1990-1999:   Tiananmen & the Hong Kong SAR

While since the 1950s it was common for a significant proportion of overseas students to remain in Australia after completing their studies, this proportion greatly increased in the aftermath of the June 4th 1989 Tiananmen incident. Sympathy for the students in Beijing flowed over to those in Australia, which at the time were some 16,000 students around Australia, though mainly in Sydney and Melbourne. At the tearful decree of Prime Minister Bob Hawke all became eligible to remain in Australia while another 30,000 students who arrived after this date and their dependents were also eventually granted similar status by early 1993.

Despite some uncertainty, the legal status of this group of students was gradually worked out with much agitation by the students themselves and support from a range of Chinese-Australian organisations.[1] Eventually four year extensions to their visa's became permanent residence by 1993, making the students eligible not only to remain and become citizens but also to bring in immediate family members. The result was a large increase not only in the Chinese population of Australia but also of a large group of young, well educated people with strong links to China. A population within which there were relatively few Cantonese speakers or readers of traditional Chinese characters.

One consequence, apart from sheer numbers, of the settling of large numbers of educated young families from China was the development of a literature of the Chinese-Australian experience. This is something that, aside from a very few individual works, had not occurred previously in Chinese-Australian history. Works in this field are mostly in the vein of student experiences and generally appealed to potential students still in China.[2] Along side such literature there was also an increasing number of academic studies as students also turned towards their fellow students to examine across a range of disciplines the experience of being a Chinese student in Australia.

Politics in China continued to influence who came to Australia and the approaching reunification of Hong Kong with China in 1997 lead to great uncertainty among the many British subjects of that colony. The result was that large numbers of professional people applied for Australian residence. For a time the phenomenon known as 'parachute families' was the norm, something almost the opposite of Chinese migration practices of the past.[3] What this meant was that working men with

---

[1] Lee, Francis, *Out of bounds: journey of a migrant* (Petersham North, N.S.W.: Universe Books, 2010), pp.157-158 & Jia Gao, Organized International Asylum-Seeker Networks: Formation and Utilization by Chinese Students *International Migration Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Summer, 2006), pp. 294-317.

[2] Wenche Ommundsen, Transnational (Il)literacies: Reading the "New Chinese Literature in Australia" in China, *Antipodes*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Special Issue: Australia and Asia (June 2011), pp. 83-89.

[3] Rogella Pe-Pua, Colleen Mitchell, Robyn Iredale and Stephen Castles, *Astronaut families and parachute children: the cycle of migration between Hong Kong and Australia* (Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, 1996).

business interests in Hong Kong and China would transfer their families to Australia while returning themselves to Hong Kong to live and work.

While the 1997 re-unification was accomplished with little immediate change apparent, the flow of professional people continued, including increasingly from both the PRC and Taiwan in addition to Hong Kong. The educational and class levels of people entering Australia of Chinese background in the 1990s was a factor very different from past migration and in keeping with the very different migration policies maintained by Australia. Policies that in the 1990s for the first time became practically non-discriminatory on a racial level as they became increasingly so on a class and educational level. In this decade over 200,000 people of Chinese background arrived in Australia.[4]

One consequence of the increasing migration of professional people has been the arrival of children who are neither Australian-born as in the past, nor full migrants as their parents, but people who have a more mixed sense of identity as a result of growing up in one country part-way through their childhood as well as more often undertaking regular return visits to their country of birth than past generations had been able to. While many individuals have been in similar situations, for the first time this was true of a significant proportion of a generation. Issues of individualism versus conformity, occupational choices, intermarriage and identity all loom large for this generation.[5]

During the 1990's trade with China also grew at a rapid rate, a 400% increase, until China became Australia's major trading partner. While China now loomed large for Australia, as a proportion of China's total trade the Australian component did not and even declined slightly.[6] Thus as China grew greatly in importance from Australia's perspective, Australia did not grow as significant from that of China's.

The growing significance of the Chinese-Australian community in the 1990s was shown as marketing, for the first time since the 1920s, by non-Chinese businesses directly to Chinese-Australian's as a consumer group took off. Advertising in Chinese language papers was increasingly common, of which there were four in Sydney by 1994 (Sing Tao Jih Bao (HK), Chinese Herald, Independence Daily (Taiwan), Australian Chinese Daily (HK, China).[7] Also translations of advertising and specific targeting, such as when the NSW lotteries began to feature dragons on special runs of lottery tickets, all began in this period. Other examples of business adaptation to the needs of its Chinese customers include in 1995, the Advance Bank's development of a Quickphone service designed to meet the needs of Cantonese speakers specifically.

---

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

[5] Lan-Hung Nora Chiang and Chih-Hsiang Sean Yang, Learning to Be Australian: Adaptation and Identity Formation of Young Taiwanese-Chinese Immigrants in Melbourne, *Australia Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 2, Migration and Mobility (Summer, 2008), pp. 241-258.

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

[7] Alvin Chan, *Marketing to Chinese-Australians* (UWS, 1996), pp.8-9.

Similarly the Sydney Casino changed the colour of its free shuttle bus from black (unlucky) to gold.[8]

Also in this period began the re-making of the various Chinatowns of Sydney, Melbourne, and the creation of a new one in Brisbane. For political and tourist reasons, however, the heritage of the Chinatown 'ghetto' was being preserved just as the reasons for such ghettos in a post-WAP Australia was removed. Ironically this transformation began at a time most of the Chinese-Australian community were establishing themselves in the various suburbs of Australia's main cities in what some have called 'ethnoburbia'.[9] In 1996 a Chinese Cultural Centre was established in one of these suburbs, in Sydney's Chatswood, as a place for teaching various Chinese crafts and exhibiting Chinese art and culture.[10]

The 1990s was a mixed period as far as multiculturalism was concerned. In 1991 the Hong Kong born Henry Tsang was elected the Labor representative on Sydney City Council and became the Deputy Mayor. While the following year the Indo-China Chinese Association felt it necessary to publish a handbook on combating racial discrimination.[11] In 1994, SBS showed a documentary history of the Chinese in Australia entitled 'Flowers and the Wide Sea', and two years later in 1996 began another outburst of broadly anti-Asian racism with the rise of Pauline Hanson and the One Nation political party.

This racism of the 1990s provoked a much quicker and more openly political response that was well supported by Chinese-Australians than that of the 1980s inspired by the Blainey remarks. This response included in 1998 the founding of the Unity Party by Dr Peter Wong. In 1999 both Peter Wong and Henry Tsang were elected to NSW Parliament, while Robert Ho took over the Sydney City Council position. Nevertheless perceptions of "more overt" racism were reported by those working in the community sector as was surprise at the willingness of Chinese-Australians to demonstrate publically about these issues.[12]

Questions to ask/answer?

- Degree those from 'Greater China' motivated by their children's educational future?

---

[8] Ian F. Wilkinson and Constant Cheng, Multicultural Marketing in Australia: Synergy in Diversity, *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1999), pp. 106-125.

[9] David Ip, Contesting Chinatown: Place-making and the emergence of 'ethnoburbia' in Brisbane, Australia, *GeoJournal*, Vol. 64, No. 1, Contextualizing the Emergence of New Chinatowns (2005), pp. 63-74.

[10] Angelina Yeung, Alan Tang (Eds), Chinese Cultural Centre (NSW) 中華文化中心十周年誌慶 10th anniversary celebration, 1996-2006 (Chinese Cultural Centre, 2006).

[11] Wendy Dwyer, Charles Khoo, *A community handbook on combating racial discrimination* (Indo-China Chinese Association, 1992).

[12] Jennifer Martin, Australians of Chinese background from Vietnam: a resource for community workers and mainstream agencies (Ecumenical Migration Centre, 1999), pp.21-22.

- Role of the Chinese Australian Union?
- Details of the children of the 'Tiananmen' generation?
- Consulate interest in Overseas Chinese?