

1970-1979: Post-White to Multicultural Australia

At the beginning of the 1970s the stage was set for more significant changes in the Chinese Australian community than had perhaps occurred since the gold rushes of the mid-19th century. By 1970 most, though not all, of the legislative barriers that constituted the White Australia policy had been dismantled. Social changes associated with greater acceptance of differences, along with a modest number of arrivals of student and middle-class Chinese and Asian migrants, had also occurred. These changes made it possible for the Whitlam Labor government not only to normalise relations with the government of China, but also to formally remove the last vestiges of the White Australia policy in a series of legal changes in 1973 that included the Migration Act – which lifted restrictions on Aboriginal movement overseas, the Aliens Act – notifications to the Immigration Department no longer required, Crimes Act – naturalised citizens could no longer be deported, and the Citizenship Act – under which British-born were also required to take out Australian citizenship.¹

In practical terms, these legal changes did not result in any significant increase in non-white people generally or of Chinese people specifically in Australia. The Labor Government had in fact restricted immigration numbers so that no substantial visible change in the composition of the Australian population occurred. In 1975 the Labor Government eventually decided to accept several hundred orphans and refugees from Vietnam in a practical ending of the White Australia Policy. It was under the succeeding conservative government of Malcolm Fraser, however, that significant numbers of refugees arrived and were accepted from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, often as ‘boat people’, in an authentic termination of the White Australia policy if not of a White Australia.

While not directly from China, many of these refugee arrivals were also of Chinese origin, some Cantonese speakers and others not. Many of those from Cambodia for example were people of Chinese origin known as Teochiu. The Immigration Department did not record the ethnic background of its refugee intake but estimates are that 60% of all Indo-China refugees were ethnic Chinese.² This was certainly recognised by the Chinese Australian community and Charles See-Kee tells of how when he became aware of the poor conditions at the Darwin quarantine station he was able to arrange the bringing of food to refugees paid for by Darwin’s Chung Wah society.³

¹ Ann-Mari Jordens, *Alien to Citizen Settling migrants in Australia 1945-75*, (Allen & Unwin/NAA) p.228.

² Lawrence W. Crissman, George Beattie and James Selby, ‘The Segmentation and Integration of the Chinese in Brisbane, Australia’, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Family, Kinship and Ethnic Identity among the Overseas Chinese (Summer 1985), p.198.

³ Giese, Diana, *Astronauts, lost souls & dragons: voices of today's Chinese Australians* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997), pp.32-33.

Not that assistance for these refugees was limited to the Chinese Australian community and Tac Tam Lam recounts how his boatload of refugees fleeing Vietnam was helped by the crew of an Australian ship in Sarawak with directions and a map that ultimately saw them as one of the first of the 'boat people' to arrive in Darwin harbour in 1976.⁴

Aside from this refugee intake, basic immigration policy at this time increasingly favoured skilled and professional migrants with many Chinese from Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan arriving under these criteria, as well as smaller numbers from New Guinea, Fiji and East Timor (Hakka) also providing numbers of Chinese people entering Australia at this time. The result was the creation of what some have termed a multicultural middle class, of which people of Chinese origin make a significant proportion.⁵ Over this decade more than 30,000 Chinese people arrived in Australia.⁶

While Australia was making its own changes socially and legally, China in 1975 also began a long series of internal and legal changes that were to have great consequences for the development of the Chinese Australian community. The first of these changes was when the China government began to allow families to migrate freely. This began to increase the number of China born people entering Australia as wives and other family members joined those who had already been in Australia for some time.

In general Sydney and Melbourne were the main destinations of most arrivals, refugee or not, with Brisbane also to a lesser extent.⁷ While some efforts were made to ensure settlement in cities such as Perth and Adelaide, generally most people have ended up in the big three cities, with Sydney predominating. Overall an estimated 300,000 people of Chinese origin from a variety of countries entered Australia between 1975 and 2006.⁸

Of course categorising people as of 'Chinese origin' does not automatically form them into a distinct group. For example, many Chinese people who had acquired Australian citizenship in New Guinea moved to Australia on its independence. People in this group had often lost their Cantonese and those in Brisbane eventually formed the Cathay Club as a separate entity from the Chinese Club of that city.⁹ While in another example, Hong Kong-born and Cantonese speaking Francis Lee married a

⁴ Giese, Diana, *Astronauts, lost souls & dragons: voices of today's Chinese Australians* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997), p.31.

⁵ Val Colic-Peisker, A New Era in Australian Multiculturalism? From Working-Class "Ethnics" To a "Multicultural Middle-Class", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 45, No. 3, Fall 2011, pp.562-587.

⁶ ABS Migration, Australia (3412.0), <http://www.border.gov.au/about/reports-publications/research-statistics/statistics/live-in-australia/historical-migration-statistics>

⁷ Crissman, Beattie and Selby, *The Segmentation and Integration of the Chinese in Brisbane*, pp.181-203.

⁸ James E. Coughlan, The Changing Spatial Distribution and Concentration of Australia's Chinese and Vietnamese Communities: An Analysis of 1986-2006 Australian Population Census Data, *Journal of Population Research*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (September 2008), pp.161-182.

⁹ Crissman, Beattie and Selby, 'The Segmentation and Integration of the Chinese in Brisbane', pp.193-194.

fellow 'Chinese' immigrant whose family was in Malaysia and who were speakers of the Chaozhou dialect. This was a marriage that initially met with family disapproval on grounds familiar to many who enter into 'mixed' marriages.¹⁰

Similarly the many newly arrived students did not automatically associate with Australian-born Chinese-Australians. This was a situation that perhaps first began to change when many such students became involved in the Tiao Yu Tai movement, their campaigning efforts resulting in their greater contact with the general Chinese-Australian community.¹¹

Another change that had an even greater impact on the general Chinese-Australian community was the development of the concept of 'multiculturalism', at first under the Whitlam Labor government but then greatly enhanced under the following Fraser Liberal Government. Among other features, multiculturalism encouraged the use of community languages and established a range of institutions in which people of various cultural backgrounds were encouraged to participate.¹² These institutions included new radio and television stations (2EA & 3EA established in 1975, and SBS TV in 1980), bureaucratic advisory bodies such as the Ethnic Affairs Commission, and support for community language schools, all of which had their Chinese Australian participants. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s the benefits of this government-sponsored multiculturalism was still confined to those directly involved, with attitudes to migrants and migration remaining 'assimilationist' at best with a large proportion of the general community.¹³

The 1970s was also a time in Australia when governments began to increasingly take on part of the welfare burden previously borne by family and church groups. This meant increased government funding to community groups and in 1973 the Australian Chinese Community Association (ACCA) was formed. The ACCA was the first such body to claim to represent the entire Chinese-Australian community. According to some, the Australian Chinese Community Association of New South Wales was formed after the National Population Inquiry as the successor to the temporary committee formed to respond to that inquiry.¹⁴ Whatever its origins, the Australian Chinese Community Association acted as a spokes body for the Chinese Australian community at large, and to assist elderly Chinese. One feature of its activities was the sponsoring of tours to China as families began once again visiting villages and

¹⁰ Lee, Francis, *Out of bounds: journey of a migrant* (Petersham North, N.S.W.: Universe Books, 2010), pp.87-88.

¹¹ Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, p.149.

¹² Victor J. Callan, Anglo-Australian Attitudes toward Immigrants: A Review of Survey Evidence, *International Migration Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1983), pp.120-137.

¹³ Victor J. Callan, Anglo-Australian Attitudes toward Immigrants: A Review of Survey Evidence, *International Migration Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1983), p.130.

¹⁴ Charlotte Jordon Greene, 'Fantastic Dreams': William Liu and the origins and influence of protest against the White Australia Policy in the 20th century (PhD, University of Sydney, 2005), p.258.

relatives.¹⁵ Not only visits but support, including donations for schools and other village facilities was popular with those living in Australia, as it had been before 1949.¹⁶

Linked to the family relations with villages was an increased interest in developing Australia's relations with China as a country and a government. At Sydney's Mandarin Club, for example, in February 1973 a banquet was held to celebrate Australia-China relations attended by Dr Stephen Fitzgerald, Australia's Ambassador to China.¹⁷ This was just one of many such community organised events attended by those instrumental in Australia-China relations. In 1976, for example, the Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry was formed with William Liu as its first Governor.

Government intervention was also active in other areas, including urban renewal and helping to attract tourism. These aims combined at the end of the 1970s in the establishment of the Dixon Street Mall as part of a renewal of Sydney's remaining Chinatown, including the setting up of its 'Chinatown gates'. Henry Tsang, architect and later Sydney City Councillor was instrumental in fulfilling this plan in 1979.¹⁸

Questions to ask/answer?

- Figures on dialect groups across Australia?
- Non-Chinese refugee numbers?
- Development of language schools – Mandarin/Cantonese?
- History of the Mandarin Club?
- Details of the 1980 Regularisation of Status Program – amnesty?

¹⁵ Hunt, Stanley, *From Shekki to Sydney: an autobiography* (Broadway, N.S.W.: Wild Peony, 2009), p.153.

¹⁶ Hunt, Stanley, *From Shekki to Sydney: an autobiography* (Broadway, N.S.W.: Wild Peony, 2009), p.183.

¹⁷ Charlotte Jordon Greene, 'Fantastic Dreams': William Liu and the origins and influence of protest against the White Australia Policy in the 20th century (PhD, University of Sydney, 2005), p.253.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, pp.151-152.