

# IN THE SHADOW OF GOLD MOUNTAIN

Karen Cho, a fifth-generation Canadian of mixed heritage, discovered that half her family wasn't welcome in the country they called home. While Canada encouraged and rewarded immigration from Europe, it imposed laws that singled out the Chinese as unwanted and unwelcome.

Cho's film, *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain*, takes her from Montreal to Vancouver to uncover stories from the last living survivors of the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act. This dark chapter in our history, from 1885 until 1947, plunged the Chinese community in Canada into decades of debt and family separation.

At the centre of the film are personal accounts of extraordinary Chinese Canadians who survived an era that threatened to eradicate their entire community. Through a rich melding of history, poetry and raw emotion, this documentary sheds light on an era that shaped the identity of generations. With deeply moving testimonials, it reveals the profound ways this history still casts its shadow.

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A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA PRODUCTION

43 minutes 4 seconds



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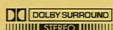
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## TIMELINE

### 1849

Gold is discovered in California, attracting Chinese miners to the west coast of North America.

### 1858

First Chinese miners move from California to British Columbia after gold is discovered in the Fraser Valley.

### 1872

British Columbia disqualifies Chinese from voting.

### 1881-84

More than 15,000 Chinese move to Canada, including about 6,500 who help build the Canadian Pacific Railway from Montreal to Vancouver. Hundreds are killed in accidents, often in explosions blasting tunnels through mountains.

### 1885

The federal government imposes a head tax of \$50 on every Chinese immigrant to Canada.

### 1903

Head tax is raised to \$500. By 1923 the government will have collected \$23 million from 81,000 immigrants—more than \$2 billion in today's money.

### 1923

On July 1, Canada's birthday, the federal government passes the Chinese Immigration Act, banning all Chinese immigrants from the country.

### 1935

Japan invades China in an attempt to conquer the country.

### 1939-1945

Hundreds of Chinese Canadian men and women volunteer to serve in Canada's armed forces during the Second World War.

### 1947

The Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 is repealed. Chinese Canadians regain the right to vote in federal elections.





Vancouver Sun

**1957**

Vancouver's Douglas Jung becomes the first Chinese Canadian Member of Parliament.

**1982**

Canada passes The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, making it illegal to discriminate based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

**1984**

The Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) asks the federal government for an apology and financial recompense on behalf of surviving head tax payers and their families. More than 4,000 payers, widows and descendants sign up with the CCNC.

**1988**

An agreement is reached between the federal government and the National Association of Japanese

Canadians to compensate Japanese Canadians for their treatment in Canada during the Second World War, when many lost their homes and businesses.

**1994**

The federal government refuses to grant compensation for head tax.

**1997**

After more than 150 years of British rule, Hong Kong is handed back to Chinese control.

**1998**

Vivienne Poy is appointed the first Chinese Canadian Senator.

**1999**

Adrienne Clarkson is appointed Governor-General of Canada. Clarkson was born in Hong Kong and came with her family to Canada as refugees during the Second World War.

**2004**

New Zealand becomes the first Commonwealth country to apologize and offer compensation for a head tax on Chinese immigrants.



## OBJECTIVES

**The Shadow of Gold Mountain** tells the story of the exclusionary treatment of Chinese immigrants to Canada. This study guide is designed to help educators raise awareness about the obstacles faced by Chinese Canadians and other immigrant groups, notably racism, stereotyping, prejudice and systemic discrimination.

## BEFORE SCREENING THE VIDEO

1. Have you ever experienced a situation where someone is excluded from a group because he or she is different? How did you react?
2. Why has gold been considered so valuable for such a long time?
3. Telephones, airplanes and the Internet allow people to stay in touch with each other even if they're thousands of kilometres away. Imagine what it would be like to leave your family for many years and only be able to contact them by writing a letter. For many Chinese immigrants who were illiterate, it was not even that simple. They had to dictate their messages to a scribe.
4. Did you immigrate to Canada? Talk about your experiences with the class. If you were born here, do you have a parent or grandparent who immigrated to this country? Talk to him or her and find out what it was like to move here.

5. There were very few Chinese Canadian university graduates before the 1950s. What could have been possible reasons for that?
6. Think of the last movie or TV show you saw that portrayed Chinese people. What types of jobs did they do? Did you find the portrayal realistic or stereotypical?
7. What do you think are some of the reasons there are more immigrants from a wider range of countries coming to Canada now than, say, 100 years ago?

## AFTER SCREENING THE VIDEO

1. Why did the owners of the Canadian Pacific Railway hire so many Chinese men to help build the railway?
2. What do you think it was like for Chinese women who could not join their husbands in Canada when the Chinese Immigration Act was passed in 1923?
3. How did the Chinese Immigration Act affect young Chinese Canadian men, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s?
4. What would you have done if you were told that you couldn't enter university, use a public pool or join certain clubs because of your background?

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TITLES AND VISUAL EFFECTS  
GASPARD GAUDREAU

## FOLLOW-UP PROJECTS

1. If you live in a city that has a Chinatown, visit it and take photographs.
2. Write a letter to the Prime Minister explaining about the Chinese head tax and why you think people who paid it and their surviving family members should or should not be repaid and receive an apology.
3. Write a journal entry in which you pretend that you are a Chinese Canadian living in Canada in 1923 and you have just heard that the Chinese Immigration Act was passed.
4. Use a library or the Internet to find out about the Acadians. These French Canadians were forced to leave their homes and their country in 1755. Why? What happened to them? Did Canada offer any compensation or apologies for what happened?
5. Why did Chinese Canadians tend to live near each other in different cities in Canada—areas known as Chinatown?
6. The film includes negative comments from several politicians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries about Chinese workers. Would you expect politicians today to make comments like this?
7. Do you think it was a good idea for some Chinese Canadians to volunteer to fight for their country in the Second World War, even though many were sons of men who had paid a head tax to enter Canada?
8. One of the techniques that the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) has used to gain momentum for people seeking redress for the head tax is rallies at Parliament Hill in Ottawa where people gather with placards to protest. Can you think of other ideas that would draw the attention of Canadians to their campaign?
9. Can you think of other groups of Canadian immigrants who suffer as a result of stereotyping today? What lessons can we learn from the treatment Chinese immigrants received?

## RESOURCES

### Books:

Chan, Anthony B. *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World*. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983.

Con, Harry et. al. *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982.

Lai, David Chuen-yan. *Chinatowns: Towns Within Cities in Canada*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988.

Li, Julia Ningyu ed. *Canadian Steel, Chinese Grit: a Tribute to the Chinese who Worked on Canada's Railroads More Than a Century Ago*. Toronto: Paxlink Communications Inc., 2000.

Huang, Evelyn and Lawrence Jeffery. *Chinese Canadians: Voices from a Community*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992.

Jin Guo, *Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*. Toronto: The Women's Book Committee, Chinese Canadian National Council, 1992.

### Related NFB Films:

*Bamboo, Lions and Dragons*, 1981, 27 min. Directed by Richard Patton.

*Freedom Had a Price*, 1994, 55 min. Directed by Yuriy Luhovy.

*Minoru: Memory of Exile*, 1992, 19 min. Directed by Michael Fukushima.

*My Name Is Kahentiosta*, 1995, 30 min. Directed by Alanis Obomsawin.

*Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story*, 2003, 51 min. Directed by Jari Osborne.

*Speak it! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia*, 1992, 28 min. Directed by Sylvia Hamilton.

*Speakers for the Dead*, 2000, 50 min. Directed by Jennifer Holness and David Sutherland.

*A Tribe of One*, 2003, 39 min. Directed by Eunhee Cha.

*Under the Willow Tree: Pioneer Chinese Women in Canada*, 1997, 52 min. Directed by Dora Nipp.

*Unwanted Soldiers*, 1999, 49 min. Directed by Jari Osborne.

*Who Gets In?*, 1989, 52 min. Directed by Barry Greenwald.

