

Register of Chinese Immigrants to Canada, 1885-1949

This is an electronic copy of the Register of Chinese Immigrants to Canada preserved at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa. It was created between 2005 and 2008 as part of a research project on immigration from China to Canada directed by Professors Peter Ward and Henry Yu of the Department of History at UBC. This research project was supported by the Social Science Research Council of Canada, grant number 410-2005-0922.

The Register lists all immigrants of Chinese origin who entered Canada under the so-called Chinese Head Tax Act and subsequent legal restrictions which, between 1885 and 1922 attempted to limit immigration from China by means of an escalating entry tax, and between 1923 and 1949 prohibited all Chinese immigration apart from a small number of individuals in highly restrictive categories. The Register also lists those who came to Canada prior to 1885 who, by registering with immigration authorities for a nominal sum, could then leave Canada and return at a later date without having to pay the entry tax. In effect the Register is both a census of the people of Chinese origin living in Canada in 1885 and list of those who arrived between then and 1949. It does not include the names of a relatively small number of Chinese immigrants who arrived in Newfoundland during this period, when it remained a British colony rather than a part of Canada.

The original Register consists of ledger-formatted books with columns for various categories of information and one line for each immigrant registered. Administratively it was the responsibility of the Chief Controller of Chinese Immigration and was maintained by his staff. Information obtained at the time of admission commonly was gathered with the assistance of translators employed by the immigration service. For a more detailed discussion of the creation and reliability of these records see: W. Peter Ward, "Stature, migration and human welfare in South China, 1850-1930," (forthcoming).

This electronic copy of the Register includes the following information:

- Index numbers assigned to each immigrant for administrative purposes
- Name of immigrant
- Place and date of registration
- Type of entry permit issued
- Fee paid
- Age and sex of immigrant
- Village, county and province of origin
- Occupation
- Domicile outside Canada
- Port and date of arrival
- Means of arrival (if by ship, normally the ship's name)
- Height
- Destination in Canada (1910 and later)

- Library and Archives Canada microfilm reel and image numbers for filmed and scanned copies of the original records. These can be used to trace individuals from the electronic record to specific pages in both types of copies of the original Register.
- Standardized corrections for village and county names, in both English and Chinese, for approximately half of the immigrants in the Register. These corrections were introduced to address the problem of multiple English spellings for many Chinese place names. These corrections were added by Ms Eleanor Yuen, Head of the Asian Library at UBC. This project is ongoing.

The original records include a column for general remarks. In many cases it records physical characteristics of the immigrants. Among these, only the heights have been recorded in the database.

The Register is of value to genealogists and, for this reason, the project directors agreed to share some of the information for each immigrant (eg. name, sex, age, and indexing information) with the genealogical centre at LAC to facilitate their users' access to archival copies of the document. It should be noted, however, that because of periodic immigration fraud, the names of many migrants may be in error. While the extent of this problem isn't clear, estimates of its extent range as high as 15% of all names in the Register.

W. Peter Ward
8 March 2011