

January 20, 2004

Dr. Lynn Copeland  
University Librarian  
Simon Fraser University  
WAC Bennett Library, 8888 University Drive  
Burnaby, B.C.  
Canada V5A 1S6

Dear Dr. Copeland,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to write in support of the proposed Canadian Multicultural Heritage Project, a joint initiative of Simon Fraser University and the University of Calgary to digitize local-based historical materials covering the widest spectrum of immigrant and ethnic group experiences in Canada. In particular, I applaud the plan to launch this ambitious project with the historical Vancouver-based Chinese language newspaper The Chinese Times.

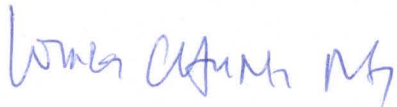
In my view, the Canadian Multicultural Heritage Project is extremely timely and very well conceived. Information technology has indeed revolutionized the way we teach and study history. Access to historical documents is now faster and more cost-effective than ever before as university libraries, government repositories, and even private archives have begun to make available their valuable holdings online – page by page, image by image, sound bit by sound bit. And yet, for a country with such diverse multicultural heritage as Canada, the task of preserving, organizing, presenting, and promoting the use of its historical records is especially challenging. Understandably, much earlier effort at digitization was focused on mainstream French and English language materials. While individual communities, local ethnic organizations, and universities have done some work for specific groups and in specific places, there still exists considerable gaps in Canada's collective knowledge of its past. The Multicultural Heritage Project is destined to fill these gaps, by tapping into the latest computer technology and by coordinating local initiatives across the country.

The choice of The Chinese Times is an excellent one. The historical value of this Chinatown newspaper is beyond questionable. The newspaper was in print from the turn of the century until it ceased publication in 1992. I drew on it heavily when I worked on my book The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-1980 and I have relied on it even more in my current research project about Chinatown theaters. There simply isn't another source of historical material that matches the depth and length of coverage on Chinese Canadian history afforded by The Chinese Times.

This ambitious project to digitize immigrant and ethnic group records in Canada will obviously help promote cross-cultural understanding, facilitate dialogue, and foster a cosmopolitan outlook among the diverse population of the country. Not to be overlooked, from the perspective of this Canadian-trained and now U.S.-based academic, is the opportunity to present Canada – as it was and as it is – to the international communities of students and scholars who conduct transnational and comparative researches on migrant populations across the globe. Multicultural Canada can make a significant contribution to such an endeavor.

Thanks for the opportunity to express my support, and let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Wing Chung Ng  
Associate Professor and Chair  
Department of History