



The Crow Band, including some Japanese-Americans, in Hardin, Montana in the 1920s.

Photo: The Montana Historical Society. Courtesy of Pat Murdo.

This fast-moving, engaging film condenses over eighty years of Asian-American immigrant history.

From the Far East to the Old West

Chinese & Japanese Settlers in Montana

Directed by Kathy Witkowsky

Produced by Pat Murdo

1999. 28 Minutes.

Commissioned and Distributed by The Mansfield Center
for Pacific Affairs (MCPA)

1401 New York Avenue NW, Suite 740

Washington, DC 20005-2102

Phone: 202-347-1994, Fax: 202-347-3941

E-mail: mcpadc@mcpa.org

Web site: www.mansfieldfdn.org

The Chinese and Japanese immigrants who settled in Montana were pioneers in every sense of the word, according to the documentary *From the Far East to the Old West*.

The film provides an often unheard perspective on settling the western United States. It is not the story of cowboys and romantic gun battles with outlaws, but rather the toil and perseverance of ordi-

nary people who chose to do an extraordinary thing. This is the story of many immigrants to the West, but it is clearly the heritage of the Chinese and Japanese in Montana—and elsewhere in the United States. While the film focuses on the history of one state, the story is representative of experiences elsewhere and could be used as a starting point to discuss a broad range of issues.

This fast-moving, engaging film condenses over eighty years of Asian-American immigrant history. Filmmakers never rest on one image or idea very long. Archival images flash on screen. Photographs and maps constantly change, yet are well-chosen to coincide with the narration, which is provided by the distinct voice of George Takai (best known for playing Mr. Sulu on the original *Star Trek*). The film gives historical context through this narration, then punctuates the history lesson with details from historians, anecdotes from descendants, and quotes from primary source materials such as newspapers, letters, diaries, proclamations, and laws. A quick, folksy soundtrack featuring fiddle and banjo complements the presentation.

Approximately half of the video focuses on the Chinese, while the other half features the Japanese experience. It may be an accident of history that the two groups settled Montana forty years apart, but this clear delineation makes it easy for teachers to counter the all-too-common confusion that all Asian peoples are the same. The Japanese



Chinese at the railroad station eating with chopsticks and being observed by young boys.

Photo: The Montana Historical Society. Courtesy of Pat Murdo.

and Chinese immigrants are described and their reasons for coming are succinctly explained.

With the exception of one brief moment when a descendent talks of a Montana senator who stood up for the rights of Japanese, there is little emotion. The cuts are too quick to allow us to get to know the interviewees. This is not necessarily a problem but teachers may be frustrated by a lack of parallelism in the statistics. Numbers are offered, but comparison between them is impossible. For example, viewers are told the Chinese made up ten percent of Montana's population in 1870, but are given no true idea of the extent of their exodus when told only 1,300 remained in 1910.

The relatively short length of the film allows for viewing and debriefing within the same class period. Discussion topics could include labor, immigration, discrimination, and racism, and the role of Japanese and Chinese immigrants. While clearly produced for middle school students, the film is never condescending and has much to offer high school students and even adults who have little or no background in this part of American immigrant history.

The video includes a study guide that details instructional objectives, lists and defines select vocabulary, and suggests questions to ask students prior to and after viewing the film. A study packet with additional resources is available. ■

TRACY BEE is Associate Director of The National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies, a joint project of the Social Studies Development Center and the East Asian Studies Center at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Women in Japan

Memories of the Past, Dreams of the Future

English version—Joanne Hershfield/Jan Bardsley
2001. 52:25 Minutes. VHS/DVD. Color.

Web site: <http://womeninJapan.com>
Inquiries: orders@womeninJapan.com

The stereotype of the Asian woman as subservient, selfless, and obedient to her husband has dominated Western thinking for over 150 years. The video, *Women in Japan: Memories of the Past, Dreams of the Future*, presents quite a different version of the modern woman in Japan. Award-winning filmmaker Joanne Hershfield, Professor of Film and Video Production, and Jan Bardsley, Associate Professor of Japanese Language and Literature Curriculum in Asian Studies, both from the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, undertook this film project, funded in part by UNC-CH and in part by the Japan Foundation, to examine the nature (role) of women in modern-day Japan.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.

The film consists of interviews with an eclectic group of women, some Japanese who have traveled abroad, others non-Japanese, who marry Japanese men and choose to live in Japan. The Japanese interviewees represent leaders in education, international Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), and the arts. A common thread that links the group is their perception of their mothers as classic examples of the selfless Confucian wife and mother, product of a pre-arranged marriage, devoted to husband and family—and their strong-willed independent reaction to that perception. Perhaps the most radical departure from a generation of tradition-bound females is exemplified by the life story of the internationally famous painter Taeko Tomiyama, who not only chooses an unconventional occupation, but also refuses to marry her lover and the father of her children because she does not wish to be subservient to (owned by) his family.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.



Photo courtesy of Jan Bardsley.

This modern-day willful independence is demonstrated in the non-Japanese interviewees, as well. The trend among young Japanese to move from the rural villages to the ever-expanding urban areas has created a