

Archive Package: 1923–1946 (Exclusion Act)

Fact Sheet: Key Issues and Events of 1923–1946

- 1923: The federal government passes the *Chinese Immigration Act*, banning Chinese immigration from China. As well, ethnic Chinese with British nationality were banned from immigrating to Canada. All Chinese people living in Canada, including those born in Canada, were required to register with the federal government. At the time, Chinese Canadians referred to “Dominion Day” (now Canada Day) as “Humiliation Day,” and refused to join celebrations until the act was repealed in 1947.
- The Great Depression (1929-39) reached its height in 1933, with about one-third of the labour force out of work. The Canadian government offered one-way passage back to China, and many accepted, leaving Canada for good.
- Over this period, Chinese population in Canada dropped by 25 percent. Poverty-stricken Chinese workers were unable to reunite with their families, leaving them stranded alone in BC. Many became ill, and suicidal.
- Prior to World War II, Adolf Hitler cited Canadian and American anti-Chinese immigration laws as precedents for discriminatory measures in Germany.
- The Depression heightened the Chinese Canadian communities’ reliance on each other, and they are noted for declining social assistance.
- Left-wing white labour expressed solidarity with the Chinese workers, seeing all races as victims of the capitalist system. In March, 1935, Chinese Workers’ Protective Association and the Unemployed Workers Association held a joint meeting and called for equal treatment in the employment and welfare of Chinese workers.
- 1932: Support for “Oriental rights” was expressed as part of the platform of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (a predecessor of today’s NDP). Their popular political slogan, directed at white citizens, stated: “A vote for the CFF is a vote to give the Chinaman and the Japanese the same voting rights as you have.”

- 1939: World War II began, and while Canada and China were allies, BC opposed Chinese Canadians and other Asians enlisting. Despite this, over 600 Chinese Canadians served, fighting overseas, working in wartime industries, and working on fundraising campaigns.
- During the war, the USA repealed its anti-Chinese immigration law.
- 1941: An estimated 20,141 Chinese Canadian families lived apart, with husbands in Canada and wives in China.
- During this period, Vancouver gradually took over the trade that passed through Victoria.
- 1944: A group of Chinese Canadian activists drafted and signed a petition as members of the Chinese Canadian Association, requesting the rights of Chinese Canadians to vote in elections in British Columbia.