

CHINESE-INDIGENOUS MARRIAGE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

1788

- This short film establishes Chinese-Indigenous contact as something that occurred at the same time as white settler-Indigenous contact in 1788.
- *1788* challenges the assertion of white settler indigeneity, which is wielded against Chinese people.
- The lack of status for Chinese men who married Indigenous women after the introduction of the Indian Act meant that they could not live on reserves and thus had to leave their families.
- Vitally, this film addresses how the Indian Act produced confusion; "glimpsed histories of abandonment" where Chinese men often had no choice but to leave reserves.
- The film establishes how Canadian narratives of white settler indigeneity privilege white residence in British Columbia and racializes Chinese people as invaders.

"The Forgotten Ties"

- In this conference paper, Lily Chow places the 1858 Fraser Canyon gold rush and the 1885 construction of the CPR as the key events which fostered Chinese-Indigenous marriages in the interior of British Columbia.
- In general, Cantonese marriage culture allowed plurality, but dictated marriages within the community. Chinese men who did marry Indigenous women were often already married and had families in China.
- Indigenous cultures largely accepted the plurality of marriages and perceived marriages as insoluble.
- Lily Chow establishes how the 1876 Indian Act and the 1948 Family Unification Act forced families apart. The Indian Act forced Chinese men to leave reserves and the 1948 Act led Chinese men to return to wives who had been previously prevented from entering Canada.

"Beyond Chinatown"

Argument: In this article, Jean Barman argues that the conception of Chinese life in colonial British Columbia as racially insular urban bachelor societies is incorrect; in rural British Columbia, Chinese men intermarried with Indigenous women.

Key Points:

- In the 19th century in BC, 1 in 6 partnered Chinese men were partnered to Indigenous women.
- These marriages occurred almost entirely in the interior of British Columbia.
- Racist attitudes from both Chinese and white communities affected these couples.
- The children of these unions grappled with losing their Indian Status and often absent fathers as a result of Chinese men being disallowed from living on reserves after 1876.
- Census categories did not allow for the registering of mixed Chinese-Indigenous births. Thus children in these unions were marked as either Chinese or Indigenous and records of Chinese-Indigenous unions have been obscured as a result.
- Born to a Chinese-Indigenous mother, Charlotte Sullivan is now a Gitksan hereditary chief, recalling that despite prejudices; "she held her head up high". Her mother also regularly received mail from her father in China, who had been very reluctant to leave her behind, and would take the mail to Chinese family friends in Smithers and Hazelton to be translated.

Cedar and Bamboo

Central Point:

The short documentary *Cedar and Bamboo* displays the variable impacts of Chinese-Indigenous marriages in British Columbia by centering the personal stories of their descendants.

Key Points:

- The descendants of Chinese-Indigenous marriages experienced dramatic and unique racism, alienation, and separated households as a result of federal policy.
- Racism surrounding mixed heritages is still very present and continues to obscure Chinese-Indigenous history and make reconnection difficult.

Personal narratives:

- Born to an Indigenous mother and Chinese father, Judy Joe was taken by her father to China when she was 5, there her passport was taken and she was made to do farm labor for 9 years. Eventually able to reclaim her passport and return to Canada, Joe felt alienated from her family history. However, in reconnecting with her mother's relations in Lillooet, she finds a certain amount of closure.
- Howard E. Grant's story details the racism he experienced being labeled "impure" and the healing that occurred afterward through cultural connection with the Musqueam nation.
- The story of Hannah and Jordie Yow addresses being on the receiving end of "what are you?" and the positive impact that being informed on their mixed identity had.

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