian history (Couchman 2021). In an article published in 2021, Sophie Couchman, the former curator of the Chinese Museum in Melbourne, reflected that conducting oral histories in Chinese has been plagued with several technical challenges, including the fact that native Chinese speakers may not have a good enough grasp of historical context, or a lack of capacity to understand the diverse dialects spoken by Chinese emigrants, making interpreting, transcribing and translating into English an insurmountable exercise (Couchman 2021: 87). As a result, very few oral histories have been recorded in Chinese in Australia.

In recounting her fieldwork in Xinhui (Sun Wui) County of Guangdong Province, historian Kate Bagnall (2013) recounted that the villagers she met were as excited to hear about their kinsfolk's lives in rural Victoria, Australia, as Bagnall was to learn about their families' lives in the ancestral home in China. This bi-directional curiosity points to the immense value of doing transnational field research in both Australia and China. The migrant destinations and places of origin offer complementary perspectives necessary to reconstruct a fuller account of the migrants' lives (Zheng 2003: 34; Yu 2018: 201; Lozanovska 2019: 5); it is what Vertovec (2009: 69) describes as a dual orientation to "cope with the range of cultural differences." Given the complications of navigating the Sinolinguistic landscape, along with the time and resources needed in working with oral history, my research can be considered a significant advance in Chinese-Australian history, in that it is based on in situ observations and documentation derived from fieldwork in China and on otherwise hard-to-get personal insights gained from a series of interviews conducted in Chinese in both China and Australia.

As an interdisciplinary study, this project draws on fields as diverse as architecture, anthropology, archaeology, and cultural studies. In the end, the project revolves around an innovative method that allows for an alternative narrative of diaspora-funded schools to surface. The understanding that diaspora-funded schools were socio-material assemblages (Chapter 2) is a novel element of the approach I have taken and is crucial to understanding how new diaspora-funded schools were physically assembled (Chapter 4) and how, over time, many of them fell into disuse and were repurposed (Chapter 6). But the social dimension of the schools has been inseparable from their material dimension, and the interaction of the two influenced, for instance, the memories of individual students, school donors, and their families (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

My study of the legacy of diaspora-funded schools provides a chronology of how schools in the *qiaoxiang* have been desired (Chapter 4), experienced (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), and remembered by the diaspora (Chapter 7). In the *qiaoxiang* region itself, diaspora-funded schools built in the early or late twentieth century were often associated with the prospect of and desire for a modern lifestyle beyond farming (Chapter 5). As each village-lineage aspired to out-perform its neighbour, people in the native places in China exerted pressure on their diaspora to improve their facilities (Chapter 4). Yet, during the Maoist era, the situation of diaspora-funded schools often became a source of despair, resignation, or helplessness for those who had an attachment to them, such as their alumni (Chapter 6) and their donors (Chapter 7). Some school donors in the diaspora, for various reasons, thus preferred to “forget” about their existence, although, subsequently, their curious descendants often wanted to reclaim their “lost” heritage.

## **Diasporic Heritage: A Future Category of Transnational Heritage in Australia?**

In the past decade, transnational heritage has emerged as a new subject of interest in Australia. Since 2007, overseas places of significance have been gazetted (Clarke 2017), which include sites relating to warfare, sports, and scientific achievement. Many of these can be interpreted as sites of competition and confrontation, rather than demonstrating mutual understanding and co-operation between Australia and the countries where these sites are located (Logan 2007; Beaumont 2016; Waterton and Dittmer 2016).

My own study takes a rather different approach to transnational heritage: that is, by examining diaspora-funded schools in China as a category of Australian diasporic heritage. Chinese-Australians are Australia’s most numerically significant non-European and non-Indigenous minority group, and my study, along with the larger project to which it contributes—the China–Australia Heritage Corridor project (Byrne 2016a, 2016b, 2021)—helps to reveal how the ongoing connectivity between Australia and China, stemming from Chinese migration, has produced its own transnational heritage record. This heritage of connectivity was recognised by Ronald Choy, a descendant of an early twentieth century Chinese-Australian school donor, whom I met in China. During our meeting with the school principal at the new Lihe School in Zhuhai in 2018, Ronald commented: “My grandfather [CHOY Hing] went to Sydney to make a living and returned to build department stores, and a [village] school. Now you are coming from Australia, doing research in

China. I see the value of your work.”<sup>504</sup> Byrne (2016b: 2361) postulated that diasporic heritage can be seen as comprising material assemblages that are transnationally orientated. Twentieth century diaspora-funded schools were dependent on Chinese migrants in Australia, toiling in market gardens, attending Christian churches, operating grocery stores and Chinese restaurants, all of which in one way or another influenced or helped generate funds for the construction of new schools in the *qiaoxiang* (Chapter 4). They were activities that may be said to have been partly oriented towards China just as, in some ways, preparing pupils for life as migrants, the schools were oriented towards Australia and other migrant-receiving countries (Chapter 5). This kind of mutuality was productive of a heritage record distributed across national borders.

In China, since the reforms beginning in 1978, the heritage of “overseas Chinese” has often been promoted in the name of tourism (Chiang 2021). The UNESCO World Heritage listing of diaspora-built *diaolou* (watchtowers) in Kaiping County, west of Zhongshan, occurred in 2007 (Guo 2012), and these sites have been a major drawcard for tourism. Members of the diaspora visiting China to explore their family history partake in what is referred to as “roots tourism,” often in the context of organised group tours participated in by descendants who are willing to pay for the experience (*cf.* Alexander, Bryce and Murdy 2017: 553). As one root-seeker noted, “To actually have been there—well you cannot put a price on a moment like that. But you would [have to] pay someone to help you get there” (Compart 1999: 3). Expectations are often high among migrant descendants visiting ancestral places, but disappointments are frequent, since the extent of an ancestor’s deeds, such as their contribution to the village school, cannot be grasped without first identifying the ancestral locale (see Chapter 7). Since 2006, Sydney resident Douglas Lam, now in his seventies, has been assisting descendants of Cantonese families across the Pacific Rim with their search for their roots in China.<sup>505</sup> Also, since 2017, Australian historians Kate Bagnall and Sophie Couchman have been running homeland heritage tours for modern-day descendants of Chinese Australians (Couchman and Bagnall 2019).

The heritage of Chinese Australians that is situated in China, such as the diaspora-funded schools, may seem significant only to Australians of Chinese ancestry. Yet the outcomes of research such as my own have the potential to inform and foster greater connections and understanding between

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<sup>504</sup> Interview with Ronald Choy (grandson of Zhongshan-born Australian-school donor), 77, Zhongshan, 29 November 2018.

<sup>505</sup> Correspondence with Douglas Lam, 21 December 2020; also see The China–Australia Heritage Corridor. 2019. “Douglas Lam.” <[www.heritagecorridor.org.au/people/douglas-lam](http://www.heritagecorridor.org.au/people/douglas-lam)> (accessed 19 November 2020).

people in Australia and China more broadly and might even be politically significant to China–Australia relations. According to Darian-Smith and Hamilton (2019: 6), when memories move from the private into the public domain, they may either reinforce or challenge popular narratives and experiences. These memories, however, may not always be positive. A discontinued school being converted into a factory, for instance, shows how an otherwise satisfying relationship that a descendant anticipated having with the homeland may instantly dissipate when expectations are disappointed upon return visits. As shown in this study, as memories move from individual families into the public sphere of the village, for example when Chinese–Australians such as Stanley Hunt, Stanley Yee and Robert Yuen returned to China to establish a diaspora-funded school in memory of a forebear, they create new meanings and opportunities for descendants of migrant families to reconnect with and reflect on the past. The material heritage of transnational migration, if well maintained, can similarly be beneficial in creating better understanding between generations, cultures, and even countries. And unlike the “Australian” overseas heritage places mentioned at the beginning of this section, many of which originate in histories of competition and confrontation between countries, the heritage sites of the Chinese diaspora—such as Australian diaspora-funded schools in China—were products of mutual connection between people at either end of the China–Australia migration corridor. Reminding the public of the long history of connectivity between Chinese Australians and their relatives and village communities in China might, to some extent, benefit China–Australia relations at a time when they are in their worst state since the two countries restored diplomatic relations in 1972 (Fang and Walsh 2020).

It should be noted that some of the pre-Communist era, that is before 1949, schools funded by Australian Chinese that I have studied in this thesis have already been inscribed as historic buildings and immovable cultural relics of Zhongshan city, Guangdong.<sup>506</sup> Once designated, if these structures are tampered with, the perpetrator would be penalised by the Chinese government.<sup>507</sup> If the ownership of these buildings has been entrusted to the Zhongshan Municipal Government, maintenance can be carried out when funds are available. However, since these same schools are of significance to Australia’s history and heritage of migration, there would be value in adopting a “shared heritage” approach to them.

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<sup>506</sup> A comprehensive study was conducted in Zhongshan city in 2007, an inventory created in 2009 and published in 2012. There are a total of 558 sites identified, which include bridges and ancestral graves and traditional buildings, such as temples, ancestral halls, imperial era study halls (Zhongshan Culture, Broadcasting, Press and Publication Bureau 2012).

<sup>507</sup> Interview with HU Songke (Zhongshan Culture, Broadcasting, Press and Publication Bureau), Shekki, 12 December 2017.

Australia already has a category of overseas sites of historic significance (announced by the government in 2007). At present these include sites like military battlefields of the two World Wars but does not include overseas sites significant to Australia's history of migration.

As a way forward, new transnational heritage partnerships should be forged to formalise the conservation (or commemoration) strategy for the protection of the shared heritage of China and Australia. Such partnerships could involve detailed plans for long-term joint management by a body of stakeholders from both countries who meet regularly. For diaspora-funded schools, stakeholders might include the school administration, village representatives, and members of the diaspora, such as donors, alumni, and their descendants, who are all people who have a stake in the school's heritage and its future. And to ensure that this shared heritage is managed collaboratively by a broad range of people with suitable experience and interests, there might be a need to implement a programme of commissioned specialists with a reputable level of competence and experience (Willems 2014). As well as locating the right Chinese-based experts, preferably bilingual Australian heritage architects and historians could also be consulted for recommendations. Not only because diaspora-funded schools are a transnational legacy co-created by Chinese-Australians (or people who now simply identify themselves as "Australians"), but also because Australia is a forerunner in the international heritage management scene (Aplin 2002; Amar, Armitage and O'Hare 2017), whose experts would be well positioned to collaborate with the Chinese counterparts. Australia prides itself on its inclusive approach to stakeholder consultancy in heritage management. Understandably, however, heritage management in China is a different "playing field" (Du Cros and Lee 2007; Su 2015). To participate and even to contemplate the possibilities of co-operation would require Australian participants respecting China's heritage rules, as opposed to them learning *our* (Western heritage) rules, recognising that although the heritage schools are of transnational significance they are located on Chinese soil. It would also involve Australian participants skillfully managing relationships that result from a predominantly "top – down" form of heritage governance (Chan and Cheng 2016; Xiao, Liu and Cheng 2017). Once some common ground is found, certificates might be issued to the stakeholders involved, helping to cement and publicly acknowledge the prospect of long-term transnational co-operation.

In addition to bringing the right people together, my thesis will hopefully serve as a reference source to help better manage the heritage schools into the future. Understandably, limited information is available in Australia on the schools, but surprisingly, the Chinese heritage records

also lack qualitative depth on the schools. For example, in the *Catalogue of Immovable Heritage of Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province* school buildings in Zhongshan (such as, Cho Bin School, Chuk Sau Yuen School, Sha Chung School, Sha Chung Girls Dormitory, and Heng Mei School) mainly contain facts on their architectural properties. These include building dimensions, number of floors, construction materials, building technology and architectural style. There are vague statements that “the building was a testimony to the modernisation of education,” but the records do not elaborate on what this meant (Zhongshan Culture, Broadcasting, Press and Publication Bureau 2012). My thesis addresses this deficiency, as it reconstructs the narrative of how modernisation took root in rural Zhongshan from the perspective of those who participated both from China and Australia. In so doing, it produces a social history that sheds light on the transnational context of how these schools came into being in the first place, and why, on top of their architectural value, they matter at a social level. How, for example, these schools were and are socially significant to past students, donors, and their families. Thus, to ensure that the legacy of transnational migrant heritage is safeguarded both the architectural value and social history of the schools need to be recognised. Dissemination of this knowledge through various publications, including major Chinese and Australian media outlets will help enhance cross-cultural understanding and public awareness of the long-standing diasporic ties and ongoing bilateral co-operation between China and Australia.

On another level, bringing Chinese diasporic heritage to light is something that is pertinent to all migrants in Australia. It has the potential to broaden the understanding by immigrant and immigrant-descendant communities of diasporic histories outside their own. For example, when a fellow PhD student, who identified herself as a “Kazzie,” first heard about this research project, she immediately envisioned the possibility of doing something similar in her own ancestral homeland in the Greek Islands of Kastellorizo—a homeplace of the “Kazzies” in Australia (Murphy 1993: 152; Alexakis 1995). Identifying and researching transnational heritage may enable Australia to better embrace its diverse, multicultural past.<sup>508</sup> After all, Australia—as a country of settlement for immigrants—boasts a very high proportion of foreign-born citizens. According to Frost et al. (2009: 107), Australia’s foreign-born population is the third highest in the world. Documenting the historical ties between migrant homelands and destinations can show how, even as a standalone island nation, Australia is still situated within the space of numerous “migrant

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<sup>508</sup> Other relevant ethnic migrant communities in Australia outside the Chinese diaspora include the Greek, Italian, Vietnamese, Irish, Welsh, and Scottish communities, to name a few.



heritage corridors”. This is comparable to the way that, in South-East Asia, Singapore has been noted for this character (Liu and Zhang 2020). In this regard, the “heritage corridor” and the socio-material assemblage framework developed in this thesis provide a model for future studies in diasporic heritage. Clearly there is also ample scope for further developing the category of transnational heritage to include that which is diasporic in nature.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. These include the accessibility and verifiability of my field data, and the uniqueness and representativeness of “Australian” migrant heritage in China. Each limitation, however, presents possible opportunities for future research.

The first of my project’s limitations concerns a practical issue: the accessibility of sources. During the entire research period, the main Zhongshan city library was closed. After an eight-year-long hiatus, the library apparently reopened in December 2019, just when what would become known as COVID-19 began to spread in China and international travel was no longer possible. Historians who had previously benefited from its collection, such as Ms. CHEN Diqui of Zhongshan and Michael Williams from Australia, have both commented on my misfortune.<sup>509</sup> The consequent inaccessibility of the collection of overseas Chinese magazines (*qiaokan*) and old newspapers held at the library has impinged on their own research as well. Follow-up research, once access to the library’s collection is possible, will undoubtedly refine my present findings.

In addition, I am sure it would have been illuminating to have been able to record more first-person recollections of mixed-descent children (those children of Chinese migrant men and Anglo-Australian women) who experienced being “sent back” to China for education. But, due to a shortening of my fieldwork period due to the political situation in Hong Kong in 2019, and the global COVID-19 pandemic since 2020, I was only able to meet and interview those school children (now village elders) born in China not of mixed-race descent and who had benefited from modern education provided by new diaspora-funded schools. In the future, after contacts are made, further research can be done on children of mixed-heritage in China—some of whom may

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<sup>509</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Michael Williams (Australian historian), 13 December 2018, and phone interview with Ms. CHEN Diqui (Zhongshan historian), 22 November 2020.

have returned to Australia—to dispel the many misunderstandings about their time in China (Bagnall 2018b; Williams 2018: 176–177).

The third limitation concerns verifiability. Those research participants capable of reading English were shown drafts of my writing to check the accuracy of its contents. Yet, I have been unable to fully present my work to my Chinese participants, whose perspectives inform the bulk of this study. This is mainly due to my inability to carry out a final stint of fieldwork in China, where I could more easily present my findings orally to my participants, but it was also due to the time required to provide them with accurate translations into Chinese of my research findings, written in English. As a compromise, when possible, I have double checked information that was unclear or contradictory. I have also provided an abstract of this thesis in Chinese to potential Chinese readers. In the future, this study will benefit from a full translation. Doing so will not only enable my research participants, many of whom only read Chinese, to verify and refine my findings, but will ultimately make the research more accessible to readers in China and Australia, especially those whose primary language is Chinese. Hopefully, I will be able to complete the translation before too long, as, within the span of this research project (2017–2021), some research participants have already passed away.

Finally, follow-up research could be conducted to determine the “Australianness” of a more extensive array of diasporic heritage in China. Since this study is focused on Zhongshan, a single “strand” of the China–Australia Heritage Corridor, there remains scope for comparative research on other origin regions of Chinese Australians. Future studies on other Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang* (besides Zhongshan), and other Cantonese–Pacific destinations (besides Australia) can help better define the particular characteristics of the heritage of the China–Australia Heritage Corridor.

Possible research on other “Australian” *qiaoxiang* in the Pearl River Delta might include, for example, Ko Yiu (高要 often misspelt as Ko You), 135km away from Zhongshan, in western Guangdong, a less-studied origin place of many Chinese Australians who are based in Sydney.<sup>511</sup> This native place is associated with the oldest surviving “traditional” village-style Chinese temple in Sydney, situated in Alexandria and built around 1908 (Stephen 1997; Penny 2008). A comparative migrant destination in the Cantonese Pacific for follow-up research is Hawaii. This

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<sup>511</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Michael Williams (Australian historian), 3 August 2017.

migrant destination has a long-standing relationship with Zhongshan, boasting one of the highest concentrations of expatriate Zhongshan people outside the native home (Williams 2018: 37, 39). It has been the subject of a long tradition of historical research, centred around the Hawaii Chinese History Center in Honolulu. Future research on educational philanthropy on the part of the diaspora there might help define the particularity of such philanthropy on the part of Chinese Australians, and of the material heritage of this philanthropy.

Any follow-up research that I conduct will certainly be based on more oral histories, such as those recorded in the present study, with knowledgeable but elderly participants who are descendants of Chinese-Australian migrants. Potential research participants would include people such as MA Yin-chiu (now in his 80s) and Mrs. Felicia Seeto (in her 70s), who grew up in Zhongshan (in the villages of Sha Chung and Cho Bin respectively) and have ongoing kinship and lineage ties to Australia due to their predecessors' migration history spanning more than a century. They would both readily recount stories passed on to them through their families. When domestic and international travel and face-to-face interviews become possible, there is enormous benefit to be had from carrying out extra research in both Australia and China, drawing on the memories of knowledgeable informants of advanced age who have inhabited the space of the migrant corridor. And, given the age of these potential research participants, there is also a degree of urgency to do so before the opportunity passes.

## **An Overview of the Thesis Arguments and Key Contributions**

The purpose of the study is to recognise that overseas migrant heritage is also part of Australia's heritage. By doing so, it amplifies the fact that Australian heritage is not limited by the territorial borders of the nation-state, despite the country's best known heritage sites being situated inside those borders (e.g., Great Barrier Reef, Uluru, Sydney Opera House, Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne). Awareness is only the first step towards protecting the physical record of our shared past, but achieving a transnational heritage approach is fraught with problems. Many places abroad, such as diaspora-funded schools in China, are significant to Australia, but they are unknown to the majority of the Australian public. As this thesis shows, significant places in the history of Australian migration in southern China can be identified by working with the Zhongshan immigrant community in Australia, especially those who speak the community language and have retained familial links to the ancestral homeland. In addition to those better-known overseas places of

Australian heritage (e.g., Anzac Cove, Kokoda Track, Howard Florey's Laboratory), Chinese-Australian diaspora-funded schools are unquestionably a significant material heritage from Australia's past. Taken together, multicultural heritage found in Australia and abroad is a testament to the nation's long-standing transnational connections, demonstrating that the nation's migrant history and heritage are, in fact, significant nodes of intergenerational memory and, thus, are an inseparable part of the country's history. They connect many Australians to their ancestral roots and migration routes to Australia.

My transnational heritage study has shown that one of the novelties of working with a community stretched across the space between Australia and China is the way it has challenged limited perspectives of personal and family history research produced in Australia, the architectural history research in carried out China, and historical research on overseas Chinese in general. My transnational, interdisciplinary and multi-method study transcends traditional research approaches. Rather than relying solely on textual sources, many native language (namely Cantonese) oral history interviews were recorded in Australia and complemented further with a wider range of interview participants in China. In terms of analysis, my study goes beyond the conventional documentation of "objective facts" (size of diaspora-funded schools, their cost, type of materials and construction technique) found in Chinese publications (e.g., Zhongshan Culture, Broadcasting, Press and Publication Bureau 2012; Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs 2013). Instead, it focuses on the more difficult-to-obtain "expressive documents" that tell the actual subjective experiences of those involved with the schools (Wang 2007; Maudlin and Vellinga 2014).

The results of this study confirm that, as with Chinese migration to elsewhere in "Gum San", the Cantonese goldrush destination in the Pacific or "Nanyang", the Chinese term for South-East Asia (see e.g., Yu 1983; Cook 2000; Wang 2007; Jiang, Jiang and Cai 2012), Chinese migration to Australia, generally transformed the southern China homeland of emigrants from a backwater region into a transnationally networked region with facilities such as modern, state-of-the-art schools. Yet, divergent from the conventional architectural or historical perspective of existent scholarship, I have introduced the novel concept of a socio-material assemblage to study diaspora-funded schools (Chapter 2). By studying the material heritage of the diaspora from an alternative angle, I show how diaspora-funded schools, as a unique transnational socio-material assemblage, were assembled (Chapter 4), and how over time they also fell apart (Chapter 6). From this, not only do we learn about how much it took to establish and then maintain the schools, including material and financial resources as well as physical and emotional labour are invested in keeping

the schools “alive” (Hodder 2012; Myers 2001: 3; Smith 2020), but also why these schools mattered in the way they did, to their donors (Chapter 4), alumni (Chapter 6), school and village administrators (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7), and the diaspora (Chapter 7). This was an insight that could not be easily gleaned from studying diaspora-funded schools from textual records or architectural analysis. The inclusive and longitudinal (*longue durée*) approach of my study highlights both the enormity of the initial effort behind transnational diaspora philanthropy but also the challenges that the preservation of the heritage schools ultimately poses for future generations.

Another major finding of this study was that each permutation of the socio-material transformation of the schools had a gamut of meanings and emotional affects (Appadurai 1986; Müller 2015: 36). Throughout the twentieth century, the novelty of new modern schools in Zhongshan initially made these landmark sites the pride of both the villagers and the diasporic community (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Later, when many Zhongshan donor families settled in Australia, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century, the schools took on for them the aspect of “living museums,” allowing the returning families of donors and alumni to observe the socio-material transformation of their native home (Chapter 7). These findings suggest how the overlooked social dimension of material heritage (Byrne 2008; Jones 2017) can be productively embedded in the writing of a richer narrative of Chinese-Australian history.

Finally, given the economic prosperity and pace of development in contemporary China, with new infrastructure expanding rapidly, the old schools I have studied become vulnerable to redevelopment. Although I appreciate that economic growth is raising living standards across the country, a downside is that the built environment of the present-day school campuses in the *qiaoxiang* may in the future bear little resemblance to that of the past, as, for example, old diaspora-funded school buildings give way to new and, in many ways, better facilities. Someday, this thesis might constitute one of the few records of twentieth-century Australian diaspora-funded schools in the Pearl River Delta. Each chapter of the thesis addresses a distinct dimension of the diaspora-funded schools. Some bear upon the questions posed by my curious research participants (Australian descendants of school donors), for instance, one participant asked how the Chinese in Australia contributed funds to a new school in China (Chapter 4), and another asked what happened to the school once funds stopped coming from overseas (Chapter 6). Clearly Australian descendants of migrants of Zhongshan ancestry wanted answers as much as I myself (a descendant of a former student) did. In this sense, I would like to think of my study as a valuable gift to future children of the diaspora, when they desire to discover and reconnect with a largely untold past.

For such children, the past may, quite literally, be “a foreign country,” (Lowenthal 1985). For the immediate future, now that an aspect of our shared heritage has been identified and described in Zhongshan and many schools are still intact, Australia and China should seek common ground and formalise a joint conservation or commemoration plan, so that the shared past of Chinese-Australian migration can be better managed and understood.

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## Glossary

**Adaptive re-use** A strategy that extends the life of abandoned buildings by adapting them to new purposes.

**Ancestral hall** (祠堂) A lineage shrine or temple dedicated to ancestors, used for worship, festivals, and celebrations.

**Art Deco** A functional and decorative architectural style with geometric motifs, curvy style and bold colours, which appeared in Europe between the 1920s and 1940s and spread internationally.

**Balustrade** A railing at the edge of balconies and stairs.

**Bauhaus architecture** A minimalist and functionalist style related to architecture and industrial design that appeared in 1919 in Germany. It is the most influential school that paved the way for modern Western architecture.

**Beaux-Arts architecture** A heavily ornamented neoclassical style that appeared first in Europe from the 1830s to the late 1800s.

**Cantonese-Pacific** A geosocial network emerging from emigration from Guangdong Province to the European-settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States between the 1850s to the 1950s.

**Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test** (CEDT) A document issued from 1901 until 1958 as part of the administration of the White Australia Policy (below), allowing pre-1901 foreign residents in Australia who were denied citizenship to obtain re-entry (previously known as **Certificates of Domicile**.)

**Ching Ming** also spelt **Qingming** (清明). A festival sometimes known as Ancestors Day when families visit their ancestors' graves to make offerings.

**Chung Shan** (中山) [Literally middle mountain]. The Cantonese spelling for Zhongshan.

**Confucian classics** Ancient texts, including those relating to history and philosophy that were mandatory study texts for students aspiring to government posts to learn. They embodied the common culture of the educated elite in imperial China.

**COVID-19** An infectious virus that emerged in December 2019 and caused millions of deaths worldwide.

**Cultural Revolution** (文化大革命) A decade-long upheaval from 1966 to 1976 initiated by Mao Zedong, aimed at eradicating old ideas, habits, customs, and cultures of China, and consolidating the Communist Revolution of 1949.

**Cupola** A small dome-like structure on the roof of a building.

**diaolou** (碉樓) A multistorey fortified village house found in the Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang* (below) built with reinforced concrete during the second half of the nineteenth century.

**Dictation Test** A primary means of implementing Australia's Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (see **White Australia policy**), which restricted non-Europeans from entering the new "White" Australian nation.

**Façade** The front of the building, usually facing the street or an open space. It is considered the most important aspect that determines the tone and style of the architectural design.

**fengshui** (風水) [literally wind and water]. A belief system and practice in China that, among other things, posits the flow of vital energy to determine favourable orientation of buildings and tombs.

**Ferro-concrete** See **reinforced concrete** (below).

**Flat roof** A horizontal roof (slope less than 10°) providing additional usable living space.

**Floating population** (流動人口) The phenomenon of temporary large-scale rural-to-urban migration that occurred after the de-collectivisation of the communes in China in the 1980s.

**Gold Mountain Firm** (金山莊) A migrant-related trading and remittance business associated with Cantonese-Pacific migration (see above) operating since the second half of the nineteenth century.

**Grey brick** (青磚) Also known as **Chinese grey brick** or **blue brick**. A key construction material in traditional Chinese architecture that has a distinctive bluish grey hue.

**Gum San** (金山) [literally **Gold Mountain**]. A Cantonese expression referring to the major nineteenth-century gold rush destinations in the Pacific, namely the United States, Australia, and Canada.

**Heung San County** Also spelt **Xiangshan** (香山縣) [literally fragrant mountain]. The pre-1925 name of Zhongshan County, which had a wider geographic scope, including the jurisdictions of modern-day Macao, Zhuhai and Zhongshan.

**huaqiao** (華僑) Also spelt **wah-kiu**. A Sinocentric term for an overseas Chinese who maintains Chinese culture abroad and has connections with China, for example by visiting and contributing to the maintenance of their ancestral home (see **qiaoxiang**).

**Indo-Pacific Region** A geopolitical area which includes the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

**International Style** An architectural style that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s defined by modernist form and aesthetics as well as the availability of new construction materials, such as steel, glass, and **reinforced concrete**.

**Land Reform** (土改) This involved the confiscation of land from landlords and the redistribution of land to poor peasants in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in line with the political platform of the Chinese Communist Revolution.

**Liang Du** (良都) See **South District** (below).

**Long Du** Also spelt **Lung Doo** (隆都). A **qiaoxiang** region of present-day Zhongshan county including the towns of Shaxi (沙溪鎮) and Dachong or Tai Chung (大涌鎮), defined by a joint ancestral tongue originating from southern Fujian.

**Longue durée** A term for an approach to historical writing that prioritises long-term patterns, especially associated with the Annales school of history in France.

**Maoist era** The period from the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the death of Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong in 1976.

**minban school** (民辦學校) A term for a community-managed school, often with insufficient funds and poorly trained staff. It was common throughout China in the Maoist period and continued to thrive after the **Reform period** (below), catering to the children of the **floating population** (above).

**Modern architecture** A philosophy of building inspired by the idea that form should follow function.

**Nanyang** (南洋) [literally south seas]. A term for the southern coastal regions of China and beyond, including South-East Asia.

**Neoclassical architecture** A building style based upon the design principles of ancient Greeks and Romans, following certain scale, proportions, and classical order that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century and was adopted globally, particularly in the European colonies.

**New Year** Also known as **Chinese New Year** or **Lunar New Year**. This is the most important festival of the whole year, marked by special ceremonies, and is the time when all Chinese families return to their native places if possible.

**Parapet** A low wall on the edge of a flat roof designed to prevent humans from falling off the roof of the building and to hide the roof from view from below.

**Pediment** A triangular upper part of the **façade** (above) of a classical or **neoclassical** building.

**Pitched Roof** A sloping roof, generally with an angle more than 20°.

**Plan** A horizontal graphical representation of a building, showing the layout of the spaces.

**Portico** A covered entranceway to a building, often supported by a row of columns.



**Priority school** (重點學校) A selective state-funded school that became popular in China after the 1980s and that has better than average learning and teaching conditions.

**qiaokan** (僑刊) A term for a magazine published in a **qiaoxiang** (below) and distributed to the overseas Chinese diaspora.

**qiaopi** (僑批) A term for remittance-bearing letters sent by overseas Chinese to family members in China.

**qiaoxiang** (僑鄉) A native place of overseas Chinese, typically in Fujian and Guangdong provinces, that has undergone cultural and physical change through international migration and remittances.

**Qing Dynasty** (清朝) The period of Manchu rule over China from 1644 to 1911.

**Qingming** (清明) See **Ching Ming** (above).

**Reform period** (改革开放) The period from 1978 to the 1990s, marked by the opening up of the Chinese economy and the introduction of the free market system after the death of Mao in 1976.

**Reinforced concrete** (鋼筋混凝土) A durable construction technology in which concrete is reinforced with embedded steel metal rods or bars (also known as **Ferro-concrete**).

**Republican period** (民國時期) The period from the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 to the defeat of the Kuomintang (Nationalist) government in 1949.

**Roots tourism** (尋根之旅) Also known as **genealogical tourism**. The practice whereby migrant descendants travel to the origin place of their migrant ancestors to enhance their knowledge of and connection to the “homeland.”

**Sent-down youth** (知青) Urban, educated young people in China who were subject to massive involuntary relocation to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.

**sishu** (私塾) A traditional family-orientated school dedicated to the teaching of the **Confucian classics** (above) as its core curriculum.

**South District** (南區) A *qiaoxiang* in Zhongshan known to some emigrants as **Wan Shing** (Cantonese) or **Huancheng** (Mandarin) (環城), its former name from 1959 to 1998, and by historians as **Liang Du** (良都), the name by which the district has been known since the Ming dynasty.

**Taiping Rebellion** (太平起義) A massive rebellion against the Qing Dynasty that was based on a popular religious cult and that lasted from 1850 to 1864. It started in Guangdong Province and spread through the southern half of China.

**Traditional Chinese Architecture** Buildings in China built typically of wood, stone, and brick, with gabled, tiled roofs and often including courtyards, usually oriented to face south.

**Veranda** (陽台) A covered open space in front of or around the periphery of a building, particularly a house.

*wah-kiu* (華僑) The Cantonese spelling for *huaqiao* (above).

**White Australia policy** (白澳政策) A racist policy adopted in Australia that lasted from 1901 until it was formally abolished in 1972, which prohibited people of non-European ethnic origins from immigrating to Australia. It was designed to preserve the “White” character of the nation based on European migration.



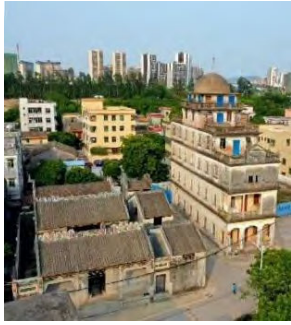






## Appendices

Appendix A: Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Photographic Catalogue

Key	Image of school
	<b>Year built</b>
	校名及地點 <b>School name</b> Location
	Figure No. <span style="float: right;"><i>current condition</i></span>

unavailable  <b>1911</b>  中山市火炬開發區大嶺小學 <b>Dai Leng Primary School</b> Torch Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, Zhongshan	  <b>1915</b>  中山市石岐世光女子高等小學 <b>Sai Kwong Girls' School</b> Shekki, Zhongshan	  <b>1918</b>  中山市南區歐亮福音堂學校 <b>Owe Lerng Missionary School</b> South District, Zhongshan
Figure A-1 <span style="float: right;"><i>demolished</i></span>	Figure A-2 <span style="float: right;"><i>school re-built in situ</i></span>	Figure A-3 <span style="float: right;"><i>church re-built in situ</i></span>
  <b>1918</b>  石岐香山女子師範學校 <b>Heung San Girls' Normal School</b> Shekki, Zhongshan	  <b>1921</b>  中山市南區沙涌幼兒園 <b>Sha Chung Kindergarten</b> South District, Zhongshan	  <b>1920–1923</b>  中山市南區沙涌學校 <b>Sha Chung School</b> South District, Zhongshan
Figure A-4 <span style="float: right;"><i>unknown status</i></span>	Figure A-5 <span style="float: right;"><i>demolished</i></span>	Figure A-6 <span style="float: right;"><i>proposed museum</i></span>

Appendix A: Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Photographic Catalogue

 <p>circa 1920s–1930s</p> <p>中山市南區沙涌女學校宿舍 <b>Sha Chung Girls' Dormitory</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-7 <i>abandoned</i></p>	 <p>1927–1929</p> <p>中山市南區曹邊學校 <b>Cho Bin School</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-8 <i>office and museum</i></p>	 <p>1930</p> <p>珠海市唐家灣鎮外沙村禮和學校 <b>Lai Wor School</b> (on right) Ngoi Sha village, Tangjia Bay, Zhuhai</p> <p>Figure A-9 <i>warehouse</i></p>
 <p>1923–1933</p> <p>中山市南區沙涌婦兒院 <b>Sha Chung Women and Children's Centre</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-10 <i>private kindergarten</i></p>	 <p>1932</p> <p>中山市南區竹秀園學校 <b>Chuk Sau Yuen School</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-11 <i>in use</i></p>	 <p>1933–1935</p> <p>中山市南區恆美學校 <b>Heng Mei School</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-12 <i>private school</i></p>
 <p>1954</p> <p>中山市華僑中學 <b>Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School</b> Shekki, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-13 <i>school re-built in situ</i></p>	 <p>1982</p> <p>中山市南區竹秀園學校 <b>Chuk Sau Yuen School</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-14 <i>in use</i></p>	 <p>1983</p> <p>中山市南區先施學校 <b>Sincere School</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-15 <i>private kindergarten</i></p>

Appendix A: Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Photographic Catalogue



1983

珠海斗門區馬山小學  
**Ma Shan Primary School**  
Doumen District, Zhuhai

Figure A-16 *to be re-built in situ*



1983

中山市三鄉鎮雍陌村博愛中學  
**Bok Oi Middle School**  
Yongmo village, Sanxiang Town,  
Zhongshan

Figure A-17 *in use*



1984

中山市大涌鎮疊石學校  
**Dip Shek School**  
Dachong Town, Zhongshan

Figure A-18 *private primary school*



1984

中山市南區福涌中學  
**Fuk Chung Middle School**  
South District, Zhongshan

Figure A-19 *private kindergarten*



1985

中山市沙溪鎮象角學校  
**Cheung Kok School**  
Shaxi Town, Zhongshan

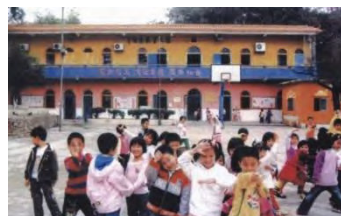
Figure A-20 *in use*



1985

珠海斗門區馬山小學圖書館  
**Ma Shan School Library**  
Doumen District, Zhuhai

Figure A-21 *in use*



1985-1987

中山市火炬開發區江尾頭小學  
**Gong Mei Tau Primary School**  
Torch Hi-tech Industrial  
Development Zone, Zhongshan

Figure A-22 *village office*



1985

中山市大涌鎮安堂小學  
**On Tong Primary School**  
Dachong Town, Zhongshan

Figure A-23 *demolished*












1986

中山市沙溪鎮涌頭幼兒園  
**Chung Tau Kindergarten**  
Shaxi Town, Zhongshan

Figure A-24 *in use*

Appendix A: Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Photographic Catalogue

 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1987</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市南區曹邊幼兒園 <b>Cho Bin Kindergarten</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-25 <i>community centre</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1991</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市南區馬嶺村羊寮學校 <b>Yeung Liu School</b> Ma Leng village, South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-26 <i>private kindergarten</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1991</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市大涌鎮全錄小學 <b>Chuen Luk Primary School</b> Dachong Town, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-27 <i>minban-school</i></p>
 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1993</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市大涌鎮南村學校 <b>Nam Tseun School</b> Dachong Town, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-28 <i>in use</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1994</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市大涌鎮卓山中學 <b>Cheuk Shan Middle School</b> Dachong Town, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-29 <i>school re-built in situ</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1995</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市大涌鎮大涌中心幼兒園 <b>Tai Chung Central Kindergarten</b> Dachong Town, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-30 <i>in use</i></p>
 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1996</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市大涌鎮全錄幼兒園 <b>Chuen Luk Kindergarten</b> Dachong Town, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-31 <i>in use</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2004</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市南區沙涌幼兒園 <b>Sha Chung Kindergarten</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-32 <i>diaspora-funded kindergarten</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2014</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市南區馬嶺村羊寮幼兒園 <b>Ma Leng Kindergarten</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-33 <i>private kindergarten</i></p>

Appendix A: Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Photographic Catalogue

 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2014–2015</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市大涌鎮卓山中學 <b>Cheuk Shan Middle School</b> Dachong Town, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-34 <span style="float: right;"><i>in use</i></span></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2017</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">珠海市高新區禮和小學校 <b>Lihe Primary School</b> Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, Zhuhai</p> <p>Figure A-35 <span style="float: right;"><i>in use</i></span></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2020</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市南區竹秀園中心小學 <b>Zhuxiuyuan Central Primary</b> South District, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-36 <span style="float: right;"><i>in use</i></span></p>
 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2020</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">中山市大涌鎮安堂小學 <b>Antang Primary School</b> Dachong Town, Zhongshan</p> <p>Figure A-37 <span style="float: right;"><i>in use</i></span></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">unavailable</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>proposed</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">珠海斗門區馬山小學 <b>Ma Shan School</b> Doumen District, Zhuhai</p> <p>Figure A-38 <span style="float: right;"><i>in use</i></span></p>	



## Appendix A Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Photographic Catalogue

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### Photo Credits

Figure A-1 Dai Leng Primary School  
Not found.

Figure A-2 Sai Kwong Girls' School  
Gaojiaji School 高家基學校 Permanent Exhibition. (Field visit 11 June 2018).

Figure A-3 Owe Lerng Missionary School  
Field (c.1991: 31), taken c.1924. This is apparently the earliest known photo of the building.

Figure A-4 Heung San Girls' Normal School  
*Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs* (2013: 19).

Figure A-5 Sha Chung Kindergarten  
*Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Affairs* (2013: 19).

Figure A-6 Sha Chung School  
Ms. CHEN Diqu. Original photo belonged to MA Man-fai (馬文輝 1905–1994), son of MA Ying-piu (1860–1944).

Figure A-7 Sha Chung Girls' School Dormitory  
Christopher Cheng, 4 December 2018.

Figure A-8 Cho Bin School (see also Figure A-25)  
Cho Bin Village Collection, circa 1979.

Figure A-9 Lai Wor School (see also Figure A-35)  
JIM Wah-hing, 1 May 2020.

Figure A-10 Sha Chung Women and Children's Centre (see also A-15, A-32)  
Zhongshan Museum (2011: 9).

Figure A-11 Chuk Sau Yuen School (see also Figure A-14, Figure A-37)  
*The 80th Anniversary of Chuk Sau Yuen School (1932-2012)*, p.22.

Figure A-12 Heng Mei School  
LU Jian, circa 2015.

Figure A-13 Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School  
*The 50th Anniversary of the Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Middle School (1954-2004)*, p.102.

Figure A-14 Chuk Sau Yuen School (see also Figure A-11, Figure A-36)  
*Zhongshan Qiaokan* 1982, p.19.

Figure A-15 Sincere School (see also Figure A-6, Figure A-32)  
*Zhongshan Qiaokan* 1983, p.11.

Figure A-16 Ma Shan Primary School (see also Figure A-21, Figure A-38)  
*Voice of Doumen* July 1984 (7): cover image.

Figure A-17 Bok Oi Middle School  
*Sanxiang Qiaokan* February 1986, p.41.

Figure A-18 Dip Shek School  
Christopher Cheng, 28 November 2018.

Figure A-19 Fuk Chung Middle School  
Christopher Cheng, 8 May 2018.

Figure A-20 Cheung Kok School  
Yee (2006:13)

## Appendix A Diaspora-Funded Schools: A Photographic Catalogue

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Figure A-21 Ma Shan School Library (see also Figure A-17, Figure A-38)  
Christopher Cheng, 18 December 2017.

Figure A-22 Gong Mei Tau Primary School  
*Zhongshan Overseas Chinese Edition* 2011(1), p.88.

Figure A-23 On Tong Primary School (see also Figure A-37)  
Douglas Lam, 2013.

Figure A-24 Chung Tau Kindergarten  
Shaxi Town Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (2013: 37).

Figure A-25 Cho Bin School (see also Figure A-8)  
Christopher Cheng, 8 May 2018.

Figure A-26 Yeung Liu School (Also see Figure A-33)  
Ms. LUM Muk-na, 30 June 2007.

Figure A-27 Chuen Luk Primary School (see also Figure A-32)  
Christopher Cheng, 21 December 2017.

Figure A-28 Nam Tseun School  
Christopher Cheng, 6 December 2018.

Figure A-29 Cheuk Shan Middle School (see also Figure A-34)  
School Photo Collection.

Figure A-30 Tai Chung Central Kindergarten  
Christopher Cheng, 28 November 2018.

Figure A-31 Chuen Luk Kindergarten (see also Figure A-27)  
Christopher Cheng, 12 December 2017.

Figure A-32 Sha Chung Kindergarten (also see Figure A-15, Figure A-10)  
Frances Lo, 6 February 2019.

Figure A-33 Ma Leng Kindergarten (see also Figure A-26)  
Ms. LUM Muk-na, 5 January 2016.

Figure A-34 Cheuk Shan Middle School (see also Figure A-29)  
Christopher Cheng, 21 December 2017.

Figure A-35 Lihe Primary School (see also Figure A-9)  
Christopher Cheng, 29 November 2018.

Figure A-36 Zhuxiuyuan Central Primary School (see also Figure A-11, Figure A-14)  
Zhongshan's South District (2020).

Figure A-37 Antang Primary School (see also Figure A-23)  
Sina News (2020).

Figure A-38 Ma Shan School (see also Figure A-16, Figure A-21)  
Unavailable.

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**SCHOOL DONORS, FAMILY & FRIENDS**


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	Title	Surname	First Name	Chinese	Affiliation	Place of Residency	Language	Particulars
1	Ms.		"Amanda"			Sydney, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
2	Mr.	CHENG	Kin Chi	鄭健志	Boi Oi Middle School	Hong Kong, China	Cantonese	Friend of school donor
3	Mr.	CHOY	Ronald	蔡旭光	Lai Wor School/Lihe School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Descendant of school donor
4	Mr.	FONG	King Moo	方勁武		Sydney, Australia	English	Friend of school donors
5	Mrs.	HING FAY	Cynthia		Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	Cantonese	Descendant of school donor
6	Mr.	HUNT	Stanley	陳沛德	Ma Sha School	Sydney, Australia	English	Australian school donor
7	Mrs.	LAI	Eileen	李杏華	Chung Tau Kindergarten	Sydney, Australia	Cantonese	Australian school donor
8	Mr.	LAI	Lance		Chung Tau Kindergarten	Sydney, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
9	Mr.	LAM	Douglas	林源	On Tong School	Sydney, Australia	English	Friend of school donor
10	Mr.	LEE	Billy	李中屏	Ma Leng School	Zhongshan, China	English	Australian school donor
11	Ms.	LEE	Vicki		Lee Ancestral Hall, Larm Ha	Hong Kong, China	Cantonese	Descendant of school donor
12	Mrs.	LEONG	Beverly		Fuk Chung Middle School	Sydney, Australia	English	Relative of school donor
					Cho Bin School	Sydney, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
14	Dr.	LEONG	Joe	梁子謙	Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
15	Mr.	LEONG	Raymond	梁德仁	Fuk Chung Middle School	Sydney, Australia	Cantonese	Descendant of school donor
16	Mrs.	LEONG	Wenney		Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	Cantonese	Spouse of school donor
17	Mrs.	LIANG	Evon		Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	Cantonese	Spouse of school donor
18	Mr.	MA	Yin-chiu	馬彥昭	Sha Chung School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Friend of school donor
19	Mr.	MOONEY	Tony		Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	English	Friend of school donor
20	Mrs.	RAINFORD	Phyllis		Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
21	Mrs.	SEETO	Felicia	梁淑彥	Cho Bin School	Brisbane, Australia	Cantonese	Descendant of school donor
22	Mrs.	OSBORN	Beverly		Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
23	Mrs.	WANG	Janet		Cho Bin School	Melbourne, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
24	Mr.	WILSON	Howard		Lai Wor/Lihe School	Canberra, Australia	Cantonese	Descendant of school donor
25	Mr.	YEE	Jonathon	余威達	Various schools in Daichong Town	Sydney, Australia	English	Descendant of school donor
26	Mr.	YEE	Stanley	余金晃	Various schools in Daichong Town	Sydney, Australia	English	Australian school donor

## FORMER STUDENTS & VILLAGE REPRESENTATIVES

	Title	Surname	First Name	Chinese	Affiliation	Place of Residency	Language	Particulars
27	Mr.	AU-YEUNG	Chow	歐陽洲	Dai Leng School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, scribe
28	Mr.	CHEN	Song Hao	陳頌豪	Koo Chung Village	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Village representative
29	Mr.	CHENG	Bing Tong	鄭炳棠	Bok Oi School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, village rep.
30	Mr.	CHENG	Colin	鄭志剛	Heng Mei/Chuk Sau Yuen Schools	Cairns, Australia	Cantonese	Former student
31	Mr.	CHEUNG	Yuet Keung	張銳強	Chung Tau Kindergarten	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, village rep.
32	Ms.	CHOY	Chu	蔡珠	Lai Wor School	Zhuhai, China	Cantonese	Former student
-	Mrs.	HING FAY	Cynthia		Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	Cantonese	Former student
33	Mr.	HING FAY	Keith	雷慶輝	Dutao School	Townsville, Australia	Cantonese	Former student
34	Mr.	HUANG	Shanchi	黃善池	Gong Mei Tau village	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Village representative
35	Mr.	JIM	Wah-hing	詹華興	Ngoi Sha Village	Zhuhai, China	Cantonese	Village chief
36	Mr.	KWOK	Lai-mun	郭乃文	Chuk Sau Yuen School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student
37	Mr.	LEE		李先生	Larm Ha	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Village chief
38	Ms.	LEON	Siu-en	梁紹英	Cho Bin School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student
39	Mr.	LEONG	Anthony	梁正衡	Cho Bin School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Village chief, historian
40	Mr.	LEONG	Chi-kwok	梁志國	Cho Bin School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, village rep.
41	Mr.	LEONG	Cheuk Kun	梁卓坤	Cho Bin School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student
-	Dr.	LEONG	Joe	梁子謙	Cho Bin School	Zhongshan, China	English	Former student
42	Mr.	LEONG	Shao King	梁少京	Fuk Chung Middle School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student
43	Ms.	LIANG	Haochi	梁浩池	Cheun Luk School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, village rep.
44	Mr.	LIANG	Jiahao	梁嘉浩	Cheun Luk School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, village rep.
45	Mr.	LIANG	Paul	梁文泰	Cho Bin School	Townsville, Australia	Cantonese	Former student
46	Ms.	LUM	Muk-na	林慕娜	Ma Leng Village	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Village representative
47	Mr.	MA	Kit-leung	馬傑良	Sincere School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, village chief
-	Mr.	MA	Yin-chiu	馬彥昭	Sha Chung School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student
-	Mrs.	SEETO	Felicia	梁淑彥	Cho Bin School	Brisbane, Australia	Cantonese	Former student
48	Ms.	SHENG	Lai Kum	盛麗金	Lai Wor School	Zhuhai, China	Cantonese	Former student
49	Ms.	XIAN	Carmen	冼嘉敏	Cho Bin School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student
50	Mr.	YU	Hinz	余先生	Dip Shek School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former student, village rep.

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**PRINCIPALS & TEACHERS**

	Title	Surname	First Name	Chinese	Affiliation	Place of Residency	Language	Particulars
51	Mr.				Dip Shek School	Zhongshan, China	Mandarin	Teacher
52	Ms.	CHEN		陳主任	Ha Zhat	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Head Teacher
53	Mr.	CHEN		陳老師	Lihe School	Zhuhai, China	Cantonese	Teacher
54	Mr.	CHENG		鄭校長	Cheuk Shan Middle School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Headmaster
55	Ms.	CHEUNG	Wai Ling	張惠玲	Chung Tau Kindergarten	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Headmistress
56	Mr.	HUANG		黃校長	Ma Shan School	Zhuhai, China	Cantonese	Headmaster
57	Mr.	HUANG		黃校長	Gaojiaji School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Headmaster
58	Ms.	LEE	Oi Hing	李愛卿	Chung Tau Kindergarten	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Teacher
59	Mr.	LI	Xiangping	李向平	Chuk Sau Yuen School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Headmaster
60	Ms.	LIANG		梁老師	Daichong Central Kindergarten	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Teacher
61	Mr.	LO	Siu Kwong	羅少光	Chuk Sau Yuen School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Deputy Principal
62	Ms.	NG	Sze Na	吳斯娜	Chung Tau Kindergarten	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Teacher
63	Ms.	SHEN		沈主任	Sha Chung Kindergarten	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Head Teacher
64	Mr.	YEUNG	Chun Wan	楊振環	Cheung Kok School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Headmaster
65	Ms.	YAO	Yuchen	姚玉琛	Lihe School	Zhuhai, China	Mandarin	Headmistress
66	Mr.	XIE		謝老師	Overseas Chinese Middle School	Zhongshan, China	Mandarin	Archivist and teacher

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**ZHONGSHAN OVERSEAS CHINESE AFFAIRS OFFICE**

	Title	Surname	First Name	Chinese	Affiliation	Place of Residency	Language	Particulars
67	Ms.	CHEN	Diqiu	陳迪秋	Overseas Chinese Affairs	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former officer, historian
68	Mr.	CHOW	King	周勁	Overseas Chinese Affairs	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Liaison officer
69	Miss	FUNG	Mei Ling	馮美玲	Overseas Chinese Affairs	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	East Town Officer
70	Miss	HUANG	Wan Shu	黃婉舒	Overseas Chinese Affairs	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	South District Officer
71	Ms.	KWOK	Man Ling	郭敏玲	Overseas Chinese Affairs	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	South District Officer
72	Ms.	LEUNG	Amily	梁美梨	Overseas Chinese Affairs	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Shaxi Town Officer
73	Mr.	TAM	Man Fai	譚文輝	Overseas Chinese Affairs	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Director

## OTHERS

	Title	Surname	First Name	Chinese	Affiliation	Place of Residency	Language	Particulars
74	Ms.	BAO		鮑牧師	Liangdu Christian Church	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Pastor
75	Mr.	CHAN	Yiliang	陳翼良	Sheung Tong Village, South District	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Archaeologist, conservator
76	Dr.	CHEN	Ju-Chen	陳如珍	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong, China	English	Anthropologist
77	Ms.	CHING		程女士	Sha Chung Girls' Dormitory	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former resident
78	Mr.	CHENG	Kalok	鄭加樂	Liangdu Christian Church	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Church worker
79	Mr.	GAN	Jianbo	甘建波	Zhongshan Museum	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Former curator
80	Mr.	LIU	Jianneng	劉建能		Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Builder
81	Mr.	LU	Jian	呂劍	Heng Mei School	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Archivist
82	Prof.	PENG	Changxin	彭長歆	South China University of Technology	Guangzhou, China	Cantonese	Architectural historian
83	Dr.	ROBB	Sandi		James Cook University	Townsville, Australia	English	Heritage specialist
84	Dr.	SU	Mingxian	粟明鮮		Brisbane, Australia	Mandarin	Historian
85	Dr.	WILLIAMS	Michael		Western Sydney University	Sydney, Australia	English	Historian
86	Mr.	HU	Songke	胡頌科	Zhongshan Culture, Broadcasting, Press and Publication Bureau	Zhongshan, China	Cantonese	Researcher
87	Dr.	WANG	Hui	王惠	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong, China	Mandarin	Historian

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**PhD Project: The Legacy of Diaspora-Funded Schools**

**Mr. Christopher Cheng**

Traditional education in China was very different to present-day schooling. At one time, only boys from rich families could study. They read poetry and ancient texts to prepare them for exams into government jobs. The feudal system of government was replaced in the early twentieth century, which changed education as well.

Village schools in southern China were leading this transition. In the mid-nineteenth century, many poor farmers left their homes to escape poverty. They went overseas to places like Australia to make a living. Money earned there was sent home to China to support the family and build new homes. Some money was used to build new schools for boys and girls in the village. These schools were grand buildings made of the newest and finest building materials. Focusing on Zhongshan in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong, my PhD project aims to build new knowledge about these new schools and the migrant donors who built and supported them. Many questions await answers, such as: How did migrants build these schools? In what ways did education change life in the village? What did students learn? How did education change the students' lives?

The oldest modern school in China was built in Zhongshan. There have been many others built since. Migrants who generously donated to these schools were greatly admired. And even children born in Australia were taken back to the village to study. Either way, the schools remain an important part of many people's lives. Once considered part of a bright future, many schools look old today. In some cases, we do not even know what the schools looked like, as old photos are hard to find. In fact, there are many different stories about schools. As the story has not been fully written, I hope that with your help, we can write this story together. Then our children, grandchildren and their children in Australia and China can learn about this aspect of our past. I hope to talk to people in Australia who identify with such schools. I plan to visit Zhongshan and take photographs of these "Australian schools" to understand why they are special. The results of my study will be available to the public and academic community via published articles and a website, so anybody interested can find out more about this fascinating story.

**Project Funding**

This PhD project forms part of the "China–Australia Heritage Corridor" project (funded by the Australia Research Council Discovery Project DP170101200). Christopher Cheng's doctoral research is funded by the Australia–China Institute for Arts and Culture at Western Sydney University in Australia.

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ABN 53 014 069 881 CRICOS Provider No: 00917K

Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

[westernsydney.edu.au](http://westernsydney.edu.au)

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### About the Researcher

Christopher Cheng is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Culture and Society at the Western Sydney University and an executive member of the Chinese Australia Historical Society. He is an Australian born Chinese of Zhongshan descent who speaks Cantonese and Mandarin. His interest lies in the history of Chinese in Australia, modern Chinese architecture, and the conservation of *qiaoxiang* heritage.

### The Research Program

- + **Interviews.** I will interview Zhongshan migrants and their families in Australia and China to understand why village schools are significant to them.
- + **Heritage recording.** I will photograph several schools in Zhongshan and map their location. This information will be made available to the community, heritage managers, and others via the “China–Australia Heritage Corridor” website which will be in English and Chinese.
- + **Photographs, drawings and letters.** With consent, I will make copies of photos, architectural drawings, letters and other documents in the possession of the people I interview.
- + **Heritage conservation.** I will meet with Chinese heritage administrators and architects to discuss and develop a networked, cross-border approach to managing and conserving the heritage of the schools.
- + **Ancestral village tours.** The outcomes of the project will be available to Zhongshan migrant families and others visiting their ancestral villages in China.

### Contact Us

If you can relate to diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan and wish to participate in this project or if you would like more information, please contact:

Mr. Christopher Cheng

[Christopher.Cheng@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:Christopher.Cheng@westernsydney.edu.au) ph. 0426 653 688

or his supervisor, Dr. Denis Byrne

[D.Byrne@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:D.Byrne@westernsydney.edu.au) ph. 0423 775 875

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ABN 53 014 069 881 CRICOS Provider No: 00917K

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### 僑捐學校與中澳文化傳承

鄭藝超 博士生

中國傳統教育制度和現在的已有所不同。從前，只有富家子弟有機會讀書。他們讀的是詩詞和古籍，以便參加科舉，考取功名。這一切直到上世紀初封建制度結束，才發生了改變。

在十九世紀中葉，很多窮苦農民離鄉背井去海外謀生，其中某些去了澳洲。這些走在時代前尖端的僑胞，賺了錢就寄回家作為家用，還贊助蓋房子、建新學校給家鄉裡的男女幼童。這些外觀宏偉的學校採用了當時最先進的物料建造而成。我的博士項目專注於廣東中山，希望透過支持建校的移民捐款者來了解中山現代教育。當中有很多值得探討的問題：移民怎樣建立學校？這些學校如何改變鄉村的生活？學生參與什麼課程？現代教育如何改變他們一生？

中國最早的現代學校在中山（舊稱香山），此後，不少學校陸續落成。甚至海外移民把他們在澳洲出生的孩子也帶回鄉下就學。學校裡面的學生們則成為了新生代，而捐贈建校的移民也獲得大家的尊敬。當然，這些輝煌一時的現代學校，現在看起來都已很殘舊了。但是，關於學校的故事卻留在了人們心裡。可是，從沒有人說出完整的故事，甚至連老照片也沒法呈現學校的外貌。因為這些故事從沒被記錄過，我誠意邀請你幫忙，一起把這些故事寫出來，讓我們的孩子、孫兒，不論在中國和澳洲都能讀到我們整理好的故事。我希望與關注學校的人談論這方面的事。同時會探訪並拍攝在中山的澳洲僑捐學校，分析它們的特別之處。研究結果將會在文章和公開網頁與普羅大眾及學術界分享，讓所有有興趣人士都能接觸這段有趣故事。

### 經費來源

本研究計劃是「中澳承傳長廊」研究的一部分（由澳洲研究議會「探索發現項目」DP 170101200 資助）。鄭藝超的博士研究是由西雪梨大學澳大利亞—中國藝術與文化研究院資助。

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ABN 53 014 069 881 CRICOS Provider No: 00917K

Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

[westernsydney.edu.au](http://westernsydney.edu.au)

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## 研究者

鄭藝超是西雪梨大學「文化與社會研究院」博士生及澳洲華人歷史協會的執行委員。鄭先生是澳洲籍中山後裔，操流利廣東話，並熟悉普通話。他的研究領域包括澳洲華人社史，中國現代建築，僑鄉文化遺產的傳承管理。

## 研究計劃

- + **訪問** - 我希望訪問在澳洲和中山的中山移民及其親友，了解他們的移民經驗，以及僑捐學校的存在對他們的意義。
- + **承傳記錄** - 我將會為這些學校拍攝照片，並在地圖上標示位置。這些資料會透過「中澳承傳長廊」的雙語（中文和英文）公開網頁發佈，讓中山同鄉、文化傳承管理者及其他研究人員查閱。
- + **照片、建築圖紙及信件** - 經受訪者同意後，我會將他們的照片、建築圖紙、信件及其他文件的複印本保存。
- + **討論承傳保育** - 我將會與南中國文化遺產管理者和相關專家會面，討論發展網絡性、跨國界承傳保育的方法，以及如何管理和延續僑捐學校。
- + **成果共享** - 我計劃向中山移民家庭，及其他前往中山各村落的訪客分享研究成果。

## 歡迎與我們聯絡

如果您關注中山僑捐學校，並願意參與本研究，歡迎聯絡我們以獲取更多資訊：

博士生 鄭藝超

[Christopher.Cheng@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:Christopher.Cheng@westernsydney.edu.au)

電話：0426-653-688

或

丹尼斯·拜恩博士（導師）

[D.Byrne@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:D.Byrne@westernsydney.edu.au)

電話：0423-775-875

**Institute for Culture and Society**

University of Western Sydney

ABN 53 014 069 881 CRICOS Provider No: 00917K

Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

[westernsydney.edu.au](http://westernsydney.edu.au)

## WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



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### 侨捐学校与中澳文化传承

郑艺超 博士生

中国传统教育制度和现在的已有所不同。从前，只有富家子弟有机会读书。他们读的是诗词和古籍，以便参加科举，考取功名。这一切直到上世纪初封建制度结束，才发生了改变。

在十九世纪中叶，很多穷苦农民离乡背井去海外谋生，其中某些去了澳大利亚。这些走在时代前尖端的侨胞，赚了钱就寄回家作为家用，还赞助盖房子、建新学校给家乡里的男女幼童。这些外观宏伟的学校采用了当时最先进的物料建造而成。我的博士项目专注于广东中山，希望透过支持建校的移民捐款者来了解中山现代教育。当中有很多值得探讨的问题：移民怎样建立学校？这些学校如何改变乡村的生活？学生参与什么课程？现代教育如何改变他们一生？

中国最早的现代学校在中山（旧称香山），此后，不少学校陆续落成。甚至海外移民把他们在澳大利亚出生的孩子也带回乡下就学。学校里面的学生们则成为了新生代，而捐赠建校的移民也获得大家的尊敬。当然，这些辉煌一时的现代学校，现在看起来都已很残旧了。但是，关于学校的故事却留在了人们心里。可是，从没有人说出完整的故事，甚至连老照片也没法呈现学校的外貌。因为这些故事从没被记录过，我诚意邀请你帮忙，一起把这些故事写出来，让我们的孩子、孙儿，不论在中国和澳大利亚都能读到我们整理好的故事。我希望与关注学校的人谈论这方面的事。同时会探访并拍摄在中山的澳大利亚研侨捐学校，分析它们的特别之处。研究结果将会在文章和公开网页与普罗大众及学术界分享，让所有有兴趣人士都能接触这段有趣故事。

### 经费来源

本研究计划是「中澳承传长廊」研究的一部分（由澳大利亚研究议会「探索发现项目」DP 170101200 资助）。郑艺超的博士研究是由西悉尼大学澳大利亚 - 中国艺术与文化研究院资助。

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### 研究者

郑艺超是西悉尼大学「文化与社会研究院」博士生及澳大利亚华人历史协会的执行委员。郑先生是澳大利亚籍中山后裔，讲流利广东话，并熟悉普通话。他的研究领域包括澳大利亚华人史，中国现代建筑，侨乡文化遗产的传承管理。

### 研究计划

- + **访问** - 我希望访问在澳大利亚和中山的中山移民及其亲友，了解他们的移民经历，以及侨资学校的存在对他们的意义。
- + **承传记录** - 我将会为这些侨资学校拍摄照片，并在地图上标示位置。这些公开资讯会透过「中澳承传长廊」的双语（中文和英文）公开网页发布，供中山同乡、文化传承管理者及其他研究人员查阅。
- + **照片、建筑图纸及信件** - 经受访者同意后，我会将他们的照片、建筑图纸、信件及其他文件的复印本保存。
- + **讨论承传保育** - 我将会与南中国文化遗产管理者和相关专家会面，讨论发展网络性、跨国界传承留存的方法，以及如何管理和延续侨资学校。
- + **成果共享** - 我计划向中山移民家庭，及其他前往中山各村落的访客分享研究成果。

### 欢迎与我们联络

如果您与中山侨资学校关联，并愿意参与本研究，欢迎联络我们以获取更多资讯：

郑艺超 博士生

[Christopher.Cheng@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:Christopher.Cheng@westernsydney.edu.au)

电话：0426-653-688

或

丹尼斯·拜恩博士（导师）

[D.Byrne@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:D.Byrne@westernsydney.edu.au)

电话：0423-775-875

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Figure D.1 Map of Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province, China

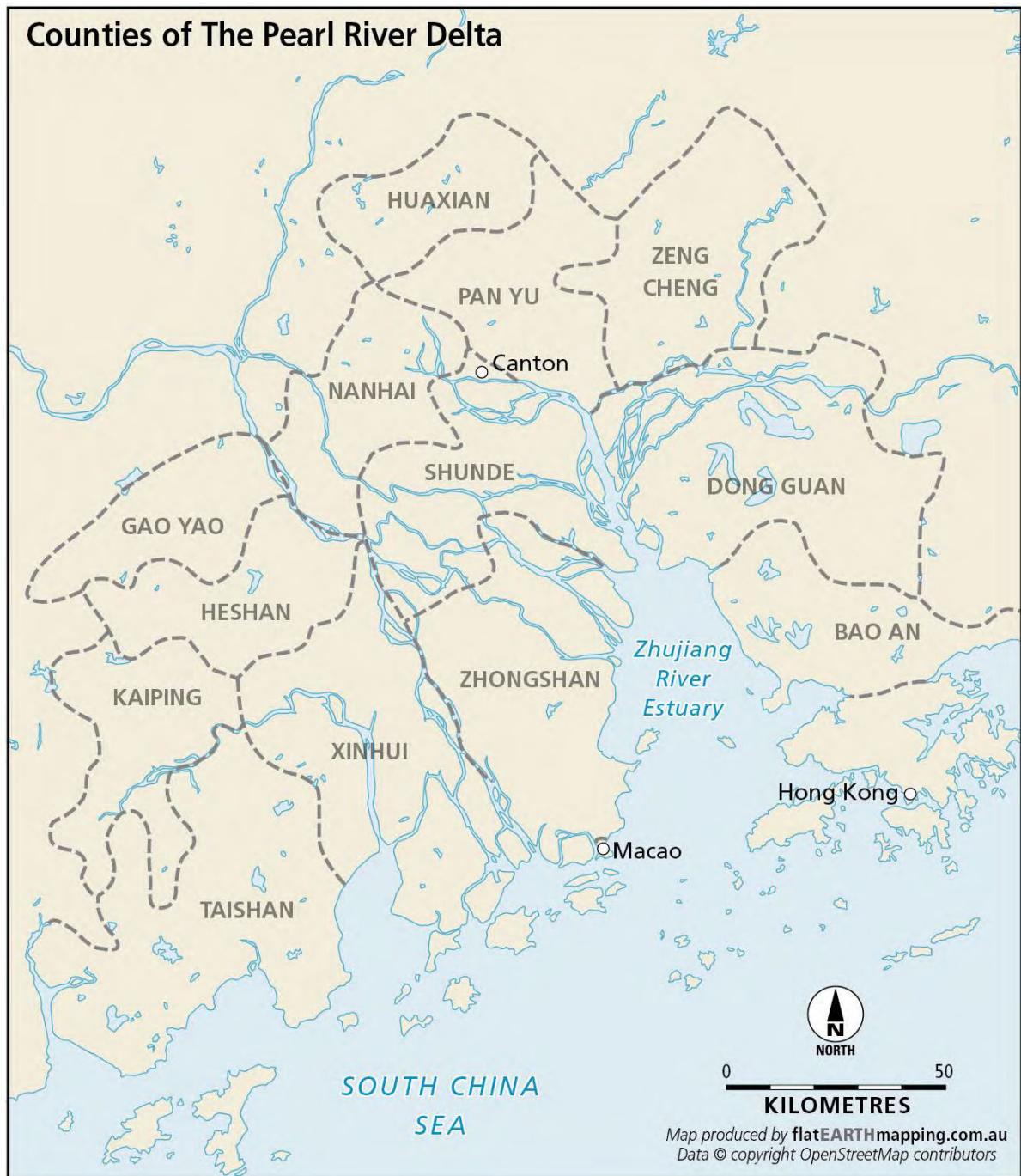


Figure D.2 Map of the counties of the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province, China

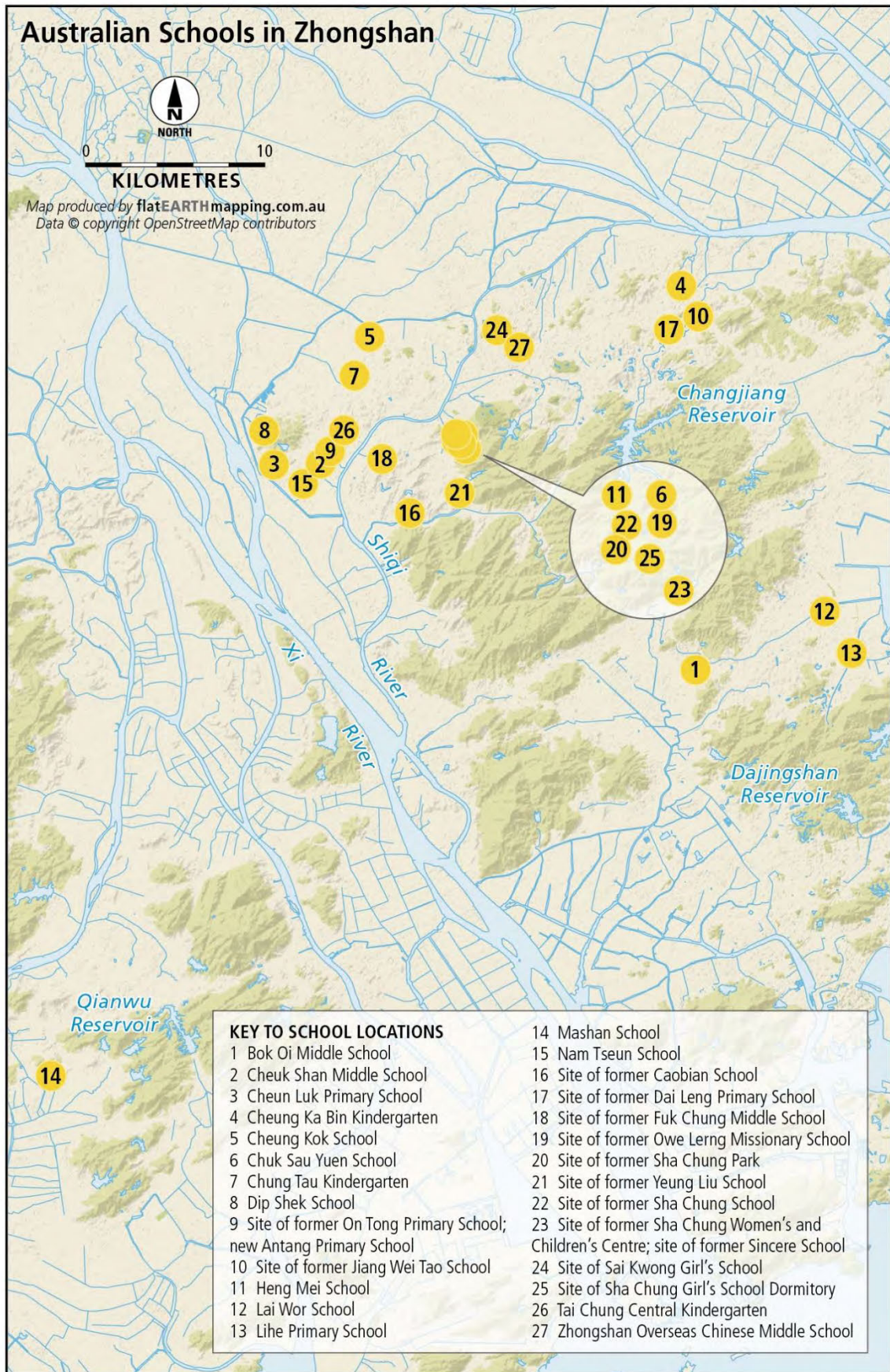


Figure D.3 Location map of Chinese-Australian diaspora-funded schools in Zhongshan

## Bio-note

Christopher Cheng knows firsthand the double pains of being disconnected from his Chinese roots, while at the same time not being firmly grounded in his parents' immigrant country of Australia. For not quite a decade since 2008, he has been privileged to further his education in Hong Kong and southern China after completing the first part of his architectural degree in Brisbane, Australia. When not studying, he has been wandering around his ancestral land in southern China. In 2017, he joined the China–Australian Heritage Corridor team as a doctoral student and has been researching and publishing his field observations in academic and popular outlets, so that other “children in the diaspora” can also benefit. When he's not researching, Christopher writes poems in Chinese, chanted in Cantonese to rhyme.

- 2005 Bachelor of Design Studies (University of Queensland)
- 2009 Chinese Language Program (Sun Yat-sen University)
- 2012 Master of Philosophy in Anthropology (Chinese University of Hong Kong)
- 2015 Tourist Guide Course (Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong)