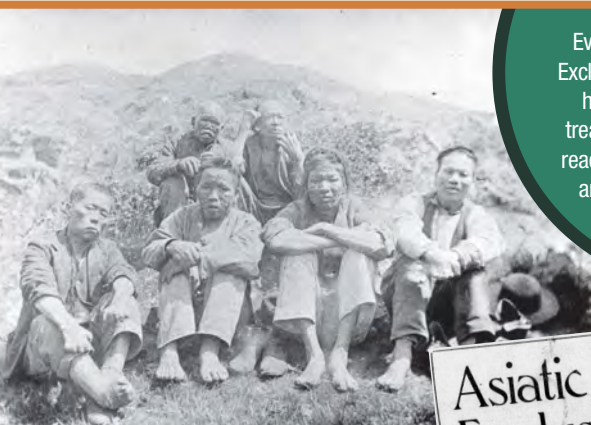


By Debbie Jiang

UNWANTED

Chinese immigrants stuck it out and succeeded despite racist attitudes and discrimination from white Canadians.



Even beyond head taxes and the Exclusion Act, Canadians of Chinese heritage have lived with unfair treatment for generations. You will read about some ugly things in this article, but they are also part of Canada's story.

THE UNWANTED OF THE UNWANTED

In the 1890s, Victoria, B.C., Chinese victims of leprosy — a serious contagious disease — were sent to nearby D'Arcy Island instead of a hospital. The city gave them food but no medical help, leaving them to die in this leper colony or lazaretto.

Canadians often referred to Chinese people with the racist name "chink."



The Asiatic Exclusion League was formed in B.C. in 1907. Its members wrongly blamed the loss of their jobs on people of Chinese and Japanese origin.

That same year, Exclusion League members trashed Vancouver's Chinatown and Little Tokyo.

In 1910, employees from China, Japan and India who worked at Ferridge Lumber Company in Langley, B.C., had to wear one of these discs around their necks. They returned them at the end of the day for their pay. White employees were identified by name and didn't have to wear tags.

Royal BC Museum, Public Domain, Salsihan Archives

In the 1930s, it was impossible for any of Victoria, B.C.'s Chinese Boy Scouts to become a King's Scout. To earn this highest honour in Scouting, they had to prove they could swim, but people of Chinese heritage were barred from the city's only swimming pool.



Boy Scouts, Victoria, B.C., 1930.

“I want to wash dirty clothes all day for half the pay.”

“When I grow up, I want white people to treat me like an outcast.”

Not things kids would say, but that was the reality.



Members of the Chinese National Association League, Quebec City, 1921.

In 1912, the law in Saskatchewan said a Chinese businessman could not hire a white woman to work for him. In some places, it was against the law for women and girls even to enter a Chinese-owned business. Movie theatres forced Asian customers to sit in the balcony, separate from white moviegoers.

During the First and Second World Wars, Canadian-born youth of Chinese ancestry were eager to fight for their country, even though Canada refused to allow them to be citizens. Their valour helped persuade the government that people of Chinese descent deserved full citizenship rights. The right to vote finally came in 1947.

FIRST WORLD WAR



Private Wee Hong (Walter) Louie from Kamloops, B.C., was a gunner in the First World War. Afterward, he bought a radio shop in Orillia, Ont., but the city refused to give him a business licence. He sent his war medals and uniform to Prime Minister Mackenzie King to protest. His items were returned along with an apology. Louie was granted his licence.



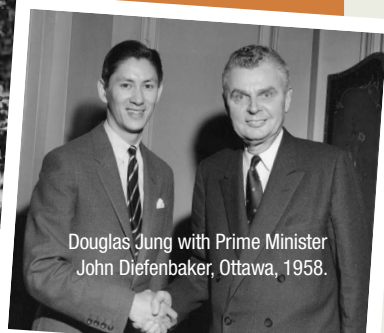
Flying Officer Quan J. Louie of Vancouver was a star player for the Chinese Students Soccer Team. He was part of the family that still owns London Drugs. He died when his bomber crashed over Germany.

SECOND WORLD WAR

Vancouver's Lieutenant Wilfred Seto was chosen to lead Canadian soldiers fighting in Italy. A higher-ranking officer told him that no one would take commands from a "Chinaman" and sent him back to Canada.



Canada's military rejected Sergeant Douglas Jung. But the British Army recruited the Victoria man for dangerous secret missions because he spoke Chinese and blended among Southeast Asians. In 1957, he was elected Canada's first Member of Parliament of Chinese heritage.



Douglas Jung with Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, Ottawa, 1958.



From 1998 to 2012, Vivienne Poy served as the first Canadian of Asian descent to be appointed to the Senate of Canada. Her work was essential to the creation of Asian Heritage Month, celebrated each May.

Sophia Leung represented Vancouver Kingsway from 1997 to 2004 as Canada's first female MP of Chinese heritage. She was married to Dr. So Wah Leung, mentioned on p. 3.



In 2022, Ken Sim of Vancouver became the first person of Chinese ethnicity to be elected mayor of a major Canadian city. In 2023, Olivia Chow became Toronto's first mayor of Chinese descent.



Born in Harbin, China, Simu Liu moved to Ontario when he was four. He starred in the hit TV comedy *Kim's Convenience* and shot to worldwide fame in the 2021 movie *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* and in *Barbie* in 2023.



Over 38 years, about 82,000 Chinese immigrants paid nearly \$23 million in discriminatory head taxes. In 2006, as shown above, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on behalf of the government. By then, only twenty head tax payers were still alive to hear Canada say it was sorry.

Although our laws now provide equality to all, there are still anti-Chinese feelings around. They came to the surface during the COVID-19 pandemic when people of Chinese origin were blamed and attacked.

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WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP STOP RACISM?