

# Moving the Mountain

DIRECTED BY WILLIAM GING WEE DERE AND MALCOLM GUY

PRODUCED BY MALCOLM GUY, PRODUCTIONS MULTI-MONDE

DISTRIBUTED BY CINÉMA LIBRE, 4067, BOUL. ST. LAURENT, SUITE 403  
MONTREAL, QUEBEC, H2N1Y7, CANADA

1993. 85 minutes

In this informative and empathetic documentary, the filmmakers follow individual and family history to try to interpret Chinese roles in Canadian history. In many respects, this work complements other Chinese-Canadian fic-

tional works like *Bone*, and *Half Moon Cafe*. It may also provide context and counterpoint for the recent Chinese-Canadian feature-length film, *Double Happiness* by Mina Shum. Together, these works address the multicultural landscape of contemporary Canada with its ever-growing Asian populations, and should raise questions for students about the differences among Chinese diasporas.

William Ging Wee Dere and Malcolm Guy present the film as a quest for Dere's personal

history. To learn who he is, he seeks his roots: what kind of lives his father and grandfather led, especially as Chinese-Canadians in the early 1900s under various forms of institutional racism.

Chinese-Canadian history shares many traits with that of the U.S., including restrictive immigration and bachelor societies. Canada imposed a head tax of \$500 on Chinese immigration from 1885 to 1923, followed by the Chinese Exclusion Act, barring all Chinese immigration to Canada. The film uses these events and the later compensation/redress of this head tax to provide a basic structure. Within this, the documentary loosely follows chronology and geography from Dere's family home in southern China, to those of his grandfather and father who first came to Vancouver, and finally to Montreal. Dere's ancestors were laborers and laundrymen, subjected to unjust legislations. After much struggle, with Chinese-Canadians' involvement in the Second World War and the subsequent repeal of the immigration act, Dere, his mother, and siblings all immigrated to Montreal. With the redress of the head tax, Chinese-Canadians, who survived many different forms of prejudice, have finally become full citizens of Canadian society. The film ends with a ritual visit to the ancestors' graves, including Dere's daughter opening a new, yet continuous, phase in Chinese-Canadian history.

Dere and Guy have assembled and interpreted varied materials—first-person narration, archival news headlines, photos, TV news, footage of



Photo Courtesy of Cinéma Libre and James Wing

▲ William Ging Wee Dere became very close to James Wing (second from right in above photo), who, like Williams' father, had to leave his wife (seated left), three children and father (seated center) when he emigrated to Canada. The photo was taken on one of James's yearly visits to China.

► William Ging Wee Dere's father and mother in their laundry in Montreal.



Photo Courtesy of Cinéma Libre and William Ging Wee Dere

family gatherings, Chinatown scenes, and interviews with family members and friends. These are interspersed with solo performances by Chinese-Canadian artists to weave the histories of the Dere family and Chinese-Canadian families together since the turn of the century. While it is refreshing to see the filmmaker in the film, making reference to his own role in making this documentary and inserting his own voice to the text, the film remains a largely non-self-conscious autobiography. Dere's voice-over sometimes becomes too overpowering and one-dimensional even as it celebrates the long struggle of his family and all Chinese-Canadians. Furthermore, no contextualization deals with other Chinese populations of Canada today, such as recent Hong Kong immigrants.

Overall, nonetheless, the film provides a wide-ranging and informative history of Chinese-Canadian life. The topic merits even more explorations within the constantly changing landscape and peoples of Canada.

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#### ORDERING INFORMATION

For rental and sales, contact  
Cinéma Libre: 514-849-7888

## Sensō Daughters (Senjō no Onnatachi)

PRODUCED BY NORIKO SEKIGUCHI

DISTRIBUTED BY FIRST RUN ICARUS

153 WAVERLY PLACE, 6TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10014

1989, 54 minutes

*Sensō Daughters* is an ambitious, deceptively complex video that participates in an on-going controversy revolving around Japanese behavior during the Second World War. While it deals with the so-called "Forgotten War," Japan's brutal and dehumanizing conquest of New Guinea beginning in 1942, it finds its controversial heart in the vexing issue of the "comfort women" used by the Japanese Army to satisfy the sexual needs of its soldiers.

Until 1992, the Japanese government refused even to publicly acknowledge that the military, from as early as 1932, forced women into sexual slavery to serve the Army overseas. Figures vary as to the number of so-called "comfort women"—as *Sensō Daughters* indicates, record keeping on comfort women was virtually nonexistent, not so much out of a sense of trying to keep criminal activity secret, but rather stemming from a refusal to acknowledge the basic humanity of these women. However, it appears that no less than 80,000 and perhaps as many as 200,000 women were brutalized in this manner. The majority of these comfort women were not Japanese, but instead were primarily Korean or Chinese.

"Comfort Houses" were set

up throughout much of the region of the Pacific that the Japanese conquered: China, Hong Kong, Indochina, Burma, Thailand, Borneo, and New Guinea, among others. That the army, with the government's tacit cooperation and even encouragement, had convinced itself of the necessity to set up these comfort houses, which forced women into sexual slavery, is one of the most horrifying aspects of the whole issue. Embarrassed by the reaction to the "Rape of Nanking," (not the horrors committed by the soldiers, but the world-wide reaction to it) and concerned about the spread of venereal disease among the soldiers or the possibility of espionage occurring in unregulated houses of prostitution, the military made the sexual servicing of its soldiers a high priority. The Japanese government today has so far refused to make reparations to the surviving women.

While public discussion of this issue in Japan has been minor until recently, the Japanese have dealt in film with the issue of war-time prostitution. But these films, such as *Nikutai no mon* (Gate of Flesh), *Sandakan hachiban shokan* (Sandakan No. 8), or Imamura Shohei's powerful documentary, *Karayuki-san*, focused on Japanese women whose forced

prostitution differs in substance, if not in essence, from the non-Japanese women forced into sexual slavery out of racist and misogynistic attitudes.

There is a calm, presentational style to *Sensō Daughters*, thus removing any notion of sensationalism or exploitation of its powerful subject. In accented English, the filmmaker narrates some of the factual material the audience needs to know (though, if anything, factual background and information are relatively lacking here), and we occasionally hear her questions to her New Guinean subjects. More significantly, the voices of the women who lived through the Japanese occupation of their nation provide much of the drama here. Their memories of deprivation and hardship, of the fate of their husbands, of their occasional sexual servitude, is played in sharp counterpoint to the Japanese subjects interviewed. Scenes of an army gynecologist dispassionately discussing the "regulations" surrounding sexual relations between soldiers and comfort women, and displaying photographs of his war-time office; the casual racism of Japanese veterans who still seem to refuse to understand the moral crime of using comfort