

1858–1870s Gold Rush

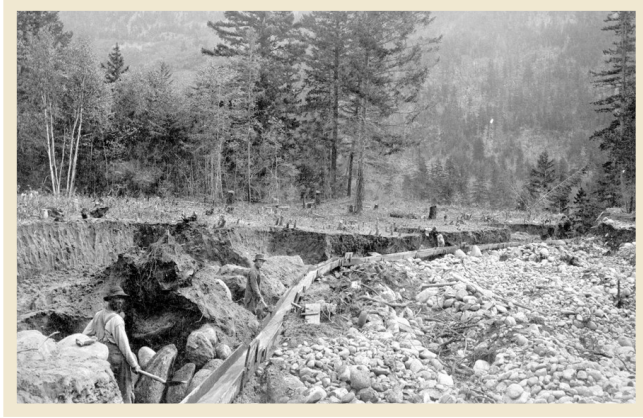
There were two big gold rushes in British Columbia. The first **gold rush** started in 1858 on the Fraser River from Hope to north of Lillooet. The second gold rush began in 1862 in the Cariboo region. There were also a number of smaller gold rushes.



Some Chinese people arrived from California, where a gold rush that had begun in 1849 was coming to an end. Others followed from Hong Kong and Guangdong, China, fleeing war and **poverty**. The Chinese named the Pacific Coast region of North America *Gum San*, meaning Gold Mountain. The name Gum San referred not only to the gold that could be found in the region, but also to the wealth that could be made even if you did not mine for gold. This is why the name continued to be used long after the gold rushes ended.



The first group of Chinese immigrants from San Francisco arrived in Victoria in June 1858 at the start of the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush. Victoria was where miners first came to get licenses to prospect and pan for gold in BC.



Fort Victoria, at the time, had a population of about 500. With the discovery of gold, the population swelled to over 20,000 people. The several hundred Chinese people who remained in Victoria provided supplies to the gold fields. They also worked as small merchants, building a strong community in the city.

The first Chinatown in Canada was founded in Victoria in the 1850s.

More Chinese people came to BC in the early 1860s when news of the Cariboo Gold Rush reached China. The Chinese also helped to build the 614-kilometer Cariboo Wagon Road by digging ditches, hauling gravel, and building wooden channels for water (called flumes). They also operated grocery stores and restaurants, and grew vegetables and other crops for the gold rush communities.

After the gold rushes ended around 1870, many Chinese people found employment working as servants, mainly in Victoria. Others worked in the coal mine in Nanaimo, and in the Fraser River salmon canning industry.

Vocabulary

gold rush:
a movement of people to where gold has been discovered

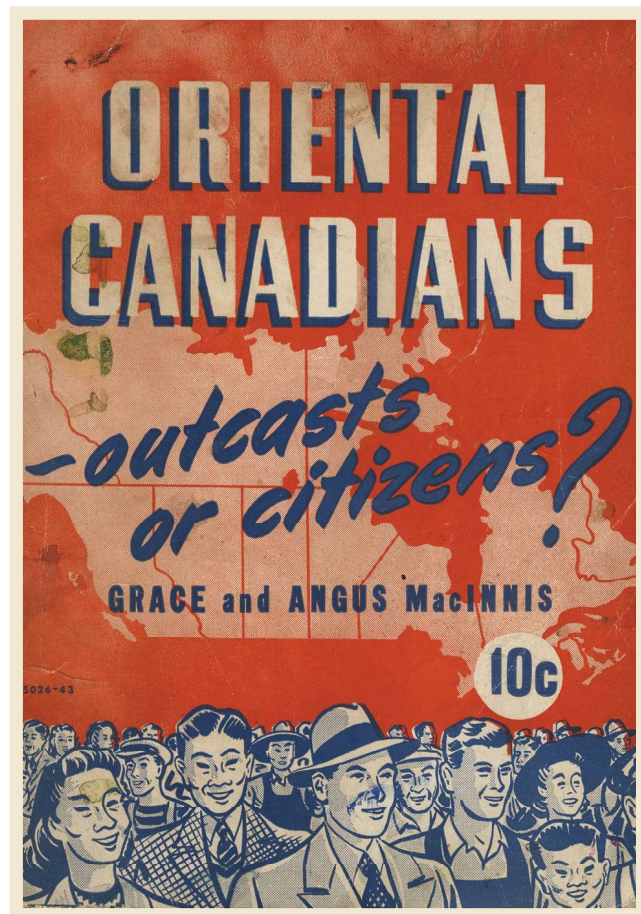
poverty:
being extremely poor

1872 Chinese Disenfranchisement

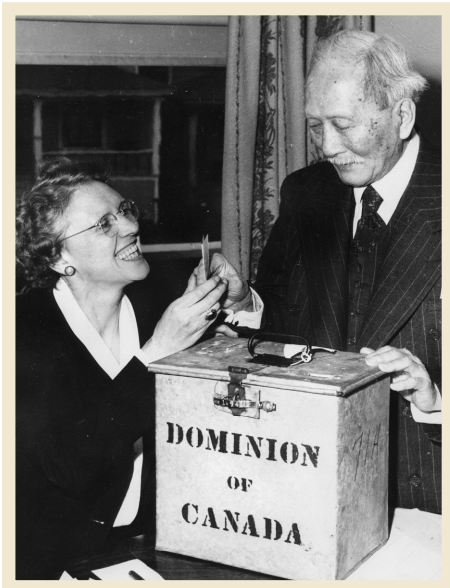
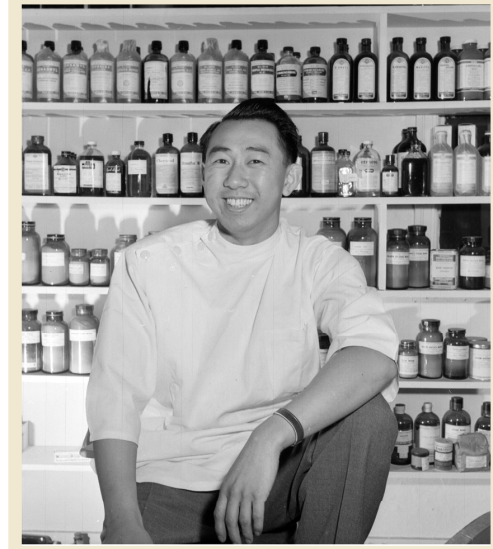
In 1861, Chinese immigrants who had lived in the Colony of Vancouver Island for three years in a row had the same rights as citizens born there. This included the right to vote.

By 1865, the gold rushes were mostly over and the colony began to face difficult economic conditions. There were a limited number of jobs. **Discrimination** against Chinese workers increased.

In 1872, one year after BC entered Confederation, the *Qualification and Registration of Voters Act* was passed. This Act excluded Chinese and First Nations from voting in provincial elections, even though they made up nearly 62 percent of BC's population at the time.



In 1895–96, new federal legislation was passed. It stated that if a person's name was not on the provincial voters list, they could not vote in a federal election. This meant Chinese people didn't have the right to vote in Canada. Because of this, Chinese people were also prevented from entering many occupations. Professional groups such as lawyers, accountants, and pharmacists required their members to be on the voters' lists.



It was not until 1948 that the *Dominion Elections Act* was repealed. The first election Chinese Canadians in BC were able to vote in was in 1949.

Vocabulary

discrimination:
unjust treatment of
people based on
race, age, or sex

disenfranchisement:
denied the right to
vote

1881–1885 Canadian Pacific Railway

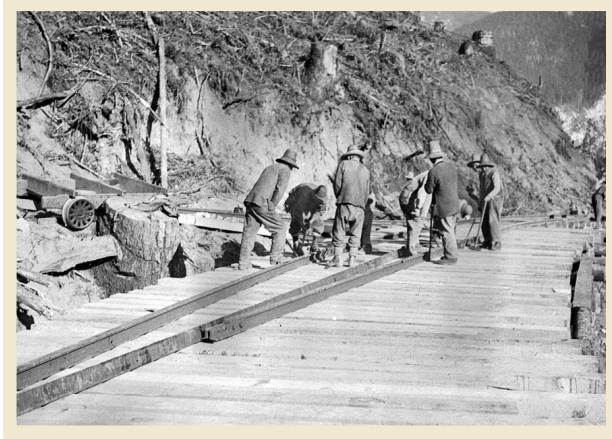
In 1871, BC joined Confederation, becoming one of the provinces that made up Canada. Prime Minister John A. MacDonalD promised that a railroad would be built to connect BC with the rest of Canada. The railway was completed in 1885.



The western section of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was 400 kilometres long. It linked a mountainous and rocky region, from Port Moody on the BC coast to the interior of BC west of Revelstoke. The American head engineer and construction contractor on the project needed 7,000 workers to start the project. He recruited Chinese workers who were willing to work for less pay than white workers. Some Chinese workers hired for the CPR came from the United States where they had helped build the **transcontinental**

railroad. Others came from southern China. Recruiters in the Guangdong province of China arranged passage to Canada and employment. In 1882, ten ships sailed from Hong Kong to Victoria, which took several months. There was little food and water and many men died on the journey.





White workers earned \$1.50 – \$2.50 a day. Chinese workers earned as little as \$1.00 a day. Chinese workers also had to provide their own food, clothing, transportation, and equipment. In contrast, white workers were provided these items.

Chinese people working the railroad lived in camps, slept in tents or boxcars, and cooked over open fires. They ate rice, dried salmon, and tea. In the freezing winters, many became ill and died from diseases such as smallpox and cholera. Others died from **scurvy** and starvation.

Work on the western segment of the CPR was difficult and dangerous. Chinese workers were given some of the most backbreaking and dangerous jobs. They cleared and graded the roads, and they blasted tunnels through rocks with explosives. Many workers died from fires, collapsed tunnels and bridges, landslides, and dynamite blasts. Many of these deaths were not recorded, and the families of the Chinese workers who were killed were not told of the deaths.

It has been estimated that approximately one Chinese worker died for every foot of track laid through the Fraser Canyon. Other estimates claim that a Chinese worker died for every mile of track laid. That means between 400 and 2,200 Chinese workers died during the construction of the CPR.

Vocabulary

scurvy:

a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C that results in swollen, bleeding gums

transcontinental:

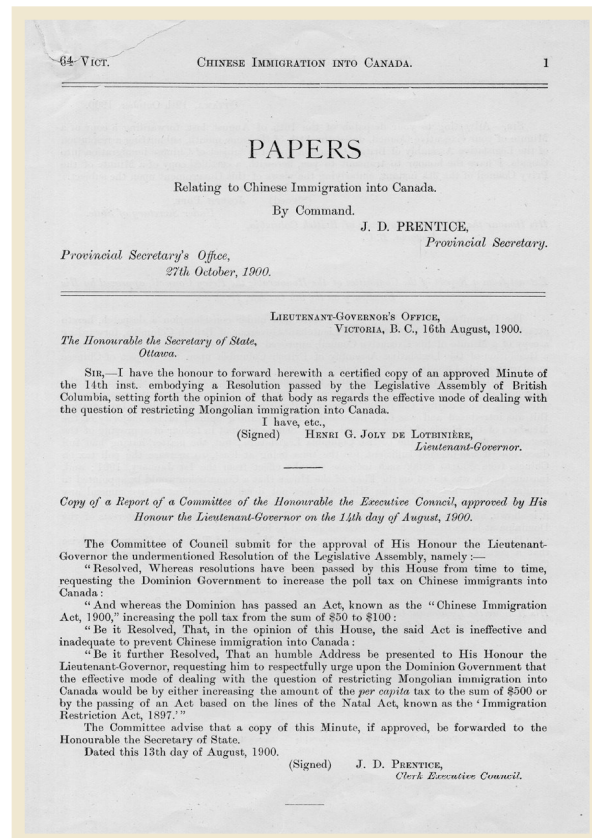
crossing a continent

1885 Chinese Immigration Act – Head Tax

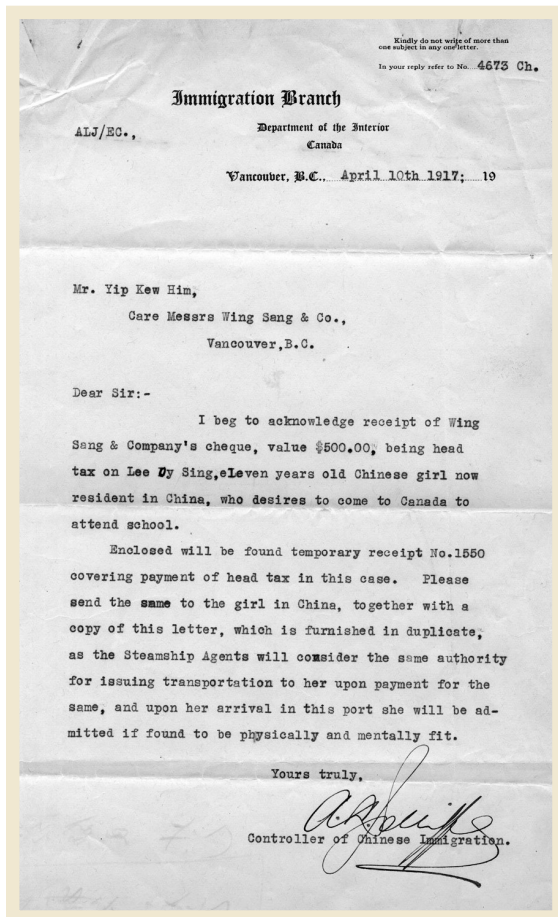
Chinese labourers on the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) worked for less pay than other workers. When the CPR was completed in 1885, politicians and the general public were afraid that Chinese people would take jobs away from white people.

In 1885, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald stated that Chinese people should be excluded from Canada. Under the *Chinese Immigration Act* (1885), the Canadian government forced Chinese workers and their families to pay a \$50 head tax to enter Canada. It was thought that Chinese people would not be able to afford this tax and would not come to Canada.

No **immigrants** from any other country had to pay such a tax to enter Canada. The head tax meant family members in China were left behind. Some families lived apart for many years. Some family members were never reunited and lived in poverty in China.



Chinese immigration dropped from 8,000 in 1882 to 124 in 1887. But newcomers from China still came to Canada. For this reason, the head tax was raised to \$100 in 1901. It was raised to \$500 in 1903—equal to about two year's pay. The head tax remained until 1923. The government changed the *Chinese Immigration Act* and excluded Chinese from immigrating to Canada altogether. This law did not change until 1947.



On June 22, 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered an apology in the House of Commons for the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants. In addition, on May 15, 2014, BC Premier Christy Clark apologized to Chinese Canadians for the provincial government's historical wrongs against Chinese Canadians from 1872–1947

Vocabulary

immigrants:
people who
come to live
permanently in a
foreign country

1907 Vancouver Anti-Asian Riots

From 1903 to 1907 there was a downturn in the Canadian economy. This led to increased anger towards Chinese and Japanese **immigrants** in BC. Some people feared Asians would take jobs away from white workers. Asians were willing to work for long hours doing dangerous and dirty work for little pay.



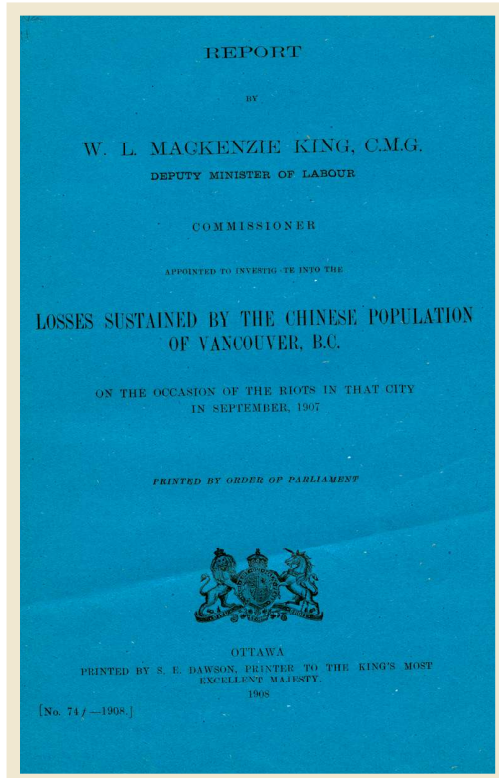
A group of people joined together to form the Asian Exclusion League (AEL). The AEL wanted to spread anti-Asian feelings, and push for limited Asian immigration.

In September 1907, the AEL organized a parade of several thousand protestors. They gathered at Vancouver City Hall carrying banners that said, "Keep Canada White" and "Stop the Yellow Peril." A figure of the BC Lieutenant-Governor Robert Dunsmuir was burned during the rally. He employed Asian immigrants in his coal mines on Vancouver Island. Dunsmuir did not support those who wanted to limit Asian immigration.



As part of the rally, people gave speeches that criticized the growing Asian population. At 9:00 p.m. the leaders of the rally encouraged the crowd to move towards Chinatown and Japantown. This led to hours of rioting. Windows were

broken and Asian businesses were looted. The Chinese did not fight back. The Japanese residents built **barricades**. Armed with guns, knives, and bricks, the Japanese residents managed to hold off the rioters. The rioting petered out in the early hours of September 8. Many people were injured and there was a lot of property damage. On September 9, rioters tried to attack Japantown again, but they were dispersed by the police.



In 1908, the federal government awarded compensation to riot victims. Japanese victims received \$9,000 as a community and Chinese victims received \$26,000 as a community. It was decided that Asian immigration to Canada was the primary cause of the riot.

On July 1, 1923, the federal government passed legislation suspending Chinese immigration indefinitely. Only after World War II, in 1947, were Chinese once again allowed to immigrate to Canada.

Vocabulary

barricades:
barriers built to block or defend oneself

immigrants:
people who come to live permanently in a foreign country

1922–1923 Victoria School Strike


In the early 1920s, George Jay was the chairman of the Victoria School Board. He decided that over 200 Chinese elementary students who attended public schools should be **segregated**. He argued that Chinese students were unclean and they held back the other students. The Chinese community described this as *Huangbai Fenxiao*, which translates to “Yellow and White in Separate Schools.”

In September 1922, principals of two Victoria schools called the Chinese students out of their classes and marched them over to the schools that were for only Chinese students. But three organizations—The Chinese Community Benevolent Association (CCBA), Chinese Canadian Club (Tongyuan Association), and Chinese Commerce Association—planned a student **strike**



against the Victoria school system. When students reached the segregated school, instead of entering the building, they went home.

The three associations formed an Anti-Segregation Association (ASA). The ASA set up a Chinese Free School for students to attend during the strike. The strike lasted for a year as the ASA and the Victoria School Board tried to come to an agreement. In 1922–1923, fewer than six Chinese students attended public schools in Victoria. In the previous year, there were 216 Chinese students in Victoria public schools.



CHINESE PUPILS START "REBELLION"
Refuse to Conform to School Board's Decision
Segregated School Issue in More Acute Form

Chinese pupils attending city schools vanished into thin air yesterday when principals of some schools attempted to carry out Chinese segregation plans adopted by the City School Board. The Board intends to stand firm on its decision to keep Chinese and white pupils separated and the young Orientals fail to attend at the schools provided for them. The truancy officer will take a hand in the proceedings.

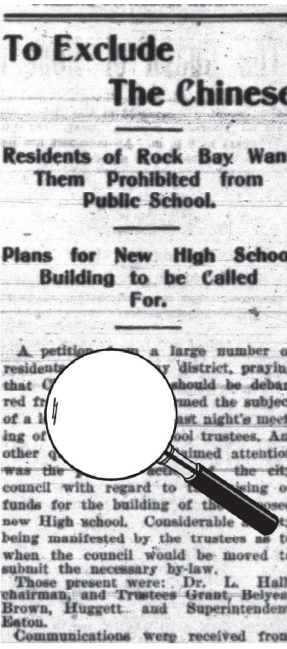
What amounts to a virtual strike against the School Board's decision has been initiated by the Orientals instigated by the parents of the pupils.

A. Surprising Incident.

"Chinese pupils attending city schools vanished into thin air yesterday when principals of some of the schools attempted to carry out the Chinese segregation plans adopted by the City School Board. The Board intends to stand firm on its decision to keep Chinese and white pupils separated and the young Orientals fail to attend at the schools provided for them. The truancy officer will take a hand in the proceedings.

What amounts to a virtual strike against the School Board's decision has been initiated by the Orientals, instigated by the parents of the pupils."

In September 1923, the school board allowed all Chinese students to return to the schools they attended before the strike. But partial segregation continued. Chinese students from Grades 1 to 4 continued to be educated separately. It was only after World War II had ended in 1945 that students of Chinese origin were fully integrated into public schools in Victoria.



To Exclude The Chinese
Residents of Rock Bay Want Them Prohibited from Public School.
Plans for New High School Building to be Called For.

A petition from a large number of residents of the Rock Bay district, praying that Chinese children should be debarred from attending the subject of a meeting of a school trustees. An other petition demanded attention was the subject of the city council with regard to the building of funds for the building of the new High school. Considerable opposition being manifested by the trustees as to when the council would be moved to submit the necessary by-law.

Those present were: Dr. L. Hall chairman, and Trustees Grant, Belyea Brown, Huggett, and Superintendent Eaton.

Communications were received from

"A petition of residents of Rock Bay district, asking the board to withdraw the permission to Chinese children to attend the school, or to place them in a separate room of the building. Mr. Grant (Trustee) would like to see the Chinese placed in a separate school.

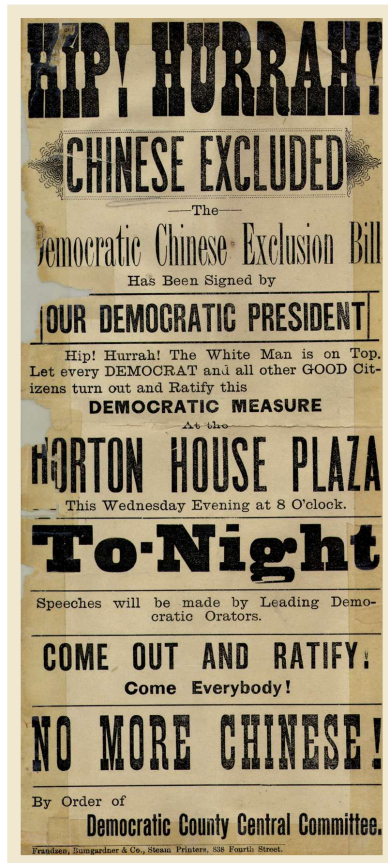
Mr. Belyea [Trustee] pointed out that Chinese children, under the existing law, had the same right to free education as those of any other race, and the school board had no power and no right to take action on the petition."

Vocabulary

segregated:
 to set apart or divide based on race, religion, or sex

strike:
 walk off the job (or leave school) in protest

1923 Chinese Immigration Act (Exclusion Act)



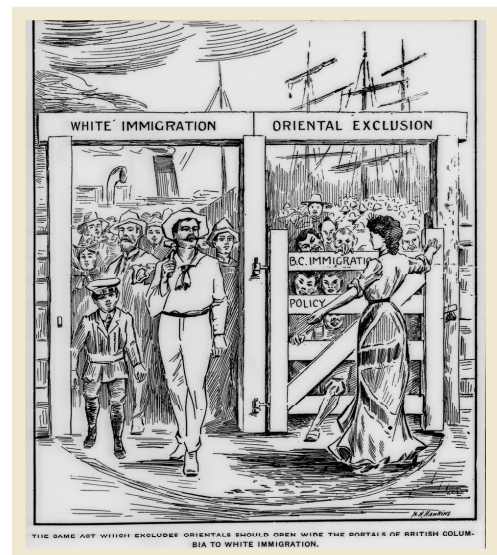
World War I ended in 1918. After the war, Canada faced poor economic conditions. Some people blamed these conditions on visible minorities, like the Chinese people, because they worked for less pay.

Starting in 1903, Chinese people had to pay a \$500 head tax beginning in 1903 in order to enter Canada. Some people felt this was not enough to prevent Chinese people from immigrating to Canada. There was a call from white society to ban Chinese **immigration** altogether. This request began in BC, but had support across Canada.

A new *Chinese Immigration Act* was **legislated** in 1923. It became known as the Chinese Exclusion Act. This new legislation banned Chinese

immigrants from entering Canada unless they were students, **diplomats**, or **merchants**. Chinese people were the only immigrants completely barred from entering Canada.

The act was passed on July 1, 1923—Canada Day. Chinese Canadians renamed this celebration, “Humiliation Day”. As a protest, Chinese Canadians closed their businesses and boycotted Canada Day for years after.



The Head Tax and *Chinese Exclusion Act* were very hard on families. Early Chinese pioneers were not allowed to bring their families to Canada. This resulted in long periods of separation. Chinese wives were left to raise their children in China, and often experienced economic difficulties and starvation. Here is one account of the hardship:



You came here [to Canada] and if you behaved, then you could go home and meet the family again... Sometimes you came here for 30 or 40 years, 50 or 60 years, and never went back to see them... I know of one guy here, when he went back to China to get married, he lived there for a couple of months... He never saw his wife [again] for 40 years... You came in here... year after year, worked a little bit, spent a little bit, couldn't save money to see your wife... So what could you do?

From: Peter S. Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1998. P. 68. © Oxford University Press Canada 1998.

The *Chinese Immigration Act* was abolished in 1947.

Vocabulary

diplomats:
officials who represent another country

immigration:
coming to live permanently in a foreign country

legislated:
made into law

merchant:
a person or company who trades goods or products, or supplies goods to a particular trade