

# Lost Years | Exploring 150 years of the Chinese diaspora in Canada, USA, New Zealand and Australia

Posted February 15th, 2012 by Devon Wong & filed under Identity (<http://schemamag.ca/identity/>), Pop Culture (<http://schemamag.ca/pop-culture/>).



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I offered to cover the latest film-screening invitation for Schema based on my own interests in documentary film production and my Chinese-Canadian heritage. When I arrived into the theatre, I knew immediately that this would not be the kind of usual guerrilla style, grassroots film product I'd be used to reviewing at local student film festivals.

The room was packed full of a demographic I was unused to seeing in the local film circuit: Asian faces, plenty of them, ranging from ages 30 to 80...possibly older. For an instant, I regretted not taking my father as my date. A group of prim dressed seniors to my right were having an intense conversation about politics that I was only able to understand when she dropped the English word "discriminate" against her Mandarin tongue.

The opening speaker took the stage and prompted the audience with a question he so often encountered as an academic: "Why must we go to the past? Can't we move on already?" His answer: "Because if we lose our memories, we don't know who we are".

From a filmmaker's perspective, I have to congratulate the Producer and Director, Kenda Gee, for the emotive composition, great archival sources, and overall reverent tone of *Lost Years* (<http://www.lostyears.ca/>). But from a personal perspective, I must also say a warm thank you to Gee, for providing me some insight to my own literal "lost years" of my family history.

With British Columbia as a foundation, Gee uses the film as an opportunity to explore the patterns and stories of Chinese diasporas throughout Canada and beyond. The film focuses on the years between the introduction of the Chinese Head Tax in the late 1800s, until the Act was finally repealed in the late 1940s.



In many ways, *Lost Years* delved directly into the part of my own family heritage that I'd given up trying to access. I'd never been able to have the conversations around my own family's migration, despite having my great-grandfather arrive in Canada over a hundred years ago. I'd lost the language on the way, and the ability to communicate and understand their struggles.

Gege collects an eclectic, and sometimes eccentric, cast of informed interviewees

to elaborate on the various experiences of families affected by immigration from China. From celebrated hockey hero Larry Kwong to refreshingly blunt Gim Wong, each voice offers an individual insight and depth to the formation of a Chinese-Canadian identity. Moments of comedy were punctuated by an underlying melancholy in the unveiling of a deeply shameful history in the treatment of early Chinese-Canadians.

Tune into CBC TV for the television special premiere of *Lost Years* (2 part mini-series) on CBC TV's Absolutely Canadian this February 18, 2012 @ 9:00 PST

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## ABOUT DEVON WONG



Devon is a video producer, writer, and host, born and raised in Vancouver but currently based in Manila working with @rapplerdotcom.

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