

The Chinese Head Tax and Chinese Immigration to Canada

Amy Kim

October 11, 2022

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

Census Data

Chinese Registry

3. Initial Descriptives

Immigration in Response to Head Tax

Decomposing Chinese Immigration

Outline

1. Background

2. Data

Census Data

Chinese Registry

3. Initial Descriptives

Immigration in Response to Head Tax

Decomposing Chinese Immigration

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)

Outline

1. Background

2. Data

Census Data

Chinese Registry

3. Initial Descriptives

Immigration in Response to Head Tax

Decomposing Chinese Immigration

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)

Summary Statistics for Census vs Registry Data

TODO : add t-test to the summ stats table

Outline

1. Background

2. Data

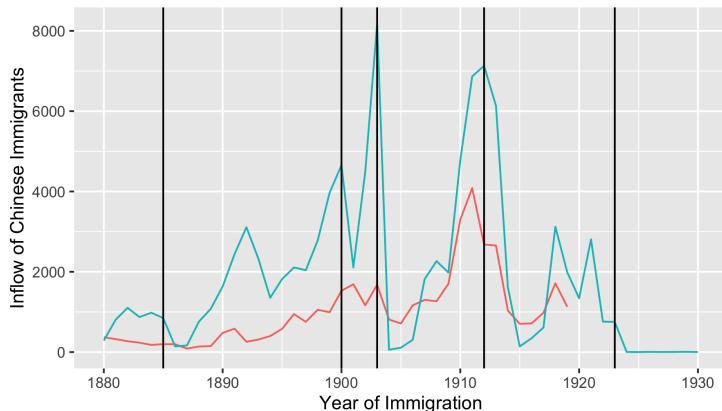
Census Data

Chinese Registry

3. Initial Descriptives

Immigration in Response to Head Tax
Decomposing Chinese Immigration

Chinese Immigration to Canada by Year and Data Source



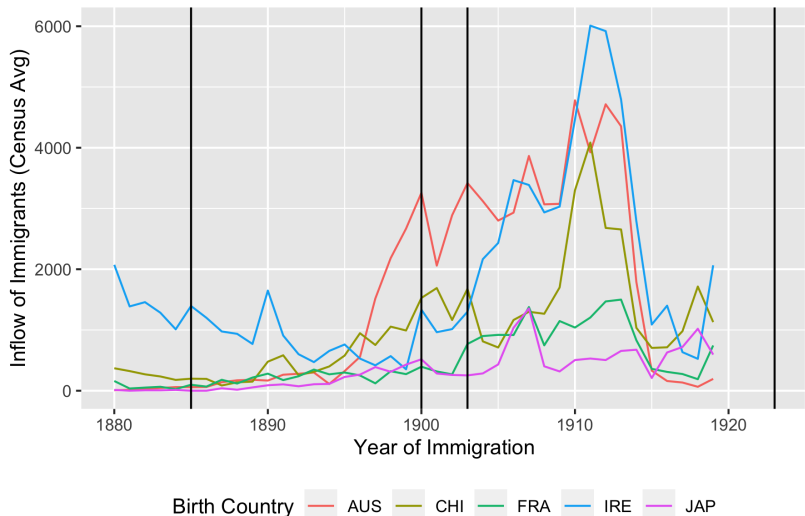
Data Source — Census (1901-1921 Average) — Chinese Registry

Denisty of Chinese Immigration by Date

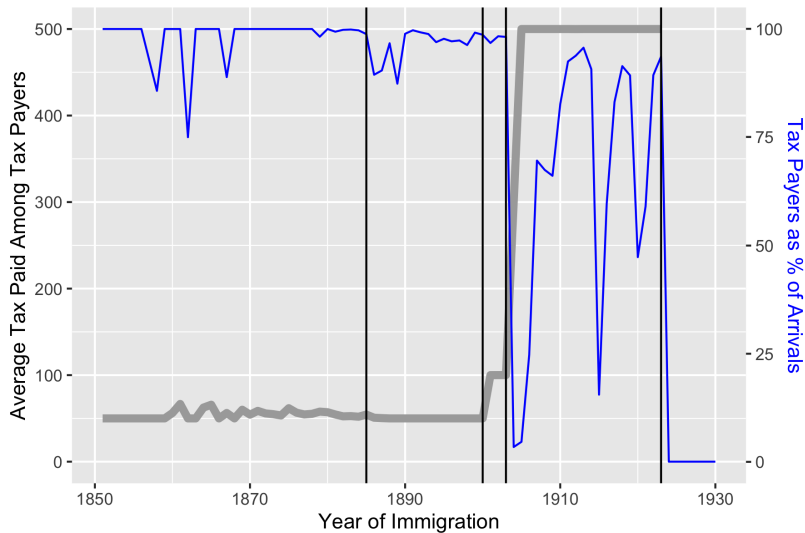
Relevant Events in the 1910s

- ▶ 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?

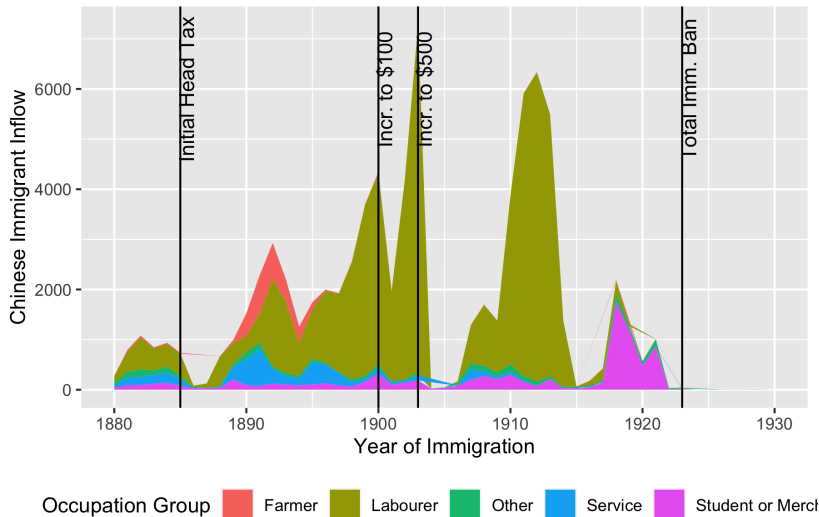
Immigration to Canada by Year by Country



Head Tax Payers: Taxes Paid and Fraction of Arrivals



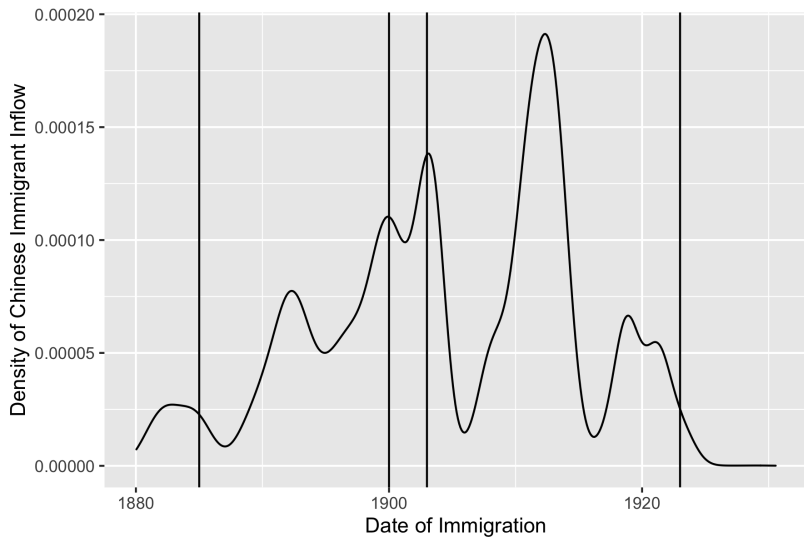
Chinese Immigration by Occupation Group



Summary Statistics

	All	Immigrants	Chinese Imm	Chinese Registry
% Male	0.52 (0.5)	0.58 (0.49)	0.98 (0.16)	0.97 (0.16)
Avg. Imm Age	- -	20.49 (13.81)	23.20 (8.99)	25.90 (21.31)
Avg. Age	26.61 (19.5)	34.64 (17.81)	34.79 (11.74)	26.15 (9)
% Married	0.37 (0.48)	0.54 (0.5)	0.55 (0.5)	- -
% Can Read	0.84 (0.36)	0.91 (0.28)	0.68 (0.47)	- -
Avg. Earnings	734.9 (12756.29)	783.7 (1212.1)	441.6 (296.33)	- -
Obs	1004561	204777	4230	96601

Density of Chinese Immigration to Canada by Date



Chinese Immigration by County of Origin in China

