

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens Canada
Actualité**

Friday, December 2, 2005 ♦ vendredi, 2 décembre 2005

Table of Contents/ Table des matières

<u>Compensate Chinese immigrants fairly</u>	<u>3</u>
--	-----------------

Source: Vancouver Sun

Date: 2005.12.2

Byline: Daphne Bramham

Compensate Chinese immigrants fairly: Botched attempt at redress has exposed a misunderstanding about the Chinese-Canadian community

There is no other group that Canada tried as hard to keep out as the Chinese.

For 62 years, a parade of governments formulated and enforced laws to make it difficult and then virtually impossible for Chinese people to immigrate.

And for more than 20 years, Chinese-Canadians have actively sought redress for the policies that date back to 1885, when Canada imposed a head tax on Chinese immigrants.

That was enforced until July 1, 1923 -- Dominion Day -- when it was replaced by the Chinese Immigration Act, which should more properly have been called the exclusion act.

The exclusion of Chinese was only repealed in 1947 under pressure from Britain, which needed ethnic Chinese soldiers for the war in Asia. Between 1923 and 1947, only 50 people were allowed to immigrate from China.

The policies were also cruel. Families ended up being torn apart, in many cases irrevocably. Not all of the men whose families had sent them ahead to what was called Golden Mountain could ever earn enough to pay the head tax required to bring their wives and families.

The tax started at \$50, was increased in 1900 to \$100 and then to \$500 in 1903.

The legacy has been documented by writer Denise Chong in *The Concubine's Children: Portrait of a Family Divided* and in a documentary by Vancouver filmmaker Colleen Leung.

Over the years, while the Canadian government was actively recruiting Europeans, including my ancestors, with the promise of free Prairie land, it collected \$23 million from 82,000 Chinese. Unlike my ancestors, the Chinese immigrants were denied the full rights of citizenship until 1947.

Earlier this year, Paul Martin's Liberal government set aside \$25 million to redress not only the wrongs done to ethnic Chinese, but for Italians, Ukrainians and Germans interned during the Second World War. Of that, \$12.5 million was earmarked for Chinese-Canadians.

That's a tiny fraction of what the government collected in head taxes. Using the Bank of Canada's inflation adjuster, that \$23 million collected in 1923 is equal to \$2.7 billion in current dollars.

But no one was asking for anywhere near that amount.

Since 1984, the Chinese Canadian National Council has lobbied for redress. It has registered 4,000 head-tax payers and their families and has consistently asked for two things -- an apology and individual compensation.

It based its request on a similar agreement reached in 1988 between Canada and Japanese-Canadians to redress their internment during the Second World War.

The two things the council wanted were the two things the Liberals said they would not negotiate.

So, Multiculturalism Minister Raymond Chan bypassed the council and began negotiating with the National Congress of Chinese Canadians. The congress was founded in 1991 by Chan, recently elected Vancouver school trustee Don Lee and others, to play down Chinese human rights' abuses including the Tiananmen Square student massacre in 1989 and improve business relations.

Since then, the congress has provided political support to Liberal candidates, including Chan at his recent nomination meeting.

Congress president Ping Tan -- a Malaysian-born Chinese who came to Canada as a student in 1968 -- quickly agreed to a \$12.5-million settlement, even though some of the congress board members criticized the deal because it contains no apology and no individual compensation.

Last weekend -- just days before the Liberal government was forced to call an election -- Prime Minister Paul Martin had planned to sign the deal at a Vancouver conference the congress was holding to talk about what it would do with the money. The conference was paid for with a \$100,000 grant from Chan's department.

Martin didn't sign the deal because of growing pressure from groups like the CCNC, the National Association of Japanese-Canadians, the National Anti-Racism Council, the Urban Alliance on Race Issues and prominent Canadians including Margaret Atwood, June Callwood, Shirley Douglas, Stephen Lewis, Joy Kogawa, Naomi Klein and Toronto Mayor David Miller.

Instead, after brushing past protesters, including a few people in their 90s who had paid the head tax, Martin signed a \$2.5-million agreement with the congress.

"There is much anger and frustration at the federal government," says Sid Tan, the grandson of a head-tax payer, a director of the Chinese Canadian National Council and head of the B.C. Coalition of Head Tax Payers, Spouses and Descendants.

"His [Chan's] proposed agreement with the NCCC is unethical and humiliates the very people who overcame the racist legislation to allow him to serve in public office."

The tragedy in this botched attempt at **reconciliation** is that Canada has had more than the lifetime of most people to apologize and give back the money to those to paid the tax.

Vancouver resident Charlie Quon is one of them. He's 98. Another Vancouverite, Chung Shee Quon, is 100 and still waiting to get a refund of the money her husband was forced to pay.

They deserve the money. They and their families deserve an apology.

For now, the January election has put on hold the deal that would have handed millions to a group that has no connection to the head-tax payers and their families.

The Liberals' botched attempt at **reconciliation** has exposed a deep misunderstanding about the Chinese-Canadian community and about how to redress human rights' abuses. It could cost them votes, and it should.

But after the election, the government must finally right the terrible wrong done to Chinese immigrants and their families.

It must negotiate with the people directly affected. And it must be willing to apologize and compensate them fairly.

To do anything else only adds further shame to a shameful history.

dbramham@png.canwest.com