

Chinese and Japanese Canadian Immigrants

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While the United States claims to be the “melting pot” of the world, modern day Canada could make an equal claim due to the vast amount of different demographics that make up the Canadian population. Not all demographics are equal however, and there are two particular groups of people that have suffered a great deal to get to where they are today – Chinese Canadians and Japanese Canadians. While Chinese Canadian and Japanese Canadian immigrants faced similar journeys on their paths to immigration due to the discrimination they faced from the Chinese Exclusion Act and the War Measures Act, both developed into two different cultures that have retained their own unique identities.

The first official sign of opposition that Chinese Canadian immigrants faced came from the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885. This act was signed in order to reduce the numbers of Chinese immigrants coming into Canada by forcing such immigrants to pay a hefty fee. When the bill was first passed, this fee was fifty dollars (Poy, 2013). It was raised to five hundred dollars in 1903; this is the modern equivalent of almost \$8000 when adjusted for inflation (Poy, 2013). This bill became so out of control that it was eventually declared as law that only one Chinese immigrant could enter the country for every fifty tons of ship they were travelling on (Poy, 2013). The Chinese Immigrant Act or Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1923 in order to completely ban Chinese immigrants from coming to Canada. Exceptions were made only for a small number of diplomats, foreign students, and “special circumstances” that had to be granted by the Minister of Immigration (Morton, 1974). The United States had passed their own version of this bill in 1882, and the discrimination against Chinese laborers eventually made its way up to Canada when they were outright banned by the Chinese Exclusion Act (Harvard University, n.d.). The bill was eventually repealed in 1947 after the Canadian Parliament was happy with the

contribution that Chinese Canadians made in World War II, but this bill was an ugly mark on Canada's history that never should have existed in the first place. Though no such bill was passed to ban Japanese immigrants from entering Canada, (most likely because they did not migrate over in the larger numbers seen by the Chinese immigrants) they experienced their own version of this persecution when the War Measures Act was passed in 1942. Because Japan was an enemy of the United States and Canada during World War II, the federal government decided that all Japanese Canadians were enemies of the state, and had to be detained in order to preserve the safety of the country. 20,881 Japanese were forcefully removed from their homes and placed into internment camps, all while their property and homes were taken and auctioned off by the government without their consent (Sugiman, 2004). They also received a slap to the face when they were forced to pay for the new bad housing, which is something not even prisoners have to do. These people were held against their will in these camps until 1949, and were left stricken to fend for themselves without a roof over their head. This was a major misstep by the Canadian Parliament, and the settlement of \$20,000 that was paid to each of the survivors in 1993 was nothing compared to what these people had to unnecessarily suffer through (Burns, 1988).

It is important to understand similarities and differences. The majority report to have no religious affiliation. A 2001 census study found that 46% of Japanese Canadians practiced no religion, and 56% of Chinese Canadians declared no religion (Statistics Canada, 2001). These numbers were much higher than the national average, which was only 17% (Statistics Canada, 2001). However, each group was found to have a healthy number of Buddhists, Catholics, and Protestants. The religion with the strongest influence on both of these groups was the Protestantism. 24% of Japanese Canadians belonged to this group while 9% of Chinese Canadians declared themselves as Protestants (Statistics Canada, 2001). The only Eastern

religion that still managed to claim a foothold was Buddhism, as 16% of Japanese Canadians reported to be Buddhist versus 14% of Chinese Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2001). Still, the Chinese Canadian population has used its presence to establish a foothold in the Canadian media scene, which Japanese Canadians have not. Chinese newspapers such as the *Ming Pao Daily News* and *Sing Tao Daily* are printed on a regular basis. Chinese Canadians also have many television channels to choose from that display original Chinese Canadian programming. This includes stations such as Chinavision Canada, Talentvision, Fairchild TV, as well as several radio stations like CHMB, CJVB, and CHKF-FM. Thus, the two groups contrast in cultural influence.

Despite the hardships that both of these groups of people had to deal with, there is still a healthy population of both Japanese and Chinese Canadians alive and well today. One noticeable difference amongst these groups is that there have always been significantly more Chinese Canadians in the country compared to Japanese Canadians for over a century. There are currently about 1.3 million Chinese Canadians living in the country, and only 100,000 Japanese Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2006). Chinese Canadians have allowed the spread of Cantonese and Mandarin to have a greater cultural effect than what Japanese Canadians have had. They have also settled in different regions. From a 2001 survey, it was found that 75% of the Chinese Canadian population lives in Toronto or Vancouver (Flanders et al., 2005). Half of these immigrants who had arrived at the turn of the century had done so because they already had family members living there. Japanese immigrants on the other hand have historically settled in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. The first generations primarily settled in British Columbia and then slowly spread out to other provinces over the years.

These two groups have suffered a lot for Canadian citizenship. They have endured internment camps, heavy fines, and outright exclusion based on the “merits” of racism and

prejudice. But still they thrive, and each group has made its impact on the population with their unique perspective on religion and language and silent contributions to the economy of Canada. Asian immigrants will be coming into The Great White North for many years to come, and the hardships they have suffered through have only made them stronger as people. The atrocities committed against them are real, and people should acknowledge them and make sure they never happen again. This happens through education and efforts to treat Japanese and Chinese Canadians as equals.



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