

Asians Against Racism and Hate



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100 Years After *The Chinese Exclusion Act (1923)*

What was the Chinese Exclusion Act?

- The first and only legislation deploying state power to sanction an ethnic group from coming to Canada

Canada's History of Chinese Immigration

- The first Chinese settlers arrived in 1858. Many were from the Guangdong province or Pearl River Delta Region of the People's Republic of China
- They were subject to discriminatory housing, voting, and employment laws
- Their labour was priced significantly cheaper than white labour, so often immigrants found work in mining, forestry, transportation, and other labour-intensive industries

The Canadian Pacific Railway

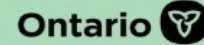
- Chinese labour was used to construct the most dangerous parts of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which would connect the west coast to eastern Canada (as part of Canada's settler colonial strategy)
- Accidents in this work were frequent and many labourers died of exhaustion, harsh weather, and poor living conditions
- Death tolls can only be estimated at approximately 600 to 2200 bodies, but "the Chinese in Canada have a saying that a Chinese worker died for every foot of railroad through the canyons" (Government of Canada, 2022, *Significant Events in History of Canadians of Asian Heritage*)

1885 Immigration Act

- Construction of the railway finished in 1885 and after the government sought to deter further Chinese immigration and generate profit with the *1885 Immigration Act*
- This act imposed a head tax on Chinese folks to reduce the number of immigrants (this was in place from 1886-1923)
- While the head tax deterred some, many Chinese families continued to pool and borrow resources to send family members to Canada (CCNC, 1988, *It is Only Fair!: Redress for the Head Tax and Chinese Exclusion Act*)
 - The head tax started at \$50 per person but by 1903 it increased to \$500
- From 1885-1923, the Canadian government collected about \$23 million from over 81,000 Chinese immigrants (Canada Year Book, 1923 as cited in CCNC, 1988, *It is Only Fair!: Redress for the Head Tax and Chinese Exclusion Act*)



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The Chinese Exclusion Act (1923)

- In response to growing immigration, the 1923 *Chinese Exclusion Act* was enacted to virtually cease Chinese immigration and seriously restrict the mobility of Chinese folks in Canada
- This Act was passed on July 1, 1923 and stopped all Chinese immigration to Canada for 24 years (repealed in 1947, but immigration was severely restricted until 1967)

It's important to note that despite facing racism and discrimination in all aspects of their lives, Chinese immigrants and migrants continued to display resilience, power, and resistance, creating safe spaces, challenging unconstitutional laws and norms, and paving the way for equity

- More than *just* laws, these laws make a statement about who is 'good' and who is 'bad,' alongside who is Canadian and who is not and can never be
- As these stories aren't always taught in our history, it's important to ensure that we continue to remember these histories and use them as fuel to continue fighting for equity for all
- By recognizing these roots of anti-Asian racism or of injustice, we can address hate and inequity at its roots

Why do we fight? What do we fight for?

- In 1980, CCNC (the Chinese Canadian National Council) formed to promote and support the equal rights of Chinese Canadians
- CCNC's redress campaign began in 1984 to lobby the government to:
 - Acknowledge the injustice imposed with the Chinese head tax
 - Recognize the suffering of individuals but also the entire Chinese Canadian community from legislated discrimination and forced family separation
 - Return a symbolic sum of money that was unjustly collected as a head tax
 - Source: Road to Justice, 2011, *Charter Challenged*
- More than 4000 head tax payers, spouses, and descendants registered with CCNC to lobby the government
- It wasn't until 2006 that our community members saw an apology from the Government of Canada

While community organizing made this possible, we *continue* to fight to advance equity for all - this is our collective responsibility



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The Future of East Asian/Asian/Chinese Canadian Organizing

- We are learning from our past and using it to guide us into a better future
- CCNCTO works to spread awareness about systemic anti-Asian racism
 - Out Fight COVID Racism Reporting Platform allowed us to track data on increasing rates of anti-Asian racism throughout the COVID-19 pandemic
 - This data has often been ignored by our government
 - We have written several community research report analyzing the scope of anti-Asian racism in Canada in 2020 and 2021, our Chinese Canadian community members' experiences with and hopes to combat anti-Asian racism, and barriers facing Chinese migrant workers when accessing legal services
 - They are available to the public and available on our website www.ccnctoronto.ca
 - We work with community members to build their capacity for anti-racism education and collective action
 - We work with students, parents, guardians, and stakeholders for change in education
 - We create intergenerational spaces for our community members to learn and talk about anti-racism
 - We are building solidarity with other marginalized communities, ensuring that our anti-racism work is inclusive and does not perpetuate harm to other communities

