

Tracing Chinese Canadian Histories

Asians
Against
Racism
and Hate

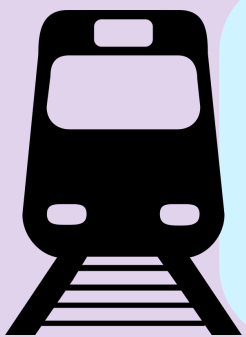
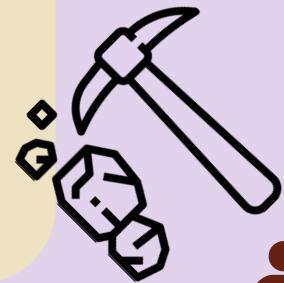


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Large-scale Chinese immigration to Canada

- Began in the mid to late 1800s
- Many were from the Guangdong Province or Pearl River Delta Region in the People's Republic of China
- In the early days of Chinese immigration, many of these immigrants were men looking for work in mining, forestry, transportation, or labour-intensive industries



Gold mining and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) were two industries that required large rates of labourers, encouraging increased Chinese immigration

Many early immigrants settled in British Columbia

Content warning: The following sections will detail instances of violence, discrimination, and death that impacted Chinese immigrants

The Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR)

Chinese labour was significant to the construction of the CPR

- Their labour is a significant part of Chinese Canadian history



Constructing the CPR was extremely dangerous but **necessary** to the growth of Canada as a country

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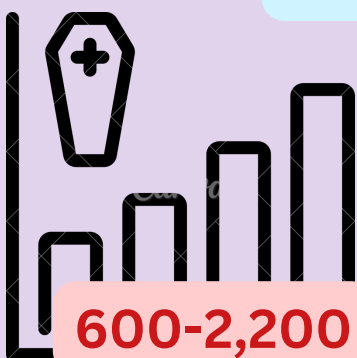
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Chinese workers were employed because

- It was easier to bring labourers to B.C. by water from across the Pacific Ocean¹
- They were experienced and efficient, but paid lower wages than white workers, meaning that employing them was cheaper²

Many workers died because of the dangerous working conditions, inadequate food, lack of medical aid, and other illnesses³



“The death count of Chinese workers over the entire construction period has been estimated to be between **600 and 2,200 workers**”⁴



1. Government of Canada, 2022

2. Ibid.

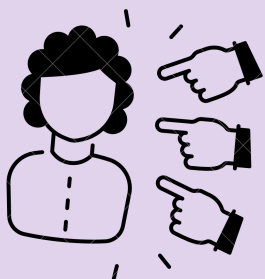
3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Chinese labourers provided indispensable labour, but how did Canada treat them?

In our 'Addressing Anti-Asian Racism' resource, we shared that the government used legislation and other measures to target those of Chinese descent

- These measures restricted their financial success, excluded Chinese folks from social and political integration, and attempted to hinder the growth of the Chinese community in Canada
- ***Make sure to review our previous resource for examples of anti-Chinese legislation!**



Why did the Canadian government discriminate against Chinese communities?



- They saw people of Chinese descent and Chinese communities as a 'threat' to the well-being of Canada and Canadian society
 - By labelling Chinese immigrants as '**threats**', white Canadians could maintain power and control in Canada



For example, by labelling all Chinese people as '**less civilized**' and '**diseased**', white Canadians could be considered as 'superior' and 'real' Canadians



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Creating safe spaces

In Chinatowns

- Because of racism and discrimination, including measures restricting the working and living arrangements of Chinese immigrants, many immigrants were restricted to **Chinese-only spaces**, known as Chinatowns
- Some restrictions in B.C. also meant that people of Chinese descent couldn't live or invest in properties outside of Chinatowns⁵
- However, as part of Chinese Canadians' resilience, Chinatowns became safe spaces



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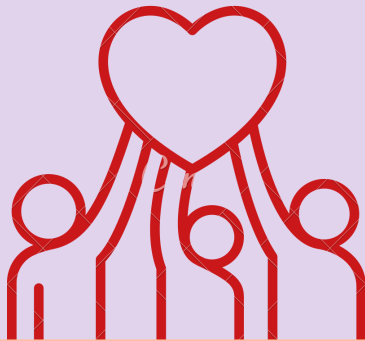
- They isolated Chinese folks from “the hostile and racist environment that surrounded them”⁶
- They fostered cultural environments that allowed Chinese Canadians to pay respect to Chinese cultural elements, including food and traditions



Other ways that Chinese immigrants found a sense of community was through the formation of associations



- These associations focused on “providing personal and community welfare services, social contact, and political activity”⁷



In these safe spaces, Chinese communities have displayed acts of **resilience, power, and resistance!**



5. Government of Canada, 2022

6. Chan, A. B., 2019

7. Ibid.

Why is it important to recognize Chinese Canadian histories?

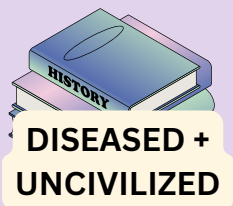
Chinese Canadian histories aren't thoroughly taught in school



By excluding Chinese Canadian histories from our curriculum, what is the government saying about who is truly Canadian? Why are non-white contributions ignored?

Many new immigrants may not know about Chinese Canadian contributions and experiences (including discrimination) in the past

- Understanding Chinese Canadian histories allows us to **connect** past injustices **to** current events
 - For example, we can connect past stereotypes of Chinese people as 'diseased' and 'inferior' to present-day racism surrounding COVID-19 and Chinese immigrants or tourists



- We can also connect the history of Chinese exclusion in Canada to the country's current use of state sanctioned legislation to control who can immigrate and receive citizenship status in Canada today



- Today**, many Chinese folks continue to be barred from receiving immigration status and as such many work in areas of employment where they are more vulnerable to exploitation



Root of Injustices

Only by understanding the historical root of these injustices can we fight for justice!

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PAST

PRESENT

How can we reflect on Chinese Canadian histories?

Speak to your parents and family members about their migration experience

- Examine the difficulties they faced, including economically, socially, and politically
- Consider the factors that encouraged their immigration



Speak to your friends, coworkers, and peers about their family's migration history to Canada



Ask your teachers to share more about non-white Canadian contributions in class (ex. History and English classes)



Look for workshops where you can learn more about Chinese Canadian history



Image: CCNCTO social justice student workshop about Chinese Canadian history

Plan a visit to local Chinese Canadian cultural centres, museums, and shopping areas to celebrate Chinese Canadian heritage

- Chinese Canadian Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto in Scarborough, O.N.
- Ottawa Chinese-Canadian Heritage Centre in Ottawa, O.N.
- Chinese Canadian Museum in Vancouver, B.C.
- Chinese Canadian Museum - Victoria Exhibition in Victoria, B.C.



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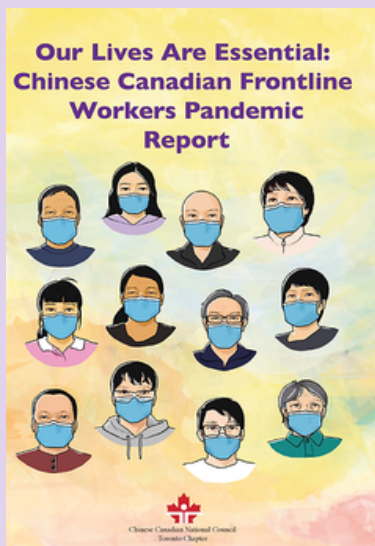
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Stay in touch with CCNCTO

Add us on **WeChat** or follow us on Instagram @**CCNCTO**

Check out our most recent [2021 anti-Asian racism report](#) and our [Frontline Workers Pandemic report](#)



Images: CCNCTO staff connecting with frontline Chinese workers



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Fill out [this form](#) to join our volunteer team and support our various organizing, anti-racism, and equity work

Works Cited

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