

Chinese through the Americas

May 16-19, 2012 Vancouver, B.C. Canada

Title: The Forgotten Ties

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Objective: To articulate the relationship between the First Nations People and the early Chinese Chinese Immigrants (1858~1967)

Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to share a general study of the relationship between the indigenous people and the early Chinese immigrants. Their earliest contacts can be traced to Liang Shu (梁书), a historical anthology of the Southern Dynasties in China. Around 458 A.D., a Buddhist monk and 40 disciples sailed from Dahan Guo (大汉国-China) across the Pacific Ocean and arrived at northwestern North America. They settled there and attempted to preach Buddhism to the indigenous people. In 1788, a fur trader bought 79 Chinese artisans from Canton (广州-Guangzhou) to build ships at Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island. The following year the Spanish seized the establishment, but the Chinese workers escaped and lived with indigenous people in the British Columbia interior. In 1858, some Chinese miners were accused of selling arms and supporting the indigenous people in the Canyon War. During construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1880-1885), both indigenous people and Chinese labourers were employed to lay tracks for the railroad. In the late 18th century when fish canning became an important industry, these two ethnic groups worked together in the fish butchering department. Later, when the systemic discrimination against the Chinese was enforced, small Chinese businesses, especially cafés and restaurants, could not employ white women. The Chinese had no choice but to hire indigenous women. These contacts and interactions provided opportunities to develop friendship; some blossomed into marriage. All these findings indicate the existence of a relationship among members of these two ethnic groups; however, they faced obstacles and challenges that were caused by differences in cultures and lifestyles and by the effects of political, social, and economic development. The impacts of these factors will be included in the discussion.