

FROM C TO C CHINESE CANADIAN STORIES OF MIGRATION

**A review of the captivating and enthralling documentary of the Chinese
Canadian journey**

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Canada, a country proud of being a land of multicultural diversity, has had its history placed under the spotlight in Jordon Paterson's riveting and vivid documentary *From C to C: Chinese Canadian Stories of Migration* (2010). Produced by SFU Creative Services, this piece tells the stories through first-hand accounts of Chinese immigrants' experiences living in and fighting for Canada and the importance of sharing history to be remembered by future generations.

Opening with the moving lyrics from the *Gold Mountain Song* (1896), the documentary offers a strong and beautiful foreshadowing of the stories to be shared of migration, racism, riots, starvation, war, and heart break.

Using a prominent contrast, the opening scene shows families gaining their citizenship through the Canadian Citizenship Ceremony. Voice over narration by Henry Yu, a historian at the University of British Columbia, speaks about how Canada refers to their young as having a 'global citizenship'. That they are encouraged to grow up and help change the world, but this is often a vision limited to those who were born in the country. A noteworthy comment Yu says, 'we need to re-examine the history of Canada through the lens of those who are left out, those who paid the price of the building of a particular type of nation that's built around white supremacy. If we want to move

forward, we can't ignore those things anymore.'

A view of Canada often omitted, *From C to C* gives authentic recounts of first-person experiences. Frank Wong, a World War II Veteran, relates in heart breaking detail growing up in Vancouver. Where he was confined to live in China Town, where the only jobs available were farm work or in the Cavalry. No professional white-collar jobs were available for Chinese immigrants.

From C to C also highlights the difficulties of immigration. Charlie Quan recalls how he moved from China to Canada to earn a better living. The Head Tax at the time was \$500, an equivalent today to over \$7000 per person. He recounts the horrific treatment of immigrants, in which the Chinese Immigration centre was described as 'the pig house', a chilling gaze into the dehumanisation of the Chinese immigrants. The process sometimes would take up to two months to complete. In 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologised for the Chinese Head Tax and the fallout from the startlingly recent 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, however only 30 out of the 80,000 people who paid the

Head Tax were alive to receive the \$20,000 redress payment.

From C to C discusses Canada's own version of the American Dream, the Gold Mountain, and how many Chinese men moved there to mine the gold as an easy way to earn a good living. However, as the documentary highlights, this wasn't the case for many of the Chinese population. Keith Quan speaks about how many of the men that went never returned. A mixture of lack of money to return, pride and embarrassment of failing, many men stayed in Canada, never seeing their wives or children again. The documentary is successful in showing all aspects of the story, it highlights the hardships of not only the men, but also the women who lost their husbands. Selia Tan, an Architectural Conservationist in Kaiping tells how, with their husbands gone, many of the women had added hardships of not only grieving their husbands, but also making sure they were able to juggle childcare, house care, and farming.

Throughout the whole documentary, a reoccurring theme shown is the importance of sharing history and making sure the younger generations know the struggles their ancestors endured. Lieutenant Colonel Howe Lee speaks about how little

the Canadian history books tell of the Chinese Canadian history and how, when speaking to the younger generations, they are unaware as to what their ancestors went through. Tommy Chen, a student, believes learning about the past helps him to better understand and feel closer to his elders. This documentary could be a leading force in showcasing the importance of sharing history, not only to highlight the various hardships and austerity faced by immigrants, but to bring different generations together, telling the true stories of their ancestors. If the history books are unable to recount what happened to the younger generations, then perhaps more documentaries such as this should be used to educate them. Forty-six minutes of run time covers almost two hundred years of history without losing the emotion nor tension.

A stunning piece of work, *From C to C: Canadian Stories of Migration* tells an important story using nostalgia inducing imagery, captivating musical scores, and poignant truthful accounts of the past. Using beautiful cinematography to tell a harsh truth, *From C to C* captivates a strong source of emotion to show its audience the truth straight from the mouth of those who experienced it, and those who still experience it today.

Going in depth and showing its viewers the history that Canada seems almost unwilling to share itself, this documentary is a useful tool to bring light to generations of struggle and hostility funded and supported by the Canadian government. I highly recommend this documentary to those who wish to know the undiluted truth of the history of the Chinese Canadian migration experience.

REFERENCES

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