in: Jan Ryan (ed), Chinese in Australian and New Zealand:
A Multidisciplinary Approach, New Age International Ltd
Publishers, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 5-20

CHINESE? AUSTRALIAN? THE LIMITS OF GEOGRAPHY AND ETHNICITY AS DETERMINANTS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Paul Macgregor

Australia does not exist as an a priori culture. It is not tied to the land that is our continent, like some property of the soil and rocks. It exists where people make it so, by cohabiting in that space, in a selfconsciously Australian way.

Since white occupation in 1788, two Australias have existed. One, the imaginative construct that lays claim to the whole continent as a cultural entity. The other Australia is the segments of land upon which Australians actually move and live the web and lattice of occupied territory, where people regularly move and work.

The occupied territory has never been contiguous. It is not one spread of coherent territory. Even within the zone of greatest white settlement, in eastern, southeastern and southwestern Australia, there are wild areas and unfrequented areas. These spaces are called Australia too because our community surrounds them, and because we sometimes venture into them.

As one moves into the centre and north of the continent, the wild and unfrequented areas become the majority of the space, almost as inhospitable to European forms of existence as the sea. The places of white Australian activity which were established in central and northern Australia last century, were, to all practicable purposes, islands. They were outposts of 'Australia', the northern outreaches of a zone of white colonisation, intruding into an Aboriginal land, but as part of an expanding white Australian settlement zone in this part of the globe.

Because they came under Australian sovereignty, we call them Australian frontiers. But they were also frontiers for Aboriginals, for Chinese, for Japanese and for Macassans. Each culture had a presence, trying both to maintain their cultural uniqueness, and to come to working relationships with other cultures, to make cultural accommodations.

The concept of the frontier often assumes that we are dealing with the edge of a contiguous zone, whether it be sovereign territory or a cultural zone. But the non-indigenous cultural frontiers operating in northern Australia around the turn of the century were isolated outposts of their home cultures, rubbing shoulders with each other in small pockets of inhabitation, far from the majority of their cultural fellows.

Chinese, Japanese and Macassans are usually seen merely as intruders; moreover, doubly intrusive, into both black Australia, and into the white Australia which was proclaiming its prior right to usurping hegemony in the north. The activities of these Asians which are mentioned are those which take place in Australia. Cursory treatment is given to their origins and their continued links with others of their own culture, either in their homeland, or elsewhere. Their history in northern Australia is not viewed primarily by most Australian historians as part of Chinese, Japanese, Macassan or Indian zones of expansion, settlement and economic and community development in South East Asia, the East Indies, Australasia and Oceania. As Henry Chan points out, the histories of Chinese in Australia need to be viewed within the broader histories of Chinese people outside China. [1]

I would add that the histories of white Australians, outside eastern, southeastern and southwestern Australia, also need to be viewed as part of a diaspora - a white one. For, as well as settling in northern Australia, white Australians, in conjunction with other whites, were also settling in, or frequenting, South East Asia, the East Indies and Oceania. As part of the British Empire, and as part of the community of Europeans pursuing economic, political and cultural interests in Asia, there were many white Australians who were active as pearlers, traders, missionaries, planters, seafarers and the like. To white Australians who were very British, very European, a network of familiar communities could be found all the way across to Asia.

The histories of northern Australia would gain much from being seen less as part of Australia and more as primarily part of a wider, fluid, multicultural interaction zone which crossed sovereign borders.

Cairns, Thursday Island, Palmerston and Broome had more similarities, as communities of people, to Port Moresby, Christmas Island, Nauru, Singapore, Fiji and Hong Kong, in 1900, than they did with Melbourne, Bendigo or Perth. All of these locations, from northern Australia across Southeast Asia, the East Indies and Oceania, were islands, whether surrounded by land or sea, where different cultures established outposts together, creating complex localised and interweaving cultural frontiers.

To white Australians of 1900 living in Melbourne or Sydney, Thursday Island and Darwin were as exotic as Fiji or Singapore. The belief in white sovereignty over the whole of the continent of Australia had psychological importance, but the reality was that, north of the Tropic of Cancer, cultural hegemony for whites, where desired, was a struggle; cultural uniformity, nonexistent.

Chinese and whites should be seen from their own perspectives, but they should also be seen as overlapping and intermingling networks of cultural expansion. The lack of expanding political sovereignty and state support for Chinese endeavours should not blind us to the internal integration of each ethnic network. Chinese and white were both expanding into northern Australia, were both expanding into Asia and Oceania. Australia's sense of its own history should both contract and also expand beyond its sovereign shores. We should allow the expansion of Chinese history within Australian shores.

Cultural frontiers also existed in the more settled south of Australia. Communities of different cultural background settled at various locations. For this paper, I choose to focus on the frontiers of Chinese and white.

The creation of identity of 'White Australians' was concurrent with the territorial expansion of white Australia, and depended upon major developments in the technology of travel, communication and warfare, so that the defined zones of cultural hegemony, the spaces of desired inhabitancy, were able to become really occupied, and effectively controlled.

But the same technological developments also allowed for more than one community to inhabit the same space we call Australia. The zone of occupation by white Australia, being a web of inhabitation, had within it spaces for other cultures to set up their own distinct webs of community. Chinese people in Australia are a clear example of this.

The new technologies allowed pockets of Chinese here and there to maintain contact with each other, and continue community, in spite of being hundreds or thousands of miles apart. The very unity of Chineseness of communities within Australia, and in fact across the world, depends on the ability to send letters, forward freight, travel from one part of the country to another, distribute newspapers, send back for brides and travel between countries.

Most Chinese in Australia before 1950 came from counties around Guangzhou (Canton). The contrast between the smallness of the See Yup area, for example, and the vastness of the world within which the bonds of community are maintained by expatriate See Yup people and their descendants, is extraordinary, and only possible because of the revolutions in the technologies of travel and communications since the middle of last century.

Cultural communities are thus not necessarily monolithic aggregates of uniform people who solely occupy the same space, time and thought. Within a community, the extension of bonds can in fact be fragmented by time, space and human interaction.

Nevertheless each community needs to have a sense of the space that it occupies, that is its shared zone, that it has a right to call its own, a place where the members of the community feel safe in the expectation that they can continually and indefinitely meet and remeet, and trust that that space is their own shared territory, that they are bonded to each other because they trust that they can meet there. They are thus bonded to that territory.

That territory need not be contiguous. It can be a string of sites scattered across a city, across a continent, across the globe; the physical places which are the sites of communal activity - a series of homes of the extended family, the shops we frequent, our temples, churches, clan halls.

This is the practice, but in the end communities do not have full security in the right to occupy those spaces. There is the threat, however distant at times, that that right may be taken away at the worst this leads to war, and when it comes to war, it is easiest to stake out contiguous land and defend it.

For most of the time, though, peace is enjoyed, and a social and legal framework that gives all peoples the opportunity to create their own patterns of islands of shared activity, their own webs of interaction.

But I am talking of frontiers, and the concurrent webs of Chinese Australian and European Australian still had to rub shoulders.

Within each community of Chinese - and European-Australian, there were (and still are) degrees of venturing into the other's cultural territory. The political power flowing from European technological superiority in the nineteenth century, the smallness of Chinese communities visavis European, and the colonising sense of culture by Europeans of the time meant that far more Chinese moved into European cultural space than the other way round.

Those Chinese Australians who did make journeys into European culture, then absorbed the frontier within themselves, sometimes being Chinese, sometimes being European. Because cultural identity is developed through shared patterns of interaction, one's cultural identity in practice alters depending on the groups of people one regularly and habitually interacts with. One need not always be Chinese, one need not always be Australian. Sometimes one can also be a shopkeeper, a football player, a

Christian, a professional historian. We are part of a multiplicity of communities, and we interact with different communities on different occasions.

We thus have multiple identities, intrinsically tied to processes of shared communal activity. Depending on which community of people we are with, we change aspects of our speech, mannerisms, even, to an extent, our thoughts, to take part in the shared rituals of behaviour which tie us together in temporary, yet continually repeated, gatherings of each community. We temporarily locate in a shared space, read the same newspapers, exchange according to shared patterns, then go off and join with other groups, make other patterns.

So those Chinese Australians who absorbed European culture into their identities did not do so necessarily by choosing to become solely European. Nor was their European-ness an individual characteristic. Their European/Austalian-ness was communal; was developed and maintained through interacting with communities of other European Australians. Conversely their Chinese-ness was maintained and supported by the ongoing interactions between themselves and their fellow Chinese in Australia, and their fellow Chinese both in China and across the trading and communal networks of the developing global diaspora.

And as Chinese Australian communities developed across several generations of Australian born descendants, aspects of European /Australian-ness became part of the ways of culture solely within ChineseAustralian communities. Even while a pride in being Chinese could be strongly declared, English could be spoken, bread and butter eaten, Australian Rules football played and jazz danced to in elegant evening gowns.

The degrees of Chinese-ness of behaviour would depend on the nature of the group of people being interacted with at any given moment, the meaning of the occasion, and the location of meeting. At times Chinese, at times Australian, at times a bit of both.

Unfortunately, and particularly prior to the last 20 years, cultural identity in an individual Australian was required to be uniform and undivided. To not be purely white Australian was to not be purely Australian. The actuality of multiple communities, and the ability of individuals to be familiar denizens of many different communities, though part of the daily practice of many Chinese Australians, was not allowed to be acknowledged as completely coexistent with cultural allegiance to being Australian. Loyalty to Austalian-ness precluded loyalty to one's Chinese-ness, at least in public declarations.

Such a divergence between the practice of diversity within the Chinese Australian community, and the culture of conformity publicly espoused in

European Australia, forced many Chinese Australians to make emotional choices.

Rather than identity being seen as a suit of comfortable clothes that can be changed for another with a sense of ease, depending on the circumstances, having multiple cultural identities was seen by many Chinese Australians as a juggling act, with only one suit as the true and only real reflection of one's cultural allegiance although sometimes the suit that one claimed to be the true suit changed depending on which community one was currently interacting or 'identifying' with.

If contiguous geography and political sovereignty can be deconstructed as necessary determinants of cultural identity, so, similarly, can ethnicity.

A sense of a single ethnicity, which is tied inalienably to one's blood, one's family, one's people, one's language, has to be seen to be a social construct, almost a myth. If we look at genetic inheritance alone, it is clear that few people in the world are genetically 'pure', whatever that in fact means.

Yes, 'white' Australians, and 'Chinese' Australians have physical characteristics which it is often assumed can readily make the difference between the two 'races' apparent. Yet, within each 'race' there is enormous variety of shape, colour, build, movement, strength. Each race has absorbed other races into it, but continually defines and redefines a unity which overwhelms or accommodates the differences of the newcomers. Yet the sum of our similarities, racially, has never been fixed. The genetic and cultural mix of 'Chinese' in the Han dynasty was not the same mix as that of the Qing dynasty. Both Europe, and China, have absorbed new influxes of people, have shifted territories and absorbed 'barbarians' into their culture.

At any one time, people often believe that they are of a singular race, but over time, they accommodate changes.

If we consider ethnicity more technically as not race, but as shared language, or as shared cultural practices, shared patterns of thought, language, eating, movement, dress, etc, then these too are neither pure, homogenous nor immutable.

While the terms 'Chinese' and 'British' can be used loosely to denote ethnic groupings, both from within and without each of these ethnicities, there are pulls towards difference and unity. Within 'British Australian', there were competing allegiances to English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh, as well as other suballegiances. Within 'Chinese Australian', there were competing allegiances to See Yup, Sam Yap, Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, Teochiu and more. From the outside, all Europeans or Chinese may seem alike. From the inside, the differences between subethnicities can be crucial; at other times, the unifying characteristics are seen as paramount.

Shared cultural patterns, as well as conceptions of difference, are continually reinforced within the community, taught to children, learnt at school and in the house, reinforced by communal activity.

Different patterns of interaction are created, and different locations, occasions or media of interaction are devised, to gather together people who see themselves, or who choose to continue to maintain seeing themselves, as part of one or more community group, ethnic, subethnic, subcultural or otherwise.

Whether it be See Yup-ness, Hokkien-ness, Cantonese-ness, Pan-Chineseness or Chinese-Australian-ness, each allegiance requires forums, occasions, and communication media for people to invoke and share what they have in common. Those patterns of interaction are most strong and immutable which are constantly reinforced in daily intercommunication, so much so that they become habitual, and regarded as second nature. However, modern communications and travel allow such strong and ingrained patterns of interaction, and, of course, intramarriage, to be maintained at vast distances.

But we also play around, we make changes, we are stimulated by a new pattern, and absorb a new turn of phrase, a new hair style, a new way to kick a football. We respond to changed circumstances. We absorb influences from other cultures with whom we come into contact, or whom we absorb into our midst.

As Europeans and Chinese have both spread around the globe, so new cultural groupings, which we would hesitate to yet call ethnicities, have been created. Are Malaysians of Chinese descent as different from their kin in the People's Republic of China, as Australians of Irish descent from their kin in Ireland?

Although the changes which occur may not be agreed to by all members of an ethnic community; although some changes may be unintended consequences of other choices; and although regrets and rejections of elements of change may occur within a community; nevertheless, over time, a culture changes because most people in a community want it to. The ethnic community then creates, and continually recreates, a sense of unity over time, and uses history and myth to explain the unity.

In considering 'Chinese' and 'Australian', we need to reinforce the knowledge that 'white Australia' has never been static. It has been defining and redefining itself over 206 years. For the greater proportion of that time, Chinese Australians have also been defining and redefining themselves. As has China itself, and Chinese people throughout the world.

However, European/British cultural patterns are highly attractive; so too are Chinese cultural patterns. Both cultures have shown a notable ability to attract other cultures to adopt their ways, and similarly to maintain their culture, while incorporating other cultural influences.

The experiences of Chinese people in Australia, in the last two centuries, places such people at the forefront of cultural change and accommodation during a period of globalisation of cultures. For most Chinese Australians a strong desire was felt to maintain a sense of the cultural heritage of their forebears. They were, and are, able to maintain Chinese cultural cohesion over vast distances. But they found the experience of another culture, whether through the living proximity of other people, or a mediated presence through books, films, newspapers and radio, a powerful force which simultaneously aroused curiosity, adoption, accommodation and rejection.

The Australia-China Oral History Project, a joint endeavour of the Australia-China Council, the Museum of Chinese Australian History and the National Library of Australia, was conceived partly to document the experiences of such people, focussing on the pre1950 period.

The experiences of maintaining and creating common and multiple identities is a recurrent theme in the family and individual histories recorded so far for the project. For this paper, I will focus mainly on two families, Ah Ket and Moy, as both provide excellent examples of the range of cross-cultural accommodations, multiple allegiances and cultural identities in Chinese Australian communities.

William Ah Ket, notable Melbourne barrister of the 1910s to 1930s, was born in Wangaratta in the 1870s of first generation Chinese migrants. While he learnt to both speak, read and write Chinese, he was also baptised a Christian, and studied law at Melbourne University.

In his public life, he strove to join together the east and the west. He was one of the founders of the Sino-Australian Association, in 1906, an initiative of young Australian-born Chinese men. He was both a prominent Mason, and a leader of the See Yup Society. His youngest daughter, Toylaan, now in her seventies, recalls that their comfortable middle class home in Malvern would witness the arrival on Sundays of a veritable fleet of chauffeur-driven Rolls Royces, as business and community leaders of the Melbourne Chinese would come to discuss matters with her father.

His life and career were firmly planted in Melbourne. His wife was an Australian of English background, Gertrude Bullock. He mixed with great ease amongst Melbourne society: his home being the venue for many splendid 'jazz' parties during the twenties; and his family sharing holidays with other prominent professional families at seaside resorts on Port

Phillip Bay. According to Toylaan,

> ...he was a very much sought-after after-dinner speaker and a wonderful, oh, I suppose you would call it raconteur in the same way that Quong Tart was. And he could recite poetry and he could take great passages from Shakespeare and music and he loved the Harry Lauder songs and the Gilbert and Sullivan lyrics and he was an amusing after-dinner speaker. And yet serious, he would always have a serious point to make...[2]

Yet he was also very active in Chinese affairs. As well as being important in the Melbourne Chinese community, he also went to Peking in 1912, along with Mee How Ah Mouy, as the candidates of Victorian overseas Chinese in the election for Overseas Chinese members at the first Chinese republican parliament. Later he was twice Acting Consul for the Chinese Government in Australia, in 1913-14, and 1917.

All important visitors from China to Melbourne were guests in his home, ranging from later consuls such as Ouei Tze-king, through military officers such as Ts'ai T'ing-k'ai, the hero of the defence of Shanghai in 1932, as well as the Chinese national Olympic champion swimmer Kwok Chun Hang.

While his full Chinese name was Marc Sec Cheong, he continued the use of Ah Ket as his surname in English, following his father's usage. His eldest son was christened William Marc, to carry on the clan name, the second son was given the names Stanley Albert, while the two daughters were given first an English name, then a Chinese one: Geraldine Mielaan and Margaret Toylaan; all with the surname of Ah Ket.

Homelife was conducted primarily on English Australian lines, with the assistance of a maid, but presided over by Gertrude, and with English Australian meals every evening-except for Sunday evening. On Sunday, William would himself cook a Chinese meal for the family. And it is around food that Toylaan remembers the most important moments of Chinese cultural bonding between her father and herself:

> ...my father's manifestations of his real Chinese-ness would be witnessed more by myself, sort of, in the garden, dad's girl; dad out the back plucking the chook in the oriental crouch, the back of his shoes cut out so that he was wearing the sort of Chinese slippers....he would cut down his old shoes so that he could wear them in the garden. And he would crouch and he and I would pluck the chook and....I mean, all of the Chinese things were sort of slightly left to Dad and Toylaan out in the back garden.[3]

For Russell Moy, born in Melbourne in 1913, food, too, figures prominently in his family's Chinese-ness. Russell's father, Leong Moy, came from the Hoiping district to Melbourne around 1900. After first working in a market garden with the Leong clan, he moved to Little Bourke Street and became manager of the clan firm of Hoong Chong, fruit and vegetable wholesalers. The fruit and vegetable industry in Melbourne in the early twentieth century was dominated by Chinese. According to Russell, clan allegiances were crucial to economic activity. In the 1920s and earlier, the Leong clan, among others, had a network of growers, wholesalers and suburban hawkers, who generally only traded within the clan, except at the point of sale to the non-Chinese consumer.

Eating brought Russell in regular contact with the hawkers:

> ...the Leong clan that I can remember was mostly like fruit hawkers who came to the Victoria Market to buy their produce and market gardeners. And they used to congregate after (it would be every morning or every second day when they went) they bought produce from Victoria Market. Then after they did their buying they'd come into Little Bourke Street. So mostly, I can still remember being a child, I'd be taken by some of the Leong clan, and I thought it was lovely to be taken to have Chinese breakfast with them, you know, at the restaurants.[4]

Clan loyalties also affected household shopping; there were many Chinese general and food stores in Little Bourke Street - each usually serving the needs of one of the major clans in Melbourne. In some cases the quantity of stock was not great, as the store was more important as a venue for the clan members to meet and socialise in. Usually each store had a large room behind the store front, with stools for people to sit around, and often meals would be cooked for clan members.

Sunday was a day off work for most Chinese in 1920s Melbourne, and the day for all to meet in Little Bourke Street. Some of the bigger stores, such as Foon Kee, would sell roast pork on Sunday mornings. '...You could see [Chinese people] coming from everywhere. Really, you would have a line up to go to some of the stores.'[5] The market gardeners and hawkers would come in from the suburbs too. After buying the pork, people would congregate according to their clans either at home, or in rooms behind the various clan businesses, where a cooked meal would then be shared.

New Year was also celebrated mainly in the clan stores, with no memory by Russell either of street parades, lion dances, or of going to the temple for New Year.

Beyond clan communal activity, there were wider affiliation networks, both traditionally Chinese, and also Western influenced. District societies such as the See Yup, the Kong Chew and the Num Pon Soon Societies, all had (and still have) their own premises, serving both as temples and meeting halls. Russell's memory is of the See Yup Temple, its main role being a focus for the ceremonies associated with the ancestor festivals, after which clan members would visit the graves of relatives at Melbourne and Coburg cemeteries.

One of the strongest influences for Europeanisation, and also community affiliation, was Christianity. However, from Russell Moy's testimony, it is clear that Christianity played an important role in both maintaining Chinese-ness, and also inculcating European-ness. Three denominations had congregations of Chinese in Little Bourke St: the Methodists, the Presbyterians and the Anglicans. In Russell's childhood, during the 'teens' and 'twenties', all three had Chinese-born ministers. Leong Gie, minister to the Methodist flock, ran classes in spoken Cantonese, and reading/writing Chinese, for the Chinese children in the neighbourhood. Conversely, Russell attributes his father's command of English to classes run by the Chinese Christian churches.

As might be expected, Christianity and traditional worship competed for the community's spiritual allegiance. Gender and generation appear to have been very crucial here. It was only fathers, who were primarily migrants themselves, and their sons, who attended the temples, and visited the clan graves. The mothers, who were primarily Australian-born, though of Chinese families, took strongly to Christianity. They would take both their daughters and their sons to church services, tea meetings and Sunday schools; but fathers did not go, nor other adult men, the majority of whom were economic sojourners, their families left behind in China.

The role of Australian-born Chinese women in converting to Christianity is also highlighted by Toylaan Ah Ket:

> ...when (my) grandfather died, when old Mah Ket died, he died only about six days after the death of his wife, Muriel, and it was written up in the local Wangaratta papers that no doubt old Mah died of a broken heart. But it just so happened that Muriel, the wife, who was full Chinese and, as I say, bound feet and as Chinese as the day she was born, was baptised or we say christened into the Christian church just before she died and the grandfather also six days before he died. So no doubt this was due to family pressure also from (the daughters) who would plead with their parents 'Please allow us to end your days, that you be returned to earth as Christians rather than planted in the soil of Australia where many

> Chinese had been temporarily planted and then to be...their bones dug up and returned to China and back to the village. You are Australians, you've dug your roots, this is your family, please be buried in Australian soil as Christians.'[6]

In a curious parallel to Russell Moy's story, although Mah Ket's son William was also baptised Christian, Toylaan remembers that her father never went to church, nor did his two sons; there was no attendance apart from Gertrude and the two daughters. Nor, for that matter, were Chinese religious rituals part of the family practice: 'we didn't make a point of going into Little Bourke Street on New Year's Eve'.[7]

Russell Moy indicates that the churches in Little Bourke Street acted pan-denominationally as an alternative community focus; tea meetings were held by the three main churches, which Chinese from all denominations would attend. In this way the churches were a locus for reinforcing the community as Chinese, by maintaining Chinese congregations, even while they were breaking down Chinese religious values at the same time.

Leong Moy's early death in 1926, when Russell was only 14, was crucial to a decline in many of his Chinese cultural values. The family moved to Middle Park, a bayside suburb of Melbourne. From that date, Russell's daily interaction with Chinese Australians decreased, especially with the first generation migrants who lived and worked around Chinatown. He stopped attending Leong Gie Cantonese classes, and now barely remembers how to read or write in Chinese. Without the father's lead, the sons stopped attending the temple and the cemeteries. '...Well, we were brought up Christians, weren't we?...[and] a lot of them had their bones sent back to China and there weren't many left and so we just discontinued going.'[8]

It is likely that the Immigration Restriction Act was an important factor, too. Far fewer new immigrants were arriving in Melbourne, and the ageing, primarily male population was declining through either death or returning as old men to their families in China. The smaller sector of the community, the families of Australian-born Chinese, were not having their Chinese values refreshed by a consistent stream of new arrivals.

Russell describes how new forms of community allegiance were being created by the Australian-born Chinese. The Chinese Progressive Association, the Chinese Athletic Association, and their successor, the Young Chinese League of Melbourne, became prime non-religious foci of Chinese in Melbourne. All were sporting and social clubs, and British-Australian in their activities. Australian Rules football and tennis teams were formed. Table tennis and cards could be played in the evening in the clubs' rooms. Monthly dances at The Dorchester on the Yarra River were held, with a hired three-piece band of piano, drums and saxophone played by British-Australians. From 1938 into the 1980s an annual debutante ball was held at the St Kilda Town Hall, led by an all-women band which had been formed by Álma Quon and her sister Lorna.

The balls, like the tennis and football, and annual picnics at Aspendale beach, were crucial to maintaining social cohesion in Melbourne, but they also tied the community to China. The Consul for the Republic of China, and his wife, were the guests of honour at most of the balls. Evening gowns for ladies, black tie for men, were customary dress. On ceremonial occasions, including the annual celebrations of the founding of the Chinese Republic, the male members of the Young Chinese League would wear the League's blazers - sporting jackets in the best English tradition - to celebrate paramount Chinese events.

These community developments were paralleled in Sydney. Another interviewee, May Young, recalled that 'Dragon Balls' began to be held in the 1930s, partly to raise funds for the Anti-Japanese War in China, partly 'so as to keep an eye on the younger generation', to know that they were mixing with people whose families were known to the parents.[9] A New South Wales Chinese Tennis Association was formed, and from 1966 an Annual Tennis Challenge between this Association and the Young Chinese League began, alternating between Sydney and Melbourne, acting also as a vehicle for keeping the Chinese communities of each city in closer touch with each other.

May's family background is indicative of how community networks of Chinese were maintained across Australia. Her grandfather had originally arrived in Darwin from China. His son, May's father joined him there, but on his father's death, the son moved to Melbourne to join an uncle. There he married a British-Australian woman and May was born. During May's early school years, the family shifted to Sydney and settled there. Family and friendship have kept May strongly tied to Melbourne, even though her life has been spent mostly in Sydney.

Thelma Cremin, now 85, a granddaughter of Maa Mon Chinn and Lula Mak, also comes from a family of significant mobility. Originally a pioneering Tasmanian tin-mining immigrant family, the second generation of Chinns began to leave Weldborough in the early part of this century. Two sons went to Sydney, the rest to Melbourne, followed by the parents around 1920. Maa Mon Chinn passed away in his late seventies shortly afterwards. Lula, much younger, lived on as the matriarch of the family until the 1950s. Her third son Frank was one of the founding members of the Young Chinese League, and its president for almost 30 years. To Lula, who her children married was very important, and was unusual for her times (by comparison with Russell Moy's accounts) in insisting that her children only marry Chinese, and preferably to people in China itself. In fact she took two of her younger children back to Hong Kong to be married. Perhaps it was the isolation of her early marriage years in 1880s Tasmania, as a young woman far from Chinese friends and family, that made her so insistent on this point. Nevertheless, she acquired many European-Australian attributes and tastes, speaking English by preference, wearing European clothes, and most notably...

> she taught herself to play the piano by ear...I can hear old fashioned waltzes, Pink Lady was something because I know that when I learned the piano I then thought: right, this is what grandma used to play.[10]

The above accounts clearly demonstrate that the cultural identities of Chinese Australians were multiple, attached neither purely to their geographical origins in China, nor purely to their adopted homeland in Australia. They show, too, that a significant amount of the shared cultural practices of a British-Australian ethnicity could be as firmly embedded in the identities of Chinese in Australia, as it could be in Australians of British cultural background.

The accounts of these Chinese Australians show that their multiple identities and cultural allegiances depended on how and with whom they formed communities. Just as there were varied circles of community and allegiance within which they moved, so also their identities were multiple and varied; so, too, they varied the sense of the geography with which those identities were associated. These accounts show that an individual's cultural identity can only be created in a community, and needs a sense of community to exist. They also show that many communities can be operated in by one individual, and that, rather than being determinants of cultural identity, the concepts of geography and ethnicity are themselves determined by communities and their senses of identity.

To Russell Moy, in spite of his many European-Australian acculturations, people of his generation and background (in his younger days) regarded themselves as more Chinese than Australian,

> because they [European-Australians] don't accept you as Australian. They wouldn't know what you were. When I shifted out from Little Bourke Street down to Middle Park, they all abused you. You know, the kids, they don't know any better. They call you a Chow or something like that...[but]...so long as you stand up to them they know they can't tease or say it anymore, they just give up...but it didn't worry me for a start because later on I was very friendly with a lot of them.[11]

But in 1942, his gut reaction to imminent Japanese invasion was to volunteer for the Australian airforce, because:

'You didn't want to be invaded and take over the country so you just thought as an Australian, not Chinese.'[12]

ENDNOTES

1 Henry Chan, 'A Decade of Achievement and Future Directions in Research on the History of the Chinese in Australia' Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific, Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne, 1994.
2 Interview, Toylaan Ah Ket, Sydney 1993, transcript p161.
3 Interview, Ah Ket, p.168.
4 Interview, Russell Moy, Melbourne, 1994, transcript p.9.
5 Interview, Moy, p.69.
6 Interview, Ah Ket, p.170.
7 Interview, Ah Ket, p.168.
8 Interview, Moy, p.218.
9 Interview, May Young, Sydney, 1993, transcript p.23.
10 Interview, Thelma Cremin, Melbourne, 1994, transcript p.35.
11 Interview, Moy, p.172.
12 Interview, Moy, p.192.

REFERENCES

Interviews with Australians of Chinese descent conducted as part of the Australia-China Oral History Project:

1 Cited in this paper:

Russell Moy, interviewed by Paul Macgregor, Melbourne, 1994.

May Young, interviewed by Paul Macgregor, Sydney, 1993.

Toylaan Ah Ket, interviewed by Paul Macgregor, Sydney, 1993.

Thelma Cremin, interviewed by Paul Macgregor, Melbourne, 1994.

2 Also interviewed:

Jean Gooey, interviewed by Elizabeth Saunders, Melbourne, 1994.

Lee Kim, George, interviewed by Paul Macgregor, Melbourne, 1994.

All of these interviews have been archived as both tapes and transcripts at both the Oral History Section, National Library of Australia, and also at the Museum of Chinese Australian History in Melbourne.

Other references used:

C.F. Yong, The New Gold Mountain: The Chinese in Australia 1901-1921, Raphael Arts Pty Ltd, Richmond, South Australia, 1977.