

Immigration History

Chinese immigrants first came to Canada in substantial numbers beginning in 1858, coming from China and from California for the Fraser Valley Gold Rush on the West Coast. Contributing factors at the time were the Taiping Rebellion, natural disasters, extreme poverty, and famine.

From 1881 to 1885, the Canadian Pacific Railroad (a crown corporation) contracted over 15 000 Chinese men to work on the most dangerous part of the railroad—in the Rocky Mountains.

With the railroad complete, the B.C. government blamed Chinese for the new **unemployment**.

Starting in 1885, every Chinese person entering the country was forced to pay the Chinese Head Tax of \$50. In 1903 this was raised to 100\$; in 1907 it rose again to 500\$. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1927 (July 1) stopped the entry of virtually all Chinese people to Canada.

Empowered by Chinese and Chinese-Canadian participation in WWII, and with increased advocacy from the home community, the Exclusion Act was repealed in 1946.

The **Head Tax and the Exclusion Act** ravaged family ties, keeping husbands, fathers and brothers separated for decades. Chinese communities in Canada remained **bachelor** societies, keeping them weak and stagnant. Chinese people constantly advocated against the Acts, often lobbying the Chinese government to pressure Canada to change its racist policy.

In the postwar economic boom, Canadian business interests were searching for skilled labour and people with formal education to fill gaps in the labour market. The Federal government introduced the “Universal Point System” in 1967. For the Chinese community this meant an influx of educated and middle-class immigrants mostly from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and more recently from Mainland China as well.

Labour

Exclusionary immigration laws and labour laws designed to protect “white labour” forced Chinese into the **domestic services** sector, which became known as the “ethnic labour market.”

- After the completion of the railroad in 1885, Chinese people in B.C. didn't have many work options. Domestic labour was one type of work that Chinese people were allowed access to.
- The skills they developed in domestic work translated into skills to establish certain kinds of small businesses: **laundries, restaurants**.
- The types of roles (washing clothes, cooking food) Chinese small business owners took were roles that white people were used to seeing, and Chinese businesses in Chinatown were mostly these types of businesses.

Li states that “institutional racism limited the bargaining power of Chinese, and confined them to the marginal participation in the labour market. [...] it gave impetus to the development of ethnic businesses among Chinese.”

The Quebec Chinese Restaurateurs Association was created in response to economic segregation, increasing the purchasing power of individual businesses by collective association.

Immigration System

- CIC (Immigration Canada) Points system. They look for individual entrepreneurs who will invest a huge amount of capital into Canadian economy. If coming on the investors class, you must be willing to invest a minimum of \$400, 000. This class was invented soon after Hong Kong was announced to be handed back to China. This announcement left many Hong Kong people scared and protective of their money. Canada provided a safe place to invest.

- MRCI (Quebec Immigration) working with the restaurateurs association to begin a Pilot project that would recruit over Chinese chefs to remote areas of Canada. They would come over as temporary workers and could claim permanent residence, but would have to match up with the required points system, despite the amount of time they work here.
- Similar to the Live-in Caregiver Program and the Seasonal Farm Workers program, which rely on Filipinos and Caribbean Commonwealth countries. These programs each target ethnic groups for work in temporary, low-paying jobs, and do not allow participants the same benefits of other Canadians, despite living in Canada for several years at a time.

Community Building

Associations were the Chinese immigrants' first formal groups formed in Canada. They lay the foundations of every Chinatown.

- Provided for the essential and emergency needs denied to Chinese people by mainstream white service organizations— **shelter** for migrants upon arrival, **drop-in social centres**, often with **libraries** and **soup kitchens**. Most functioned, and some continue to function, as **credit unions** for members.
- For example, one soup kitchen in Vancouver spurred Chinese resistance and protest by refusing to serve Chinese -- 134 men died. Chinese in Vancouver staged a protest to reject this racism.
- Associations also provided **conflict mediation**: considering white racism towards Chinese people and the general lack of police presence in Chinatown, Associations were places to mediate and resolve conflict. Chinese did not trust the white dominated courts and police. (This function has been demonized in mainstream media, through Hollywood movies, etc.)
- These functions are different from “services,” which the government provides out of obligation. They were roles that the association took as a family responsibility, and mutual aid.
- Associations in many ways embodied the forced, self-sufficiency of early Chinatown.

Other sorts of organizations now dominate: business associations, government funded service organizations, religious organizations, and, to a lesser degree, associations based on ethnicity/region (for example the Chiu Chau Association, which we will pass by later...)

The Clan Social Network

- First Wave immigrants were mainly young men coming to work and send money home. They maintained an elder-kinship system even in Canada, through family associations organized according to village ties and family clans.
- Associations provided a community network which would care for and at the same time reinforce village values and commitments. Elders monitored young men's lives, and families in China could contact elders to inquire as to their men's behaviours and in case of missing remittances. These social networks also fought loneliness and isolation in a new country.