

FROM THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA



Return Home

歸屬

First-generation Chinese-Canadian filmmaker Michelle Wong returns to her birth place, St. Paul, Alberta, to get reacquainted with her aging grandparents. Her visit becomes an emotional journey into the past and into herself as she documents their stories, their lives.

Return Home captures the spirit and experiences of early Chinese-Canadian immigrants, acknowledging a vital part of Canadian history.

Listening to their stories of life in China and of coming to Canada, Michelle recognizes the strength and achievements of her grandparents. This new knowledge helps bridge the cultural and generational gap that existed, bringing her to a clearer understanding, a new perspective and appreciation of her cultural heritage.



The film's themes of struggle, courage, and the need to define and respect cultural and personal identities makes *Return Home* an important film.

A CO-PRODUCTION OF FORTUNE FILMS AND STUDIO D
OF THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

DIRECTOR: MICHELLE WONG

PRODUCER FOR FORTUNE FILMS: MICHELLE WONG

PRODUCER FOR STUDIO D: MARGARET WONG



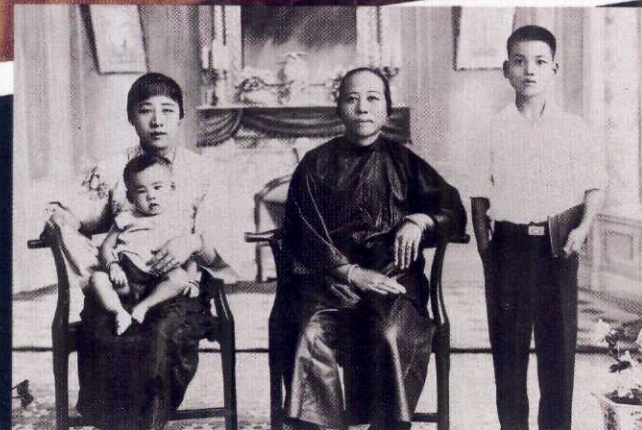
29 MINUTES 18 SECONDS
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A DECODER IS REQUIRED.

RETURN HOME 歸屬



VHS
113C
9192 129



Return Home

歸屬

I have always struggled with being Chinese. It began at school with the teasing and chanting of "Chinky-chinky Chinaman," to being called a "Juk Sing" (Toi-sanese) by older Chinese people, which implied that I was not an authentic Chinese person. These comments made me feel uncomfortable and ashamed of being Chinese.

Although I grew up with both Chinese and Western values, I applied society's stereotypes and negative images to my family and to other Chinese people, but not to myself. I did not see myself as part of "them," my Chinese side was separate, outside of myself. I kept a distance from my family, remaining ignorant about Chinese culture, refusing even to learn the proper words to address my paternal grandparents. They tried to correct me, but I rejected their teachings, believing that by doing so I would be part of mainstream society.

No matter how much I tried to disassociate myself from being Chinese, society continued to project its negative stereotypes on me, seeing me as someone who should "go back to her own country." The rejection and the pain of knowing that society would never fully accept me, motivated me to find a home; a place where I could feel secure and comfortable.

My grandfather's illness prompted my return home. It was a chance to spend time with my family and to seek out the truth, the truth of being Chinese, for myself.

Through my grandparents' stories I realize that Chinese people are not backward, unintelligent or weird. Their lives personified the experiences of Chinese immigrants of the past, the strength, courage and perseverance needed to survive. I began to appreciate my Chinese heritage. The stereotypes and negative images about Chinese people are not true. Their way of expressing themselves is different, but that does not mean that they are not whole and complete persons with valid feelings and emotions. By understanding and accepting my Chinese heritage, I can finally begin to acknowledge and accept the Chinese side of myself.

-Michelle Wong

DIRECTED, WRITTEN AND
EDITED BY
MICHELLE WONG

ADDITIONAL DIRECTION
MARGARET WONG

CINEMATOGRAPHY
STEVE MOORE

SOUND RECORDING
RICK YOUNG

KEY GRIP
VICKI LALONDE

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
BRIGITTE RONDEAU

ANIMATION GRAPHICS
MEILAN LAM

ANIMATION CAMERA
PIERRE LANDRY

SOUND EDITING
JACQUELINE NEWELL

MUSIC EDITING
CATHERINE MERKLINGER

RE-RECORDING
JEAN-PIERRE JOUTEL

CHINESE SUBTITLES
SU ZHOU

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE
CONSULTANT
MARGARET WONG

TITLES
VAL TEODORI

UNIT ADMINISTRATOR
GISELE GUILBAULT

PRODUCER FOR
FORTUNE FILMS
MICHELLE WONG

PRODUCER FOR STUDIO D
MARGARET WONG

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR
STUDIO D
GINNY STIKEMAN

COLOR
29 MINUTES 18 SECONDS

ENGLISH VERSION:
VIDEO C 9192 129
FILM C 0192 129

CHINESE SUBTITLED
VERSION:
VIDEO C 1492 129
FILM C 1492 129

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To stem the flow of Chinese into Canada, the government established in 1885 a Head Tax of \$50 for any Chinese person seeking entry into Canada. It was gradually increased to \$500 in 1904. In 1923 the Head Tax was replaced by the Chinese Immigration (Exclusion) Act which prohibited further immigration of Chinese into Canada. Registered Chinese were only permitted to leave Canada for two years; if they did not return within the two-year period, they would not be allowed back into Canada. The Act was finally abolished in 1947.

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

- ◆ Where does the perception of ourselves come from? Question these perceptions and discover what the truth is for yourself.
- ◆ What is stereotyping and what are the consequences? Where does society get its assumptions about other cultures? How can one prevent assumptions and stop the growth of stereotyping in society?
- ◆ Where do our values and beliefs come from? Outline the similarities and differences between your values and beliefs and those of your parents, grandparents and society. Are there really differences, or is the difference only in how one expresses these values?

FURTHER READINGS

- ◆ Lee, Sky. *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990.
- ◆ Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Toronto: Random House, 1989.
- ◆ _____. *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Toronto: Random House, 1991.
- ◆ Women's Book Committee, Chinese Canadian National Council. *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1992.

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ADDITIONAL FUNDING AND ASSISTANCE:
SECRETARY OF STATE MULTICULTURALISM AND CITIZENSHIP CANADA,
CANADA COUNCIL EXPLORATIONS PROGRAM, ALBERTA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS,
NFB-NORTHWEST CENTRE, AND THE CALGARY SOCIETY OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS

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MONTREAL, QUEBEC H3C 3H5

