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Merle Audrey Jacobs

Anglo-Burmese Culture

Letters from my mother

SERIES IN SOCIOLOGY

Professor Merle Jacobs offers a unique and thought-provoking examination of Anglo-Burmese identity from a social science perspective. Her approach, which combines historical and cultural analysis with autoethnographic narratives, effectively illustrates the complexities of belonging and identity within the Anglo-Burmese community during the colonial period and in their later diasporic experiences. By incorporating diverse sources and viewpoints, Jacobs captures the intricate nature of this identity.

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About the author

Brought up in Burma within an Anglo-Burmese family, **Merle Jacobs** immigrated from Burma to Canada because of a military takeover. Jacobs joined the Branson Hospital School of Nursing, where, in her senior year became the class president. While in Nursing at North York Branson Hospital, she became a Nurse Manager in Mental Health and a psychotherapist. She also worked at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Society, Women and Health In-patient Unit, which dealt with women and trauma. Jacobs also served on several LAPS committees at York University as Chair, Sub-Committee on General Education, Committee on Curriculum, Curricular Policy and Standards, Tenure and Promotion Committee, a member of APPC, and LAPS Council Executive. At the University level she was a voting member of the Senate and also served on the Senate Tenure and Promotion Appeals Committee. Her works include: 'The Cappuccino Principle: Health, Culture and Social Justice in the Workplace' (Ontario: de Sitter Publication, 2007), 'Women's Work: Racism and Trauma' (Toronto: APF Press, 2008), 'Social Dislocation to Geographical Dislocation: Trauma & Resilience' (Ed)(Toronto, APF Press, 2015), 'Race In-Equity: Intersectionality, Social Determinants of Health, & Universal Rights' (2017), 'Health, Power, and Inequity: A Critical Analysis' (APF Press, 2024).

Summary

This work, written for the Anglo-Burmese community, adopts an interpretive paradigm and delves into the complex markers of the Anglo-Burmese culture, a blend of British and Burmese influences during the colonial period. The community is primarily composed of individuals of mixed European and Asian ancestry who held privileged positions akin to those of the Anglo-Indians in India during the British colonial era. The community's development was influenced by British laws, values, and norms. It uses social science theories and methods in developing Anglo-Burmese culture and does not intend to be a book on unpacking British history. The work explores belonging as a fundamental human need that is crucial in shaping one's personal identity as an Anglo-Burman.

The book utilises various sources, including autoethnographic recollections, survey responses, open-source social media narratives, historical documents, and secondary accounts, to comprehensively understand Anglo-Burmese culture. Various groups, such as British colonialists, anthropologists, theologians, novelists, politicians, and historians, have contributed their perspectives, impacting the representation and documentation of mixed-race individuals in India and Burma during that time. The portrayal of mixed-race persons as half-caste and the intrigue surrounding interracial relationships were prevailing themes among those depicting the Anglo-Burmese and Anglo-Indian communities during the 19th century.

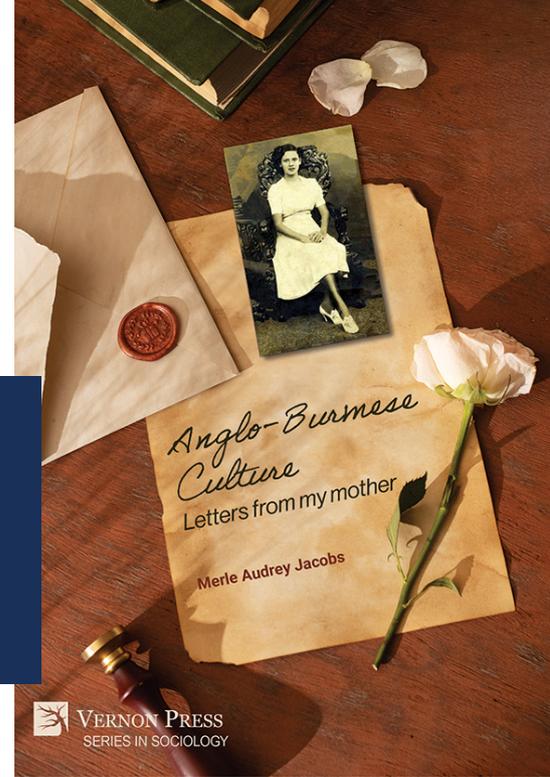
The process of Anglo-Burmese assimilation into British societal norms can be observed through the analysis of historical and political power dynamics, particularly with regard to education and religion in British Burma. This book constructs Anglo-Burmese culture from within the community. With a rich blend of Asian and European heritage infused with the values of British colonialism, the Anglo-Burmese culture has evolved into a truly unique and intriguing cultural phenomenon. The book offers an extensive study of this culture, shedding light on its customs, traditions, and way of life from their lived experience. The Anglo-Burmese community inhabited a distinctive liminal zone between the coloniser and the colonised. These details offer a wealth of insights into Burma's complex tapestry and the intricacies of race and colonial hegemony.

The Anglo-Burmese community's displacement to Western nations as a result of Burma's independence, World War II and the Ne Win military regime had a significant influence on their cultural heritage and identity. With the gradual passing of the older generation of Anglo-Burmese in the diaspora, we will see their knowledge, practices, and customs that constitute the distinctive Anglo-Burmese culture being lost over time.

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