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Chinese Canadians: A Case Study

(Taken from: http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/china/chinese_immigration.html)

The story of the Chinese who came to Canada really begins in the mid-19th century. At this time, agricultural productivity in China could not keep pace with rapid population growth and wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few people. Most of these migrants came from the densely populated coastal provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. They traded poverty and social unrest at home for a life of hard labour and racism abroad.

FIRST WAVE

The first major wave of Chinese immigrants came to Canada in search of gold and settled in the Fraser River Valley, in British Columbia, in 1858 when the Gold Rush began. These miners did not know that they would only be able to work in the mines until after the white miners had finished.

As well as men seeking gold, there were also 17,000 Chinese immigrants who came to build the British Columbia section of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). 700 of these individuals died in the process of building the railway and all were paid half as much as white workers.

The Chinese were tolerated when they were a useful source of cheap labour. In 1861, a Victoria newspaper was welcoming: "We have plenty of room for many thousands of Chinamen... There can be no shadow of a doubt but their industry enables them to add very largely to our own revenues."

But in 1885, after the CPR was built, many thousands of labourers were laid off. And at a Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, Chinese were often described as taking work away from white workers. Later that year, Canada imposed a head tax on Chinese seeking to enter the country (Meaning: the Chinese had to pay money to come to Canada). After the railway work ended many Chinese drifted eastwards within Canada, and some returned to China.

During the Second World War and the Depression, many Chinese created opportunities for self-employment. Family-run businesses, such as

restaurants and laundries, sprang up both in small towns and in the Chinatowns that had emerged in the bigger cities across Canada. These small businesses became drawing points for Chinese people, to both operate and to work in. Discriminatory laws encouraged Chinese-only enterprises. Thus, Chinese migrants stuck together and formed small areas that were culturally different from surrounding areas.

Depression-era Chinatowns were lonely places because immigration restrictions prevented Chinese men from bringing their wives and families to Canada. In 1931, there were 1,240 men to every 100 women in Chinese Canadian communities. Census data show that most of the men were married. But their wives were in China and prevented from joining them.

SECOND WAVE

In the 1950s, most immigrants from China were wives and children of men already settled in Canada. But still anti-Chinese sentiments remained because China was now a communist country. It was not until 1967, when the points system was introduced for selecting immigrants, that Canada began admitting Chinese using the same criteria as for any other applicants.

THIRD WAVE

Changes to the immigration law in 1978 and 1985 promoted the arrival of wealthy entrepreneurs from Hong Kong and Taiwan. They had to show a net worth of at least \$500,000 and investment in a Canadian business venture of at least \$250,000.

In recent decades, however, most new Chinese Canadians have actually been middle-class rather than super-rich. Indeed, in the past 50 years, more than half the Chinese who have immigrated have been in white-collar occupations. They have tended to settle in suburbs of major cities, particularly Vancouver and Toronto. The last national census, in 1996, put the Chinese Canadian population at more than 920,000, with 46% in Ontario and 34% in British Columbia. Highly educated and upwardly mobile, the recent arrivals have transformed Canadian society and the Chinese communities within it.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ON THE NEXT PAGE! ☺

Chinese Canadians Case Study: QUESTIONS

1. Fill in the following chart.

	What kinds of people were migrating to Canada during each wave?	Why did each group decide to migrate to Canada?	Did they move to rural or urban areas?	What provinces did they move to?
Wave 1				
Wave 2				
Wave 3				

2. On the back of this piece of paper write a short paragraph summarizing, in your own words, the change that occurred in what Chinese were migrating, why they emigrated, and where they move to. Do you see a pattern?