



Righting Canada's Wrongs: The Chinese Head Tax and Anti-Chinese Immigration Policies in the Twentieth Century

Arlene Chan

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The first Chinese immigrants arrived in Canada in the mid-1800s searching for gold and a better life. They found jobs in forestry, mining, and other resource industries. But life in Canada was difficult and the immigrants had to face racism and cultural barriers. Thousands were recruited to work building the Canadian Pacific Railway. Once the railway was finished, Canadian governments and many Canadians wanted the Chinese to go away.

The government took measures to stop immigration from China to Canada. Starting in 1885, the government imposed a Head Tax with the goal of stopping immigration from China. In 1923 a ban was imposed that lasted to 1947. Despite this hostility and racism, Chinese-Canadian citizens built lives for themselves and persisted in protesting official discrimination. In June 2006, Prime Minister Harper apologized to Chinese Canadians for the former racist policies of the Canadian government.

Through historical photographs, documents, and first-person narratives from Chinese Canadians who experienced the Head Tax or who were children of Head Tax payers, this book offers a full account of the injustice of this period in Canadian history. It documents how this official racism was confronted and finally acknowledged.

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