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BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Timothy J. Stanley  
*Contesting White Supremacy:  
School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the  
Making of Chinese Canadians*

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011. xiii, 326 pp.

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Timothy Stanley's book, *Contesting White Supremacy*, tells the story of the 1922–23 Chinese students' strike in Victoria, British Columbia in response to the public school board's attempt to establish racially segregated schools. In its thorough use of Chinese-language sources, it makes a significant contribution not only to the history of the education of racialized minorities in Canada, but to Canadian historiography generally. His solid grounding in critical race theory allows Stanley to utilize powerful analytic tools to demonstrate: how racial categories of 'Chinese' and 'Canadian' were created over many decades; how those racializations resulted in the assertion of political, economic and social white supremacy; and, how racism and racial exclusions were resisted by Chinese Canadians.

The first chapter of the book tells the story of the 1922–23 strike. This is followed by two multi-chapter sections: one that explains how racism had become "a texture of life" (6) in British Columbia by the 1920s; the other addresses the nature, organization and impact of anti-racism. While this results in some repetition of information, it also provides a multiperspectival and complex assessment of the creation and consequences of invented Chinese and Canadian racial identities not just for the strikers, but ultimately for today.

After the opening narrative chapter about the strike, Stanley begins his analysis by outlining the anti-First Nations and anti-Chinese racisms foundational to the project of colonizing territory that came to be British Columbia. The next chapter describes the historical invention of racial categories of Chinese and Canadian. Critical race theory argues "race differences are made through social processes, rather than natural

or biological ones" (8). While they are made to appear self-evident, these processes, referred to as racialization, are historically produced. In this chapter, Stanley explains this process, analyzing the late nineteenth-century discourse about 'the Chinese' that simultaneously created the separate racial category of 'Canadian.' He describes how this "race-thinking" discourse resulted in the disenfranchisement of those racialized as Chinese and the introduction of racist immigration policies.

Stanley then turns to the nature and consequences of racialized exclusion. He asserts that, "state formation organized racializations into material and symbolic exclusions that fundamentally shaped people's life chances" (96). Chapter Four outlines how state schooling in British Columbia contributed to a racist state formation through its organization, governance and the content of curriculum and textbooks. Stanley describes how the public schools were managed and controlled by those racialized as white. He calls the curriculum and textbooks, artifacts of "white supremacist thinking" (112), and identifies them as particularly important in creating racism that seemed natural and logical because they provided a kind of 'scientific authority' for race-thinking. Until this point in his book, Stanley relies on English-language primary sources because they embody the discourse about 'the Chinese' that defined their race and justified their political, economic and social exclusions. In Chapter Five he turns to Chinese-language sources to explain the impact of racialized exclusions on the lived experience of those racialized as Chinese. He focuses on three specific consequences of that exclusion: the constant threat of violence; the tenuous nature of their lives and economic well-being; the fact that communities in British Columbia consisted overwhelmingly of men. Stanley examines how residential segregation provided places of refuge. He stresses how chain migration and the need for communities that would provide economic and social support resulted in a "Chinese archipelago" in Canada where "each island...differed from the others in terms of its age, economic base, and ethnic composition, as well as its class, gender, and generational composition" (123). He demonstrates how it is that by 1922 Victoria had the most settled community of racialized Chinese with sufficient cultural capital to resist white supremacy.

The second section of the book, which is informed by an anti-racist theoretical perspective, is particularly significant. Here Stanley explains how the second to fourth generation locally-born Victoria community challenged the racial binary of Chinese and Canadian that had been so deliberately crafted and reasserted in the previous decades. This community identified itself as Chinese Canadian and "had sufficient cultural resources to openly resist, if not overcome, white supremacy" (146). Stanley uses letters written by members of the Chinese Canadian community to English-language newspapers in Victoria to demonstrate the organized response of their anti-segregation campaign and their considerable cultural capital in their ability to use Canadian political discourse to make their arguments. They appealed to British justice and notions of fair play; they named the prejudice that motivated the school board and its supporters and called it un-Christian.

The next two chapters reveal how through discourse and the creation of a variety of institutions, racialized Chinese in British Columbia created a new collective

identity, an imagined “Chinese nation.” Institutions such as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and Chinese language schools mitigated the effects of racism and embodied “a sense of China, and people and things Chinese, different from that provided by English-language discourse” (189). The final chapter in the section on anti-racism provides insights about those in the ‘white’ community who supported the strikers, including some Christian missionaries, teachers, school inspectors and principals. Included here is the fascinating story of Harry Hastings, a Eurasian who did not fit into accepted racialized categories. During the strike he used his position as simultaneous insider and outsider in both the ‘Chinese’ and ‘Canadian’ communities to intervene in the strike.

A major strength of this book is the nature of the primary sources used. Stanley draws on letters preserved by the Vancouver merchant Yip Sang’s family and business. As the Chinese agent of the CPR Yip Sang’s business became a point of contact between workers in Canada and their families in China. These hundreds of letters provide insights into the lived experience of those racialized as Chinese, and he reads them through and within the context of the nature of their family relationships, and the challenges of economic insecurity and political disenfranchisement in Canada. Chinese language newspapers demonstrate how Chinese nationalism emerged and then mobilized to resist school segregation in Victoria. English-language sources too are used in nuanced ways, particularly the records of the 1924 Survey of Race Relations. Stanley teases out the social realities for the members of the Chinese Canadian community that researcher Winifred Raushenbush interviewed, even as he acknowledges the ways her own observations and interpretations shaped the data. Excellent photographs inform and enhance the text.

Stanley asserts that, “History can help with anti-racist projects...disciplined investigation of the past can bring into circulation previously excluded knowledge. It can document the constructed nature of racializations. It can trace the development of particular racisms and expose their dynamics and recurring grammars” (233). In this powerful book Stanley uses the 1922–23 strike as a case study to analyze the deliberate and long-standing efforts to assert white supremacy, describe the toll of that supremacy on those defined as outsiders, and explore how racialized communities can be empowered by resisting and refusing the exclusions forced upon them. He demonstrates that, “as racisms were invented, so too racisms can be uninvented” (234). Accounts like Stanley’s are a crucial contribution to that project.