

## Archive Package: School Segregation

### Quote Sheet: School Segregation

#### **Gordon Cumyow**

Born in Vancouver in the early 1900s.

Gordon's father, Won Cumyow, was reputed to be the first Chinese person born in Canada.

“ My father sent us to school when we were six, and then made us go to Chinese school after that. That was killing, spending five or six hours in school and then, at half past four, I'd have to come down to Chinatown and go to Chinese school until half past seven, then go home and do my homework. We lived up in Grandview; my father didn't want us to get mixed up with certain elements in Chinatown. In those days, it was more or less of a bad influence down here, when the gaming houses were wide open and the police were raiding them, and opium was being smoked. My dad wanted to keep us away from all that.

#### **Fred Soon**

Born in Canton, China, in 1908.

Immigrated to Vancouver with uncle and cousins in 1921.

“ The Chinese children who were born here had no trouble integrating with the white children. It was the immigrant children like myself [who had trouble]. Naturally you come up with a lot of discrimination amongst children because some of them don't want to play with you, and you can't blame them because it's just like a chicken and a duck, they don't talk the same language.

## Harry Con

Born in Vancouver in 1922.

“ In the 1930s they tried to close the Chinese school [in Vancouver]. Because in the opinions of the white we were just like today they talk about East Indians, they say they're “hardcore”—they do not integrate with the white society because of their culture, and that comes from the schools. I remember many of the School Board suggested we should close the Chinese school. But the thing is, it works just the opposite, if you give it a chance. I'm the second generation, and they had to push me to learn Chinese—my father had to take me back to China. But when it comes to my children, they all speak English now and I think, in the future, my grandchildren are going to have a rough time trying to speak Chinese. I feel it makes no difference now. We recognize ourselves to be Canadian—so, naturally, you should know the language here. But on the other hand, it's good to know your own language. I like this word “multicultural.” Canada today, is like the United Nations, we have all kinds of people in it. And we should understand each other, so that we can wipe out all this discrimination.

Excerpts from:

ed. Itter, Carole and Marlatt, Daphne. *Opening Doors: in Vancouver's East End Strathcona*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2011. Print. Pages 34, 147, 201.

**Excerpt from an interview with Cecil Lee (husband of Grace Cumyow), one organizer of the school strike.**

“ I think if I had ability enough there would be no position in Canada that would not be open to me. You know how the Canadians feel about the French Canadian, and yet Sir Wilfred Laurier is Premier of Canada. And Brandeis, a Jew, is head of the Supreme Court of the United States. I do not think there is any real prejudice against the Chinese. There would not be if the Canadians knew them. The trouble is there are so many Chinese of the lower classes.

Raushenbush, Winifred. Interview with Cecil Lee, a native son who is married to a Hakkla. British Columbia: 1924 May 26-June 1 p.3. SRR [https://collections.stanford.edu/pdf/10100000000024\\_0034.pdf](https://collections.stanford.edu/pdf/10100000000024_0034.pdf)

## Excerpts from an interview with Harry Hastings, one organizer of the school strike.

Mr. Hastings agreed to conduct the fight of the Chinese against separate classes for Chinese children, providing the Chinese would stick it out to the end. Successive reasons were given by the school Board for their discrimination against the Chinese, to each of which Mr. Hastings found it rather easy to make reply. The first reason alleged was that the Chinese are carriers of disease, because they live in unsanitary quarters. The second objection made was, I believe, to their morals, but the objection which came nearer to hitting the real issue was the lack of knowledge of English on the part of the Chinese children. The fact that they often stood at the top of their classes didn't count because their English conversation was not very adequate.

The school strike involved about 136 Chinese children. Certificates were given to 61 of those children who were known, as Mr. Hastings said, to be the children of merchants and prominent people. These children were to be allowed to go back to their regular classes... Mr. Hastings felt that this was a clever way of trying to divide the community against itself, and told the Chinese children to refuse to accept the certificates.

There was a real issue, I think, back of the school affair. Mr. Hastings referred to it, as the issue concerning the refugee children. In Victoria, as in Vancouver, there appears to have been quite a number of children, boys for the most part, who had only recently come over from China. These boys would, of course, be older than most of the public school children and their English would be very limited. Mr. Hastings explanation of the fact that there were so many of them, was that it was less expensive and more secure to educate your children in this country rather than in China because of the very unsettled conditions around Canton. The upshot of the matter has been, both in Vancouver and Victoria, that these particular children are in separate classes, while the rest of the Chinese children are mixed with the whites. As Mr. Hastings said, "It was all handled so stupidly. If they really wanted to settle the

matter it could have been settled so easily. All they would have needed to do, was to come and talk with some member of the Chinese community.”

Mr. Hastings felt that the enlightened and educated part of the public in Victoria was swung over to the Chinese side, in the course of this year-long contest. He said, “People talk about this kind of thing to each other at their dinner tables, and though this is a very quiet way of spreading an impression, I think that it counts. There are, after all, only a few people who are very prejudiced.”

Raushenbush, Winifred. Interview with Harry Hastings Regarding the School Strike and Other Matters. British Columbia: 1924 May 26 and 30 p.1-2; 3-4. SRR [https://collections.stanford.edu/pdf/10100000000024\\_0032.pdf](https://collections.stanford.edu/pdf/10100000000024_0032.pdf)