



# Canadian Government Apologizes Chinese Head Tax

By CK Wong 2006.06.26

<http://www.ck-wong.ca/China/Canadian%20government%20apologizes%20chinese%20head%20tax%2020060625.pdf>

## Introduction

Canadian Prime Minister Harper realizes the election promise to apologize on the Chinese head tax which has been a major Chinese Canadian concern in the last 20 years. I have to say Harper has the courage, the wisdom and the intellect to complete a task other government left out. As a Chinese Canadian, I admire PM and continuously surprise by his political wisdom.

## A legacy issue

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Sir Johnny A. MacDonald championed the trans-Canada railway to bring Canada to the modern age and united all provinces from East to West. In respond to the work, other than the Caucasian, a lot of Chinese labor was introduced from the United State after their transcontinental railway project had finished. The speed of these Chinese laborers was amazing. It was about 2 to 3 times of the Caucasian although their size was much smaller.

After the trans-Canadian railway had been completed, over 10 thousand of these Chinese remained in Canada. It is a reasonable to expect them being treated at the same standard as the Italian, the French or the British. However, the Californian's anti-Chinese movement extended to Canada. There were different restrictions on the jobs and activities Chinese could do. To the worse, the Parliament passed the Chinese head tax to impost a \$100 tax for each Chinese Canadian. Later the tax was raised to \$500. This is the money of end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The \$100 was about the income of 2 years. A lot of Chinese had to work really hard to save enough money to bring their family to Canada.

In the 1980's, the pressure organization started a dialogue with the Parliament on why Chinese were singled out and being taxed. They expressed this is discrimination. The PC and Liberal governments ducked the issue and never had a direct resolution until Jean Christen to agree setting up a fund to recognize the contribution of Chinese. But the Chinese Canadian pressure organizations requested a formal apology and compensation.

This week, a few survived plaintiffs and a large number of first generation of plaintiff attended a special ceremony to accept the apologies from the Prime Minister and other parties. During the ceremony, it was very appropriately the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's office used Cantonese to apologize because these labors are coming from the Guangdong province.

If people think Harper is just using this opportunity to win the Chinese ethnic vote for his next election, I would say why not. This is politics. This is something last few Prime

Minister could do but did not. I can say the Harper government is here to stay for a long time.