

2000-2015: The Education Industry, Business and History

In the first decade and a half of the 21st century China was increasingly influencing Australia and Australia was influencing Chinese-Australians. If Australian history seems often too obsessed with the Chinese as goldminers, in 2012 the circle was completed when Chinese miners purchased large shares in various Australian gold mines.¹ Ten years earlier the Malaysia-born Penny Wong entered the Federal Parliament, becoming a member of Cabinet in 2007. In between these dates, the would-be Labor politician Francis Lee had restored his family graves in Zhongshan in 2004.² For many Chinese-Australians issues of identity, individualism and respect of parents loomed large. Mimi Zou, for example, who had arrived in Australia aged seven declared that: “Despite my non-Chinese attributes, I still possess a strong sense of cultural identity and appreciation of my heritage.”³

At the beginning of the 21st century Australia’s migration policies continued to focus on education, skills and increasingly those with capital to invest. This has led to large numbers of the students coming to Australia to study obtaining permanent residence, as well as large numbers of business people acquiring similar status. In 2014 some 60,000 China-born students were studying in Australia, the largest single group and nearly one third of all overseas students, while over the first 15 years of the 21st century nearly 450,000 people of Chinese background have entered Australia.⁴

With China now Australia’s top trading partner the role that Chinese-Australians’ have always played in Australia’s economic ties with China have become more significant than ever before. During the 1990’s Australia’s trade with China grew 400% to make China Australia’s major trading partner. As rapid as that growth rate was, it took only another three years into the 21st century for that trade to double again. Though as a proportion of China’s total trade the Australian component did not rise and even declined slightly.⁵

Despite the growth, Chinese-Australia continues to be very much an urban phenomenon. Based on the 2006 census:

The China-born (the 4th largest overseas-born group for the whole of Australia) are particularly underrepresented with only 7,569 living in regional and rural

¹ Goode, Keith. Enter the dragon, *Gold Mining Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 109, Oct/Dec 2012: 8-9.

² Lee, Francis, *Out of bounds: journey of a migrant* (Petersham North, N.S.W.: Universe Books, 2010), p.278.

³ Cheong, Doreen, Zou, Mimi, Loong, Nikki (ed), *From great grandmothers to great granddaughters: the stories of six Chinese Australian women* (Katoomba, N.S.W.: Echo Point Press, 2006, p.78.

⁴ ABS Migration, Australia (3412.0), <http://www.border.gov.au/about/reports-publications/research-statistics/statistics/live-in-australia/historical-migration-statistics>

⁵ Minyue, China-Australia Trade: How Important and Complementary is it?, pp. 155-179.

Australia out of the total Chinese migrant population of 206,581 people nationwide.⁶

Within the major cities, Sydney remains the most popular with over 50% of Chinese-Australians with most of the rest in Melbourne and Brisbane, though Perth does have a growing community.

Based on the 2011 census, those born in China were the third largest overseas born group after those from the UK and NZ at 319,000 people.⁷ This was estimated to be 447,000 in 2014. These figures do not include many people who would identify as Chinese but who were born in locations such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, etc. When these numbers are added the 'Chinese' population of Australia of those born overseas is well over at least 600,000. However, a figure of nearly 800,000 is obtained when languages spoken at home are considered as this figure includes the Australian-born children of those born overseas. Over 50% of those speaking Chinese are Mandarin speakers and a little over 40% Cantonese.⁸

In Sydney China-born people are the second largest group, nearly equalling those from the UK, however this was only 4% of the Sydney population overall. Within Sydney the suburbs of Hurstville/Allawah and Burwood/Ashfield have the highest proportions of China-born people at over 30% each. In Melbourne, China-born people are the third largest single group behind both the UK and Indian-born populations and are less concentrated with only the suburb of Box Hill having a proportion of China-born people over 20%. Perth has in recent times begun to receive a larger number of China-born as well as many people from Singapore, usually students or former students, and together these would make Chinese people the fourth largest overseas-born group in Perth at some 30,000.⁹

As in the past, the government of China has shown an interest in Chinese communities living in Australia and in the 21st century as China's wealth has grown this has begun to include government support for cultural activities. These range from specific local events such as a photographic exhibition entitled 'China's Rise' in the Sydney suburb of Hurstville, to the establishment of Confucius Institutes in universities that involve both Chinese Australians and the broader community in what is often called 'soft politics'. The Chinese government also endeavours to maintain connections with the many students studying in Australia.¹⁰

⁶ Simon J. L. Massey and Nick Parr, The socio-economic status of migrant populations in regional and rural Australia and its implications for future population policy, *Journal of Population Research*, 03/2012; 29(1):1-21. DOI:10.1007/s12546-011-9079-9

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Where do Migrants Live?* (<http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features102014>)

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2011, Languages Spoken at Home.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Where do Migrants Live?* (<http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features102014>)

¹⁰ Wanning Sun, Motherland Calling: China's Rise and Diasporic Responses, *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Spring 2010), pp. 126-130.

Another aspect of China's increasing wealth has been the significant increase in the numbers of Chinese tourists travelling the world. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics: "Short-term trips from China have grown from 234,000 in 2003-04 to 769,000 in 2013-14."¹¹ This is up from seventh to being second only to New Zealand (and nearly equal if Singapore and Hong Kong are added), and when this is combined with China's status as a trading partner it is not surprising that many at a local and state level are seeking to use Australia's Chinese-Australian past as a hook to attract Chinese tourists in the present. Examples of this include Tasmania's Trail of the Tin Dragon and the Lambing Flat Festival in Young, NSW; the one highlighting the efforts of tin miners, and the other, more surprisingly, a series of anti-Chinese riots on its nearby goldfields. Other towns on former goldfields such as Orange and Bathurst have also begun to feature their Chinese goldminers.

That these efforts are taking place in rural areas is not surprising as, despite the preference of Chinese migrants for living in major cities, Chinese tourists do favour visits to farms. This preference is at a rate of 25% compared to the average of 10% for all visitors to Australia.¹²

In addition to tourism promoters, academic and family studies have also developed an increasing interest in Chinese-Australian research. The establishment of the Chinese Australian Family Historians of Victoria (CAFHOV) in 2001, the Chinese Australian Historical Society in 2002, the Dragon Tails biannual conferences held since 2009, as well as studies of Chinese-Australians as voices in literature are all part of this increasing interest in things Chinese.¹³ Other increasingly popular related areas of study consider such questions as what it means to be 'Chinese' and 'Chinese-Australian' and studies of Chinese students in Australia (seven since 2004).¹⁴

In 2010, wealthy China-born businessman Dr Chau Chak Wing donated \$25 million to the University of Technology Sydney. Of the gift, \$20 million went towards the construction of the Frank Gehry-designed Dr Chau Chak Wing Business School and \$5 million towards an endowment fund to support the Dr Chau Chak Wing Scholarships.¹⁵ In 2014 this same wealthy China-born businessman donated to the Australian War Memorial to establish a new technology centre and to promote research into Chinese Australian veterans. In 2015 Chau Chak Wing provided \$15m

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Media Release: Short-term visitor arrivals from China have more than tripled since 2003-04 (7 August 2014).

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, Farm Visits in Australia (24 May 2012).

¹³ Sophie Couchman, *Secrets, Silences and Sources: Five Chinese-Australian family histories* (Asian Studies Program, La Trobe University, 2005.) & Sun, Christine (Christine Yunn-Yu), *Voices under the sun: English-language writings by Australian and other authors with Chinese ancestry* (Belgrave, Vic.: Taiwan, c2007).

¹⁴ Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: living between Asia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2001) & Carol Chunfeng, Wang, Kate, Andre, Kenneth Mark, Greenwood, Chinese students studying at Australian universities with specific reference to nursing students: a narrative literature review. *Nurse Education Today*, 2015 April; 35(4): 609-19.

¹⁵ <http://www.uts.edu.au/scholarships/223781>

to the University of Sydney for the development of a new Museum to house the Nicholson collection of antiquities.