

孟子曰：「仁之勝不仁也，猶水勝火。今之為仁者，猶以一杯水，救一車薪之火也；不熄，則謂之水不勝火。此又與於不仁之甚者也，亦終必亡而已矣。」

Mencius said, “benevolence wins against malevolence, like water wins against fire. The benevolent people of today are like a cup of water trying to save a cart loaded with firewood already set ablaze. The fire does not extinguish, and then claims that water cannot win against fire. This only helps the malevolent people grow in strength and results in the loss of benevolence altogether.”³

Anti-Chinese discrimination slowly diminished in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1967, the Canadian government implemented the point system to assess the suitability of applicants immigrating into Canada. While this system still prioritized certain groups and discriminated against others, this system, at the least, removed the subjectivity of the assessment due to race. The quest to redress anti-Chinese immigration policies began in 1983 when two head-tax payers, Dak Leon Mark and Shack Yee, asked for a refund for their \$500 head-tax payments, but were denied. For the next decades, the Chinese Canadian National Council and the National Congress of Chinese Canadians (NCCC) campaigned for a public apology from the Canadian government, funds for historical education on the policies, and financial compensation. In 2004, Inky Mark, a member of parliament, introduced Bill C-333 that began negotiations with NCCC on redress. During the same year, United Nations special rapporteur on racial discrimination also proposed that Canada redress the head tax. When the Liberal government lost power in the next federal election, the Conservative Party led by Stephen Harper pledged to redress the head tax. Harper issued a public apology on June 22, 2006, in the Parliament, and began the distribution of compensation to eligible head-tax payers.⁴

³ Mencius, 告子上.

⁴ Arlene Chan, “Chinese Head Tax in Canada,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, September 8, 2016. Accessed October 10, 2025.

From the activism to have the *Immigration Act* repealed to the redress of the Chinese head tax, these were achieved through the slow progression of changing sentiments of peoples and governments who were hostile to the Chinese, which was the direct result of Chinese activism over many years. At the same time, the activism was also rallying more people to stand up for what was right. Activism on social issues could only bear fruit when more and more “benevolent” people “picked up their cup of water.”

The objectives of this thesis have been threefold. Firstly, it reexamines Chinese Canadian history from a Chinese perspective through the lens of Confucianism. Before 1967, there were a myriad of individuals and organizations that advocated for the relaxation of Chinese immigration, and more broadly to the end of anti-Chinese discrimination. Foon Sien was chosen as a case study to analyze post-World War II activism within a Confucian framework because the Chinese traditionally evaluated people by their historical deeds while they lived, and the metric for the appraisal was based on the teachings of Confucianism. Therefore, despite there being many organizations with the same goal as Foon Sien, this thesis chose to focus on a single individual rather than chronicle the deeds of many organizations. Secondly, the thesis provides a short exposition of Confucianism for Chinese Canadians who grew up without such knowledge as a means to understand the motivations and rationales of their predecessors during a time when anti-Chinese discrimination ran rampant. Thirdly and most importantly, this thesis demonstrates the efficacy of Confucianism to creating harmonious human relations. World leaders constantly criticize the domestic affairs of other nations or resort to military posturing; none of these actions can create lasting peace for their nation or other nations. The criticism of domestic affairs in other nations while issues persist in their own is “seeing the speck in one’s neighbour’s eyes, but

not noticing the log in one's own eye.”⁵ The same situation if taken from the Confucian perspective is trying to achieve world peace (平天下) before governing their own country well (治國). The formation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stands as a testament to the relevance of Confucianism in the modern day. During its drafting, diplomat C.P. Chang instilled ideas of Mencius into the Declaration because Confucian values have universal validity. According to Hans Ingvar Roth, Chang “emphasized respect for each person’s dignity as a human being” and defined dignity as “showing benevolence (*ren*) towards one’s fellow beings.” These ideas culminated in Article 25:1 in the UDHR.⁶ However, the true potential of human rights to bring harmony to the global community can only be reached through education, not weaponization and criticism. This thesis demonstrates that the *hua qiao* applied the principles of Confucianism through the continuous extension of goodwill to establish harmony between Chinese and Canadians during the mid-twentieth century. Ultimately, good changes in society can only occur when more and more people are willing to break branches for the elderly, and cups of water have to accumulate until they are sufficient to extinguish the fire on a burning cart laden full with firewood (杯水輿薪).

⁵ Paraphrase of Matthew 7:3–4.

⁶ Hans Ingvar Roth, “P.C. Chang, Multicultural Confucian Philosopher and Human Rights Champion,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 21, No.4 (Dec 2023): 26–27.

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