

Exploring Chinese Boat People's Oral History and Contemporary Identities: Echoes of the Past, Voices of the Present

The relocation of Chinese refugees from Vietnam to Victoria, BC, Canada, by boat, following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979, is a significant chapter in Canadian immigration history. As a student in Canada from a Chinese-Vietnamese family, my own grandfather being a Chinese boat person who fled China for Vietnam, I am motivated to trace the complex and untold journey of those who moved from China to Vietnam, and subsequently from Vietnam to Canada, driven by the significant upheaval of war and political change. The story of these Chinese refugees, who risked their lives crossing the sea for a new start in Canada, also profoundly illuminates Canada's humanitarian efforts and multicultural acceptance.

This project proposes an exploration of the complex oral histories of Chinese immigrants who fled Vietnam by boat, mapping the socio-cultural and political events in their lives that led to their migration to Canada since the 1970s. It will also examine their life conditions after arriving in Victoria, which directly impacted and shaped the mindset and lifestyle of their Chinese-Canadian offspring. By gathering and analyzing personal narratives from Chinese boat people in Victoria, my aim is to deepen the understanding of contemporary Chinese-Canadian identity and society through the lens of their past immigration experiences. To achieve this, the project will present these oral histories to the public through a series of podcasts featuring interviews with Chinese boat people in Victoria, aiming to establish a new Chinese-Canadian oral history collection in UVic Library's multimedia archives instead of contributing to a specific existing collection.

My research will draw from three primary sources:

1. Chinese-Canadian archived materials and collections from UVic's Special Collections and Archives.
2. Oral histories from Chinese boat people in Victoria and their next generations.
3. UVic Library's media facilities for podcast production.

In the project's later phase, I will transform my findings into engaging podcast audio. These will be interwoven with the voices of Chinese refugees and their descendants, reflecting both past and present Chinese immigrant experiences in Canada, also their perspectives on their roots and identities. Drawing on my unique experience as a Chinese-Vietnamese student in Canada, I strive to combine my standpoints with oral histories told by the Chinese boat people and their offspring in Victoria. With the support of UVic Library's podcasting facilities, these podcasts will be published on Pacific & Asian Studies' social media platforms, and then archived in the UVic Library, with the explicit consent of interviewees. Through these informative, creative, and accessible media outputs, my research aims to connect the public more intimately with the history of Chinese boat people from the 1970s and the special content on Chinese-Canadian collections. Furthermore, the findings and collected voices from this project will significantly enrich and expand the Chinese archival collection at the UVic Library, thereby contributing to the oral history of this chapter in Chinese immigration history.