Historical Reference to discriminatory legislations towards Chinese-Canadians

1872 – B.C. Provincial Legislature passed an Act to amend the Qualification and Registration of Voters Act which disenfranchised both the Chinese and native Indians. (Statute of British Columbia, 1872, p121)

Apr 22/1875 – The amendment act was replaced later by an Act to Make Better Provision for the Qualification and Registration of Voters. (SBC 1876, p.3) The act received royal assent on April 22, 1875. After this time, the “Fight Ottawa” movement was a provincial political staple. The province of B.C. continued to pressure the federal government to address Chinese immigration issues.

Sep 02/1878 – B.C. Provincial Legislature passes the bill known as the “Chinese Tax Act” by which every Chinese person over 12 years of age would pay $10 every three months to take out a license to reside in B.C. (SBC 1878, p.30)

Mar 28/1879 – a committee established by the B.C. government drafted a grievance to Ottawa, requesting the federal government to measures to prevent Chinese immigration to B.C. (Journals of the Legislative Assembly of B.C., Vol. 8, 1879, appendix XXV)

Feb 18/1884 – B.C. Provincial Legislature passed three acts (SBC 2nd Session, 4th Parliament, 1884 chap. 2-12):

a) Prohibiting Chinese immigrants to land in B.C.,
b) Preventing Chinese from acquiring Crown land,
c) Requiring every Chinese person in B.C. over 14 years of age to $10 annual fee for a residential license.

May 12/1882 – Amor De Cosmos, MP for Victoria, requested the House of Commons to prohibit employment of Chinese laborers. Arthur Bunster, MP for Nanaimo, then attempted to insert a clause in railway contracts prohibiting the employment of anyone whose hair was more than five and a half inches long. The intention of this was to deny jobs to Chinese workers wearing their hair in a long queue. (checked the House of Commons records for his date and while both De Cosmos and Buster spoke, neither mentioned prohibiting employment nor hair length).

Feb 25/1885 – Report of Select Committee on Chinese Restrictions adopted by the Legislative Assembly of BC. The report claimed Chinese were in “unfair competition with white labour,” that Chinese presence “tends to the degradation of the white laboring classes”, and that they have “secret societies which encourage crime.” The report “urgently demands that some restrictive legislation be passed to prevent our Province from becoming a portion of the Chinese Empire.”


1885 – Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence. The purpose of the report was “to enquire into and report upon the whole subject of Chinese Immigration.”
Mar 9/1885 – The three acts from Feb 18/1884 were outlawed and forced the federal government to pass an Act to Prevent the Immigration of Chinese which further required the payment of a $50 head tax.

Source: An Act to Prevent the Immigration of Chinese, SC 1885, c 3.

Jul 20/1885 – Governor General of Canada gives assent to an Act to restrict and regulate Chinese immigration into Canada or The Chinese Immigration Act, 1885 that imposed a head tax of $50 to all new Chinese immigrants.

Source: Chinese Immigration Act, SC 1885.

1890 – The Coal Mines Regulation Act was amended to include a clause that stated no Chinaman could work in coal mines in British Columbia.

Source: An Act to amend the “Coal Mines Regulation Act”, SBC 1890, c 33.

1897 – An act relating to the employment of Chinese or Japanese persons on works carried on under franchises granted by private acts prevented Chinese and Japanese persons from working in government jobs.


Apr 20/1897 – The Legislative Assembly passes a resolution regarding “the desirability of increasing the capitation tax on Chinese entering the Dominion, and submitting that British Columbia is entitled to three-fourths of such revenue.”


Feb 25/1889 – B.C. Provincial Legislature passed an act to impose a Head tax of $500 on Chinese persons and sent the request to Ottawa on May 30/1899.


1900 – Federal Government raises the head tax to $100.

Source: The Chinese Immigration Act, SC 1900.

1903 – Federal Government raises the head tax to $500.

Source: The Chinese Immigration Act, SC 1903, c 8.
Jan 16/1912 – B.C. Premier McBride Addresses the Legislature on the Subject of Oriental Immigration. The address was titled “Exclusion of Asiatics.” In the address, Premier McBride attacked Prime Minister Laurier for not allowing BC to follow in the footsteps of the Natal Act in Australia that would allow the province to restrict labour migration.

Source: Address to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia by Hon. Premier McBride, “Exclusion of Asiatics,” 1912.

1912 – The Saskatchewan statute, titled, “An Act to Present the Employment of Female Labour in Certain Capacities” (S.S. 1912, c. 17), made it a criminal offense for Chinese men to employ white women (Scott, 2004). The act read: "No person shall employ in any capacity any white woman or girl or permit any white woman or girl to reside or lodge in or to work in or save as a bona fide customer in a public apartment thereof only, to frequent any restaurant, laundry or other place of business or amusement owned, kept or managed by any Japanese, Chinaman or other Oriental Person" (S.S. 1912, c. 17, s. 1). In 1914, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the provincial law in the case of Quong Wing v. The King (49 S.C.R. 440).


1914 – Ontario passes the Act to Amend Factory, Shop and Office Building Act prohibiting “Oriental” employers from hiring “white girls”.

Source: Act to Amend Factory, Shop and Office Building Act, SO 1914, c 40. (http://www.chrc-ccd.ca/en/timePortals/milestones/12mile.asp)


Source: The Chinese Immigration Act, SC 1923, c 38.

Mar 14/1928 – B.C. Provincial Legislature passes the Trade Licenses Board Act which gave authority for the members of the Trade License Board, as contemplated and authorized to be established under the act, the ability to “...refuse to issue, continue, transfer, or renew license to do business to any person, firm or corporation if in the opinion of the Board it be not advisable in the public interests of the municipality for which it functions to do so…” In this case, discretionary powers were introduced with the belief that they would result in the discrimination of those who were of Chinese or Oriental race.

Source: There was no explicit reference to Chinese land owners/leasees, only an implied notion (see e-book citation below).
1947 – Chinese were enfranchised and given the right to vote in British Columbia, under RBC 1947, c 28. Source: Elections BC. Electoral History of BC. (http://www.elections.bc.ca/index.php/resource-centre/electoral-history-of-bc/)

May 14/1947 – The Chinese Immigration Act (known to some as the Chinese Exclusion Act) was repealed. Governor General of Canada gives assent to “An Act to amend the Immigration Act and to repeal the Chinese Immigration Act”. Source: An Act to amend the Immigration Act and to repeal the Chinese Immigration Act, SC 1946, c 54.

Dec 28/1950 – Immigration act was amended to allow “The wife, husband, or the unmarried child under twenty-one years of age, of any Canadian citizen legally admitted to and resident in Canada, who is in a position to receive and care for his dependents,” to immigrate to Canada at the discretion of the Immigration Officer-in-Charge. Source: Order in Council P.C. 1950-2115, as amended by P.C. 6229, December 28, 1950.

1967 – A new regulatory system called the ‘Points System’ was introduced. Discrimination based on ethnicity and race was taken out of the immigration policy. Factors such as education and occupational demand began to be considered. Source: Alan G. Green and David A. Green. Canadian Immigration Policy: The Effectiveness of the Point System and Other Instruments. The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue canadienne d'Economique, Vol. 28, No. 4b (Nov., 1995), pp. 1006-1041.


May 26/1992 – City of Vancouver Council passes a similar motion moved by Councilor Chan calling on the Government of Canada to “expeditiously provide a reasonable redress for the injustice of the Chinese head tax, an issue of concern to all Canadians, and the Chinese Canadians in particular. The said redress must be provided and agreed upon in consultations with the Chinese Canadian community.”


**Mar 2/2010** – New Westminster becomes the first municipality to seek reconciliation with Chinese-Canadians for the Chinese Head Tax.

Source: New Westminster City Council Minutes, Mar 2 2010.


**Sep 20/2010** – City of New Westminster issues a formal apology to Chinese community as part of the reconciliation process.
