

## Culture



**Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy and John McMullan (eds),  
*Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing  
Industries in British Columbia*, Toronto: Methuen, 1987. 402  
pages, \$24.95 (paper)**

Yvan D. Breton

Volume 9, numéro 1, 1989

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1080903ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1080903ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),  
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne  
d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce compte rendu

Breton, Y. (1989). Compte rendu de [Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy and John McMullan (eds), *Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia*, Toronto: Methuen, 1987. 402 pages, \$24.95 (paper)]. *Culture*, 9(1), 99–100. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1080903ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1989

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

after the lifting of the Chinese Exclusion Act, still maintain a distinctive family type, association life, friendship network, and residential pattern in Canadian cities.

Secondly, given the significance of the period of entrance and the entrance status in the performance of various immigrant groups in Canada, (a point repeatedly stressed by Li himself), one is disappointed that Li has made no attempt to deal with his supposedly detailed case study in those terms. Certainly the family type, educational aspirations, and occupational performance of the Chinese who migrated from mainland China to Canada as contract labourers before 1923 must be different from those who came from mainland China in the post-1947 period for family re-unification. These in turn would surely be different from those who came from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia as independent immigrants in the post-1967 period, or those who were accepted into Canada as Indo-Chinese refugees in the late 1970's. All Chinese in Canada are not alike, even though they are subsumed under the same ethnic category in Canadian official statistics.

One final point. It is erroneous to argue, as Li does that the structural imperative of capitalism is solely responsible for the extreme form of institutional racism and exclusion directed against the Chinese in the 1920's. Capitalists in Canada had, in fact, a lot to lose and very little to gain by these extreme measures. When a large versatile pool of Chinese reserve labour, both within Canada and from China, was excluded from the Canadian labour market in the 1920's, employers had little choice but to hire white labour at a higher rate. To my mind, therefore, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 in fact represented the triumph of irrational racist ideology, opportunistic politicians, and national white labour unions over the interests of white capitalists in Canada.

In conclusion, ethnic relations, like all inter-group relations, is a complex sociological phenomenon. It cannot be adequately studied by using one single perspective or theory. Any attempt to do so is bound to grossly simplify or distort reality, as Li has done in the two books under review.

---

Patricia MARCHAK, Neil GUPPY and John MCMULLAN (eds), *Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia*, Toronto: Methuen, 1987. 402 pages, \$24.95 (paper).

By Yvan D. Breton  
*Universite Laval*

This book is the result of a research project undertaken by a group of anthropologists and sociologists at the University of British Columbia. It describes Canadian West Coast fisheries in the 1980s, focusing on the social and economic structure of the industry. Divided into three parts, it first examines the history of B.C. fishing, pinpointing the macro economic and political factors influencing its evolution; secondly, it deals with the labor process, looking at the various elements molding the organization of work; finally, it questions the viability of fishing communities in an increasingly negative and pressured context linked to environmental deterioration and economic competition.

I will not comment here the dozen or so individual contributions, many of them providing the reader with a thorough analysis of specific aspects of fishing in B.C. I will rather center my remarks on the overall impact and originality of this book within the Canadian socio-anthropological literature on maritime communities. In this regard, this book represents a significant contribution to the understanding of fishing industry in Canada and several of its qualities deserved to be mentioned:

1. It is the result of a team effort, an orientation that is strongly reflected in the organization of the book. Unlike many readers which consist of a collection of essays, the presentation of which is ordered according to highly general criteria, this book is organized by strong logical guidelines, thus facilitating a comprehensive view of the fishing industry. In addition, it starts with an introduction which discusses the main conceptual issues upon which individual contributions rely and includes a conclusion that seeks to identify the overall practical impacts of the situation previously described.
2. It provides the reader with an integrated approach for understanding the dynamics of fishing in B.C., constantly aiming at identifying structural elements and their counter-effects at the individual and local levels. For those of us wishing to better identify the impact of national

institutions upon the communities and the domestic groups' reproductive mechanisms, this study bears several methodological insights, the illustrative value of which largely bypasses the realm of maritime socio-anthropological investigations.

3. In a context of an increasing state intervention in fisheries, the book represents a significant contribution to the re-examination of the "common property" issues. It explores the various definitions of the concept, making a sharp distinction between communal and common property and argues about the inadequacy of the later when dealing with the problem of access to fish. The authors make a strong argument about the necessity of converting the "tragedy of the commons" into a "tragedy of the mismanaged State property."
4. The way the analysis is organized, both at a general and individual level, allows the reader to see fishing as a social production process, and not only as an acquisitive or extractive activity. Too many studies in maritime social sciences have neglected the analytical importance of processing and marketing activities when dealing with the reproduction of fishing in a regional context. In addition, several individual contributions directly address issues related to the organizational and ideological aspects of fishing, entering into the role of the labour unions and bureaucracies.
5. Besides using an historical framework that pinpoints how the industry is characterized by a certain "structural continuity" (for instance, the absence of an earlier domestic production system compared to what prevailed on the Atlantic Coast), this study is among the few, in my view, to show the relevance of the notion of social division of labour. By doing so, the authors are able to illustrate in a very adequate way the vulnerability of fishing. They provide convincing arguments to counterbalance official and political discourses linked to the producers' lack of management capacities and of awareness for environmental deterioration. It is, rather, the State's mismanagement of the activities related to the exploitation of other natural resources in the coastal zones that is responsible for the situation. The conduct of fishing is not only affected by internal constraints but also by the presence and negative effects of the waste disposals derived from

other capitalist branches of production, namely forest and agricultural industries.

These remarks show that this study, at the ethnographic and methodological level, will remain a landmark for social scientists interested by the evolution of regional fishing economies within a context of an increased state intervention and economic competition.

In this regard, it would have been interesting to have a few additional pages, either in the introduction or the conclusion, for systematizing the overall analytical weight and/or limits of a Political Economy framework within the present-day theoretical approaches in the socio-anthropology of fishing. This would have not only enhanced the illustrative potential of the study for students aiming at a better understanding of the social components of fishing, but would have also provided bureaucrats and other decisional agents with a more comprehensive view of the practical constraints attached to the use of formalist devices.

Finally, and this is probably a very egocentric statement, I would have liked a few more general and comparative references to the situation prevailing on the Atlantic Coast. To sum up, I consider this book as a significant contribution to maritime social sciences in Canada. I hope it will be followed by similar efforts by researchers in other regions.

---

Sarah Grey THOMASON and Terrence Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1988. xi, 411pp.

By J.V. (Jay) Powell,  
*University of British Columbia*

Before even opening this book, we are primed for it by a quote on the dust jacket from no less a sociolinguist and creolist than Gillian Sankoff, "This is truly a landmark study." So it is. Not for beginners, this comprehensive study of language change (a) reviews the range of historical linguistic assumptions about how languages change and why, and (b) then begs to differ with all of the previous approaches and offers a new perspective on the role of "interference" (contact with other languages) in the course of language development over time.

Historical linguistics has come a long way since Max Muller claimed in 1871 that there is no such thing as a mixed language. This followed the old neogrammarian axiom that language change progressed according to exceptionless sound laws and