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# NZ Govt apologises to Chinese

Story: Chinese

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(Ip, M., 2010)

## The poll tax

Although Chinese miners had been welcomed when there was labour, anti-Chinese prejudice soon resurfaced. By 1871 there was Chinese immigration to be restricted. Like the other British colonies and Australia, New Zealand imposed an entry tax on Chinese. The **Chinese Immigrants Act of 1881** introduced a 'poll tax' of £10. The act also imposed a restriction on ships' passengers – one Chinese passenger per 10 tons of cargo. In 1896 the ratio was reduced to one passenger per 200 tons of cargo, and the poll tax was increased to £100.

Chinese immigrants arrived under the credit ticket system, by which a guarantor – commonly a relative, village elder or prospective employer – advanced the fare and also the poll tax. It usually took immigrants some years to repay the debt. Although the tax was waived by the minister of customs from 1934, it was not repealed until 1944. By then other countries had abandoned it. In 2002 the New Zealand government officially apologised to the Chinese for the suffering caused by the poll tax; it was the first nation to do so.

## Other anti-Chinese laws

The poll tax was the most notorious in a long list of anti-Chinese measures, which included the following restrictions:

- After 1907 all arrivals were required to sit an English reading test.
- In 1908 naturalisation of Chinese was stopped and did not resume until 1952.
- From 1908 Chinese who wished to leave the country temporarily needed re-entry permits, which were thumbprinted.
- From 1920 entry to New Zealand was by permit only, which severely restricted the numbers of Chinese immigrants.
- Permanent residency was denied from 1926.
- Chinese people were deprived of the old age pension until 1936.

The Chinese protested against these injustices, petitioning Parliament for just treatment and legal reform.

## Occupational changes

Following the depletion of the goldfields in the late 1880s, the Chinese drifted to towns and cities looking for work. Many worked in fruit shops, laundries and commodity stores. They also found a niche in the market gardening trade, especially from the late 1920s. Growing vegetables was extremely labour intensive, requiring long hours but comparatively small capital outlay. The Chinese often leased land from Māori, and worked side by side with them, making a modest living.



Tan Yin Ling

1881:	Gaming chance to be prohibited
1882:	Aliens Act

Anti-Chinese legislation (1st of 2)



Haining Street, Wellington



Market gardeners, 1888



Notice for Chinese

## Chinese names

By Chinese convention, the family name (surname) should always go first. Many New Zealand Chinese families lost their real surnames. They had to use their pioneer ancestor's given names instead when customs officials mistook these for surnames.

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For example, the Sew Hoy family (of Dunedin) should be the Choie family. Their pioneer was Choie Sew Hoy, famous for his goldmining business. Similarly, the Ah Chee family (of Auckland) should be the Chan family. Their ancestor was Chan Dar Chee, fruiterer.

gamblers

## A community of bachelors

The Chinese community in New Zealand was predominantly male until after the Second World War. As most Chinese men could not afford the £100 poll tax for their wives, the norm was for them to make home visits every few years. Later on, many would try to send for their sons, brothers and nephews, particularly when they needed help in the gardens or shops. Some married European or Māori women.

## Anti-Chinese prejudice

Many of these men sought solace in opium and gambling, and districts such as Wellington's Haining Street became notorious. Anti-Chinese prejudice exaggerated and distorted the effects of these activities.

Organisations such as the Anti-Chinese Association, the Anti-Chinese League, the Anti-Asiatic League and the White New Zealand League agitated against Chinese immigration during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

One of the worst consequences of anti-Chinese propaganda was seen in 1905 when an elderly former gold miner, Joe Kum Yung, was murdered in Haining Street. The murderer, Lionel Terry, wanted to draw public attention to the alleged dangers of Chinese immigration.

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