

## Chapter 10

### LOOKING BACK

The Sino-Japanese War, the Second World War and, finally, the creation of Communist China in 1949 forced Chinese living in northern New South Wales to re-think their orientation. China, at least for the immediate future, did not offer the haven it had in the past. The possibility of returning there, either to visit or live permanently, was seriously damaged. Attention became focused on ensuring that the foundations laid in Australia during the first half of the century could support a long-term future. Already, many members of the community had successful businesses and investments, and they had Australian-born children with Australian schooling and prospects. They had also achieved some acceptance within their local Australian communities. The spectre of intolerance and Australian racism had increasingly become an undercurrent which they had learned to circumvent, ignore and sometimes overcome. Australia had already become a new home for some and an alternative home for others.

Events in Australia since 1950 reinforced the idea of Australia as home. In particular, post-war immigration in Australia changed not only the demographic make up of the population but also the public face of official policies and attitudes.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the 1940s, Australian immigration and settlement policies were still founded on the racist attitudes and discriminatory practices which had created the 'White Australia policy'. However, under the pressure of post-war immigration, the critical scrutiny of foreign powers, and the liberalising climate which saw the rise of minority rights movements from the 1960s, Australian policies and practices changed. There was a clear move from discriminatory to anti-discriminatory immigration policies, and from assimilation through integration to multiculturalism in settlement policies.<sup>2</sup>

The Chinese-Australians whose experiences are presented in this thesis, lived through these changes. They also lived through changes which eased the geographical isolation of rural Australian communities due to improved communications and transport, altered the commercial face of rural towns through the arrival of supermarket chain stores, opened up educational opportunities, and increased patterns of movement and settlement away from

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<sup>1</sup> On the history and impact of post-war immigration on Australia see Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1984, especially Chapters 1 and 2; James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1988, pp. 97-128; and Brian Murphy, *The Other Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993, Part II.

<sup>2</sup> There is a growing literature on the changes in immigration and settlement policies and, in particular, on the nature of the current multicultural policies. F. Lewins, 'Assimilation and integration' and J.J. Smolicz, 'Cultural diversity' in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*, pp. 856-860 and 868-873 provide an overview. An example of more specialised treatment and analysis is available in Helen Andreoni, 'Outside the Gum Tree': *The visual arts in multicultural Australia*, National Association for the Visual Arts, Sydney, 1992, Chapter 2.

rural to metropolitan areas.<sup>3</sup> Their memories of their personal and family histories were influenced by these changing circumstances. It consequently becomes appropriate to analyse in this chapter the impact of these changes both on the histories of the Chinese storekeepers and their families, and on Chinese-Australian perceptions of those histories.

The chapter begins by presenting the changes which characterised life and work in post-war Australia for this particular group of Chinese-Australians. As the survival of some stores and the closure of others influenced the opportunities available, the post-war history of these stores provide vital details. Attention is also paid to the factors which created increasingly diverse employment opportunities and settlement patterns for the children and grandchildren of the original Chinese settlers. Consideration of these changes leads to a discussion of participants' pride in their success and in their acceptance as 'Australians'. Time is devoted to analysing the ways in which participants pointed to educational and work achievements of family members, their active participation in local community affairs, and increasing marriages with people of non-Chinese ancestry as evidence of the success of settlement in post-war Australia. The analysis shows that for the participants the emphasis was on 'being Australian' by submerging those differences, at least publicly, which were related to a Chinese heritage. Equally evidence is provided of the maintenance and adaptation of Chinese aspects of their heritage in the private domain. Attention consequently turns to an analysis of the nature and significance of this Chinese heritage, especially to its public acknowledgement in the past two decades. Throughout the chapter, there is also a concern to establish the extent to which changing circumstances influenced participants' views of their own experiences and, ultimately, influenced their willingness to share their memories with an outsider. Through this discussion it becomes apparent that looking back and recalling provides insight not just into the period of the past which is the focus of this thesis but also into the way in which past and present lives interact, inform and shape one another.

- **Living and Working in Post-War Australia**

During the first half of the twentieth century, the stores established by Chinese were the centre of work and life for Chinese in the district in and around Glen Innes, Inverell and Tenterfield. They provided employment, accommodation, a social network, a base for building a life in Australia. As the century moved through the Depression, the Second World War and particularly into the post-war period, the importance of the stores decreased. Some survived and adapted to new circumstances; others closed. Children and grandchildren encountered changing circumstances and different opportunities. Work and settlement patterns diversified.

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<sup>3</sup> These patterns are documented in, for example, I.H. Burnley, 'The urbanization of the Australian population 1947-1971' in I.H. Burnley (ed.), *Urbanization in Australia: The post-war experience*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1974, pp.3-16; and Beverley Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley: A history of shopping in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, especially pp.92-93.

*The Stores: Survival and Closure*

Of the over fifty Chinese owned and managed stores which operated in the district during the first half of the twentieth century, sixteen were still operating in the 1950s. By 1970 that number had dropped to ten, and in 1995 only four were still operating under the management of descendants of early owners.<sup>4</sup> The closures represent a pattern common to rural Australia. As the post-war period brought increasingly improved transport and communications, and as supermarket chains established stores in rural towns, the rationale and viability of general stores in rural towns was partially undermined. To survive they, by and large, had to adapt.<sup>5</sup>

Chinese owned stores in northern New South Wales which did survive into the post Second World War period adopted a variety of approaches. A few, like Wing Hing Long in Tingha, retained the shop layout, goods and style of service of the pre-war period. A photograph of the exterior taken in 1983 reveals a facade belonging to an earlier era.



Wing Hing Long, Tingha, mid 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

A visit to the shop provoked the following description:

*Old show cases, shelves floor to ceiling, piles of goods including a table with Chinese cooking ingredients. Everything from food to clothes, saucepans hanging from hooks on the ceiling. Brown, dark interior.*<sup>7</sup>

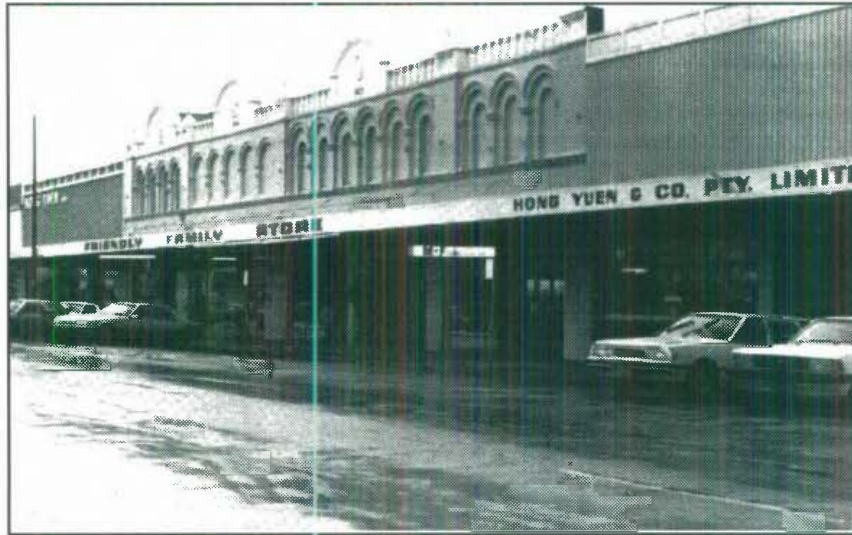
<sup>4</sup> See Appendix E at the end of this thesis for further details about the stores. The four still operating in 1995 were Kwong Sing, Glen Innes; Wing Hing Long, Tingha; Hong Yuen, Inverell (and Texas); and Sam Kee, Inverell.

<sup>5</sup> Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, pp. 91-93, and pp.94-115 *passim*. For a comparative look at the impact of post-war changes on the retail section of a larger centre see J.C. Docherty, *Newcastle: The making of an Australian city*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1983, pp.135-136.

<sup>6</sup> Photograph taken by Janis Wilton.

<sup>7</sup> Field notes, 7 October 1983.

Other stores adapted to changing demands and circumstances. Kwong Sing in Glen Innes, under the management of Stanley Young and his sons, slowly enlarged and modified its buildings and services and, eventually, leased out sections to some of the chain stores.<sup>8</sup> Hong Yuen in Inverell similarly expanded and modernised its premises. The groceries section became a supermarket, a small cafeteria was added to the store, modern display units and shelving were incorporated, and the store itself was extended.<sup>9</sup> Photographs of the exterior and interior of the store emphasise these changes.



Top: Hong Yuen, Inverell, mid 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

Bottom: Hong Yuen, Inverell, kitchen ware section, 1979.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Harvey Young, Glen Innes, 16 February 1990; Kwong Sing and Company - Changes (a one page summary of changes 1949-1990), Kwong Sing Papers, p.47.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Harry Fay, Inverell, 6 October 1983; Interview with Thomas Loy, Inverell, 15 February 1984; and *Inverell Times*, 30 March 1960, 11 April 1960, 15 October 1976 and Souvenir Edition, Supplement to *Inverell Times*, 18 October 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Photographed by Janis Wilton.

<sup>11</sup> Cum Photographs.

In Tenterfield, the Hon family similarly invested money in enlarging and modernising the premises of Sun Sun and Company. They also sold some sections - electrical goods to Joe Hing and groceries to Manwar and Loy - and specialised in drapery. As Dulcie Hon explained:

*... we were concentrating on middle to better class goods. Also we had a special foundation garment fitting business, as well as curtain making and things like that which they didn't normally have in the country, and so we had customers who were professional people and the farmers and graziers. ... and we kept lots of the smaller farmers and town workers as friends and customers.*<sup>12</sup>



Sun Sun and Company, Tenterfield, c1960 just after its remodelling.<sup>13</sup>

Specialisation was also the strategy adopted by Sam Kee and Company in Tingha (and later in Glen Innes and Inverell). Eric and Henry Fong converted the store to electrical goods.<sup>14</sup> In Tenterfield, Hop Sing and Company also specialised. From its days as a general store, it contracted to become primarily a milk bar and, for the few years before it was sold, a video rental store.<sup>15</sup>

A clear impetus behind the survival of the stores, was the need to continue to seek viability in order to keep supporting and providing work for family members. Older children were expected to work in the family business. Many left school and went straight into storekeeping. Their futures were bound, at least to an extent, to the prospect of maintaining the family business. As Harry Fay II observed when reflecting on the amount of school he missed by accompanying his father on buying trips to Sydney:

*Education wasn't important to my father. He didn't have much himself and, anyway,*

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Dulcie Hon, Sydney, 23 May 1990.

<sup>13</sup> Hon Photographs. For photographs of the earlier Sun Sun and Company, refer to p.116 previously.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with Eric Fong, Inverell. 22 November 1983 and 28 February 1990; *Inverell Times*, 12 December 1978.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews with Henry Hong, Tenterfield, 7 July 1983, 2 March 1990 and 11 May 1990.

*his son would follow him into the business.*<sup>16</sup>

Ron Ping, son of Samuel Ping who owned the Campbell Street store in Sydney which supplied many of the Chinese goods to the rural Chinese stores, vividly recalled his first official day at work in the family business:

Ron Ping : .. *I joined the shop when I left school at the age of seventeen. There was no school holiday. The day after I finished my leaving certificate examination, Dad came into my bedroom, he tore the sheets off my bed, got hold of me, and it was to work!*

Janis Wilton: *There was no question of you doing anything else?*

Ron Ping : *No, not in my time.*<sup>17</sup>

The stores which survived into the 1970s and beyond reflected this concern to retain businesses in family hands, and to provide a livelihood for family members. They were managed and partly staffed by the children, and sometimes grandchildren, of early owners. In Hong Yuen in Inverell, for example, Harry Fay's sons and older sons-in-law became the owners and managers. As they came of age, some grandsons also joined the business. In the mid-1990s, grandsons including Harry Fay III, moved into management positions in the store.<sup>18</sup> The same pattern occurred at Kwong Sing in Glen Innes. During the 1940s and 1950s, Percy Young's sons and a son-in-law managed and ran the store. Now management rests in the hands of a son and a grandson, Stanley and Harvey Young, and other family members continue to be employed there.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Sun Sun and Company and Hop Sing and Company in Tenterfield remained, until their closure in the early 1970s and early 1990s respectively, under the management of the children of the original owners.<sup>20</sup>

While some stores managed to survive well into the post-war period, the majority closed or were sold. The closures were at least partly attributed to changes in rural Australia, especially in the smaller towns. Ken Gett, for example, explained that for his family's store, Yow Sing and Company, in Emmaville:

*Business went down and down as tin ran out and the town became smaller and smaller.*

*Economic necessity [was one of the factors which]... meant we left.*<sup>21</sup>

The smaller businesses had generally provided a limited income and, as other centres started to grow, prospects there seemed better. This happened, for example, to Alice and Ernest Wong. They had moved into a small mixed business in Tingha in the 1940s. They soon also acquired a cafe to supplement their income. Eventually, they concentrated their efforts on the cafe. As Alice and Ernest Wong's daughter, Pat Yee, explained:

*... I don't think there was enough business out there [in Tingha] because there were two general stores out there and ours was only a little one. It was sort of up out of the way,*

16 Interview with Harry Fay.

17 Interview with Ron Ping, Sydney, 22 April 1991.

18 Interview with Harry Fay; and personal communications.

19 Autobiography of Stanley Herbert Young, Kwong Sing Papers; Interviews with Harvey Young.

20 Interviews with Dulcie Hon, and Henry Hong.

21 Interview with Ken Gett, Brisbane, 23 February 1990.

*and business wasn't real good. So we thought we might as well get rid of that and just work [in the cafe], because there was enough work there.*<sup>22</sup>

The next move was to buy a business in Inverell. Alice Wong recalled:

*Well, it was our bank manager... we were very friendly with him and he would always talk about what we'd try to do to make a bit of money and one thing or another. All we had was only a small business, you know, and you don't make much of a living. So he talked to Ern to come into town [Inverell] and we bought a cafe.*<sup>23</sup>

The family operated the cafe and then purchased an adjoining store which they eventually converted to a fruit and vegetable shop. Ernest Wong died in 1968. Alice Wong and her sons ran the business for a few more years but then, when Coles wanted to buy out the block of stores and put in a supermarket, they sold out. Alice Wong retired.<sup>24</sup> The family's involvement with mixed businesses and country stores had been partly shaped by the increasing difficulties of making mixed businesses and small general stores a viable concern in rural towns. Alice and Ernest Wong's youngest son, Barry, however, survived the vicissitudes and, in 1995, still owned a fruit and vegetable business in Inverell.<sup>25</sup>

The attractiveness of making a living away from small rural towns also influenced the decision made by May Lun and her family in the mid 1950s to move to the Gold Coast. One son, Ramon, had already been working in Brisbane for Tommy Young who, at one stage, owned the Sam Kee store in Tingha. Contact with Tommy Young and his business enterprises on the Gold Coast, enticed May Lun and her family to purchase their own business in Surfers Paradise. They placed their Fay's Cash and Carry store in Texas in the care of a manager who had previously owned the store. The arrangement did not work out. As May Lun explained:

*He used to own the shop before and I thought he was good enough but they weren't... [in the end] we had to close it down. And then we couldn't sell it and we ... more or less gave it away for four hundred pounds. It had cost us more than three thousand pounds to do it up.*<sup>26</sup>

The Luns cut their losses and moved on.

It was not just the decreasing markets and viability of stores or the attractiveness of small business propositions elsewhere which prompted the closure of the stores. There was also the growing pattern of younger family members no longer being interested in or needing to work in the stores. In the first half of the century, storekeeping had offered the main, if not the only, route to employment for the Chinese.<sup>27</sup> As children were born and educated in Australia, they encountered different work opportunities, sometimes in the district, more

22 Interview with Pat Yee, Inverell, 4 June 1990.

23 Interview with Alice Wong, Inverell, 24 June 1991.

24 *ibid.*; and Interview with Pat Yee.

25 Interview with Alice Wong.

26 Interview with May Lun, Surfers Paradise, 23 February 1990.

27 Refer back to Chapter 5, pp.96-98 previously.

often in bigger metropolitan centres. They were no longer around to take over the family business. As Sam Woo explained on reflecting on the status of the stores in 1990:

Sam Woo           *... all those general stores are gone now.*

Janis Wilton:     *Why do you think that happened?*

Sam Woo    :     *... some of them [the owners] retired. Others reached a stage where there was no one to carry on.*<sup>28</sup>

Harvey Young offered a similar explanation for the closure or sale of all but two of the stores established by members of the Kwan clan. He observed as the reasons for these changes:

*The passing of time. Some of the sons went to Sydney ... And we all get old! And the general changes in business.*<sup>29</sup>

Once children pursued careers other than storekeeping, then the necessity for keeping the stores open and profitable lessened. This was the case for, for example, Kwong Sing in Bundarra. Daisy and Arthur Yee's son, Derrick Yee, became a solicitor. Their daughters all sought and found professional careers away from the family store. Retirement for Daisy and Arthur Yee meant selling the family store.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Henry Hong's three children found careers away from Tenterfield and away from storekeeping. Hop Sing and Company closed in the early 1990s.<sup>31</sup>

### *Children and Grandchildren: Changing Opportunities*

The increasing opportunities in post-war Australia for children and grandchildren to stay on at school, go on to tertiary studies and seek a professional career played their part in attracting younger family members away from working in stores in rural Australia. Sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters went into a variety of occupations. Their changing occupational profiles and the widening opportunities available indicated changing circumstances both within Chinese families and communities, and within Australian society.

Not all the storeowners in the district saw storekeeping as the only future for their children. Ken Gett recalled, for example, that the economic necessity which propelled the family to sell their store, Yow Sing and Company in Emmaville, was bolstered by an acceptance that educational opportunities in a small, dying mining community were very limited and his parents believed that education offered a route to upward social mobility. Their move away from Emmaville enhanced the educational opportunities available to their children. The younger male members of the family were certainly able to take advantage of the opportunities. Clifford, Phillip and Maurice Gett all became medical practitioners<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Sam Woo, Wyoming NSW, 24 July 1990.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Stanley and Harvey Young, Glen Innes, 15 February 1990. The two Kwan stores still in business in 1995 were Kwong Sing, Glen Innes and Kwong Sing, Casino.

<sup>30</sup> Interviews with Derrick Yee, Inverell, 28 February 1990 and 5 June 1990.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Henry Hong, Tenterfield, 11 May 1990, and Personal communication.

<sup>32</sup> Clifford Gett moved to the USA and became renowned for his work on the Jarvik heart; Phillip Gett was an intensive care heart specialist who was tragically killed in a mugging in 1974 in New York; Maurice



Similarly, Derrick Yee recalled with gratitude how his parents responded to his desire to study law:

*... Actually it was a big decision and Dad would dearly have loved me to go into the shop there and he offered me a partnership and it was a big carrot to dangle in front of a young fellow. But I said, 'Look, no Dad, if I come into the shop here I will never be out of Bundarra and I want to widen my fields'.<sup>33</sup>*

Derrick Yee's parents supported their son's ambition. He studied, was admitted to the bar in the early 1950s and from then until his retirement in 1991 practised as a solicitor with the well established Inverell firm, Borthwick, Butler and Yee. Proudly, he noted that at the time of his retirement he was the most senior practising solicitor of Chinese ancestry in New South Wales.<sup>34</sup>

Lawrence Ping Kee, joint owner and manager of the Hong Yuen store in Moree, also believed that storekeeping was no longer a viable route for employment. His perspective was slightly different. He reflected that the capital investment now involved in establishing a successful retail business was too daunting. The days of setting up with very little had long passed. As he explained:

*The young generation ... today are not very keen on retail business. They go for professional and the reason ... is quite simple. In the business of a small store like we've got here, we've got a couple of hundred thousand dollars in stock. It's a lot of money to establish it, so most of them go into education and go in for the professions.<sup>35</sup>*

For varying reasons, employment opportunities outside the stores were seen as brighter and, increasingly, younger family members, particularly the males, of the second generation and both male and female members of subsequent generations sought careers outside the family stores. Some remained in the district; others moved to bigger centres in Australia; some went overseas. In the Hon family, for example, Harry and Cecilia Hon's two sons both acquired tertiary qualifications - Ted as a Seventh Day Adventist minister and Eric as a medical doctor. Both moved to the United States. The majority of Harry and Cecilia Hon's grandchildren entered the professions and other occupations removed from storekeeping. None of them live in northern New South Wales.<sup>36</sup> Harry and Ruby Fay's younger grandchildren offered a similar occupational and settlement profile, as did the grandchildren of Percy and Ethel Young, and the children and grandchildren of Bessie Chiu, Ted Lumbewe and Sam Woo.<sup>37</sup> It was a pattern which reflected the changes in occupational profile of Chinese settlers generally in Australia where an increased number of second and third

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Gett practices medicine in Sydney. *Glen Innes Examiner*, 4 July 1974; *Northern Daily Leader*, 7 December 1982; *Weekend Herald*, 16-17 November 1985; and Interviews with Ken Gett.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Derrick Yee.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*; and Field notes, 22 March 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Lawrence Ping Kee, Moree, 26 March 1990. Compare the pooling together of limited resources which saw the establishment of the Chinese stores in the first place. Refer back to Chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Dulcie Hon. Consult the family trees in Appendix D at the end of this thesis.

<sup>37</sup> Consult the family trees in Appendix D at the end of this thesis.

generation Chinese-Australians entered the professions and the majority lived in metropolitan centres.<sup>38</sup>

- **Achievements, Success and Acceptance: 'Being Australian'**

Post-war Australia provided the Chinese in the district with widening opportunities. Upward social mobility became possible. Children and grandchildren benefited. Participants in this research pointed to educational and occupational achievements as evidence of the success of settlement in Australia. They also pointed to the increasing involvement of family members in the formal and informal social life of local communities, and the increasing patterns of 'mixed' marriages. They proudly acclaimed their accommodation to Australian social and economic patterns and expectations, and the ability of family members to excel in some areas. Their pride in their success and acceptance in 'being Australian', however, is countered a little by the recognition that to achieve this success meant an uneasy submerging of difference, especially differences based on their Chinese ancestry.

#### *Family Occupations and Achievements*

The changes in occupational profile across the generations were a source of pride for participants. Recounting personal and family histories invariably meant plotting the occupations and achievements of family members. Ken Gett, for example, provided newspaper clippings and details about the achievements of his brothers, Clifford, Phillip and Maurice Gett. He also proudly described his children's evolving careers in nursing, medicine and photography.<sup>39</sup> Dulcie Hon carefully listed the achievements of her brothers and sisters and their children, itemising occupations and specific contributions.<sup>40</sup> Similar accounts were forthcoming from other participants.<sup>41</sup> Partly such details were provoked by the questions asked when information was sought about family members. Yet the ready availability of the material indicated that the following and plotting of family activities was

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, G. Beattie, *The settlement and integration of the Chinese in Brisbane*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1986, p.317; C.Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1975, pp.67-69 and 91-94; Arthur Huck, *The Chinese in Australia*, Longmans, Melbourne, 1968, pp.20-22; and K.K. Shum, 'Chinese in New South Wales since the 1960s' in Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*, pp.309-310.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Ken Gett; *The Northern Daily Leader*, 7 December 1982; *Weekend Herald*, 16-17 November 1985; *The Courier Mail*, 14 November 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Dulcie Hon.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Interviews with Constance Choy, Sydney, 23 May 1990; Bessie Chiu, Gold Coast, 24 September 1991; Eileen Cum, Warralda, 14 February 1984 and 18 August 1987; Robert Duck Chong, Sydney, 26 April 1991; Ted Lumbewe, Inverell, 7 June 1990; May Lun; and Ernest Sue Fong, Inverell, 14 and 15 February 1984 and 18 August 1987.

an important part of the family histories. It was an indication of the success of settlement in Australia.

### *Local Communities*

Success was also measured by participants in terms of their acceptance in their local Australian communities. They referred to active membership of service clubs, charity organisations, and local community groups. As such, they were building on a tradition of community service established by their parents and expected in rural communities.<sup>42</sup> Cecilia Hon and her daughters, Dulcie, Merle and Hona, were regular and effective collectors for the local branches of organisations such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Heart Foundation. Cecilia Hon had also been a regular visitor to the sick at the local hospital.<sup>43</sup> Ted Lumbewe was a foundation member of the Inverell Apex Club and had a long active involvement with the Masons.<sup>44</sup> Derrick Yee was the regional secretary for the Freedom from Hunger campaign, President and Vice-President of the North and North West Law Society, honorary solicitor for the local RSL Women's Auxiliary, the Inverell Amateur Basketball Association, Inverell Girl Guides and Inverell Sports Council.<sup>45</sup> Most of the Chinese businessmen involved in the stores were also active members of the various service clubs in the different towns, including taking their turn on the executives.<sup>46</sup> The women, in their turn, were involved with Quota, the Red Cross, the Country Women's Association and the various Parents and Citizens organisations and other associations concerned with their children's schooling.<sup>47</sup>

Families and businesses were well received in their respective communities. Participants proudly recalled significant moments. When the Hon family finally left Tenterfield, for example, their departure was marked by a series of farewell gatherings. The civic farewell given in their honour was preceded by farewells from a number of the organisations and people with whom they had been involved. As Dulcie Hon recalled:

*...when we left, Quota gave us a farewell, the graziers gave us a farewell, the church gave us a farewell and then we had a private farewell from some of the others... and they finished off with a Civic Farewell! ... Then they presented us with that pewter set in there, silver tray up there and that water set up there and the picture over there...<sup>48</sup>*

The local newspaper devoted a column to describe the event. The speeches and sentiments quoted emphasised the family's contributions particularly in terms of their service to the community. Reflecting these sentiments, the report quoted the Shire President:

42 Refer to Chapter 7, pp.156-158 previously.

43 Interview with Dulcie and Merle Hon, Sydney, 23 May 1990; and *Tenterfield Star*, 4 February 1974.

44 Interview with Ted Lumbewe.

45 Interview with Derrick Yee.

46 Interviews with Derrick Yee, Harry Fay, Ted Lumbewe, Harvey Young.

47 Interviews with Dulcie Hon; Connie Fay, Inverell, 27 February 1990; Thelma Loy, Inverell, 14 February 1984; and Pat Yee.

48 Interview with Dulcie and Merle Hon.

*No worthwhile cause would have knocked on the Hon front door in vain and I venture to say that few people would be aware of many of the generous acts performed by them over so many years.*<sup>49</sup>

As their farewell gift to the community, the Hon family provided equipment to the local hospital.<sup>50</sup> Their generous contributions to the community have not been forgotten. Local publications and the local newspaper have subsequently claimed the Hon family, their community service and their achievements as a part of Tenterfield's history.<sup>51</sup>

The strength of acceptance within the local community was similarly brought home to the Fay family in the late 1970s when their Hong Yuen store in Inverell burnt down. Members of the town's service clubs and the community generally helped with the clean up:

*One evening three hundred men turned up on the store site and within four hours had cleared away all the charred remains. This sort of rejuvenated all of us, particularly myself, in saying well this is where our future is. So we didn't have any hesitation about whether we would rebuild.*<sup>52</sup>



Community assistance cleaning up after the fire at the Hong Yuen store, Inverell, 1976.<sup>53</sup>

Recognition was also forthcoming for the contributions which the various stores made to the commercial centres of their respective towns. In her local history of Inverell, for example, Elizabeth Wiedemann commended Hong Yuen and the Fay family for their

<sup>49</sup> *Tenterfield Star*, 4 February 1974.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, *Tenterfield Star*, 29 January 1987, and Ken Halliday, *Call of the Highlands: The Tenterfield story 1828-1988*, Tenterfield Shire Council and Tenterfield Historical Society, Tenterfield, 1988, p.32.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Janis Wilton, *Hong Yuen: A country store and its people*, NSW Department of Education Multicultural Education Coordinating Committee and Armidale CAE, Armidale, 1988, p.26.

<sup>53</sup> *Inverell Times*, 13 February 1976.

longevity and success in maintaining and building a business she described as 'in time... the most prosperous in Inverell.'<sup>54</sup> The success, she argued,

*...can also be attributed to the innate business sense of the Fay family, their hard work, their willingness to undertake even the most menial tasks in the store and the frequent extensions and modernisations.*<sup>55</sup>

In Glen Innes, Kwong Sing was greeted with similar accolades. On the occasion of the store's 100th anniversary, for example, *The Glen Innes Examiner* assisted the celebration with the publication of a commemorative insert. The editorial rang with praise for the store and the Young family's commitment and contribution to the town:

*Kwong Sing and Company depicts the pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit of the Young family and their success as a family business.*

*Remaining deeply immersed in the economic development of Glen Innes, Kwong Sing and Company reflects the tenacity of a business to survive and prosper during one hundred years of fluctuating circumstances*

*The story of Kwong Sing and Company highlights a strong theme of family influence, as the places of sturdy pioneers are taken by imaginative and progressive successors, all demonstrating unswerving faith in the future of Glen Innes and district.*<sup>56</sup>

### **'Mixed' Marriages**

Participants also pointed to an increasing number of marriages to non-Chinese among the younger generations. This was, for them, an indication of the extent to which they and their families had adapted to their Australian environment and the extent to which that environment had accommodated their presence. In the Hon family, for example, the majority of Cecilia and Harry Hon's grandchildren married non-Chinese.<sup>57</sup> Three of Eileen Cum's four children married non-Chinese.<sup>58</sup> Sam Woo's children and grandchildren, and Ted Lumbewe's children all married non-Chinese.<sup>59</sup> The pattern is repetitive. In each generation, a number of family members married Chinese but, increasingly, the number of mixed 'marriages' grew. It is a pattern common to second and third generation Chinese-Australians generally.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Wiedemann, *World of its Own*, Devill Publicity, Inverell, 1981, p.188.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Kwong Sing and Company: One hundred years of excellence*, *The Glen Innes Examiner*, 1986. See also *Land of the Beardies History House Bulletin*, 10/4, 1982, pp.23-26.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Dulcie Hon.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Eileen Cum.

<sup>59</sup> Interviews with Sam Woo and Ted Lumbewe. Refer to Chapter 7, pp.165-168 and Chapter 8, pp.197-198 for examples of marriage patterns among the older generations.

<sup>60</sup> Beattie, 'The settlement and integration of the Chinese in Brisbane', pp.112-113 and 243-253; Lawrence Crissman, George Beattie, and James Selby, 'The segmentation and integration of the Chinese in Brisbane, Australia', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 16/2, 1985, pp.196-197; and Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, pp.101-103.

In offering explanations about these changing patterns in marriage, participants pointed out that for the older generations, Chinese and non-Chinese, 'mixed' marriages were rarely tolerated and were certainly not encouraged.<sup>61</sup> However, circumstances altered and family members had to accept change, although for some it was accepted with ambivalence and reluctant resignation. As Harry Fay II recalled:

*My father was pretty strict and the irony is that, in the [immediate] family, there are two mixed marriages and two divorces. Pop never said a word. He obviously didn't like it but he never said a word. ... Although I do recall him talking to me before I married. He used to talk to me as a third person, and he said to me, in that way, that I should not marry out.* <sup>62</sup>

Sam Woo similarly reflected:

*During those years, looking back about the best part of sixty years or so, it was the usual thing to try and marry someone of your own race, but gradually it came out of that. It was shown by my family. All my children have married Australians, everyone of them. And then the grandchildren have married Australians, and it will go on you see...* <sup>63</sup>

Derrick Yee agreed:

*... probably in those days, one felt that one should not intermarry, should marry your own race. Of course, that's not the way now. My son has married a red-headed caucasian! You couldn't get any [more] different, you know. ... Oh, we've become completely liberated, you know, and the idea's quite accepted, and it's the way it should be, of course.*<sup>64</sup>

Connie Fay recognised and explained the impact of these changes. She observed:

*You know ... those that have stayed have done very well and they've really settled, integrated ... some marrying Australians, some marrying Italians, some marrying Chinese and so forth...*<sup>65</sup>

In some families, the need for a greater tolerance and a willingness to accept 'mixed' marriages was furthered by social and geographical circumstances. As Keith Woo explained of his childhood and adolescence in Coonabarabran:

*We all grew up in a country town where there were very few Chinese. Our friends weren't Chinese, and we didn't particularly keep up the ties with the Chinese.*<sup>66</sup>

Dulcie Hon offered a similar explanation about the mixed marriages among her nieces and nephews:

*...what do you do? They go to school with Australians and then they mix with them socially. They go to church with them, so who are they going to marry?*<sup>67</sup>

61 Refer back to Chapter 7, pp.165-167 for examples of this lack of tolerance.

62 Interview with Harry Fay.

63 Interview with Sam Woo.

64 Interview with Derrick Yee.

65 Interview with Connie Fay.

66 Field notes, 25 July 1990.

67 Interview with Dulcie Hon.

The message conveyed through participants' emphases on family members' occupational achievements and on their acceptance in the non-Chinese community through marriage and involvement in local organisations and activities, is that the immigration and settlement of their grandparents and parents was worthwhile. It was a success.<sup>68</sup>

### *Submerging Difference*

The less overt message in participants' selection of factors indicating successful settlement, was that the values of post-war Australia with their emphasis on individual achievement, upward social mobility and the submergence of difference became a part of the attitudes of many of the participants whose recollections form the core of this history.

During the 1950s, as Australia's immigration barriers began to be dismantled, attitudes underpinning such barriers were not so easily removed. Newly arrived immigrants were expected to assimilate, to disappear magically and quickly into the 'Australian way of life' learning English and adopting and practising Australia's values and customs.<sup>69</sup> This meant becoming as inconspicuous as possible and submerging difference. It was a demand already well known to the Chinese in the district during the first half of the century when survival and success meant accommodating to the often peculiar and certainly different demands of life in rural Australia. It was a demand well met by succeeding generations of Chinese-Australians as they, not unexpectedly, sought to succeed and gain acceptance in their new home and for their futures. It meant, ultimately, that as they adapted to Australian expectations and as they gained acceptance, they came to regard themselves as Australians. Their Chinese appearance, along with their Chinese heritage, was subsumed into their Australianness. The full extent of this submergence of difference was well illustrated by Kevin Garr when he vividly recalled his response to being asked by a new acquaintance 'Where are you from?':

*I answered, 'Tarragindi', thinking he was asking where I lived. Then I realised he thought I was born overseas. See, I forget. I forget that I look Chinese and that some Australians think this means I've come from overseas.*<sup>70</sup>

The recollection highlights how well some Chinese-Australians identified as Australians. It also highlights how some non-Chinese-Australians believed that all people who 'look Chinese' cannot possibly be Australian-born. It points to the complexity of surviving in a social and cultural environment which has a history of racism and intolerance. It also points to the values and complexities which underly the recounting of past family and personal

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 58-59 for a discussion of the 'migrant success story'.

<sup>69</sup> On the nature and impact of assimilation see Wilton and Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia*, Chapter 2.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Kevin Garr, Brisbane, 25 September 1991. Tarragindi is a suburb of Brisbane, capital city of the state of Queensland. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1989, pp.3-4 opens his book with his own confusing experiences of being asked about his origins.

experiences. There is an inherent acceptance of Australia as home, an overt desire to point out how living in Australia has proved beneficial to individuals and their families, and an implicit suggestion that Australian society has benefited from the contributions made by these individuals and families. Yet the validity of this evaluation is challenged by incidents which indicate that some Australians have only recently started to appreciate that a Chinese heritage is a part of the Australian experience, and that other Australians will never accept this reality.<sup>71</sup> The validity is also weakened by the tendency on the part of Chinese-Australians, at times, to refer to themselves as Chinese and to non-Chinese Australians as Australians - us and them.<sup>72</sup>

- **Chinese Heritages**

The apparent absorption and expression of assimilationist values needs to be offset by another core element in the memories offered by these Chinese-Australians, namely the evidence of the survival and adaptation of a Chinese heritage as a part of Australian lives. The survival was threatened by the impact of decades of keeping it quiet or, at least, keeping it private because it was not acceptable publicly to reveal old world traditions in new Australia. It was also undermined by the impact of the Sino-Japanese War, the Second World War and the Communist Revolution in destroying links to China. China no longer offered a haven and home to which individuals and families could retreat. Nor was it possible, for some time, to pay visits to or keep in contact with ancestral villages and family members who played such an important role in maintaining traditions. Despite these pressures to turn their backs on a Chinese past, that past survived, was adapted and maintained. Yet, it was only recently that some family members took overt action to document and pass on parts of that heritage. They did this by researching family histories, seeking to learn Chinese languages, paying visits to China, and revitalising Chinese traditions. It emerges, however, that the Chinese heritage being sought and reinstated was itself reshaped by the years of both keeping it quiet whilst keeping it alive in Australia.

#### *Family Histories and Reunions*

An indication of participants' interest in their Chinese heritage, was the way in which members of the second and third generations in Australia sought to construct their family histories. In so doing, they revived a Chinese tradition of compiling family genealogies. In traditional terms, the activity was an important element in the confirmation and promotion

<sup>71</sup> This point about the price of 'success' is taken up by Wom Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, 'The "success" image of Asian Americans; its validity and its practical and theoretical implications', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 12/4, 1989, pp.512-537. It is a point largely missed in Australian studies which focus on patterns of occupational mobility, mixed marriages and community involvement as indicators of assimilation or integration. See, for example, the studies by Beattie, Choi, and Crissman.

<sup>72</sup> For a discussion of this terminology, see Chapter 3, p.72 previously. For examples of this usage among the Chinese-Australians whose oral histories were recorded for this p.245 previously.



of family status, and an important instrument in the negotiation of auspicious marriages, the retention of land titles and the veneration of ancestors.<sup>73</sup> In 1980s and 1990s Australia, it was about capturing a sense of a past history in danger of being lost, and about exploring and asserting individual and family identity. As third generation Chinese-Australian, Michelle Tong, wrote in exhorting younger Kwan clan members to join in the clan reunion in 1985:

*As successive generations live in Australia, we adopt the Western lifestyle while losing our Chinese background. It is up to us to learn and record our Chinese culture and family history before any more is lost.*<sup>74</sup>

In the spirit of reclaiming their Chinese past, in the last fifteen years, some individuals reinstated their Chinese family names.<sup>75</sup> The extended Kwan clan have, in the last decade, held two reunions, had a number of family members visit home villages in China, constructed a family tree of dramatic proportions, commended the need for family histories to family members, and distributed their findings through a newsletter.<sup>76</sup> Their activities were the subject of ABC radio and television reports.<sup>77</sup> Clan members have translated and added to their archives a genealogy which traces the clan back to = the eleventh generation of Kwan family members who were those responsible for settling in what became the ancestral village of Wing Ho, Chungshan.<sup>78</sup>

The Kwan clan was not alone. Members of other families related to those who owned, managed or worked in the stores in northern New South Wales also spent time finding and piecing together parts of their family histories. Marina Mar, the youngest daughter of Harry Fay, for example, asked questions, took notes, and collected information about the family for over a decade. She looked after family papers dating back to early in the century.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup> On the importance and significance of lineage, genealogies and family histories in traditional China and comparisons with the concerns of family history movements in places like North America and Australia see David Faure, 'The lineage as a cultural invention: the case of the Pearl River Delta', *Modern China* 15/1, 1989, pp.5-8; Greg Gubler, 'Asian-American records and research' in J. Carney Smith (ed.), *Ethnic Genealogy: A research guide*, Greenwood Press, Westport Connecticut, 1983, pp.242-243; Tamara Hareven, 'The search for generational memory' in David Dunaway and Willa Baum (eds), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, American Association for the Study of Local History, Nashville, 1984, pp.250-251; and Tien-Wei Lin, 'Chinese clan genealogies and family histories: clan genealogies as they relate to local history', *World Conference on Records*, 11/824c, 1980, especially pp.1-23. On lineage revival in post-1979 communist China as an example of the strength of the importance of keeping track of past, present and future members of a clan see Yuen-Fong Woon, 'International links and socioeconomic development of rural China: an emigrant community in Guangdong', *Modern China*, 16/2, 1990, pp.159-162.

<sup>74</sup> *Kwan Reunion Newsletter*, 2, November 1985, p.4.

<sup>75</sup> In Australia, as in North America, Chinese family names became lost as officialdom ethnocentrically assumed that a person's last name was their family name when in Chinese tradition, the first name is the family name. For example, Louie Mew Ping, Louie Mew Fay and Louie Mew Lun were all brothers. Their family name was Louie. In Australia they became known as George Ping (Kee), Harry Fay and Ernest Lun. Among those who have reclaimed their Chinese family names are Horrie Fatt who is now Horrie Kwan-Fatt and Herbert Long who changed his name back to Herbert Kwan

<sup>76</sup> *Kwan Reunion Newsletter*, 2 and 3, November 1985 and March 1986; *Kwan Reunion II, Newsletter*, 2, March 1993. The information in the various Kwan family trees presented in Appendix D at the end of this thesis largely came from the family tree compiled by family members.

<sup>77</sup> *Kwan Reunion Newsletter*, 2, November 1985, p.3.

<sup>78</sup> Kwan Family History. Kwong Sing Papers.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, the Mar Papers and Mar Notebooks.

Family trees and details about family histories also emerged from the diligent and caring work of individuals like Joyce Griffey, Marie Hunnam, Sharon Lee, Christine Watkins, and Noeline Yum.<sup>80</sup>

### *Chinese Languages*

Chinese languages provided another focus for the reclaiming of a Chinese heritage. A number of participants were fluent in Chinese.<sup>81</sup> However, among those who did not have this fluency, there was a regret that 'speaking Chinese' was a skill which was often not acquired or, if acquired, had been lost through years of speaking only English. As Harry Fay II observed:

*As a kid I thought it was smart to refuse to speak in Chinese. I would always answer my parents in English. Now I regret it. My older sisters still speak Cantonese.*<sup>82</sup>

Ted Lumbewe similarly recalled:

*[After the trip to China as a child] I was perhaps unable to speak English when I first went to school but I soon forgot that, even though Dad used to send me to a Chinese school to learn to write and speak Chinese. I'm afraid I didn't hold on to that and I regret it to this day.*<sup>83</sup>

Ken Gett summed up the impact of attending Australian schools when speaking languages other than English labelled one as an outsider:

*When we were children, we could speak Chinese quite fluently. Then school and you tend to lose your language.*<sup>84</sup>

The regret of having lost or never having learnt the ancestral language propelled a number of individuals towards regaining some familiarity with Chinese languages. Ken Gett, for example, spent time studying Mandarin.<sup>85</sup> It was also with pride that older relatives told of grandchildren, children, nephews and nieces who had acquired fluency in Chinese or who showed an interest in learning the language. Connie Choy, for example, expressed delight that her nephew, James Ping, went to Hong Kong University to learn Chinese.

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<sup>80</sup> Joyce Griffey is a descendant of James Suey; Marie Hunnam a descendant of James Hong Hay; Sharon Lee is the granddaughter of Frank Fatt; Christine Watkins is the daughter of Ernest and Joyce Sue Fong; and Noeline Yum is the niece of Albert Yum. These efforts are part of a wider trend among second and third generation Chinese-Australians seeking to document and come to terms with their family histories and, ultimately, their own identities. These attempts are discussed in Janis Wilton, 'Chinese-Australian family histories', *Congress Papers of the 7th Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Family History*, Brisbane, 1994, pp.59.5-59.6. Examples are provided in the work of Norma King Koi, Monica Tankey and William Yang listed in the Bibliography at the end of this thesis. Comparable examples from Chinese-Americans include the novels by Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, the short stories by Alice Lin, and Frank Ching's family history. These are also listed in the Bibliography.

<sup>81</sup> Of the 50 participants with Chinese ancestry, 13 could speak Chinese (mainly Cantonese) with some fluency.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Harry Fay.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Ted Lumbewe.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Ken Gett.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

*So, he speaks Chinese like a Hong Kong person now.*<sup>86</sup>

Bessie Chiu talked about one of her grandsons:

*[He] went over there [to China] for university something, and he went all through China. He went for six weeks and he came back and he loved it. Now this year he's trying to get a scholarship so he wants to go back and do the language.*<sup>87</sup>

Pat Yee pointed out that her own children 'can only count up to ten in Chinese' but, with pride, she talked about her son-in-law who was doing a 'thesis in ancient Chinese literature or poetry or something'. He could speak Chinese even though he had no Chinese ancestry.<sup>88</sup>

Derrick Yee who also spoke about his son-in-law, explained with some pleasure:

Derrick Yee: *[Our daughter] is married to a fellow called John Keenan who is doing his doctorate in Chinese philosophy. Now he's a Caucasian American, six foot three, he can write Mandarin and he can read and write Chinese. Kristal met him at the University in Wuhan, China, where she was teaching colloquial English for twelve months....*

Janis Wilton: *So, in fact, your son-in-law who is not Chinese has more Chinese than the rest of the family?*

Derrick Yee: *Yes. that's right...*<sup>89</sup>

### ***Recent Visits to China***

Over the past two decades, the desire to establish closer contact with their Chinese heritage also propelled some of the Chinese associated with the stores in northern New South Wales to visit China. For those who had spent part of their childhood and earlier lives in China, 1980s and 1990s visits renewed and built on memories. They had photographs and were able to identify what had and what had not changed. They went on to remember incidents connected with particular places. Their memories assisted in bolstering the significance and closeness of a Chinese heritage. Robert Duck Chong made two trips during the 1980s. His photographs provided a stimulus for recollections which related these visits to his only other visit to China in 1911:

*Now that [showing a photo from a 1985 visit] is the home of our uncle, my father's younger brother. When we entered that the first time [in 1911] we saw a huge wooden object in the corner, this corner. It happened to be a coffin. I don't think my aunty was alive. It had to be uncle waiting for his death ... The house was still there when I went back in 1985. By my 1989 visit it had been demolished.*

*It was all such a pleasure and curiosity to see [the home village]. I knew that the river was there... and I said 'Where's the hoi?' 'Hoi' is the river. 'Over there,' they said. It*

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Constance Choy.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Bessie Chiu.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Pat Yee. See also Interview with Daisy Yee,

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Derrick Yee.

*is interesting how some of the words came back to me. And that was the village dialect. I think if I went back for six months it'd come back very, very quickly.<sup>90</sup>*



Robert Duck Chong's uncle's house in his ancestral village of Gnit Gock, Chungshan, China, 1985.<sup>91</sup>



Street scene in Robert Duck Chong's ancestral village, 1985.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Robert Duck Chong.

<sup>91</sup> Duck Chong Photographs.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*



The well in Robert Duck Chong's ancestral village, 1985.<sup>93</sup>



Robert Duck Chong with relatives in China, 1985.<sup>94</sup>

For first time visitors to ancestral villages, the experience stimulated further the interest in their Chinese pasts which lured them to visit in the first place. They marvelled at the difference and familiarity of family homes, villages and members previously known only through stories and letters. Olma Gan recalled of her visit to Shekki and her mother's

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93    *ibid.*

94    *ibid.*

ancestral village and family home in 1986:

*The family home was bigger than expected. I was impressed by the mosaic tiles on the floor, all the different colours; by the sliding bars which could lock across the front doors and, if moved, could trigger alarms in the house.<sup>95</sup>*



Grace Young's ancestral home, China, 1986.<sup>96</sup>

Marina Mar remembered the experience of her visit to the family village with her sisters and brother in 1984:

*A chappy that lives here [in Sydney] ... gave me a letter and diagram on where to find my Dad's house. So when we got to the village the bus man went to the headquarters of that area and asked, and this gentleman walked us right to the house... It was so exciting. There were two doors... we went into that house and then into that house. My sister remembered it. She'd lived there for a week when she was thirteen ... and then we met this man who lives there. He's somehow related. My sister remembered him too. When they saw each other they remembered each other's names. I couldn't get over that ... They couldn't speak English, and none of us could remember Chinese too well except my sister - all of a sudden the Chinese came back to her.<sup>97</sup>*

<sup>95</sup> Field notes, 19 July 1990.

<sup>96</sup> Young Photographs.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Marina Mar, Sydney, 24 July 1987.



Members of the Fay family in the Louie ancestral village of Dau Tau, Chungshan, China, 1984. The man on the extreme right is the relative referred to by Marina Mar.<sup>98</sup>



Fay family members in a street in the Louie ancestral village of Dau Tau, Chungshan, China, 1984.<sup>99</sup>

Harvey and Eugenia Young applauded the impact of their visit to Beijing in 1985 on their three sons:

*[It] made them more aware of their Chinese heritage.... [they] became more aware after that trip about China and trading and customs.*<sup>100</sup>

98 Mar Photographs.

99 *ibid.*

100 Interview with Harvey and Eugenia Young, Glen Innes, 16 February 1990.

Visits to China provided a solid symbol and experience linking these Chinese-Australians to their Chinese past. They revived the tradition among Chinese emigrants of returning to home villages for visits. Yet the impetus changed. In the earlier part of the century the visits were bound by the desire and obligation to look after ancestral tombs and villages, and to enhance the family status and material well being within the village. The ultimate ambition for many had remained the hope of returning permanently.<sup>101</sup> The 1980s and 1990s visits were about reestablishing contact and about placing a Chinese heritage as a part of Australian lives. In multicultural Australia, it was no longer an embarrassment to discover or assert Chinese (or other minority) ancestry. Rather, the task was to establish how to accommodate this ancestry, and the practices and beliefs which emanated from it, into contemporary Australia cultural and social expectations.

### *Chinese Traditions*

Concern to balance a respect for a Chinese heritage with the reality of living in Australia was also reflected in the way participants responded to questions about the Chinese traditions which they thought had been passed on from grandparents and parents and which they wanted to pass on to their descendants. There was a recognition that the traditions were changing and adapting as they moved from generation to generation, and there was an at times confusing mixture of regret for and approval of these changes. Pat Yee expressed this when talking about her adaptations of Chinese cooking:

*See, what I cook isn't real Chinese. It's what Derrick [husband] calls Anglicised Chinese. ... We use chopsticks and they [our children] still do and I think their kids probably will. But all the old recipes ... your real traditional Chinese cooking, I think, well, as the generations go on, I think it will die out.*<sup>102</sup>

Derrick Yee, Pat Yee's husband, similarly observed:

Derrick Yee: *We still pass on the Chinese cooking customs if we can. When we have a Chinese meal we traditionally use chop sticks.*

Janis Wilton : *Do you eat Chinese food most of the time?*

Derrick Yee: *No we don't because we haven't got the ingredients here [in Inverell] and, again, we are fairly well Anglicised. We probably have Chinese meals two or three times a week.*<sup>103</sup>

As a visitor to the homes of participants, food was often a part of the hospitality offered. Invariably, the meals eaten were a mixture of Chinese and Anglicised cooking. My notes, for example, record the sumptuous Chinese feast provided by Norma Fatt as the main part of the meal. Desert was a golden syrup steamed pudding reminiscent of the pudding

<sup>101</sup> Refer to Chapter 9, pp.202-203 and 206-207 previously.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Pat Yee.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Derrick Yee.



my mother had learnt to make as a part of her non-Chinese Australian rural upbringing.<sup>104</sup> My notes also record my visit to May Lun and her expectation that Chinese food was unlikely to appeal to me:

*Immediately Mrs Lun began to feed and water me. First coffee and passionfruit butter tarts with cream. Later lunch - corn, chicken, mashed potato, mango, mango ice cream. Intriguingly, when son, Reg, came for his lunch he got sticky rice with meat. Mrs Lun seemed surprised that I knew of sticky rice; even more surprised when I said that I had some at home.*<sup>105</sup>

The conscious and unconscious mixing of food styles and the resulting emergence of what can best be termed a specifically Chinese-Australian cuisine, demonstrated the survival of links to a Chinese past and the adaptation to an Australian present. Ted Lumbewe, for example, observed:

*Well, the only thing that, not me, I know Hazel [wife] did, was Chinese cooking. She was a wonderful cook and Coral's a good cook, Nerelie's a good cook, and Randall's not a bad cook either. So she passed that on. I wouldn't say that was Chinese heritage, but part of it is. There isn't much [else] because not any of them speak Chinese of any kind. They might know a few things, they might ... know what 'good morning' is and so on, and 'how are you', but that's about the end of it ... I won't say they haven't any interest in Chinese heritage or things pertaining to China. I think they still realise they're Chinese and that's no load to carry.*<sup>106</sup>

This mixture of a desire to pass on some aspects of a Chinese heritage and to acknowledge that living in Australia meant the adaptation of Chinese traditions also surfaced in recollections of continued or revived celebrations of Chinese festivals. These included celebrating particularly Ching Ming (the Festival of the Dead) and Chinese New Year. Marina Mar, for example, recalled that her father, Harry Fay, accompanied by family members, observed and celebrated Ching Ming until his death. She pointed to a photograph dating from the early 1970s showing her father and other family members at the Inverell cemetery, with food and goods.<sup>107</sup> She recalled that not all family members liked to join in the ceremony but that, in 1986, some family members again observed the celebrations.<sup>108</sup>

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104 Field notes, 19 July 1990.

105 Field notes, 23 February 1990.

106 Interview with Ted Lumbewe. Beattie, 'The settlement and integration of the Chinese in Brisbane', p.201 argues that food is among one of habits of ethnic groups most resistant to change. Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China*, Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1940, pp.93-94 provides a useful commentary on the Europeanisation of food and eating habits among emigrant communities. For a discussion of the significance of food in another immigrant community see Michal Bosworth, 'Conversations with Italian women: close encounters of a culinary kind' in Richard Bosworth and Margot Melia (eds), *Aspects of Ethnicity in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia, Perth, 1991, pp.95-102.

107 Interview with Marina Mar.

108 *ibid.*



Fay family members observing Ching Ming, Inverell cemetery, 1976.<sup>109</sup>

The mid 1980s also witnessed a concerted effort among Chinese families still in the district to gather together to celebrate Chinese New Year. Eugenia Young explained:

*I don't know who started it but it was because of our children ... and they were all splitting up and going. So we thought we'd get them all together.*<sup>110</sup>

Robert Duck Chong's rediscovery of the gastronomic delight of Chinese New Year occurred while on a visit to his ancestral village in 1989. Pointing to a photograph of the occasion, he declared:

*Look at that feast. That was New Year's Day. We definitely arranged to be there on New Year's Day. I think they've got eighteen different dishes there. One dish had the whole chook, dressed of course, head and all. That shocked them [my granddaughters]...*<sup>111</sup>

Food, for Robert Duck Chong, was an obvious way of communicating a different tradition to his Australian-born grandchildren.

109 Mar Photographs.

110 Interview with Harvey and Eugenia Young.

111 Interview with Robert Duck Chong.



Robert Duck Chong with his grandchildren and daughter-in-law celebrating Chinese New Year in his ancestral village in China, 1985.<sup>112</sup>

The emphasis on observing festivals and on exposing members of the younger generations to Chinese traditions, was to ensure that an appreciation of the nature and place of these events and traditions became a part of their heritage. As Eugenia Young explained on being asked about continued observation of traditional Chinese practices to do with ancestor worship and veneration:

*No, we don't but a lot of Chinese do continue that, but out of a habit I think ... because the younger generation won't follow that. I've taken my children to By Sarn just so that they knew how they respected their ancestors and how they should behave, and what foods they had to offer, and what it was all about.*<sup>113</sup>

Eugenia Young's husband, Harvey Young, had earlier explained that for his parents and brothers and sisters, traditional Chinese religious beliefs had long been replaced by Christian beliefs acquired in Australia:

*As far as our family is concerned they've never been closely associated with it [ancestor worship]... It was partly religious too, and I'm Church of England and the boys are too. ... Father is Church of England. Mother is Seventh Day Adventist. And grandfather was Church of England.*<sup>114</sup>

Co-existence of Chinese and non-Chinese traditions and practices was clearly emerging. There was a recognition that both were an integral part of the heritage that had been and should be passed on.

112 Duck Chong Photographs.

113 Interview with Harvey and Eugenia Young.

114 *ibid.*

### *A Chinese-Australian Heritage*

Family histories, learning Chinese languages, visits to China, and the observation of Chinese traditions were fondly and proudly recalled. However, their recollection was couched in terms which recognised that a return to the past was not what was being sought. Rather, the desire was to invoke an appreciation of a Chinese past and the melding of selected values and practices from that past with values and practices belonging to an Australian present. This moving backwards and forwards was well illustrated in a discussion with Norma and Oscar Fatt, David and Edna Pang, and Daisy Yee about the changes in values they could detect between generations. The discussion was triggered by a question about the manners and values taught by their parents:

David Pang : *They'd [our parents] teach them [children] good virtues. All the good virtues.*

Janis Wilton : *What are the virtues you were taught?*

David Pang : *Humanity, justice, politeness*

Oscar Fatt : *thriftiness*

David Pang : *and wisdom*

Norma Fatt : *respect your elders*

Oscar Fatt : *that was the most important how to address them, how to greet them...*

Daisy Yee : *Dad always said, if they're older than me you call them Ah Bak and if they're younger than me you call them Ah Sook....But I can remember when we were growing up I was never allowed to call Henry and Stanley by their name. I had to call them Di Gor and Yee Gor.*

Oscar Fatt : *Yes. first brother, second brother.*

Daisy Yee : *I was never allowed to call them Henry and Stanley as Dad and Mum used to call them.*

Norma Fatt : *And now they [Australians] call their parents by their name!*

Daisy Yee : *Well things have changed today. Changed for the worse, not for the better!!*

Janis Wilton : *In what way do you think?*

Daisy Yee : *Well, I reckon they're fifty-fifty. It's fifty percent gone the wrong way.*

Oscar Fatt : *Gone to the other extreme. Very little discipline these days. On the other hand, in the early days, as far as the Chinese were concerned there was too much discipline.*

Daisy Yee : *But you see now how the Chinese are becoming all westernised and they do the same as the western people do now....Do what they want.*

*They dictate to their parents. Well you see now, young children cannot be punished by their parents. ...* <sup>115</sup>

The exchange highlighted a desire to retain some values from the past while recognising that change was an inevitable part of life generally and especially of immigration and of living in post-war Australia where social values, expectations and opportunities had undergone relatively dramatic changes. The Chinese heritage which was being investigated and reinstated by this particular group of Chinese-Australians was a distinctly Chinese-Australian heritage.

- **Why Now?**

Concern to reinstate and affirm the Chinese part of their heritage - searching out family histories, reclaiming Chinese names, visiting China, acquiring and passing on an awareness and appreciation of a Chinese heritage, a willingness to provide individual and family memories and memorabilia for a public record - only came to the fore in the past two decades. Why? What changed for this group of Chinese-Australians to make them more willing to present and explore their Chinese heritages openly? How did this willingness, and the factors shaping it, influence the ways in which they viewed and recounted their past experiences?

One change was the conscious move on the part of Australian governments and policy makers from assimilationism to multiculturalism. Certainly, a more tolerant and supportive environment appeared to be legitimising and assisting the efforts of individuals, families and communities to claim and assert their different cultural heritages. It was a changing climate recognised by Chinese-Australians themselves.<sup>116</sup> The changes, in many ways, reached their climax in the 1988 bicentennial of white settlement in Australia. Cultural diversity and the policies affirming and promoting that diversity, were presented as among the country's great achievements. Government funding poured into projects concerned to applaud the experiences and contributions of ethnic communities.<sup>117</sup> It became acceptable, if not laudable - at least on an official level - to assert publicly a non-English-speaking heritage.

However, an appeal to changing values and policies is not adequate in explaining a renewed and relatively public interest in a Chinese heritage. There are other factors which can be found in the explanations and memories offered by participants.

The majority of participants had retired from full-time paid work, and were over fifty years of age. Like many people at this stage of life, they had the time and were willing to look back, remember and evaluate.<sup>118</sup> The prospect of leaving a legacy in memories, advice

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Oscar Fatt, Edna and David Pang, and Daisy Yee, Sydney, 19 July 1990.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, the discussion in Chapter 3. p.53 previously.

<sup>117</sup> For example, the end result of one bicentennial funded project was the hefty and informative Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*:

<sup>118</sup> On the impact of this life review stage see Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, pp.116-117 and Robert U. Akeret, *Family Tales, Family Wisdom*, Henry Holt, New York, 1991, pp.46-51.

and wisdom for subsequent generations also had an appeal, particularly when they recalled how the pressures of living in Australia, which occupied their own childhoods, had denied them access to information about family histories and a Chinese heritage. As Connie Fay observed:

[while we were growing up] *See, things are so sketchy because ... there's nobody to tell us all this... the older brothers and sisters were not much older than my father, and the grandparents went back to China to die... and, as children, we were so busy trying to become good Australians that we forgot .. that we were Chinese. And now it's going full circle. Now you want to know who your ancestors are..*<sup>119</sup>

In this context, participants were willing to search their own memories and memorabilia for information which might shed light on the silences which otherwise could continue to occupy the past. Participants were also willing to talk about some things which, in earlier years, would have remained unsaid. As Mel Duck Chong observed of his father, Robert Duck Chong:

*... his memory has many closed cabinets which are only slowly being opened. He has locked away aspects of the past until some trigger causes the door to open. ... It is only in the last ten to fifteen years that Dad has started to talk about his Chinese past - triggered by us eating Chinese food, and by the growing acceptance around this table of the Chinese part of the family story and heritage.*<sup>120</sup>

Memories were also jogged by the opening up of China in the 1980s, and the visits to China described earlier which then became possible. These visits were accompanied by a renewed correspondence with relatives in China. Robert Duck Chong, for example, following his 1985 visit to China, felt inspired to assist his ancestral village. Like his emigrant forebears, he wrote back to the village asking how he could help. The response was a little daunting:

*After some time they wrote back and said, 'Well, could you arrange for water to be laid on?' I said, 'Oh no, I'm only a pensioner. I'd like to help in some way but not that way!!'*<sup>121</sup>

Marina Mar and Dulcie Hon received letters from relatives in China, some seeking information, some in response to requests for details about family histories and experiences.<sup>122</sup> The easing of Chinese emigration restrictions from the mid-1980s meant that, among the Chinese immigrants coming to Australia there were clan and family members providing links to a more recent Chinese heritage. In the early 1990s, for example, Marina Mar established contact with a grandson of Wong Chee who had moved to Australia.<sup>123</sup> The approaching change in the status of Hong Kong is similarly inspiring further family

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Connie Fay.

<sup>120</sup> Field Notes, 5 July 1991.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Robert Duck Chong.

<sup>122</sup> Interviews with Marina Mar and Dulcie Hon.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Marina Mar.

members to relocate to Australia.<sup>124</sup> These renewed and new links to China played their part in revitalising and reshaping the Chinese part of a Chinese-Australian heritage.

Another important factor is the audience this group of Chinese-Australians was addressing. They did not remember or talk in a vacuum. Their recorded memories were prompted by two types of listeners, with different purposes but sharing a willingness to listen and to hear what was said.

The first audience consisted of younger family members who showed a deep concern to learn about the past of parents and other ancestors. Their interest was apparent in the active encouragement given to parents and grandparents to revisit and reveal their Chinese heritages. Mel Duck Chong, for example, inspired, organised and accompanied his father on his two visits to China in the 1980s.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Stanley and Grace Young's visits to



Robert Duck Chong with his son, Mel, on their visit to China in 1985.<sup>126</sup>

in the 1980s were in the company of their daughters, and Harvey Young played an important part in encouraging his father to record and share his memories.<sup>127</sup> It was also the younger family members who took most action in searching out and documenting family histories. They were perhaps experiencing the curiosity evident among other second and

<sup>124</sup> For an overview of changes in legislation since the 1960s, and the subsequent increased immigration of Chinese from China and elsewhere see Peter Hanks and Andrew Perry (eds), *The Chinese in Australia*, Monash University, Melbourne, 1988, especially pp. 1-23.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Robert Duck Chong.

<sup>126</sup> Duck Chong Photographs.

<sup>127</sup> Interviews and conversations with Harvey Young.

third generations in immigrant families who want to discover and assert their identities.<sup>128</sup> Unlike their parents and grandparents, they were not trapped by the pressures of establishing a new life and livelihood in a new and alien environment. Rather, they were confronted by the need to come to terms with the nature of their place in their own society, and they were able to do this given their own social and economic security and given an increasingly tolerant, at least on the surface, social and cultural environment in which they lived. In 1992, for example, photographer Anthony Kwan-Gett, son of Ken Gett and grandson of Walter Gett, produced a body of work which focused on his heritages and his identities. For him, the excursion into his family past meant an exploration and assertion of his specifically Chinese-Australian identity.<sup>129</sup>



Anthony Kwan Gett, Self portrait, 1992.<sup>130</sup>

The other listeners to whom participants were responding were outsiders - myself as an academic with no Chinese ancestry, and the wider Australian public.<sup>131</sup> From the outset of the research for this thesis, it was made clear that a significant objective was to place participants' recollections and perspectives on the public record in order to correct a little the imbalance in that record. As Sam Woo's eldest son, Keith Woo, observed: 'It's great that someone from outside is finally taking a notice of all this.'<sup>132</sup>

<sup>128</sup> See, for example, Karen Herne, Joanne Travaglia and Elizabeth Weiss (eds), *Who Do You Think You Are?: Second generation immigrant women in Australia*, Women's Redress Press, Sydney, 1992; and Susan Varga, *Heddy and Me*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1994.

<sup>129</sup> *Weekend Courier Mail*, 14 November 1992, p.40. Gett Papers.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Refer to Chapter 2, pp. 28-33 and 40-41 for a discussion of the impact of this on the content of participants' oral histories.

<sup>132</sup> Field notes, 25 July 1990.



The changing political and social climate in Australia, the influence of reaching retirement and being willing to reflect on life experiences, the re-opening of contacts with China, and the presence of interested audiences worked together to provoke a willingness to remember and a desire to document and pass on individual and family histories. It was a combination of factors possible only in the 1980s and early 1990s. As such, the sharing of memories also meant the sharing of current values and of hopes for the future, and revelations about the ways in which living in Australia for the past fifty to ninety years has influenced values and expectations.

- **Conclusion**

The main concern of Part Two of this thesis has been to construct and analyse the history of the Chinese contribution to a particular part of northern New South Wales during the first half of the twentieth century. As such, chapters have been devoted to establishing the settlement and occupation patterns of the Chinese, their economic and social history, and the significance of their links to China and within the extended Chinese communities in Australia. However, as the structure, tone and texture of the history has clearly emerged from the recollections of Chinese-Australians, it has been essential to acknowledge the way in which those recollections connect past and present. This has been the task of this final chapter in Part Two.

The post-Second World War histories of the stores, the storekeepers, their families and employees demonstrated the continuities and changes in their circumstances. Family remained a significant impetus to ensure the survival and viability of some stores. Equally the absence of family members to take over the management of stores was significant in influencing the closure of others. Survival or closure was also shaped by factors impinging more widely on life in rural New South Wales - improved transport and communications, the intrusion of chain stores and supermarkets, the better education and employment prospects outside the region. Australian-born children and grandchildren were increasingly able to take advantage of such widening opportunities.

Participants applauded the achievements made possible by these changes. They pointed to family members' educational attainments and the increasing number who opted for successful professional careers. These were seen as indicators of a wider acceptance in Australia and a comfortable adaptation by the Chinese themselves to the possibilities provided by living in Australia. Further indications of this acceptance and adaptation were seen in the growing involvement of family members in their post-war local communities, and in the increasing patterns of marriage with non-Chinese. Looking back at these experiences from the perspective of the 1980s and 1990s, participants could applaud and praise. Although, imbedded in the language of that praise were hints that these achievements were bolstered by an acceptance of the values prevalent in Australia at the time. These were

values which emphasised the submergence of difference and the public denial of links to a Chinese heritage. In these terms 'being Australian' did not include 'being Chinese'.

Participants' recollections, however, also indicated that an evaluation of their experiences which measured them only against the success of their settlement in Australia and the ways in which that success demonstrated their absorption of specific values, offered too simplistic a view of their histories and the way they perceived those histories. Alongside the emphasis on success and acceptance, there was an emphasis on the survival and adaptation of a Chinese heritage. This was evidenced in the 1980s and 1990s by interest in family histories and reunions, the learning of Chinese languages, visits to China, and the revitalisation and adaptation of certain Chinese traditions. There was a desire to reinstate aspects of a Chinese heritage and, consequently, to replace the era of keeping silent about that heritage with a new era of researching, exploring and publicly acclaiming Chinese ancestry and traditions. The language used by participants and the descriptions they offered of their interests and activities demonstrated that the Chinese heritage they sought to revive and proclaim was one which had evolved as part of their lives in Australia. There was no longer their ancestors' desire to keep open links to China in order to provide a safe retreat once time spent overseas was finished. A visit to China, instead, provided a route to coming to terms with a Chinese past and a Chinese-Australian identity. There was no longer a wish to retain in their entirety the disciplinary codes and family values which had shaped their grandparents' and parents' lives. Living in Australia and in a changing Australian society had offered alternatives. The desire was to mix and match the values, expectations, obligations and standards, and to research and present both the Chinese and Australian parts of the history. The desire was to retain and further the notion that this distinctly Chinese-Australian heritage was and is a part of Australia's history.

This emphasis on both the Chinese and Australian aspects of their heritage, and the ways in which the two informed each other, clearly influenced the ways in which participants evaluated their past experiences. They spent time recalling and sharing memories of life in China and in Australia, of Chinese lifestyles surviving behind the front doors of rural country stores, and of circumventing racist legislation in order to fulfil traditional Chinese obligations towards family, clan and village.

The willingness to share these experiences was significant in itself. For a long time, Chinese-Australian perspectives on the history of the Chinese in Australia were not a part of research agendas or of Australian history. In the 1980s and 1990s the increasing emphasis on the value of Australia's cultural diversity provided a climate in which, at long last, it became acceptable to claim a Chinese ancestry. There was also the stimulus provided as China again opened its doors and visits and contact with relatives living there became possible. As well, there were audiences eager to listen and hear the experiences and evaluations of older Chinese-Australians. All these factors shaped the willingness of Chinese-Australians to offer their memories for the public record and to include in those memories details about their Chinese heritages. The present, again, played its part in

providing access to and shaping our understanding of aspects of the past. It also acted as a reminder that the history presented in this thesis is very much a history inspired and constructed from the oral histories of a number of Chinese-Australians.

## CONCLUSION

'Yum say see gnin' - 'When you drink water, think of its origin, think of where it comes from.'<sup>1</sup> It was with this Chinese proverb that Stanley Young of Glen Innes closed his address to his relatives at the Kwan reunion in 1986. He was exhorting young and old alike to remember that it was his father, Percy Young (Kwan Hong Kee), who began the clan's Australian history. The proverb is also a fitting way to begin a conclusion to a thesis whose inspiration comes from the oral histories of a group of Chinese-Australians whose lives were initially shaped by the enterprise of men like Percy Young. This group of Chinese-Australians willingly shared their experiences. Their recollections produced a range of source material which documented the richness of the Chinese contribution to a particular part of northern New South Wales during the first half of the twentieth century. The challenge was to convert that wealth of material into a history which contributes to the study of the Chinese in Australia and which ethically reflects the experiences as they were shared by the people who lived them.

Until recently the history of the Chinese in Australia has been dominated by studies concerned to excise and analyse the social, economic and political contexts of Chinese immigration and settlement. Consequently, there is a reasonably extensive literature analysing the nature and impact of the racism which structured Australian immigration policies until well past the Second World War. There is also a substantial literature on the demographic characteristics and migration patterns of those Chinese who came (and left) and the forces shaping their movements. These studies are safely based on those accepted paradigms of social science and historical research which seek quantifiable results and broad patterns. They focus on power structures and relations, on economic and social forces, and on establishing broad causes and outcomes.

There is, however, an increasing concern that this quantitative and structural focus leaves unasked and unanswered questions. Over the past ten to fifteen years, a number of researchers and community members have turned to localised subjective and interpretive approaches. They have asked not about the forces shaping immigration nor about the broad patterns of that immigration and its history. Instead, they have examined the responses of Chinese-Australians to the immigrant experience and to their position within Australian society. They have explored how Chinese-Australians negotiated and made sense of the external factors which so dramatically impacted on their histories and their lives. They have examined the nature of social, economic, political and cultural life within the Chinese communities and networks which evolved in different parts of Australia. Finally, they have contemplated whether the perceptions and understandings offered from within Chinese-Australian communities add further dimensions to, or even challenge, the interpretations and

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<sup>1</sup> Speech by Stanley Young to the Kwan Reunion, celebrated on Easter Saturday, 1986, at the Mandarin Club, Sydney. Kwong Sing Papers.

patterns established by studies focused on the structures and context of the history of the Chinese in Australia.

This study fits within this interpretive paradigm. In particular, it explores how oral history based research with a specific group of Chinese-Australians, who have links to a particular part of northern New South Wales, has added depth and detail to the history of the Chinese in Australia.

An exploration of the variety of the methodological and analytical approaches which have been used to record and interpret the evidence emerging from the oral history interviews reveals that there are layers of messages and meanings imbedded in the memories, stories and memorabilia so willingly shared by participants. Their silences about racism were particularly significant. The silences defied the emphasis in established historiography about the centrality of racism in the lives of the Chinese. It became clear that, while the racist environment should not be denied, it became a force which was negotiated and, at times, overcome rather than one which dominated and shaped lives. Participants were talking beyond racism. They were recalling other aspects of their lives and seeking to emphasise those aspects, and to applaud achievements rather than to cast themselves in the roles of objects and victims. This has set the tone and orientation of the history. The danger is to move too far down this road and ultimately imply that racism did not matter, and that success was achieved without pain, frustration and denial. The concern becomes to balance participants' perceptions of strategies successfully employed to survive and adapt to an alien environment with an acknowledgement of the price paid for that success.

Beyond racism there were the memories and details of vital and complex business, community and family networks which supported and furthered the immigration and settlement of a new wave of Chinese to northern New South Wales after the turn of the century and after the imposition of the restrictive 'white Australia' policy. Central to these networks were the general stores, big and small, which had their origins servicing the Chinese in the tin mining communities of Tingha and Emmaville in the late nineteenth century. These stores took on new life as the main means of employment and livelihood for Chinese who stayed in the district and for the new arrivals who came after 1901.

A close look at the histories, business practices, staff and employment conditions of the stores reveals that there was a mixture of practices resonant of traditional and emerging Chinese businesses and of an adaptation to the specific demands of seeking customers in small, isolated, non-Chinese Australian communities. There was also evidence of the enterprise and acumen which saw key storekeepers and their families successfully negotiate the restrictive immigration legislation in order to sponsor an increase in the number of relatives and fellow villagers from Chungshan in China. These new arrivals provided a core labour force for the stores which was supplemented by the employment of Australian-born Chinese from within and outside the district. The end result was the profitable marketing and expansion of the businesses. Such success was also underpinned by business networks

which stretched throughout the district, from north Queensland to Sydney, and to Hong Kong and China, especially to Shekki in Chungshan and to Shanghai.

The stores provided the public face for the Chinese in the district. They also supplied the anchor for the social and community life which evolved. It was a lifestyle initially shaped by the isolation of coming to terms with life in a relatively unwelcoming and alien social, cultural and physical environment. Chinese largely had to depend on other Chinese for their leisure. The gambling and opium smoking which had characterised the earlier Chinese, largely all male, mining communities still provided one form of escape. The opportunities then broadened as the network of stores provided a conduit along which young Chinese men, Chinese families, and eventually young Chinese women, could meet. Pastimes common to non-Chinese Australians of the time became a part of their activities - swimming, evenings around the piano, football, cricket, tennis, horse racing. These activities also saw some bridges built between Chinese and non-Chinese. The bridges were reinforced by the actions of storekeepers who sought to ensure business success and acceptance by supporting the charities of the local non-Chinese communities. Some barriers came down. Involvement in local service organisations and sporting clubs, the employment of non-Chinese staff, contacts with non-Chinese businessmen, the attendance of children at local schools all meant that there was increased social interaction between Chinese and non-Chinese. Weddings and marriage patterns provided an end symbol of the extent to which there was a melding of Chinese and non-Chinese traditions, practices and encounters. Throughout the period, the number of 'mixed' marriages increased slightly but the majority who married, still married Chinese. Yet the wedding ceremonies celebrated in Australia demonstrated the extent to which the Chinese in the district accommodated different cultural worlds - traditional Chinese practices and Chinese community networks sat comfortably alongside non-Chinese customs and guests.

The social and community life which developed for this particular group of Chinese-Australians was characterised and nurtured by an increasing number of Chinese females born in China and in Australia. Here again, the intention of the 'white Australia' policy was defied. Contrary to the expectations underpinning that policy, Chinese in northern New South Wales managed to sponsor girls and women from China, not just to visit but to settle in Australia. Their presence, as well as the increasing number of Australian-born Chinese females, meant that, for the first time, the community had a reasonable proportion of females to males. The experiences of these women added a further dimension to the history of the Chinese contribution to the region. They emphasised the influence of the patriarchal values which directed the lives of women in China, and the extent to which this influence was challenged by having to survive in isolated communities in rural New South Wales. These women confronted changes which encouraged some of them to join the paid workforce, acquire a new status within families as breadwinners and store managers, gain an education, and remain unmarried. Yet, throughout the period, the binding ties remained largely those which emanated from Chinese traditions. In particular, in the midst of the new

Australian society with its emphasis on the individual, women remained committed to the importance of the family above all else. The family, family honour and success - with all the obligations, support and potential exploitation these entailed - remained the guiding concern and interest which directed the lives of women. The ways in which they accommodated this concern, however, changed.

As the history unfolded, it was clear that members of the community had been brought up on a diet of accommodating to life in Australia while recognising that a second home existed back in China. This second home reached across the oceans beckoning the fulfilment of obligations through sending remittances and support, and through paying visits. Yet, visits to China sometimes challenged the security and familiarity offered by ancestral villages. This was particularly the case when Chinese visiting from Australia discovered that their values and expectations were already different to those of relatives living in China and when they realised that the welcome they received was often only nominal. Even for those who were attracted by the comfortable lifestyles available to returning Chinese business families and by the cosmopolitan nature of places like Hong Kong and Shanghai, the attraction waned when the disruption of the Sino-Japanese War and then the Communist Revolution took over. Australia seemed pleasant and reassuring by comparison. The messages received about the disasters encountered by relatives and ancestral villages as Japanese troops marched through southern China and then, in the late 1940s, as the Communist Revolution imposed a new type of rule and turned attention to acquiring landed property and disowning overseas Chinese, confirmed for most of these Chinese-Australians that the immediate future would be better focused on life in Australia. For the time being at least, the China of their ancestors was a place to be remembered but not a place to visit or in which to find a second or alternative home.

Looking back on these experiences, the Chinese-Australians whose memories lie at the core of this thesis, emphasised that, in the end, post-war Australia offered them and their families successful futures. Most of the stores which had provided livelihoods for them and their predecessors during the first half of the century eventually closed. Nevertheless they had provided the base for children and grandchildren to gain education, enter the professions and acquire a cross-generational upward social mobility of which grandparents and parents could be proud. Those who stayed in northern New South Wales, became integral members of their local communities. The price paid for this success was to submerge, at least publicly, those differences which related to a Chinese heritage. Yet, even this turned around. As Australian government policies and attitudes during the post-war period moved from assimilation through integration to the multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s, there was a growing willingness to sanction and encourage the public recognition of different cultural heritages. This coincided from the late 1970s with the reopening of the doors to China, and the possibility to establish or reestablish contact with relatives and ancestral villages. These influences have nurtured a willingness on the part of some Chinese-Australians to explore and assert publicly the Chinese as well as the Australian aspects of

their heritages and, ultimately, their identities. This coalition of influences played its part in ensuring that Chinese-Australians approached to participate in this study were willing to do so. It also ensured that the emphases and messages which they wanted to convey should focus on the complexity of the success of their family members. Such emphases and messages have certainly influenced the framework of this thesis as attention moved from a focus on the impact of racism to the strategies and skills used to negotiate, overcome and sometimes subvert that racism, and ultimately to the lifestyles and achievements which evolved despite racism.

By employing an oral history approach to document and write a history of Chinese immigration and settlement in a particular region of northern New South Wales during the first half of the twentieth century, this thesis has added to available literature on the history of the Chinese in Australia. In particular, it has demonstrated how a local and oral history focus can reveal evidence which challenges the universal applicability of broad demographic and immigration patterns, and which adds detail to the complexity of the Chinese contribution. The detail includes information about individual and family work and life histories, about the nature and purpose of Chinese-owned general stores, about surviving and prospering in rural Australia, about the lives and contributions of Chinese women, about the importance of links with China, and about the emergence of a Chinese-Australian heritage and identity. The challenges include the different emphases and information which emerge when attention focuses on the lives and contributions of individuals and families rather than on broader patterns and structures.

An oral history based approach also invites reflections on the oral history process itself. In particular, it requires addressing ethical and intellectual issues, current in oral history literature, about the power relations between researchers and participants, and about strategies for ensuring that participants' emphases and interpretations are respected even when they could be challenged by other evidence and different research approaches. The resolution in this study is to acknowledge that the research process involved a sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise. I came to the research with the skills of an (oral) historian and the experience of having worked with a range of ethnic communities in the Australia of the late 1970s and 1980s. Participants came with the knowledge and wisdom of having lived the experiences we were documenting. The challenge has been to construct a history which incorporates the perspective, skills, and knowledge of all concerned.

In the process of the research, a large quantity of new material was uncovered and collected. Yet, there was always more - other people to interview, other archives to explore, other possibilities to follow up. In the collation, analysis and interpretation of the evidence it also became apparent that some leads could not be followed further, and some analytical and interpretive issues could not be addressed within the framework established for the thesis. It is perhaps the nature of research *per se* that one of the discoveries at the end is that the end is also another beginning!



Among the topics and issues touched on but outside the framework of this thesis are those which invite the material to be used for specific analysis under, for example, the rubric and evolving literature on ethnic enterprises<sup>2</sup> or within the discussions on the intersections between class, gender and ethnicity and the evolution of multiple identities.<sup>3</sup> There are also topics and issues which can now be taken a step further. In particular, more could be done on following the business and family leads along the networks which bound stores in northern New South Wales to the growing department stores in Hong Kong and southern China.<sup>4</sup> Extensive research in this area would require the skills and insight of a bilingual researcher based in both Chinese and Australian studies.<sup>5</sup> Similar skills and expertise would assist in pushing further the examination of the significance and nature of contacts with China. More research could be carried out on the role Christian religions played in providing Chinese with a means of accommodating to the alienness of the social and cultural environments in which they lived in Australia, and the ways in which those religious beliefs have become a further element in the multiple identities of some Chinese-Australians. The experiences and contributions of Chinese women in Australia yearn further close attention, perhaps akin to the work emerging in the United States under the authorship of scholars and community members like Judy Yung.<sup>6</sup> Attention needs to be paid to topics relegated to the shadows of memory and shielded from too public a scrutiny by Chinese-Australians themselves. In the oral histories for this thesis these topics included, for example, hints of illegal immigration and of the exploitation of Chinese by Chinese. The use and analysis of the oral history process itself could be extended. Not just to include other groups of Chinese-Australians, but also to explore other aspects of the ways in which present and

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Kitay and Constance Lever-Tracy, From survival to success: working in Chinese restaurants in Australia. Unpublished paper to the International Working Party on Labour Market Segmentation Conference, Trento, Italy, 1990, provide an overview of the literature, some of the theoretical frameworks, and make some reference to the experiences of Chinese businesses in the early part of the twentieth century. See also Peter S. Li, 'Ethnic businesses among Chinese in the United States', *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 4/3, 1976, pp.35-41 on small business as a survival mechanism in a racist environment; and Stephen Castles *et al.*, *The Global Milkbar and the Local Sweatshop: Ethnic small business and the economic restructuring of Sydney*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Prime Minister's Department, and Centre for Multicultural Studies, Wollongong University, 1991, pp.20-32 for a survey of relevant theoretical perspectives.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Gillian Bottomley, Marie De Lepervanche and Jeannie Martin, *Intersexions: Gender/Class/Culture/Ethnicity*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1991; Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes (eds), *Migration and Identity: International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories, Volume II*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994; and Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994. In relation to the research for this thesis, the issue of multiple identities attracted some attention in an earlier article. See Janis Wilton, 'Identity, racism and multiculturalism: Chinese-Australian responses' in Benmayor and Skotnes, *Migration and Identity*, pp.85-100.

<sup>4</sup> See Janis Wilton, 'Chinese stores in rural Australia' in Kerrie MacPherson (ed.), *The Asian Department Store*, Curzon Press, Hong Kong, 1996 (in press) for an initial excursion down this path.

<sup>5</sup> A plea made by historian, Henry Chan, more generally for the study of the Chinese in Australia. See Henry Chan, 'The Chinese communities in Australia: the way ahead in a neglected field of research', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 10/1, 1989, p.41.

<sup>6</sup> Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A social history of Chinese women in San Francisco*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995.

past inform each other, and of the impact the oral history relationship has on the material which is recorded and used.

The possibilities are inspiring and add to those possibilities already opened by other studies on Chinese communities in Australia. This thesis has offered a contribution to the literature through its emphasis on the value of a local and oral history based approach. At the same time, the thesis has acknowledged and incorporated the emphases and insights offered by the Chinese-Australians whose memories lie at the core of the study. The history is their history and, while the shape and tone has been moulded by the efforts of an outsider, it should resonate with their voices and lives. Listening to Chinese voices and examining Australian lives has meant exposing and exploring the complexities of the lifestyles and contributions of a particular group of Chinese-Australians.