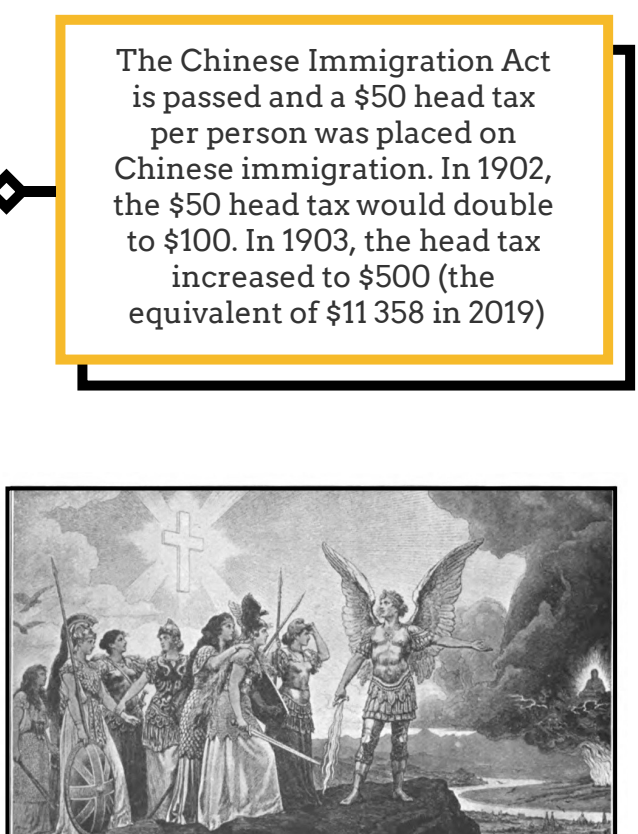
Tracking Yellow Peril

Then and Now

Yellow Peril is commonly known as a historical term used to describe East Asians perceived to be **a threat to Western civilization**. The term also invoked images of a disease - implying that East Asians were **uncivilized, dirty, unwanted and perpetually considered as foreign or "Other"**. However, if we take a closer look at contemporary events and media portrayals throughout the recent past, we will be able to trace alarming xenophobic notions of Yellow Peril that have persisted beyond historical events.

1884

The Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration looked for ways to show that limiting Chinese immigration was necessary. Testimony was gathered across BC and the Chinese were reported to be **"immoral, dishonest, unclean, prone to disease and incapable of assimilation"** (Gagnon et al., 2020)



(The Canadian Encyclopedia)

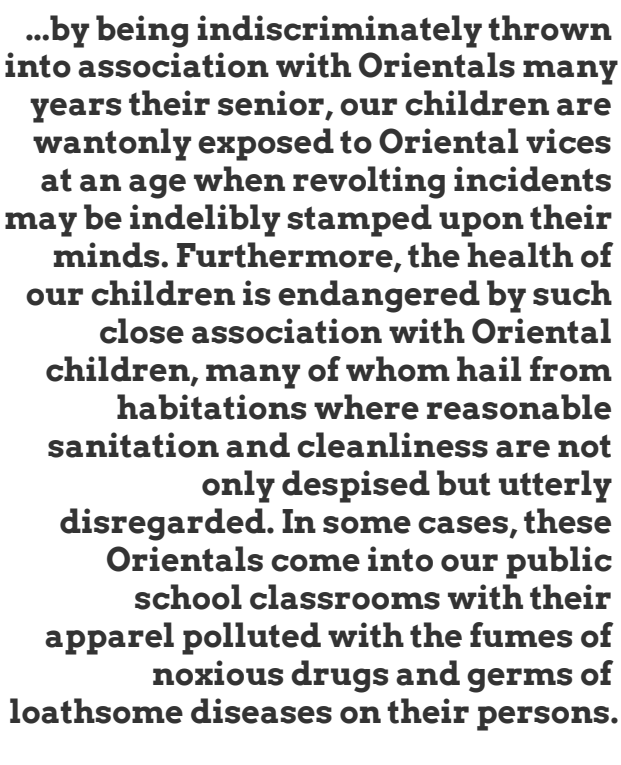
1885

The Chinese Immigration Act is passed and a $50 head tax per person was placed on Chinese immigration. In 1902, the $50 head tax would double to $100. In 1903, the head tax increased to $500 (the equivalent of $11 358 in 2019)

(The Globe)

1895

"Yellow Peril" was not limited to North America. Wilhelm II, German Emperor, had a dream and saw Buddha riding on a dragon and about to invade Europe. He commissioned the painting of the dream by artist Hermann Knackfuss. The painting was published in a "Harper's Weekly" magazine a few years later and was widely known as **"Yellow Peril"**.



(Hathi Trust Digital Library)

1907

In Vancouver, a march organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League turns violent as the angry mob started rioting and vandalizing businesses in Chinatown and Japantown. The marchers carried signs with messages such as **"Keep Canada White" and "Stop the Yellow Peril"**.

(Library and Archives Canada)

1922

The school board in Victoria, BC imposed school segregation for Chinese students that sparked a year-long Chinese students' strike. Those who called for segregation deemed it necessary to **protect White children from Chinese students who brought disease, depravity and immorality.**

> **"...by being indiscriminately thrown into association with Orientals many years their senior, our children are wantonly exposed to Oriental vices at an age when revolting incidents may be indelibly stamped upon their minds. Furthermore, the health of our children is endangered by such close association with Oriental children, many of whom hail from habitations where reasonable sanitation and cleanliness are not only despised but utterly disregarded. In some cases, these Orientals come into our public school classrooms with their apparel polluted with the fumes of noxious drugs and germs of loathsome diseases on their persons.**
>
> **(City of Vancouver Council Minutes as cited in Stanley, 1990, p. 289-290)**

1923

On July 1, The Chinese Immigration Act (new law under the same name, or also called the Chinese Exclusion Act) was passed, which almost entirely prohibited Chinese immigration. Although known as Canada Day, **the Chinese would refer to this day as "Humiliation Day" instead.**

(Vancouver Public Library)

2003

When SARS cases appeared in Canada, media portrayed the disease as **"deadly", "fearful" and "exotic"**. This contributed to public fear towards Asian communities and led to racial discrimination and harassment.

> **In the school, about half the children were absent because their parents felt it was not safe to go to school where there are lots of Chinese people (Leung, 2004).**

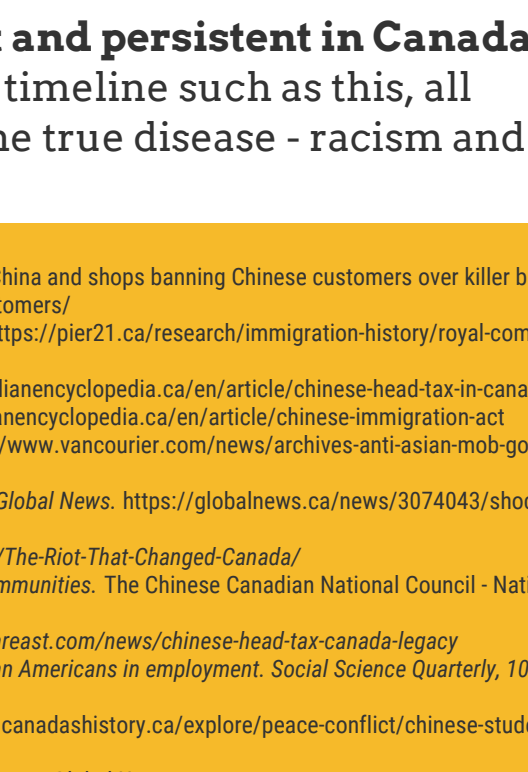
2016

Racist flyers were dropped off in Richmond, BC homes. This is one of many racist incidences that occur and indicates the recurring and persistent presence of Yellow Peril. In this case, painting the Chinese as **invasive, foreign and unwanted.**

(Global News)

2020

A French newspaper uses the headline "Yellow Alert", indicating another global Yellow Peril resurgence in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak. In Canada, an Angus Reid poll found that **43% of those surveyed reported having faced threats or intimidation due to the outbreak.** Additionally, another data point found that only 13% of those surveyed agreed that they were seen as Canadian all the time (CBC News, 2020).



(Courrier picard)

As you can see, **Yellow Peril has been present and persistent in Canada and beyond**. In order to have an ending to a timeline such as this, all Canadians must act together to put an end to the true disease - racism and discrimination.

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