Passage to Fortune Fact Sheet

Background to Emigration

- Emigration from China to Canada began in 1858.
- Most Chinese immigrants were single men.
- Immigration took on two forms:
  1. Coolie broker.
  2. Chain migration.
- Coolie broker immigration involved an indenture arrangement by which the immigrant worked off his indebtedness to the broker who had paid his passage to Canada from China before he was free to seek employment of his own.
- Coolie broker immigration provided gangs for construction and mining, and is a major part of Chinese-Canadian history in the late nineteenth century.
- Chain migration in Canada was common after 1900 and occurred when the immigrant came to Canada on his own and worked until he had enough money to return to China. Sometimes the immigrant would return to Canada with a wife, and establish a family in the new land.
- Chinese migration is a product of the forces that shaped Chinese history: population pressure, political weakness, foreign intervention, and natural catastrophes. Other factors include Christian missions, the opium traffic, and limitations on China’s sovereignty.
- In the mid-nineteenth century, China was in the midst of the Taiping Uprising, a millenarian movement that caused a civil war in which an estimated 20 million people were killed.
- Even with the re-establishment of China’s central government in the 1870’s, banditry remained in the countryside and private armies were a way of life.
- An increasing population put relentless pressure on an already exhausted farmland.
- Most Chinese emigrants came from areas that were the least arable and the most overcrowded.

The Origins of Chinese Emigrants to Canada

- Chinese migrants came primarily from the coastal provinces of Guangdong and Fujian.
- The majority of Chinese migrants to Canada came from a small area of eight contiguous counties in the Canton delta, in particular the four adjacent counties of Sun-wui, Hoi-Ping, Toi-san, and Yin-ping, known collectively as Sze-yap, the Four Districts.
- The majority of Chinese who migrated to Canada were of rural origin. In China, they were merely tenants renting inadequate farmland from greedy landlords. Canada provided the promise of hope and new beginnings.
Early Immigration and Settlement, 1858—1880

The British Columbia Gold Rush

- The first group of Chinese prospectors arrived in Victoria on June 28, 1858.
- By the early 1860’s there may have been as many as six or seven Chinese in what is now British Columbia.
- Many of these migrants came north from California where anti-Chinese sentiment was becoming widespread.
- Many Chinese were attracted to Quesnel Forks, a supply center for miners, where they could provide services such as laundries and restaurants to working single men.
- In 1862, news of Billy Barker’s spectacular gold strike brought thousands of prospectors into the area. The population of Barkerville soared into the thousands, and at least 3,000 Chinese lived there. In 1862, sixteen Chinese businesses opened up, including brothels, opium dens, and eight Chinese restaurants.
- In 1863, Governor Douglas commissioned a wagon road into the Cariboo to provide easier access for the growing mining industry. A route was commissioned through the Fraser canyon to provide access to the various mining sites and towns on the lower Fraser. Various sections of the road were let to tender, and several contractors found that Chinese laborers were the most satisfactory workers, and the most available to work.
- Approximately 1,000 Chinese worked on the Cariboo Wagon Road and an additional 1,000 were hired to build dikes and ditches in New Westminster and Victoria. In the years to come, the Chinese would work on many other infrastructure projects.
- As the gold rush dwindled, many men, including the Chinese, moved into urban centers. Mining companies replaced these early prospectors and by 1875, there were more than thirty Chinese-owned companies mining gold in the Cariboo.
- The coal industry lured the Chinese north from Victoria. Coal had first been discovered in British Columbia at Nanaimo in 1850, and, after having suffered a regional depression in 1866, two coal mining companies began hiring Chinese workers at $1 per day as opposed to the minimum wage of $2.50 per day for a white worker. However, after a month the Chinese struck for $1.50 per day and won.
- The Chinese also became involved with domestic service. It is estimated that by the end of the 1870’s there were over 400 Chinese servants and cooks in Victoria alone.

Building the Railroad

- On October 7, 1877, the Victoria Colonist announced that the Canadian government had at last called for tenders for construction of the long-promised transcontinental railroad.
The construction tendered was from the head of navigation on the Fraser to the Western end of Kamloops Lake, 127 miles up the Fraser and Thompson canyons.

Attempts by British Columbia Premier Walkem to have clauses inserted into the contracts prohibiting the use of Chinese labour were rejected by Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, who argued that the government could not dictate how the contractors carried out their work as long as it was done well.

Although this length of the railroad was tendered in four different contracts, Andrew Onderdonk, an American, managed to buy them from the lowest bidders on the grounds that one company could do a more efficient job than four.

Responding to anti-Chinese sentiment, Onderdonk gave his assurances that he would only rely on white labour, providing that there was enough available.

Onderdonk soon realized that many of the white men he had hired from San Francisco were totally unreliable, calling them “the most useless lot of broken down gamblers, barkeepers, etc. ever collected in one place”.

Onderdonk began to hire Chinese labourers from San Francisco and Portland, Oregon within a month of starting the project. A Chinese company, the Lian Chang Company, recruited these workers even before they were contracted, so that it was paying expenses for travel and maintenance before positions were guaranteed.

Over 1,500 experienced Chinese railroad workers came to Canada from the United States in 1880 and 1881.

In 1881, Onderdonk contracted the Lian Chang Company to bring 2,000 workers from Hong Kong. Of the 8,000 who arrived in Victoria in 1882, 6,500 disembarked to build the railroad in the three months of April, May, and June.

The 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration reported that 15,701 Chinese entered Canada during the period January 1881 through June 1884. Another 1,306 Chinese arrived in port from July to October, making a total of over 17,000 Chinese immigrants to Canada in the four years of railroad construction.

There was a high turnover rate in the construction of the railroad. Working conditions were difficult and accidents were frequent. Due to the racist approach of the railway companies, many Chinese workers perished in rock explosions, collapsed tunnels, or drowned after falling off incomplete bridges.

It is estimated that over 600 Chinese workers died in the construction of the railway, approximately four men for every mile of track. This figure, however, is probably a conservative estimate as it was based on Onderdonk’s testimony to the Royal Commission.

**Early Chinese Communities**

By the 1880’s there were three identifiable settlement patterns among the Chinese community in British Columbia:

1. Those who worked for non-Chinese companies such as the railroad, coalmines, canneries, and fisheries.
2. Those who provided commerce and service for a large body of independent Chinese miners.
3. Those who served the white population as servants, tailors, cigar-makers, and vegetable-sellers. These communities also provided the
Chinese with services such as doctors, barbers, teachers, and prostitutes.

- There were very few women among the Chinese in Canada at this time. In fact, women comprised only 1.2 per cent of the total Chinese population, giving a sex ratio of only one female for every eighty-two males at that time.
- By 1885, there was a Chinese population of over 10,000 in Canada, a population that was limited to British Columbia.

Growing Anti-Chinese Sentiment & Federal Government Policy

The 1884–1885 Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration

- The British Columbia government’s attempt to pass a series of discriminatory acts sparked an anti-Chinese sentiment the Dominion government could not ignore. In July 1884, it established a Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration.
- The Commission was the result of a motion that was presented to the Canadian House of Commons asking that a law be passed to prohibit the Chinese from immigrating to British Columbia. The nineteenth century belief held that Chinese workers were taking jobs away from white workers.
- The Royal Commission heard from fifty-one witnesses who submitted their evidence as written answers to a list of twenty-seven questions provided by the Commission. There was a great deal of disagreement as to what policy the government should follow.
- Summing up the evidence provided by the witnesses, Judge Gray suggested that there were three categories of public opinion in British Columbia:
  1. “A well-meaning but strongly prejudiced minority, whom nothing but absolute exclusion will satisfy.”
  2. “An intelligent minority, who conceive that no legislation whatever is necessary.”
  3. “A large majority, who think there should be moderate restriction.”
- Gray suggested a $10 head tax to be levied on each disembarking immigrant, whether man, woman, or child; and a joint Chinese and white tribunal to replace the Chinese associations that settled disputes among the Chinese community.

The Chinese Immigration Act, 1885

- The Canadian government responded to Gray’s report on April 13, 1885 with An Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration into Canada. The Act received royal assent from the Governor General on July 20, 1885.
- Growing anti-Chinese sentiment in British Columbia lead to further restrictions in the Act. Rather than the suggested $10 head tax, the final wording of section 4 stated, “Every person of Chinese origin shall pay…on entering Canada, at the port or other place of entry, the sum of fifty dollars.”
- Other amendments limited the number of Chinese who could come to Canada on any single ship to one migrant per every fifty tons of cargo, imposed strict health
regulations on the Chinese, and created two new offices: Controller of Chinese Immigration and official interpreter.

- The new law had an immediate effect on Chinese immigration, as the number of migrants fell to 212 in 1886 from the thousands who had immigrated in the early 1880’s. In 1887, the number of migrants fell even further to 124, but the following year Chinese immigration once again began to rise, and by 1890 annual numbers were once again over 1,000.

**Restrictions to Growth, 1900--1910**

- According to the census there were 17,312 Chinese in Canada in 1901. Chinese immigration, which had decreased in the late 1880’s, had greatly increased between 1889 and 1901 to over 2,000 arrivals per year.
- In response to growing pressure from British Columbia, Ottawa passed the *Chinese Immigration Act of 1900*, which went into effect January 1, 1902. The Act raised entry head tax from $50 per person to $100 per person, giving the province of British Columbia one-half of all the acquired head tax revenue.
- The $100 head tax was much less than the $500 amount requested by the British Columbia government. Growing discontent over this concern, led to the 1901 Royal Commission’s investigation into Chinese immigration.
- The Royal Commission recommended denying the Chinese the right to vote, as they paid little in taxes.
- In 1903, the federal government responded to these findings by raising the head tax to $500 per person, with the exemption of established merchants and their families, diplomats, clergymen, tourists, students, and scientists.
- British Columbia had previously disenfranchised the Chinese at the provincial level, and proceeded to remove the municipal franchise. As federal voters’ lists follow provincial voters’ lists, the federal franchise was also removed.
- Saskatchewan followed British Columbia and disenfranchised the Chinese in the *Elections Act of 1908*.
- Raising the head tax from $50 to $100 did very little to discourage Chinese immigration. In 1903, there were 5,000 new arrivals, the largest ever for a single year. The federal government responded by raising the head tax to $500 per migrant.

**The War Years, 1914—1918**

- During the first three years of World War I, unemployment was severe among both the white and Chinese populations.
- Unemployed Chinese were encouraged to return to China, and others were discouraged from immigrating to Canada.
- Government rules were suspended. Normally, any Chinese person who left Canada for China had to return to Canada within one year or else lose his right to tax-free return. But during the war years, the federal government provided one blanket extension after another, eventually stipulating that all Chinese eligible to return to Canada had to do so within twelve months of the declaration of peace.
• The Chinese found themselves supporting both China’s modernization and Canada’s involvement in the war effort.
• The Chinese of Vancouver contributed $100,000 to the war effort in bond purchases.
• Although no Chinese were drafted for military services, a small number volunteered for infantry service as enlisted men.
• The war brought Canadians and Chinese together as allies but still race-relations proved problematic.

The 1923 Legislation

• Post-war anti-Chinese sentiment was fuelled by an economic slump, factory layoffs, unemployed war veterans, and so on. This, coupled with the existence of Chinese immigration abuses led to suggestions of general exclusion of the Chinese population in immigrating to Canada.
• In response to this sentiment, two Members of Parliament, H.H. Stevens and W.G. McQuarrie, introduced a resolution in favor of Chinese exclusion.
• Legislation introduced in 1923, contained the following provisions:
  1. The head tax was abolished.
  2. Students below university age were no longer admitted.
  3. Only four classes of immigrants were allowed to enter: university students, merchants involved in the import-export business, native-borns returning from education in China, and diplomatic personnel.
• Missionaries and Chinese organizations alike opposed the legislation and called for amendments. Yet, the amendments that were made were minor.
• July 1, 1923 the legislation took effect, virtually terminating Chinese immigration to Canada. In the seventeen years to follow, only six Chinese were admitted into Canada, as opposed to the 44,455 Chinese in the seventeen years prior to this legislation.
• The Chinese Exclusion Act remained the law until 1947.

Chinese Settlement in Moose Jaw

• With the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late 1880’s, the Chinese began to move eastward. In Saskatchewan, Moose Jaw had the largest Chinese population.
• Chosen as the divisional point for the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1882, Moose Jaw had become a booming town overnight. Incorporated as a town in 1884, commerce and industry in Moose Jaw were skyrocketing.
• Life of the early Chinese settlers is not well documented, but it is known that hand-laundry was by far the most common occupation. Requiring neither training nor capital, this was a relatively easy business to establish.
• Other Chinese operated boarding houses, and restaurants, while others found work as railroad-maintenance workers, and domestic servants.
Due to a gradual increase in Moose Jaw’s Chinese population, and rampant discrimination towards the Chinese, a mini-Chinatown formed around River Street.

The Chinese population of Moose Jaw grew slowly to 162 in 1911.

May 12, 1912 saw the first Chinese organization established in Moose Jaw, the Chinese Mission, now called the Chinese United Church.

In 1912, a Chinese restaurant owner assaulted a white waitress after having quarreled with her. The man was arrested, and the incident resulted in the passing of an Act to Prevent the Employment of Female Labour in Certain Capacities by the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly. The Act states:

No person shall employ in any capacity any white woman or girl to reside or lodge in or to work in or, save as a bona fide customer in a public apartment thereof only, to frequent any restaurant, laundry or other place of business of amusement owned, kept or managed by any Japanese, Chinaman, or other Oriental person.

This Act was repealed in 1918 and replaced with the Female Employment Act which required Chinese businessmen to obtain a license from the municipality in order to hire a white female.

According to the 1921 Moose Jaw census, of the 188 Chinese residing in Moose Jaw, 11 were female.