

The Chinese Head Tax and Chinese Immigration to Canada

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Research Question

How did the Chinese Head Tax affect selection into immigration and/or immigrant wealth of Chinese immigrants to Canada in the early 20th century?

Outline

1. Background

2. Data

3. Initial Descriptives

Immigration in Response to Head Tax

Decomposing Chinese Immigration

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Timeline

- ▶ Early 1880s: Influx of Chinese immigrants for construction of Canadian Pacific Railway
- ▶ 1885: Chinese Exclusion Act institutes \$50 tax
 - ▶ Only exceptions for students, merchants, and diplomats
 - ▶ Was not applied retroactively, but the tax was required even for re-entry going forward
 - ▶ One-time tax¹, applied at the port of entry
 - ▶ Payment was tracked using a physical 'head-tax certificate'
 - ▶ Failure to pay would result in being sent back to China – many immigrants had to borrow money or enter indentured servitude contracts

¹Repayment was only required if someone was out of the country for more than 2 years

Timeline

- ▶ 1900: Tax raised to \$100
- ▶ 1903: Tax raised to \$500
- ▶ 1912: All certificates re-issued with a photo (to prevent entry using someone else's certificate)
- ▶ 1923: Chinese immigration banned completely (with very few exceptions)
- ▶ Chan (2014) estimates that the Canadian government generated \$23 million in revenue from the Head Tax (approx. 440 million USD today)

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Canadian Census Data

Year	Coverage	Sampling Method
1852	20%	Random, clustered sample
1871	1.8%	Stratified sample (8 strata)
1881	100%	Full sample
1891	5%	Random sample ²
1901	5%	<i>Not Specified</i>
1911	5%	Random sample ³
1921	4%	Random sample ⁴

Note: China was not listed as a country of origin in the data until the 1881 census.

²Also includes 10% of cities and 100% of all large dwellings and some areas of Ontario

³Also includes 10% of large dwellings and 25% of multi-unit dwellings

⁴Also includes 10% of large dwellings and 20% of multi-unit dwellings ▶

Canadian Census Data



Shari Eli
@ShariJEli



The complete-count Canadian censuses from 1861-1921 will become available in 2023 thanks to The Canadian Peoples project led by Kris Inwood. In the meantime, GIS polygon layers for these censuses are now available. Take a look!



Kris Inwood @kris_inwood · Sep 29

GIS polygon layers at subdivision level now available for all Canadian censuses 1851-1921 + digital versions of 19 published census tables at hgiscanada.usask.ca. Created by @HGIS_UofSK & The Canadian Peoples/Les populations canadiennes project thecanadianpeoples.com. #hgis

1:29 PM · Sep 29, 2022 · Twitter Web App

Chinese Registry Data

- ▶ Publicly available and fully digitized
- ▶ Includes a full count of every person of Chinese origin arriving in Canada from 1885-1949
- ▶ Also includes information on pre-1885 entrants who chose to register for re-entry
- ▶ Includes: Name, Age, Sex, Occupation, Date & Port of Arrival, **Fee paid**, Area of Origin in China, Date of Re-Entry (if applicable)

Outline

1. Background

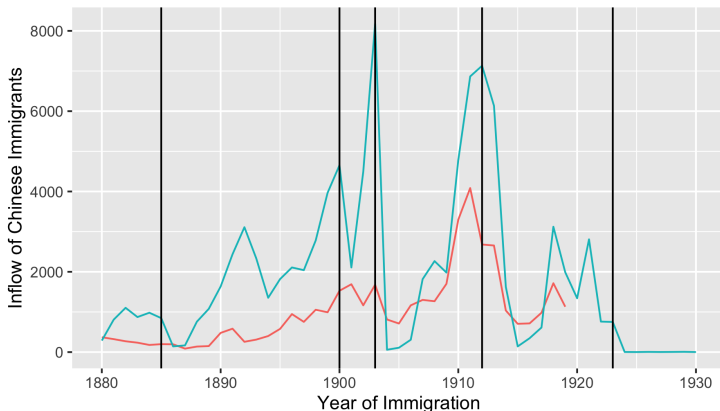
2. Data

3. Initial Descriptives

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Chinese Immigration to Canada by Year and Data Source



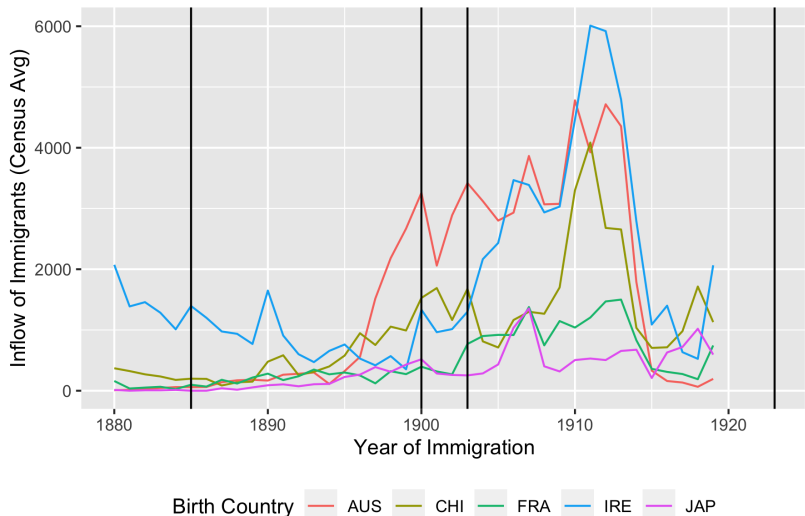
Data Source — Census (1901-1921 Average) — Chinese Registry

Denisty of Chinese Immigration by Date

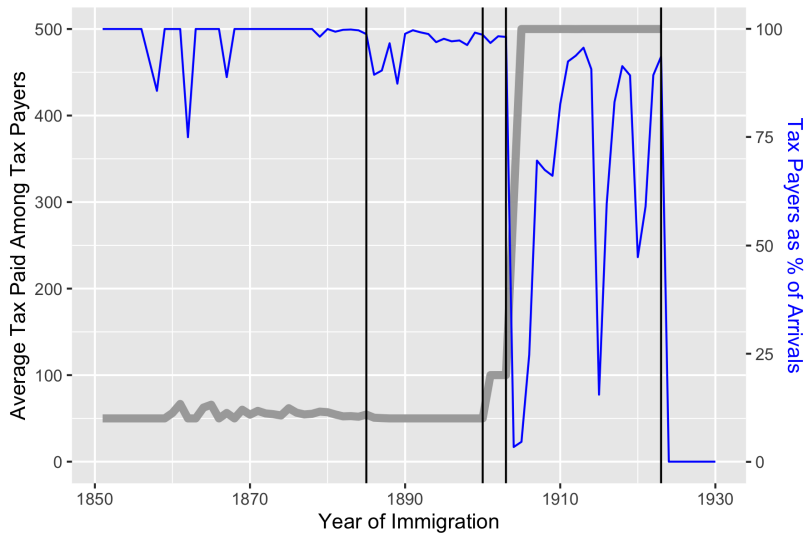
Relevant Events in the 1910s

- ▶ Canada: Head Tax Certificates reissued with photo
 - ▶ Unlikely to have such a massive spike just from using other people's certificates
- ▶ China: Republic of China established in 1912 following Xinhai Revolution (1911)
 - ▶ If this is primary cause of spike, would expect some change in regional origin of Chinese immigrants
Chinese Immigration by Origin by Year
 - ▶ Also would not expect to see spike in immigration from other countries
Immigration to Canada from Different Countries
- ▶ Worldwide: WWI begins July 1914
 - ▶ Unclear why most of spike is prior to 1914 – general global unrest?

Immigration to Canada by Year by Country



Head Tax Payers: Taxes Paid and Fraction of Arrivals



Summary Statistics

ADD CHINESE REGISTRY SUMM STATS IN NEW COLUMN

	All	Imm	Chi
	1881-1921		
MALE	0.52 (0.50)	0.57 (0.50)	0.97 (0.16)
MARRIED	0.354 (0.48)	0.54 (0.50)	0.51 (0.50)
AGE	26.0 (19.4)	36.2 (18.6)	34.6 (11.6)
Obs.	5,715,448	902,890	10,283
	1891-1921		
CANREAD	0.87 (0.34)	0.92 (0.27)	0.70 (0.46)
Obs.	1,437,638	288,321	5,967
	1901-1921 with nonzero earnings		
EARN	708 (1179)	784 (1212)	442 (296)
Obs.	215,725	69,438	3,018

Density of Chinese Immigration to Canada by Date

