

Asian Immigrants Paving the Way

Asian immigrants have made great contributions to Canada's foundations over the past one hundred years. Members of the Asian community have built paths to a better country for present and future generations. For example, Chinese people came to Canada in waves, and they faced obstacles along the way. Yet as difficult as it was, they managed to lead us into a better and more diverse country. These next four stories will illustrate the journey of Chinese immigrants coming to Canada.

The first story takes place in 1918. It is about a young man who came to Canada seeking good fortune for his family. Ging Gar Chew chose to leave China, with the intention to find prosperity in the British Columbia Gold Rush. Yet as determined as he was, he experienced severe challenges. When he arrived, he had to pay a head tax due to the Chinese Immigration Act. Unfortunately, in 1923 Canada's environment became even more hostile by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act. The Exclusion Act banned all Chinese immigration to Canada. For this reason, Ging Gar Chew lost all hope of bringing his family over. He stayed in Canada, to work alone. His wife passed away, and he missed seeing his children grow up. He was now alone in a strange and unfamiliar country. Anti-Chinese sentiment was very common at that time. He experienced harsh racism, and he was given no right to Canadian citizenship. He had no right to vote, or to have a voice in Canadian governance.

Similar to Ging Gar Chew, Ho Shiu Mee was the next generation to immigrate to Canada. Ho Shiu Mee was a young girl who grew up hungry, tired, and living with a neighbour who resented her in Hong Kong. She was desperate for a life of change. This opportunity became available in 1956 when she obtained the necessary immigration papers to come to North America. Initially, she was

hesitant about leaving the only home she knew. Instead, she kept this paper in her closet and waited. As fate would have it, the double Ten Riots broke out in Hong Kong and violence was everywhere. Her mother urged her to leave immediately. She immigrated to America at first, where she experienced extreme racism. Many people assumed because of her different appearance and culture; she was a second-class person. Frightened, she left and went to Canada.

The next story is about Carl Xuan, who was able to immigrate to Canada with fewer challenges. He was a young man who came to Canada with his family in 1990 searching for opportunity. He attended a predominantly Asian school and said he “stuck with his own kind”. He described the atmosphere as “More calm and less challenging than life in China.” However, in the 1990’s Toronto was a smaller and less diverse city than it is today. Therefore, he felt more welcome with members of his own Chinese community. He did not experience any extreme racism, but he found it difficult to make friends with those of different groups because everyone had trouble relating to his experiences coming from China.

Despite the obstacles that were placed in front of them, each of these individuals overcame their challenges to lead good lives. Ging Gar Chew went on to open his own restaurant and raise a proud family in which his daughter became a respected health professional. Ho Shiu Mee settled down in 1968 to become a typewriter for an office. She got married and raised a family of four children who all grew up to excel in their careers. Carl Xuan went on to work for the government of Canada and began a life with his family in Toronto.

The final story includes a young Chinese girl. Born in 2006 in Toronto from second generation immigrant parents, she lives a life of peace and prosperity. She attends a prestigious high school and she has been given countless opportunities to achieve all her dreams. She lives in a diverse community, filled with people who have had the same experiences and opportunities as her. She is lucky, yet humbled because she understands the challenges her ancestors faced in the past. That young girl's life is the result of what happens when countless generations come together to break down barriers. She will go on to achieve many things in her life and become the doctor she always wanted to be.

These stories are examples of how the future relies on the paths our ancestors have built for us. There is a Chinese proverb, which states “Only when all contribute their firewood, can they build a strong fire” meaning that it takes a group of people to build something that lasts. Overall, members of the Asian community have had their misfortunes in the past, yet their achievements and contributions have led to a more advanced and modern society for present and future generations.

Sources:

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