

# ***‘FANTASTIC DREAMS’:***

***WILLIAM LIU, AND THE ORIGINS AND INFLUENCE OF PROTEST  
AGAINST THE WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY***

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## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

**I hereby certify that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a higher degree or diploma at any other tertiary institution.**

**Information extracted from other published and unpublished sources has been properly referenced in the text and included in the bibliography.**

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**Charlotte Jordon Greene**

**31 March 2005**

## **Abstract**

The structure of this study of William Liu will closely reflect his ideas and the major historical influences in his life, and will span the period from 1893 through ninety years spent mainly in Sydney, ending in 1983, the year before the beginning of the attack on multiculturalism launched by the historian Geoffrey Blainey. The memorialisation of Liu in the post-Blainey “immigration debate” period will then be considered. The study will also reflect the changes in protest against racially discriminatory immigration policies in Australia, as Liu moved from a period in which his was an almost isolated critique to one in which he was able to embrace the ever-widening group of people opposed to the ‘White Australia Policy’. This process has not been fully examined, perhaps due to the fact that the protest often appeared to have little impact upon policy. But the way in which Liu and other protestors expressed their view of what Australia should be and how the ‘White Australia Policy’ affected this vision sheds a great deal of light on these periods in Australian history. The structure of this thesis around Liu’s life, beginning with a period in which the ‘White Australia Policy’ was widely accepted, and ending in a period in which multiculturalism was entrenched as official policy, emphasises the cultural shift which was brought about by decades of protest against the Anglo-conformist model of Australian identity.

## **Introduction**

The history of the White Australia Policy in the twentieth century is not only an official history of routine legislative exemption of non-European people. It is also a history of exemptions, representations, deportations, deals and obfuscation. But these aspects of the Policy are not adequately dealt with by merely writing about the periodic changes in the laws relating to the residence of non-European people in Australia. Although officially ended by 1972, the White Australia Policy itself lives on in memory, both individual and collective, for it was not so long ago that it formed the very basis of Australian national identity. The histories of non-European exclusion and opposition to the Policy can be traced through the memory of people affected by it, for in this case, many of the opposing voices were not documented in the same way as those of supporters, who were seen as the mainstream, the majority of Australians.

One such story of opposition is that of William Liu, a Chinese Australian man who lived from 1893-1983, and whose life was to a large extent shaped by the White Australia Policy, and his dealings with its racially restrictive provisions first legislated in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. His own identity as a person who placed importance on belonging to both China and Australia, and bringing the two countries closer together, was threatened by the exclusionary nature of Australian identity for much of the twentieth century, and he spent his life trying to convince Australians to acknowledge and embrace the Chinese part of their history and identity. This process was at times seen as ineffectual, or impossible, and Liu's visions for Australia were seen

by friends and critics as “fantastic dreams”, which could only lead to disappointment.<sup>1</sup> But the “fantastic dreams” are the fascinating story, and this story is important whether or not we accept that Liu had a major, direct impact upon the changes in immigration policy, although that possibility will be examined. Liu’s opposition to the Policy had scant public support until the late 1950s, and the way in which he eventually came to have his advice solicited by reform groups, and ultimately government ministers, sheds light on how his views became part of the political culture in Australia influencing both sides of the political spectrum.

The impact of memory and identity on the immigration reform movement in Australia can be fruitfully explored by recourse to the rich personal papers of William Liu. Liu’s views on Australia and on its relationship to China reveal a great deal about shifting notions of Australian national identity in the twentieth century, and the way those notions were defined in relation to China via the White Australia Policy. The memories of opposition to Australia’s “foundation” policy need to be examined in order to understand what kind of country people like William Liu wanted Australia to become, and how they felt their country relegated them to less than first class citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

### **Images of Chinese in Australia**

The histories of Chinese in Australia before Federation, so important to an understanding of how William Liu was viewed by white Australians, are well covered, in an administrative sense, in terms of the arrival of the land-clearing and Gold Rush

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Leong Wah to Liu, 24 February 1939, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 6294/1.



Chinese and their subsequent exclusion. Much has been written of the numbers of Chinese who came to Australia, the amount of tax they were forced to pay by the colonies, and the beginnings of the movements to halt their entrance. Histories such as Charles Price's *The Great White Walls Are Built* and A.T. Yarwood's *Asian Migration to Australia: The Background to Exclusion* detail the stages of exclusion and the attempt to create a white nation set in opposition to those excluded.<sup>3</sup> The fact that these anti-Chinese movements gained pace during nationalistic periods such as the centenary celebrations of 1888, and the lead up to Federation, made clear the connection between race and nation which Australia's 'founding fathers' such as long-serving Premier of New South Wales Sir Henry Parkes created.<sup>4</sup>

However, despite these attempts to keep Australia 'white', Chinese influence in Australia was widespread in the period between the end of convict transportation to the east coast (from 1840 onwards) and the time of Federation. Chinese labourers were brought to Australia from 1848 to assist in clearing land and developing the country. The Gold Rush greatly increased the numbers of Chinese coming to Australia, and the relative numbers of Chinese to European settlers were high, particularly in booming Gold Rush towns. By Federation in 1901, there were approximately 30,000 Chinese still in Australia.<sup>5</sup> Although population estimates vary widely, this figure represents a much

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Abbott, MHR, Country Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Vol. 179, 20 September 1944, p. 1093.

<sup>3</sup> Charles A. Price, The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia, 1836-1888, The Australian Institute of International Affairs in association with Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974.

A.T. Yarwood, Asian Migration to Australia: The Background to Exclusion 1896-1923, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1964.

<sup>4</sup> Lyn Spillman, Nation and Commemoration: Creating national identities in the United States and Australia, Cambridge University Press, Oakleigh, Victoria, 1997, pp. 53-54.

<sup>5</sup> A.C. Palfreeman, The Administration of the White Australia Policy, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967, p. 5.

lower number of Chinese than at the height of the Gold Rush.<sup>6</sup> This meant that at the time of the implementation of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, its basic aim to maintain a White Australia was never going to be achievable, and was really not intended to be. From the beginning, a Chinese Australian population was maintained, and limited Chinese immigration allowed. This immigration was restricted to employment positions which Australians were usually unable to fill, for example cooks in Chinese restaurants, and to allow the entry of Chinese businessmen to facilitate Australian international trade. Some fee-paying Chinese students were also allowed at various levels of schooling.<sup>7</sup> These categories were developed because they were seen to benefit the country, and did not allow the Chinese to compete with Australians for jobs, as it was thought they had in the nineteenth century in employment areas such as seamen and cabinetmaking.<sup>8</sup> The increase of the Chinese population of Australia, however, was blocked through a strict control of the immigration of the wives and children of Chinese business immigrants.

The view of the Chinese which many Australians had did not differ greatly from that of the government members in charge of immigration control, and the newspaper columnists who supported it, which can be seen through popular events such as the protests over the docking of the S.S. *Afghan* in 1888.<sup>9</sup> The *Afghan* steamship first arrived in Melbourne at the end of April 1888 with 268 Chinese passengers of whom 67 were destined for Victoria. It was found that 48 of its passengers had fraudulent naturalisation

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<sup>6</sup> C.Y. Choi, Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1975, pp. 18-22.

<sup>7</sup> Chinese students were subject to restrictions regarding attending public schools, which was only allowed in limited circumstances until the general review of the 'White Australia Policy' in 1947. Palfreeman, The Administration of the White Australia Policy, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Markus identifies these two areas as particular focal points of continuous agitation by unions feeling the effects of competition, although there was widespread concern over cheap Chinese labour in other industries as well. Andrew Markus, Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia & California 1850-1901, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1979, p. 121.

papers, and the Victorian government, under pressure from public meetings and trade union deputations, agreed to forego prosecution if the captain left the port of Melbourne without allowing even the legal passengers to dock. The ship then sailed to Sydney, arriving at much the same time as several other ships with Chinese passengers, to enormous public opposition and demonstration: on 3 June an estimated 40,000 people marched through Sydney in support of the anti-Chinese cause. Premier Henry Parkes sought to rush through an Act far more prohibitive than the existing legislation. This failed to pass, and the New South Wales Supreme Court ordered that 50 of the legal passengers be allowed to disembark. But the widespread support for more restrictive legislation led to the passage of uniform legislation in all the colonies except Tasmania, effectively preventing nearly all Chinese immigration.<sup>10</sup>

Commonly, elements of the portrayal of Chinese included that they gambled, smoked opium, were a threat to the virtue of white women, lived on the “smell of an oil rag”, were not capable of participating in Australian political institutions, and in general could not possibly assimilate into European Australian society due to their racial difference.<sup>11</sup> They and other non-Europeans were considered to be best suited to manual labour in the tropics, and were often brought to Australia for this purpose.<sup>12</sup> These stereotypes continued to have an impact upon Chinese Australians well into the twentieth century, and William Liu was forced to deal with them on more than one occasion.

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<sup>9</sup> Price, The Great White Walls Are Built, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard (eds.), Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2003, pp. 30-1.

<sup>11</sup> Draft letter from Liu to Prime Minister Menzies and Arthur Calwell, Leader of the Opposition, mid-July 1963, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Reynolds, North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia's North, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003, pp. 63-4.

This climate of opinion at the turn of last century meant that the way in which Australians were collectively portrayed in speeches, articles and celebrations of the time reflected a selective reading of history which denied the role of non-Europeans in clearing the land and conquering the continent. Chinese were relegated to the status of a temporary intrusion which was halted with Federation, and Aboriginal people were considered to be a dying race who had given up the land which they had not put to good use. The White Australia Policy was pronounced to be the foundation stone on which the aspirations of the new country rested, and Australian identity was cast in opposition to the ‘yellow hordes’ who sought to invade and lower standards. Parliamentarian and future Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, during speeches on the Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901, stated that

We here find ourselves touching the profoundest instinct of individual or nation – the instinct of self-preservation – for it is nothing less than the national manhood, the national character, and the national future that are at stake...No motive power operated more universally on this continent...than the desire that we should be one people and remain one people without the admixture of other races.<sup>13</sup>

The desire of the majority of Australians at this time was to closely identify with the British Empire, and British race. As Richard White writes of Federation, “The rhetoric of the occasion stressed this unity, and developed the theme of a twin identity, both Australian and British.”<sup>14</sup> This racial continuity privileged the narrative of discovery by Captain James Cook and subsequent settlement at the expense of alternative histories of indigenous ownership and white invasion. These alternative histories continued to be

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<sup>13</sup> Deakin, MHR, Liberal, Attorney General, in Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), 12 September 1901, p. 4804, as quoted in A.T. Yarwood, Attitudes to Non-European Immigration, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1968. P. 99.

denied for the duration of the White Australia Policy, for to acknowledge them would be to destabilise the very foundations of the Policy. These elements which came together at Federation essentially wrote William Liu's family, along with other Chinese-Australian families, out of Australian history, and ignored the value of their contribution to Australia. Australian national identity was written in response to a fear of 'Asia', and longing for the past connection with Britain.

### **Reconstructing Australian history**

This contestation of the national myth of Australia's founding was an important issue for William Liu and other Chinese Australians, who frequently made the point that their families were in Australia for much longer than those of most Australians, and their input into the country's foundation was not valued. As Graeme Davison points out, "The histories of New World nations, like their classical prototypes, reproduce a limited repertoire of mythic themes – the heroic journey, the foundation myth, the treaty and the battle. The new land derives its legitimacy from the heroic acts of those who voyaged to the new land, who founded it, who conquered or made peace with the original possessors of the soil and who overcame the trials of fire, flood, pestilence, earthquake and revolution."<sup>15</sup> The power that Parkes and other politicians had over the way Australian history was characterised left the Chinese Australian community feeling powerless to

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<sup>14</sup> Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 1981.

<sup>15</sup> Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 2000, p. 57.

change their treatment under the White Australia Policy, as they had few representatives who had the power to challenge this dominant view.

The imagined community of Australia that was created by Parkes and other colonial politicians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was therefore incomplete, and the Federation celebrations helped to cement an image of the new nation which Chinese Australians could not alter.<sup>16</sup> History was then, as it is in the present, a contested narrative which those in power attempted to control. This abuse of history was chronicled by Nietzsche and connected to the Australian situation by Davison, who cites Nietzsche's discussion of three forms of historical thought – the antiquarian, the monumental, and the critical.<sup>17</sup> As Nietzsche states, "History is necessary to the living man in three ways: in relation to his action and struggle, his conservatism and reverence, his suffering and desire for deliverance."<sup>18</sup> The first construction, monumental history, is described by Nietzsche as necessary to the man of action who fights a great fight and needs examples, teachers and comforters which he cannot find amongst his contemporaries. However, to give this strength, many of the differences must be neglected, and the individuality of the past generalised. Antiquarian history, on the other hand, values all equally, and differs sharply from monumental history in that it has no instinct for shaping the present, but only understands how to preserve life. Critical historical thought interrogates and condemns history, which Nietzsche considers a danger as well, "For as we are merely the resultant of previous generations, we are also the resultant of their errors, passions, and crimes; it is impossible to shake off this chain. Though we condemn the errors and think

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<sup>16</sup> The term 'imagined community' is taken from Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Verso, London, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Davison, The Use and Abuse of Australian History, pp. 10-19.

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, The Use and Abuse of History, The Liberal Arts Press, New York, 1949, p. 12.

we have escaped them, we cannot escape the fact that we spring from them.”<sup>19</sup> Abuse of history resides in the overemphasis of one form of history unchecked, and as Davison argues, this typology sheds light upon the process of historical interpretation.

It is clear that Australian history has been and is interpreted in one or another of these directions. But despite the more recent trend towards critical history, which was first disparagingly labelled ‘black armband’ history in a 1993 lecture by Geoffrey Blainey, one must be cautious in applying it too severely to the case of national identity in deconstructing its meaning for someone like William Liu.<sup>20</sup> For however he perceived the racist elements of Australian identity, he did not abandon hope of being regarded as fully belonging. As Benedict Anderson points out, “In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe?) to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love.”<sup>21</sup> This was the feeling that mattered above petty bureaucratic problems, or other personal disappointments for Liu.

Critical history, however, was a godsend for the Chinese Australian community when it was applied to the Australian case. Humphrey McQueen’s 1970 work, *A New Britannia*, “marked a sharp break with the traditions of monumental history that had dominated left-wing, as well as conservative, Australian history-writing” when he wrote “History is not on our side. The past belongs to the enemy. We must understand it in

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<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, pp. 12-22.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, VIC, pp. 3 and 244.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 141.

order to end it.”<sup>22</sup> From the early 1970s, and particularly after 1972 when the Whitlam government came to office and Al Grassby took over as Minister for Community Affairs, there was an awareness not previously evident that the non-British background communities in Australia had been excluded from Australia’s national narrative, and that this had caused pain for many people. In the case of the Chinese Australian community, and specifically William Liu, Grassby sought to remedy the situation by involving Liu and gaining information on the history of the Riverina and the role of the Chinese in its development. Grassby subsequently gave a speech which Liu had written on the Chinese Australian history of this, Grassby’s electorate, and this awareness continued through what Liu labelled the “Golden Decade”, 1972-1981.<sup>23</sup>

### **Collective memory and history**

Grassby’s acknowledgment, which meant so much to Liu in particular because his father was one of the Riverina Chinese referred to, meant that the collective memory of the Chinese Australian community was given a formal place, by someone with the political power to do so, in the national historical memory. This preservation of lived experience in historical narrative is a process which is the subject of debate amongst historians, some of whom argue that the process of transmission signifies the death of

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<sup>22</sup> Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, pp. 14-15; Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia: An argument concerning the social origins of Australian radicalism and nationalism*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria, 1970, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Al Grassby, “Contribution of Chinese Settlers to Australia”, MLMSS 6294/10; William Liu, 1 April 1981, MLMSS 6294-10.



collective memory, the “conquest and eradication of memory by history”.<sup>24</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, for example, has argued that historical memory is a marker of the moment and condition in which memory is loosed from its social moorings and becomes anchored instead in the abstract frameworks of chronology and factual detail, “severing the bonds” from its “social milieu”. History is by definition singular and “unitary”, while collective memory is multiple, with as many memories as there are groups within which to remember, and so history represents a loss of many of these elements, which is perpetrated by the person sifting through the memories.<sup>25</sup> As Pierre Nora writes, the time when the need is felt to create a history and capture the experience of a social group is the time when the living memory is perceived to be threatened, but the two genres are seen to be always in “fundamental opposition” to one another:

History...is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past...History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.<sup>26</sup>

Other historians have argued that this opposition is not always present. The late scholar of Jewish thought, Amos Funkenstein, for example, argued that “Western historical consciousness doesn’t contradict collective memory, but rather is a developed and organised form of it” which Susan Crane sees as equating historical consciousness with historical memory.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Susan A. Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 5, December 1997, p. 1378; Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*”, in *Representations* No. 26, Spring 1989, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, p. 1377.

<sup>26</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History”, p. 12, pp. 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, p. 1373.

The act of including the collective memories of the Chinese Australian community in the national historical consciousness was a political act of the Whitlam government which was an important component of its rejection of the priorities of previous governments, and its way of constructing Australian national identity. The appropriation of certain pioneering stories of Australian Chinese was seen as crucial to providing a basis for a new multicultural policy in the present, and the rejection of the White Australia Policy as a founding policy for the new nation. Despite the homogenising force of a unitary history of the Australian people, the Whitlam government saw this promotion of a new history as unifying. As Alon Confino writes in an article on collective memory, “National memory, for example, is constituted by different, often opposing, memories that, in spite of their rivalries, construct common denominators that overcome on the symbolic level real social and political differences to create an imagined community.”<sup>28</sup>

The use of national memory and a national history to unify in the era of multiculturalism continued after the demise of the Whitlam government, and was a central aspect of the bicentenary ‘Celebration of a Nation’ in 1988. The bicentenary inspired a growth in history writing which included groups that had been previously ignored. Some of these histories appeared in a collected volume of writings entitled “Stories of Australian Migration”, which emerged from a conference series which the Australian National University had planned to celebrate the bicentenary.<sup>29</sup> One of the works was by the eminent historian Wang Gungwu who, for his contribution, decided to interview the Liu family to obtain additional information on his friend William Liu,

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<sup>28</sup> Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method”, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 102, No. 5, December 1997, p. 1400.

whom he considered to be perfect for “a portrait of an exceptional Chinese Australian who may capture in some striking way Chinese society and its problems in Australia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>30</sup> This is the most substantial piece of work on William Liu, and his contributions to Australia and the Chinese Australian community, for although it was limited to a published conference paper, it represents a preliminary outline of Liu’s life and his importance to the development of a multicultural Australia.

In this article, Wang contextualises Liu’s life with a brief discussion of the first stage of Chinese immigration to Australia, before exclusion, and argues that a change came about with Federation, in that “the cultural gap between Chinese and Europeans of the first stage had widened with the growth of nationalism in Australia. There were newly emerging national values which everyone was expected to accept. The remaining Chinese had to assimilate as best they could...”.<sup>31</sup> Wang discusses the major events in Liu’s life, and makes the important point that

In his own life, too, Bill Liu moved from being a Chinese born in Australia to an Australian who happened to be of part-Chinese extraction. But, remarkably, he did not do so by denying his Chineseness. On the contrary, he asserted his loyalty to the Chinese community and served it indefatigably while claiming that it was his duty as an Australian to bring whites and Chinese closer together, to ensure that the Chinese survived in Australia and to make the two countries partners in trade and economic development.<sup>32</sup>

This article, which places Liu at the forefront of an evolving multicultural Australia, characterises him as someone for whom national unity and acceptance of Australians of all backgrounds as part of national identity was the first priority. It sets the tone for

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<sup>29</sup> Letter from Wang Gungwu to Winsome Dong, 21 November 1984, MLMSS 6294/18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Wang Gungwu, “The Life of William Liu: Australian and Chinese Perspectives”, in John Hardy (ed.), Stories of Australian Migration, New South Wales University Press in association with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Kensington, NSW, 1988, p. 111.

subsequent references to Liu's life, such as those in Eric Rolls' *Citizens*, or in Shen Yuanfang's *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes*, and makes him central to Australia's historical development.<sup>33</sup> Rolls and Shen draw upon Wang's interpretation of Liu's life in order to incorporate Liu into their narratives of bridging Australian and Chinese cultures, and Wang is their major source of information about Liu.

### **Liu's writings – the issues**

The motivation for Liu's lifelong attempt to bring about the acceptance of the place of the Chinese Australian community in Australian national identity is an essential part of his writing. For Liu, personal identity was a source of motivation for his work to make the Australian identity more inclusive, and this connection was explicit in his own writings. In the search for the way in which he constructed his own identity, one can question the place of individual memory in Liu's writings and interviews via his personal archives. The Liu archives, which are located at the Mitchell Library, extend from 1907 to 1994 and consist of 18 boxes of letters, reminiscences, photographs, newspaper clippings and other materials, and 4 Chinese character memorial scrolls. The fact that they are so extensive, and were added to for over 10 years after William Liu's death by his son Bo, attests to the importance placed by his children upon making Liu's memories available for public consumption.<sup>34</sup> In this process, "Memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution. Its new vocation is to record; delegating to the archive

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<sup>32</sup> Wang, "The Life of William Liu", p. 117.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Rolls, *Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1996; Shen Yuanfang, *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese-Australian Autobiographies*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, Victoria, 2001.

the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, as a snake sheds its skin.”<sup>35</sup> The Mitchell Library, as one of the places of memory designated by the community, contains these memories, sorted thematically and chronologically, though perhaps not as Liu originally had arranged them, and preserves them, as Pierre Nora writes, as “moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.”<sup>36</sup>

The question of audience and the reception of the message by those multiple audiences is one that inevitably arises in looking at these archives. The audience for Liu’s letters and other writings ranged from Prime Ministers, to the Queen, to suspected illegal Chinese immigrants, to his family, to Chinese Australian friends, to politicians and government bureaucrats both friend and foe, and to the general Australian public. Some writings were also Liu’s reminiscences, not intended for public consumption. Each of these pieces of writing was deeply affected by its intended audience, to the extent that facts were changed. These historical errors were not restricted to his own writings, but occurred in some of the published articles which he had kept. Part of the reason for this was the way that Liu shaped his personal history and performed it in the course of different interviews, as well as in his writings for different audiences. He did not give incorrect facts, but intentionally used language which could be, and was, interpreted in conflicting ways. This is a common finding amongst oral historians, and their theories on the subject can be applied in many cases to the question of autobiography as well, for autobiography has much in common with oral history. Paula Hamilton has argued that

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<sup>34</sup> Bo Liu included his own papers relevant to the William Liu obituaries, memorial book, and scrolls.

<sup>35</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History”, p. 13.

oral history is a form of autobiography, an association which reclaims authority for the storyteller.<sup>37</sup> In William Liu's writings, as well as in interviews such as his 1978 session with Hazel De Berg for the National Library's oral history archives, he clearly retains ownership of his story, and remains vague on particular aspects, and crystal clear on others, depending upon what he chooses to recall and how he wishes to structure his story.<sup>38</sup> In this way, oral history is not merely 'evidence' with an 'informant' to give it, using the terms traditionally associated with oral history work. It is an active exchange, and the presence of the interviewer affects it quite deeply. For this reason, many people would classify oral history as a form of biography, in which two people are, to a greater or lesser degree, implicated, and involved in constructing the evidence.<sup>39</sup> However, as Hamilton argues, it is more appropriate to conceptualise oral history as autobiography, for she feels that it is crucial to give authority in the process to the storyteller. As many of Hamilton's interviewees stated, "I could write a *book* about my experiences", and to a certain extent, they were doing this verbally through the way they constructed their own stories.<sup>40</sup>

This close association between the meanings inscribed in auto/biography and oral history makes it appropriate to make use of some of the theories of oral history to describe the processes at work in William Liu's writings. However, one aspect to consider with using an archive of this type is the advantages it may have over straight oral history, or even straight autobiography. Liu did not sit down to construct his story all at one time, with a unified vision of what he wished to say and a great time lag

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<sup>36</sup> Nora, "Between Memory and History", p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Paula Hamilton, "'Inventing the Self': Oral History as Autobiography", in *Hecate*, No. 16, 1990.

<sup>38</sup> Interview of William Liu by Hazel De Berg, 1978, transcript MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>39</sup> Hamilton, "Inventing the Self", p. 130.

between the events and the retelling. Rather, what the archives provide is an ongoing narrative of Liu's history, at times purposefully vague but at other times detailed, and the detail has little to do with the time lag after the event. In one case, a painful event is fully recalled in print for the first time over 50 years after it has taken place.<sup>41</sup> In all previous retellings of this event, euphemistic language was used and the event was reduced in importance to the extent that one wonders why it was retold so often. This is not solely an oral history, in which interviewees are often said to be reluctant to talk of intimate issues or personal failure. And it is not a written autobiography in which the writer has a sense of his own importance and wishes to convey this in print, leaving out the nasty bits. It is difficult to tell if this archive was purged of more personal detail by either Liu or his family, but enough remains to leave what seems to be a balanced picture of Liu and the people and events which were important to him.

There is, however, one major gap in the archives, and that is the story of Liu's wife, Mabel Quoy, and their family life. The few references which exist in the archives suggest a problematic relationship and a family which separated for periods of time while William Liu was at work on his various projects. One document explicitly discusses the stresses placed on their marriage, suggesting it had become a marriage for show.<sup>42</sup> But the other side of the story is absent in the archives, which raises questions regarding whose stories are considered to be important for public accounts. Firstly, if one assumes Liu received the odd letter from his wife, it seems appropriate to wonder why none

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<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, "Inventing the Self", p. 131.

<sup>41</sup> Liu writes about this, an incident in which he was racially insulted and told Australia would soon be rid of the likes of him, in full detail only in 1963. This will be discussed in greater detail later, as will other themes referred to here. William Liu, "Persona Non Grata I am in my own native land" 13 June 1963, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>42</sup> William Liu, "Form S.A.7, July '61", MLMSS 6294/10.

appear in his papers, when other people such as her cousin, had kept her letters to them.<sup>43</sup> According to what is said in the archives, ‘Mrs. Liu’ is mentioned only at the conclusion of letters to Liu, and her role becomes passive, accommodating William Liu’s hectic political schedule. This story of marital difficulty, however, may never be addressed in any more detail by the immediate family, for family problems are not an area that is often illuminated in oral history interviews, particularly the closer the interviewee is to the person discussed. It could be argued, from reading the Dedication which Bo Liu contributed to the family’s memorial publication entitled *William J. Liu, OBE 1893-1983 – Pathfinder*, a collection of captioned paintings of scenes from his life, that the children, who spent some years living separated from their father, had greater sympathy for their mother’s situation, perhaps justifiably:

My father’s unrelenting endeavours to encourage and inspire friendship, understanding, trading and commercial relationships between Australian and Chinese peoples led my late Mother, Mabel, my sister Winsome, and myself to understand that our normal family life needed to take second place<sup>44</sup>

These issues of family disharmony caused in part by William Liu’s endeavours are important to examine, if only in part, for a fuller understanding of the role of Liu’s wife and family.

### **Social context of memory**

The fact that Liu’s memory was intimately affected by the multiple social contexts with which he was associated makes it particularly important to understand the

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<sup>43</sup> See letters from ‘Yooty’ to ‘Lum’ in Yip family papers, private collection of Allen Yip, mentioned in Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tape Gold Scissors: the story of Sydney’s Chinese*, State Library of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1996, pp. 170-171.



impact of family, the various political associations, and Chinese or Chinese Australian community groupings on William Liu. Maurice Halbwachs has emphasised the social contextualisation of all individual memories, and the way that “individual memory can only be recalled in the social framework within which it is constructed”. Individuals, according to Halbwachs, belong to many social groups, and a collective memory inheres in each. It is therefore important to attempt to understand the way in which Liu moved between these groupings, and related to people in various areas of his life, including his private life. But through the process of collecting these memories to create some sort of general history of his life, they are severed from these original contexts:

Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time. The totality of past events can be put together in a single record only by separating them from the memory of the groups who preserved them and by severing the bonds that held them close to the psychological life of the social milieu where they occurred, while retaining only the group’s chronological and spatial outline of them.<sup>45</sup>

This group factor can be a fruitful way of considering, for example, whether Liu’s memories did change as he became known later in his life as the “father of the Australian Chinese community”, and whether this made his later recollections of community relations more positive.<sup>46</sup>

The issue of the separation of memory and history which Halbwachs discusses here, however, is the subject of much scholarly debate amongst historians, as well as

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<sup>44</sup> Mo Yimei Lone, “William J. Liu, OBE 1893-1983 – Pathfinder”, Pirie Printers Sales Pty. Ltd., Canberra, 1991, dedication.

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, “Historical Memory and Collective Memory”, in *The Collective Memory*, Francis J. Ditter, Jr., and Vida Yazdi Ditter, trans., New York, 1980, p. 84, as quoted in “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, p. 1376.

<sup>46</sup> “‘Uncle Bill’ pioneered path of Australia-China links”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2/5/83, MLMSS 6294/11.

between historians and scholars from other fields such as sociology or anthropology.

Patrick Hutton contextualises Halbwachs writings on collective memory by noting that

In assessing Halbwachs' analysis of the relationship between memory and history, one should keep in mind that he was caught up in the promise of positivist science for early-twentieth-century scholarship. That he should have ignored the interconnections of mnemonic and historical perspectives on the past is perhaps understandable. He wrote at a time when the boundaries around history as a field of scholarly inquiry were still sharply drawn, and he clung to the positivist conception of the historian as an authenticator of documented facts. His main purpose as a historian was to show how unreliable memory is as a guide to the realities of the past.<sup>47</sup>

Hutton argues that because Halbwachs believed that history begins where living memory ends, he never reflected sufficiently on their connections. Halbwachs never looked at history as a kind of official memory, a representation of the past that happens to enjoy the sanction of scholarly authority, hence he failed to recognise the full implications of what he himself had discovered about the history/memory relationship. However, despite Halbwachs circumscribed definition of history which "few historians would today accept", his "profound insight into the nature of tradition now enables them to appreciate collective memory at once as the foundation of historical inquiry and as a province for historical study".<sup>48</sup>

### **Critiques of oral history**

Halbwachs' reservations about the use of memory and oral histories in the discipline of history are shared by some recent historians, and must be addressed before

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, University of Vermont, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1993, p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

the use of undocumented historical evidence can be contemplated. In a 1979 *Quadrant* essay entitled “Oral history: Facts and Fiction”, Patrick O’Farrell attacked the emerging oral history field in Australia, as it derived from the practice of particular overseas historians such as Paul Thompson.<sup>49</sup> At this time, Thompson had only recently published his book entitled *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, which O’Farrell described as both an essay in methodological justification and a practitioner’s manual.<sup>50</sup> O’Farrell’s criticisms illuminate many of the topics of debate amongst historians from the late 1970s on. O’Farrell writes that “it seems a good time to ask some questions about an approach to writing history for which a great deal has been claimed – that it has, above all other approaches, immediacy, humanity, colour, relevance, balance, democracy, reality, greater potential for truth.”<sup>51</sup> O’Farrell focuses upon Thompson’s perceived left-wing bias, and his focus upon the radical implications of oral history:

He [Thompson] says, “A history is required which leads to action: not to confirm but to change the world.” Marx placed understanding the world as a lesser demand to that of changing it, and Thompson is in this tradition. Whether it is a valid historical tradition in the scholarly sense seems highly doubtful. “A history is required...”: patently Thompson is seeking a history to meet his political requirements, and believes one to exist – oral history.<sup>52</sup>

O’Farrell believes that Thompson’s use of history “is disturbing for anyone, socialist or whatever, who has any serious respect for the integrity of history as a scholarly discipline.” But his opposition is not limited to how Thompson is perceived to have corrupted history. Oral history in general is viewed by O’Farrell as lacking many of the rigours of working with traditional sources. He quotes Thompson’s line that “Oral

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<sup>49</sup> Patrick O’Farrell, “Oral History: Facts and Fiction”, *Quadrant*, November 1979, pp. 4-8.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford University Press, 1978.

<sup>51</sup> “Oral History: Facts and Fiction”, p. 4.

historians...may choose precisely whom to interview and what to ask about” and responds that

it follows, whom not to interview and what not to ask about. The oral historian is creatively free to avoid talking to tiresome persons of alien outlook or values, and to neglect questions which are not deemed worthwhile, and, of course, those which do not occur to him. Human enough. This degree of “creativity” is usually not available to historians handling written sources, where professional integrity (and a salutary fear of discovery as being partisan or incompetent) compels them, both to attempt to exhaust the available sources, and to cope with the expression of standpoints other than their own.<sup>53</sup>

O’Farrell goes even further in questioning the need for oral history, saying that “Long may history continue to discover the uncommon man or woman, the extraordinary person, but oral history techniques are by no means the only methods of such discoveries.” This statement goes against the entire justification for oral history, that it records the experiences of people left out of traditional histories, and without it, those experiences would be lost. Despite O’Farrell’s contention that, particularly in Australia, left-wing history has been the norm and oral history is just more of the same, the examples which O’Farrell cites are of working-class white men, and the narrow focus of this history almost demands greater focus upon an oral history which considers the majority of the Australian population left out of that formulation.

While oral history sources cannot be used uncritically in writing history, neither can written sources, whether published or unpublished. Both oral and written sources have their own methodological problems, and have been subject to a process of sifting, sorting out what is considered to be unimportant based on the opinion of the sifter. Written sources can often be quite misleading to use, as is the case with contemporary

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

articles on William Liu. The handful of newspaper articles mentioning him from the 1970s through to 1983 (mainly relating to his Order of the British Empire in 1982 and his death in 1983) contain many factual errors, from different birth dates to basic errors related to his family. It is only through cross-referencing with his own papers and his family that these mistakes can be identified. This can in some cases be related to Liu's intentional vagueness on certain points of his life story, which was misinterpreted by these journalists.

Despite these criticisms of oral history, it provides the important dimension of sound to add to a mental picture. It is surprising how one can visualise a person through reading their papers, even to the extent of imagining a voice, and interesting to see how that mental picture gels with the discovery of pictures, video or audiotape of that person. In the case of Liu, it was clear from other sources that he had a strong Australian accent.<sup>54</sup> His pictures and letters also suggested a sense of humour that extended to wry comments about the White Australia Policy, and friends tell of his quick wit and persistence.<sup>55</sup> Although he was 75 when his National Library interview was taped, and he started off the interview quite hesitantly, this manner of delivery was evident. Liu's personality was such an important part of his influence with politicians and members of the Chinese Australian community that to hear him speak adds to an understanding of how he interacted with people.

### **'Remembering' the experiences of others**

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<sup>54</sup> Trevor Kennedy (ed.), *The Australian Family: a Special Bulletin Project*, Conpress Ltd., Alexandria, 1976 or 1977 (undated, but 'Teachers' College Sydney' library receiving stamp of 1977, and Liu's age in article dates it at either year).

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman, 16 September 2004.

The way in which Liu portrayed his life in the De Berg interview and other writings highlights the fluidity of individual memory for Liu, as it is not only his own life he recalled – he ‘remembered’ events from his parents’ past as well. This is an inextricable part of his individual memory, for the ways in which his parents were discriminated against shaped the course of his life, and determined the issues which were important to him. This social component of individual memory has been written about in terms of the way in which events which are important to the collective memory of groups are often incorporated into individual memories, in order for individuals to make sense of their identity. Yong Chen, in his study of social memory in one Chinese American family, found that individuals from that family remembered more about their ancestor Ah Quin when the stories had more of an impact on them personally. Yong analysed what the knowledge of Ah Quin meant to his descendants and their sense of identity. Focusing on one particular descendant, Tom, Yong wondered whether he could relate to Ah Quin, whether Tom saw similarities between Ah Quin and himself in terms of how they lived and thought, and whether his memory of Ah Quin helped Tom in any way to form an identity as a Chinese American. While Yong found Tom answered in the negative to these questions, he felt this was because Tom did not see himself as sharing Ah Quin’s experiences. However, Yong noted that Tom was interested in exploring his Chinese background in this way, despite his insistence that he did not see himself as Chinese American, but rather as American.<sup>56</sup> Unlike Tom, however, William Liu clearly placed much more value on being bicultural and fitting well into both the Chinese and Australian

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<sup>56</sup> Yong Chen, “Remembering Ah Quin: A Century of Social Memory in a Chinese American Family”, in *Oral History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Winter/Spring 2000, p. 75.

settings. Therefore, Liu incorporated his parents' experience into his personal history, because he felt that there was a continuity between their experiences due to the racism in Australian society which expressed itself through the White Australia Policy.

### **Memory and identity**

The issue of how memory shapes identity is integral to the understanding of how William Liu represented himself in his writings. As David Lowenthal writes, "The past is integral to our sense of identity; the sureness of 'I was' is a necessary component of the sureness of 'I am'. Ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose, and value."<sup>57</sup> At the same time, identity is continually in the process of being reshaped with the reinterpretation of memories, which are rarely integrated into any consistent self-definition: "Rather, we stumble like drunkards over the sprawling canvas of our self-conception, throwing a little paint here, erasing some lines there, never really stopping to obtain a view of the likeness we have produced."<sup>58</sup>

As discussed earlier, individual memories and identity are inextricably linked to the social milieu of the individual, and this connection is often the impetus for the reinterpretation of memories: "To distinguish the individual from the social in any human being's makeup is like trying to pull apart the two sides of a piece of paper."<sup>59</sup> Thus, to ascribe individual agency to someone like William Liu because of the personal

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<sup>57</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, Penguin, 1966, pp. 72-3, as quoted in "The Past is a Foreign Country, p. 199.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The social construction of oral history*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 102.

experiences he and his family had, would be to deny the impact of social policy in Australia on his position. Elizabeth Tonkin describes this relationship:

Doctrines of individualism which give every person a unique but equivalent value and explain actions in personal terms are widely held. But insofar as they ignore the ways in which individuals are social beings, such doctrines are misleading...Individuals are members of classes or groups which have different interests to defend and unequal economic power. These experienced and constitutive features of every individual's identity, including gender and varying with age, since that affects one's changing life experience, will generate what people genuinely wish and feel as personal conviction.<sup>60</sup>

While identity, therefore, is constituted by individual memories, these are grounded in collective memories. William Liu constantly negotiated his personal identity in relation to how he was accepted by others, and this relationship extended out from family to community and nation, both Chinese and Australian. Because Liu saw the foundation to his identity as his belonging in both Chinese and Australian cultures, the impact on him of the White Australia Policy becomes clearer. In order to further explore the influence of Liu's identity, it is useful to analyse a few conceptions of the development of identity, and apply these to Liu's situation.

### **The family and identity development**

The importance of society in the formation of individual identity is a concept which was developed extensively by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, who launched 'identity' as a defining concept for our times in the 1950s.<sup>61</sup> Erikson described identity as a "process 'located' *in the core of the individual* and yet also in the core of *his communal*

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



*culture*".<sup>62</sup> Miriam Dixson writes that "For him, beginning with early childhood, identity is critically fashioned from the way local and national influences (which he contended were always historical) play through the family into the developing personality."<sup>63</sup> This is a connection between national and individual identities which is formed from the top down, and the process was seen by Erikson to work when the national identity was an inclusive and supportive one, which was something to strive for.

Identity, for Erikson and many others writing from the psychoanalytic perspective, was crucially influenced by events in early childhood and particularly the role of the mother, and separation from her. Jacques Lacan's mirror metaphor is particularly useful to show the importance of the subject constructed from the outside. From infancy, he writes, the mirror image "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction", and so identity is shown to not be always already present, but coming into being "from the place of the Other".<sup>64</sup>

The position of the family in the development of one's identity was considered by Frantz Fanon, who argued that identity-formation in relation to the family is fundamentally different for families of the dominant culture versus families of an oppressed culture. Fanon uses the familiar ID-EGO-SUPEREGO identity structure to argue that the relationship of family to society becomes oppositional when the family is of a minority group. He quotes Joachim Marcus' argument that "The [white] family

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<sup>61</sup> Miriam Dixon, *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts and Identity – 1788 to the present*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>62</sup> E.H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*, Faber and Faber, London, 1970, pp. 265-266, as quoted in *The Imaginary Australian*, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *The Imaginary Australian*, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage", in Paul du Gay, et. al., *Identity: a reader*, Sage Publications, London, 2000, p. 45.

structure is internalized in the superego, and projected into political behavior”, to make the point that

The white family is the agent of a certain system. The society is indeed the sum of all the families in it. The family is an institution that prefigures a broader institution: the social or the national group. Both turn on the same axes. The white family is the workshop in which one is shaped and trained for life in society.<sup>65</sup>

However, Fanon argues that the Negro family in France (or, one could read, the Chinese family in Australia particularly early last century) will feel different from others, for it will not have the connection with the national, European, structure. A member of this family will therefore have to choose between his family and European society: “...in other words, the individual who *climbs up* into society – white and civilised – tends to reject his family – black and savage – on the plane of imagination...”<sup>66</sup> In this case the schema becomes FAMILY-INDIVIDUAL-SOCIETY and the family structure is cast back into the id. This structure is useful to consider the place of minority families in a culture which defines itself in opposition to those families, as was the situation with the Chinese in Sydney. However, William Liu made a point of avoiding this oppositional idea in his own life, for he could not reject part of his own family. As Wang Gungwu writes, “Although there were opportunities for him to become the ubiquitous overseas Chinese or something like the universal Eurasian eternally seeking acceptance in a

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<sup>65</sup> Joachim Marcus, ‘Structure familiale et comportements politiques: l’authorite dans la famille et dans l’Etat’, *Revue Francaise de Psychoanalyse*, April-June 1949, quoted in Frantz Fanon, “The negro and psychopathology”, in *Identity: a reader*, Sage Publications, London, 2000, pp. 204-205; Fanon, “The negro and psychopathology”, pp. 204-205.

<sup>66</sup> Fanon, “The negro and psychopathology”, p. 205.

Western world, he was content to stay both Chinese and Australian” and found comfort in the fact that he could do this in Australia.<sup>67</sup>

The importance of Liu’s family background in his personal identity will be discussed at length in the following chapter, but it is important to point out here that the role of his mother in her absence was a profound one in his life work. Her rejection by her English parents due to her marriage to a Chinese man led to an early life of hardship for William Liu and his sister and brother, and her loss of sanity as a result of this rejection and possibly post-natal depression, left William Liu with an emotional reminder of the negative impact of White Australia on many people’s lives. Liu’s attempts to improve relations between the Chinese and Australian communities were at times explicitly framed as a response to this rejection, and it highlights the importance of family influence upon identity.

## **Religion**

The family in Liu’s case was also a source of cultural tools which he drew upon in his later work, and Liu explicitly acknowledged this in his writings. In the case of his mother, who influenced him in many ways as mentioned above, the transmission of Christian religious values was something which Liu valued highly, and which served as the basis for much of his writing.<sup>68</sup> Liu also, interestingly, combined his religious education in Sydney with what he learned in China, with the figures of the Virgin Mary and the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, “Kwun Yum”, figuring prominently, to produce a

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<sup>67</sup> “The Life of William Liu”, pp. 123-124.

<sup>68</sup> See for example letter from Liu to editor of Sydney Morning Herald, 23 January 1961, MLMSS 6294/10.

hybrid religion in which he emphasised treating others with kindness.<sup>69</sup> In the case of Liu's father, Liu wrote that his father sending him to China for a Chinese village education was the best thing he could have done for him, in that it gave him cultural knowledge which he put to use in his work:

I come to know so much about the White Australia Policy and I realise why my father had sent my brother and myself back in order to acquire a knowledge of the Chinese language, to come back, you see, and be more useful, as I feel that he thought. [Also, as I imagine, to benefit us by a Chinese upbringing under the care of his village relatives, and, of course, in easing himself out of that responsibility].<sup>70</sup>

These tools which his parents passed on to him gave him the cultural capital to move easily between China and the Chinese Australian community, and white Australia. Bourdieu's concept is useful in understanding Liu's particular ability to negotiate and be accepted in different cultures, as cultural capital represents "the sum of valued knowledge, styles, social and physical (bodily) characteristics and practical behavioural dispositions within a given field".<sup>71</sup> Liu was able to draw on the different aspects of his upbringing to relate more easily to people, which was very useful for him politically. When he needed to relate to someone or persuade someone, he drew upon his cultural knowledge to establish a link. An example of this is his 1958 letter on behalf of Mr. Sze Chung-Hwa, who was threatened with deportation by the Commonwealth Migration Officer, Mr. B.C. Wall. In the opening of the letter, Liu connects Sze's plight with the

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<sup>69</sup> "From Manchu to Mao: The Life Story of 'Uncle Bill' Liu", *The Asian*, November 1977, p. 9, MLMSS 6294/11; De Berg interview transcript, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>70</sup> De Berg interview transcript, MLMSS 6294/3. The sentence in brackets appears in the transcript but not in the interview tape.

<sup>71</sup> Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW, 1998, p. 53.

‘comforting’ message of Christianity, which he appears to use as a way to relate to the Minister for External Affairs, R.J. Casey:

Mr. Sze came to my home to see me about his troubles last Friday, Good Friday it was, whilst my family, friends and myself were gathered to see and hear the 2.30 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. Channel 2 T.V. programme “Royalty Meets the People” and “Behold the Man”, events leading to Christ’s Crucifixion. A play by Westminster Players, London.

I mention this because of the significance of the time of Mr. Sze’s arrival at my home, just at the point of the earthquake tremor and disappearance of Christ’s body from the hillside lock-up and He became the living Christ again, which Mr. Sze witnessed. Later over our afternoon tea, I temporarily managed to comfort him with the moral of that Event and hope with the promise that I would follow up the matter for him, which I am now doing.<sup>72</sup>

### **The proper name**

Another part of Liu’s movement across cultures involved the most basic signifier of identity, his name. Bourdieu writes that the social world has available all sorts of institutions of integration and unification of the self, with the most evident of these being the proper name. This, which Bourdieu accepts as being assigned by baptismal rights, institutes “a constant and durable social identity...which guarantees the identity of the biological individual in all possible fields where he appears as *agent*, that is in all his possible life histories.”<sup>73</sup> It is the means for connecting the different phases of one’s life to understand them in a form like biography:

The proper name is the visible affirmation of the identity of its bearer across time and social space, the basis of the unity of one’s successive manifestations, and of the socially accepted possibilities of integrating these manifestations in official records, curriculum vitae, *cursus honorum*,

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<sup>72</sup> Letter from Liu to the Hon. R.J. Casey, M.H.R. (Liberal) Minister for External Affairs, 11 April 1958, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>73</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The biographical illusion”, in Paul du Gay, et. al. (eds.), *Identity: a reader*, Sage Publications, London, 2000, p. 299.

police record, obituary, or biography, which constitute life as a finite sum through the verdict given in a temporary or final reckoning.<sup>74</sup>

Bourdieu notes the ridiculous task of trying to understand a life in a unified way when the only constant is that of a proper name:

Trying to understand a life as a unique and self-sufficient series of successive events (sufficient unto itself), and without ties other than the association to a ‘subject’ whose constancy is probably just that of a proper name, is nearly as absurd as trying to make sense out of a subway route without taking into account the network structure, that is the matrix of objective relations between the different stations.<sup>75</sup>

But in many cases, one does not even have the constancy of a proper name to unify the various aspects of a life. The different names which come into play with someone like William Liu, as with many Chinese Australians, designate the different parts of his identity which come to the fore in particular situations, and serve to highlight Bourdieu’s point that the proper name can only produce an artificial unity in a person’s identity. To William Liu’s friends in the Chinese community in Melbourne, he was Kwong Fook, his Tai San village name which meant ‘Bright and Happy’. At a prayer meeting in 1913 which Liu was called upon to speak at, this was the name that a kinsman called out to him, rather than his Christian name by which he had been formally introduced to the group.<sup>76</sup> Liu’s name was actually still legally Lumb at that point, as his father’s last name was identified incorrectly as his first by the Australian immigration authorities. This type of common mistake led to many Chinese Australians going by two different names throughout their lives, which signified the different social milieu they moved in – and made it rather difficult to ‘integrate their successive manifestations’ in

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<sup>74</sup> “The biographical illusion”, p. 300.

<sup>75</sup> “The biographical illusion”, p. 302.

public records. But to professional acquaintances that Liu was particularly close to, he was ‘Billy’, and Liu actively sought this level of familiarity with a wide range of people, including Arthur Calwell and other politicians.<sup>77</sup> In the case of Calwell, the use of alternative names extended to Liu inventing a nickname for Calwell from at least 1963, ‘How Pung Yo’, or good friend. Personal letters from Liu to Calwell were thus addressed to Mr. How Pung Yo Calwell.<sup>78</sup> This invented an identity for Calwell which diverges from his public identity, and suggests the acceptance by Calwell of a level of familiarity and friendliness with the Chinese Australian community. Tracing the use of different names to signify varying levels of relationships can assist in an understanding of Liu’s social identities, or the way in which people perceived him and his involvement in different projects. At times, Liu was considered a valuable source of village knowledge, a nuisance, politically naïve, the ‘father’ of the Chinese Australian community, the “Don Bradman of Australia-China relations”, and a political threat mentioned in Parliament. I will examine the issues surrounding these multiple identities more fully in the course of the following chapters.

## **The Other**

Many theorists on identity view the formative experience of identity construction to be the point when rejection occurs, for they see identity formed by its constitution in relation to what it is not, or an ‘other’. This fundamental opposition was extensively documented by Edward Said, in the context of the ‘Orientalist’ tradition of study of the

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<sup>76</sup> De Berg interview transcript, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>77</sup> De Berg interview transcript, MLMSS 6294/3.

Middle East by Europeans. Said wrote that “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’.”<sup>79</sup> ‘The Orient’ was thus not only examined but produced through its relation to the West, and this production caused European culture to “gain in strength and identity” by setting itself off against its surrogate self.<sup>80</sup> This dynamic led to the emergence of an Oriental world out of a sovereign Western consciousness “first, according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.”<sup>81</sup> This production of otherness carries many advantages for the dominant culture, as it inscribes its political strength while denying the other a political voice.

In the Australian setting, the Chinese have been used as the political and cultural other to the construction of the Australian nation, with the commonly-held view of politicians, particularly at the time of Federation, being that the Chinese were incapable of participating in the political and social life of the Australian nation as they were seen as the inversion of what was acceptable. In Sir Henry Parkes’ terms, by definition, Chinese were incapable of living up to the standards of the ‘British type’: “I contend that if this young nation is to maintain the fabric of its liberties unassailed and unimpaired, it cannot admit into its population any element that of necessity must be of an inferior nature and character.” Because of this essential opposition of Chinese to Australian society, they were to be denied the opportunity to alter this equation:

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<sup>78</sup> See for example letter from Liu to Calwell, 29 July 1963, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>79</sup> Edward W. Said, Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria, 1995, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Said, Orientalism, p. 3.



In other words, I have maintained at all times that we should not encourage or admit amongst us any class of persons whatever whom we are not prepared to advance to all our franchises, to all our privileges as citizens, and all our social rights, including the right of marriage. I maintain that no class of persons should be admitted here, so far as we can reasonably exclude them, who cannot come amongst us, take up all our rights, perform on a ground of equality all our duties, and share in our august and lofty work of founding a free nation.<sup>82</sup>

Parkes defined the Chinese as incapable of participation because of their racial inferiority, for their race was seen to be a signifier of behavioural traits inferior to those of people of British background.

The construction of identity based upon the ‘self’/‘other’ dynamic has been an important part of psychoanalytic writings on identity, as defined by Erik Erikson. Writing in his *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erikson argued that “...each *positive* identity is also defined by *negative images*...and we must now discuss the unpleasant fact that our God-given identities often live off the degradation of others.”<sup>83</sup> Erikson’s concept of a ‘negative identity’ meant that negatively-defined identity groups internalised the criticisms of others:

The human being, in fact, is warned *not* to become what he often had no intention of becoming so that he can learn to anticipate what he must avoid. Thus the positive identity, far from being a static constellation of traits or roles, is always in conflict with that past which is to be lived down and with that potential future which is to be prevented. The individual belonging to an oppressed and exploited minority, which is aware of the dominant cultural ideals but prevented from emulating them, is apt to fuse the negative images held up to him by the dominant majority with the negative identity cultivated in his own group.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Sir Henry Parkes, “Parkes’ Speech on the Influx of Chinese Restriction Bill”, New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, 16 May 1988, pp. 4781-7, quoted in *Attitudes to Non-European Immigration*, p. 94.

<sup>83</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Faber & Faber, London, 1968, p. 299.

<sup>84</sup> Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 303.

This means of identity formation constructed through difference, however, is “inherently unstable, divided and haunted by the liminal presence of those ‘Others’ from whom they seek to distinguish themselves”, as Stuart Hall has argued.<sup>85</sup> Hall writes that

...identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation...<sup>86</sup>

The way in which Hall argues that identities are constructed necessitates an analysis which focuses upon their production “in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies”.<sup>87</sup> Ultimately, identities cannot be understood in any other way, for they are formed through, not outside of, difference. The importance of the concept of the Other becomes central, as Hall writes:

This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed.<sup>88</sup>

The impact of this view of identity formation upon the politics of cultural identity leads to an emphasis on fluidity. Hall argues that the idea of otherness as an inner compulsion means that cultural identity is not some fixed essence, lying unchanged outside history and culture:

It is *something* – not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories – and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past

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<sup>85</sup> Peter Redman, introduction, in *Identity: a reader*, p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> Stuart Hall, “Who needs ‘identity’?”, in Paul Du Gay, et. al., *Identity: a reader*, Sage Publications, London, 2000, p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification... which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence, but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'.<sup>89</sup>

### **Identity under erasure**

However, this deconstruction of the idea of 'identity as essence' has not resulted in the creation of other useful descriptive concepts to supplant this inadequate one, but has merely placed it 'under erasure' as it is no longer serviceable in its 'originary' and unreconstructed form. As Hall writes, since it has not been superseded dialectically, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with it – albeit now in its detotalized or deconstructed form, and no longer operating within the paradigm in which it was originally generated.<sup>90</sup> He quotes Jacques Derrida's description of this approach as thinking at the limit, a kind of double writing:

By means of this double, and precisely stratified, dislodged and dislodging writing, we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new "concept", a concept that can no longer be and never could be, included in the previous regime.<sup>91</sup>

Hall goes on to state that "Identity is such a concept – operating 'under erasure' in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old

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<sup>89</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1990, p. 226.

<sup>90</sup> Hall, "Who needs 'identity'", p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> Hall, "Who needs 'identity'", p. 16.

way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all.”<sup>92</sup> Derrida conceived the term ‘*differance*’ to describe the linguistic elements in the meaning of identity. This concept “foregrounds both the centrality of difference to meaning production and the endless slippage or ‘deferral’ of meaning in language”.<sup>93</sup> The term therefore explicitly focuses upon what many theorists see as the primary elements of identity, while emphasising its inherent instability.

It is this instability that continually undermines the colonial gaze, and the attempt to produce identity as a function of definition in relation to an Other. Homi Bhabha uses examples of poetic descriptions of invisibility to dramatise his argument concerning the “impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision.”<sup>94</sup> The ‘Invisible-Ness’ of the migrant turns the colonial gaze back on itself, disrupting the certainties of identity, and dramatising the absence of the subject from language:

Just as the stereotypes of colonial representation do not provide the migrant with a secure position from which she or he can speak of a ‘self’, so there is no authentic position rooted in black experience, just more representations. However, Bhabha argues that this ‘absence’ also serves to undermine the colonial gaze. The impossibility of ever ‘seeing’ this ‘invisible’ or ‘absent’ object of the colonial gaze (a black subject fully present in language) constantly thwarts the attempt to fix a ‘white’ identity in terms of its difference from a black Other.<sup>95</sup>

This cycle which leads back to the undermining of white identity has led in Australia to endless discussions of Australian identity, ever since the end of the White

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Rutherford, *Identity*, introduction, p. 12.

<sup>94</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative”, in *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 46.

Australia Policy. The racial certainties that were a part of the White Australia Policy and the colonial period in general allowed a national identity which was clearer because the idea of an ‘other’ was clearer. What made Australia different was that it was not all of the things that Australians thought a country like China was, and the Policy served to strengthen this othering. This way of structuring Australia’s identity was a primary focus of William Liu’s political action, and it was brought into question by his very presence and view of his own identity as well as by his work.

Liu’s idea of himself was very different to the way in which other Australians of various backgrounds viewed him. For Liu, his Chineseness was an essential part of his Australian identity, and he believed that the ideas of the two cultures worked well together, and were not in opposition as many others believed. He believed he was equally Australian and Chinese, and wanted to feel acceptance in both countries, which was a goal that many of his friends of Chinese background had abandoned because of their rejection by the Australian community. Although Liu may have seemed “the epitome of an assimilated Chinese”<sup>96</sup>, he worked hard to promote the distinct culture of the Chinese Australian community in the assimilation period. Liu celebrated when ‘multiculturalism’ was instituted by the Whitlam government, as this policy more accurately reflected Liu’s views, but he did not always fit into this structure, which in many instances treated the Chinese community as if a small representative group could speak for the whole. Liu, ex-Kuomintang, rather pro-Communist, Christian Buddhist and bicultural, represented many ideas.

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<sup>95</sup> Rutherford, *Identity*, introduction, pp. 12-13.

<sup>96</sup> “The Life of William Liu”, p. 112.

## Hybridity and creolisation

The concept of hybridity in identity is an important one to consider in relation to William Liu, and the ways in which the national cultural identity was structured in Australia in the twentieth century. Hybridity was a nineteenth century scientific term which, like Darwin's idea of survival of the fittest, soon began to be used by some cultural commentators to describe the inevitable domination of the white race over 'inferior' races. It was thought that any mixing of the races would produce a hybrid person who would then be infertile, as the races were considered to actually be of distinct species, like the horse and the mule.<sup>97</sup> Hybrid, then, was a perjorative term, but it has been reclaimed by identity theorists of the twentieth century – while “in the nineteenth century it was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe a cultural one.”<sup>98</sup> Robert Young identifies a range of possible positions in the historical discussion of hybridity, which can briefly be summarised as

1. the polygenist *species* argument – different races cannot mix for any product would be infertile
2. the *amalgamation* thesis – the claim that all humans can interbreed prolifically and in an unlimited way, sometimes accompanied by the 'melting-pot' idea that the mixing of peoples produces a new mixed race with merged but distinct moral and physical characteristics
3. the *decomposition* thesis – an admission that some 'amalgamation between people may take place, but that any mixed breeds either die out quickly or revert to one or other of the permanent parent 'types'

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<sup>97</sup> Robert Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> Young, Colonial Desire, p. 6.

4. the argument that hybridity varies between ‘proximate’ and ‘distant’ species – unions between allied races are fertile, those between distant either are infertile or tend to degeneration
5. the negative version of the amalgamation thesis, namely the idea that miscegenation produces a mongrel group that makes up a ‘raceless chaos’, merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate and degraded, threatening to subvert the vigour and virtue of the pure races with which they come into contact<sup>99</sup>

The positive reclaiming of the concept of hybridity has also taken on the pseudo-scientific character of its nineteenth-century predecessor, but the term is used to attempt to describe a cultural phenomenon in which fusion goes beyond the idea of multiculturalism. Stephen FitzGerald, although he did not use the term ‘hybrid’, wrote in 1997 of a future Australian utopia which closely resembled the amalgamation thesis – a “honey-coloured society” which would result from immigration and intermarriage, and be a new blend of European and Asian, no longer one or the other.<sup>100</sup> Young and Bhabha cite Mikhail Bakhtin’s writings on the subject of hybridity, to look at linguistic hybridity and the dialogical situation of colonialism. Hybridity delineates the way in which language, even within a single sentence, can be double-voiced:

What is a hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.<sup>101</sup>

Hybridity in Bakhtin’s argument can be intentional, with each voice in the double-voiced, hybrid discourse unmasking the other; or it can be unintentional, as in the

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<sup>99</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 18.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen FitzGerald, *Is Australia an Asian Country?*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 1997, pp. 71, 138, 179.

<sup>101</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist (ed.), University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, p. 358.

case of the slow evolution of languages, “by means of a mixing of various ‘languages’ co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language, a single branch, a single group of different branches, in the historical as well as paleontological past of languages.” This unintentional, organic hybridisation may not make “use of conscious contrasts and oppositions”, but it can have a culturally productive effect:

...such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new ‘internal forms’ for perceiving the world in words.<sup>102</sup>

Young here introduces the term ‘creolization’ to describe this imperceptible process in which two or more cultures merge into a new mode.<sup>103</sup> As Jon Stratton argues, the use of the term creole is a means of distancing oneself from the elements of the term hybridity which imply an ultimate separation of the hybrid into its constituent elements. Stratton writes that the idea that cultures may integrate but will ultimately separate is one of the negative images of Australian culture produced through the policy of multiculturalism, and creole has more of a connotation of permanence.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, the term hybridity has been reclaimed, and described as undermining the discourse of colonial authority. The idea that hybridity could be a threat to colonial power, which echoes Young’s last description of hybridity as leading to subversion, is Bhabha’s motif – an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power:

For Bhabha, hybridity becomes the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling the critic to trace

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<sup>102</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 360.

<sup>103</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 21.

<sup>104</sup> Jon Stratton, *Race Daze: Australia in identity crisis*, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW, 1998, pp. 15-16.



complex movements of disarming alterity in the colonial text.<sup>105</sup>

Bhabha defines hybridity as “a problematic of colonial representation...that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority”. He argues that colonial power thus is productive of hybridity, as the single voice of colonial authority undermines the operation of colonial power by inscribing and disclosing the trace of the other so that it reveals itself as double-voiced. Bhabha extends his notion of hybridity through his concept of the ‘Third Space’, which intervenes to effect

the ‘hybrid’ moment of political change. Here the transformational value of change lies in the re-articulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides* which contests the terms and territories of both.<sup>106</sup>

Hybridity here becomes the form of cultural difference, unsettling the dominant cultural norms and calling into question any divisive politics based on an ‘us’ and ‘them’, or ‘mainstream’ and ‘ethnic’, categorisation. Writers such as Bhabha and Hall, among others, note the way in which minorities in some countries have found a shared identity in their experience of diaspora, and have used commonality for political organisation – an example of this being the way the term ‘Black’ is used in Britain.<sup>107</sup> Use of the term in Britain carries a very different connotation to the United States – while in the US, black refers solely to Afro-Americans and has become an accepted term for their specific cultural experience, in Britain, it refers to a variety of non-white communities, from Afro-

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<sup>105</sup> Young, Colonial Desire, p. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p. 13.

Caribbean to East and South Asian.<sup>108</sup> Hall's conception of hybridity differs from Bhabha's though, in that it is productive of new forms, like creolisation, rather than a permanent revolution, as in Bhabha's description: "Hybridization as creolization involves fusion, the creation of a new form, which can then be set against the old form, of which it is partly made up."<sup>109</sup>

The use of the term 'hybrid' acknowledges a continuity between the 'racial' use of the term in the nineteenth century and its 'cultural' use in the twentieth century. As Young asserts, "the racial was always cultural", and "the interval that we assert between ourselves and the past may be much less than we assume".<sup>110</sup> The chaotic elements of hybridity have always been avoided in official constructions of Australian identity, from Anglo-conformity and assimilation to integration and multiculturalism, which were all premised upon the idea of an Anglo or Anglo-Celtic core culture. This was the reason that William Liu was threatening to many of those with whom he corresponded or spoke. Liu wrote from the perspective of a hybrid identity, and so he did not feel excluded from or threatened by institutions such as the Australian government, as did some of his friends who identified primarily as Chinese rather than Chinese Australian. His identity in this respect was an asset which meant he was sought after to represent the Chinese community to the Australian government.

## **Conclusion – identity and writings**

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<sup>107</sup> Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha", in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1990, pp. 220-221; "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", p. 223.

<sup>108</sup> In both countries, though, the term 'black' has been reclaimed from its previous status as a derogatory term.

<sup>109</sup> Young, Colonial Desire, p. 25.

Liu considered that he held what has been termed by Pierre Bourdieu as ‘symbolic capital’, which gave him a sense of national belonging in the Australian (and the Chinese) context, and a right to speak on issues of government policy. This symbolic capital was the result of his accumulation of cultural capital, and importantly, that which was valued in each national field – for example, looks, accent, demeanour, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour.<sup>111</sup> Of course, the Chinese aspect of his identity was not a nationally valued characteristic in Australia, but his other attributes gave him the ability to speak to those defenders of White Australia with a level of legitimacy bestowed on his representations by them. Liu felt a sense of ‘governmental belonging’, or a belief that he had the right to contribute a legitimate opinion with regard to the internal and external politics of the nation.<sup>112</sup> This influenced his writings to government bureaucrats on Australia-China relations and the White Australia Policy in a way in which his friends were not influenced.

The manner in which Liu remembered and incorporated his personal history and the elements of his identity into his arguments for a different Australia is one of the unique elements of his writings. The way in which this reflection changed over the course of his decades of political involvement underscores the point that a study of Liu’s writings can be organised chronologically without sacrificing the logic of a thematic construction, for his ideas always reflected new social currents. The impact of World War II and the Asian refugee crisis, the current of Communist thought and the reconstruction of China, the civil rights movement and Aboriginal Australian rights –

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<sup>110</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 28.

<sup>111</sup> Hage, *White Nation*, p. 53.

these were all as important to Liu in many ways as the influence of his family history, and his writings reflected this. Liu was quick to embrace new movements which he saw as benefiting China and Australia, and he often made an effort to contact major figures in those movements, to offer his support. This element of creating networks in support of goals such as ending the White Australia Policy is a very important part of Liu's story.

### **Upcoming chapters**

The structure of this study of William Liu will closely reflect his ideas and the major historical influences in his life, and will span the period from 1893 through ninety years spent mainly in Sydney, ending in 1983, the year before the beginning of the attack on multiculturalism launched by the historian Geoffrey Blainey. The memorialisation of Liu in the post-Blainey "immigration debate" period will then be considered. The study will also reflect the changes in protest against racially discriminatory immigration policies in Australia, as Liu moved from a period in which his was an almost isolated critique to one in which he was able to embrace the ever-widening group of people opposed to the White Australia Policy. This process has not been fully examined, perhaps due to the fact that the protest often appeared to have little impact upon policy. But the way in which Liu and other protestors expressed their view of what Australia should be and how the White Australia Policy affected this vision sheds a great deal of light on these periods in Australian history. The structure of this thesis around Liu's life, beginning with a period in which the White Australia Policy was widely accepted, and

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<sup>112</sup> Hage, White Nation, p. 46.

ending in a period in which multiculturalism was entrenched as official policy, emphasises the cultural shift which was brought about by decades of protest against the Anglo-conformist model of Australian identity.

Chapter Two will cover the period primarily from 1893-1914, with some discussion of the racial ideas concerning Chinese in Australia stemming from the Gold Rush, and the history of the push for a racially restrictive immigration policy. Liu's family difficulties, and his upbringing in China and Australia, will be analysed in this context, as will his early political influences. The importance of his work at the Chinese Consulate in Melbourne and his close relationships with prominent political figures are analysed here.

Chapter Three, covering the period 1914-1932, will look at Liu's private-sector employment with influential Chinese-Australian community figures, and his clashes with the Australian government in the failed China Australian Steamship Line scheme. The deep impact of Japan's invasion of China on Liu, and his decision to remain in Australia rather than follow his friends' advice to give up on changing it, will be considered.

Chapter Four, 1932-1945, will discuss Liu's work during World War II in support of China, and the impact of World War II on the general public's attitudes towards Chinese Australians, and on the attitudes of groups working for immigration reform. The allied status of China and other 'non-European' countries, and the service in the Australian forces of many non-Europeans (including Liu's son) were crucial to Australia, and Liu and others considered that they were deserving of more than being rewarded with racism. But to many others, World War II highlighted the importance of the White Australia Policy to Australia's identity and national survival.

Chapter Five will cover the period 1945-1949, and the turmoil in Australia caused by the deportation of large numbers of non-Europeans, while the large-scale postwar European migration scheme was beginning. A split between Labour and Liberal parties opens regarding the Policy, although almost all politicians profess to support it as the cornerstone of Australian society. The attitudes of the public seemed to retreat into an isolationist stance when confronted with the idea of altering the White Australia Policy, but the inhumane nature of the deportations, especially of those with family in Australia, led attitudes to change somewhat, and may have contributed in some way to the downfall of the Labour government.

Chapter Six will look at the period 1949-1958, and the contradictions which the fear of Communism brought into the debate over the White Australia Policy – as, for example, the DLP and Communist Party both supported changes in the Policy whilst remaining fierce political rivals. The Policy remained intact despite the Menzies government's publicising of their 'humane' approach, and university students began to protest against the policy, influenced by their interactions with Asian students entering Australia under the Colombo Plan. This chapter concludes in 1958, the year of the symbolic abandonment of the dictation test.

Chapter Seven, 1958-1972, will discuss Liu's shift in focus, from 1957, toward the yearly Citizenship Conventions, which excluded participants of Asian or Aboriginal descent. These were seen to be important symbolically for the Chinese Australian community, as they emphasised the exclusion of Chinese people from the Australian identity. The university protests increased, and the universities became involved in another way through participation by academics in the Immigration Reform groups. The

Prasad case was a focus in the early 60s, with Aboriginal activist Charlie Perkins becoming involved in the fight against the White Australia Policy. This shifted the method of protest significantly, widening the base of participants and targeting issues of racial discrimination against multiple minorities, a current of thought which Liu picked up on in his writings. Politically, the Policy was no longer an issue which united parliamentarians, and reference to it was removed from Party platforms. Holt as Prime Minister initiated changes in 1967 to immigration policy which were more favourable to non-Europeans, although he reiterated his support for the White Australia Policy. The 'time of hope' which Donald Horne identified in the post-Menzies, pre-Whitlam period will be discussed.<sup>113</sup>

Chapter Eight will cover what William Liu termed the 'Golden Decade', from 1972-1982, which Liu felt began when Gough Whitlam visited China. The Whitlam period for Liu brought an acceptance of the place of Chinese Australians in Australia's identity, as well as its pioneering history. The final dismantling of the White Australia Policy and the development of multiculturalism are discussed, as well as its institutionalisation in the Fraser years. For Liu this was a period of reflection and gathering together of his own stories for newspaper articles and his own writings. Liu's efforts for the Chinese Australian community and Chinese Australian relations finally began to be acknowledged in a variety of ways. His 1978 interview for the National Library Archives, 1982 O.B.E. and other accolades were evidence of the recognition of his role in preserving the continuity of the Chinese Australian community, and making

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<sup>113</sup> Donald Horne, A Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1980.

sure his community was valued as an integral part of Australia's identity, rather than an 'unassimilable' group in opposition to it.

The concluding Chapter Nine will discuss the intersections between William Liu's writings and his sense of identity, as well as the position of the Chinese Australian community in 1983 and the changes which took place the following year with the Blainey debates. It will consider the way in which Liu's place in Chinese Australian history was and is 'imagined', and how Liu's impact on Australia can be considered. Liu often related aspects of Chinese ways of thinking to those on Australia, and where they varied, argued that both societies could learn from one another, rather than placing a higher value on one country's way of doing things. He was able to bring together both societies in his own identity, which was something which many thought impossible in the days of White Australia. This individual story brings together many strands of the story of the White Australia Policy, and its day-to-day workings, and it sheds light on the conflicts involved in the interaction of community and government, on the issues of immigration and identity.



## **Abstract**

The structure of this study of William Liu will closely reflect his ideas and the major historical influences in his life, and will span the period from 1893 through ninety years spent mainly in Sydney, ending in 1983, the year before the beginning of the attack on multiculturalism launched by the historian Geoffrey Blainey. The memorialisation of Liu in the post-Blainey “immigration debate” period will then be considered. The study will also reflect the changes in protest against racially discriminatory immigration policies in Australia, as Liu moved from a period in which his was an almost isolated critique to one in which he was able to embrace the ever-widening group of people opposed to the ‘White Australia Policy’. This process has not been fully examined, perhaps due to the fact that the protest often appeared to have little impact upon policy. But the way in which Liu and other protestors expressed their view of what Australia should be and how the ‘White Australia Policy’ affected this vision sheds a great deal of light on these periods in Australian history. The structure of this thesis around Liu’s life, beginning with a period in which the ‘White Australia Policy’ was widely accepted, and ending in a period in which multiculturalism was entrenched as official policy, emphasises the cultural shift which was brought about by decades of protest against the Anglo-conformist model of Australian identity.

## *Chapter Two*

*“My history is as chop-suey as you like”*

*1893-1914*

In order to understand why an individual such as William Liu would devote more than seventy of his ninety years to the ending of the White Australia Policy, and write thousands of letters in often fruitless attempts to reach policymakers, politicians, journalists, and other individuals, it is important to first examine what sort of personal motivation Liu had as a result of his early life. Liu's idea of himself was fully bicultural, a person easily able to live in Australia or China, and move fluidly between the two contexts, understanding the cultures, languages and ways of thought fully. This was a unique way of thinking in either country during his lifetime, as most people he met, Chinese or Australian, focused upon his Chinese side as his defining characteristic. It seems that Liu was more easily able to fit into his Chinese village life (despite initial difficulties), and the Chinese community in Australia, than he ever was into non-Chinese background Australian life, and this was very important for him to try to change. Liu, because of his family background, had a primary attachment to Australia, and Sydney in particular, and this was strengthened when he had a family of his own. For the sake of his parents' experience, and the experience of his own children, he wanted Chinese Australians to be accepted as Australians and not be excluded from certain citizenship rights because of their racial background. The impact of his family on this aspect of his identity comes out clearly in his writings.

William Liu was Australian-born, but was also a child migrant to Australia who spoke no English on arrival, and this contradiction formed the basic dual allegiance of his life, and is one of the reasons why he was so concerned to strengthen Australia-China relations. Liu's Cantonese father, Liu Hee Lum (or Lumb), came to Australia from the district of his 1858 birth, Sun-ning, now Taishan, in Kwangtung, now Guangdong,

province, which Liu described as approximately 100 miles southwest of Canton, or Guangzhou.<sup>1</sup> He arrived in the Riverina and camped in the Narrandera area to clear land under contract from the Sam Yick Company.<sup>2</sup> In 1891, according to Liu's notes, the elder Liu married Florence Thomas, an English migrant born in 1869 who had come to Australia with her family at the age of four.<sup>3</sup> They met in the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney, where Florence Thomas was assistant organist.<sup>4</sup> When they married, the Thomas family disowned their daughter for marrying a Chinese man, and "They wouldn't go to the wedding or to my birth or my brother's or my sister's."<sup>5</sup> The reason for this disowning becomes clearer through family interviews, as according to Liu's niece, the date of Liu's parents' marriage was 26 November 1892. William Liu was born on 29 January 1893, barely 2 months later.<sup>6</sup> Interracial marriage was not the only issue for Florence's parents.

The couple had three children, first William in 1893, followed by Charles in 1895, and Pauline in 1897<sup>7</sup>. However, Florence's mental state deteriorated at the time of Pauline's birth, possibly reflecting her social isolation. In Liu's words, she "went mental" after the birth, and was taken to Parramatta Mental Hospital, leaving her three

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<sup>1</sup> Toishan Wang Sui Ling Hong Toon was how Liu wrote the full name of the village, and the area where his father was brought up was Hor Chung Hong Li Toon, a few miles away. "From Manchu to Mao: The Life Story of 'Uncle Bill' Liu", *The Asian*, November 1977, p. 9. The spelling of the district and the village vary slightly in different documents, and the transliteration used in each document is reproduced as it appears in the original. The district will otherwise be referred to in the thesis as Taishan, the pinyin transliteration.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> William Liu, "The Chinese in Australia", 25 August 1957, MLMSS 6294/10; letter from Liu to the Rt. Hon. Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Prime Minister of Britain, 22 June 1964, MLMSS 6294/10; undated printout which contains gravestone inscription for Liu's parents, MLMSS 6294/18. Liu also says in a letter to Arthur Calwell that his mother would have been 100 on the day Calwell was due to fly to Ireland, 8 August 1967 (Letter from Liu to Arthur Calwell, 27 July 1967, MLMSS 6294/3).

<sup>4</sup> "From Manchu to Mao", p. 9, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. One can assume Liu may have meant 'christenings' here.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Marina Mar, Liu's niece, 11 October 2004.

very young children in the hands of their father.<sup>8</sup> In fact, this was most likely a case of postnatal depression, which was not diagnosed at the time. Rather than being assisted to care for her family, Florence Thomas was forcibly removed from her home by two policemen, which William Liu remembered very clearly at the age of six, and sent to the mental hospital, her baby taken away from her.<sup>9</sup>

Florence Thomas lived there for approximately 36 years until her death on May 9, 1936.<sup>10</sup> She was allowed visitors, and was able to go home on some weekends when she was in fit condition, and the Liu extended family have photographs of members of the family with Florence Thomas.<sup>11</sup> This experience is not spoken of in specific terms in most articles about Liu and most of his own statements, and his use of the term “lost” has led to the frequent misinterpretation that she died in childbirth.<sup>12</sup> The result was similar, in that the family was broken up, with Liu and possibly his brother sent to Randwick Boys’ Orphanage temporarily, and Pauline adopted out to friends, the family of Wong Chee, who ran Kwong Sing’s store at Glen Innes.<sup>13</sup>

The effect of his mother’s mental breakdown and subsequent lifelong commitment to an asylum was, for Liu, a catalyst for him to try to improve relations between Australians and Chinese, for this might have meant she would not have been socially ostracised for marrying a Chinese man and might not have had the breakdown.

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<sup>7</sup> Liu, “The Chinese in Australia”; transcript of interview with Hazel De Berg for National Library of Australia Oral History Archives, 1978, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>8</sup> “From Manchu to Mao”, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Marina Mar.

<sup>10</sup> The most detail is contained in a letter from Liu to Arthur Calwell, 27 July 1967, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Liu to Arthur Calwell, 27 July 1967, MLMSS 6294/3; interview with Marina Mar.

<sup>12</sup> This intentional vagueness can be found in his extensive interview in 1978 with Hazel De Berg, MLMSS 6294/3; see for example Eric Rolls, *Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1996, p. 263.

<sup>13</sup> William Liu, “The Color Line”, 21 March 1963. Liu cannot recall if his brother was with him; De Berg transcript, MLMSS 6294/3.

The impact of the loss of his mother on Liu on his subsequent “Sino-Aussie obsession” was important to him, as he confessed in a letter to his friend Arthur Calwell:

It is because of the stupid happenings of the past, and in memory of what my Mum had suffered, I sometimes imagine is the main reason why I'd like to make a contribution to get matters better for my family and people like us that I have managed to keep up my 'battling' for better Sino-Aussie understanding so long.<sup>14</sup>

Liu's time at the orphanage was often frightening, and was another event he chose not to discuss in his extended interview in 1978 for the National Library archives. He recalls in personal writings that he was warned not to try to climb over the fence at the orphanage to escape, and how this incident later affected him:

I was told that boys who climbed over the Sydney Randwick orphanage fence before, were never heard of any more as they were eaten by the black fellows over the sandhills towards the Bay of Botany, where Captain James Cook, the explorer landed in Australia and got the black fellows very angry. The way I was told and adding up my patchy scrappy thoughts together later, the frightening story unfolded itself to me to understand why they the black fellow aborigines would eat me and all the white people they could get ahold of. It was because we took their land from them and so many of their people were killed.<sup>15</sup>

But his father had not abandoned him there, as he “took along lots of Chinese fireworks for that year's Empire day celebrations” when he visited his children at the orphanage, and in fact his father subsequently took him out of the orphanage. The three Liu males lived together for a short time “in a street parallel to Campbell Street, between what is now Wentworth Avenue and Foster Street”, actually, Hunt Street, in the home of

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<sup>14</sup> Letter from Liu to Calwell, 27 July 1967, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>15</sup> Liu, “The Color Line”.

a friend located in an area which was inside the “fenced-in plague area” at the time.<sup>16</sup>

Liu’s father had a hair salon nearby, and William was frequently there:

Grandfather Liu had a hair salon near Wentworth Avenue. Upstairs was a residential (bed and Chinese tea), a place for country people to stay. His salon was for people with pigtailed. They paid how much and with whatever they chose. Uncle Willie maintained that, in between haircuts, his father would have a game of fantan. While he was away, Willie would entertain the clients by playing the gramophone.<sup>17</sup>

Liu’s father was making plans to send his sons, alone, back to his village, via the same company which had sent him to Australia, Sam Yick’s on Connaught Road in Hong Kong. This was where the two boys were delivered before making their way to Taishan. Apparently they were helped on their way by William Liu’s future wife’s father, Yip Tong Quoy or Gilbert Ting Quoy as he was known in Australia by many.<sup>18</sup> They were “smuggled” out of Australia in 1900 wrapped up to resemble corpses, for the Child Welfare Board could not satisfy themselves of conditions in China.

Then returned my memory about being wrapped in a blanket one night and taken away from the plague area to a Chinese store in Goulburn Street, between what is now Hordern’s new parking for cars and George Street where Charlie and I couldn’t have stayed long. From then on from our temporary staying at Billy Ng Hock-shung’s Goulburn street store, brother Charlie and I were shipped off to China, from the west side of Circular Quay that was where the present new Sydney Terminal wharf is now. I well remember waving good-bye to my Father Ah Lum, as he was called...<sup>19</sup>

I remember going down in a big boat from Hong Kong to Kong Mun, a customs port, and from there by flat bottomed boats along the rivers and then into small sampans for the last leg of the journey.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Liu, “The Color Line”; interview with Marina Mar; William Liu, “The Chinese in Australia”, Sydney, 25/8/57, MLMSS 6294/10

<sup>17</sup> Marina Mar, William Liu’s niece, as quoted in Janice Wilton, Hong Yuen: A Country Store and Its People, Immigrants in the Bush, Armidale, 1988, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Marina Mar. This is an incorrect anglicisation of his name, as of course Yip is the last name.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Marina Mar; Liu, “The Color Line”

<sup>20</sup> “From Manchu to Mao”, p. 9.

William and Charlie arrived at Taishan to begin their education as Chinese rural villagers, an education which Liu would later recall helped him to relate to people from this background as well as those from an urban Australian background:

On account of my up-bringing and re-visits to China I have throughout my years felt quite 'at home' in any part of China as I did in any part of the equally wide space of Australia and thoroughly enjoyed my life as a Sino-Aussie in the lands of both my parents and have always been appreciative and grateful to them in having thus made that broader joy for me possible.<sup>21</sup>

Spending a few years in one's ancestral village was not an uncommon pathway for Australian-born Chinese, as Liu's wife and sister also spent part of their childhood in their families' villages, his wife at Doong Gwoon village near Sheh-Loong rail station between Kowloon and Canton, and his sister at her adopted family's village Sheh-kee, Chungsan, where Sun Yat Sen was born, close to Canton.<sup>22</sup> The two boys were placed in the care of village relatives, specifically their "Ah Por" ('grandma'), a senior aunt of Liu's father who was a village elder – "She was like a mother, grandmother...everything". They received an education from her in respect and obedience:

Ah Por taught me to be always alert and ready to help. She was the elder lady of the village. If any family had trouble, they always called her. And she would always take me with her so that I would mix with people and understand things. She had bound feet and sometimes used to lean on me as she toddled along. In sickness and family problems, I got my adult education very early. It took me some time to learn what was being said or done, but my mind was busy absorbing so many interesting situations. Ah Por taught me to be available to help anybody. Mao Tse-tung had the same idea. 'Wei yun fook moo' he called it – 'Serve the People!' I also learned from Ah Por by repeating after her of an evening: 'M ho gong dai wa (It's not good to speak big words – lie), M ho tun sum (don't be greedy), Teng Ah Por wah, teng ah sum wah (always

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<sup>21</sup> William Liu, "The Way I See Things – China and Things Chinese", 1959, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>22</sup> Liu, "The Way I See Things – China and Things Chinese". He also writes the village name as Cheongsam. De Berg transcript, MLMSS 6294/3.



listen to Ah Por). M ho pah jmo wah (Don't take, don't covet).<sup>23</sup>

In addition to this education in Chinese language and ways of doing things, Liu was sent to school in the village. At first when the brothers arrived, other villagers discussed how to deal with them and their white halves:

When I arrived, I could not speak a word of Chinese. It was some months, maybe a year, before I could speak my father's language and chum up with the kids. I can vividly remember the feeling against the Manchus. One day when I was playing with the other village kids, they told me I had been very lucky when I arrived. They said that at that time it was gossiped at the store – that's where you get all the news in a Chinese village – what was to be done with the two Farn Kwai Doi (foreign devils) if war came between the White man and the Chinese. They said that as we were half white, we might turn against them. One young fellow said: Why not put the two brothers in a pig cage and dump them in the pond? That will be the finish of it. Most of them seemed to agree that was the solution until one old man, with a long beard, said: 'Yes, yes, you're right. But what about their Chinese half?' That pulled everyone up with a start. 'No, no, we can't do that!' they all agreed and the subject was dropped.<sup>24</sup>

This was one stage in Liu's acceptance into the village and into the life of the school. Another stage was reached when Liu volunteered in class to sacrifice himself to assist in the overthrow of the Manchu. Dating his memory in reference to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, Liu recalled that in 1904 or 1905, he was in class in the Chinese village, and a schoolmaster was discussing the loss of Hong Kong and the Western powers' treatment of China, and blaming this on the failures of the Manchu who had taken over in 1644:

"China, it was inevitable, she will be carved up like a watermelon, like other lands, Africa, America, South East Asia, and so forth and the first job we have to do is to overthrow the Manchus. Now" (he asked the students), "who would be prepared to make the sacrifice for the overthrow of the Manchu?" I was the first to put my hand up. In so doing I had established myself in the

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<sup>23</sup> "From Manchu to Mao".

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

village. Now, it was a dangerous speech by the teacher, dangerous talk to the students, it was dangerous for us, so those who had put up their hands were asked to stay after class and when we did we were all given secret names. So then, besides being William Liu in Sydney, Kwong-Fook in China, but I had another name before that, when I went to school they gave me a school name, Sook Ming, Uncle Understands, Teacher Understands. Kwong Fook, Bright and Happy, I don't know who gave that name, I don't think Father thought it out himself, I think some friend told him and he gave the brother Kwong-Wing, Bright and Sunshine. So we stayed back after school and we were given these secret names and we were warned how careful we had to be, in what we say, in what we do, so he says, "The time will come, maybe years, before you have an opportunity to do as you people put your hand up, and said would do, it could be the end of you, because that would be warring against the Manchus". Oh yes, after that even another surprising thing happened. Never again did I ever hear anybody there calling me Farn Kwei Doi, Foreign Devil Boy, well I never heard anybody so therefore I was fully accepted into the community like all the others, as if I was China born.<sup>25</sup>

These were both pivotal events in his village life for Liu, which he retold more than once, for they signified what he considered to be his full acceptance into Chinese village life by the rest of the community, and his ability to interact with people from that social milieu with a full background of cultural knowledge. In Liu's memory of his own history, certain themes took on a heightened significance, such as his three near-death experiences in his village. The first was the villagers' discussion about whether to drown him in the pond, the second was his survival through a plague which hit the village, and the third was his accidental near-drowning in the well after disobeying his Ah Por.<sup>26</sup> But Liu's story emphasised his overcoming of these events to become fully accepted in the village, and he later discussed how important his village experience was to him in relating to other Chinese people.

Liu dealt with the changes to his life which the move to China caused by using his previous cultural knowledge to make sense of his new surroundings. This can be seen in

the syncretic manner in which he took on Buddhism and retained different elements of Christian and Buddhist religious teachings, as well as the teachings of Confucius, as guides to his moral life.

Now, before leaving Australia, I don't quite remember whether I could sing God Save the Queen, but I do remember I was able to say my prayers, which I'd very quickly forgotten and my Chinese prayer replaced it.<sup>27</sup>

When I arrived in China my mind was always inquiring and comparing. After a while I forgot my Christian prayers and substituted others to Kwun Yum, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy. I always felt that when I was saying my Chinese prayers, I had the blessing of both the Chinese Goddess of Mercy and the Holy Mary at the same time. 'Na Mo Kwan Sai Yee Poo Thiart; Na Mo Foot; Na Mo Fut, Na Mo Larn; Hoot Yue Yin Ah!'<sup>28</sup>

Another aspect of Liu's education in the village was his time spent living in a female dormitory for girls who were nearly of marriageable age, due to the daughter of his Ah Por, Gim Gou, taking him there. This was an important source of religious and cultural knowledge for him and he considered that most of the girls became his teachers, with the language, Chinese songs, and prayers such as that to the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy being part of the education. Liu slept in the girls' dormitory – although it is unclear how frequently – until about age ten, which was considered highly unorthodox by his friends. He highly valued his experience in terms of increasing his Chinese cultural knowledge:

Now, you just imagine up to ten say, up to ten that's it, up to ten I got that foundation, in religion, and then here were the girls exchanging views... Now, with that background and hearing these girls teaching one another what is expected of them, when they are married, what their in-laws and

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<sup>25</sup> De Berg transcript, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>26</sup> "From Manchu to Mao".

<sup>27</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>28</sup> "From Manchu to Mao".

what a husband and what the relatives expect, they were taught all those things – just imagine me, from the age of ten onwards, getting all that learning. I suppose at the time it was repeated time and again and that is how I came to acquire as much as I did. I must have missed a lot, I'm sure, but what I gathered, my word that was some of my best schooling in my boyhood days.<sup>29</sup>

From 1900 to 1908, and the ages of 7 to 15, William Liu received this varied education.<sup>30</sup> In 1908, he returned to Sydney, with a few months spent in Hong Kong relearning his ABCs.<sup>31</sup> When he returned to Sydney, though, he could not speak English, and he enrolled in 1909 as an over-age pupil at Christchurch St. Lawrence School in Pitt Street.<sup>32</sup> The school had little or no experience in teaching non-English-speaking background students, and at first the headmaster did not know where to place Liu: “Two teachers would not have me in their class and then I saw the master looking through to the infants’ class. I got the shivers. Just then a lady gripped me by the wrist and led me to her class. Her name was Barbara West, the daughter of the proprietor of the Parramatta Times. She took me to her class. I had a desk on the third row.”<sup>33</sup> But his time in this class was not easy:

The girl behind me seemed to resent my being in the class, and each time I had to stretch my leg out she used to stick a pin into my leg and all I could do was jump up and say ‘Miss, Him, Mmm’ give a sign of jabbing. Each time I wrote down the time and in Chinese the word ‘pin’. After the third time I was tempted to throw my books away and get a job in the markets. Then I recalled how I used to dodge school in China, so much so that I was an expert. I had so many excuses for not going to school that I became the kids’ advisor on how to dodge school. That’s how I became popular. I doubt if in my eight years in China I had more than four years schooling. I spent my time growing

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<sup>29</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>30</sup> His brother Charles would remain at the village until 1914. Liu, “The Chinese in Australia”, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>31</sup> William Liu, timeline of his life to 1945, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>32</sup> De Berg transcript. Winsome Dong, Liu’s daughter, recalls Liu recounting the difficulty of learning Chinese and then relearning English after a few short years (Interview with Winsome Dong, 14 October 2004).

<sup>33</sup> “From Manchu to Mao”.

rice and vegetables.<sup>34</sup>

In 1910, Liu went to Wahroonga Boys' College near Hornsby to board, and participated in a variety of school activities, such as athletics, and here as was likely in the other school he was enrolled as 'W.J. Lumb', a common administrative mistake which stemmed from his father's first name being mistaken for his last.<sup>35</sup> In 1911, he continued at the College as a day boy, while spending some nights at a technical college learning a trade, fitting and turning, and mechanical drawing. When the headmaster pointed out that he was over-age to be an apprentice, he changed courses, and attended Stott and Hoare's and Remington Business Colleges at the same time to take up Double Entry Book-keeping, Pitman shorthand, Typewriting, General Office routine, Elementary Commercial Law, and Correspondence, amongst other courses, and received his advanced certificate.<sup>36</sup> However, in 1912, he was forced to leave school and find work due to the death of his father.<sup>37</sup> While Liu's friends encouraged him to continue his studies, he could not now afford to, and he received assistance in finding employment through his renewed contact with the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney:

I was 19 when Reverend Young-wai recommended Mr. Hwang to take me from school in Sydney to his Consulate at Melbourne where I could continue to learn, as my Father passed away in 1912 and I wasn't able to continue my schooling much longer. So instead of taking the job at the Consulate as a care-free job, as youths at that age usually do, I'm afraid that I was already too seriously minded from much teaching I had already received at Rev. Young-Wai's Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney and at his home.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> De Berg transcript; undated notes, MLMSS 6294/18, and interview with Marina Mar.

<sup>36</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>37</sup> "The Chinese in Australia".

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Liu's experience as a young child growing up in both Australia and China gave him a social tool which hardly any Australian Chinese had at that time – being fully bilingual. Most of his compatriots were either fluent speakers of a Chinese dialect, if they had grown up in China, or of English only, if they had grown up in Australia. It was also very difficult to relearn a forgotten language once another was learned. Liu's brother, Charles, never fully re-learned English when he returned from China in 1914, partly because he was 19 when he returned, and partly because as Charles admitted, he was spending the allowance William gave him at the 'pictures' instead of for school lunch.<sup>39</sup> William Liu's dual fluency was very important cultural capital for him, and was a major reason he was recommended for his first job at the Melbourne Chinese Consulate. His dual language abilities led to many people seeking him out from the Chinese community and the Australian government, to help them communicate, and he acted as a bridge in this way before he sought on his own to become one.

While Liu continued studying in the evenings at Melbourne Workingmen's College and the Melbourne Y.M.C.A., he was to receive a political education during his time at the Consulate, from 1912 to 1914. He gained some knowledge of the workings of government in the Melbourne Model Parliamentary Club which he joined at the Y.M.C.A., where he was made a Conservative Member of the Government, and Minister for Home and Territories in charge of new settlers coming to Australia:

That gave me a lot of experience. That is the foundation of my learning so much about the White Australia Policy. I was, I would say a great entertainer, you see, of our fellow members, because at our meetings I could see, you see, they were most interested in searching my mind and my thoughts on that question, and I was bombarded with many questions which would be very hard to answer in the ordinary course, but what they did not know is that one

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<sup>39</sup> William Liu taped interview, dated 1980 (but Liu says he is 89 in the tape which would date it 1982, or 1981 if he is going by his Chinese age), Marina Mar.

of my jobs at the Consulate was anything concerning China, Chinese people or our community here or the White Australia Policy. I had the cuttings of the paper, they were in a scrapbook to bring before the notice of the Consul General Huang. Now all the questions that were fired at me, including such a popular one as that I was ‘opening the flood gates for the Asians to come to Australia’ I always had ready answers. I just repeated what the then Minister had been saying and I would remember and I’d quote him.<sup>40</sup>

Reminiscing about his time in Melbourne, Liu connected his political work there with the intentions of his father when he sent him to China. He saw this period in his life as an important learning experience to prepare him for his advocacy work on behalf of the Chinese community, and his village experience was an intrinsic part of this work:

Now, back to my 1912 to 1914 years in Melbourne, it was very much like I was back in my father’s relatives’ Taisan village, from 1900-1908. There you could say I had led a peasant life, a village peasant’s life, very much as if I was born there. I went there, couldn’t speak English; within months, I suppose a year or so, I began to feel one of them and so much so, and the dialect that I learnt at Taisan was mostly spoken in Melbourne in the Chinese community, so I was in my element, a very very enjoyable two years personally, but officially very sad. I came to know so much about the White Australia Policy and I realised why my father had sent my brother and myself back in order to acquire a knowledge of the Chinese language, to come back, you see, and be more useful, as I feel that he thought. Also, as I imagine, to benefit us by a Chinese upbringing under the care of his village relatives, and, of course, in easing himself out of that responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

At the Consulate, Liu worked to increase his knowledge of the history of the Chinese in Australia, and immigration restriction, so that he could better handle his position. He had access to many documents related to the position of Chinese in Australia, such as the 1907 “Petition relating to the employment of Chinese in Factories, particularly furniture manufacturing”, an original of which appears in his papers.<sup>42</sup> These

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<sup>40</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> MLMSS 6294/10.

gave him a good picture, albeit a depressing one, of the fate of the Chinese community particularly since Federation:

At the Consulate at 48 William Street, Melbourne, I learned a great deal and was able to get a bit of the overall picture of the Chinese position in Australia – the ups-and-downs, the happiness and also the sadness of individual as well as groups of our Chinese people here in Australia and with my village experience in China, I also understood and felt with them their own lot here and their anxieties about their folks back at the village, townships, Canton or Hong Kong where most came from.<sup>43</sup>

Liu's time at the Consulate under Consul-General Hwang was made more difficult by their differing dialects – Liu spoke the Cantonese See-Yup dialect of much of Melbourne's Chinese community, while Hwang spoke Mandarin and was not interested in learning the Cantonese dialect that most in the Australian Chinese community spoke. Liu therefore acted as a translator although he could not speak much Mandarin at all. The two most often communicated in English.<sup>44</sup> This communication difficulty was particularly evident on the occasions when the Consulate organised public meetings with members of the Chinese Australian community.

At the end of 1912, or beginning of 1913, as Liu remembers it, he helped organise a gathering of many of the different Chinese Australian groups, to hear a statement by Hwang “about matters relating to our Chinese position in Australia and our then and future welfare in this country”.<sup>45</sup> This representative meeting was very difficult to achieve for reasons that Liu would subsequently argue also inhibited the collective politicisation of the Chinese Australian community. The many widely differing political orientations of the community participants meant that it was hard for them to agree on a

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<sup>43</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>44</sup> “The Chinese in Australia”.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



common agenda, and Liu believed that this meeting was important as it was one of the few times he saw this done, and so he would “always treasure the happy memory of that gathering”:

At that memorable gathering of so many groups of the community, pro-Manchus, pro-Kuang Yu-wei conservatives, pro-Yuan Shih-kai, pro-Sun Yat-sen and all the pro-French and pro-American republican systems and the pro-British idea with a King instead of an Emperor and all the pro-didn't themselves know what was best and all of which use to be aired in heated arguments in Little Bourke Street, and how all those pro-what-nots, were temporarily put aside when the very important matter concerning their immediate and future interests in Australia were unfolded onto them.<sup>46</sup>

Liu, at the age of around twenty, organised this meeting and held a pivotal role during it, for as he could not easily translate Consul-General Hwang's Mandarin, he held a bit of latitude regarding what he said and attributed to Hwang. This was in many ways his introduction to these more powerful members of the Chinese Australian community, and they subsequently took advantage of the young man in the Consulate who spoke their village dialect. By this time, through his Consulate work, Liu was becoming friendly with Fred J. Quinlan, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Home and Territories. Liu's work on individual immigration cases brought him personally over to the Department quite frequently, and Quinlan was quite sympathetic to Liu's arguments.

He really became my teacher and helped me a great deal, to serve the Chinese Consulate. It must sound strange, doesn't it? I remember the community, members of the community, they found it too much to walk from Little Bourke Street down to 48 William Street, where the Consulate was, the Western Markets, behind the Customs House, and they used to phone me, “Will you come up and have tea with us at the store? I've got something to say, it will save me going down to the Consulate and taking up the Consulate time”, they got me roped, so I would go up and I would hear these stories concerning they want to get this cousin or want to get this son or want to do something, in their interests, and I asked them to write

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

down what they want. They say “you know we cannot write English”, I say, “you haven’t got to write English, you write it in Chinese and that will give me the basis in order to make up a letter”. “Oh no”, he says, “you do the same your Ah Por used to do to the josses in China”, I used to follow the Ah Por, you know, the things she says to the josses, I learnt – you see what was another way of learning – so I would then hear their story and I would write a letter, give something to the Consul General, the Consul General would correct it for me, and as he thought best, and I would take it up to Mr Quinlan and I would lay it before him and I always remember one day Mr. Quinlan says, “Mr Liu, this letter, how much is true, how much isn’t?” “Mr Quinlan”, I said, “I had this written down, what I thought to be the wish of the applicant”. The Consul General had a look at it and we submit it.<sup>47</sup>

Quinlan and Liu remained friends for decades, and their friendship for Liu was proof that not even most government bureaucrats involved in enforcing the White Australia Policy fully supported its racial implications. Quinlan was perhaps the first official Liu befriended who helped him to subvert the regulations to get more Chinese into Australia – a process which was officially described as ‘under his discretionary authority’. Liu described the example of a merchant with big business turnover, who is allowed to have his wife for one year, “and then she’s got to go back, but she’s got a baby and then out of compassion we allow her to stay. The next thing is, but she must go, and she’s got to go away and be away two years, before she can apply to come back again.”<sup>48</sup> These types of situations could be dealt with individually through personal contact and representations:

We well know the White Australia policy is so worded there is no, what will we say, way of overcoming it, it’s all a matter whether you feel, we’ll make some enquiries about this particular person, whether he deserves being helped. If he deserves being helped, you think his business deserves being helped, you get the Minister to have a look at it, I said, “you are the God in this case, it’s up to you, we don’t know, because whatever we write down we can’t comply, this immigration restriction act is so tight”.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Over the years, Liu wrote many letters on behalf of prominent Chinese Australian businessmen and others in order to assist the government bureaucrats such as Quinlan to see the merit of each case. In his files, there are letters on behalf of Chinese signed by businessmen such as Gock Chew, whom Liu worked for at Wing On & Company – these are likely written by Liu.<sup>50</sup> According to Janis Wilton, there were a number of men working as Liu did, as an interpreter and an agent for lobbying and filling in applications for Certificates of Exemption from the Dictation test. This assistance gave these men status and power within their own community and to an extent, within the wider community.<sup>51</sup> It was Liu's frequent visits to Quinlan's office as an advocate which brought him face to face one day with the rejection of his work and his presence in Australia altogether. In many of Liu's letters, and in the few articles and references to him in books, Liu refers to an incident which was important to him in which he was first told that the Chinese community in Australia would soon virtually disappear:

One day at Home and Territories a strange thing happened. I was talking to one of the staff while waiting for Mr. Quinlan and he let the cat out of the bag. He said there would be no more Chinese in Australia by the 1940s because of The Immigration Restriction Act. The old timers were dying, few new Chinese migrants were allowed in, there were very few women and only a handful of children being born. I leaned back and said: "It looks like Australia is going to do the same to us Chinese as it did to the Tasmanian Aborigines."<sup>52</sup>

The interesting thing about this incident is that it may not have happened at all, for in one of his writings he recounts a terrible incident which occurred at around the same time, and had a similar point. The major difference in the two stories was that in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See for example letter from Gock Chew to F.J. Quinlan, 21 April 1931, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>51</sup> Janis Wilton, Golden Threads: The Chinese in Regional New South Wales 1850-1950, New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, 2004, pp. 40-1.

<sup>52</sup> "Manchu to Mao".

the second incident, Liu was so shocked by the vitriol and racism of what was said that he was unable to respond, and this incident affected him deeply. Fifty years after the incident occurred, he recalled it with perfect detail in a piece which is worth reproducing in full, entitled:

Persona Non Grata I am  
In my own native land

13/6/63

Away back one day in 1913 AD, a year after I got my first job as a clerk-interpreter at the Chinese Consulate General, 48 William Street, Melbourne, in an unguarded moment, an office lad about my own age then at the Home and Territories Department at corner of Bourke and Spring Streets told me, as best as I can remember something like – “You chows and chinks, we’ll soon rid Australia of the likes of you so we’ll have a pure, white Australia.”

It took me minutes to recover from the blast as I was then waiting for an interview with the then Assistant Secretary Mr. F.J. Quinlan of the Department as a chore from Consul-General Huang Yung-liang over a matter relating to a case concerning an application for wife and family of a Melbourne Chinese merchant coming to Australia to join him, the sort of approval then so tough to get on account of the laid down policy concerning entry of Asians coming to Australia.

As a 20-year old Sino-Aussie of Anglo-Chinese parents, I had by then acquired a dual outlook and thinking that I could react to most situations as a dinkum Aussie and/or as a peasant Chinese. Living my 1900-1908 boyhood days with my Cantonese Dad’s Taisan village relatives, about a hundred miles south-west of Hong Kong, made that possible. At the...village, we were poor, humble and tolerant and humble people as we were then, somehow, ...to do as most Chinese people then did as become a sort of traditional habit, I learned to bow graciously to the inevitable as poor people usually do, because what else could one do when one is poor?

I was time and again told by my Ah Por, one of my Dad’s senior aunts as I was taught to address as Grandma, as Ah Por means, an illiterate and so wise and kind hearted lady and to whom, all my life I have felt and always retained grateful memories of our having had our eight-years living-together goodness, but so instinctively in flash-like moments, as I was confronted with by that chink-and-chow incident at a Government department, I suppressed my native-born Sydney way to punch the office lad on the nose and let ‘die-away’ as if I hadn’t heard what he said.

Soon the lad saw me again and beckoned me to enter Mr. Quinlan’s office and I was invited to sit down.

“Hey! Mr. Liu, you look pale, are you well?” Mr. Quinlan asked me. Replying, I said, “I was on my way travelling up Bourke Street coming hopefully to see you hoping to obtain approval of Ah Doo’s wife and family coming to Australia soon and got upset whilst waiting my turn to come in to see you” and humbly related the experience with his

office lad and he became sallow-face too, but quickly registered a smile and brightened me up, as he opened Ah Doo's folder of papers before him and told me that he had good news for me and to forget what that rascal office lad said outside. A restless unmindful lad he was, or something like that Mr. Quinlan, then, whoopee! came the good news as he told me his Minister granted approval for the entry of Mrs Ah Doo and children to come to Australia. I became quite well right away as Mr. Quinlan could well see as he himself brightened up too and we parted as friends. I left the Consular service to return to Sydney in 1914 and Quinlan – his friendship continued to the day Mr. Quinlan passed away after World War II.<sup>53</sup>

This incident was particularly offensive to Liu as he had felt that he was at that point fully accepted in China and Australia, and to be rejected by someone who held a government position was a blow to him. It is important to read this description of Liu's motivations in full, for Liu explained his differing response by describing his upbringing. Liu's "dual outlook" which gave him the ability to move between cultures, gave him the choice to respond with violence in the "Sydney way" or to respond as he did, to "bow graciously to the inevitable as poor people usually do", which he wrote was his response because of his boyhood background as a "peasant Chinese". Liu's later public version of the story, which was told in this instance to a Melbourne Chinese newspaper called the *Asian* which had interviewed him in 1977 for a celebratory article, empowered him in the incident, for he "leaned back" and responded immediately rather than taking "minutes to recover" silently. Liu's rewriting of the story also showed his later connection of the racist incident to the cultural destruction being visited on the Chinese community in Australia, similar to that being committed against Aboriginal people, and this was a recurring theme in many of his later writings.

Another recurring theme for Liu was religion, and the way in which he connected it with racial harmony and acting in a Christian way towards other people. This is a

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<sup>53</sup> MLMSS 6294/3.

similar interpretation to that of many churches in Australia in the post-World War II period, when opposing the White Australia Policy. But Liu's interpretation stemmed from his early religious teaching via his mother and the church where his parents met, the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney. The religious teaching he received from the Reverend Young-wai at that church was syncretically combined by Liu with his religious teaching in China, and he took what he wanted from each tradition. The importance of this to Liu was conveyed when he was asked to teach a Bible class in 1913 by the Reverend Sue, which was held in Melbourne in Russell Street, two or three doors from Little Bourke Street, Chinatown. Sue requested Liu's assistance to counteract the dwindling numbers at the class, and Liu responded by compiling a stack of books to assist him to teach as he felt he should: a Compendium of Christian religious teachings, the Four Classics of Confucius, a black book in English and Chinese, and the Bible:

Then my troubles started, I read so much I got so chop suey mixed up and when it came to the day what did I do?...I introduced myself, which many of them already knew, because many came from my father's village and nearby, so it was quite entertaining for them to rehear me, back in my boyhood days in China, and in particular how I came to learn early Chinese and some of the antics of my village life, as a 'farn-kwei doi' (foreign-devil boy). I had them laughing. You know what I have earlier said? That was the opening too of the opening lines prayer to the Goddess of Mercy. Then I also said the opening of the Prayer lines to "Kivan Goeng' another Chinese (Benefactor) God...Besides trying to learn all I could about the White Australia Policy, I was also keen to find out the impact of the Christian Bible had on our Chinese community.<sup>54</sup>

All of these other influences may have increased the numbers of Chinese people attending the meetings, but they did not please the Reverend, who was a purist and did

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<sup>54</sup> De Berg transcript.

not appreciate the blending of these other influences with the teachings of the Bible. Liu soon lost the teaching stint:

After it got so crowded it remained so and I was there for a few more afternoons, he reinvited me back to his home and he said, "Look, you have created a problem for me now". I said. "What's that?" He said, "If this goes on too long and they are all debating the Bible, we are creating doubts and that's not quite what I had looked forward to." I said, "in that case I had better not come", that's right, that puts that right.<sup>55</sup>

But these ideas remained with Liu, and he often brought religious themes into his letters to politicians, and his private writings. Combining religious traditions common in Australia and China was another important way in which Liu connected his life in the two countries.

From 1912 to 1914, Liu experienced much at the Consulate. He personally took down the Imperial Dragon flag of the Manchu when Australia finally recognised the new Republican government, long after the 10 October 1911 proclamation by Dr. Sun Yat Sen, and put up the five bar new Chinese Republic flag. He also saved the life of Consul-General Hwang when a disgruntled former employee tried to shoot him in his office, by wrestling the gun away from the man.<sup>56</sup> When Hwang subsequently left and William Ah Ket, prominent Melbourne barrister, became acting Consul-General, Liu had many frank discussions with him, and Ah Ket once told him that he was unable to get a Judgeship on account of the White Australia Policy.<sup>57</sup> The racism that this policy condoned seemed to extend even to affect the most prominent people in the Chinese Australian community.

This period at the Consulate was a formative experience for Liu in that he had personal involvement in Chinese immigration cases from the discussion with the affected

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

person through to the meeting with the bureaucrat in charge. He was also involved in policy discussions at the Consulate, and gained an intimate knowledge of the intent of the Immigration Restriction Act to obliterate the Chinese community in Australia. These years were the first in which Liu began to write about the precarious position of the Chinese Australian community and began to act to improve their position. In doing so, Liu was putting into action his feeling that the Chinese community was an integral part of Australia's development and its future, for he could see how his father had helped as a pioneer in the development of the country and the clearing of land, and how the Australian government was beginning to develop closer ties with countries in the Asian region, and with China particularly through trade links. The Australian government was using the Chinese community in Australia to increase the markets for Australian goods, and yet it was only allowing such Chinese immigration as would further this end. Chinese temporary immigration was restricted to roles such as business assistants for firms which turned over more than £5000 a year, and these people were unable to bring their families or change jobs without the express approval of the Australian Government. The Australian government realised that to develop the economic relationship it would have to allow a few Chinese people exemptions from the Immigration Restriction Act, but in general the restrictive policy was intended to halt the expansion of the community through births or permanent immigration. Liu began to see this pattern of cultural destruction during his time at the Chinese Consulate in Melbourne, and it would be an experience he would draw on for his future campaigns against the White Australia Policy.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



**Chapter Three**

***“Our Chinese in Australia were doomed”***

***1914-1932***

Sydney in the year that William Liu left the Chinese Consulate in Melbourne, 1914, was in many ways an inhospitable place for Chinese Australians to live and do business. The Chinese Australian population was shrinking because of the restrictions of the White Australia Policy, and many prominent Chinese Australians were beginning to exacerbate this population shrinkage by leaving Australia themselves, often permanently. If the Australian Government did not want their relatives and families to come to Australia, and if it made it difficult for them to do business in the two countries, these Australian Chinese believed it was easier for them to choose their Chinese life over their Australian one. William Liu faced this choice himself, but ultimately turned back to Australia, and this decision meant for him that he had to constantly push to reverse the trend of the shrinking Chinese community, to preserve the continuity of Chinese history in Australia which the White Australia Policy had threatened to obliterate.

In 1914, Liu moved from Melbourne back to Sydney, and from employment at the Chinese Consulate to a position as indent manager with Wing Sang's. He was recommended for this position by George Bew who was Manager of the Company, for Bew felt that it would be good training for Liu, and that he would in future be able to work for Bew at the Hong Kong branch.<sup>1</sup> Wing Sang's, at this stage, had a three storey store at the corner of Lackey and Hay streets, as well as three stores in Campbell Street near Anthony Hordens. They were importers and exporters and China agents for Arnott's biscuits, Hutton's hams, and IXL jams, amongst other Australian products, and they pioneered the sale of these items in Asia.<sup>2</sup> Chinese Australian import-export firms at this

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of interview with Hazel De Berg for National Library of Australia Oral History Archives, 1978, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>2</sup> "From Manchu to Mao: The Days When Chinese Went Unheard", The Asian, April/May 1977, p. 16, MLMSS 6294/11.

stage were very important to the perpetuation of the Chinese Australian community, for businesses could only hire assistants from China if their export turnover was greater than £5000 a year. Chinese restaurants were another type of business regularly allowed to bring in Chinese assistants, but generally only as chefs, as it was obvious that Australian labour would be unable to fulfil this role.

Wing Sang's ('everlasting'), which was founded in 1890 by members of the Mar and Kwok families, eventually spawned another important Sydney Chinese store, Wing On's ('every happy'), when some of the employees at Wing Sang's, many of them of the Kwok family, left to start that new store in 1897.<sup>3</sup> Soon afterwards, the Australian Chinese heads of these two stores went to Hong Kong to open branches. In the case of Wing Sang's, Samuel Horden of the famous department store Hordens became involved through sharing his business practice with some at the store, including Mar Ying Piu, Sui Tak, and Choy Hing amongst others. But when they left to start a new branch of their department store in Queen's Road, Hong Kong on HK\$20,000 capital, known as the Sincere Company Department Store, they were soon forced to close it and move to Connaught Road on the waterfront, as their Chinese customers didn't appreciate the Western concept stated in signs around the store: "No Price Bargaining".<sup>4</sup> But the store was successful there, as was Wing On's, and later, the Sun Company Department Store, which was started by another Choy of Wing Sang and Co. in Sydney, Choy Chong (a

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<sup>3</sup> De Berg transcript; Kerrie L. MacPherson, *Asian Department Stores*, Curzon Press, Richmond, Surrey, UK, 1998, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> De Berg transcript; "From Manchu to Mao". There is some dispute over the question of whether the Hong Kong Chinese appreciated the decision to not allow price bargaining. William Liu's niece, Marina Mar, also states that the lack of price bargaining in Hong Kong was a mistake (Interview with Marina Mar, 11 October 2004), but Adrian Chan argues that the Hong Kong Chinese liked the fixed prices (Interview with Adrian Chan, 29 September 2004).

brother of Choy Hing). All of these stores subsequently branched out to Shanghai in the 20s and 30s, and Liu assisted in the setting up of Sun Company.

Liu's position at Wing Sang's was his first participation in Chinese Australian business ventures, aside from his representations on behalf of Chinese assistants to businesses in Australia. In between other ventures, he remained involved with Wing Sang's until well into the 1930s, at which stage he was also involved with Wing On's and the Sun Co. But his many connections meant that other possibilities were available when his assistance was required. The first scheme for which he became well known in many circles was his participation in the Australia China Navigation Steamship Company, whose name was changed in 1917 to the China-Australia Mail Steamship Line.<sup>5</sup> This venture "expressed the unity and co-operation achieved for the first time by Chinese in Australia over a single issue of common interest", overcoming for a time the divisions between conservatives and republicans.<sup>6</sup>

The reason for Australian Chinese attempting to set up their own steamship company stemmed from Wing Sang's and other import/export firms' business ventures in China. Wing Sang's, in its role as Australian agents for the Sincere Company which began in Hong Kong, was unable to obtain the ships needed for the goods to go back and forth between Australia and China, and this was the case for many other Chinese Australian firms as well. The problem became acute as a result of World War I, for the outbreak of war meant that the Japanese shipping trade flourished in the absence of German and British ships, for German ships ceased operation between the East and Australia in 1914, and British ships were mostly requisitioned by the British

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<sup>5</sup> De Berg transcript.

government.<sup>7</sup> Two Japanese shipping companies, the Nippon Yusen Kaisha and the Osaka Shosen Kaisha, monopolised the carrying trade between these two areas, and by September 1914 they announced an increase in freight and passenger rates, eventually increasing them by 1918 to more than 10 times the peacetime rate. Editorials in Australian Chinese newspapers called for Chinese in Australia to begin a private shipping company, arguing that the three biggest Hong Kong Department Stores, Sincere, Wing On and Sun, had started their businesses in a small way but had developed into enormous enterprises. In addition, they argued, there was the important precedent of the successful Chinese American shipping company, the China Mail Steamship Company Limited. These arguments, as C.F. Yong writes, led Chinese Australian businessmen to become overly optimistic regarding their prospects.<sup>8</sup>

In Australia, only the Australian/Oriental Line had two small ships, the *Chang Sha* and the *Tai Yuen*, and even when Japanese ships were free they weren't a good option: "We could not get our cargo down; any time we got any cargo on a Japanese ship that came down we had to put it in the boat at Hong Kong, when they discharged some cargo, pay the freight to Japan, pay the freight back to Hong Kong and then to Australia..."<sup>9</sup>. A group of Chinese Australian businessmen decided to start their own steamship company, and accumulated additional capital from overseas Chinese shareholders in Hong Kong and Shanghai. But there was another hurdle for them before they were able to purchase their first ship, and that was that a ship could not be transferred to a foreign company in wartime, and the original Australia China Navigation

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<sup>6</sup> C.F. Yong, The New Gold Mountain: The Chinese in Australia 1901-1921, Raphael Arts Pty. Ltd., Richmond, South Australia, 1977, pp. 97-9.

<sup>7</sup> Yong, The New Gold Mountain, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Yong, The New Gold Mountain, p. 98.

Steamship Company had been incorporated in Hong Kong, with its Head Office at Wing On Department Store.

This was where Liu came in handy. There were other Australian-born Chinese who would have been more than willing to have his level of involvement in the Steamship scheme, but only Liu was trusted by all the different factions: “I then recommended Mr. Yinson Lee of On Yick & Lee Co. who was well up in Chinese and English, a very public spirited man, to become the figurehead owner of the *Gabo*, and being an Australian citizen we might get over that difficulty, but Billie Gockson of Wing On’s said to me, “Don’t you repeat that name any more, because we would not pass it. This is your beginning, you’ve got to see it through and as you’re Australian born so you take that place.” Liu did not go to Hong Kong with George Bew, perhaps also because it was around this time that he was married, on February 12, 1916, to Mabel Quoy whose father, Gilbert Ting Quoy, was a well-to-do produce merchant in Sydney.<sup>10</sup> This association helped Liu win the confidence of the Chinese Australian community, for Gilbert Quoy was a native of Tung Kuan county and was much respected by merchants from the Tung Kuan and Chang Shen counties. With Quoy’s support, merchants from these two counties would not oppose Liu. Liu made use of his negotiating skills by bringing merchants of various county origins and various political backgrounds together at five round table meetings to discuss the plans.<sup>11</sup> He remained in Sydney to negotiate the purchase of two steamships, the first of which was the *Gabo* on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1917,

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<sup>9</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>10</sup> ‘List of Wedding Presents, 12.2.1916, William Liu and Nee Mabel Quoy’, MLLMSS 6294/10; Eric Rolls, *Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1996, p. 264. The proper Chinese name of Gilbert Ting Quoy, as discussed in Chapter Two, was Yip Tong Quoy, and his daughter was also known as Mabel Yip (Interview with Marina Mar, William Liu’s niece, 11 October 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Yong, *The New Gold Mountain*, p. 101.

from its original owner Howard Smith, for £20,500. The *Gabo* was 32 years old, had been previously used as a hulk in Sydney Harbour, and required reconditioning,. The second steamship purchased, from Huddart Parker for £75,000, was the *Victoria* in January 1918, which needed no repairs and was only 20 years old.<sup>12</sup> Then, the China-Australia Mail Steamship Line purchased number 249 George Street, a narrow building opposite Bridge Street, next to the Union Steamship Company, for £9,000, and renamed it, at Liu's recommendation, 'China House'.<sup>13</sup>

From this building, in 1918, Liu set to work on getting the ships transferred to his name. He began in late 1917 even before the *Gabo* was transferred to Mort's Dock for reconditioning. References were prepared for the Comptroller of Customs, in order to speed the transfer of the ships to Liu and emphasise his Sydney birth.<sup>14</sup> But although the transfer took place, this proved to be not enough for some elements who resented the Australian Chinese group overcoming the hurdles placed in front of them. A story appeared in *Smith's Weekly* claiming that Liu had gone "overnight from pen pushing to become ship owner", and Liu was eventually called before the Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, in his office at the Treasury Building, Fitzroy Gardens, near Spring Street in Melbourne. Liu was accompanied by Federal MP Jim Boyd, on the introduction of Barrister Ah Ket and the Chinese Consul General. At the meeting, Hughes angrily exclaimed to Liu, "This is an astounding story, we read in the paper!", and, banging his fist on the table, said "I don't believe it".<sup>15</sup> Liu was sent down to Customs to meet with Admiral Clarkson and, fortuitously, his acquaintance Charlie Hughes of the Union

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<sup>12</sup> "China-Australia Mail Steamship Line" (draft), W.G. Volum, 13 March 1978, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>13</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from J. White (shipbroker) to Comptroller of Customs, 1 December 1917, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>15</sup> De Berg transcript.

Steamship Company, who had in the meantime been promoted to Assistant Comptroller of Customs. Hughes contacted their mutual solicitor Billy Creagh, and between them they organised for Liu to be the registered owner of the China-Australia Mail Steamship Line.

One difficulty was overcome, but a greater problem emerged when Liu and the other Steamship Line associates attempted to run the ships. Almost immediately, the Government intervened in the operation of the steamships and demanded in January that the *Victoria* be sent to Darwin, rather than to Hong Kong as planned. While the *Gabo* was still at Mort's Dock, the Government forced the company to run the *Victoria* at a Charter rate, which was not based on the cost of the boat but on the age of the boat and speed. The *Victoria* began to lose money for the company in the Government Charter, and when the *Gabo* came out of the servicing, the company received an official requisition to take over the two boats for World War I service. The company responded by taking out a charter in Shanghai on the *Hwah Ping*, but lost a great deal of money in this transaction due to the poor exchange rate between Shanghai dollars and the Australian pound. But by this time, the steamships of their main competitor company, E.N.& A. Boats, were being released from military service, and E.N.& A. began to offer very low steerage rates which were half of what Liu's company could offer on the *Hwah Ping*. The shareholders of the China-Australian Mail Steamship Line eventually lost their £108,000 investment, and although many wanted to continue the attempt at running a steamship line, Liu responded that "The more capital you have in, its like dumping it in



the ocean, we have no hope of competing, none of us know enough about shipping and...better [to] acknowledge and get out of” the business.<sup>16</sup>

This shipping saga depressed Liu for years afterwards, as he felt that he had disappointed all the Chinese community who had viewed him as someone who could make this venture work. He was also frustrated at the extent of government involvement in the collapse of the company, which was probably administrative revenge for Billy Hughes at having been outsmarted in the setting up of the company. Liu had seen the shipping line as one way to make Chinese-Australian trade and travel between the two countries easier, and therefore improve the relationship, but the collapse of the venture jeopardised both this vision for him, and his standing in the community:

Well, of course I was not well received in the community [committee], that was my first conflict. During those 1917 to 1921 years was the best in the Chinese community for co-operating, because we had an interest in something of mutual concern and hope and...that hope was not realised and the community split...<sup>17</sup>

The collapse, while depressing for Liu, did not ruin his community standing, for he did a great deal for many Chinese Australians in terms of assisting them with immigration matters, and he had many allies before the shipping disaster. His status amongst republicans increased with his 1921 trip to Shanghai to cancel the *Hwah Ping*'s charter – his first trip back to China since he left as a fifteen year old boy in 1908.<sup>18</sup> As Liu was preparing to return to Australia, he was called on by Dr. Sun Yat Sen, recently re-elected President of the Republic of China for the second time, to visit him at his

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<sup>16</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>17</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>18</sup> William Liu, 'In China – 7 times to Oct. 1964', MLMSS 6294/10.

Presidential yamen, or administration office, at Canton.<sup>19</sup> Liu, in his capacity as secretary of the Kuomintang in Sydney in 1920/21, visited Dr. Sun, accompanied by his wife Mabel and their four year old son, Dalton Gockbo 'Bo' Liu.<sup>20</sup> This meeting with such a visionary leader was an event which Liu referred to in a number of his writings, as he felt taken into Dr. Sun's confidence as he "unfolded unto my wife, myself and 4-year old son China's sorrows":

He said China then was suffering from rural bankruptcy, 80% illiteracy, China was shackled with the burden of many many foreign unequal treaties, and what made matters worse was the selfish and many corrupt administrators, which his new government's planning, to heal China, would need 30 to 50 years.<sup>21</sup>

The meeting was also impressive to many in the Chinese Australian community, for most factions could admire Sun's overthrowing of the Manchu Dynasty which had been in power since 1644.<sup>22</sup>

Liu returned to Sydney and his regular job with the Wing Sang Company, and there he continued his advocacy on behalf of Chinese to come to Australia on Certificates of Exemption. His standing in the Chinese Australian community was solid in the 1920s, both in Sydney and Melbourne, as he considered himself to be a "runabout for the community" ever since his days at the Consulate.<sup>23</sup> His own view of the Chinese Australian community from his Consulate days on, however, was mixed. At times, Liu felt that he was a "runabout" due to the political apathy of most of the community.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Banquet to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of William Liu, O.B.E.', MLMSS 6294/18; De Berg transcript.

<sup>20</sup> De Berg transcript. Sun commented during the meeting, according to Liu, that "...the sickness of China then was, officialdom was corrupt and until the Nationalist Party, KMT, was finished, she would retard China's progress."

<sup>21</sup> This is part of one of Liu's informal poems, which seem to have been written at times of extreme emotional stress. MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>22</sup> De Berg transcript.

During his time at the Consulate, he felt that he was always doing the work for businesses of getting their assistants into Australia – he was “roped”, and the Chinese businessmen would not even write down the information for Liu in Chinese so he could translate it, so he was forced to do it all himself. Liu stated that “Many of the storekeepers were too lazy to go down to the consulate in William Street”. Reminiscing about the meeting he helped organise for the Consulate, Liu recalled his feeling that the difficulties of the Chinese Australian community were not all caused by the White Australia Policy:

besides explaining the serious aspects of the operation of the White Australia Policy and the undoing of the position of our Chinese in Australia, it was pointed out to those present that some of the disabilities the community was faced with were not totally attributable to the Government’s policy here, but to the thoughtless undoings brought about by ourselves and only for that, our past and then and future position would be much better.

In addition, Liu blamed, in a vague way, nefarious elements of the Chinese community, such as opium smokers, for their own discrimination under the White Australia Policy:

Some of the points brought out at that gathering, I have no doubt, must have lingered in the minds of many who have since passed away here or gone to China. Some probably forgot all about it that night, especially those who went away from the meeting and played fan-tan and lost and those who went away to smoke opium, like some of our ancient philosophers, Li Po and others, probably treated the whole matter as a joke. Not many of this last group would be living at the present time and they were some of the folks that had helped to bring about, what was said, to be some of our own undoings.<sup>24</sup>

This criticism raises an interesting point about the political participation of the Australian Chinese community. Liu was not the only one who found fault with the amount of assistance given to his efforts on behalf of the community. Acquaintances of his, frustrated with their own experiences of the White Australia Policy, also decried the

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<sup>23</sup> De Berg transcript.

lack of political involvement of Australian Chinese. When Kim Jack, a third generation Australian, tried to get Australian residency for his two foreign-born daughters, he wrote to Liu, recalling his trials in getting his compatriots politically organised:

In answer to your question, there is no Australian Chinese organization in Hong Kong. As I told you when I saw you in Melbourne, I tried to start one before the war but there was such a lack of interest it was impossible to get anywhere. After the war, realizing the difficulties of trying this again with the Australian Chinese, I teamed up with others to form an overseas Chinese society, my function being to get the Australian Chinese together into the society. I failed again not only because the Australian Chinese did not join up but because the other overseas Chinese also showed no interest. The only Australian organization here now is the Australian Association, the membership of which consists of Australians and Australian Chinese. But here again the Chinese Australians show a lamentable lack of interest. They seldom attend any of the functions and many of them do not even join up. With this apathy perhaps we deserve the treatment we are now getting. I think you must have experienced the same attitude so my admiration for your unselfishness and public spirit is immense and deep.<sup>25</sup>

But these sorts of criticisms stemmed from the incredible frustration involved with tackling the White Australia Policy, and the fact that one of the responses of harried Chinese businessmen was to focus on the bottom line rather than trying to change what they knew they couldn't. No one, not William Liu or even the Chinese Consulates or Embassy as a whole, could adequately assist all Chinese wanting to come to or remain in Australia to plead their case, for this assistance required a case-by-case pleading to the immigration department. The White Australia Policy ensured that, as the official rules barred all Chinese from entering the country, the only Chinese allowed in were at the discretion of the bureaucrats involved, and discretion could not be exercised unless the individual case had been pleaded by an associate, someone like Liu who was trusted by the official. Kim Jack put it best when he stated that "since from the legal point of the

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<sup>24</sup> William Liu, 'The Chinese in Australia', 25 August 1957, MLMSS 6294/10.

Immigration Act they can ban my daughters I have tried to appeal from the sentimental angle” and to enlist Liu’s help in doing the same.<sup>26</sup> The vast majority of Chinese had no access to this privileged level of advocacy, and so had no chance. The informality led to frustration, which either resulted in apathy or, in a very few cases such as Liu’s, to a person who devoted themselves to altering the situation. The frustration could also lead to a ‘divide and conquer’ situation, in which prohibited immigrants felt that they were in competition with one another. Kim Jack in his letters repeatedly denigrated other Chinese who had “less deserving” cases and yet were allowed into Australia while his daughters were being refused Certificates of Exemption.<sup>27</sup>

Australian Chinese were writing their views down in Chinese-language newspapers but these were not translated into English by anyone except, in the Communist era, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO, formed in 1949 by Prime Minister Chifley), for the views of the Australian Chinese community were strongly against the White Australia Policy.<sup>28</sup> As Liu pointed out, this was not an effective way to push for political change:

Back in 1912-14, when I was a clerk/interpreter with the Melbourne Chinese Consulate, our communities were dwindling following Federation in 1901. The four Sydney Chinese newspapers and one in Melbourne were making loud noises about the injustices to Chinese residents in Australia. However, no one in the European community could hear. All five papers were in Chinese and despite my personal efforts, I could not get one of them to print an English supplement so that Chinese grievances could circulate widely.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Kim Jack to William Liu, 13 December 1957, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Kim Jack to William Liu, 5 November 1957, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>27</sup> This mentality existed even before the White Australia Policy dictation test mechanism had been fully implemented, when the Japanese government, emboldened by British support for the Anglo-Japanese alliance, insisted that they were a special case and should not be lumped in with Chinese and other prohibited groups.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, letters in ‘Law – Commonwealth Restricted Migration – White Australia Policy – Volume 1’, National Archives, Series No. A6122/46, Control Symbol 1810.

<sup>29</sup> ‘From Manchu to Mao: The Days When Chinese Went Unheard’, *The Asian*, April/May 1977, p. 16, MLMSS 6294/11.

The fact that these views were not aired in English says more about the Chinese community's desire to stay low-profile than it does about the fact that they were apathetic. The decision not to publish in English did not reflect apathy, as someone had bothered to write the article and it could have easily been translated by a number of people including Liu himself. The desire to stay low-profile was clearly an issue in the post-war Communist period, when, as Liu himself noted, Chinese Australians who were not born in Australia (and those who were but had friends or family they wished to see immigrate) were severely constrained in their political activities. For example, Liu helped to form the Australia China Society in 1950, but saw the Chinese membership gradually drop off:

...in this Society; we started off, I got many many Chinese into it, but on account of the Immigration Department always asking the question, 'Do you belong to the Australia/China Society? Do you read China pictorials, do you read China Reconstruct' and if they did, well there was no chance of getting extension of their permit to school or live in Australia – the result was that the Chinese Membership dropped out and believe it or not, its mainly Australians that are carrying on this organisation, which is growing...<sup>30</sup>

Liu, on the other hand, was free to pursue his political advocacy, as the authorities couldn't touch him due to his Australian birth. This was the case with fewer and fewer Chinese Australians in this period, as one of the White Australia Policy's objectives was to eliminate the native-born Chinese population.

If the Chinese Australian community was not apathetic towards the White Australia Policy, an important question becomes how they responded to and supported his 'Sino-Aussie obsession'. This point is crucial because the lack of evidence of clear

community support was a basis for criticism of Liu's efforts. Liu was seen by some as charging ahead by himself without organising the Chinese Australian community first, a tactic which, it was argued, would be more effective. W.H. Donald, advisor to Chiang Kai-shek before and during World War II, wrote to Liu more than once, telling him that

I think myself that the line of procedure should be for you to get the Australian Chinese now in Hongkong or China to develop an intelligent united front... There are more ways of killing the goose than to cram its neck with butter, as the saying goes. And one of them is a dignified approach by the united Chinese from Australia.<sup>31</sup>

And from the left, criticism of Liu focused on his lack of organisation, and the way in which his 'going it alone' could actually damage the prestige of the Chinese Australian community. One critic, V.Y. Chow, argued that Liu gave "no evidence that our own community are behind your words, pleading, demanding with you for a better life through more equal opportunities and so on." Chow also wrote that community organisation was a crucial prerequisite to the types of activities Liu was pursuing.<sup>32</sup>

But there is evidence that large sections of the Chinese Australian community, or at least those business leaders whose opinions were respected, supported Liu's work and wished him to continue. The fact that Liu's stature in the community was growing is evidenced by his election in 1927 as Vice-President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of NSW.<sup>33</sup> And in 1928, Liu was presented with a testimonial which praised his work for the Chinese Australian community from the time he left school to work at the Chinese Consulate in Melbourne:

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<sup>30</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from W.H. Donald to William Liu, Chungking, 22 April 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from V.Y. Chow to Liu, 18 May 1938, MLMSS 6294/1. This letter will be discussed more in the following chapter.

Sydney

1<sup>st</sup> January,  
1928

*Mr. Wm. J. Liu*

*Vice President  
Chinese Chamber of Commerce of N.S.W.  
Sydney*

We the undersigned **C**hinese **M**erchants desire as a mark of esteem and in recognition of your ever readiness and generous labours to give to the **C**hinese **C**ommunity your best in your endeavours to help any worthy cause, be it **C**harity, **S**ocial good or **C**ommerce, and in admiration of your services, we take the opportunity of this **N**ew **Y**ear **F**estival to record our appreciation and present this token of remembrance.

*I*t is remembered that as a young man leaving **S**chool right up to the present time, your enthusiasm towards all charitable movements, social improvements and the fostering of trade between **C**hina and **A**ustralia has been very valuable indeed and your untiring and recorded efforts to do your share for the **C**hinese **C**ommunity for the better understanding of the **C**hinese people and the people of **A**ustralia is a credit for any man to be proud of, and your elevation to the **V**ice-**P**residency of the **N.S.W.** **C**hinese **C**hamber of **C**ommerce is further proof of that recognition.

*W*e endorse our appreciation by tendering you these greetings which we ask you to accept together with the accompanying small present in the same happy spirit in which it is given, as a small token of esteem and we wish you good health and prosperity.

*I*t is our wish that you may be spared a long time to enjoy every happiness of life and encouragement to continue to do your good work for the **C**hinese **C**ommunity.

The Chinese Australian community, therefore, was generally politically active throughout Liu's life, although during the period of the White Australia Policy this was muted, and there were numbers of people who abstained from politics altogether for fear of attracting negative attention from ASIO or the immigration department. But there is evidence that many supported Liu's activities from 1912 on, and not always in an abstract

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<sup>33</sup> “ ‘Uncle Bill’ pioneered path of Australia-China links’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2/5/83, MLMSS



way. When Liu became the Vice President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of NSW, the President at that time was Ng Chu Chin, also known as Harry Foy, a well-known furniture manufacturer, and Foy assisted Liu in entering the furniture business for himself in 1928. Foy and Liu's employers at the time, Wing Sang, wished Liu to have an independent source of income so that he would be able to continue with his work for the Chinese community – as Foy told him, “all your life you're never going to have any money, you've got to be in business for all the things you are doing. I'll get you into the furniture business”. Wing Sangs were also concerned that Liu have an independent source of income, and Mar Chut, the manager, told Liu that he would keep him on at the same time as he started up the new business: “We'll tell you what, you buy the business all right, but you are our man for the morning, in the afternoon you go up there and look see, so you get the afternoon free, same salary, you've got the same job, indent”. Foy provided Liu with the capital, and Liu started the Ideal Home Furnishers at “Roma House, near where all the picture shows are now, in George Street between Bathurst and Liverpool Streets, close by Town Hall.”<sup>34</sup>

However, Liu's business acumen in this venture was not strong, and he was prone to overlooking late payments, accepting excuses from his customers. He also refused to be involved in repossessing furniture from non-paying customers. Those who worked at his store told him he was far too lenient, and his customers were taking advantage of him. But he was compassionate with regard to the tough circumstances of some of his customers after the Great Depression hit. He was always trying to think well of people even when they gave him little reason to, and this was a trait he exhibited in other areas

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6294/11.

<sup>34</sup> De Berg transcript.

as well. Eventually, he decided to sell the business and return full time to Wing Sang & Company. Due to the fact that the wealthier members of the Chinese Australian community were his ‘patrons’ to a certain extent, looking after him so that he could pursue his interests, Liu and his family were never short of necessities during this period, and Liu “was under no financial worry, at that time, although there was a big Depression in Sydney”.<sup>35</sup>

The Great Depression, though, made it tougher for Liu to solicit funds for community projects, such as when he was asked by Sir Colin McKenzie to help him establish the George E. Morrison Lectureship.<sup>36</sup> Liu was introduced to McKenzie by his old friend, Mr. Quinlan, who said that McKenzie had for a number of years been trying to establish this lectureship in honour of Morrison, a Geelong-born man who was advisor to the Manchus and Dr. Sun Yat Sen. When Liu called on McKenzie at the Royal Australian Institute of Anatomy to offer his assistance, McKenzie requested his help in getting the Chinese community to provide financial support and names of people who wished to become involved.<sup>37</sup> Liu, with Quinlan’s help, also brought in William Ah Ket to assist him in involving the Melbourne Chinese community, and despite the Depression, the four with their combined influence were able to bring in the necessary funds. From the time of their inception, to 1948, the Morrison Lectures were associated with the Royal Australian Institute of Anatomy, but in 1948, the responsibility for the management of the lectureship was taken over by the Australian National University.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Quinlan to Liu, undated response to letter dated 15 June 1932, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>37</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

The idea of the Lectureship pleased Liu, as it was one of the first ways in which he was directly involved in setting up a programme of events which would bring the Chinese community and the wider Australian community closer together, as well as educate white Australians about Chinese affairs. The yearly lectures, which Liu often attended, attracted many prominent speakers on Chinese and Chinese Australian issues, and furthered their stated dual objectives “to honour for all time the memory of a great Australian who rendered valuable service to China and to improve cultural relations between China and Australia.”<sup>39</sup> But Liu missed the very first one, by Consul General W.P. Chen, on May 10, 1932, as he had already planned to go to China for business reasons from late 1931. The Wing Sang Company had given Liu six months’ leave on part salary to travel to China in connection with the Company and with Wing On’s, to see if he could assist the Wing On Cotton Mills of Shanghai to become associated with the Alexander Woollen Yarn Mill and Sunglow Non-shrink Woollen Yarn. The Australian wool company wished to expand into the fabled massive Chinese market, and Liu was their pick to manage the deal.

Before Liu left, however, he was involved in another project to increase Australian knowledge of the current situation in China since the Tanaka Memorial, the document presented to the Emperor of Japan on July 25, 1927 by Premier Tanaka, outlining the Japanese intent to invade and take over Manchuria, which began on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1931. Friends of Liu’s, headed by Billy Young of Wing On & Co, told him, “Look, you can’t go yet, you’d better not go yet, because we need to do some publicity to let Australian friends know the China side of the story, so wait because

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

there's plenty of time to work on the woollen yarn business...".<sup>40</sup> Liu helped them to form a committee, with Young as Chairman and Liu as Secretary, and they decided to enlist the help of John H.C. Sleeman, a journalist and "Jack Lang's right-hand man", to help them compile a booklet on the Memorial.<sup>41</sup> Liu's enlistment of Sleeman was partly due to his admiration for his work, and the fact that he also stated on many occasions that Sleeman held no particular political ties to one party or another (although this doesn't seem to gel with his statement about Lang).<sup>42</sup>

This political activity, which held little danger for Liu as he was Australian-born, was very dangerous for Billy Young, as he was almost certainly the William Young that Liu just prior to this time in 1931 had assisted in his case concerning his conviction as a prohibited immigrant. Young, who was a resident of Australia for over 20 years by 1931, and who was married to an Australian-born woman, and living in Grafton, was a Chinese herbalist by trade, but all of these factors did not matter in the decision to deport him. The Chief Justice of New South Wales, however, recommended that discretion be applied in the case, and Liu, in many letters to Quinlan, eventually succeeded in obtaining Young a Certificate of Exemption for 12 months, subject to the payment of the legal costs incurred by the Commonwealth in convicting him.<sup>43</sup> This was a result to be grateful for.

For the pamphlet, Liu used much of his own material, including an English translation of the Memorial which he had obtained from Wu Lien Te, the Director of Quarantine in China, in order to present an argument that the loss of Manchuria was a terrible blow for Australia's future, for

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from William Liu to Dr. Chen, Consul-General in Australia, 29 September 1933, MLMSS 6294/1.

as we know it they have succeeded in getting Manchuria and after some years training the Manchurian kids as Japanese soldiers who take the front line and do all the horrible things like they use the Koreans, and then they will come down and try to swallow China and then South East Asia and then as the book says, they'll expand to Oceania – Oceania means the vast Pacific and Australia, New Zealand, a lot of people did not realise that, so we thought if we published this whole Memorial, Tanaka Memorial, and that is on page 65, up to 111, that might waken up the Australian people.<sup>44</sup>

The committee distributed boxfuls of the booklets amongst the Senators and Federal Members and State Parliaments, as well as newspaper editors, to try to stir up support for China, for as Liu later found out, Australian reticence was due to the fact that “the Government policy thought was that if the Japanese went into Manchuria it would take the pressure off Australia; let them take China, they won't come and take Australia.” This technique worked, and the Sun newspaper, Sunday November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1931, printed a cartoon headed “Japanese plan to take Australia in sensational document, grave fears grow as Japanese advance, brings danger of Red blaze.”<sup>45</sup> But Australian policy did not change as a result of this campaign.

In late November, 1931, Liu finally departed for Hong Kong and Shanghai with his family on the *Changte*, to launch the woollen scheme. They first went to Shanghai, but Liu “had a clinging to go back to visit the old village, hadn't been there for some time, and to meet the old people that were left there...”. He left his family in Shanghai, and his friend Bill Ma, Manager of the Sincere Department Store in Shanghai told him, “If you want to see the outlying districts you'd better go quick because the Japanese are

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<sup>43</sup> See letters between Quinlan, Liu, Gock and W.H. Barkeley, Collector of Customs, early 1931, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>44</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

crossing the Yangtse River and they'll soon be surrounding Shanghai.”<sup>46</sup> After the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, Chinese residents of Shanghai had participated in a boycott of Japanese goods, and by November 1931, skirmishes between anti-Japanese boycott activists and the Japanese marines had greatly increased. The boycott was the only option Chinese residents of Shanghai had:

They refused to buy Japanese goods. The toys, records and bicycles of the small merchants in Hongkew piled up. Chinese firms rejected Japanese merchandise. Chinese banks refused to honour Japanese bills of landing. Several hundred thousand tons of Japanese cargo littered Shanghai's piers and godowns. Chinese pickets threw passengers boarding Japanese ships into the Whangpoo. Japanese banks and underwriters lost money. Japanese shops and stores had to close. In the streets, posters exclaimed, 'Down with Japanese Imperialism' or, simply, 'Kill all Japanese'.<sup>47</sup>

In the midst of this turmoil, Liu travelled down to his old familiar spot, Taishan, and returned in time to Shanghai to avoid encountering the Japanese, who surrounded Shanghai on 28 January 1932. Liu stayed with his family in Gockson's (of Wing On & Co.) mansion in Bubbling Well Road, opposite Hatung, the great opium merchant. He could not pursue the wool scheme due to the Japanese invasion, and so Gockson said to him, "Well, you'd better leave, you and your wife and Winsome, because there are going to be dangers here." Liu responded, "Oh, no not after publishing our book down in Sydney, I want to see what happens, I want to be nearby, I ought to be safe in Shanghai here." Gockson pointed out, "Look, you cannot speak the Shanghai dialect and it's dangerous, what are you going to do to occupy your time?" Liu said, "Tomorrow morning after breakfast...I'm going down to the Cantonese Guild and give a hand in

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Harriet Sergeant, Shanghai, John Murray, London, 1998, p. 184.

working for the refugees who are pouring into Shanghai like ants” from the outlying occupied areas.<sup>48</sup>

An estimated 230,000 refugees were fleeing from the war zone around Shanghai into the Settlement and more distant points, in order to escape the Japanese bombardment:

In Chapei, tenement houses burned down or collapsed under the incessant shell-fire. Factories, churches, schools, hospitals, cotton mills, a Chinese university, the Commercial Press and its library were all destroyed...The Japanese razed Chapei to the ground. For the first time in Shanghai’s history, fighting spread into the International Settlement.<sup>49</sup>

This episode in Shanghai’s history is not written about in great detail in many histories. It has been argued that the conflict has been downplayed to the status of an ‘incident’, a footnote in most books to the global conflagration which followed. This downplaying, or even confusion with the incidents of 1937, has even occurred with the residents of Shanghai.<sup>50</sup> Given that, it seems clear how Liu’s 1932 Shanghai experience was mistakenly (according to his own writings, the dates and origins of his letters, and his family’s recollections) recorded as occurring in 1937 in Shirley Fitzgerald’s *Red Tape Gold Scissors*, a mistake stemming from the *William J. Liu, O.B.E. 1893-1983 – Pathfinder* book. In a footnote, Fitzgerald notes that “William Liu was in Shanghai during the Japanese invasion of 1937 where he volunteered support for the 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army and was active in getting news out to the outside world.”<sup>51</sup> This statement was

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<sup>48</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>49</sup> Donald A. Jordan, *China’s Trial By Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2001, p. 192. Estimates differ widely – *Shanghai* estimates 600,000 refugees (p. 190); Sergeant, *Shanghai*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>50</sup> Jordan, *China’s Trial By Fire*, preface; interview with Tony Palfreeman, 16 September 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tape Gold Scissors*, State Library of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1997, p. 171.

contained in *Pathfinder*, in which scroll 14 is captioned “Voluntarily participating in the Anti-Japanese War in Shanghai (1937)”. The story next to the scroll reads in part:

14. Although born and spending most of his life in Australia, William Liu always showed concern for the destiny of his forefather’s home land. In 1931 Japan invaded and annexed China’s three northern provinces. William Liu produced 10,000 copies of a 116 page booklet condemning the *Tanaka Memorandum*, which was an outline of Japan’s plan for the conquest of China and the South Pacific. The Memorandum had been prepared in 1927 by the Japanese Prime Minister, Tanaka and presented to the Emperor of Japan.

William Liu was in Shanghai during the Japanese attack in 1937. He volunteered his support to China’s 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army and offered his help in any capacity considered appropriate. He was active in propaganda activities, and in distributing news to the outside world.

However, Liu’s momentous experience was in fact in 1932, as in 1937 he was in Inverell working at his brother-in-law Harry Fay’s Hong Yuen & Co. Store.<sup>52</sup> This fact is corroborated by two of Liu’s ‘timelines’ that he wrote, as well as the dates of his letters and his wife’s letter which Fitzgerald reproduces in her book, saying the family was to go home on the *Tanda* early in 1936.<sup>53</sup> Liu’s letters dated him as being in Australia at least from May 11, 1936, and he was in Inverell according to his letters and oral history interview until approximately February 13, 1939, when he left for Hong Kong on *SS Nankin*.<sup>54</sup> Another letter indicated he arrived in Hong Kong on March 2, 1939.<sup>55</sup>

While Liu was working with the refugees in Shanghai in 1932, he assisted the Cantonese Guild in instituting a reform which he felt helped the refugees to keep their families together. In accordance with old Chinese custom, the refugee centre had been

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<sup>52</sup> William Liu, timeline 1909-1945, 29 September 1963, MLMSS 6294/3, interview with Marina Mar (Harry Fay’s daughter).

<sup>53</sup> Fitzgerald, *Red Tape*, p. 171.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Wm. Lieu Tsh [signature illegible] to William Liu, 11 May 1936, MLMSS 6294/1; see for example, letter from R.A. King to William Liu, 19 October 1937, and letter from William Liu to Mr.



separating the female from the male refugees, placing them in different levels of a huge storehouse. Liu told them, "It's wrong, we might have to evacuate from here and each family should be together, mixed." Liu's actions during this period in assisting the refugees were greatly admired by his friends. As William Lee, a barrister who was friends with Liu for over 70 years, said, "The episode in Shanghai was indicative of Bill's incredible strength and his love for human beings."<sup>56</sup> The Chairman of the Guild was pleased with Liu's work for the refugees, and phoned Liu to say, "Mr. Liu, I just got a phone call from Mr Wong Gee Yuan, one of the directors of the Publicity Department of the Rear Headquarters of the 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army in Zinza Road, he'd like you to go there and have a cup of tea with him." Liu said, "That's funny, how would he know me?" Liu went to see Wong, and was surprised when the man pulled out one of the "China and the Trouble in Manchuria" pamphlets which Liu had produced, and stated, "That's not the place for you to work, down with the refugees, here, right here, its dangerous, no pay". Liu said, "Oh, yes", and proceeded to work with the Publicity Department.

This work led to one of the terrible experiences of Liu's life, a time when he was nearly killed at the hands of the Japanese while they were rounding up Chinese in the occupied territories. Liu relied on his English side to escape the danger. He had volunteered to be sent by the 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army to debate a point with the British paper 'The North China Daily News', as the paper had printed something which the Army did not like. Liu walked from the Customs Rear Headquarters to the meeting, and instead of

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Harrison, 18 June 1938, MLMSS 6294/1; letter from William Liu to Mr. W.J. Scully, 23 January 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from William Liu to Sir Earle Page, 24 March 1939, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>56</sup> " 'Uncle Bill' pioneered path of Australia-China links".

coming straight back to the Headquarters, he continued on into the Japanese-controlled areas:

I went sticky beaking, in the Japanese occupied territory, across Suchow Creek. There was nobody there, you know, where the Post Office is, another block, nobody, third block, nobody. I kept on foolishly going on and when I turned round the corner in the Hong Kew Markets there they were loading the Cantonese – that’s where a lot of the Cantonese lived – loading them on to trucks to be taken away and shot. I was challenged by a Japanese marine, I suppose he’d be about aged 20, with a bayonet and this bayonet almost touched the button on my vest coat, you see what I mean? To go up – ah, you know who came to my rescue? Funny it sounds, maybe; Monty Woolley. Well, how did Monty Woolley come to my rescue? I thought of Monty Woolley in the ‘Man Who Came to Dinner and Stayed.’ What’s that got to do with this incident? You know what British indignity is, who could show off British dignity? Monty Woolley, straight back, and I acted like him. I got quite annoyed with him, (the Japanese marine) challenging me like that. I stepped back to get away from his bayonet, I stepped back another step, you see, and by the time I look and I can see I arouse a bit of doubt in his eye. I felt it, I made sure it was. I immediately stepped back far enough, clicked my heels and I bowed down and gave him the ‘respect to the Emperor’ sign. He clicked his heels, he shouldered his gun, he saluted and I saw him. I got up and I saluted back to him and gradually walked away. Oh my God, when I got across the Suchow Creek, back into the safe settlement I sat down and I took the felt hat off my head, pulled out a handkerchief, I nearly soaked it with perspiration. Don’t say you never get frightened. How frightened I must have been. It was winter time and I could get perspiration in winter time. There’s my story...<sup>57</sup>

Liu returned to the Publicity Department, and continued to work with them until May, when there was an armistice. He sent a telegram to Quinlan again from Thursday Island on 1 June 1932 as he was returning to Sydney with his family on the *Tai ping*. Quinlan responded with a handwritten note welcoming him back:

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<sup>57</sup> De Berg transcript. Liu’s recollection of acting like Monty Woolley is flawed, as “The Man Who Came to Dinner and Stayed” came out in play form in 1939 and was made into a movie in 1941. The incident could not have happened during the war after these dates, as Liu was in Hong Kong in 1939 but not Shanghai. “Alexander Woollcott – The Man Who Came to Dinner”, created 26 February 2002, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A670079>, accessed 22 March 2005. Liu wrote a letter to his son, Bo, in which he referred to this incident: “1932 early Feb. I near got bayoneted by Jap Marine at Hong Kew Markets, North Szechuan” road. Letter from William Liu to Bo Liu, 2 November 1982, MLMSS 6294/2.

I'm glad you had a nice smooth trip back + I hope you are not feeling nerve wracked as a result of the bombarding you experienced at Shanghai. It must have been terrifying + will give you something to remember for the rest of your life. If it had not been for the risks you ran, and the worry that Mrs. Liu also had, it must have afforded you a great opportunity of seeing at close quarters one of the most difficult bits of international clashing that has taken place in years, and the marvel of the whole thing to me is how it was found possible to get the contending parties to cease fighting. I shall be glad to have a chance of having a good talk with you one of these days on the whole subject. I hope that Mrs. Liu + Winsome and yourself are all in goodtrim.<sup>58</sup>

Liu responded with a lengthy letter which may have been the first he had written to Quinlan in months, in which he expressed all his anxieties over the previous few months, and became a good deal more philosophical than he had in previous letters to Quinlan and others:

Here we are back again and the six months slipped by as if a dream, interesting, happy, anxious and tragic events, all crowded into what seemed a night's dream.

Extraordinary experience is a fitting name which you gave in your April letter, received at Hongkong, it is something to think about for the rest of our lives. Oh if the people of the world would only try to think collectively for the common good of all, what a lot of hardships and suffering the people could be saved from.

Internationally one or another is so obsessed with their own superiority over others, Politically each party believes in theirs to be the only right policy for their country to pursue, Religiously each telling the other that theirs is the only belief and true gospel to propagate, Capitalist interests forcing issues with Labour organizations and vice versa, and as you say, – it makes one heartily sick of the whole thing and inclines one to hope that he can soon be quit of the whole business – reminds me of what the Buddhist Monk Chao Kung said in his “My flight into the void” inter alia – “which made me leave the Great Lunatic Asylum ‘World’ to become a Buddhist in order to escape its lies injustice and unkindness.”

Innocence is bliss and to watch the care free kids running about the decks during this smooth and pleasant return voyage, makes one feel that if he can succeed under the guise ‘suppression’ which in fact is ‘lie’ in keeping

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<sup>58</sup> Letter from Quinlan to Liu, 2 June 1932, MLMSS 6294/1.

their innocent minds clear from the existing injustices and unkindness, one is doing some good. In future, I'd be inclined to envy the blessings of those who 'No Savee' and would be almost tempted to say to them to remain 'No Savee' for as long as you can if you wish to enjoy much of this short span of life, because by searching too deeply into the present day life complexities, we are only inviting troubles for ourselves sooner than it is good for our health.<sup>59</sup>

Liu was greatly disturbed at the international conflict being played out in front of him, and the lack of interest which the rest of the world appeared to display. His emotional response to the conflict led him to want to push harder to improve China-Australia relations, for there was "great indifference" on the part of many Chinese toward Australia which he wanted badly to rectify. Liu wrote Quinlan that "On my return, I seek the help of you gentlemen to help us to raise the Chinese status, prestige and economic position in Australia to show that any assistance given at the other end by our people to advertise Australia will not be lopsided, as was claimed, but will be beneficial to both parties."<sup>60</sup>

In Shanghai, Liu was faced with a critical choice which many of his Chinese Australian compatriots also faced, and that was the decision of which country to live in and put down roots in the long-term. Australia was unwelcoming under the White Australia Policy, and many in the community who saw no future for the Chinese community in Australia under this policy chose to make lives for themselves elsewhere. Shanghai was an attractive choice, for many, even in this tumultuous period. Liu wrote to Quinlan that "Friends in China said that our Chinese in Australia were doomed, asked me to quit and make for Shanghai and forget all about it as they have and save a lot of worrying trying to solve the problem in face of the boosting of the White Australia

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<sup>59</sup> Letter from Liu to Quinlan, 1 June 1932, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Policy.” But Liu rejected this choice, telling Quinlan that “I realize that if our Chinese population can now be improved the prestige and economic position of the lesser fortunate Chinese and Australian born of Chinese parentage, will get a chance, otherwise what my friends say is correct, and I visualise, for many of our Chinese in Australia, a very tragic picture indeed.”<sup>61</sup>

Liu, in making this choice to remain in Australia, was choosing to fight the restrictions of the White Australia Policy, and to do so in a broader way than getting involved in individual exclusion cases as he had in the past (and continued to do for his whole life). Part of his letter to Quinlan was a statement he wrote on his experiences, which he asked Quinlan to edit and comment upon, and wrote that he had “given further deep thought to the subject, to see how we might get something done without causing controversies in the mind of the public.”<sup>62</sup> Liu was beginning to take a wider view of his years of work on deportation cases, and he used a term which he hadn’t before to describe what was happening to the Chinese Australian community: extinction.

You know what my ideas have been in the past, and please do favour me a generous opinion as to how far we may go to save us from our anxieties which [are] facing us by the pressure of the gradual extinction of our Chinese in Australia, of which there seem[s] no escape unless some modification of the existing restrictions can be brought about.

This is the first time in Liu’s personal papers that the broader issue of restrictions on Chinese immigration because of the White Australia Policy are mentioned. But Liu’s broader focus was not understood by Quinlan, who was used to working with Liu on individual Chinese exemption cases, and who felt that since most of the cases Liu had

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> This particular statement doesn’t appear to be included in the papers, although similar themes exist in many of his writings; letter from Liu to Quinlan, 1 June 1932.

brought to his attention had been satisfactorily resolved, there was no broader issue to be resolved:

I was sorry to read that you had found a great indifference on the part of business people in China towards Australia, and I trust that that indifference will not be maintained, as after all, business has to continue to go on whether or not everything is proceeding as they would like[...]although your friends have advised you to quit Australia and make for Shanghai, I think that it would take a lot to make you do that. I have read the statement that you enclosed, but as it is such a lengthy one I am a bit puzzled as to how to amend it, and I think that it might be as well if you left it for a week or two till I had a little time to give it the "once over". If you were likely to be coming up, I should like to talk it over with you. It is a bit difficult to say what can be done in the direction you apparently have in mind, when it is remembered that at the present time we are granting firms doing oversea business the opportunity of getting assistants in and substitutes for employees going abroad; also granting authority for admission of wives for some years, and allowing students in; but an opportunity to talk the thing over again might be beneficial.<sup>63</sup>

Liu was moving further politically from his friends in governmental positions such as Quinlan, who believed that the White Australia Policy was working well and that their individual efforts were all that was required to make it equitable. He was becoming more and more focused on pushing for a broader change in Australian policy, and he admitted the extent of his 'obsession' to Quinlan:

You know how wrapped up I am as regards the Sino-Australian question. Outside of our callings most of us have hobbies, some take to golf, others Church, education etc. Sir Colin takes to medical science for the benefit of mankind, and some take to drink and some of our fellows to the soothing effects of opium smoking and I have often neglected my bread and butter duties in order to serve in the direction mentioned. This trip to China has made me realize more that something should be done and I do not pretend to be capable to give a comprehensive report as to how to go about it...<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from Quinlan to Liu, 10 June 1932, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Liu to Quinlan, 15 June 1932, MLMSS 6294/1.

Liu tried to explain his views to Quinlan in the trade terms that Australian bureaucrats understood:

Thank you for the welcome back and the opportunity extended to mutually discuss the subject in view. This question in the broad sense, I personally value even more than had our Chinese friends in China gave us some wool and other orders, right away now, because by getting foundation right, these will come in larger quantities and what is important, that trade would be more permanent, with increasing possibilities.

But Liu's request for Quinlan to review and edit his statement was too much for Quinlan, who sent Liu a handwritten reply marked 'Private':

I have scribbled a few alterations on the first couple of pages. I hope you can read my amendments + that they will appeal to you. (Keep private.) I have done nothing with the suggestions in the other portions of your notes as they touch on problems that it would be embarrassing for me to deal with, + which you will on further consideration understand my point of view about. No doubt you will mention them when you come up.<sup>65</sup>

Quinlan was one of many people who could not accept the position which Liu was taking, criticising the White Australia Policy as a whole, and his response to Liu's impassioned letter typified the uncomprehending response of the government to attempts to alter or abolish the policy during this period. Quinlan, while concerned about Liu's welfare, could only respond to Liu in the framework of discussion of trade, for this was what the Australian government was concerned about in this period in relation to China. But this did not stop Liu's writing, and his optimism regarding the impact of his letters on the position of the Chinese Australian community. From 1932, Liu turned his efforts toward a broader attack on the White Australia Policy, and towards stemming the flow of Chinese Australians out of Australia. While he continued to advocate on individuals'

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from Quinlan to Liu, (undated but states that it is a response to Liu's letter of the 15<sup>th</sup>), MLMSS 6294/1.

behalf, he also began to look at the Chinese Australian population changes which the Policy had brought about since Federation, and this gave him more fuel to argue for the importance of the Chinese community to Australia's future. Liu's time in China had led him to feel that Australia was to be his home, and if that was to be, he would have to write to government officials to question the broader aims of the Policy, and to gather the evidence of discrimination in order to bolster his case.



## **Chapter Four**

***“They may shed their blood for you,  
but they may not live with you.”***

***1932-1945***

The period leading up to World War II and the war itself had a tremendous impact upon the White Australia Policy as well as on the policies of immigration restriction followed in countries such as the United States, whose history of Chinese immigration has so many parallels to Australia's. From the time that William Liu learned of the beginning of the Chinese war with the Japanese in Manchuria, and then experienced it first-hand in Shanghai, he understood the far-reaching implications for his other homeland, Australia, long before most Australians did. The campaigning of Liu and Chinese Australians, as well as other groups, against Menzies' shipment of pig iron to Japan, and urging assistance to China, inspired Liu to increase the scope of his campaign against the White Australia Policy and what he termed the extinction of the Chinese community in Australia. The coming of war only confirmed for Liu the intertwined destinies of Australia and China in this period, and the need for the people of Australia to acknowledge this destiny and help to fight the Japanese before they reached Australia. Such an acknowledgement of the Chinese efforts would confirm for Liu the 'prestige' of the Chinese Australian community, and their valiant struggles against the Japanese. Many hoped it would also undermine the power of the Australian government to deny its Chinese Australian citizens rights, as it had in connection with the racially-discriminatory policies directed against Chinese Americans in the United States.

But World War II instead inspired in many a renewed support for the White Australia Policy, as the call for alteration was forgotten in the desire for postwar security. World War II was to produce feelings concerning non-European peoples which were conflicting, and ultimately had little short-term impact upon national identity in either country. The hope which it inspired in William Liu for long-term changes, though, led

him to begin to think about new issues of national population strategies, and also led him to write a series of pamphlets to try to change the attitude of Australians. Liu had returned to Australia in 1932 shaken by his near-death experience but wishing to continue and expand upon his writing campaign to effect a change in Australia-China relations, both interpersonal and international.

Soon after Liu returned to Australia from Shanghai, he requested population statistics from the government relating to the Chinese in Australia, so he could make use of these in his writings, to further his argument concerning the extinction of the Chinese Australian community.<sup>1</sup> Liu's concern about this threat of extinction was believed by many recipients of his letters to be fanciful, for they argued that if Chinese people really needed Certificates of Exemption to do business, they were granted. Liu's activities in writing to convince people of the importance of the Chinese to Australia, or his 'Sino-Aussie obsession', were seen as a waste of time by many of his Chinese friends as well, one of whom wrote to him to say,

In your letter to me just 2 days before your departure you said "after the carefree rest I hope to rid myself of my fantastic dreams and then, – well – wait until I come back about August and try once more to see if I can get on the right track for peace of mind, soul and body". To be frank and sincere with you Liu I must say you [have] got to rid you of the fantastic dreams and concentrate on the rice and bowl problem. Many of your friends – true friends – are blaming you because you are too fanatic about your pet dreams. While they admired your enthusiasm they abused your wisdom of carrying out the idea. Have you ever asked yourself why you always find yourself met with frustration after frustration whenever you worked on a plan for your own? Well they say you are borne under the unlucky star. You are now well over 40 and for goodness sake do hurry up and take a dramatic change and look after yourself first.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from E.T. McPhee, Commonwealth Statistician, to Liu, 6 February 1934, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Leong Wah to Liu, 24 February 1939, MLMSS: 6294/1.

Leong's comments exemplify the lack of support that Liu experienced in the years after 1932 from many of his Chinese business friends. Liu helped to form a number of Chinese Australian organisations to further his aims, but he was generally the one writing on these issues to the Australian government, because these organisations could not improve relations between China and Australia if they were seen to be opposing Australian immigration policy (a 'separate' issue):

I don't think it is advisable for the A.C.S. to take a definite stand against the so-called White Australia Policy. There are many Church organisations and individuals who are supporting a quota policy. It was considered whether the A.C.S. should include this in its aims but the general feeling was that our over-riding aim should be to improve relations between Australia and China, apart from questions of Australian immigration policy.<sup>3</sup>

Privately, others in the Chinese community may have agreed with Liu, but particularly in his group of friends, trade was the main issue, and if Liu could work quietly with someone like Quinlan to facilitate the immigration of Chinese to work for Sydney merchants, they saw this as of more practical good than Liu's letters to powerful government figures about the White Australia Policy.

But the issue of unequal treatment of overseas Chinese was becoming important as Chinese in many countries organised support for the resistance to Japan. William Liu produced multiple pamphlets to raise awareness of the pivotal role of China in protecting Australia, the US, and other countries from invasion through the heroic efforts of the Chinese in their struggle against Japan.<sup>4</sup> Because of China's role in fighting Japan, there was an increasing amount of interest in the situation for Chinese in Australia and the US,

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from A.D. Lindsay of the Australia-China Society to Liu, 19 September 1954, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, William Liu, The Trouble in Manchuria and What it means to the World, Criterion Press, Sydney, 1931, and Chinese Are Sports in the Matter of Sino-Australian Relations. An Appeal to the People of Australia, Inverell, N.S.W., 17 May 1938.

and this added support to Liu's argument that something should be done to end racially discriminatory policies.<sup>5</sup> Articles began to appear in Chinese newspapers considering the question of discrimination, and the problems which overseas Chinese faced in finding employment. Many Australian and American Chinese were returning to China for education and employment opportunities that they were denied in Australia and the US.<sup>6</sup> When William Liu was interviewed in Hong Kong in connection with his involvement in setting up the G.E. Morrison lectures, the journalist also mentioned "the fact that Australia has seemed determined to reduce her Chinese population to vanishing point, destroying connections and arousing strong resentment."<sup>7</sup>

William Liu responded to this interest in discrimination by again turning to John Sleeman, whom he had worked with before he left for Shanghai in 1931 to produce the pamphlet *The Trouble in Manchuria and What it means to the World*.<sup>8</sup> Liu spoke to Sleeman and asked him to write a book on Australian Chinese history, which Sleeman eventually titled *White China: An Austral-Asian Sensation*.<sup>9</sup> Liu had quite a bit to do with the material for the book, including reining Sleeman in on his more socialist leanings:

...he got busy with what material I had and what knowledge he had, and what research he made, he wrote this book in 1933 of three hundred and forty-three pages. Now, we had some disagreement when it came to the last chapter; in the last chapter he rounded out, rounded up by saying that a geographic and ideologic reason as both being socialists Russia and China

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<sup>5</sup> Bo Liu in Eric Rolls with Tony Stevens, *Flowers and the Wide Sea*, Film Australia Video, Lindfield, NSW, 1994. Discussion of pamphlet published by William Liu.

<sup>6</sup> Norman T.H. Soong, "Problems of American-Born Chinese Difficult Here, In U.S.", *China Press*, 5 September 1935 press release, MLMSS: 6294/1.

<sup>7</sup> "Australia in the East", *Morning Post*, Hong Kong, No. 7, 827, Saturday, April 30, 1932.

<sup>8</sup> Wm. J.L. Liu, *The Trouble in Manchuria and What it means to the World*, Criterion Press, Sydney, 1931.

<sup>9</sup> J.H.C Sleeman, *White China: An Austral-Asian Sensation*, Published by the author, Sydney, 1933. On page 328, Sleeman recounts how he came by the title: "If China hasn't been bled white by foreign Powers and concession-leeches, then I am unable to determine the pigmentation of a nation. Also, your nation's colour of mourning is white, and she has plenty to mourn about."

would join together, and I said, “If you put that into that book you’ll kill it, because this book is primarily to build Australian Chinese relations, and if you bring Russia into it, it will kill it.” I said, “No good. I’m sorry I’ve burnt that chapter.”<sup>10</sup>

Rather than Sleeman’s originally intended final chapter, Sleeman included a dialogue chapter between himself and Liu, entitled “W.J.L. LIU HAS A WORD TO SAY!” In this addendum, Sleeman reproduces a conversation between himself and Liu on a number of issues, from communism in China, to the League of Nations, to Liu’s family background and opinions on the White Australia Policy and how it interfered with Sino-Australian trade, among other issues.

Liu put a great deal of energy into ‘selling’ the book and what he felt was its crucial message. Liu produced a handout sheet in which he wrote enthusiastically of Sleeman’s advocacy for the Chinese Australian community, and described the book’s purpose:

It gives Australians an outline of 4,000 years of Chinese history. It teaches Australians what Chinese culture means. It surveys the present-day position in China. It analyses the Japanese arguments. It denounces the way in which foreign aggression has violated Chinese territory. It tears away the prejudice that half-a-century of “White Australia” legislation has left. It guides the way to resuscitate the Australian-Chinese without breaking down the White Australia Policy.

It shows how a more liberal treatment of Chinese in Australia would react to the benefit alike of China and Australia. It does not scruple to say that unless more equitable treatment is secured, then Australia will suffer and the trade of China must inevitably drift to other countries.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Liu’s daughter Winsome Dong remembers that White China was a very important book to Liu because he had so much to do with the organising of it and material for it (Interview with Winsome Dong, 14 October 2004); De Berg transcript.

<sup>11</sup> William Liu, “Dear Friend” handout, 17 January 1933, MLMSS 6294/18.

The handout was for “Chinese distributors”, to encourage them to assist in selling the book, for Sleeman would be out-of-pocket as a self-publisher if the book did not sell well (and Liu had promised Sleeman that if he wrote the book that “the Chinese communities throughout Australia and friends in China would take 2000 copies of the book at the published price of 7/6 per copy, post free”). Because “many Chinese do not read English”, Liu also suggested that a volume bought by them and presented to an Australian friend would assist the good work, and suggested that a copy be sent by every community to the Editors of the local newspapers.

Liu argued strongly for the importance of the book to the future of the Chinese Australian community:

If something is not quickly done to conserve the interest of our communities, it is a question of only a very few years when we will be forced out of existence, and Chinese born in Australia, as well as Chinese who have spent most of their lives here, will find themselves in a most unenviable position, a position as intolerable as it will be tragic. This publicity campaign, therefore, becomes a thing of great importance, for on its success the life and death of the Chinese communities in Australasia depend. It is this serious aspect which makes me so anxious to ensure the success of the venture. If we can rebuild our economic position we can serve both China and Australia. An earnest attempt to serve both countries.

In addition, Liu pleaded in the letter for Chinese Australians to write to him and get their friends to write to him “pointing out the disabilities under which you and your friends live and trade, so that these phases may be clearly and judiciously set forth in our appeals to the authorities as well as future publications.”

While Liu was in the midst of organising this campaign, he was receiving letters from Choy Chong, the managing director of the Sun Company department store, asking him to come to Shanghai to become English Secretary of the store and assist them to

open up a new store at the corner of Nanking and Tibet Roads.<sup>12</sup> Choy was assisted in his efforts to recruit Liu by Liu's father-in law, Gilbert Ting Quoy.<sup>13</sup> Choy Chong had been a partner in Wing Sang's in Sydney, but, like many other Chinese Australian businessmen, he was frustrated at the impediments put in his way by the Australian government: "The White Australia policy restricted and discouraged Chinese immigrants to Australia and thus made the idea of setting up such sizeable businesses impracticable."<sup>14</sup> Choy opened the Sun Co. Department Store in Hong Kong, and as William Liu's son Bo recalls, "later on, the vision of getting this big modern, top ranking store in Shanghai came to his mind, and that's when he invited my father to go over and work with him on this project". Bo recalls that "all the big Chinese department stores were initiated by the businessmen from Australia", and they were also modelled architecturally upon big Australian department stores such as Anthony Horderns in Sydney.<sup>15</sup>

Liu was reluctant to make the move to Shanghai because he had been going backwards financially as a result of the Depression:

...my own position is such that I cannot at this stage afford to make any hasty move until I can assure myself that the change is for better and will enable me to meet my commitments incurred as the result of reverses during the last few years depression. Mr. Quoy assures me that you realise my difficulties and believes that my association with you will by degrees bring about a solution of those personal anxieties.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Letters from Choy Chong to William Liu, 8 January 1933 and 10 June 1933, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Liu to Choy Chong, 22 August 1933, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>14</sup> Rolls, *Flowers and the Wide Sea* video; C.F. Yong, *The New Gold Mountain*, Raphael Arts Pty. Ltd., Richmond, South Australia, 1977, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Rolls, *Flowers and the Wide Sea* video; Eric Rolls, *Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1996, p. 439.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Liu to Choy Chong, 22 August 1933, MLMSS 6294/1.



Liu finally accepted the offer, and prepared to leave for Shanghai on February 10 by the steamer *Nankin*, moving his family up to Shanghai once he was settled in.<sup>17</sup> Liu had ambitions for relocating permanently to China, writing to Choy that “I would like to go, in order to prepare a future for my family in China”.<sup>18</sup> Liu told Choy that the depression had

disastrously affected what small plans I had to secure my financial position so that I could, with confidence, look forward to take my family home to China to ensure the children a Chinese outlook for their future...But, thanks to your favourable conversations with my Father-in-law, Mr. Quoy, you are making that ambition possible for me...<sup>19</sup>

But the Liu family ultimately proved reluctant to remain in China, which was ironic given the role of Mabel’s father in getting her there. The original move was quite difficult:

When my father decided we should go over and join him, it became quite a tumultuous affair because he said “I think you’d better bring the furniture with you.” So we ended up with 56 packages, some of them big crates, wooden crates and one of the ones I remember mostly was a huge crate which held this piano that belonged to my mother. When we arrived in Shanghai, we were anxious to see the store, and we were amazed to see the huge bamboo scaffolding that was surrounding the building.<sup>20</sup>

Liu had raised millions of pounds for the construction of the new store, which would be built with the first escalator in China.

Five of us were sent over to Japan to visit Japanese department stores, to get ideas for our Department Store and I found that most Japanese department stores had escalators and there’s none in China, so I succeeded in getting the Otis people in Japan and in Shanghai to install the first two escalators in China, in our Sun Company Department Store.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from William Liu to Choy Chong, 15 December 1933, MLMSS 6294/1; letter from Liu to Choy Chong, 15 December 1933, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Liu to Choy Chong, 22 August 1933, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Liu to Choy Chong, 22 November 1933, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>20</sup> Rolls, *Flowers and the Wide Sea* video.

This worried Liu a great deal because he was afraid that the Shanghai Chinese would discover the Japanese involvement and boycott the store.<sup>22</sup>

The opening of the Sun Company store was slightly delayed, and finally took place in February 1936.<sup>23</sup> By this time, Liu's family had already convinced him to take them back to Sydney, for they were homesick and had not adjusted to life in Shanghai:

I think my dad had an idea that we might live in China for quite a while, but my mother, my sister and myself, we missed Australia, and we missed our friends, we missed our relatives, and the way of life you know, sports, beaches and that sort of thing, and I don't think we ever intended to stay there.<sup>24</sup>

Mabel Liu had been sick for a year, contracting bronchitis, and had been in the Western District Hospital. According to William Liu, she wanted to go back to Australia from the start, and didn't like Shanghai, saying it was a mistake taking the children there and spoiling their schooling, and that there was no life for them there. Her doctor told Liu that 'it is your wife or your job', and to let them go back.<sup>25</sup> Mabel's letters home support this homesickness:

...we are preparing to go home by Tanda next trip and just how we are looking forward to it only the kiddies and myself know...Shanghai as you know is a devil of a place for spending money...Everything is so expensive and now the weather so cold makes it worse...It's very dull and miserable, makes me feel rather homesick.<sup>26</sup>

The family left for home on 10 February 1936, and William Liu, on the suggestion of his brother-in-law Harry Fay, left his family in Sydney and went to Inverell

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<sup>21</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>22</sup> William Liu, taped interview with Marina Mar, 1981.

<sup>23</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>24</sup> Rolls, *Flowers and the Wide Sea* video.

<sup>25</sup> William Liu, taped interview with Marina Mar, 1981.

in June 1936 to work at Harry Fay's Hong Yuen store for close to three years.<sup>27</sup> His family joined him there for one year.<sup>28</sup> During this time, Liu had an idea that he would start a store in Wee Waa belonging to Bo and Winsome, as he was afraid another family would marry Bo into their family and Bo would be working for them. But friends told Liu that he would be bucking the trend, as country store children were flocking to the cities and Liu would be doing the opposite.<sup>29</sup> Liu continued to be involved politically, assisting Chinese to apply for admission to Australia, and campaigning against Japanese aggression in China.<sup>30</sup>

At this time, Liu was writing letters to V.W Bowden, who was appointed Australian Trade Commissioner for China (located in Shanghai). This post had not been active for some time: "In 1921, at the suggestion of Mr George Morrison the first Australian Trade Commissioner was sent to Shanghai, but he was soon withdrawn in 1923, and the post was not renewed until 1935."<sup>31</sup> Liu began by sending him a copy of *White China*, which Bowden also received from another source.<sup>32</sup> Bowden also congratulated Liu on his pamphlet *Chinese Australian Trading Relationship*, and thanked Liu for his "kind expressions of goodwill".<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Letter from 'Yooty' to Lum, 9 December 1935, in *Red Tape Gold Scissors*, p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Liu to Choy Chong, 23 November 1935, MLMSS 6294/1; Liu's mother had just died on May 9<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Bo Liu to Joan and Russell Jack, 12 May 1993, MLMSS 6294/17. Liu wrote in 1961 that his marital problems were one reason which prompted his going to Inverell (William Liu, 29 September 1961, MLMSS 6294/10).

<sup>29</sup> William Liu, taped interview with Marina Mar, 1981.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Liu to Mr. Peters, 18 June 1936, MLMSS 6294/1; letter from R.A. King to Liu, 19 October 1937, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>31</sup> Mo Yimei Lone, *William J. Liu, OBE 1893-1983 – Pathfinder*, Pirie Printers Sales Pty. Ltd., Canberra, 1991, note to scroll 13.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from V.W. Bowden to Liu, 18 October 1935, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Bowden to Liu, 19 September 1935, MLMSS 6294/1.

But the relationship did not bear fruit, and Liu was again frustrated in his attempts to become more officially involved in improving the relationship between Australia and China. Despite Liu meeting with Bowden in March 1936 in Hong Kong, an event pictured in scroll 13 in *Pathfinder*, he continued to be left out, as his letter to Mr. Peters of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior recounted:

Say Mr. Peters, thanks a lot for the encouragement extended re possibilities of link-up with Mr. Bowden, but without fullest enthusiasm from him, the work would not succeed and I appreciate your kind offer all the same. I know that Sir Colin will be disappointed, because he was so keen that I should follow up the matter. In fact, it was after consultation with him and on his advice that I did. Apparently Mr. Bowden said a bit more to me at Hongkong than he intended which lead me to believe in the possible link-up to push the work up there as I had in view.<sup>34</sup>

Liu realised that he had apparently misread Bowden's enthusiasm, to the point where he had spoken to friends who thought he had been offered a job:

I am delighted to learn that you have had an offer from Commissioner Bowden to join him in the task of promoting Sino-Australian trade in this country. I am sure no one could do it as well as yourself, and trust that before long we shall be seeing you back again in Shanghai. It is certainly wise of Mr. Bowden to invite you, for the time has gone when any foreigner, however able, can think of undertaking such tasks as what Mr. Bowden proposes without the collaboration of educated Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

Liu tried to take up the issue of Sino-Australian relations and enhancing the position of Chinese in Australia with Country Party leader and Minister for Commerce Sir Earle Page, "This time without the contentious issue of me appearing as a mere job-hunter. Progress – nil."<sup>36</sup> Liu was hurt that his motives could be misunderstood:

I cannot help feeling that Australia's interest is very closely knitted in China's

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<sup>34</sup> Letter from Liu to A.R. Peters, Department of the Interior, 18 June 1936, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Wm. Lieu Tsh to William Liu, 11 May 1936, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Liu to Mr. W.J. Scully, 23 January 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

welfare and as one born in Australia of Chinese parentage, it is only natural that one would work for the promotion of better understanding between Australians and Chinese. In the course of one's endeavours, one's motives may be easily misinterpreted as you may have noticed in the booklets I mailed you.<sup>37</sup>

Liu published pamphlets including some of the letters which he had written to members of Parliament and other prominent figures, which showed the lack of response to his arguments. The pamphlets, including the *Bowden-Liu Communications* (1936) and *Chinese are Sports in the Matter of Sino-Australian Relations* (1938) were his attempt to reach a wider group of people, but it was argued that they also could be seen as a sign of Liu's ineffectiveness. The latter pamphlet, in which he included letters back and forth to Sir Earle Page, was severely criticised by a Chinese Australian, V.W. Chow, as "pitiful reading".<sup>38</sup>

V.W. Chow appears as a subject of discussion in the Addendum to *White China*. He is described as a young, hotheaded member of the Young China movement, and Liu comments on his personality:

Mr Chow speaks with the didactic emphasis of youth...I disagree with many of Mr. Chow's conclusions but I admire the energy that, like the soul of a tornado, acts without thought of the result. At times it may be good to go full steam ahead.<sup>39</sup>

The lengthy letter from Chow is a detailed criticism of Liu's tactics of writing to powerful persons:

I am almost convinced that the tactics you adopted though the only ones under the circumstances, have been worthless since they were so meagre of result. I understand fully why it was so necessary to adopt that cajoling,

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Liu to Mr. W.J. Scully, 8 February 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Earle Page to William Liu, 23 December 1937, MLMSS 6294/1; William Liu, *Chinese Are Sports in the Matter of Sino-Australian Relations. An Appeal to the People of Australia*, 17 May 1938, MLMSS: 6294/5.

<sup>39</sup> Sleeman, *White China*, pp. 309-10.

pleading tone, to one in Government employ, but permit me to suggest that our community has such little prestige that unless you could have obtained support from sections of the Australian public who could have brought pressure to bear on Page, your great efforts were foredoomed to failure.<sup>40</sup>

Chow argued that Liu, rather than working individually, should use new methods for organising the Australian Chinese community:

The publicity which you gave to discussions with Sir Colin MacKenzie lacks force because, after all, you are merely a Chinese individual bespeaking one in power (or possessing influence) and you give no evidence that our own community are behind your words, pleading, demanding with you for a better life through more equal opportunities and so on...A pamphlet which is circulated to members of parliament, who, in all probability, will not read it anyhow because it is from a Chinese, will not do the work of active agency, that is, our own functioning as a self-respective community.

This criticism was followed by suggestions from Chow for a reorganisation of the Chinese community from the existing variety of organisations, to a central organisation with an economic base derived from a Chinese business tax, as well as from contributions and funds derived from social events including invited “Australian sympathisers”. Chow put forward the idea of “self-help” in the Chinese community to better themselves economically, but, while he was sympathetic with Liu’s broader aims which involved the White Australia Policy, he seemed also to be focusing upon the economic difficulties which Chinese Australians faced:

By our Chinese having a change of heart, I mean simply that we should quit moaning and make our cause mean something to us. We should organise. We should bring up the matter by showing what we can do and by resolutely carrying out a plan to achieve equality, or, for something in lieu thereof, a happy life without economic degradation.

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from V.W. Chow to William Liu, 18 May 1938, MLMSS: 6294/1.

This centralisation of Chinese organisations was not achieved, but new Chinese organisations aimed at changing the conditions for Chinese-Australians sprang up around the time of World War II. One of these organisations, the Chinese Australasian Association of Hong Kong, was started in early 1940, with William Liu playing a leading role in its beginning and Choy Hing becoming its first president.<sup>41</sup> Liu left for Hong Kong on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1939 on the *Nankin*, arriving on March 2<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>42</sup> He had organised to go to Hong Kong to ‘foster Sino-Aussie relations in a practical way’, and remained in Hong Kong care of the Sun Co. Department Store on Des-veoux Road until August.<sup>43</sup> One of Liu’s ‘practical ways’ to assist was to encourage his brother-in-law Harry Fay to import Chinese art products to sell in Australia, such as carved trunks, to open up a new channel for Chinese commerce.<sup>44</sup> His friend Leong Wah wrote to him encouraging him to return to his “old firm Wingsang”, and to forget, as has been mentioned, his “fantastic dreams”, as he would just meet with frustration after frustration.<sup>45</sup> Liu did return to Wing Sang’s, working there until the end of the war, but he did not forget his ‘fantastic dreams’.

The Chinese Australasian Association of Hong Kong that Liu had assisted in setting up during his time in Hong Kong furthered Liu’s lobbying efforts, wasting no time in fighting for the rights of Chinese Australians, as it was made up of frustrated expatriate Chinese Australians who felt that they had more opportunities in China than they could ever hope for in Australia. In a letter from Choy Hing to the Australian

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<sup>41</sup> Letter from T.K. Tseng to William Liu, 20 July 1939, MLMSS 6294/1; letter from Choy Hing to the Minister for the Interior, Canberra, 27 March 1941, MLMSS: 6294/1.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from William Liu to Sir Earle Page, 24 March 1939, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Liu to Mr. Scully, M.H.R., 23 January 1939, MLMSS 6294/1; letter from Leong Wah to Liu, 26 June 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Choy, Sun Co., to Liu, 11 July 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

Minister for the Interior, the most pressing issue was revealed – the fact that evacuation of people from endangered areas in China and elsewhere in the region was organised on a racial basis. In the letter, a series of questions were asked of the Minister:

- What rights of Australian citizenship remain to Australian born Chinese who have left Australia?
- At what stage, if any, is right of return to, and domicile in, Australia, considered to have been forfeited?
- What law justifies such deprivation?
- Does the Australian Government accept responsibility for Australian-born Chinese abroad?
- If not, to whom should they appeal for fair treatment and for recognition of their Australian rights, if any?
- Does the Australian government propose to make provision for evacuation of Australian-born Chinese from Hong Kong if this Colony becomes involved in active hostilities?
- If such provision is being left to the Hong Kong Government, will the Australian Government ask the Hong Kong Government to include Australian-born Chinese in its evacuation plans?
- Will the Australian Government inform the Hong Kong Government that Australian-born Chinese, their wives and children, may be sent to Australia?<sup>46</sup>

The reply from J.A. Carrodus, secretary for H.S. Foll, Minister for the Interior, was, predictably, quite evasive. The answer to the first question, and to others, was that, “No general reply can be given to this question. If information covering any specific case is required it will be furnished.” But Carrodus did reveal that Australian-born Chinese lost their citizenship after 15 years’ residence outside Australia, and Chinese born elsewhere who were permanently domiciled in Australia lost their right of return after 10 years away.<sup>47</sup> This was not the case for non-Chinese, and the response led William Liu to fire off a letter to Minister Foll:

The answer to No. 1 question is an answer that creates confusion in the mind. For instance it is a special ban upon the birthright of an Australian of Asiatic

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from Leong Wah to Liu, 24 February 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Choy to Foll, 27 March 1941, MLMSS: 6294/1.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Choy to Foll, 27 March 1941, MLMSS:6294/1.



parentage... This does not appear to me to be fair or legally honest. If Australian born are to be differentiated between on account of the colour of the skin of their parents, I suggest that we are treated as an inferior race, an inferiority that we do not feel, an inferiority which history does not show...<sup>48</sup>

This exchange, although it did not lead to immediate results in the evacuation of Australian Chinese from dangerous areas, did highlight the beginnings of a more general protest by Chinese organisations against White Australia Policy restrictions. Rather than attempting to assist Chinese in particular cases, Choy Hing questioned the policy more generally, as an unequal treatment of Australian citizens. This approach brought Choy and other prominent Chinese more into line with Liu's way of thinking.

Liu's individual approach to inequality in the period before World War II was no longer an isolated one as the entry of Australia and the United States into the war caused many others to share his concerns. A wartime alliance with China against Japan led to major shifts in the emphases of immigration policy, and policy toward Asian groups in the two countries. No longer was Japan considered to be the more 'civilised' and 'advanced' society, worthy of a Gentleman's Agreement allowing some immigration into the United States. Now with Japan the new 'yellow peril' endangering Australia and the US, China moved from enemy to friend, and Chinese concerns had to be addressed by her allies. This meant that

No longer was the immigration issue one for the Chinese and half-Chinese. It had become a political and an international question concerning race and colour...[Liu] was no longer one of the few voices that no one heard. Loud white Australian voices were raised in support of change, indeed much more effective ones because they were the voices of white Australians themselves.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from William Liu to Minister Foll, 23 June 1941, MLMSS: 6294/1.

<sup>49</sup> Wang, "The Life of William Liu", p. 122.

World War II altered the position of Chinese in Australia and the US, although this did not lead to practical change in the area of citizenship rights as much as it led to symbolic change. As previously mentioned, the Chinese resistance in the 1930s led Chinese to feel that they were indirectly defending countries like Australia and the US from Japanese aggression, and this fact increased the prestige of the Chinese communities. Before the outbreak of World War II, and during the war, there were parades and drives to increase donations to the Chinese war effort, and these emphasised the resistance movement which required support.<sup>50</sup> In addition, China supporters lobbied the government to provide funds or equipment for China, and later, to provide shelter to her refugees. The Chiang Kai-shek government, either via the Chinese community or directly, emphasised the need for assistance, and it was this direct appeal which would put pressure on the Australian and American governments to assist not only monetarily, but in ways which would boost morale. This process put the Chinese exclusion policies of both countries in a precarious position.

For Australia, it was an ex-Australian journalist who became the conduit for some of the criticism of the Australian government's response to China. W.H. Donald had advised several Chinese leaders, including Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>51</sup> Although this fact, as Donald pointed out, did not endear him to anyone in the Australian Government because it made him a political outsider, it caused him to be acutely aware of how powerful people in China were responding to Australia.<sup>52</sup> Donald wrote a number of letters on the issue of Sino-Australian relations to William Liu, and allowed Liu to use one letter in

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<sup>50</sup> Rolls, *Flowers and the Wide Sea* video. See also letter from Choy Hing of Chinese Australasian Association to William Liu, 7 September 1940, MLMSS: 6294/1.

<sup>51</sup> Wang Gungwu, "The Life of William Liu", p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from W.H. Donald to William Liu, 15 June 1941, MLMSS: 6294/1.

particular to add to the ones he regularly wrote.<sup>53</sup> In this letter from the ‘Headquarters of the Generalissimo’, Chungking, Donald wrote:

You perhaps remember that I stated in my letter of March 25 to Sir Earle Page that “I have no hesitation in endorsing your views with regard to the importance of doing whatever is possible to enhance the position of Chinese in Australia”. I would go further and say – as the world must now recognize – that China is not only fighting her own battle against Japanese aggression, but the world’s battle to preserve the peace and happiness of all Democracies. Australia is one of those Democracies, and the one that will be most immediately affected by any weakening of China’s resistance...The stalwart defence being sustained by China against Australia’s sole dangerous enemy is sufficient in itself to justify the revision of the objectionable regulations in order to promote better co-operation between the two countries.<sup>54</sup>

This line of argument highlighted the division in thought between China enthusiasts such as Donald and the line put forth by those he criticised in Australia. As Donald pointed out, “The policy of absolute national isolation of any nation has long proved disadvantageous...I feel confident that Australians will be ready to consider the question and do the proper thing by the Chinese people in Australia.” Donald’s wish, like Liu, was for the Chinese Australian population in both countries to be able to strengthen the economic and cultural ties between Australia and China, and for the Chinese community in Australia to grow in number to cement this bond. The position of those defenders of the White Australia Policy in Australia was, as Liu noted with his comparison of the Chinese and Aboriginal communities, to oversee the gradual extinction of a minority community which the government found to be problematic and incompatible with White Australia. The letters of both these men could not on their own reverse the course on which this policy was set. World War II, while it did strengthen the hand of Chinese in this regard, would prove to do so only temporarily.

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<sup>53</sup> Letter from William Liu to Robert Menzies, draft, MLMSS: 6294/1.

While the war did not markedly improve the political situation for Chinese Australians, lobbyists in the United States used the example of China's role in the war in their push for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts. Chinese Americans faced hardship under United States' immigration laws. The parallels with Australia's Gold Rush period and subsequent exclusion have been well documented, and Asian exclusion in general was consolidated under the National Origins Quota Act of 1924, which provided for wholesale exclusion of all Asians.<sup>55</sup> Prior to this Act, some Japanese immigration was allowed via the Gentleman's Agreement in place from 1908, but Chinese immigration had stopped in 1882.<sup>56</sup> The 1924 Act meant long periods of separation for Chinese Americans with families in China, as these Chinese were not allowed to immigrate. Chinese communities in the United States, as in Australia, were primarily bachelor societies.<sup>57</sup> By World War II, these conditions of hardship remained, and Chinese Americans were faced with the option of fighting for a country in which they did not have equal citizenship rights.

Of course, the position for Japanese Americans by World War II was a great deal worse. While they had a privileged position vis a vis other Asian communities in the United States in the earlier part of the century, the threat of war with Japan meant that they, and often Asians in general, were stereotyped as being dangerous. This racial

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<sup>54</sup> Letter from W.H. Donald to William Liu, 17 April 1939, MLMSS: 6294/1.

<sup>55</sup> See for example Charles Price, The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia, 1836-1888, The Australian Institute of International Affairs in association with Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974; L. Ling-chi Wang, "Politics of the Repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Laws", in The Repeal and Its Legacy: Proceedings of the Conference on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Repeal of the Exclusion Acts, November 12-14, 1993, Chinese Historical Society of America, San Francisco, 1994, p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> Ronald Takaki, A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1993, p. 320; Diane Mei Lin Mark and Ginger Chih, A Place Called Chinese America, Organization of Chinese Americans, Washington, D.C., 1993, p. 36.

<sup>57</sup> Mark, A Place Called Chinese America, p. 50.

generalisation led to the internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast whether or not there was any proof of their association with the enemy, a situation which did not extend to other racial groups. In his diary on February 10, 1942, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson considered the racial implications of evacuation:

The second generation Japanese can only be evacuated either as part of a total evacuation...or by frankly trying to put them out on the ground that their racial characteristics are such that we cannot understand or trust even the citizen Japanese. This latter is the fact but I am afraid it will make a tremendous hole in our constitutional system to apply it.<sup>58</sup>

Japanese Americans had their rights severely violated as they were not only interned unjustly, in many cases losing all their possessions, but had their young men imprisoned for refusing to fight in the US defence forces.<sup>59</sup>

Chinese Americans, although facing a great deal of discrimination, were still able to capitalise on the strong political position they were placed in as a result of the coming of World War II. According to Fred Riggs, there was a tradition of respect for China in the United States which uneasily co-existed with periodic waves of anti-Chinese feeling, and this respect led to the establishment of Sinophile societies such as the China Society of America in 1911 which stimulated friendly relations between China and America.<sup>60</sup> Some of these groups issued specialist journals, while new publications brought cultural and political aspects of Chinese life before the public, along with articles in learned and art journals, the religious press, and political periodicals. Popular literature also reflected

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<sup>58</sup> As quoted in Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, pp. 381-2. Interestingly, internment did not occur in Hawaii, because of the demographic and political clout of the Japanese community there.

<sup>59</sup> Bradford Smith, *Americans From Japan*, J.B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, 1948, pp. 282-8; Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1988, pp. 267-74.

<sup>60</sup> Fred W. Riggs, *Pressures on Congress: A Study of the Repeal of Chinese Exclusion*, King's Crown Press, Columbia University, New York, 1950, pp. 31-34.

a change in the general attitude toward the Chinese.<sup>61</sup> When Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* was published in 1932, it became a best-selling prize winner, and Buck, along with her husband, went on to be an influential advocate for China.<sup>62</sup> In addition,

This newly aroused interest in China was not merely academic and curious. It manifested itself in concrete activity: in support of the missionaries; in contributions to various relief agencies and special funds, such as the Church Committee for China Relief, Far Eastern Student Service Fund, American Bureau for Medical Aid to China; and in support of the Chinese industrial Cooperatives, schools, orphanages, and institutions for the blind. Many of these agencies pooled their fund campaigns through the United China Relief which then staged large scale and spectacular publicity drives for China. Thus since 1882, a sympathetic interest in China had widely penetrated the American public, making it relatively easy to arouse support for repeal of the exclusion act when the opportune moment arrived.<sup>63</sup>

Reports from Free China concerning the Chinese resistance were panegyrics about the spirit of freedom and patriotism which permeated the Chinese masses, meant to convince the United States that "this was a race to be honored and aided above all others". The Chinese also emphasised the impact of American support, and the importance of this "lifeline" to China.<sup>64</sup> But military support alone was not sufficient, particularly when one considers the impact of Japanese propaganda aimed at the United States. Japanese broadcasts continually stressed the racism of the United States and made the point that Chinese were good enough as Allied fighters but not good enough to be allowed to immigrate. A radio broadcast from Batavia in 1943 claimed that the 1924 Immigration Act

was the far reaching cause of the present war...The passage by Congress

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<sup>61</sup> Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> L. Ling-chi Wang, "Politics of the Repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Laws", in *The Repeal and Its Legacy: Proceedings of the Conference on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Repeal of the Exclusion Acts, November 12-14, 1993*, Chinese Historical Society of America, San Francisco, 1994, p. 68.

<sup>63</sup> Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, p. 36.

of this immigration law marked the turning point of relations between America and Japan, and in fact has to be considered the primary cause of the outbreak of the war between those two great Pacific powers....The Anti-Japanese Exclusion Act has caused a great gap in the formerly so-friendly relations between both countries.<sup>65</sup>

The Japanese statements did not escape the notice of American politicians. In a special message to Congress on October 11, 1943, sent to make sure Congress was apprised of the significance of the repeal bill on the US war effort in Asia, President Roosevelt stated that repeal would “silence the distorted Japanese propaganda”.<sup>66</sup>

A great deal of lobbying was required to achieve repeal, but it has been noted by some historians that there was a lack of involvement on the part of most Chinese Americans. This fact can be given a variety of interpretations. Were the Chinese kept out of the proceedings, or did they remain apart for some other reason? Were they concerned that their involvement could hinder a cause they supported, or was what was being lobbied for unacceptable to them for some reason, and was this why they did not involve themselves? Was it “possible that Chinese Americans simply did not care about the discriminatory laws and the denial of citizenship”?<sup>67</sup>

Answers can be sought by examining who was at the centre of the lobbying efforts. As mentioned, a number of Sinophile organisations were advocates for China in the interwar period. Riggs notes that “The popular campaign for repeal of the Chinese exclusion acts was characterized by the pervasive influence of the Citizens Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion.” Although it was minute in size, as a “catalytic group”, it

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<sup>65</sup> Files of the Citizens Committee to Repeal the Chinese Exclusion Laws, Japanese Broadcasts, as quoted in Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, p. 163.

<sup>66</sup> As quoted in Wang, “Politics of the Repeal”, p. 69.

<sup>67</sup> Wang, “Politics of the Repeal”, p. 66.

helped to stimulate interest in and coordinate the activities of other organizations.<sup>68</sup> It was formed by Donald Dunham, a diplomat stationed in Hong Kong, and Charles Nelson Spinks, an authority on East Asia. Their efforts “led to a rapid convergence of powerful interest groups in American politics: the old China hands...the corporate China traders, the missionaries to China, diplomats, and the media.”<sup>69</sup> But there was little Chinese involvement in the Committee, and Wang explains why:

The Committee’s stated objectives were 1) repeal of the Chinese Exclusion acts, 2) a quota basis for the Chinese, and 3) eligibility of Chinese for naturalization. In other words, its aim was narrowly defined: to repeal the Exclusion laws, but to still keep the Chinese immigrants excluded through a tiny annual quota. Fighting racism was never the intent of the committee. In fact, racism was alive and well, even among the liberals and friends of the Chinese. This explains, as we shall see later, why Chinese Americans were excluded from the process. Even if Chinese Americans were to bring their concerns directly into the legislative process, they were to be ignored.<sup>70</sup>

This distance which the Chinese American community had from the repeal process was recalled by Gilbert Woo, the late publisher and editor of the *Chinese Pacific Weekly*, who wrote, “As far as I can remember, the campaign was not initiated by the Chinese community, neither was it pushed by the community. Our attitude was as if we were *just outside observers*.”<sup>71</sup>

Chinese Americans, according to Riggs, were deliberately excluded from the process, but

this was part of a deliberate strategy, however, and not through lack of interest. When the Citizens Committee was organized, it was decided to limit membership to American citizens not of Asiatic origin so as to give the impression that the demand was completely indigenous, and not fostered by the Chinese or anyone with a personal “axe to grind.” No Chinese names are found on the list of

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<sup>68</sup> Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, pp. 43-46.

<sup>69</sup> Wang, “Politics of the Repeal”, p. 68.

<sup>70</sup> Wang, “Politics of the Repeal”, p. 68.

<sup>71</sup> Wang, “Politics of the Repeal”, p. 66.



members of the Citizens Committee.<sup>72</sup>

The primary Chinese involvement in the repeal came from China directly, as the government wanted the United States to at least provide a symbolic gesture for the Chinese people. The visit of Madame Chiang Kai-shek in 1942-43, who was Wellesley-educated and had lived for years in the United States, made the Chinese position on the issue of repeal clear. While she did not do this publicly, she did invite members of the House Immigration Committee to a dinner party, at which she stressed how the repeal would help Sino-American relations in a united front against Japan. Through public engagements, Madame Chiang also helped to prepare public opinion for acceptance of repeal.<sup>73</sup> She received a huge amount of favourable publicity during her speaking tour of the United States, and this generated the financial and moral support which she wanted for China.

But the general lack of involvement of people of Chinese background reflected the limited aims of repeal. Most Americans did not want Chinese immigration to be increased, and they did not want Chinese Americans to have increased rights and power in the United States. While there were nine repeal bills before Congress in 1943 which differed in their aims, supporters of these bills were careful to talk down the implications of their bills for increased immigration, and emphasised instead the symbolic aspects. In President Roosevelt's message in support of the repeal bill, HR 3070, he pointed out, after a flowery speech about the spirit of China's people, that "The Chinese quota would therefore, be only about one hundred immigrants a year. There can be no reasonable apprehension that any such number of immigrants will cause unemployment or provide

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<sup>72</sup> Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, p. 113.

competition in the search for jobs.”<sup>74</sup> They also emphasised the economic aspects: during Congressional floor debates, Congressman Walter Judd put it bluntly by stating, “To prove our intention to treat China as an equal is not starry-eyed idealism or sentimental generosity. It is good, hard business sense.”<sup>75</sup>

Ultimately, it was the Magnuson Bill, HR 3070, which passed. Congressman Magnuson was from Washington State, and so had the West Coast support so vital for a bill concerning Chinese immigration. Senator Andrews, who proposed a companion bill, was from Florida, and so provided the Southern support component, important for a bill concerning non-whites in the United States. And the bills which also proposed further measures, such as Congressman Lesinski’s, which would allow non-quota immigration of Chinese spouses of American citizens, did not have a chance at this stage.<sup>76</sup> The symbolism of the move was considered to be the important component, and for the war effort, in many ways, it was. Symbolism did not affect Chinese American lives, but it did provide American politicians, businessmen, and missionaries with a means of response when asked about American racism towards Chinese. This recourse to symbolism was an option which the Australians dealing with China and other critical countries did not have, and they suffered dearly for it.

Another crucial change in United States immigration policy which occurred in 1943 was the acceptance of servicemen for US citizenship when they had served six months in the armed forces. This procedure meant that the servicemen did not have to go through the lengthy US naturalization procedure, and it was geared towards non-English

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<sup>73</sup> Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, pp. 114-6.

<sup>74</sup> Wang, “Politics of the Repeal”, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> Wang, “Politics of the Repeal”, p. 73.

<sup>76</sup> Riggs, *Pressures on Congress*, pp. 40, 137.

speaking people as they were exempt from being required to speak English well.<sup>77</sup> This was a substantial difference to the Australian rules on the rights of servicemen, who had no claim on being able to remain in Australia after the war, much less become Australian citizens. This ruling was in addition to the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, which gave Chinese in the United States the right to become citizens in the United States through the usual procedures. None of these advantages were available in Australia at this stage. Although the US immigration quota was still minuscule at this stage for Asian Americans, the benefits would become clear for some in the years immediately following the war. However, all of the laws passed to give Chinese Americans greater access to full US citizenship rights were based upon their World War II service record. This was seen as the basis for Chinese Americans to prove their right to benefits. These exemptions did not occur in Australia, as the White Australia Policy was seen to allow for no compromise.

The impact of international protest, particularly emanating from countries in the Asian region, on the alteration of immigration policy in the United States and Australia has been well covered.<sup>78</sup> The Australian government did not respond to this pressure in the way that the United States did, however. One of the fundamental reasons for this divergence was simply that ethnic uniformity was seen as the very basis for Australia as a nation. White Australia and Federation happened as one, and Deakin commented on their relationship in 1901:

We here find ourselves touching the profoundest instinct of individual or nation – the instinct of self-preservation – for it is nothing less than the

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<sup>77</sup> Rose Hum Lee, The Chinese in the United States of America, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 1960, p. 220.

<sup>78</sup> See for example Sean Brawley, The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America 1919-78, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1995.

national manhood, the national character, and the national future that are at stake...No motive power operated more universally on this continent or in the beautiful island of Tasmania, and certainly no motive operated more powerfully in dissolving the technical and arbitrary political divisions which previously separated us than the desire that we should be one people and remain one people without the admixture of other races.<sup>79</sup>

This crucial tie of the White Australia policy to the very existence of the nation overrode any suggestions that it be diluted in response to pressure from Asian allies during or after World War II:

The time is ripe for the Government to define its attitude towards the White Australia policy. It is all very well to say that we should allow any one to enter this country – brown, black, brindle, yellow, piebald, skewbald, half caste, quadroon, or octoroon. That is not the question. Such people came to our aid, just as white people went to the aid of the people of Java. The question is a national and economic one, namely, whether Australia is to be preserved to the white race or is to be converted into a coloured continent. We have to be sure that the Government will protect the rights of the Australian people, and will not depart one iota from the White Australia policy. It may have pressure put upon it; it must resist that pressure for the White Australia principle is the rock on which the nation stands or falls.<sup>80</sup>

The policy was seen as the basic fabric of Australian society which the soldiers were fighting for, and its maintenance meant much more than economic standards to many politicians: “The preservation of every standard that has been built up in this country is conditioned by the maintenance of a white Australia. Let us have a little less humbug and pious expressions about what white Australia means. It means no more nor less than our existence, and in that way we must regard it.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Mr. Deakin, MHR, Liberal, Attorney General, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], 12 September 1901, quoted in A.T. Yarwood, ed., Attitudes to Non-European Immigration, Cassell Australia, Stanmore, 1968, p. 99.

<sup>80</sup> Mr. Abbott, MHR, Country Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 179, 20 September 1944, p. 1094.

<sup>81</sup> Mr. Gullett, MHR, Liberal, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 189, 27 November 1946, pp. 658-9.

With the importance of keeping Australia peopled with British, or failing that, European, stock, enshrined in the national identity, recourse to the ideology of democracy as a basis for altering immigration laws, as happened in 1943 in the United States, was not possible. Pressure from Asian countries to soften Australia's immigration restrictions simply led the vast majority of Australian politicians to reiterate their bi-partisan support for the White Australia Policy. Any weakening would mean the loss of a basic racial tie to the Mother Country, and the weakening of the foundation of a nation.

Both Australia and the United States defended their immigration policies in very similar terms. According to the official line, immigration was not restricted because of racism, but rather out of economic necessity. In the United States, the 1943 Report of the House on Immigration Committee stated that "The original act of exclusion (against the Chinese) was not born of ill will towards the Chinese people. The motivation was exclusively economic."<sup>82</sup> In Australia, when it was acknowledged that Asian countries did not approve of the White Australia Policy, their anger was seen as misplaced for the reason that the policy was not racially-based (although as the following quote shows, this was a difficult argument to maintain):

A great deal of misunderstanding exists in the minds of some of our Allies concerning the White Australia policy. I refer particularly to the coloured nations who are fighting with us in this struggle. They regard the White Australia policy as an insult to them. We refuse to allow unrestricted entry to coloured people. That is not because we regard them as racially inferior. The White Australia policy is based on economic grounds. It is clear that if we allowed coloured people unrestricted entry to Australia, the white population would be swamped within a very short period. We should not be afraid to explain the reasons for the White Australia policy.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Wang, "Politics of the Repeal", p. 71.

<sup>83</sup> Senator Foll, Senate, National, United Australia Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Vol. 179, 20 September 1944, p. 1030.

Another technique for ambassadors, politicians and other government bureaucrats was simply denial of the problem. The Asian countries were said to have no problem with the White Australia Policy, as it was an internal issue and all countries had the right to regulate their immigration. This was an argument used at various points such as the lead-up to Indian independence in 1947. During World War II, Indians had made it clear that they were angered by the White Australia policy, and this feeling was acknowledged by Senator Armstrong, who again tried to justify the Policy economically, but to no avail:

In that country [India] there is almost a universal hatred of Australia because of its White Australia policy. The people of India say that, although they, too, are members of the British Empire, they are not allowed to enter Australia. The answer must be made plain. It is not that Australians think that they are better than Indians, but that they realize that the future of the white race in this part of the Empire would be jeopardized if there were unrestricted immigration of Indians and Chinese to Australia. The natural increase of population of these people is so great that with unrestricted immigration they would soon constitute three-quarters of the population, and Australians would be the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. They must be told that the White Australia policy is not based on any sense of superiority, and is not due to any hostility to them, but exists merely because Australians believe that the future of the white race in this part of the world depends on effect being given to it.<sup>84</sup>

But Indian feeling was still strong after World War II, and when an Indian spokesman criticised the policy in 1946 in the context of impending Indian independence, the statements were carried in major newspapers in Australia. This caused Dr. H.V. Evatt to make statements in Parliament denying the Indian intention to slight the Policy:

That matter has never been raised by India or by Australia at any stage. The subject was not mentioned on the appointment of an Indian High Commissioner to this country, on the appointment of the Australian High Commissioner to India, Sir Iven Mackey, or on any of the very numerous occasions when our representative has been in touch with the Indian Government, not merely before the recent constitutional developments, but also during those developments. A telegram that I have received only to-day confirms that view. Dealing with the

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<sup>84</sup> Senator Armstrong, Senate, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 179, 20 September 1944, p. 1048.

migration policy in India, the Indian spokesman recently referred to in the press made no special reference to Australia. He was referring to the policy of migration in relation to all countries. A firm and lasting understanding with the people of India – this is not merely desirable but also essential – can be based only on a frank understanding of the immigration policy of this country. No nation makes more definite demands to the right to determine the constitution of their own population than do China and India. We demand that right for this country. No doubt honorable members will have some suggestions to make about this matter. I believe that a clear and frank understanding of our basic policy on migration is an absolute condition to rapid progress in co-operation between the two countries. I do not think that there will be any difficulty in reaching that understanding. No doubt there are some rules and regulations that might be altered in connexion with visits to Australia by students, and also by representatives of commercial undertakings to permit a freer flow of trade between this country and eastern countries, but the migration policy to which all members of this House are pledged is basic to our economy, and I do not think that the Government of India would ever challenge it.<sup>85</sup>

Another more politically savvy argument in defence of White Australia came from Menzies, as part of this particular debate about the Indian feeling on the White Australia policy. Rather than denying that Indians and other Asian peoples disliked the policy, Menzies placed the policy in the tradition of countries having the right to determine their own destinies, as well as the new catchcry of Asian nations throwing off the yolk of imperialism – ‘Asia for the Asians’.

I want to say, beyond any equivocation, that I believe that, as a policy of migration, the White Australia policy is a sound policy, and it is our business and nobody else’s business. Exactly in the same way as the inhabitants of India have said, in effect, “India for the Indians”, so are we perfectly entitled – and I refer back to the agreement between Australia and New Zealand – to deal with this matter of migration as one which concerns the receiving country and is not to be made the subject of an international order. It would be a very sorry day for us should our migration policy, our factory policy, or our any other kind of policy, be the subject of orders from somebody outside Australia.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Dr. H.V. Evatt, MHR, Labour, Minister for External Affairs, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 190, 26 February 1947, pp. 165-6.

<sup>86</sup> Mr. Menzies, MHR, Liberal, Leader of the Opposition, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 190, 19 March 1947, p. 856.

A method which some bureaucrats found effective for dealing with inquiries about racism in Australian immigration policy was the vague response. This was a difficulty which William Liu had to face in the responses to his letters from politicians and government agencies. But this vagueness was not just the result of inefficiency in the bureaucracy. It was government policy: “Australia’s Asian posts were told to say nothing about White Australia and, indeed, bluff inquirers.”<sup>87</sup>

The type of response which acknowledged the racial aspect of the policy also included the argument that if large numbers of non-European people were allowed into Australia, then racial disharmony would occur, and this would be irreversible. Most often, the example used here was the United States. While many politicians viewed the large-scale European immigration into the United States in the early part of the twentieth century as a success, they universally regarded the ‘Negro problem’ as a salient example of what Australia needed to avoid:

I know that at the peace table the sparsity of Australia’s population and its undeveloped state will be in the minds of many representatives of other countries; but whatever the problems that confront us, they will not be as great as if the immigration barriers which now exist were pulled down completely. I do not want to see in Australia the racial and economic problems of the United States of America where there are about 13,000,000 negroes. Honorable members will remember that just before the outbreak of war a bill was introduced in the Senate of that country for the raising of \$12,000,000,000 for the purchase of four provinces in Liberia in which to settle American negroes in an attempt to overcome the problem their presence in America creates. Our choice lies between selective immigration on a big scale and completely tearing down the barriers which prevent the flooding of Australia by millions of coloured people and Asiatics.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Brawley, *The White Peril*, p. 243.

<sup>88</sup> Mr. Harrison, MHR, Liberal, backbencher, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 183, 29 August 1945, p. 4983.



Interestingly, some politicians felt that the social unrest of the ‘Negro situation’ was not the only aspect of the American situation to avoid. Non-Europeans attaining power in a country which Australians felt to be analogous to their own was seen as dangerous, something which would ruin Australia as they wished it to be. After a trip around the United States, Senator Nash spoke in Parliament about his experiences:

In many towns in the United States of America the population is cosmopolitan. It is strange to an Australian to see public vehicles such as tram cars and buses driven by negroes, with white men acting as conductors. It was common to see coloured women driving motor vehicles throughout portions of America. In some localities the coloured people are living more or less separate from the white population, but in other parts blacks and whites are gradually coming together. In fact, the black people are in many places ousting the whites from their residential areas. In Washington the negroes are living in areas right up to the heart of the city, and in some localities white people are living amongst them. When I visited Harlem, I was impressed by the modern buildings, and the apartment flats of five or six stories. The streets and footpaths are very wide. I was informed that the negro population of Harlem is slowly but surely extending to the best parts of New York. As the black population in the United States of America is already 13,000,000, a serious problem has arisen. The franchise has been extended in some electorates to the black races. I cannot see how one can object to that, because the black man is required to fight for his country and is able to perform the same work as the white man in the essential industries required for the prosecution of war. I was told that, whilst the negro has the franchise, the average American citizen does not worry about it, because voting is not compulsory; but the negro vote is becoming an influence in American political life. Some of the political representatives of the people have to take notice of what the negro population requires.<sup>89</sup>

A “serious problem” had been caused by the increase of the power of the black communities, and the fact that politicians were forced to respond to the demands of non-European voters. Even when Nash spoke of the prospering black middle class, this was not seen as a positive sign of assimilation as it would have been for a white community. The black community was a problem because of their participation in society.

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<sup>89</sup> Senator Nash, Senate, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 183, 12 September 1945, p. 5277.

But Australian politicians regularly used, and still use, the example of the United States as the foil to Australia's harmonious society, although at this early post-war stage the argument was continued by saying that Australia could never have the diverse population which the United States had, and this was why White Australia was so important. Many Australian politicians harboured a particular dislike of black Americans, for they were seen to have ruined a great society, one which had had a successful experience with the type of migration that the politicians wanted for Australia.

This dislike does not square with the historical experience of black Americans in Australia. From the time of the Gold Rushes in Australia, black Americans were accepted by many Australians in a way in which they were never accepted in America, and often treated quite fairly, at a time when Chinese were experiencing terrible discrimination. Blacks often mixed socially with European Australians from that point on, and sometimes married Australian women, with certainly less protest than they would have received in the United States.<sup>90</sup> This situation continued right through the period of the White Australia policy, for blacks appeared to be thought of as more 'refined' than other non-Europeans.

But in the eyes of Australian politicians, blacks seemed to have committed an even worse sin than non-Europeans from other countries, because, like Maoris, they presented a particular diplomatic problem for the politicians. While it was difficult to get around the problem that the British Empire posed, in that many non-Europeans were members and believed they had a right to reside in other parts of the Empire, it was particularly difficult to argue that some non-Europeans who were part of these allied

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<sup>90</sup> Richard Waterhouse, From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: The Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1990, pp. 57-58.

countries for generations were not allowed into Australia. Australia, New Zealand and the United States had a particularly close strategic relationship which was to be cemented by the signing of the ANZUS treaty in 1951. This was damaged by discrimination against the citizens of these countries by Australia.<sup>91</sup> But Australian politicians found it galling that they could not keep African-American and Maori servicemen, as well as other non-European American servicemen, from socialising in Australia when they came to Australia to defend it. This frustration is evident in an exchange in Parliament:

Mr. Francis asked the Minister for Immigration, *upon notice* –

In view of police complaints concerning the conduct of United States of America negro seamen in the port of Sydney, as reported in a Sydney weekly, will he consider withholding landing permits from such seamen until the police authorities consider that conditions are normal?

Mr. Calwell –

Under existing immigration policy United States of America negro seamen are not eligible for the grant of landing permits to enable them to remain permanently in Australia. There is, however, no power under the Commonwealth Immigration Act under which action can be taken to prevent the master and crew of a vessel from landing whilst their vessel is in port.<sup>92</sup>

Australian politicians could not bring themselves to follow the example of the United States, which automatically granted citizenship to all who fought in its defence forces, including Chinese and other non-Europeans. They would not even grant exemption permits to non-Europeans who had married Australians they had met when stationed in Australia. The type of feeling this caused in many Australians was conveyed

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<sup>91</sup> See for example the exchange between Mr. Gullett, Mr. Calwell and Mr. White in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 196, 28 April 1948, pp. 1134-5. The case of a Maori ex-serviceman who married an Australian woman and wished to come to Australia was mentioned.

<sup>92</sup> Mr. Francis, MHR, Liberal, backbencher, and Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 189, 13 November 1946, p. 196.

by Mr. James in a speech to the House of Representatives which caused a huge uproar and was reported in all of the newspapers:

I am forced now, however, to make some remarks which may be severely criticised because of their possible effect upon the White Australia Policy which I have always advocated... In connexion with the problem that is in my mind now it may be said, "You accepted black, brown, yellow, and brindle races into Australia when it was necessary to defend this country, yet you say now that because of the White Australia Policy such people cannot remain here and live with you. They may shed their blood for you, but they may not live with you". I feel rather inclined to reject the idea of any people of a different colour coming to defend me unless I am prepared to say afterwards, "Welcome, brothers". We have to ask ourselves some questions about the White Australia policy.<sup>93</sup>

There was widespread opposition to Mr. James' comments in the House of Representatives and the Senate, an example of which was the response of Mr. Archie Cameron the following day:

I was surprised yesterday afternoon when the honourable member for Hunter (Mr. James) made certain remarks concerning the White Australia Policy, the effect of which was that any one who was brought to this country to fight should be entitled to live here, regardless of his colour. I do not accept that view. After our experiences in this country during this war, I am more than ever convinced of the necessity for the continuance of the White Australia policy. I believe that it is a first essential to the maintenance of a British community in the Commonwealth. However much we may desire to debate the subject, I must say that every time I see an American negro walking along the streets of our big cities, I see a living argument in favour of White Australia. I hope that I shall not be misunderstood on this subject, but, for Heaven's sake, let honourable members opposite pay some regard to the experiences of other countries in which races of different colours have been brought together, as they have been, unfortunately, in the United States of America. Whenever the coloured races are introduced in this way they create their own problems, and their own peculiar types of outcasts, in comparison with whom the outcasts of India may be regarded as a minor problem. They develop also their own peculiar antagonisms and their own difficulties. There can be no such thing as a common meeting ground on which a cohesive and homogeneous race may develop. Australian statesmanship will be tested by the manner in which it deals with this problem and with the problem of migration as a whole.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Mr. James, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 179, 19 July 1944, p. 201.

Once again, anger was expressed in Parliament concerning the vision of black Americans walking freely on the streets, when many Australians considered them responsible for creating so many problems in the United States.

World War II had clearly not been an impetus for a relaxation of the White Australia Policy – on the contrary, it was used by Arthur Calwell and others as a salient example of why Australia needed to have a racially restrictive immigration policy. As Calwell later argued, it was possible to have a ‘black Australia’ or a ‘white Australia’, and any laxity in the administration of the White Australia Policy would produce a black Australia.<sup>95</sup> There was no room for sympathy over the unequal treatment of Chinese Australians, or concern at their dwindling numbers. The efforts of people such as William Liu to urge humanity in dealing with the plight of temporary refugees and other non-European people in Australia on Certificates of Exemption, and to bring Australians and Chinese closer together, could not overcome the arguments in favour of retaining the homogeneous sanctity of White Australia. But the idea of protest against immigration restriction began to spread in Australia after World War II, and this would eventually lead to the weakening of the White Australia Policy.

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<sup>94</sup> Mr. Archie Cameron, MHR, Country Party, United Australia Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 179, 20 July 1944, p. 335.

<sup>95</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 201, 11 February 1949, p. 205.

**Chapter Five**

***“Savages” “Concubines” and White Australia***

***1945-1949***

Despite the many and varied ways that Australian politicians had found to defend the White Australia Policy, the immediate postwar period saw a huge number of deportations of non-European people allowed into Australia for the duration of the war, and until the cessation of hostilities in their own countries. Deportations, or ‘Repatriations’ as the Australian politicians delicately termed them, could not take place straight after the war because of the international shipping shortage, but soon ships were departing Australia with non-Europeans and returning with Europeans.<sup>1</sup>

This mass-deportation of non-Europeans took place despite all the calls of people from a wide cross-section of the Australian community to allow non-Europeans, who had set up a life in Australia during their exile period, to remain in Australia and become a permanent part of the Australian community. These calls came from a variety of sources, representing most political and social orientations of the Australian public, from returned servicemen, to church leaders, politicians of differing political hues, academics, and other concerned groups of people. They were directly influenced by the experience of World War II and the lesson it held that countries were no longer isolated and able to perpetuate outmoded policies. Australia now had the world’s gaze upon it, more concentrated due to Australia’s championing of the United Nations initiative.<sup>2</sup> A wide variety of people in Australia supported a change in Australian immigration policy similar to the groups in the US who had supported the implementation of a quota system in 1943. Many of the groups concerned with social welfare stressed the wrongness of forcibly returning people

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 189, 22 November 1946, pp. 506-7.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Sean Brawley, The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America 1919-78, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1995. Brawley deals extensively with the impact of international condemnation upon the White Australia Policy.

to war-torn situations, and separating them from their families, while church leaders wrote of the doctrine of equality of man which was being ignored:

White Australia? For the first time in its short history Australia is beginning to place a question mark after its strongly held immigration policy. The impact of two world wars has shattered for ever the illusion of isolation and forced all to realise that the situation facing Australia today is vastly different from that of the early years of the century. The long misunderstanding and resentment of some nations and the puzzlement of others are at last challenging the Australian mind. Conservatives, Liberals, intellectuals, even the Labour Party have revealed misgivings. The whole country is beginning to realise it must re-think its White Australia Policy.

Among Christian leaders uneasiness is perhaps most evident. Jesus has planted the idea of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man too deeply within the Christian conscience for His followers to be happy in the presence of any situation which even appears to violate these principles. Paul held up the ideal of there being “neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free in Christ” too vividly for the Christian to accept racialism, colour consciousness without heart-searching. Thus the Christian knows HE must re-think this business of a White Australia in the light of the principles of the Christian Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

The Australian Communist Party also argued at this time that the White Australia Policy was offensive to Australia’s Asian neighbours, and advocated a ‘sensible’ quota immigration system – one which was sensitive to the needs of Australian workers:

We are not in favour of an immigration policy that is going to swell the army of unemployed or undermine Australian standards of living...These dangers must be guarded against more (not less) effectively than in the past. But that does not imply a “White Australia” Policy. What we say is that immigration can be regulated, immigrants can be admitted or excluded, without using the dangerous, insulting term “White Australia”.<sup>4</sup>

The party argued that Chinese wartime allies and others should not be angered, but drawn into a ‘Pacific friendship’, which would be beneficial for Australia’s defence and trade relationships. A quota system such as existed in America, Canada, etc, but

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<sup>3</sup> Reverend Alan Walker, White Australia?, Epworth Press, Sydney, 1945 (?)



which was responsive to the state of employment in Australia, was considered to be the optimum solution. This statement of the party's immigration policy could not be as emotive as other statements such as those from the World Council of Churches, for it toed the line between support for Australian workers and an attempt to reach out to oppressed groups internationally.

Returned servicemen were of widely differing opinion on non-European immigration for while they were often stridently against Japanese immigration and supportive of the White Australia Policy, many stressed the noble qualities of the Asian people which they had observed while on duty, and claimed that it was wrong to deport people who had served with them to defend Australia. But the use of wartime service-related arguments to defend the right of non-Europeans to stay were not convincing in the face of the argument of tradition associated with the defence of White Australia. Military defence was associated with the protection of White Australia in a much stronger way than it was ever associated with its potential demise. This was due to the old fear of the 'yellow peril' writ large through Japanese bombing of Darwin, compounded with the fear of a 'fifth column' in Australia assisting the enemy. The war proved for many that White Australia was crucial for national survival:

The foundation of the Commonwealth rests upon what we call the White Australia policy. The last war proved conclusively to any sensible man, or woman, that standing by ourselves we were unable to defend this country. Of course, had the enemy landed, we should have done the best we could; but I point out that standing alone we cannot defend Australia against a major power. The White Australia Policy, which has been in operation for many years, has been accepted by the world, not because we were able to give effect to a policy that slammed the doors of this country against the crowded nations of the East, but because there behind us was the British Empire. For no other reason has the White Australia

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Communist Party, "White Australia", 1946, National Archives of Australia, A433, 1946/2/1428.

Policy prevailed for a generation and more. It is vital to us that we shall maintain this policy.<sup>5</sup>

Many politicians, though, continued their call for a reconsideration of the White Australia

Policy in the light of the service record of many non-Europeans in Australia:

Is it not fair to ask ourselves whether we do not owe a heavy obligation to those who went into battle in Australian uniforms and fought side by side with Australians in order to save this country? Could not such an obligation be fairly advanced as a reasonable ground for special consideration in cases where marriages have been contracted with Australians and residence established? In addition, should we not give some consideration to the plight of the women who married these men while they were serving with the Australian forces at a time when we were under the impact of war?<sup>6</sup>

But these considerations failed to alter the minds of the majority of the population. The military service of non-Europeans in Australian forces also failed to change the minds of most politicians, and the position of non-Europeans who were in Australia during World War II continued to be temporary. The war seemed to be, for a greater percentage of the Australian population, an argument for caution in immigration matters, as was evidenced by a Gallup Poll publicised in *The Sunday Sun and Guardian* on 19 March 1944. The poll interviewed a cross-section of people in six capital cities and 120 country towns, to discover whether they favoured the admission of a limited number of coloured people 'after the war'. In 1943, the poll had found that 40 percent of Australians favoured this limited admission, while 51 percent opposed it and 9 percent were undecided. In 1944, the opposition to limited coloured immigration increased, with

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<sup>5</sup> Mr. Hughes, MHR, UAP, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 189, 21 November 1946, p. 477.

<sup>6</sup> Mr. Lang, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 203, 30 June 1949, p. 1896.

only 35 percent in favour of it, and 53 percent opposed, with 12 percent undecided.<sup>7</sup> Judging from these results, it is not surprising that few people went out of their way to oppose governmental deportations once they began.

William Liu, and Chinese Australians in general, were disappointed in the Australian government's lack of response to their entreaties to liberalise the White Australia Policy after World War II. Liu thought that "...following World War Two, and China being on the Allies' side, we naturally expected Australia would give our people a new deal, but it didn't go that way."<sup>8</sup> Liu seized on the existence of groups of evacuees in Australia as a result of the War, and in particular foreign evacuees of Chinese descent still in Australia, whom he estimated at around 600 people. Many of these had worked as seamen during World War II. For Liu, the proper course of action was clear, the Government should allow these people to remain in Australia if they so desired, to allow them to help rebuild the Chinese Australian community from the disastrously low levels to which it was sinking.

This was the time that Liu was warned about in 1913, by the racist office employee at the Department of Home and Territories, for in one of Liu's recollections of the incident, Liu referred to a young staff member telling him that, due to the White Australia Policy, there would be no more Chinese in Australia by the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> And Liu considered that the Chinese Australian population was at very low levels by the close of World War II. He was concerned about the China-born resident component of the community, which he estimated numbered around 5000 in the whole of Australia, with

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<sup>7</sup> "Gallup Poll – Most people want a White Australia", The Sunday Sun and Guardian, 19 March 1944, National Archives of Australia, A6122/46, 1810.

<sup>8</sup> William Liu, transcript of interview with Hazel DeBerg, 17 February 1978, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>9</sup> "From Manchu to Mao", p. 9, MLMSS 6294/11.

more than two-thirds of that number comprised of “aged pre-Federation Chinese”. Liu wanted to see young “replacements” for these (mainly) men in particular, to maintain the China-born component of the Australian population and keep its close link with China. Liu wanted these Chinese in Australia to become “ambassadors for Australia among their respective folks in China from Hainan island in the south to provinces north to Shangtung”, as the aged component of the China-born Australian population generally came from the south, “from Hong Kong and Kwangtung, except the few dozen Swatow and Shungtung silk merchants”.<sup>10</sup>

These replacements, Liu argued in a letter to W.J. Scully, M.P. (and a similar letter to T.H.E. Hayes also on 27 May 1947) were “imbued with an Australian outlook”, and were already “more or less settled in various businesses, factories and other employment, and some are married, mainly in the States of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland”. Liu wanted the Australian government to “take an overall and long view, as the Americans do of their Chinese residents in U.S.A.” to “conserve the nucleus of a happy and contented Chinese community in Australia”.<sup>11</sup> Liu also wrote to Calwell on this issue, taking an approach which he thought would better influence Calwell, by arguing that only those Chinese with relatives in Australia would want to stay, therefore producing only a small net increase in the Australian Chinese population.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Liu approached Sir Douglas Copeland, Minister to Chungking, and his Darwin-born secretary Charles Lee, to ask them to speak to the Australian Government, for he wanted the government “to say that any Chinese evacuee or refugees here now, whether from the

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<sup>10</sup> William Liu transcript.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Liu to W.J. Scully, M.P., 27 May 1947, National Archives of Australia, A433, 1946/2/1428.

<sup>12</sup> William Liu transcript.

Islands or from the boats, is to get their wish”.<sup>13</sup> But they did not get their wish – as Liu recounts, despite his representations to Calwell, “they engaged a ship to get them away and then Calwell engaged planes to take them away”.<sup>14</sup>

The Labour Government was not interested in conserving the nucleus of a non-European population in Australia, which it saw as antithetical to its postwar focus on the setting up of Australia’s huge European migration programme. A bipartisan approach to keeping Australia white and British guided the setting up of the programme, with a hierarchy of wanted immigrants – “first, British people, secondly, British-speaking people, and thirdly, selected migrants from European countries”, to protect Australia from its Asian neighbours.<sup>15</sup> “Populate or Perish” simply meant for most parliamentarians the possible forcible invasion of Asians should Australia not fill up with Europeans, and this invasion could take place either via the force of the Asian countries themselves, or via the force of the new international bodies being set up:

During the recent debate on international affairs, we heard a great deal about the force of world opinion and a court of human rights. These matters do not concern us very deeply to-day, because world opinion is not easily expressed and there is no court of human rights. We should be glad that such is the case, because a truly international and fair-minded court which did not pay regard to race, colour or religious persuasion, would compel us immediately to take large numbers of foreign, coloured migrants, particularly from India, China and Indonesia. Whilst I am not a prophet, I believe it to be quite certain that within the next ten years very heavy pressure will be put on us to accept unlimited numbers of coloured migrants, unless we apply without delay a policy which will ensure our receiving the migrants that we want.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> William Liu transcript.

<sup>14</sup> William Liu transcript.

<sup>15</sup> Mr. McEwen, MHR, Country Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol 178, 19 September 1944, p. 1001.

<sup>16</sup> Mr. Gullett, MHR, Liberal, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 189, 27 November 1946, pp. 658-9.

Liu's efforts on behalf of these groups of Chinese did not have the effect of stemming the tide of deportation of Asians which was seen as so integral to Australia's survival, but he did manage on occasion to influence politicians to cancel deportation orders. One such instance which Liu recounted in 1978 involved approximately 19 Honan Chinese men living and working in Australia, many of whom were married to Australian women. They had been taken to Long Bay Gaol in preparation for their deportation by plane, and a delegation of their wives came to see Liu to ask for his help in freeing the men. Liu went to see the men in the gaol, then organised the wives into a committee, and wrote to a *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent that he knew in Shanghai, Mr. Horsley, to ask his assistance. Liu couched his letter to Horsley as the outcome of the meetings of the Australian wives of the Chinese men in the gaol, and the resultant newspaper article

came out in inch or so front page letters and saying as the girls are supposed to have said, 'we fear Calwell as millions and millions in Europe fear Hitler and Mussolini'. That stopped it – Calwell then cancelled it and let these fellows out. They became Australian citizens...that's almost a pleasure to look back in my life and they are scattered all over the place. I don't know how many of them there are now.<sup>17</sup>

This incident did not disrupt Liu's friendship with Calwell, and Liu did not criticise Calwell at this point in his 1978 interview (or at any point in his writings), even when he was asked "What did you think of Calwell's Immigration Policy?"<sup>18</sup> Rather, Liu remembered the incident as a source of amusement for them which they referred to later on during one of Liu's trips to Canberra:

Oh yes, well, Calwell and I, we used to have some slang-bangs, but right up to 1958 or so, and we finished up, when he used to write to me, he used to always

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<sup>17</sup> William Liu transcript.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

address me as ‘Dear Ho Pang Yow’, Billy Liu (Ho Pang Yow means good friend) so despite all these slang-bangs we had, but I do remember, I was up at Canberra and crossing King’s Hall, Parliament House, Mr. Arthur Calwell spotted me and waved his finger, and we were going to have a cup of tea, and while we were having this cup of tea in Parliament House there, he murmured these words, ‘We fear Calwell’ – I said, ‘Stop, stop’ you see. He said, ‘Billy Liu, I knew, I interviewed every one of those girls that married those Chinese, There’s not one of them could have thought out words like that! Now who did it?’ These funny things happen in life.<sup>19</sup>

Liu’s representations, while possibly helping to secure the place of the Chinese men in Australia, did not alter the view which men like Calwell had of these men, or of the Australian women who married them. On their own, the Australian wives had no power to stop the deportation of their spouses, for their relationship with the Chinese men was not approved of as a part of White Australia. The politicians reinforcing White Australia after World War II did not take into account personal relationships when they interfered with government policy. Even British people were denied entry into Australia if they were too old, or physically handicapped in some way, even if they were members of a family which were admitted for entry into Australia.<sup>20</sup> Once separated from their elderly parents, parents were often ‘buried alive’ by children who could not afford to revisit their homes and were not subsidised to do so by the Australian government, which wanted all previous ties cut in order to facilitate assimilation.<sup>21</sup> Australian men or women who married non-Europeans had very little chance of overcoming this social engineering, although men were more likely to have the influence to be able to have non-European

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<sup>19</sup> William Liu transcript.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Dr. Cairns, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], 1 May 1958, p. 1423.

<sup>21</sup> Mr. James, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 178, 19 July 1944, p. 201.

spouses admitted to Australia. However, each year that passed saw more and more people becoming concerned about the harm done to people deported from the country.

One of the first incidents to attract widespread publicity towards the workings of the White Australia Policy was that of the deportation of Indonesian seamen, many of whom had Australian wives and children who were not allowed to accompany them to Indonesia. While they were allowed into Australia as 'temporary refugees' during the war, the presence of the seamen was unacceptable to the Australian Government and 2,900 of them were deported in the *Esperance Bay* and the *Manoora* in early 1947. But the Australian women and children were kept in Australia, as their marriages to non-Europeans were seen as unacceptable to many Australian parliamentarians, who labelled the Indonesian men 'semi-savages' and inferred that the women were being 'held against their will' as they would not willingly consent to marriage with non-Europeans.<sup>22</sup> The separation of these families left the women and children to rely on a Department of Social Services benefit, and so placed more of an economic burden upon the Australian Government.<sup>23</sup>

This situation was repeated in the case of Malayan seamen the following year, who were deported in two groups in February, 1948, after their Certificates of Exemption expired. The *Westralia* departed from Sydney on 7 February with 16 Malays on board, and the *Kanimbla* departed on 18 February with 15 Malays, including two who had escaped deportation on the *Westralia*. In each group, the Malaysians were requested to report to the Australian Immigration Authorities in Sydney, gaoled, and deported the next

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<sup>22</sup> Mr. Blain, MHR, NT, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 193, 14 October 1947, pp. 672-3.

<sup>23</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 195, 26 November 1947, p. 2717.



day without allowing them to talk to their Australian wives and children.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the Malays, the colonial government of Malaya made it clear that the Australian wives should not be allowed to accompany them. In a letter written by the Australian Commissioner for Malaya to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, on December 30, 1947, the Commissioner stated that

the authorities here are always anxious to avoid a situation where European women and children might find themselves destitute in this Asian country... These views represent those of the Immigration Department. The attitude of the Malayan authorities in general, particularly when account is taken of that of the Governors, is far less accommodating. They view the arrival of the families with great anxiety, for it is inevitable that it will lead to a generally difficult and embarrassing situation. The governors of these territories are particularly disturbed of course, at the possible damage to white prestige which will result from the spectacle of white women following a native standard of life.<sup>25</sup>

The publicity surrounding the cases of the Malaysians in both Australia and Malaya forced the Minister for Immigration, Mr. Calwell, to find ways of attracting public and governmental support for the 'repatriations'. This was done by maligning the character of the Malayan seamen, and arguing that they were not deported because of their colour, but because of their unsavoury character and their illegal actions. The seamen were said to be deserters, who had not only abandoned their wartime duties but also their families in Malaya. Allegations were made that some of their marriages to Australian women were in fact 'de facto' marriages, and much was made of this accusation in Parliament:

Dame Enid Lyons. –

I wish to ask a question with relation to the repatriation of Malayan seamen. As their repatriation involves the separation of husbands and wives, I ask the Minister for Immigration whether the Government has arrangement for

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<sup>24</sup> "Unfair treatment Alleged by Seamen", *Straits Times*, 30 March 1948, National Archives of Australia, A4968, 635514.

<sup>25</sup> The Australian Commissioner for Malaya to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 30 December 1947, National Archives of Australia, A4968, 635514.

sending the wives of these men to Malaya should they so desire? In the meantime, has the Government been obliged to make provision for the sustenance of these women and children? If so, what is the nature of that provision? Are these women a charge upon the Treasury?

Mr. Calwell. –

As I announced some weeks ago, the Commonwealth will send the wives and children of Malayan seamen, even their *de facto* wives, to them when shipping is available, or when the husbands, or *de facto* husbands, indicate to their wives, or *de facto* wives, that they have provided accommodation for them and are ready to receive them. We have never denied the right of these Australian women to go anywhere with their men if they want to do so. We have offered to pay their passages and the passages of their children.

Mr. Menzies. –

Are they *de facto* children?

Mr. Calwell. –

We have accepted into our vocabulary and dictionaries the term “*de facto* wife”, but we have not reached the stage of accepting the term “*de facto* children”. However, the Department of Social Services is making payments to the women for the maintenance of themselves and their children.<sup>26</sup>

Calwell further stated that “A *de facto* wife is just a concubine and is not entitled to any rights”. These assertions were clearly intended to erode support for the separated families by questioning their morals. The *de facto* accusation was another to add to

Calwell’s list:

I have some information concerning the circumstances in which the fourteen Malays entered Australia, and in view of the publicity that has been given to their projected repatriation, I think I should outline these circumstances to the House. One of the Malays deserted his ship in 1942 in Australian waters; another refused to re-sign his ship’s articles in 1943; and another was permitted to sign off his vessel for recreation leave and failed to rejoin the ship. Three served with the American transport services and signed off in 1946 pending repatriation. Another was brought here in 1945 from Japan for recuperation and subsequent repatriation. Seven signed off vessels in Australia pending repatriation. No ships were available at the time to repatriate these men, and they were permitted to remain in this country. I pointed out yesterday that two of the Malays were already married in Singapore before they contracted marriages in Australia with Australian women. I now find that two others included in the fourteen who are alleged to be married are living with Australian women who are not their wives, but only their *de facto* wives.

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<sup>26</sup> Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 196, 7 April 1948, pp. 513-514.

I do not propose to make any further investigations. I have already learned enough to be able to convince the Australian people if that be necessary that what the Government is doing is right and proper, and in accordance with established practice and precedent. The Government does not intend to depart from that practice and precedent.<sup>27</sup>

The Parliamentary exchanges attracted the anger of supporters of the Malaysans, including churches, who were involved in protesting against the White Australia Policy. Bishop C.V. Pilcher of Sydney, in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* published on 6 February 1948, objected to the Government's statements about the Malayan seamen.<sup>28</sup> Pilcher argued for the sanctity of marriage, saying that it was inhumane to break apart the families. He also debunked statements by Calwell that the seamen had deserted, saying that they were all honourably discharged, and he stated that only one was guilty of questionable conduct in relation to a previous marriage (and, "After all, if the Government decided to deport everyone whose married life had not been entirely correct, it would succeed in quite appreciably diminishing the Australian population.") In addition, the Bishop questioned whether the seamen were even aware that they could be forcibly repatriated, a point which was central to Calwell's argument that "The men knew when they came here that they would have to leave Australia."<sup>29</sup> The Bishop quoted a letter from the Department of Immigration which implied the possibility that the men would not have to leave – "The Minister has decided that no action will be taken to require the Malayan seamen, whose cases have been mentioned, to leave the

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<sup>27</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 195, 3 December 1947, pp. 3062-3.

<sup>28</sup> "Deportation of Malaysans – Bishop Appeals for Reconsideration", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February 1948, National Archives of Australia, A4968, 635514.

<sup>29</sup> *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 196, 7 April 1948, p. 514.

Commonwealth until the general question of non-European immigration has been considered.”

A number of other religious bodies also made their feelings clear about the White Australia Policy and its relation to Christianity. On 9 February 1948, the Australian section of the World Council of Churches issued a statement outlining the reasons for its opposition to the Policy. The WCC argued from a more practical perspective of ‘expediency’, referring to issues such as ‘the need for international co-operation’, but also extended its argument to more grand statements about Christianity in general:

We believe that the White Australia Policy is a direct denial of the Christian profession that God is the Father of all and that every man is invested with dignity and worth. The cardinal sin in the judgment of Jesus Christ was contempt for man. However reasonable it may seem to us, other people resent our consistent exclusion of the coloured man, because it suggests that we regard colour as a badge of inferiority.<sup>30</sup>

These sentiments regarding the breaking up of families did not have much impact upon government policy at this stage, and new cases continued to make the headlines. On 9 April 1948, a report appeared on the front page of the Singapore Free Press under the headline “Australian Deportation: Singapore Woman Told to Go”, which referred to the pending deportation case of Mrs. Carvill, the wife of a Perth-based Englishman. This article influenced members of the Singapore Chinese community to write to the Australian Government commissioner in Singapore, Mr. Massey, to request details on the case, for the community wished to take up the matter publicly. Yap Pheng Geck, representing the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Straits Chinese British Association, wrote in a letter to Massey that “unless there is more information than what

has appeared in the press recently I fear there will be serious consequences; so that if you are in possession of any information not generally known which may ease the situation it would be best if you could make some publicly known to stave off likely precipitate action by the local Chinese.”<sup>31</sup> This letter concerned Massey so much that he immediately sent a cablegram to H.V. Evatt marked ‘Secret’, requesting further details on the case to present to the Singapore Chinese community. Massey emphasised that the involvement of the Straits Chinese community would be more problematic for Australia than the previous anger of Malays, for they lacked the “wealth, power and political consciousness of Chinese. If Chinese leaders take up this and similar cases trade boycott[s] and attempt[s] to have issue raised at next United Nations meeting cannot be ruled out.” He further wrote that

I have been informed privately by leading Chinese here that present case has produced intense bitterness, and that I will be well advised to obtain strong brief before public protest, which is now pending, is launched. It will help if I can show that Mrs. Carvill was admitted only on understanding that she must return to Singapore when opportunity offered. I again urge the tremendous harm done to Australia by adverse publicity given here to such measures as this. I realise requirements of traditional policy but recent developments have quite outweighed all we have achieved through general foreign policy, and such gestures as South-east Asian scholarships.<sup>32</sup>

The case was brought to the attention of the House of Representatives in Australia on 15 April 1948, when Mr. Ryan asked Mr. Calwell to comment on the reason for the action, and whether it was mandatory under Australian law:

Does the decision mean that should an Australian marry a Siamese, or an Indian, or a woman of any other nationality, to which the Minister might

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<sup>30</sup> World Council of Churches, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1948, National Archives of Australia, A4968, 635514.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Yap Pheng Gack to Mr. C. Massey, Commissioner to the Australian Government, Singapore, 9 April 1948, National Archives of Australia, A4968, 635514.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Massey to Evatt, 10 April 1948, National Archives of Australia, A4968, 635514.

take objection the wife will be deported? If that is the law, does not the Minister consider it to be too rigid, impolitic and inhuman and, therefore, should be amended?<sup>33</sup>

Calwell responded with a defense of the deportation order, saying that it was consistent with the 47-year practice based on restrictive sections of the Immigration Restriction Act:

...there is a discretion; but it has been uniformly administered in one direction. I do not propose to depart from the existing practice, and all the sentimentalists, emotionalists and the rest of the minority groups throughout Australia, who have become so stirred up over the question of altering our laws because of the marriage of certain Australian or other British people to Asiatic ladies, will have no effect upon my decision.<sup>34</sup>

The involvement of ‘sentimentalists’, be they from churches or newspapers or other fields, irked Calwell, although he was determined not to respond to their concerns, but it was the Annie O’Keefe case which highlighted the increasingly effective involvement of Australian community organisations in opposition to the White Australia Policy. The O’Keefe case has been discussed in the writings of Sean Brawley in regards to relations between the Dutch and Australian Governments over the White Australia Policy, but it also affected Australia domestically for many came to the conclusion that the Government was in the wrong.<sup>35</sup> Annie O’Keefe was an Ambonese woman, formerly Mrs. Jacob, who was evacuated to Australia with her husband in September, 1942 to escape the war. He was killed on an Allied intelligence mission two years later, and in June, 1947 she married John O’Keefe, an Australian with whom she and her eight children were living in Melbourne. In early 1949, the family was told that they were to

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<sup>33</sup> Mr. Ryan, MHR, Liberal, backbencher, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 196, 15 April 1948, p. 889.

<sup>34</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 196, 15 April 1948, p. 889.

<sup>35</sup> See Brawley, *The White Peril*, pp. 248-251.

leave Australia by midnight on 28 February or they would be deported.<sup>36</sup> Calwell's refusal to make an exception for O'Keefe led to furious exchanges in Parliament and through the press. Holt used the first day of the 1949 session of Parliament to launch an attack upon Calwell and the Labour party:

I present this motion [for adjournment] on behalf of the Opposition parties in this Parliament. We believe that the O'Keefe case is the culminating episode in a long series of harsh, rigid and bungling ministerial administrative acts of the present Minister for Immigration (Mr. Calwell). We claim that this is the worst of the many bad cases that have occurred in recent years in the administration of this policy by the Minister. We claim that the case involves powerful humanitarian considerations which should receive sympathetic support from all sections of the Parliament. Beyond that, we claim that the Minister, by his inept handling of this whole policy, far from defending the White Australia policy, as he claims to be doing, has done more to jeopardize that policy and provoke resentment and inflame hatred against this country and the policy he administers than any other Minister in the history of Federation.<sup>37</sup>

The case further angered Calwell when Mrs. O'Keefe appealed to the High Court to overrule the deportation order, and won her appeal. The decision of the High Court declared invalid sections of the Immigration Act, and so the Labour party introduced the Immigration Bill 1949 and the War-time Refugees Removal Bill 1949 in a retroactive attempt to legally deport the O'Keefe family.<sup>38</sup> This bill was seen by some in Parliament to be vindictive:

This is a savage piece of legislation. It should be called "Reprisals Against Mrs. O'Keefe Bill". It reeks of venom and spite. The Minister for Immigration (Mr. Calwell) has been frustrated, so he turns what should have been an ordinary act of administration into a personal vendetta against a woman he has never met. When the High Court of Australia ruled against

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<sup>36</sup> Mr. Holt, MHR, frontbencher, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 201, 9 February 1949, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Mr. Holt, MHR, frontbencher, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 201, 9 February 1949, pp. 56-7.

<sup>38</sup> Mr. Daly, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 203, 23 June 1949, p. 1484.

him, he was consumed with a personal hatred of Mrs. O’Keefe. She had appealed to the highest judicial body in Australia, and had won. That was sufficient to earn the undying enmity of the Minister. He must have his revenge. He had to show her that, no matter what the High Court of Australia said, he was the final authority. Once he said that this lady had to go, she had to go. It did not matter if he dragged down the Government in the process. He had to get his revenge. It did not matter that the platform of the Labour party says that the High Court of Australia should be the final court of appeal. It did not matter that a fundamental principle of justice is that no person shall be tried twice for the same offence. It did not matter that this woman, having established her right of residence by an appeal to the High Court of Australia, should have been left undisturbed. It did not matter that the principle established in the *Walsh-Johanson* case might be placed in jeopardy. All those considerations were thrown overboard in order that the Minister might wreak his petty spite on one person. That is why this legislation is to be retrospective in operation, and why it is aimed specifically at a lady called Mrs. O’Keefe.<sup>39</sup>

Different sections of the Australian community became involved in the O’Keefe case as these developments took place. A “Mrs. O’Keefe Fighting Fund” was started by the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, with many Liberal party supporters, such as Mr. J. Cassidy, K.C., Dr. F.A. Macguire, and Councillor J.O. Cramer, as well as members of the Asian Australian community, such as William Liu, Ah Fat, Lee Jan Sing, Soo Hoo Lock, Lee Moon, Sun Hon, and Lee Park.<sup>40</sup> Other prominent figures, such as Eugene Goossens, were also “foolish enough” to allow their names to be used in this manner.<sup>41</sup> This was an issue which brought Liu and Calwell into direct opposition, but this was not evident in their interactions with and letters to one another. Calwell did not acknowledge that he knew any of the named men personally, but stated in response to the raising of the subject in Parliament that “It does not matter how many names were on the subscription list and

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<sup>39</sup> Mr. Lang, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 203, 30 June 1949, pp. 1893-4.

<sup>40</sup> Mr. Daly, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 201, 15 February 1949, pp. 229-30; Mr. Daly, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 201, 9 March 1949, p. 1144.

<sup>41</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, *ibid.*



whether the subscribers were natural-born British subjects, naturalized subjects or aliens, because this Government will do its duty in carrying out the immigration laws.”<sup>42</sup>

In addition, there was heavy church involvement in the protest against the Government’s actions, mainly because Calwell accused the church in which the O’Keefes were married of performing the ceremony to subvert Australia’s immigration laws. Father Fitzpatrick, who performed the ceremony, was quoted by the Melbourne *Herald* as saying that

It was in this church that the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. O’Keefe took place. I celebrated the marriage...I knew when I married them that Mrs. O’Keefe, being an Indonesian, did not acquire by marriage to an Australian the right to stay in Australia.

I take the Minister’s statement as implying that I was conniving at defeating the immigration laws of Australia. But I knew also that the Minister for Immigration had power to grant extensions of the certificate of exemption.

I was particularly concerned in seeing that Mrs. O’Keefe’s children received a Christian education, so that when they returned eventually to their own country – as their mother intended – they would go as apostles for Christianity.

Therefore, I ask you men and women of this church to do everything in your power to stop this Godless and un-Christian action. Each of you should approach your own member of Parliament; you should even see the Minister.<sup>43</sup>

A wide spectrum of the Australian community was becoming more vocal in protesting against the workings of the White Australia Policy. By 1949 there were many to the right of the political spectrum, as well as the left, who opposed the extreme application of the Policy. This motley alliance was remarked upon by a Labourite:

They enlisted aid and propaganda from the extreme “left” and, astonishing though it may be, the extreme “right”. So it was the tottering old Tory in the Union Club as much as the most rabid Communist who attacked the White Australia policy on their behalf.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 201, 9 February 1949, p. 58.

But a Gallup poll result dated 19 May 1949 showed that there was still strong general support for tightening immigration restrictions. In a statement by the Public Opinion News Service entitled “Our Migrant Laws Should be Firm: Majority Opinion”, the poll was summarised as showing that “The Government’s decision to close loopholes in our immigration laws is approved in principle by most of us”.<sup>45</sup> Interviewees were asked to briefly describe the O’Keefe case (which 75% could do), and then asked “The Government plans to strengthen the immigration laws, so that people allowed to come here temporarily can be sent away again. Do you think those laws should be strengthened or not?” 53 percent said ‘strengthen them’, 31 percent said ‘don’t strengthen them’ and 16 percent had no opinion. Mr. Thompson used the results in Parliament on the day they were released to back the Labour government’s administration of the White Australia Policy. Support for strengthening restrictions was highest amongst Labour voters, and lowest amongst Country party voters, with Liberal support levels slightly higher than those of the Country party. Typical comments of support were “We must safeguard against undesirables” or “Maintain the White Australia Policy”.

At the same time as the O’Keefe case was attracting publicity, another case involved Calwell in a personal battle with a deportee. Lorenzo Gamboa was a Filipino who gained United States citizenship after joining the US Army, but who had been deported from Australia in 1946 because of his race. His Australian wife and two young children were separated from him as they attempted to gain back his residence. The case

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<sup>44</sup> Mr. Haylen, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 197, 17 June 1948, p. 2223.

<sup>45</sup> Mr. Thompson, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 202, 19 May 1949, p. 90.

caused particular difficulties for Calwell as Gamboa had been a member of General MacArthur's staff in Australia and later in Japan, and MacArthur's staff became involved in his fight.<sup>46</sup> Calwell's animosity towards Gamboa and O'Keefe was seen as unreasonable, and they were both forced to wait for a change of government before being guaranteed residency.

The Gamboa case, along with others in which the issue was intermarriage, emphasised the racial basis of the White Australia Policy and led to a wider group of people organising opposition to the Policy. Gamboa made his view of the nature of the Policy clear in a letter written to question his exclusion from Australia:

By letter dated 3 February 1949 I was advised by your Mission of the disapproval of my application for entry into Australia to join my wife and children. Thereafter I was informed that such disapproval was based in your Government's immigration policy, which bars the entry into Australia for permanent residence of persons of Asiatic descent.

It is most difficult for me to understand the basis for such policy at this time. During the war when I was ready to give my life for your country there was no question of race, colour or creed involved. Nor was there any such question involved when I married an Australian girl in Australia.

In the interest of justice, and for the well-being of my wife and small children, I beseech you to reconsider my application and permit me to be reunited with my family. This does not appear to be asking too much.<sup>47</sup>

These cases were focused upon as many parliamentarians condemned the Policy, for they made starkly clear the racial basis of the Policy, and put the lie to the economic defence:

This Parliament is asked to transmit to the President of the Republic of the Philippines the naïve lie that our White Australia policy is based, not on racial but on economic grounds. When Sir Edmond Barton, the first

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<sup>46</sup> Mr. Lang, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 202, 19 May 1949, pp. 72-3.

<sup>47</sup> Gamboa to Head of Mission, Australian Mission in Japan, 31 March 1949, National Archives of Australia, A1838/2, 1453/334.

Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, laid down the immigration policy of the new Commonwealth, he said that the test for admission of people to this country was to be whether they were the sort of people whom we would admit to full social and political rights, including the right of inter-marriage. That is a basic statement concerning our immigration policy. Including the right of inter-marriage! Is that an economic or racial question? Obviously it is a racial question, and it is based on emotional, or, if you like, racial grounds.<sup>48</sup>

However, the major objection to the White Australia Policy was not that race was an issue central to the Policy, but that the Labour Government had not utilised the flexibility of the Policy to defend it from critics. This was a point made by Harold Holt frequently:

The White Australia policy is one that every political party has supported since federation. Certainly every political party and every honorable member of this House at the present time supports that policy, and I stress that now because I am quite certain that the Minister will argue that we are trying in some way to undermine the policy. We support the White Australia Policy now, and have always supported it...The whole reason why the operation of the White Australia Policy has come under challenge in recent times is because of the heavy-handed, harsh, rigid application of the policy by the present Minister for Immigration.<sup>49</sup>

In defending this series of deportations, the Labour party made use of international comparisons to argue that Calwell's actions were not unusual. It was argued that other Asian countries practiced racially-based immigration restriction in the same way that Australia did, and that the United States was also racially restrictive – therefore, these countries had no right to criticise Australian policy:

It is true that a measure of discrimination on racial grounds is exercised in the administration of our immigration policy. That is inevitable in a policy which is based on the concept that the homogeneous character

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<sup>48</sup> Mr. Beazley, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 202, 19 May 1949, p. 82.

<sup>49</sup> Mr. Holt, MHR, Liberal, frontbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 201, 9 February 1949, p. 59.

of the population, which settled and developed the country, shall be maintained. Australia does not, however, stand alone in this regard. The dominant factor of the United States immigration law is the preservation of the ethnic composition of the population of that country and that principle is inherent in the immigration laws of all countries. Non-Europeans as well as Europeans practise it. For instance, Malaya and Burma restrict the immigration of Chinese and Indians, Indonesia and the Philippines restrict the immigration of Chinese, and Ceylon restricts the admission of Indians. Unfortunately, the application of this principle in Australian immigration policy has been magnified and distorted in a fashion which has led to a mistaken belief on the part of many of our northern neighbours that we regard them as racially inferior and because of that we apply to them a policy of total exclusion.<sup>50</sup>

The United States was also used as an example of a country which was not hesitant to deport people who did not abide by its immigration laws. This example was brought into play during the mid-1949 debates over O'Keefe and the new laws which Calwell was proposing to use against temporary refugees, primarily the War-time Refugees Removal Bill. Calwell quoted Sir Frederick Eggleston, who had made some comments on immigration policy to a Sydney newspaper, as saying:

America's exclusion of Orientals was always ruthless before the establishment of the quota system and now, outside the quotas, it is still ruthless for all migrants. Few exceptions are made, and deportation follows any violation of temporary permits.

Notwithstanding the trifling quota of Orientals [sic.] by the United States, Australia has always been, and still is, more lenient in her policy than America.

The difference is that American action is taken as a matter of course by the people of that country and is not ventilated in the press, whereas, in Australia, criticism has a political basis and is made without a knowledge of the circumstances of each case, in ignorance of Australian policy, and in ignorance of the policy of other countries.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, Minister for Immigration, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 202, 9 June 1949, pp. 807-8.

<sup>51</sup> Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 202, 9 June 1949, p. 813.

This comparison with the United States was extended when members of the Labour Party found statistics to back up the claim that the United States was more harsh in relation to deportation, and so Australia should not have been considered a pariah in this respect:

The statistics cited by the Minister showed that during 1946 and 1947, Australia deported 143 persons, or approximately one person for every 48,000 of the population. During the corresponding period the United States deported 33,038 persons, or approximately one for every 4,200 of the population. Until the recent war it was believed that Australia was almost immune from attack by any Asiatic power, but the rapid development of air striking forces during the war and the application of science to methods of destruction, have demonstrated the need for us to be more vigilant than ever to safeguard our security. Nevertheless, Australia is still one of the freest and least troubled nations in the world, which is borne out by a comparison of the statistics of deportations from the United States of America. Those statistics also furnish some indication of the determination of the people of the United States to preserve their present racial composition. Although it is true that the population of the United States of America is eighteen times that of Australia, the figures that I have given are significant. Ninety per cent of the people deported from the United States of America were in that country temporarily...Who are we to question the wisdom of the immigration policy of the United States of America? That country is confronted with a delicate problem which, owing to the foresight of early legislators, does not exist in this country, and, please God, will never exist.<sup>52</sup>

The United States was a focus once again for the embattled Labour Party and Calwell, for the reason that ever since the US established an immigration quota for Asian migrants, this was seen as the benchmark for Australia to follow if it was to be seen as non-racist. The quota issue was one which Australian governments were forced to deal with from 1943 to the end of the White Australia Policy, as parliamentarians, community groups and church organisations questioned why it could not be an acceptable solution for the government's dilemma. During the debate on the War-time Refugees Removal

Bill, the issue surfaced again, as Calwell restated his reason for rejecting the quota option:

It is appropriate at this stage to refer to the question of an Australian immigration quota for non-Europeans, which some very good citizens have advocated and for which some other people, a small but noisy minority, have set up an insistent clamour. It is claimed that the grant of a token quota, under which only a few non-Europeans would be admitted each year, would satisfy the aspirations of our northern neighbours and would allay the resentment which, it is said, they feel at being allegedly discriminated against on racial grounds. According to this argument, once a quota has been granted, our neighbours would be quite content that our doors should remain barred to the rest of their nationals. Such an argument, in my view, is quite fallacious. The claim is also made that such a system could in no way affect the composition of our present population, but that its adoption would lead to much friendlier feelings between the various countries.<sup>53</sup>

In the United States, during the time of the deportation battles in Australia, the quota system as it was first implemented was seen as inadequate, particularly by Asian families who found it very difficult to get close family members into the United States. One of the most emotive issues affecting the quota system in the US was the question of returned US servicemen and their right to have their families immigrate to the United States. This was important to many in Australia as well. While in Australia, this obligation did not outweigh the ‘obligation’ to uphold the White Australia Policy, in the United States, these militaristic arguments held much more sway. Defence played a larger role in the conception of citizenship in the United States, as was exemplified through the granting of citizenship to thousands of servicemen based on their US war

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<sup>52</sup> Mr. Critchley, Senate, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 203, 6 July 1949, pp. 2029-30.

<sup>53</sup> Calwell in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 202, 9 June 1949, pp. 807-8.

service of six months or more.<sup>54</sup> This citizenship meant increased rights for Chinese American servicemen in the years following World War II. In late 1945, Congress passed the War Brides Act, which allowed the immigration of alien wives of American servicemen, but the law proved to be of limited usefulness for Chinese wives since their entries were limited by the Chinese quota. Chinese American organizations successfully lobbied Congress to pass Public Law 713 in 1946, which allowed the Chinese wives of American citizens entry under a non-quota category. This change in the law proved to be timely as the next year the 80<sup>th</sup> Congress also passed the GI Fiancées Act, which allowed the entry of fiancées of ex-servicemen. However, citizens' minor children born abroad were still not granted non-quota status until the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952.<sup>55</sup>

These legal changes meant a big difference to immigration levels of Chinese people in the following years. Between 1947 and 1952, almost 10,000 Chinese women immigrated to the United States, and the Chinese American population grew with nearly 20,000 babies born between 1940 and 1950.<sup>56</sup> All of this meant that the Chinese American community experienced a rejuvenation of its population in the early postwar period that Chinese Australians such as William Liu could only dream about, for neither the Labour nor the Liberal parties supported the introduction of immigration quotas in Australia.

Although both parties constantly reiterated their support for the maintenance of White Australia, they attempted to differentiate themselves in the lead-up to the 1949

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<sup>54</sup> Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 1960, p. 220.

<sup>55</sup> Him Mark Lai, "Unfinished Business: The Confession Program", in *The Repeal and Its Legacy: Proceedings of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Repeal of the Exclusion Acts, November 12-14, 1993*, Chinese Historical Society of America, San Francisco, 1994, p. 47.



election. One of the issues which became a factor in the election was the way in which the Labour party was handling the deportations of non-Europeans, and the image of the White Australia Policy in general. As mentioned in relation to the Annie O’Keefe case, there was much criticism of Calwell in the lead up to the election, saying that he did not care “if he dragged down the Government in the process” of trying to oust O’Keefe.<sup>57</sup> Members of the Liberal party continually attacked Calwell in this period, arguing that, far from protecting the White Australia Policy, Calwell was actually weakening it with his blunders:

It is absolute nonsense for the Minister to ask how it is possible to administer with flexibility a rigid code such as the White Australia policy. It has never been, in the long course of its history, a rigid policy. We all know that, regardless of the government in office, the Minister of the day has exercised a discretion in cases of hardship, and that with the sane administration of governments, drawn in the main from parties now on this side of the House, the number of persons of Asiatic origin in the Commonwealth to-day is only about half the number that was in this country when federation was formed although, in the meantime, the population of Australia has just about doubled. So, we have been able to hold the policy firmly, without giving offence or causing any feeling of racial resentment in other parts of the world.<sup>58</sup>

The weakening of the policy, according to Holt, was being caused not only by Calwell’s inflexibility in assessing individual cases, but also the amount of attention that the policy was attracting overseas due to Calwell’s actions. It was this image of the policy which the incoming Liberal government sought to address soon after its election on 10 December 1949, rather than any real substantive change. On 17 February 1950, a

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<sup>56</sup> Christina Lim and Sheldon Lim, “VFW Chinatown Eastbay Post #3956: A Story of the Fight for Non-quota Immigration in the Postwar Period”, *Mixed Dialogues: Politics and Culture*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1998, pp. 61-2.

<sup>57</sup> Mr. Lang, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 203, 30 June 1949, pp. 1893-4.

cablegram was sent to the Australian Consul General in Manila, describing the new way in which Holt as Minister for Immigration was going to deal with specific non-European cases, starting with the pending cases left unresolved by the previous government:

The Minister for Immigration the Hon. H. E. Holt said that both before and during the election campaign the members of the present Government had made it clear to the electors that while there was no intention of departing from the principles underlying Australia's established Immigration policy they held the view that there should be flexibility in its administration which would permit of sympathetic treatment being extended to certain wartime cases whose circumstances warranted this.<sup>59</sup>

The cablegram went on to detail Holt's reconsideration of specific cases which had made the headlines, as well as to point out that the Minister would no longer "make a practice of announcing decisions in particular cases as the private feelings of the individual concerned had to be fully considered." Publicity had done the White Australia Policy no good, and its administration would now go underground to protect it from further attacks.

The Menzies government began its long rule barely 2 months after the Peoples Republic of China was started on 1 October 1949, and its tenure was characterised by a focus on the many evils of Communism. This focus had a sizeable impact upon the daily existence of Chinese Australians, whose political affiliations came under increased scrutiny, and those who did not have Australian citizenship felt particularly concerned about this scrutiny. William Liu, though, felt free as he always had to speak his mind on issues related to China, and he continued to support the new regime, and was considered by many to be not "red", but "pink", as he had also supported the Republic of China and

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<sup>58</sup> Mr. Holt, MHR, Liberal, frontbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 202, 19 May 1949, pp. 79-80.

<sup>59</sup> Cablegram from Department of External Affairs to Australian Consul General, Manila, 17 February 1950, National Archives of Australia, A1838/1, 1477/2/11.

worked for the Kuomintang.<sup>60</sup> Liu's rationale was based upon a basic optimism that the new government would be good for the Chinese people, and that people would be "living better", sharing resources and becoming more literate and less superstitious.<sup>61</sup> This acceptance of change in China was very important to Liu's continuing links with the country, and his continued desire to forge links between China and Australia.

The four years following World War II took Australia away from the direction which Liu wanted, for rather than seeing an acceptance of those non-Europeans who had made Australia their home in such a terrible time, Liu could not stop the deportation of many of these people. The end result of this was, as Holt pointed out, that the Asian population of Australia in 1949 was half what it was in 1901. The other result for Australia was a damaged image in the Asian region, and a heightened awareness of the 'White Australia Policy' in many Asian countries. While the former result was considered a positive one by most parliamentarians, the latter was a problem that continued to interfere with Australia's international relations.

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<sup>60</sup> "Banquet to Celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of William Liu O.B.E.", MLMSS 6294/18.

<sup>61</sup> Liu transcript.

*Chapter Six*

*“Send them home with the best possible impression”*

*1949-1958*

Throughout the 1950s, the Australian government strongly maintained the White Australia Policy, but there was to be a new focus on Australia's Asian neighbours, partly to overcome the deterioration in relations due to the strict administration of the Policy. The result of this focus was the opposite to what was intended, for the interactions between Australians and Asians spawned by new programs such as the Colombo Plan led to many people rethinking the foundations of their ideas on keeping Australia 'white'. By the end of the decade, support for the White Australia Policy had greatly decreased and would continue to do so from that point on. The 1950s saw the expansion of support for protest movements against the Policy, which before that decade were confined to a very small number of people on the fringe such as William Liu. He kept aware of new movements such as student protest against the White Australia Policy, and used their ideas in his own writing. Liu also focused in this decade on the rights of Chinese in Australia who could not return to China due to the Communist regime, and continued his critique of the White Australia Policy despite a series of personal problems. Substantively, however, not a great deal had changed for non-Europeans in Australia under the Policy in the '50s, and those who were able to make a life in Australia remained the exception to the rule.

From the beginning of the reign of the new Liberal government under Menzies in 1949, Australia's tarnished image in Asia due to the administration of the White Australia Policy was seen to be an important focus. But the problem was not seen by most Liberals to be the Policy itself, but rather its unfortunate informal name, and its rigid application by the previous government. As Menzies had stated in the lead-up to the election,

We on this side of the House, agreeing entirely with the national policy, take a very different view of the ministerial discretion. That discretion

should be exercised, not only in the light of the general national policy, which is a sound one, but also in the light of the special facts of any individual case. Decisions that produce obvious injustice or hardship are a danger to the national policy. A foolish or stiff-necked insistence upon a good general rule in all cases and all circumstances is calculated only to bring the general rule into undeserved credit and avoidable attack.<sup>1</sup>

While the Menzies government, except in a few celebrated cases, continued to be as discriminatory as their Labour predecessors, they had “a far greater appreciation of the publicity effect of discrimination in Asia”.<sup>2</sup> To this end, aside from publicising exceptions to the White Australia Policy, the government also stepped up its aid commitment in Asia. But along with increasing aid, the government wanted it to be clear to the receiving countries exactly where the aid was coming from.<sup>3</sup>

Aid to Australia’s Asian neighbours was seen as a way to guard against the spread of communism there, as the fall, or potential fall, of countries in South-East Asia to communism was a preoccupation of many parliamentarians, who were already concerned with the possible implications for Australia of the Communist rule in China. It was thought that concerted international action was needed both to change the environment which made Communism attractive, and to contain the threat:

The consolidation of communism in China and the evident threat of its emergence as a growing force throughout South and South-East Asia, underline the urgency of international efforts to stabilize governments and to create conditions of economic life and living standards under which the false ideological attraction which communism excites will lose its force.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Menzies, MHR, Liberal, Opposition Leader, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol 202, June 1949, p. 1138.

<sup>2</sup> Sean Brawley, The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America 1919-78, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1995, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> Brawley, White Peril, p. 254.

This sentiment was expressed by the Minister for External Affairs, Percy Spender, upon his return from the Colombo Conference, at which delegates discussed the international coordination of the Colombo Plan, to assist the South and South-East Asian region. The plan was conceived as consisting of economic aid; a technical assistance programme; the sending of specialists to the region to assist in developmental, educational, research and other projects; and scholarships and fellowships for Asian students to undergo special training related to their country's needs.<sup>5</sup> The development of the Colombo Plan was considered to be important not only to stop the spread of communism in Asian countries, but also to counteract the negative press surrounding the White Australia Policy. Some argued that changing the White Australia Policy would not help Asian countries with their poverty and overpopulation problems:

The nature of this continent is not such that it could offer any worthwhile relief to the many millions of people who, unfortunately, are compelled by various causes to lead miserable and undernourished lives in overcrowded Asia. The introduction into Australia of as many of them as we could take would be only an insignificant contribution to the solution of the problem. In fact, it would create new problems within Australia without solving a single one of the troubles that exist elsewhere. There is no evidence anywhere on the face of the earth that great aggregations of peoples of widely differing standards of living, culture and ideals, can live together in the one community in peace and mutual prosperity. When such association is attempted, at worst it leads to hatred, bloodshed and continual outbursts of ferocious civil war. At the very best, it produces furtive fear and dislike, with one race or the other in a hopelessly subordinate position, doing the menial work of the nation and living mean and ambitionless lives on a level somewhere between that of domestic animals and that of free human beings. That "very best" is not good enough for Australia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mr. Spender, MHR, Liberal, Minister for External Affairs, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 206, 9 March 1950, p. 629.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Casey, MHR, Liberal, Minister for National Development, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 213, 21 June 1950, p. 281.

<sup>6</sup> Senator Armstrong, Senate, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 203, 6 July 1949, p. 1999.

A new way of deflecting attention from the White Australia Policy had to be found, one which would assist in repairing the damage which the postwar deportations had wreaked on Australia's image in Asia. The Colombo Plan, it was thought, would accomplish this, and relieve the pressure for Australia to change its immigration policy:

I come now to another aspect of this matter with which I was particularly concerned during my American visit. There are many people in our community to-day who feel that our immigration laws should be changed and that a quota system should apply to Asiatic immigration. Only two days ago I listened to Sir John Latham in Sydney addressing a gathering on this very problem. Having closely observed the problem confronting the American people, internally and externally, of this matter of racial differences, I believe that any whittling down of our present immigration policy would render a great disservice to this country. I believe, as did Sir John Latham, that there are too many people in this country who are prepared to apologize for our policy, and that if we were to explain our policy to the peoples of other countries they would clearly understand our position and the fact that it is our right, as it is the right of every country, to decide who shall make up our population. The Colombo plan and the other ways in which we have given concrete aid are indications of our desire to promote goodwill among the peoples of Asia, but we will defeat our object if we allow people overseas to gain a false impression of our immigration policy.<sup>7</sup>

But more than deflecting attention from the White Australia Policy, the Colombo Plan was also a type of bribe to keep Asian countries from criticising Australia. While it could not force Asian peoples to 'understand' the White Australia Policy, it could possibly alter their focus:

We do not hear very much now about the White Australia policy, so called. Our neighbours are letting us down lightly at the moment. They are not playing up the existence of that policy, but for one reason only, which is that we are helping them under the Colombo Plan, and in many other ways, and it would obviously be most ungrateful of them to attack our immigration regulations at a time when they are receiving benefits from this country. But that position will not continue forever.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mr. Daly, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. H. of R. 14, 4 April 1957, p. 537.



The Colombo Plan meant that assistance was being provided not only by sending it to the countries in need, but also by bringing Asian people to Australia to train them to help their people. It was this latter aspect which, it was thought, would benefit Australia by improving personal relations between Australia and the Asian region. Financial assistance could, as mentioned previously, improve the living standard of Asian people and make communism less attractive, but the arrival of students and apprentices could have a much greater impact on Australia. Between 1951 and 1964, nearly 5,500 students and trainees were hosted by Australia under the Colombo Plan. This was only between 16 and 25 percent of the total number of overseas students in Australia, with a high proportion of these students coming from Asia.<sup>9</sup> For parliamentarians, however, the possible impact of these students was generally seen as a limited one, and the important part of the exchange was seen as the return of the Asian student home to assist his (more often than her) country. Any interaction with the Australian community was conceived of as a learning experience which would pass into memory after the student had left. These sentiments were supported by a number of speakers:

One of the greatest contributions that Australia has made towards the well-being of the peoples of Asia, much more than money or food, is the granting of scholarships to the pupils of those nations so that they could learn with Australian students in Australian universities. I know that hundreds of students from the lands to which I have referred who are at present in Australia are appreciative of the sympathy and goodwill of the Australian people and will go back to their own countries better educated and better fitted to discharge their obligations to their fellow citizens. More than that, they will act as unofficial

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Allan, MHR, Country Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. H. of R. 9, 7 March 1956, p. 569.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Oakman, "Young Asians in Our Homes": Colombo Plan Students and White Australia", Journal of Australian Studies 72, "Jumping the Queue", New Talents 21C, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 2002, p. 90.

ambassadors for this country and will dispel many of the notions of newspaper proprietors and others who suggest from time to time that there is antipathy between Australians and those who live in nearby countries.<sup>10</sup>

Some parliamentarians argued for setting up more opportunities for interaction with the students, such as meetings with organizations like trade unions, or the Housewives Association, so that the students could gain wider knowledge of Australia:

I am all for the Colombo Plan; but, quite obviously, it is not sufficient by itself. It is not enough to offer people, rather indifferently, a certain amount of economic aid. If we want to achieve any kind of mutual understanding between ourselves and our neighbours, we must not only help them, keeping quite a distance between us, as we always do, but also offer them as much friendship and understanding as possible. To be more particular, let me refer to the large numbers of students who come to Australia from Asian countries. That is a good thing, but it will be useless to bring them here unless we, not only teach them something but also send them home with the best possible impression of ourselves as a people. I cannot help thinking that the scheme for bringing Asian students to Australia was put into operation before we were in a position to look after the students. One hears them say frequently that they feel lost here. I am certain they will not be the good ambassadors for Australia which, with little assistance, we could make them.<sup>11</sup>

Asian students could not only become ‘good ambassadors’ for Australia, but also anti-communist ambassadors, as they would learn of the Australian way of life and spread the democratic message:

I am very interested in the exchange of students. I believe that it could be a strong barrier against communism. I shall give a few facts to the House on that subject. Up to the end of 1953, 2,700 Asian students had come to Australia independently, and 350 had come under the United Nations scheme to study at our universities and technological institutions. More Asian students are coming to Australia independently than are coming here under the Colombo plan. Whilst these students represent fourteen nations, only one has come from Indonesia. That anomaly should be adjusted. This student movement represents an ideal, and it should be extended until, every

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<sup>10</sup> Mr. Calwell, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 216, 21 February 1952, p. 227.

<sup>11</sup> Mr. Gullett, MHR, Liberal, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. H. of R. 2, 10 November 1953, p. 60.

six months, thousands of Asian students are enabled to study here and be indoctrinated with our ideology so that when they return to their native countries they will provide an ideological barrier to stem the spread of communism. It is only by this means that we shall ultimately combat communism as an ideology.<sup>12</sup>

These hopes for the educational aspect of the Colombo Plan revealed a wish to achieve better relations with, and understanding of, the peoples of South-East Asia, but they also revealed the assumption of the temporary nature of the exchange. Students would come and go under the regulations of the White Australia Policy, but it was not thought that their presence would change Australia. The impact of their views on Australians, and on Australian policy towards Asian countries, was not considered, for parliamentarians believed this hosting of students provided an opportunity merely to explain aspects of Australia as they were and would continue to be.

One of the clearest ways in which the Asian students came to affect a group of Australians and, through them, Australian government policy, was in the universities in which these students came to study. Student interactions were generally over a long period of time, and they provided many opportunities to discuss political issues, and so the character of these interactions was quite different to that of other sections of the Australian community. As James B. Thomas, International Vice-President of the National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS) wrote on 23 August 1956,

Since the war, the University students of Australia have had more contact with the races discriminated against by the White Australia policy than any other section of the community, so perhaps their opinion on this question [of the White Australia Policy] is a significant one.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mr. Duthie, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. H. of R. 3, 26 August 1954, p. 697.

This process of student politicisation related to the White Australia Policy was intensified as a result of two factors – the attendance of NUAUS members at international student conferences, and the interaction of Australian and Asian students in Australia.<sup>14</sup> There was certainly university protest against the White Australia Policy prior to the development of the Colombo Plan, as can be seen through the agitation of a member of the House of Representatives:

There is another point that is always being raised. It is raised by planners, and by the more rabid members of the Liberal Party. It has been raised by university students, who do not know what they are talking about. I refer to the White Australia Policy. At Summer Schools of Political Science, at which words are bandied about in profusion, the argument has been advanced that we must have a restatement of the White Australia policy.<sup>15</sup>

The universities became much more involved as a result of student activism in the late 1950s, however. The relative importance of the international conferences cannot be discounted, although generally only two NUAUS members were in attendance, for the freedom of delegates to openly express their views on Australia in these overseas forums was often much greater than in Australia, where the views of Asian students were monitored by ASIO, and they were often warned to refrain from taking part in politics on Australian campuses.<sup>16</sup> This censorship was questioned in parliament:

Mr. R.W. Holt. –

Is the Minister for External Affairs aware that some Asian students at the University of Melbourne have received letters from a government agency,

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<sup>13</sup> Press Release from Mr. Thomas of NUAUS, “Students Question White Australia Policy”, 23 August 1956, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

<sup>14</sup> See for example National Union of Australian University Students, Report on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asian Students Forum Held at Manila December 26-31, 1956, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Mr. Haylen, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 190, 19 March 1947, p. 872.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Senior Field Officer, Victorian Office, ASIO, August 1964, “Melbourne University Chinese Students Association”, National Archives of Australia, A6122/46, 1810.

warning them against, first, interfering with, or taking part in, political party discussions, and secondly, making party political utterances? Is the Minister in favour of that form of censorship? On the assumption that he is not, I ask him to inform me what action he is prepared to take to ensure that the greatest freedom shall be given to Asian students to indulge in such discussions and to air their views.

Mr. Casey. –

I am not aware that any such instruction has emanated from the Department of External Affairs, but it is not impossible that an instruction of that kind, not necessarily in the form suggested by the honorable member, has gone out. We do take some trouble to see that Asian students, particularly Colombo plan students, do not get into the hands of Communists. Considerable effort is put into that work in all the capital cities where Colombo plan Asian students are studying. But, beyond that, I should be surprised to learn that any instruction had gone out from the Department of External Affairs or, for that matter, from any other government department with regard to the political activities or political interests of Asian students. However, I shall certainly inquire into the matter and advise the honorable gentleman accordingly.<sup>17</sup>

This 'considerable effort' included the construction of an International House in Melbourne which opened in 1957, with an allocation of £50,000 from the Colombo Plan budget. Casey was targeted by the Melbourne Rotary Club for the money, as his preoccupation with shielding students from Communism was well known. In addition, Ian Clunies Ross, Chairman of the International Service Committee of the club, asserted that by closely integrating Asian and Australian students, the Government would avoid any suggestion of sustaining policies of racial segregation.<sup>18</sup>

The factors which led to a greater interaction between Australian university students and Asian students were described in a report by Chev Kidson, International Vice-President of NUAUS:

For six years now I have witnessed this growth as a university student,

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<sup>17</sup> Mr. R.W. Holt, MHR, Labour, backbencher, and Mr. Casey, MHR, Liberal, Minister for External Affairs, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. H. of R. 11, 21 June 1956, pp. 3519-20.

<sup>18</sup> "Young Asians in Our Homes", pp. 92-93.

and I have seen it in its varied manifestations. First there came numerous international student conferences – I have been to one of them – and they have served their purpose. Programmes for facilitation of student travel have sprung up. But I am quite certain that throughout the world the most significant movement on the university level in these 10 years has been the very large schemes for exchanges of students between the various countries, both for undergraduate and post-graduate study.<sup>19</sup>

Australian university students were beginning to become politically organised against the White Australia Policy by early 1956. This year saw the coordination of NUAUS policy on the subject, as meetings at different universities concerning the White Australia Policy highlighted strong feeling against the policy on the part of the majority of students. Making student opinion clear to the Australian public via the NUAUS, however, was a difficult matter. The NUAUS could not make a statement on Australian immigration policy because, as a national union, it was meant to be apolitical, and express the views of all its members. A compromise position was soon found to get around this restriction, and it was decided to request individual universities to conduct referenda to determine the views of students regarding the White Australia Policy, and then to impartially present these results to the Federal Government and newspapers around Australia.<sup>20</sup> This was done, and the results submitted to the Federal Government in June 1956, and to newspapers in August of that year. The overall finding was that around 80% of university students in Australia supported modification of the White Australia Policy to allow a quota of Asian immigrants, or complete abolition of the White

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from David R. Teplitzky to Ethel D'Arcy Evans enclosing report by Chev Kidson "Impressions Made By Asian Students on the Australian (Student) Community", 6 December 1955, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 1.

<sup>20</sup> "Report on Action Taken by the NUAUS International Vice-President James B. Thomas on the Question of the White Australia Policy", October 1956, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

Australia Policy. The proportion was higher when postgraduate students were left out of the figures, which were separated in the case of the University of West Australia.<sup>21</sup>

This result was commented upon by Minister for Immigration Harold Holt, who continued the line of full support for the White Australia Policy, but in a way calculated to win over students more uncertain about their views on the Policy:

It is fundamental to say that Australians have no prejudice against people of other races, as such, precisely because we have never (thanks to the traditional policy) had large groups of other races here and we have not grown up in an atmosphere of tension between groups, as have the people of certain other countries.

It is to my mind in this context that one has to place the resolutions by the students. The majority have come to their Universities without previous opportunity to mix with people from Asia – but perhaps with a false idea that Australia has always kept such people out because of economic or genetic or other fears. At the Universities they have met the students from Asia whom we have been admitting in increasing numbers – in perhaps the ideal conditions for getting to know and understand others – and they have of course found Asians to be delightful people. The reaction is natural – but nevertheless founded on a misconception – that our immigration policy is founded on ignorance and prejudice and must be changed.<sup>22</sup>

Holt also criticised the students' majority support for a quota system:

It seems to me that, if it be contended that our present policy is necessarily offensive to Asians because of discrimination between them and Europeans, then it has to be agreed that any policy adopted to "correct" this must also avoid discrimination. This at once rules out any system of small quotas for Asians coupled with the existing policy of encouraging European migration because obviously this amounts to racial discrimination.

Those who advocate such a change in policy therefore must logically advocate a system whereby all quotas – for Asians and Europeans alike – are calculated on a uniform and non-discriminatory basis. Quotas based on the national origins of our existing population would, of course, be discriminatory against Asians.

Unless all countries are to have very small uniform quotas and Australia is to give up the aim of a large population for security and development, the change would mean admitting large numbers of Asians - and unless one is

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<sup>21</sup> "Report on Action Taken by the NUAUS".

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Holt to Thomas, 16 August 1956, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

prepared to state unequivocally that large numbers of Asians can and will be assimilated into the rest of our population, the idea of a quota system has to be opposed.

Although Holt's argument followed a logical progression, the conclusion that one could avoid offending Asians via a quota system by retaining a system which excluded them totally was difficult to accept. This letter provoked a response from NUAUS which defended the use of a quota to modify the White Australia Policy: "The view can be taken that even a token quota of persons from Asian countries would remove the stigma of the present application of the Immigration regulations which, even though applied with liberal concessions, are based on the criterion of colour." NUAUS went on to use the American system as an example:

It is the belief of University students who have had contact with Asians that small quotas of Asians could be assimilated into our community without any undesirable consequences. A suggestion that even a quota system is discriminatory ignores the consideration that it is widely recognised that countries have the right to restrict their immigration flow to a practical level. Thus the American immigration quotas, though highly restricted, are not regarded as discriminatory; rather, they achieve a degree of goodwill which, it is considered by students, would also occur in the case of modification of the White Australia Policy, with immeasurable benefits arising.<sup>23</sup>

Holt responded with a letter dismissing the NUAUS quota argument in relation to the United States:

I put it to you that it is not really possible to compare current American and Australian immigration policies. The United States has virtually passed the stage of large-scale immigration for development while Australia has not; so that the United States Government is satisfied with an intake of migrants which in a relative sense is far below the desirable Australian intake.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Thomas to Holt, 3 September 1956, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.



This exchange was fruitless, but the referendum exercise convinced NUAUS leadership that their cautious activism on the White Australia Policy was the proper role. At the same time that the letter exchange between NUAUS and Holt was occurring, the NUAUS co-sponsored a magazine with the Asian Students' Council of New South Wales entitled Asiana: asian-australian forum, which debuted in Spring 1956. This venture was a unique and short-lived one (two issues) which had as its goal the bringing together of Australians and Asians. It was described as “a forum of frank discussions by Australians as well as Asian contributors, dealing with problems of common interest to the Australian and Asian people”.<sup>25</sup> Article content ranged from cultural and political subjects to articles on Asian students in Australia such as “The Colombo Plan after 5 years” and “Asian Student Organisations in N.S.W.”<sup>26</sup>

The NUAUS also took a more confrontational step in early 1957 with another exchange of letters with the Federal Government. This time, however, the exchange was instigated by the Government. The Minister for External Affairs, R.G. Casey, wrote to the President of the NUAUS on 16 January 1957, in relation to a report from the NUAUS delegation to Malaya and Indonesia in 1956. This report contained a reference to a questionnaire which the Department of Immigration required overseas students to fill out asking whether the student was of predominantly European race or appearance. Casey denied the existence of the questionnaire, and attacked the NUAUS for printing the claim in its report:

I am wondering on what grounds this claim is made because at no time is an Asian student asked to indicate his racial origin during any procedure

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<sup>24</sup> Letter from Holt to Thomas, 5 October 1956, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Asiana: asian-australian forum, Vol. 1, Spring 1956

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

relating to his entry into or his stay in Australia. Such statements as that reported by your delegation in a publication distributed in Asian countries can have a very adverse effect on the friendly relations which we are endeavouring to build up and maintain with countries in the area.

The NUAUS is entitled to its own views, but in this case I think you will agree that the statement has been made without prior checking of Australian procedures for the entry of students – procedures I may say which are liberal in concept and generous in interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

But the NUAUS on this occasion put the Government on the back foot when it responded by enclosing a copy of the document with its letter. The argument of the NUAUS is interesting, as it was quite responsive to the Government's concern that it was harming international relations by publicising discrimination:

I sense that you are concerned in case our representatives make reckless statements without giving proper thought to the effect in other countries upon our National prestige, that we might be unconsciously giving the enemies of our country a weapon out of which to make further propaganda. I can assure you that nothing is further from our aims, than doing anything that could possibly damage our country. Hence we are always very careful and we expect our representatives to be very careful, in making any statement such as that to which you have drawn my attention. This present case, I submit, has been no exception.<sup>28</sup>

The NUAUS argued in the letter for ending the use of this form, which highlighted for arriving Asian students the discrimination inherent in Australia's immigration procedures:

The enclosed Questionnaire M.S. 283, is definitely given (or was given) to Asian students to fill in who come to Australia by ship. It therefore is, so far as an Asian student is concerned, a "necessary procedure relating to his entry into or his stay in Australia." I must confess that I did not know by what authority this form is issued, but to every Asian student who receives it, it must

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from Casey to Teplitzky, 16 January 1957, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Thomas to Casey, 19 February 1957, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

appear as a part of the procedure required by the Immigration Department, particularly as it asks the question, “Whether predominantly of European race and appearance”...I find it hard to envision any non-governmental authority that could justly require all the details requested on the form. I am investigating this further as it is most unfortunate that the Immigration Department should receive the blame for something of which it apparently knows nothing; doubly unfortunate that procedures for the reception of overseas students which have been especially arranged to avoid reference to racial origin should be virtually nullified by the issuing of a document such as M.S.283.<sup>29</sup>

A copy of this letter and the immigration form was forwarded to Minister for Immigration, Athol Towney, who responded by acknowledging the existence of the form after “urgent enquiries”, and proffering the explanation that it was mistakenly handed out, with no discussion of why it was important to collect racial statistics:

Urgent enquiries have been made regarding this form and I have now ascertained from the Commonwealth Migration Officer, Perth, that the form was used by boarding staff in Fremantle in connection with the entry of non-European students.

In using this form it was never the intention that it pass to any non-European student for completion and as a result of the enquiries made I can only assume that it was inadvertently handed out for completion on occasions by inexperienced boarding officers. In fairness to responsible boarding staff, however, I should point out that as Fremantle is the first port of call of a large number of vessels from overseas heavy demands are made on boarding officers, and it often becomes necessary to recruit officers from other sections at short notice. This lack of time may have caused an inadequate briefing to relief staff with the result that the questionnaire referred to inadvertently passed into the hands of non-Europeans for completion.

I would add, however, that this form is no longer in use by boarding staff at Fremantle.<sup>30</sup>

This was one of the minor victories which the NUAUS achieved through its advocacy on behalf of Asian students at Australian universities. Members of the executive of NUAUS continued to question the Government on issues relating to the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

White Australia Policy, such as the question of Asian students not being allowed to bring their wives to Australia due to fears that they might give birth to babies that would be Australian by birth. Peter King of NUAUS visited Mr. Donough of the Non-European Section to ascertain their policy on such non-European immigration issues.<sup>31</sup> In addition to a dialogue with the Government, NUAUS also discussed opening up a more effective dialogue with the Asian students, by getting them to fill out a questionnaire relating to their views on White Australia, which would ask them:

- (1) To determine their attitude as to the present administration of the system;
- (2) Whether they have been subject to any discrimination because of it;
- (3) What is their attitude towards the quota system;
- (4) If there is any discrimination, is it increasing or decreasing?
- (5) How long have they been in Australia?<sup>32</sup>

The activities of the NUAUS were an important part of the involvement of universities in Australia related to the White Australia Policy, and this involvement increased throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Although the NUAUS had to carefully situate its statements on the White Australia Policy within its apolitical framework, it was able to do this by ascertaining the majority views of students and then expressing those views. NUAUS leaders saw it as important to enter the debate by doing this.

This type of political involvement in the '50s by an organisation not expressly set up for it was avoided by many organisations, as it had the potential to scare away supporters. Such was the reasoning behind the stance of the Australia-China Society, a group which seemed an obvious candidate for opposition to the White Australia Policy.

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from Towney to Thomas, 18 March 1957, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Peter King, 5 August 1957, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from John M. Grainger, Melbourne NUAUS Secretary, to Jim Carlton, Vice-President, NUAUS, 12 August 1957, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No. 5.

William Liu was one of about 20 foundation members at its formation in 1950, and was enthusiastic about the possibility of the organisation improving relations between Australia and China. In the beginning, Liu signed many Chinese up for membership, but the Society was soon targeted by the Immigration Department, who regularly asked of Chinese trying to extend their Certificates of Exemption, “Do you belong to the Australia-China Society? Do you read China pictorials, do you read China Reconstruct?” These questions were used to refuse extensions, and so the Chinese membership soon dropped and the organisation was carried on by non-Chinese Australians.<sup>33</sup> Many of the Australian Chinese community went on to form the Australian Chinese Community Association in 1952.<sup>34</sup>

In 1954, Liu wrote to A.D. Lindsay of the Australia China Society requesting that the matter of the status of Chinese in Australia be brought before their committee. This request was refused, not for fear of causing problems for the Chinese members of the Society, but because its “overriding aim should be to improve relations between Australia and China, apart from questions of Australian immigration policy”.<sup>35</sup> The Society’s focus was upon international relations, and with such a focus, it could separate itself from the question of whether members supported Asian immigration, as people who were interested in relations with China did not necessarily support Chinese immigration to Australia.

Liu had written to the Society in order to enclose copies of the letters he had been writing to Prime Minister Menzies, on the subject of Chinese resident in Australia. Liu

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<sup>33</sup> William Liu, transcript of interview with Hazel De Berg, 3 May 1978, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>34</sup> "Superb Chinese Banquet at the White Lotus in honour of William Liu, O.B.E., *Bondi Spectator*, 27 May 1982, p. 22. See also Liu interview, MLMSS 6294/3, but Liu says 1974 in that interview because that is the year he became a foundation member of the ACCA.

was running the Kentucky Lounge café in Goulburn<sup>36</sup>, inviting acquaintances from Canberra to dine there with him, and spending much time at this point assisting the growing Chinese restaurant industry to present their menus, observe hygiene and give good value for money in order to attract business.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, he was writing to the federal government, on Chinese immigration issues:

Apart from the business and friends affairs, I have, for some months been devoting many of my evenings – late nights to early hours in the mornings – writing long letters to Canberra appealing for a New Deal to our friends and asking for permanent domicile for all Chinese nationals at present in Australia on temporary permits to do away with the extension of certificates from time to time – as most of our Chinese now consider themselves permanent exiles from their homeland on account of the changing conditions in China.<sup>38</sup>

Liu also wrote to request that the deportation of Chinese through infringements of the outmoded old regulations be deferred, and that Hong Kong students be brought to Australia under the benefits of the Colombo Plan or a similar plan to complete their advanced studies in the Commonwealth.<sup>39</sup> In October 1956, the Australian government officially acknowledged that many Chinese resident in Australia were unable to return to China, and created a new category for them, called ‘Liberal Attitude Status’, which entitled them to remain in Australia but not to bring their families from China. William Liu estimated in 1958 that around 2000 Chinese were in this situation of limbo, although they were, for practical purposes, permanent residents.<sup>40</sup> He was deeply unhappy about

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from A.D. Lindsay to Liu, 19 September 1954, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>36</sup> For example see letter from Liu to A.D. Lindsay, 19 September 1954, MLMSS 6294/1, and letter from D.R. Morgan to First Secretary, Chinese Embassy, 25 February 1957, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from R.A. Hohnen to Liu, 15 February 1951, MLMSS 6294/5; Mo Yimei Lone, William J. Liu, OBE 1893-1983 – Pathfinder, Pirie Printers Sales Pty. Ltd., Canberra, 1991, notes to scroll 19.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Liu to Mr. Chung Sim and Bros., Hobart, 3 August 1954, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> William Liu, "The Chinese Residents in Australia", 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.

the new status, which kept the White Australia Policy intact by creating a temporary category outside normal immigration channels:

Instead of allowing the unregularised thousand or so Chinese residents in Australia at the time to become absorbed with the then near million New Australian who have settled here since the end of the last world war, and rid ourselves of the costly and unpleasant administration of outmoded regulations, your Central Office created yet another category of Chinese in our midst, that which is now grouped with “War-time persons” under a separate heading and now generally referred to as “L.A.S. persons” (liberal attitude status) which is unfortunate as it is meaningless.<sup>41</sup>

The treatment of these Chinese people who had been in Australia for over a decade contrasted sharply with the encouragement of European settlers and their families. Liu characterised the discrepancy in Christian terms:

To these two groups of Chinese you say unto them that by our ‘liberal attitude’ you are allowed to stay in Australia on Certificates of Exemption (from the Dictation Test), and by granting you such an authority to stay, to engage in employment of your own choice, you forfeit any right to apply for your families and fiancées to come to Australia to join you. In effect you must divorce yourself from your folks during your stay in Australia. There it is. Our un-Christian and inhuman regulations towards our Chinese and other Asian friends, and frustrations to all who labour for Sino-Australian and Asian friendship.<sup>42</sup>

Liu maintained the family home at 14 Sturt Street Kingsford throughout his time in Goulburn, as a “sort of mirage” that covered up his ongoing marital difficulties. In 1961, Liu wrote about this period, and other traumatic periods in his marriage to Mabel Quoy, in order to explain why he needed to be granted a pension to support himself. This ‘poem’ was revelatory of his emotional state and indicates some of the reason for his obsessive focus upon his writing:

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<sup>41</sup> Draft letter from Liu to Mr. B.C. Wall, Commonwealth Migration Officer, 8 November 1958, MLMSS 6294/7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Form S.A.7, July, '61.

1702 Confidential Report-General, Pension Branch, Syd. 29.9.61  
Ref. P/L/15771/5. AL, – To Mabel, Re William: (M and W).

In connection with the claim for pension by the abovenamed person, please furnish me with the information requested h'under  
As delay could cause hardship, your early reply would be appreciated  
Authority for making this request is contained in Section 141 of the Social Services Act. Yrs. F'fully C.B. Jenkins, Director.

Questions

W. Answers

You are requested to telephone  
Special Magistrate No. 5 on BO255  
extension 246, to arrange for an  
interview regarding your h's (!)  
application for pension.

On the morning of Sept. 30 when this mail arrived,  
M. spread the Confidential SA-7 form on W's typewriter,  
W. asked about the questions, M. threw on table empty envelope –  
Which apparently brought the questionnaire, said: “embarrassing”.

The husband-wife relationship was strained away aback in 1930,  
That was during the family's tennis carnival with outsiders,  
Bit by bit misunderstandings arose, – never been right since,  
From that depression period, mutual relations then got worse.

Yes, there's been some endeavours and hopes for family sake,  
In the main for son and daughter then aged 13 and nine, who –  
Also tried in their teenage-age ways to help us, but failed,  
So the drift in the man-wife relations continued ever since.

In Nov. 1931, despite being unfinancial, I managed to get –  
Two free return 2<sup>nd</sup> class sea trip fares, paying only £26 for –  
Daughter and went to China staying with friends for some months,  
Then arranged return to Shanghai (with family) to work there.

Got job as English Secretary at Sun Co. new department store,  
I went first, Jan. 1934, family followed the year after.  
Feb. 1936, Mabel discontented and sick, we returned to Sydney,  
The tennis, our split, these two trips affected kids' schooling.

Failing a reconciliation and drift got worse, to Inverell I went,





Dear Mr. Director Jenkins, and Magistrate No. 5,  
That's my situation financially as money goes,  
I'm aware how mixed up our laws, rules and regulations are,  
Some people benefit by them as many the opposite suffer from them.

Give or no give, approve or no approve, matter in your hands,  
I can do little about it as the complicated matter now stands,  
Whether it is right or wrong, W. and M. weren't divorced,  
You know that permanent separation is fast approaching now.

I know laws, rules and regulations made tough re money,  
As the saying goes it being the root of evil and honey,  
The more I think what I've been through, it's dinkum funny,  
Like that card game by two or more persons, called rummy.

I guess that's all I can do now is to wait till there's no waiting,  
As Mabel this morning said whole thing all too embarrassing,  
Off to the races she went this sunny day to commune with horses,  
Whilst I'm contemplating, typing these lines communing "myself."

P.S. Not knowing Questionnaire, here's W's fuller reasons his need of the pension.  
=To avoid eating up the house.<sup>43</sup>

Liu did not clearly expose his marriage breakdown in any other piece of writing retained in his archives. Here, the resentment that had built up over decades poured out, and Liu described his wife's anger at his lack of financial success and his absence. His inability to support himself as a result of his lobbying and other pro bono work led to an uncertain future, inducing him to be more revelatory in this piece of writing. It had also clearly led to the fragmenting of his family life, something that he hid from everyone except the Pension Branch and his wife's family. Liu's evaluation of his family life could not be as positive as his evaluation of his successes in lobbying for immigration reform – even as he worked to keep other families together whom the White Australia Policy threatened to tear apart, his own family experienced hardship and separation.

Another revelatory slant on the marriage breakdown came from the Dedication which Liu's son, Bo, added to William Liu's memorial book years later:

My father's unrelenting endeavours to encourage and inspire friendship, understanding, trading and commercial relationships between Australian and Chinese peoples led my late Mother, Mabel, my sister Winsome, and myself to understand that our normal family life needed to take second place.<sup>44</sup>

These words bring out the other, hidden side of the story and hint at William Liu's possible contribution to the family problems.

The stresses of Liu's marriage in the mid '50s took their toll upon his health. On 14 January 1957, Liu underwent a stomach ulcer operation at Gloucester House performed by Surgeon Harley Turnbull, and he spent months after that recovering at 14 Sturt Street, Kingsford.<sup>45</sup> Liu also suffered more trauma late in 1957, when his brother Charles passed away on October 27.<sup>46</sup> But he continued to write, even more copiously, during his recovery, and barely a month after the operation, was writing to Bishop Burgmann in Canberra regarding a deportation case which he had asked Burgmann to appeal for him, as well as details of a number of other pending cases.

In Liu's letter to Burgmann, Liu quoted the words of Mencius, a follower of Confucius – "All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others" – to emphasise how that sentiment did not fit with the actions of the Immigration Department. The Department, Liu wrote, was instead frustrating "those who are labouring to promote

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<sup>43</sup> William Liu, 29 September 1961, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>44</sup> Bo Liu, in *William J. Liu, O.B.E., Pathfinder*, Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, Crows Nest, 1991, Dedication.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Liu to Dr. Ronald Mendelsohn, Assistant Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, Canberra, 12 February 1957, MLMSS 6294/8.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Liu to Calwell, 28 April 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.

understanding and friendship between Australians and the Chinese people.”<sup>47</sup> Liu felt that Burgmann would be sympathetic to his ideas as he heard that Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh were present at Burgmann’s sermon when he spoke about “our confusing laws and regulations, and especially that past concerning our treatment of Asians in Australia”. Liu felt that Burgmann’s message had “greatly contributed toward the birth of the last October New Australian Policy towards the Asian residents in Australia”, although Liu had previously stated that he did not believe the ‘Liberal Attitude Status’ then instituted met all the needs of the Chinese refugees.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond specific cases, Liu also began to reflect further upon the changes taking place in China, as well as his experiences over the years in Australia. Many Australians who were interested in China in this period, and not just wary of it, felt that there were positive changes taking place, and a new kind of society was being constructed, as Liu had said, free of past superstitions, and living simply and frugally, co-operating “for the general welfare”.<sup>49</sup> Liu recalled, later in his life, encountering the Archbishop of Sydney Most Reverend Howard Mowle at a lecture in 1956, and listening to Mowle tell him “how he felt that the people of China, making up a quarter of humanity, were in a process of building a puritan society for China’s new-born generations...to live better lives than was possible by their forebears.”<sup>50</sup> Liu supported these sentiments, writing idealistically about China on a number of occasions throughout his life.

Later in 1957, Liu began to draw together his ideas on the Chinese in Australia and his experiences into a piece entitled “The Chinese in Australia”. He wrote down his

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<sup>47</sup> Letter from Liu to the Right Reverend Bishop Burgmann, 28 February 1957, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Liu, transcript of interview with Hazel De Berg.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Liu to Prime Minister Whitlam, 2 April 1973, MLMSS 6294/10.

ideas “on the subject of our Chinese past and present activities in Australia in the hope of arriving at some conclusions as to our future in this country.”<sup>51</sup> This wide-ranging discussion looked at decreasing population figures for Chinese in Australia, about which Liu wrote that “the white man was wiping out the native Aboriginals and the Chinese, despite all that these two peoples had done in advancing Australia in her pioneering years after the arrival of the ‘First Fleet’”.<sup>52</sup> However, Liu also had some critical things to say about the laissez-faire attitude of some of his fellow Chinese Australians. In particular, Liu described a meeting in late 1912 or early 1913 of members of the Chinese community in Melbourne, which he organised with the Chinese Consul General based in Melbourne. Liu’s conclusion that some of the Chinese “had helped to bring about, what was said, to be some of our own undoings”, meant for him that he would have to put his future energies into more individual efforts on behalf of Chinese Australians.<sup>53</sup> He felt that some in the Melbourne Chinese community treated the whole matter of discrimination under the White Australia Policy as a “joke”, and spent their time smoking opium or gambling, harming the image of the community.<sup>54</sup> Liu’s correspondence with Australian-born Kim Jack in November and December 1957, on behalf of his daughters who were to be deported, only served to reinforce the idea of a lack of interest in political involvement amongst Australian Chinese.<sup>55</sup> As Liu noted a few months later on the back of an envelope, Kim Jack’s difficulties could have easily been his, and so it was important to him to be involved:

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<sup>51</sup> William Liu, "The Chinese in Australia", 25 August 1957, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. This was one of the first times Liu associates the plights of Chinese and Aboriginal Australians – an idea which he draws out more fully in subsequent letters.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. This episode is described more fully in Chapter Three.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Is it really “not cricket” to say that because you are born abroad a son or daughter of a Chinese-Australian father and/or mother...we don't want you in Australia. You would contaminate the whiteness of our homogeneous race. That could have easily happened to my son and daughter had I married in Hong Kong.<sup>56</sup>

In Kim's letter to Liu of November 19<sup>th</sup> 1957, the name of a mutual acquaintance is mentioned, Tony Palfreeman, whom Kim wonders if Liu had a chance to speak to when he was in Canberra for the Morrison Lecture: “Tony is quite a broad-minded chap and was quite disappointed to know that the Immigration Department could be so provincial and bigoted.”<sup>57</sup> Palfreeman and Kim had a connection through Lord Michael Lindsay, a friend of Kim's and a supervisor of Tony's masters research degree at the Australian National University. Lindsay ran Mao Tse Tung's radio contacts from Yunan, and came to the ANU Department of International Relations after World War II.<sup>58</sup> Palfreeman had decided to research the White Australia Policy for his degree:

[Michael] said he would introduce me to the Shanghai...Singapore, Hong Kong, Sydney Chinese community, who were the most directly concerned about Australia's immigration policy, because it was quite a large community here, and they'd been here since the nineteenth century, and they all wanted their families to come in, and they wanted much more contact with China, but of course the Policy excluded all that, so they were constantly battling for the Policy to be eased.<sup>59</sup>

Lindsay gave Palfreeman an introduction to William Liu, for Liu had the contacts to provide Palfreeman with the case studies for his research. Liu led Palfreeman through all

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<sup>55</sup> See for example letter from Kim Jack to Liu, 13 December 1957, MLMSS 6294/10. See Chapter Three for more detail.

<sup>56</sup> Note on envelope mailed to Liu, 12 April 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Kim Jack to Liu, 19 November 1957, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman, 16 September 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

the intricacies of how the Policy was working in regard to Chinese, and he took him to meet people who were experiencing difficulties:

What we were most concerned with was to meet immigrants – they were called temporary immigrants, because even though the White Australia Policy was in force, some Chinese were arriving as temporary migrants for special purposes...My purpose at the time was to meet these people, to meet some of the Sydney Chinese and understand their real family problems... So Billy Liu, my contact with Billy Liu was to set up a file of such people, and of course he knew everybody, so he would give me their names and addresses, and I would go and see them or he would tell me about their circumstances which would explain how the Policy was working.<sup>60</sup>

This was the way in which Liu most influenced the studies being done on the impact of the White Australia Policy, and this connection with Palfreeman would prove to have an even wider impact in the 1960s than the case studies which Liu provided for Palfreeman's book, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy*, which eventuated from his research.<sup>61</sup>

But Liu continued to be frustrated by the deportations carried out by the Immigration Department, most of which he was powerless to stop. The tone of his letters became more angry, as can be seen in his letter to Athol Townley concerning the eight Chinese chefs who had worked at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, who were deported around Christmas 1957. Liu wrote of his deep disappointment at the action, and stated that it brought "ridicule and mockery...upon your shoulders in the eyes of the Asian people – and broad-minded people of the whole world".<sup>62</sup>

Five days later, Liu vented his frustrations in an entirely different way, on a subject which he would focus on for the next decade. Liu's dealings with the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> A.C. Palfreeman, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967.

Immigration Department on a great number of deportation cases had clarified for him the necessity of focusing on the inequalities in the immigration law, rather than the exceptions which he sought for the potential deportees. He had decided that the broadest forum through which to publicise these inequalities was the annual Australian Citizenship Convention which was held in Canberra for a few days in January around Australia Day each year. The Citizenship Conventions were ideal for this purpose as they excluded Asian and Aboriginal people, and focused on assisting the assimilation of European migrants under the postwar immigration scheme. By January 1958, Liu had distilled the major deportation issues into three main points, and he summarised these in his first letter to the Chairman of the Australian Citizenship Convention:

I respectfully request, therefore, that the following action be taken:

1. Australian citizenship be granted to Chinese residents of good character who have been here five years;
2. The few hundred “wartime” and “L.A.S.” (liberal attitude status) Chinese residents in Australia be permitted to bring our their families and fiancées to afford them happier lives; and
3. The children of Chinese-Australian Parents who were born overseas, to be admitted to Australia as Australians.<sup>63</sup>

Liu asked that the Citizenship Convention consider granting Chinese in Australia the privileges accorded to the European migrants represented at the Convention:

I would stress that these Chinese in Australia today are permanently exiled from their homeland through changing conditions there. They ask to be allowed to plan the future of their lives here with the more promise of permanent conditions as that accorded to other new Australians.<sup>64</sup>

This plea went unanswered, but small changes were taking place at this time in political parties and the Immigration Department. The Communist Party had led the way

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<sup>62</sup> Letter from Liu to Townley, 16 January 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Liu to Chairman of Australian Citizenship Convention, 21 January 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.



in politics by renouncing the White Australia Policy, although it advocated a regulated quota of ‘Asiatics’ to preserve living standards and avoid alienating the workers.<sup>65</sup> By 1957, the Communists were joined in their anti-White Australia Policy stance by the Democratic Labour Party. The two parties made uneasy bedfellows as the DLP had wholeheartedly supported the dissolution of the Communist Party in 1951, aided by its Catholic members who were also opposed to White Australia for religious reasons.<sup>66</sup> The major parties, Liberal and Labour, still held fairly firmly to the White Australia Policy, retaining it in their party platforms, but in 1958, the Liberal Party pushed through a symbolic alteration to the Policy which altered its method of operation significantly:

In recent years, the need for a thorough overhaul of our immigration legislation has become increasingly apparent. The dictation test, however subtle and convenient it may have seemed 60 years ago, must surely appear to-day as an archaic, heavy-handed piece of machinery, in the category of those singularly ugly museum pieces of the Victorian age, and quite out of keeping with the ideas of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has been used to prevent the entry to Australia of both Europeans and Asians, and also as a means of deporting people within five years of their arrival, even though they were legally admitted to settle permanently. Its clumsy, creaking operation has evoked much resentment outside Australia, and has tarnished our good name in the eyes of the world. The Government, therefore, proposes to abolish it, and to substitute in its stead the neat, simple expedient of an entry permit.<sup>67</sup>

Debate surrounding the passage of the Migration Bill of 1958 stressed the changed view of the Australian Government relative to Asian immigration:

Another matter that has been raised during the term of office of the present minister is Asiatic migration. It should be realized that we have moved forward in this matter. We are now prepared to receive Asians

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> “White Australia”, National Archives of Australia, A433, 1946/2/1428.

<sup>66</sup> “White Australia Policy ‘not so rigid’”, *The Herald (Melbourne)*, 6 September 1957, National Archives of Australia, A1838/2, 1453/334.

<sup>67</sup> Mr. Downer, MHR, Liberal, Minister for Immigration, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. H. of R. 19, 1 May 1958, pp. 1396-7.

who wish to study or to carry on business here. We are prepared to receive Asian travellers. In certain instances, we are prepared even to naturalize Asians and allow them to remain in our country permanently. The position now is different from that which existed in the early years of this century, when our immigration policy came to be known as the white Australia policy. We have departed from the ideas that we held during the early years of the century, and that should be fully realized. We are admitting into this country now far more Asians than would be admitted under the small quota system for which some emotionalists are crying out.<sup>68</sup>

The Australian Government pushed through these cosmetic changes in acknowledgment of the tremendous changes which had occurred throughout Asia in the postwar period. The White Australia Policy could no longer be administered in exactly the same way as it had been since 1901, and this was slowly beginning to be acknowledged by the Liberal Party by the close of the 1950s. The White Australia Policy was an offensive relic of the colonial era:

It has been well said that Asia wants freedom from the white man's colonial control, freedom from the white man's economic control, but above all freedom from the white man's contempt. If we are to be gratified about that, I would say that as far as I could see in Malaya, Burma and India, if the people thought of the white man's contempt, they thought of the White Australia policy.<sup>69</sup>

The legislative changes of 1958 did not significantly alter the administration of the White Australia Policy, but merely gave the Minister for Immigration greater discretion without having to resort to the Dictation Test.

Over the decade of the 1950s, political and popular opinion relative to the White Australia Policy had shifted, and previously accepted ideas about Asians and the possibility of their integration into Australian society were no longer the norm. William

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<sup>68</sup> Mr. Joske, MHR, Liberal, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. H. of R. 20, 5 August 1958, p. 62.

Liu tried to alter government officials' views through his writing, but much credit can also be given to the presence of the Colombo Plan students and other Asian students in changing people's views, and bringing ideas of Asian genetic inferiority, so often expressed in Parliament, into disrepute.<sup>70</sup> This change in ideas led to an acceptance of more exceptions to the White Australia Policy, although the Policy was ostensibly not weakened. Liu and the Australian university students who wished to see the Policy modified found it difficult to achieve the beneficial publicity that the Colombo Plan students attracted by their interactions with Australians. It was not until the early '60s that protest against the White Australia Policy and other issues was covered to a great extent in the media.

The other reason why student activities began to have an impact upon immigration policy in the '50s was that the Australian government continued to become increasingly concerned with Australia's reputation overseas, and sought to minimise the damage to that reputation caused by the White Australia Policy. The Colombo Plan would not enhance Australia's reputation if Asian students returned to their home countries angry over racial policy in Australia. Liu also considered their views important to his argument that the White Australia Policy was interfering with Australia's relations with Asian countries, and he wrote to the Overseas Students' Co-ordinating Committee in 1958 to learn more about the overseas student numbers and their general welfare.<sup>71</sup> He had also obtained the first issue of *Asiana* magazine to read about Asian student

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<sup>69</sup> Mr. Beazley, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. H. of R. 6, 28 April 1955, p. 305.

<sup>70</sup> James Jupp, *Immigration*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1991, pp. 83-84.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from John A. Stilson, Overseas Students' Co-ordinating committee, to Liu, 28 April 1958, MLMSS 6294/2.

viewpoints.<sup>72</sup> Liu used the issue of Asian students in later Citizenship Convention letters, describing in 1961 how he imagined they would feel about Australian discrimination:

Historians record these unhappy matters...and show how unholy and un-Christian our Government leaders have been, in particular – our prejudices and discrimination against some of our minority non-European nationals in Australia, our Aborigines and all descendants of color races.

Thousands of South-East Asian and other students in our midst, before and now, notice these things, unhappily to our shame.

These are the young men, when back in their homelands, will have say in their respective countries' national affairs, and upon whom, we will be depending for the furthering of neighbourly relations.

Their knowing our unholy ways toward our native Aborigines and having ignored them and other non-Europeans at every one of the last eleven annual Conventions and 'discouraged' any participation of any of our Good Neighbour Movements anywhere throughout Australia to date, what will the Asian and other students think of us now and when our officials visit their countries to further good neighbourly friendship with them for the mutual welfare of our coming generations.<sup>73</sup>

Liu also argued that the White Australia Policy was damaging to Australia's reputation at a time when the government was making attempts to further trade with Asian countries:

We are supposed to be in the Asian orbit. Our desire is to foster goodwill among the Asian people. We want all British subjects of Asian descent to here and abroad do their part to enhance understanding and friendship among the Asians for our future welfare and same time we do not only frustrate them in their individual endeavours to secure their personal welfare, but antagonise them...[our] 'color line' regulations and deportations are embarrassing to our present M/V "Delos" Australian Trade Mission delegates in the Far East and other South East Asian countries.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Located in MLMSS 6294/12. See earlier discussion of magazine.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Liu to Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1961, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>74</sup> Draft letter from Liu to B.C. Wall, Commonwealth Migration Officer, 8 November 1958, MLMSS 6294/7.

The image of Australia overseas continued to be tainted by deportation controversies despite the efforts of Liu and other groups to change the Policy in the 1950s. Their protest tactics changed as the decade drew to a close, and the language of opposition to the Policy became more about specific goals, while the tactics of opposition became a more skilful use of the media in an attempt to reach more people. Liu's new focus upon the Citizenship Conventions was an attempt to build upon his representations on behalf of Chinese in Australia, to draw together their problems and publicise them when the Australian government wanted them to remain hidden. This publicity unearthed the Policy and forced the government once again on the defensive, in its last attempts to save the White Australia Policy from total destruction.

## *Chapter Seven*

*“A Crusade – till doomsday – day I die”*

*1958-1971*

The Australian Citizenship Convention, which began as an annual event in 1950, was the centerpiece of the Commonwealth's promotion of Australian citizenship, which was instituted in 1949 under the Nationality and Citizenship Act of 1948.<sup>1</sup> As the Convention represented an attempt to harness community support for New Australians, it attracted William Liu's attention for its exclusion of non-Europeans from the process. Liu focused his attentions and letter-writing campaign upon the Citizenship Conventions from 1958 until their final staging in 1968, but throughout this period he was excluded from the Department of Immigration's programme of events.<sup>2</sup> Liu's writing in this period reflected his growing awareness and subsequent incorporation of new currents of thought in the 1960s, as he considered issues such as the Australian manifestations of apartheid, and racism towards Aboriginal, African and Asian peoples. Liu was closely involved in organised opposition to the White Australia Policy, assisting with the production of the Immigration Reform Group's 'Control or Colour Bar' pamphlet which was published in 1960. He also raised his own awareness of related protest movements from this period, such as those involving Australian students, and was very concerned with how visiting Asian students would view Australia. Liu embraced these social movements as he had embraced the changes in China, for he was encouraged by news of others trying to improve relationships between people of different cultures. However, the total opposition of most sections of the Australian government to Liu's ideas showed no sign of changing until the arrival of the Whitlam government, and Whitlam's visit to China, while in opposition, which heralded for Liu a possible fundamental change in his relationship with the government.

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<sup>1</sup> David Dutton, Citizenship in Australia: A Guide to Commonwealth Government Records, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 1999, pp. 41-42.

One of the reasons Liu focused on the Citizenship Conventions in this period was a practical one, as he felt that this was the best forum in which to air his views and try to lobby for policy changes. Liu wanted the same conditions for Chinese attempting to migrate to Australia as for the European immigrants whom the Conventions were limited to. He asked initially for citizenship to be granted to Chinese residents after 5 years, rather than the 15 years they were forced to wait, and he wanted Chinese refugees to be able to bring their families, and Australian-born parents to be able to have their overseas-born children admitted to Australia.<sup>3</sup>

But these practical suggestions for change, which were ignored for years, revealed the different treatment which was being accorded to ‘new Australians’ and ‘non-Europeans’, and it was the Conventions which officially ingrained this difference. As Australia’s postwar immigration programme veered further from the ‘ideal’ mainly white British intake to accept southern Europeans and Mediterraneans, an assimilation programme was developed to draw these immigrants from the ‘darker shade of White’ regions into white Anglo-Australian culture.<sup>4</sup> The assimilationist agenda of the Citizenship Conventions thus drew a new divide – rather than White and non-White, the line was drawn between assimilable and non-assimilable non-Whites. In order to ‘protect’ Anglo-Australian culture, acceptability was determined culturally, and all people of predominantly European background were determined to be assimilable.<sup>5</sup> The Convention format was designed to soothe the paranoia of the Australian population regarding the changes which were rapidly taking place in Australian society. It did so by

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. The Conventions began as an annual event but were later held biennially.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Liu to Chairman of Australian Citizenship Convention, 21 January 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>4</sup> Ghassan Hage, Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society, Pluto Press, Annandale, 2003, pp. 57-58.



providing a mechanism for the Anglo-Australian community to feel they were 'managing' the new cultures and had some power over the assimilation of these cultures. The Good Neighbour Movement associated with the Conventions also facilitated participation by Anglo-Australian community members.<sup>6</sup> The Anglo-Australian community was therefore accorded a level of importance in Australian society that was set above that of Australians of other backgrounds, in that they had the power to accept other cultures into Australia, unlike communities such as the Aboriginal or Chinese Australian communities which did not enjoy full citizenship rights.

Despite the lack of power of his community to change government policy, William Liu had decided by 1958 that he would begin to push for these two goals: to ensure that Chinese coming to Australia were accorded the rights of all other 'new Australians', and to ensure that Chinese Australians were considered as an integral part of the Australian community, such that they would be included in community events such as the Australian Citizenship Convention and Good Neighbour Movement.<sup>7</sup> Liu did not consider that he possessed any less 'governmental belonging' than other people born in Australia, for all Australians were part of the British Empire, and he felt that his Aussie accent and sense of humour, and his knowledge of and love for Australia were all important elements of his identity.<sup>8</sup> Liu believed that his Chinese background was actually very compatible with that Australianness, and did not dilute his Australian identity, but rather added another dimension which allowed him to feel he belonged when

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Dutton, *Citizenship in Australia*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> From the late 1960s, other "proto-multiculturalists" were also involved in the attempt to change the exclusionary policies of the Good Neighbour Movement, and encourage the movement to promote pluralism. See Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, Victoria, 2000, p. 114. Liu was not aware of these lobbyists.

he was in China as well. In fact, Liu felt that he had “the feel” of home in Australia, South China, and also England, as his mother was born in London.<sup>9</sup> But he knew that the real reason for his exclusion from the Conventions was his non-European background.

Liu’s letter to the 1958 Citizenship Convention, which was discussed in the previous chapter and primarily concerned immigration and citizenship rights of Chinese in Australia, was acknowledged only by Arthur Calwell. It was not published in *The Good Neighbour* monthly bulletin of the Immigration Department, nor was it responded to in any way by government ministers or department bureaucrats. Liu wrote to Calwell asking him to speak with the editor of *The Good Neighbour* to try to talk him into publishing the letter, but nothing came of his request.<sup>10</sup> To back up his statements, Liu argued in the letter that the Australian government was attempting to improve relations between the two Chinas and Australia, and that these discriminatory laws would interfere with that goal:

I can’t help feeling that the ways and manner [in which] some of the Immigration Officials are handling matters are the direct opposite in Sino-Australian friendship which the Honourable R.G. Casey, as Minister for External Affairs, is trying to advance in the Taiwan and mainland Chinas and among the Chinese people in the many South East Asian countries. That’s just the sort of things – in the main – the colour line, we must do our best to remove it for the truer good neighbourhood with our Chinese friends.<sup>11</sup>

This lack of response to Liu’s letter led him to organise a much more extensive plan of attack for the 1959 Citizenship Convention, a plan which in many ways was his major attempt at protesting against White Australia Policy discrimination. From January

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<sup>8</sup> Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 1998, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> "The Way I See Things – China and Things Chinese", by Billy Liu Kwong-fook, 1959, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Liu to Calwell, 28 April 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

5-16, 1959, Liu attended the 'Sydney Summer School', which was organised by the Department of Tutorial Classes at Sydney University, and his tutor was Mr. O. Harries.<sup>12</sup> While it is not clear whether attending this class had any impact upon his decision to fly to Canberra to try to attend the opening of the Convention, he focused in the class upon "The Problems of South East Asia", and his writings for the class led him to meditate on the subject of discrimination, against Asians and other "non white-skin" Australians as well as against Aboriginal people (a connection which he would later return to).<sup>13</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, Liu flew to Canberra to learn the reason why his 1958 letter was ignored, and to attend the opening of the 1959 Citizenship Convention.<sup>14</sup> On the T.A.A. flight were His Honour Judge Dovey and Dr. H.V. Evatt, who "seemed pleased" when Liu explained what he intended to do.<sup>15</sup> Liu expected that he would be able to attend the Convention opening, and his conversations with Dovey and Evatt, as well as N.S.W. Branch President of the United Nations Mr. Oberg, and the Reverend Canon Arrowsmith at Albert Hall, did not give him any indication that he was "out of bounds" being there. But after Rev. Arrowsmith introduced Liu to an Assimilation Officer of the Immigration Department in charge of matters at Albert Hall, Mr. Mackay, Mackay told Liu, "not without some blushing embarrassment", why he was not allowed to be the 52<sup>nd</sup> standing person (all seats reserved) to witness the Official Opening of the Convention.<sup>16</sup>

Liu, having been prevented from attending the Albert Hall as well as the Parliament House events, borrowed a typewriter and spent the afternoon typing a letter to

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<sup>12</sup> Notes headed "Sydney Summer School", 5-16 January 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Liu to Professor C.P. Fitzgerald, 21 March 1959, MLMSS 6294/10; "Summer School", 11 January 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Liu to Editor of Canberra Times, 22 January 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>15</sup> Liu, "Discussion Paper 2 – on Sino-Australian Relations", Killara Apex Club, 9 March 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

K.C. Wilson, Chairman of the Convention and of the Immigration Advisory Council. Liu wrote that “The Chinese community is distressed that it should be so totally ignored by the organisers of the Convention when it so earnestly desires to participate fully in Australian life”, and he asked again that the points that he raised be discussed at the Convention or by the Immigration Advisory Council.<sup>17</sup> The blocking of Liu’s attendance was also distressing to him personally, and in addition to the letter to K.C Wilson, he wrote a poem on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January which expressed his wish to see more Chinese accepted into Australia:

1959 NEW YEAR GREETINGS

To our welcome new neighbours.

Let’s hope for our Australian 1959 New Year,  
Friends in high places in Canberra without fear,  
Say to our sad Chinese friends among us here,  
You may send for your families to come be near.

To those who have separated fiancées in Hong Kong,  
Where they’ve been waiting too to come for so long,  
We’ll be glad see you happily married and sing your song,  
As so many Aussies will gladly cheer you as you come along.

Children born abroad of Aussie-Chinese over there,  
Who too in their hearts have yearned for so many years,  
To be allowed to come to their Parent’s birth-land here,  
For everlasting happiness and promise of a future career.<sup>18</sup>

Liu returned to the Convention the following day to attempt to gain admission to the events, but was again refused entry. At the Convention’s Discussion Group Halls at Griffith Infants’ Public School, another Immigration Department Officer, Mr. Horton, and a Good Neighbour Council Representative and delegate from Horsham, Victoria, Mr.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Liu to K.C. Wilson,

John Massey, “explained, also with some discomfort, how it would be breaking precedents or some rules if they allowed me entry to any of the Halls to witness the Convention discussions.”<sup>19</sup> Liu was introduced to K.C. Wilson and was able to pass on his letter and memorandum directly, through the guidance of a Mr. Fitzgerald at Dr. Evatt’s office at Parliament House, but that was all he was able to accomplish.<sup>20</sup> On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Liu wrote a letter to the editor of the *Canberra Times*, in which he summarised the events in Canberra, but he described their refusal to allow him in in a different way to his later description of the same event to the Chinese Australian community. In the letter, he focused upon how he had not thought to apply for a ticket, and described Assimilation Officer Mackay as dealing with him “very diplomatically”. K.C. Wilson was also described as receiving Liu’s letter “very courteously”.<sup>21</sup> But Liu subsequently made much more of the events after he received replies to his letters from K.C. Wilson and also from T.H.E. Heyes, Secretary of the Department of Immigration. He was much more specific about his assumption of the reason for his exclusion in a letter to Professor C.P. Fitzgerald of the Australian National University: the officers had “explained that it would be breaking a precedent if any of them had allowed me to participate at any of the gatherings – which I took to mean – was only open to people of fuller European ancestry.”<sup>22</sup>

While Wilson’s reply to Liu’s letter does not appear to have been archived in Liu’s papers (although the date mentioned for the reply is 23 January 1959), T.H.E.

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<sup>18</sup> William Liu, 20 January 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>19</sup> Liu, "Discussion Paper 2 – on Sino-Australian Relations", Killara Apex Club, 9 March 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Liu to Editor of *Canberra Times*, 22 January 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Liu to Professor C.P. Fitzgerald, 21 March 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

Heyes' reply of 4 February 1959 appears, and it represented a justification for the actions of the officers and representatives of the Convention in keeping Liu out.<sup>23</sup> Heyes wrote that the Immigration Advisory Council had considered the question of equitable migrant representation at Conventions, following the adoption of a resolution on the question at the 1952 Citizenship Convention. However, Heyes argued that the presence of over two hundred migrant bodies "makes it an impracticable arrangement to invite representatives of each at the Convention. The principle was therefore adopted of refusing representation purely on a nationality basis."<sup>24</sup> This did not explain the systematic blocking of Chinese or Aboriginal representation at the Convention, but merely asserted that representation was not specifically based upon background, and that the cultural constitution of the delegates was an unplanned result. Heyes went on to write that

Whilst appreciating your desire to seek representation on behalf of the Chinese community, I can only repeat that representation at the Convention is not based on nationality and regret that it is not possible to agree to your request.<sup>25</sup>

And so, despite the fact that representation was argued by Heyes to be a random mix of cultures, Heyes was able to definitively refuse entry to Liu in his letter, which undermined his argument. His addition in the letter of factors such as facility and accommodation restrictions in Canberra was also undermined by the fact that Liu had already found accommodation, and there was standing room space at the venue which other participants were already using.

Liu's rejection spurred him to organise a series of meetings to increase awareness of and rally support for his campaign for Chinese Australian representation at the

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<sup>23</sup> Liu, "Discussion Paper 2 – on Sino-Australian Relations", Killara Apex Club, 9 March 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from T.H.E. Heyes to Liu, 4 February 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

Citizenship Conventions. One meeting, which Liu organised soon after he received the letter from T.H.E. Heyes, was held at the Killara Apex Club, North Sydney. Amongst the participants was influential Chinese Australian community member Bing Lee, of chain-store fame. Liu's focus at this meeting was on the meaning of citizenship for Chinese Australians, a group which he defined as covering people of Australian birth and full or part Chinese descent, as well as naturalised Australian citizens of Chinese background. Liu's allegation was that the Department of Immigration was acting in a discriminatory way against Chinese Australians because of the influence of White Australia Policy attitudes upon their officials, and

I am inclined to feel that it was because of that, these Officials cannot bring themselves to confer the equal consideration upon aforementioned Sino-Australian citizens as is given migrants from England and other Western countries.<sup>26</sup>

This differential citizenship based upon racial background produced the discrimination which Liu had highlighted in his memorandum to the 1958 Citizenship convention, and it also produced the result of him being refused entry to any events of any of the Citizenship Conventions. It pitted Liu and Chinese Australians with often a century or more of links with Australia against newly arrived immigrants from Europe, and forced a separation in the Australian community between those white 'old Australians' with 'first-class' citizenship and other groups with an inferior citizenship which could be based solely on race. Liu felt that his experience showed that Chinese Australians were not just considered to be less Australian than white native-born Australians, but were a "third class" behind "new Australian" immigrants. He compared

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Liu, "Discussion Paper 1", Killara Apex Club, 9 March 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

this level of discrimination to that of Aboriginal Australians, but the occasional access of Chinese Australians to levels of economic and social power, as well as the impact of Chinese Australians upon the colonisation and displacement of Aboriginal people placed Aboriginal people at a different level. Nevertheless, neither group was allowed access to the Citizenship Convention, and Liu called for “dinkum representation [which] should, at least, cover a delegate of our original native people from each State of the Commonwealth”. Liu argued that this inclusion would strengthen the aims of assimilation:

This kind of getting-together of old and new citizens of all lands, irrespective of the darker tint of the skin of some, will more quickly forward the aims of the Good Neighbour bodies’ aims and ensure greater harmonious assimilation of the various migrant groups to closer understanding more widely, friendly to the stability of citizenship throughout the Commonwealth.<sup>27</sup>

Liu sought the views of the Apex members on these matters, and also finally managed to have his views aired at the Australia China Society weekend conference in Newport on 3-5 April.<sup>28</sup> While the A.C.S. leadership had been unwilling to bring matters of White Australia Policy discrimination before the Society in 1954, by 1959 they had determined that this was an acceptable matter for discussion.<sup>29</sup>

Liu continued to write to the government regarding his rejection by the officials of the 1959 Citizenship Convention, but he was more specific about the reason for his anger in his correspondence subsequent to the Apex and A.C.S. meetings. As he had mentioned to C.P. Fitzgerald in his 21 March 1959 letter regarding the Convention, he was convinced that the Convention was open only to people of “fuller European

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Liu to Professor C.P. Fitzgerald, 21 March 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from A.D. Lindsay to Liu, 19 September 1954, MLMSS 6294/1.



ancestry”.<sup>30</sup> Liu later reiterated this allegation in a letter to Mr. E.J. Bunting, Secretary to the Prime Minister’s Department, in which he wrote that after the 1959 Convention incident, he “was later told that the Australian Citizenship Convention was eligible only for Australian citizens of European extraction and not for local-born citizens nor naturalized citizens of Asian ancestry.”<sup>31</sup>

On 31 July 1959, Liu wrote to Calwell, then Deputy Leader of the Opposition, regarding the 1959 incident, enclosing Heyes’ 4 February letter. Calwell’s response of 4 August was more forthright about the possible reasons for Liu being refused entry to the Convention. Although Calwell promised to discuss Liu’s issues with the Minister for Immigration and the Secretary of the Department after Parliament resumed, he wrote that he did not expect a different result because the constitution of representation at the Convention was “settled policy”. Calwell also wrote in support of the decision not to represent every migrant group, and perhaps the decision to exclude Liu:

As the Department has pointed out, the Annual Convention is held for the purpose of promoting assimilation, and not for other purposes, such as the matters you have in mind.<sup>32</sup>

The Convention was not set up to be a place for ‘social activism’ that was not approved by the government, but rather, a way to involve the Australian public in a routine reinforcement of the government’s policy of assimilation. For government officials involved in the Convention’s operation and most Parliamentarians, Chinese Australians were not an assimilable group. Calwell went on to argue in his letter that the importance

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Liu to Bunting, 22 March 1960, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Calwell to Liu, 4 August 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

which Liu placed on a continuing personal engagement with China was not compatible with his Australianness:

You will not mind me being frank with you, I am sure, when I say that the Chinese tradition of dual citizenship is a great stumbling block to assimilation, and creates an adverse opinion among European Australians. You instance yourself in your letter when you say you hope to leave for China some time in the future as a guest of the Shanghai Return Overseas Chinese Association. As a Sino-Australian, the son of a Chinese father and an English mother, the question of any return on your part to China...<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately the rest of the letter is missing, but it is quite clear that Calwell was arguing that Chinese in Australia in particular were problematic assimilation candidates because of Chinese government policy, and that Liu's wish to revisit his homeland was an unacceptable indicator of his attachment to China and not compatible with his Australian identity. Migrants at this time were encouraged by the lack of government funding and other measures never to return to their homeland, for they had chosen Australia and renounced their foreign citizenship if they had taken out Australian citizenship. All ties were to be severed to their past in order for assimilation to work, and a culture of continuing association with the homeland such as that which seemed to exist in the Chinese community in Australia was a threat to this assimilation policy that Australia's migrant programme was based on.

Despite Calwell's opposition, Liu returned to Shanghai in October 1959 for the first time in twenty years, paying a visit to his boyhood village of Toishan Wang Sui Ling Hong Toon.<sup>34</sup> The friendship between Liu and Calwell survived their differences of opinion, and Calwell attended Liu's mother-in-law's 91<sup>st</sup> birthday party, which was

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Liu, "In China – 7 times to Oct, 1964", MLMSS 6294/10, De Berg interview, MLMSS 6294/3, Liu, "From Manchu to Mao, The Asian, November 1977, p. 9, MLMSS 6294/11.

written up in the *Daily Telegraph* on 26 January 1960. Calwell was a guest of honour at the occasion, which was given by the woman's son, Inverell businessman Harry Fay, and Calwell spoke at the gathering, saying in Mandarin that he was looking forward to attending her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday party.<sup>35</sup> Calwell's presence at this and other Chinese Australian events is clearly recalled by Fay's daughter, Marina Mar, who has photographs of Calwell at the events and knew him since she was a teenager.<sup>36</sup>

The presence of Calwell when Leader of the Opposition, along with Immigration Department staff who used to work under him, at Chinese Australian lunches, Chinese opera, functions and dinners is also recalled by Tony Palfreeman, who met Calwell at one or two Chinese 'tiffins' at venues such as Tai Yuen:

as I say there was this kind of love-hate relationship between them, between the Chinese and Calwell. Calwell's brief was to stop anyone coming in, but he seemed to be, he seemed to be, very friendly with Billy Liu and Billy Liu's colleagues, and they would slap each other on the back and say 'Good to see you', and use almost rather obscene comments to each other, which I won't repeat here, as if they were the best of mates. And they'd all sit down and have lunch together, always paid for by Billy Liu, always, Calwell thought his officers were guests of the Chinese community, and therefore paid for by Billy Liu, and they would sit around the table and discuss everything you could think of, until it came to the crunch about immigration. And they'd always bring it up, because that was the purpose of it. Calwell was on the face of it adamant that nothing could change, but he still accepted their food and hospitality. And so I found this a bit strange, because Calwell was acting in quite a schizophrenic way, that he would appear to be so friendly with this community but [when he was Minister for Immigration] once he would get back to Canberra he would sign deportation orders and put these assistant cooks in gaol for staying a week over and all this stuff. So it was rough, and it was matey, and it was hard to grasp that connection.<sup>37</sup>

By 1960, Liu was no longer so isolated in his views on the White Australia Policy, as "public opinion was moving in the direction of liberalization" of Australia's

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 26 January 1960, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Marina Mar, William Liu's niece, 11 October 2004.

immigration policy.<sup>38</sup> This shift in opinion was harnessed by organisations such as the influential Immigration Reform Group, which sought to provide policy options in its pamphlet *Control or Colour Bar?*, published in 1960.<sup>39</sup> When the group sought to expand the material from the pamphlet into a book, published in 1962, Kenneth Rivett contacted William Liu to ask him to confirm some of the types of discrimination which Chinese Australians experienced under Australia's immigration laws.<sup>40</sup> Liu's association with Rivett and with Tony Palfreeman, who had provided much of his pre-publication research material for use in the book, meant that he was known to be an important source for information on this discrimination. Although the Associations for Immigration Reform, like the Australian Chinese and Aboriginal people, were banned from the Australian Citizenship Conventions, their membership included many important community and governmental figures, and so they had a greater influence than Liu.<sup>41</sup> But Liu, according to Palfreeman, had a huge influence on the organisation: "I'd say we had quite a lot to do with Billy Liu...in fact, you could say he was an instigator of this organisation...No question about it...looking back on it and thinking from 1956 onwards, that the momentum established by Liu transmogrified into the Immigration Reform Association..."<sup>42</sup>

The Immigration Reform Group, and much of the writing in this period on altering or ending the White Australia Policy, emanated from Australian universities. Rivett and Palfreeman were based at the University of New South Wales, and Rivett

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman, 16 September 2004.

<sup>38</sup> H.I. London, *Non-White Immigration and the "White Australia" Policy*, New York University Press, New York, 1970, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> *Control or Colour Bar: A proposal for change in Australia's immigration policy*, Immigration Reform Group, Melbourne, 1960.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Kenneth Rivett to Liu, 4 May 1962, MLMSS 6294/2.

asked Tony to join the IRG, which he had set up, and which had other prominent UNSW members such as A.T. Yarwood.<sup>43</sup> The writing being published on the topic of the White Australia Policy was the fruit of years of interest in the topic and protest at the treatment of Asians by the Australian government, as well as the increased contact with Asian students brought about by the Colombo Plan. The IRG proposed that Colombo Plan students had demonstrated their capacity for ready absorption into Australian society, and that this was an example of the integration possibilities of increased Asian migration to Australia.<sup>44</sup>

Adding to this link, the publications of the Immigration Reform Group inspired new levels of protest in Australian universities. The Student Action group, organised at the University of Melbourne specifically to protest against immigration policy during the 1961 election campaign, drew heavily on the ideas of the Immigration Reform Group and the Associations for Immigration Reform for its handbill statement.<sup>45</sup> Their high-profile election campaign protests drew attention to issues of discrimination discussed in the writings, and also to cases in the headlines, such as the deportation of Malayan pearl divers. Slogans on placards displayed during the demonstration included “Mind That Tan, They Might Deport You”, “Control Yes, Colour Bar No”, “Australia Not Colour Conscious, Migration Policy Is”, “White Australia Policy Equals Apartheid”, and “White Australia Policy, Good Enough For Our Grandfathers, Not Good Enough For Us”.<sup>46</sup> Lauchlan Chipman of Student Action central committee also described how the students

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<sup>41</sup> London, *Non-White Immigration*, p. 136.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Oakman, "'Young Asians in Our Homes': Colombo Plan Students and White Australia", *Journal of Australian Studies* no. 72 special issue "Jumping the Queue", University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 2002, p. 97.

entered Kew Civic Hall where Menzies was speaking, to deliver their message.<sup>47</sup> This protest came to the attention of William Liu, who used it in a letter to both Prime Minister Menzies and Leader of the Opposition Calwell as an example of the changing attitudes of the Australian public:

Through Melb. Uni. Students' protests registered at your respective opening elections campaigns, Nov. 15 and 16, in Melbourne, I'd say, they had recorded the feelings of millions of fellow Australians in regard to the Canberrans' color-line antics under the cloak of our long outmoded White Australia Policy.<sup>48</sup>

Student Action led Melbourne to become a centre of student protest against the White Australia Policy earlier than Sydney. An article on the group in *Honi Soit* stated that "It could not have happened in Sydney", for Student Action was based upon activism at Melbourne University that other university delegations of the National Union of Australian University Students were concerned violated the apolitical stance of the Union.<sup>49</sup>

The Student Action protest highlighted the way in which students were equating Australian policy with that of South African apartheid. This was a connection that was also made by William Liu in one of his open letters to Australians:

No Aborigines or Australian-born citizens of full or part coloured parents have been allowed to participate in any of the past twelve Annual Australian Citizenship Conventions each January in Canberra; nor permitted to participate in any of our Commonwealth-wide Good Neighbour and Assimilation Movements, so far as I am aware, and it is to be hoped that this "apartheid" attitude will be discarded at the approaching 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Citizenship Convention in January 1962.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> London, *Non-White Immigration*, pp. 123-5.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>47</sup> Dean Letcher, "Mind that tan – they might deport you", *Honi Soit*, 13 March 1962, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Liu to Menzies and Calwell, 20 November 1961, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>49</sup> Letcher, "Mind that tan", p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Liu to Editors and fellow Australians, 4 December 1961, MLMSS 6294/10.

The N.U.A.U.S. continued to be concerned about apartheid in South Africa, with its Council appointing an Anti-Apartheid Campaign Director in 1963 and passing a vote to condemn the South African Cricket Tour.<sup>51</sup> Student opinion was also focused on racial discrimination in the United States against African Americans, and this feeling climaxed in a Sydney University Commemoration Day 6 May 1964 protest in front of the US Consulate. Some participants wore Klu Klux Klan coverings, burned crosses, and lynched a Martin Sharp-designed “nigger dummy” in various places downtown. Twenty-eight students were arrested.<sup>52</sup> This US-focused aspect of the day, though, led directly to the refocus of student protest upon Australian conditions. US commentators turned the student gaze away from conditions in the US by asking why they were not concerned about discrimination at home. Alan Jackson, a CBS news commentator, remarked in a US radio broadcast:

Their demonstration, although displaying surprising fervour, served only to emphasise that discrimination in one form or another is neither new nor isolated. The Australian students, for example, said not a word about their own immigration policies, which are intended to keep Australia predominantly white. And within Australia, the native aborigines might be said to correspond to our own American Indians...they have suffered a similar fate. There were as many as half a million aborigines when the first white settlers arrived in Australia. Now there are only about 90,000 out of a total population of some 11 million and they are generally relegated to the poorer fringes and to the arid interior areas.<sup>53</sup>

Jim Spigelman has also stated the influence that this US criticism had on the decision to organise protest in support of Aboriginal issues:

After the Commem. Day demonstration several American magazines

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<sup>51</sup> "National Uni. Union meets in Melb: Aug. Council", Honi Soit, 10 September 1963, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Honi Soit, 12 May 1964, pp. 1, 7.

<sup>53</sup> "Voice of America?", Honi Soit, The Grand Festival Supplement, 12 May 1964. P. 1.

criticised Sydney University students on the grounds that we are too prone to criticise the USA, overlooking racial discrimination in our own country. Now a new organisation has been formed at the Uni. to protest against the mistreatment of our own aborigines. The Student Action for Aborigines is modelled upon the US student body, the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (“Snick”) which has achieved so much in the Negro struggle for civil rights.<sup>54</sup>

Criticism of the Commem. Day protest also came from other international sources. The *Ceylon Observer* carried an article on 10 June entitled ‘Strange Reactions’, which stated that the student demonstration for US civil rights “must surely have brought guffaws and giggles from any who gave these reports a second glance”. The article went on to argue that Australia

is the one country into which no human being is permitted if the pigment of his skin has acquired even the slightest shade of colour – be it brown, yellow or black. We ‘coloured’ folk in Ceylon can even go to the U.S. and make it our home and be discriminated against, if we so choose. But Australia? Very definitely NO...These demonstrators...would have done well to look around their own homeland and probe the complete LACK of coloured neighbours. If these demonstrators cared to look a little further and deeper, they would have come across as nauseating a form of social hypocrisy in their own backyards as that they were demonstrating against. I refer to the treatment of the Australian Aborigines.<sup>55</sup>

This overseas critique, as well as some similar local critique, influenced some of the Sydney University students to join the already active Aboriginal rights movement, through Student Action for Aborigines, and to organise a ‘Freedom Ride’ modelled on those in the US in their summer, 1961. Charles Perkins, one of the leaders of the action and one of two Aboriginal students at Sydney University at the time, helped to organise the Ride through north-western New South Wales in February 1965. Perkins’ activist

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<sup>54</sup> Jim Spigelman, "Student Action for Aborigines", *Honi Soit*, 23 September 1964, p. 9. Also recordings in Freedom Ride bus, Australian Museum, Sydney.

<sup>55</sup> Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: a freedom rider remembers*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002, pp. 8-9.



profile was greatly lifted by the publicity surrounding the rides, which successfully highlighted the discrimination and virtual apartheid Aboriginal people faced in many of the towns they visited.

Perkins also used his profile to make a statement about other forms of racial discrimination in Australia perpetuated by the White Australia Policy. In August 1965, Perkins entered the controversy surrounding the latest race-based deportation case, that of a 7 year old girl named Nancy Prasad whom the Australian government had been trying to deport to Fiji for two years. Although Perkins did not support the ending of the White Australia Policy and corresponding increase in ‘coloured’ immigration until Aboriginal people were “satisfactorily placed in Australian society”, he felt that “Nancy was a special issue at the time”.<sup>56</sup> Perkins and a group of Sydney University students came to the airport at Mascot on 7 August, and in a pre-arranged action, ‘kidnapped’ Nancy and delayed her deportation, an action which caused a media sensation. Immigration Minister Opperman commented that “It’s a laugh that Perkins screams his head off about the condition of the coloured people in Australia, but he tried to keep Nancy here.”<sup>57</sup> Nancy’s case led to an increase in public opposition to the White Australia Policy, for because of her age it seemed obvious that the only objection to her remaining in Australia could be based upon race. The case in general, and the Perkins action, it has been argued, were strong contributing factors in the 1966 decision to liberalise the White Australia Policy.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Charles Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1975, pp. 97-98.

<sup>57</sup> London, *Non-White Immigration*, p. 239.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

This action in 1965 on Aboriginal and White Australia Policy issues was, however, doomed to return to the background in the face of the Vietnam War, as protest became focused again on overseas issues:

While rural New South Wales stagnated, the world was changing. On 15 September 1965 the ALP Club had brought out its usual *Wednesday Commentary*, most of which was about SAFA, but a tiny note on the last page pointed to what was to be the end of mass student participation in Black affairs: 'Anti-Vietnam Demonstration – Martin Place Friday 5pm.' Throughout 1966, SAFA membership dropped in proportion to the acceleration in the Vietnam controversy. Spigelman recalled, 'we lost half our membership overnight. By the end of 1966 SAFA as a political force was finished.'<sup>59</sup>

The target of protest was the United States, or South Africa, not the unique problems which Australia faced. Books on protest in this period and later mirror this shift, as issues of protest even if they were not overseas events, were increasingly issues which were also important overseas, such as women's rights or the environment. The White Australia Policy was not ended in 1965, but had gone off the radar as far as protest organisers were concerned. It is not clear why, but a possible reason for the focus on overseas issues could be that the big issues of Vietnam and apartheid were considered to be life and death, affecting more people, and more important because of global focus. Also, Australian students were borrowing culturally in the latter 1960s from US protest and counterculture as well as that of Europe, and Vietnam and apartheid were the major issues:

Even the Australian anti-war movement, so rhetorically antagonistic to Uncle Sam, derived much of its impetus from its American counterpart, and aped many of its forms of protest.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: a biography*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria, 2001, p. 124.

In the twelve months from March 1965 to March 1966, “there were eighty or so reported demonstrations, vigils, strikes, folk concerts, marches, sit-downs or teach-ins, almost all based on forms of protest developed in the United States”.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to these other issues taking precedence in protest, the lack of media focus on the White Australia Policy after the Prasad case, and the publicity surrounding liberalisation of the Policy in 1966, could have led students to think the Policy was ‘dead’ and that it was not necessary to focus upon it anymore. Vietnam was an issue of greater importance to the students for personal reasons as well, because of conscription. Any or all of these were possible contributing factors to the change in focus of protest in Australia.

But for those who were directly affected by discrimination in Australia, this was still an important issue. William Liu continued to write letters criticising the Citizenship Convention throughout the 1960s, and in 1963, he was inspired to write on the top of one of his letters concerning exclusion from the Convention: “A Crusade – till doomsday – day I die”.<sup>62</sup> Liu’s feelings about the discrimination which Asian and Aboriginal Australians faced also led him to write a ‘prayer’ on these issues:

In Australia, our Special Prayer is that according to our 174 years sad history,  
“Our Ancestors came and conquered our primitive Australian Native Aborigines;  
“And because they were primitive and didn’t savvy our English ways or language,  
“Our forebears, bit by bit, from Sydney Cove, pushed the Abos. Far inland, and  
“Oh! God! We humbly pray for our Grandpas, Grandmas and for our Parents, in  
“Having followed the squeezing, squashing, crushing and squatting on the land  
“Of primitive people to become squatters and squires to ‘status as Esquires’.  
“We know God, You have Eyes, You can See, You will, from now on, See that we –  
“Do everything quickly to merit your blessing as we make our Aborigines happy.

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<sup>60</sup> Gerster, Robin, *Seizures of Youth: 'The Sixties' and Australia*, Hyland House, South Yarra, Melbourne, 1991, p. 34.

<sup>61</sup> Donald Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney & Melbourne, 1980, p. 52.

<sup>62</sup> MLMSS 6294/10.

“Right away, we’ll encourage Native Aborigines to participate in all our Good-  
“Neighbour and Assimilation Movements and our Annual Citizenship Conventions.  
“Evidence of that, God, you will see this year 1962 and at the 14<sup>th</sup> Convention  
“At Canberra next January, 1963, and after that, we promise, all will be well”.

“A solemn promise this is, as we don’t want our Asian neighbours  
To think that we are crazy Australians”.

“To linger and dishonour that priority undertaking now, in time,  
We will, indeed, the world over, become known as being crazy.”

“Whilst levelling up status for people here, don’t forget our women,  
Many fellow-Australians may not know that women, and all –  
Minority nationals in peoples’ China enjoy equal status.  
About that an ethical-living Chinese can teach us now”.<sup>63</sup>

Liu used the occasion of the Queen’s 1963 Royal Tour to Australia to again push his case for Asian and Aboriginal representation at the Conventions, and he quoted the Queen’s Christmas message in which she urged “no distinction of race or creed” in a letter to her in order to ask for her “blessings” on the matter. Unfortunately, his letter never reached the Queen, and was instead intercepted by W.L. Tyrrell, Official Secretary to the Governor General, who wrote that “no good purpose would be served by sending your enclosures to the Queen” as the matter had already been dealt with by the Government.<sup>64</sup>

The most effective way in which Liu found to publicise his ideas was through letters to newspaper editors, such as one which he wrote shortly after returning from his last trip to China, which was published on 14 December 1964 in the *Daily Mirror* under the heading “Crusade for Coloured People”.<sup>65</sup> In it, Liu states that “in many respects our attitude towards Asians is quite unwholesome”, and interferes with Australia’s diplomatic relations with Asian countries. He also makes the point that

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<sup>63</sup> Liu, "Addendum, 1962, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from W.L. Tyrrell to William Liu, 20 March 1963, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>65</sup> Liu, "In China – 7 times to Oct. 1964", MLMSS 6294/10, letter to the editor, *Daily Mirror*, 14 December 1964, p. 18, MLMSS 6294/10.

For my own sake and that of my family and our four grandchildren and other Australian folks like us of full or part Asian descent, and the Aboriginals too – all of us with sun-tanned skin – how far would people be prepared to crusade for us to have some representation at the annual citizenship conventions in Canberra?<sup>66</sup>

Liu continued the crusade on his own, but he was both happy to note the change in Labour government immigration policy in 1965, and disappointed in the Liberal failure to get rid of the White Australia Policy:

Following the Australian Labour Party's mid-1965 Sydney Conference, at which Federal A.L.P. gathering, the workers' delegates wiped their 100-year old traditional White Australia Policy from its national and political platform, the Coalition Government missed its 1966 favourable "change of wind" chance to create a "Friendly Australian Image" to merit "The changing times" with newer attitudes towards Asians. Oh!...What a pity and great loss to our Commonwealth of Australia.<sup>67</sup>

Liu wrote again in 1966 to various government officials regarding the Citizenship Convention. That year, he wrote to the Governor-General, Lord Casey, focusing on Casey's comments when addressing the 1962 Convention, when Casey urged "Migrants [who were settling in Australia] to interest themselves sympathetically in Asian people". Liu felt that these comments 'gave his heart comfort' that

at long last, you were warming up the hearts of the Chairman of that Citizenship Convention and those of the old and new Aussie Delegates, to change their ways and admit some representation of our minority nationals – Aboriginals and other non-substantial European-Aussie citizens – to all their annual Conventions and at the nation-wide Good Neighbour Integration and Assimilation Movements, from then onwards.<sup>68</sup>

No change was to come from the Governor-General's comments, and so in January 1966 Liu wrote to K.C. Wilson, Chairman of the Convention, as well as Minister

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Liu, "Sino-Australian Relations", 1 September 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

for Immigration Hubert Opperman, requesting permission for himself and two or three Sino-Aussie friends to attend the Official Opening of the Convention as well as the Discussion Groups. In the Opperman letter, Liu was critical of government policy, saying that “God in Heaven...should be frowning on thee, as a responsible Commonwealth Crown Minister for behaving as you and your Administration have toward us over the years...”. Liu also criticised the “unholy racialism” of the Conventions. This prompted a response from Opperman’s secretary, P.R. Heydon, who wrote that

Invitations to nominate delegates to attend Australian Citizenship Conventions are confined to organisations established on a Commonwealth-wide basis which are active in promoting the welfare of migrants and their integration into the Australian community. The Good Neighbour Councils in each State, which are responsible for co-ordinating and expanding voluntary integration activities, are also invited to nominate delegates. The appropriate course for people anxious to attend Conventions is to join one of the organisations mentioned and seek nomination by them as their delegates.<sup>69</sup>

Heydon reaffirmed his advice in a later letter to Liu.<sup>70</sup> This argument directly contradicted previous letters to Liu from the government regarding the reasons why he could not attend the Convention. As the then Secretary of the Department of Immigration T.H.E. Heyes had written to Liu in 1959, the presence of over two hundred migrant bodies “makes it an impracticable arrangement to invite representatives of each at the Convention.”<sup>71</sup> It seemed that the rules were constantly changing, but the result was the same. Calwell had a different response when Liu sent a copy of his letter to him. After writing that there was nothing further he could do to persuade the Government to

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<sup>68</sup> Letter from Liu to Lord Casey, 5 January 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from P.R. Heydon to Liu, 14 January 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from P.R. Heydon to Liu, 23 August 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from T.H.E. Heyes to Liu, 4 February 1959, MLMSS 6294/10.

meet Liu's point of view, he wrote: "I think the Government should decide to hold no more such Conventions in the present form."<sup>72</sup>

Liu was incensed at Heydon's response to his letters, calling it a "witchery letter", and composing two responses. The draft letter which Liu wrote on 28 August considered Australia's future amongst Asians "as they link our Commonwealth with the same racial apartness with apartheid South Africa, Portuguese Angola, Rhodesia and a number of other lands of racialism...".<sup>73</sup> The draft letter which Liu wrote the next day was much more strongly worded:

If you and your colleagues were at the receiving end of your Department's "rule and order" as has been our misfortune to be subjected to, because we are not pure white Aussies, you all would have revolted or prayed to God to strike [them] dead or otherwise out of action from further harming fellow humans and causing them...continuing unhappiness...As you think of us as 'chopsuey' people, how would you like us similarly thinking of you 'the same' too?<sup>74</sup>

Part of Liu's problem was that there were no Chinese Australian nationally-constituted organisations which could become involved or nominate Convention delegates. As he later wrote, "There are unaffiliated Capital Cities' Clubs, societies and associations, and none of the executives of any of them cares to become involved in such controversial questions, the way I have done since 1958. I have our people's blessings, in so far as they wish me success."<sup>75</sup> This was not enough.

Liu felt that part of the problem of exclusion from the Citizenship Conventions lay with semantic division of Australians into two categories, European (acceptable) and non-European (unacceptable), and he wished to do away with the discriminatory prefixes

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<sup>72</sup> Letter from Calwell to Liu, 21 January 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>73</sup> Draft letter from Liu to Heydon, 28 August 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>74</sup> Draft letter from Liu to Heydon, 29 August 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

to 'Australian' (or apply them to all). In what he intended to be an open letter written in July 1967, Liu wrote that

The purpose of this letter is to seek to remove that stigma imposed by our Immigration Department in its use of the term 'non-European' Australians for defining both Aboriginal and Asian-descent Australians. If the Department still want to define and classify Australians, then it must be extended to all Australians, migrant, native-born and/or otherwise, e.g. Abo-Australians, Asian and/or Sino Australians, Malta-Aussies, Greco and/or Italio-Australians, and such prefixes – which many Australians find equally objectionable, and further, Jap-Aussies, Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Yankee-Australians, and we feel sure none wish to be called White or Russian-Australians who have now made their home in the Commonwealth!<sup>76</sup>

Liu received further response to his pleas from Minister for Immigration Snedden, who reiterated Heydon's reasons for Liu not being allowed to attend the Citizenship Convention.<sup>77</sup> The government had succeeded in its banning of Liu from every Convention, as the last one was held in 1968.<sup>78</sup>

Despite Liu's representations and ongoing protest, the government had not changed the foundation of its policy towards 'non-Europeans' in Australia. The much-heralded liberalisation of immigration policy that was announced by Prime Minister Holt and Immigration Minister Opperman in 1966 at the beginning of the Holt government did not end the White Australia Policy, but tried to make it more palatable by easing some of the discriminatory laws. It was announced by Holt that the changes would maintain "the basic principles of our policy".<sup>79</sup> The basic changes which were implemented were detailed by Opperman:

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<sup>75</sup> Letter from Liu to Prime Minister Gorton, 12 January 1968, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>76</sup> Liu, "An Open Letter of Mutual Interest", Mid-July 1967, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Snedden to Liu, 9 August 1967, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>78</sup> Dutton, *Citizenship in Australia*, p. 42.

<sup>79</sup> Prime Minister Holt, MHR, Liberal, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 50, 9 March 1966, p. 34.



First, it has been decided that non-European people who are already here under temporary permits but are likely to be here indefinitely, should not have to wait 15 years before applying for resident status and for Australian citizenship, but should be able to apply after five years' residence, so ending a situation often criticised for its effect on individuals and families.

The second decision is that applications for entry by well qualified people wishing to settle in Australia will be considered on the basis of their suitability as settlers, their ability to integrate readily, and their possession of qualifications which are in fact positively useful to Australia. They will be able after five years' stay on temporary permits to apply for resident status and citizenship. They will be able to bring their immediate families with them on first arrival.<sup>80</sup>

These changes, although minimal in practice, did deal directly with two of William Liu's concerns which he had repeatedly written to the government and to the Citizenship Convention organisers about, and it is possible that he had a direct influence on this policy change. These requests were

1. Australian citizenship be granted to Chinese residents of good character who have been here five years
2. The few hundred "wartime" and "L.A.S." (liberal attitude status) Chinese residents in Australia be permitted to bring out their families and fiancées to afford them happier lives<sup>81</sup>

The Chinese and other non-Europeans who fell into these two categories were on the minds of the government when they implemented these liberalising changes. The Chinese refugees in particular, attracted belated sympathy for their plight caused by the delay in addressing this issue:

By a decision of the Government in 1956, they were allowed to stay on but, lacking the status of settlers and citizens, have been unable to bring their wives and children here. I am very glad to say that one important benefit of the Government's decision to abolish the so-called fifteen-year rule will be to enable many families who have been separated for some years to be

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<sup>80</sup> Immigration Minister Opperman, MHR, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 9 March 1966, pp. 68-9.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Liu to Chairman of Australian Citizenship Convention, 21 January 1958, MLMSS 6294/10.

reunited much sooner than would have been possible under the previous rule.<sup>82</sup>

But these changes in no way jeopardised the White Australia Policy, for it was asserted that only the name was offensive to Asians, and not the discriminatory aspect.<sup>83</sup> This was the argument for years, put forth by parliamentarians of both the Liberal and Labour parties, for this was, as Liberal Sir Keith Wilson put it, “a matter free from party politics”.<sup>84</sup> Many parliamentarians argued both during the discussion on this policy change, and during previous discussions, that Asian countries had restrictive immigration policies, and so Australia had the right to restrict its immigration as well.<sup>85</sup> As the then Minister for Immigration Downer had expressed in 1959, in an oft-repeated theme,

Is not this the elementary right of every government, to decide the composition of the nation? It is just the same prerogative as the head of a family exercises as to who is to live in his own house.<sup>86</sup>

This choice was exercised, officially, through determining who was able to integrate successfully into the Australian community and who was not. Race was not the deciding factor, it was frequently argued. As Sir Keith Wilson put it,

When we turn to the countries of Africa we find that in many cases 90 per cent. of the inhabitants are totally illiterate. So the number of Africans who may be successfully integrated into our community is very low. Their applications to migrate would be refused, not on the ground of colour or nationality, but simply because they could not be successfully integrated into the community. All kinds of friction would

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<sup>82</sup> Immigration Minister Opperman, MHR, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 9 March 1966, p. 68.

<sup>83</sup> Mr. Daly, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March 1966, pp. 584-5.

<sup>84</sup> Sir Keith Wilson, Senate, Liberal, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March 1966, p. 586.

<sup>85</sup> See for example Immigration Minister Opperman, MHR, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 9 March 1966, p. 69.

<sup>86</sup> A.R. Downer, Commonwealth Club luncheon, Town Hall, Adelaide, 4 December 1949. In Rivett, Kenneth (ed.), Immigration: Control or Colour Bar?, Melbourne University Press, Parkville, Victoria, 1962, pp. 156-7.

be caused if numbers of illiterate idle coloured people were allowed to settle in this country.<sup>87</sup>

Of course, skills were not an issue in the height of the postwar European migration scheme, but they were deemed to be very important when the issue of coloured migration was raised. The argument, though, was a contradictory one, as possessing desirable attributes, or lacking them, could keep non-Europeans out:

...I wish to give an assurance that the possession of wealth, for instance, will certainly not be the sole basis of admission to Australia. In other words, the right to settle in Australia cannot be bought... We are determined to be most careful not to deprive underdeveloped countries of the skills and talents that are needed by them much more than by Australia... We do not intend, either, to admit workers to meet labour shortages. We will not admit persons on the basis of special training and experience if suitably qualified Australians are available.<sup>88</sup>

Lest an intending migrant might view these restrictions and decide that the best way to be qualified and to obtain skills more specific to Australian needs was to study in Australia and obtain Australian qualifications, the government made that, too, a disqualification for immediate residency.<sup>89</sup> This decision was backed by most members of the Liberal and Labour parties except, apparently, Gough Whitlam and very few other detractors.<sup>90</sup> The logic had not changed – these non-European students were needed in their homeland, and should return there.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Sir Keith Wilson, Senate, Liberal, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 16 March 1966, p. 305.

<sup>88</sup> Immigration Minister Opperman, MHR, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March 1966, pp. 687-8.

<sup>89</sup> Immigration Minister Opperman, MHR, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 9 March 1966, p. 68.

<sup>90</sup> Mr. Pettitt, MHR, Country Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March 1966, p. 610.

<sup>91</sup> Mr. Stewart, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March 1966, p. 612.

The fear factor was also still present in the arguments of parliamentarians to retain the existing policy (although they accepted the announced modifications). It was argued that increasing non-European immigration could lead to a racially charged situation which Australia had not experienced before. The non-Europeans would bring this situation to Australia:

I would always oppose any move that I thought would encourage entry to Australia of the type of people who, in their turn, would encourage discrimination. This could only lead to more discrimination in the long term.<sup>92</sup>

The logic was that Australia was racially harmonious because of White Australia, and non-Europeans would be guilty of bringing discrimination upon themselves and disturbing this harmony because of the way they looked. Thus racism was not a trait indigenous to Australia but dormant – it could be caused by relaxing the immigration laws. Holt had also subscribed to this view in the past when he was Minister for Immigration, which was why he did not support real change to Australia's immigration policies.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to this argument, the old bogey of the troubled US resurfaced, joined by Great Britain and its Commonwealth migration scheme which had brought so many non-Europeans 'flooding' into Britain. Both were clear examples of the 'evils' which a freer immigration system could cause:

Let me take the example of Great Britain. This is a reasonable comparison for the purpose of this subject. When the Conservative Government of Great Britain, supported by the Labour Party, opened the immigration doors, Britain was flooded with non-European labour, most of it unskilled.

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<sup>92</sup> Mr. King, MHR, Country Party, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 17 March 1966, p. 376.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Holt to Thomas, 16 August 1956, National Library of Australia, MS 2412, Series 3, Subheading No, 5.

This has resulted in a congregation of these people in certain areas, racial discrimination, riots, ugly scenes and examples of racial hatreds similar to those that exist in the United States of America...Great Britain now has an imported racial problem with all the strife and bitterness that follows.<sup>94</sup>

The argument using the US as an example was hotly contested by Mr. Beazley of the Labour Party, who argued that one could not extrapolate from a situation in which slaves were unwillingly brought to a country to a situation in which people freely chose to migrate to a country and had much greater capacity to integrate in that country.<sup>95</sup>

Other left wing Labour party members in the debate over immigration policy also pointed out the flaws in the arguments supporting the existing restrictive policy. It was argued that it was discriminatory to refuse migration to a non-European on the basis of skill when this was not a factor for European migration. Mr. Hayden cited the example of a Filipino bank clerk who was refused entry, to prove his point:

What about the case of Mr. Locsin, the Filipino bank clerk?...It was that Mr. Locsin was a bank clerk and we did not seek that category of worker. But I can bring to the Minister many clerks who have migrated to this country. They were bank clerks when they left their home country and they are bank clerks in Australia. The difference is that they are European.<sup>96</sup>

Hayden and Dr. Cairns expressed their opposition to the immigration policy, which was also an opposition to majority opinion in the Labour Party, in the debate over the changes which Opperman had announced, and also put forth the argument that the Liberal Party was still running a White Australia Policy, despite their protests to the contrary:

There are quite a number of cases that arise from time to time, particularly

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<sup>94</sup> Mr. Daly, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March 1966, pp. 584-5.

<sup>95</sup> Mr. Beazley, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March, 1966, p. 608.

<sup>96</sup> Mr. Hayden, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 52, 27 September 1966, p. 1313.

concerning persons from places like Ceylon, Egypt, and Hong Kong who, without any shadow of doubt, could maintain a high standard of living and income in Australia, but who are refused permission to come to Australia. The only possible ground for the refusal is the colour of their skin. I think this has to come to an end in Australia. From time to time the Minister has said that his Government does not have a white Australia policy. I contradict that. His Government does have a White Australia policy.<sup>97</sup>

Hayden also argued that denying the name “white Australia policy” did not deny the fact of racial discrimination in immigration policy:

Have we in the past in this country had a white Australia policy? Do we still have it? I think there is plenty of evidence to show that the policy has existed and still exists.<sup>98</sup>

Aside from the announced changes, the Liberal government refused to consider more extensive reforms of the immigration policy, such as the quotas which many were still advocating.<sup>99</sup> As was argued by Labour MP Jones in support of government policy, quotas were still a form of discrimination, and were abandoned in the US in 1965 because they were not a satisfactory form of control.<sup>100</sup>

The minimal alterations left the White Australia Policy intact, and as previous alterations had done, strengthened support for a restrictive immigration policy by making it more palatable to a greater number of Australians and removing the most terrible inequities. It is questionable whether Horne’s argument that the alterations were a “symbolic dismantling” of the policy, accurately describes government intentions in

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<sup>97</sup> Dr. Cairns, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 52, 27 September 1966, p. 1307.

<sup>98</sup> Mr. Hayden, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 52, 27 September 1966, p. 1312.

<sup>99</sup> Immigration Minister Opperman, MHR, Liberal, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 9 March 1966, p. 69.

<sup>100</sup> Mr. Jones, MHR, Labour, backbencher, in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], Vol. 50, 24 March 1966, pp. 590, 593-4.

1966, rather than a view in hindsight.<sup>101</sup> These alterations were not applied with an intent to dismantle White Australia any more than previous alterations which had led to more non-Europeans being allowed into Australia had been. Restrictive provisions still remained, as two reforms recommended by the Department of External Affairs were rejected by the Cabinet. Non-Europeans would be admitted only as temporary residents (unlike Europeans), and non-European British subjects would not be eligible to register for Australian citizenship after one year (as European British subjects were). Moreover, Cabinet emphasised limiting the number of new non-European entrants and imposed requirements on the Minister for Immigration to report on those he admitted.<sup>102</sup> The policy was not renounced – only the name (which was nothing new) – and its detractors were left to speculate upon the possible reasons in specific cases for non-Europeans being denied entry, for the official reasons were never race-related. It was clear to observers such as William Liu that the Liberals had missed their chance to rid Australia of the White Australia Policy, and he continued his letter-writing and lobbying campaign.<sup>103</sup>

Liu's work against discrimination was finally beginning to gain him notoriety amongst the general Australian population by 1968. On 15 January, just before the final Citizenship Convention, Liu was written up in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (along with an inventor of a lifeboat launching device) in an article entitled "THE BATTLERS: Sellen and Liu".<sup>104</sup> Individual photos of the two men accompanied the article. The story of 'Liu the dedicated battler' contained some factual errors, but described his background and his Citizenship Convention 'crusade' well:

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<sup>101</sup> Horne, *Time of Hope*, p. 131.

<sup>102</sup> Dutton, David, *One of Us? A Century of Australian Citizenship*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, pp. 74-7.

<sup>103</sup> Liu, "Sino-Australian Relations", 1 September 1966, MLMSS 6294/10.

Mr. Liu has a...lifelong determination to see Aborigines and nationalised Asians given the same treatment and attention as European-Australians. Tomorrow, the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Citizenship Convention begins in Canberra. As usual, Mr. Liu has had no success in getting an Asian or an Aborigine invited to observe or attend the proceedings. It's not for want of trying. Since 1958 he has sent an average of 500 letters every year to Ministers, M.P.s and Immigration Department officials, each time making the same request and each time getting exactly nowhere.<sup>105</sup>

This was the first of a few articles on Liu which presented him as an important member of the Chinese-Australian community who had involved himself in a level of activism on immigration and discrimination issues. More articles were written in the 1970s. Liu was presented in this article as acting individually, because as he noted, other Chinese Australians could not be involved:

It's been a lone battle for me. The Chinese feel strongly about this, but they will never come out with it; they don't dare to get involved, because the worst name you can be called is a 'Commo'. You have to be a bit of a scallywag like me, then you get immune.<sup>106</sup>

Liu continued to write to the government regarding the ongoing discrimination against non-Europeans, and as the above article mentioned he had, only the previous weekend, written to Prime Minister Gorton asking him whether any changes would take place under his administration:

Remembering your recent T.V. interviews and much of what you said to us about promoting happiness for us all if you were to become our Prime Minister, encouraged me to respectfully plead to you, Sir, to pave the way for us non-European Australian citizens...to be allowed to participate in our nation-wide "Good Neighbour and Assimilation" Get-togethers, and to have some representation at our "Annual Australian Citizenship Conventions"...<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Helen Frizell, "THE BATTLERS: Sellen & Liu", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 January 1968, p. 6, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Letter from Liu to Prime Minister Gorton, 12 January 1968, MLMSS 6294/10.



Liu felt that the Chinese Australian community had been duped by the suggestion that there was going to be a real change to the White Australia Policy:

This discrimination came as an unhappy surprise among our families and friends who thought that when the Government, in 1966, declared that our past 100-year-old White Australia Policy had greatly changed; that our Immigration Minister would have changed the past rules and regulations to meet the changing times for our own, our children's and our grandchildren's citizenship, dignity and happiness.<sup>108</sup>

Liu was not told that there were no plans to hold another Citizenship Convention as of late 1968, and so he continued to focus on that issue in his letters.<sup>109</sup> He also mentioned in a letter to his local MP that he had intended to write to the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. U. Thant, if the announced change to citizenship rules had not taken place in 1966.<sup>110</sup>

There were few changes to inspire Liu through the period of the McMahon government until Gough Whitlam's engagement with China ahead of his 1972 election. Clearly for Liu, it was Whitlam's visit to China, rather than his ideas on immigration policy, which heralded a new era in Australia-China relations. For Whitlam, in line with Labor Party policy, did not wish to see an increase in immigration which could threaten Australian jobs:

In the run for the Australia party's quality of life vote he said immigration would be cut down anyway and as a by-product of this, since there were to be fewer immigrants, and since they would tend to be chosen on a 'friends and relatives' basis, under his government, 'very few black or yellow people' would settle in Australia, fewer than under the Liberals.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Minister for Immigration Snedden to Curtin, 23 September 1968, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Liu to D.J. Curtin, M.P. for Maroubra, 16 August 1968, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>111</sup> Horne, Time of Hope, p. 133. The spelling of the Australian Labour Party becomes Labor from 1967 in Parliamentary Debates [Hansard], and this spelling is adopted from this point in the chapter.

However, what was important to Liu, as he was probably not aware of these comments, was engagement with China. He was optimistic about the impact which the Cultural Revolution had had in China (although it is unclear what access he had to the details of this period). He wrote in a 1973 letter to Whitlam that the Communist period in China was “wonderful” because of the achievements which had taken place

in so short a period, 1949 to 1973, and particularly since the 1966-68 nation-wide cultural revolutionary re-adjustments and re-education, as well as the re-thinking of the old and young in inter-communication and bridging of age-gaps atop of the 23 years of leap-ahead progress in all round reconstruction in building China anew...<sup>112</sup>

Liu was excited by China’s increasing engagement with the world through Whitlam’s visit in July 1971 as Labor Opposition leader, ahead of Nixon’s visit in February 1972, and by the People’s Republic of China joining the United Nations on 25 October 1971.<sup>113</sup> Whitlam’s visit was a great symbolic change in relations between Australia and China, which Liu wrote about to acquaintances.<sup>114</sup> For Liu, this was the beginning of what he termed a ‘Golden Decade’, a term which Liu coined five years before his death and which meant for him great improvements both in Australia-China relations and China’s relations with the world.<sup>115</sup> Liu felt that Whitlam’s positive relations with China in this decade were continued by Malcolm Fraser.<sup>116</sup> Although Liu did not specifically link it to internal developments within Australia in his writings, the ‘Golden Decade’ also signified improvements in the status of the Chinese Australian community within Australia.

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<sup>112</sup> Letter from Liu to Prime Minister Whitlam, 2 April 1973, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>113</sup> Horne, Time of Hope, pp. 122, 128-9.

<sup>114</sup> Letter from Liu to T.K. Goh, 9 August 1971, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>115</sup> "Superb Chinese Banquet at the White Lotus in honour of William Liu, O.B.E.", Bondi Spectator, 27 May 1982, p. 22, MLMSS 6294/11; Liu, 1 April 1981, MLMSS 6294/10.

Throughout the years in which Liu tried to influence Liberal government policy on the citizenship rights of non-Europeans in Australia, he tirelessly lobbied for them to be considered an important part of Australia's increasingly culturally diverse community. He wished to see the dismantling of the White Australia Policy so that Chinese Australians and other non-European Australians – and their families – would be able to become a permanent part of Australia. Liu had decided from 1958 that the best way to address discrimination issues against non-Europeans was through targeting in his letters the Australian Citizenship Conventions, which supposedly were instituted to help all Australians assimilate into Australian society. He was also aware of other groups' tactics to weaken or destroy the White Australia Policy, such as those of student protestors. The publicity which these means of protest attracted to the workings of immigration policy in Australia led to a weakening in support for a White Australia, although in principle the policy continued to be defended as important for maintaining racial harmony in Australia. By the late 1960s, Liu was beginning to be recognised for his role in increasing the citizenship rights of non-Europeans in Australia, and his 'crusade' against discrimination appeared to have an impact on changes in policy. Liu welcomed the 1970s and the coming 'Golden Decade' of improved relations between Chinese and Australians, and improved status of Chinese Australians within Australia, as a period which signified the end of the struggle for recognition, and the beginning of a more inclusive period in which the right of non-European communities to thrive in Australia might no longer be questioned.

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<sup>116</sup> Liu, "People's China 1950-1980", 1 September 1980, MLMSS 6294/10.

**Chapter Eight**

***The 'Golden Decade'***

***1971-1982***

The 'Golden Decade' for William Liu was the period of his ultimate recognition for his life's work, his 'crusade' to improve the status of the Chinese Australian community in Australia. It was a title which he dreamed up and which appeared in several of his writings and interviews at almost the close of the decade, 1978, as this decade began for him, variously in 1971 or 1972, with the momentous events of Gough Whitlam visiting China, the People's Republic of China becoming a member of the United Nations, and Australia normalising relations with the People's Republic of China.<sup>1</sup> The optimism that accompanied the period of the Whitlam Government was a crucial part of the Golden Decade, but it would not have continued without the support of Malcolm Fraser's Liberal Government for multiculturalism and the furtherance of cordial relations with the People's Republic of China. The Golden Decade's importance to Liu was also underscored by the increasing interest of newspapers, television programmes and the National Library in his work, and his greatest official achievement, his receipt of an Order of the British Empire in 1982.

But the Golden Decade did not begin in a promising manner. In fact, Liu had little cause for optimism leading up to 1971, as he had experienced widespread resistance in the Australian government toward the changes which he pushed for in immigration policy, the Good Neighbour Movement, and matters of Australian Chinese relations in general. 1971 also brought disappointment for Liu at the outset, as he observed an example of what he described as the United States' pro-Japanese policy of containing the People's Republic of China, an insult to him because of Japan's World War II aggression.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Golden Decade' is named by Liu in four areas in his papers, firstly in his 1978 National Library interview (MLMSS 6294/3), secondly in a letter from him to Ian MacPhee, Liberal Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, dated 22 July 1980 (MLMSS 6294/2), thirdly in a memo he wrote to

This came with the announcement that the United States would transfer the ‘Tiao Yu Tai’ islands in the East China Sea to Japan in 1972. The United States had administered the island group as part of the Ryukyu islands, and both Japan and China had laid claim to the islands.<sup>2</sup> China’s claim originated with the islands’ discovery and mapping in 1403, while Japan took over the islands, including Taiwan in 1895, following the first Sino-Japanese War, and had controlled them from that time, an act that was forcible according to China.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese believed that the islands had been returned to China at the end of World War II in 1945 based upon the 1943 agreement of the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations<sup>4</sup>, but the United States had administered the islands from the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, to the 1971 Reversion Agreement which was to become effective in 1972.<sup>5</sup> The islands had become strategically important because of the discovery in 1968 of oil, and the Japanese and Ryukyu governments had been forcibly ejecting Chinese fishermen since that discovery, to enforce their claim to the islands which they called the ‘Senkaku’ islands.<sup>6</sup> This angered supporters of the People’s Republic of China, leading to international protests, and Liu also felt strongly about the message of support for Japanese territorial aggression that the transfer of the islands sent.<sup>7</sup>

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himself on 1 April 1981 (MLMSS 6294/10), and fourthly in an article, "Superb Chinese Banquet at the White Lotus in honour of William Liu, O.B.E., Bondi Spectator, 27 May 1982, p. 22, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Ching, "U.S. Chinese Ask Backing on Island: Demonstrate in Washington on Tiao Yu Tai Control", New York Times, 12 April 1971, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Dzurek, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute", International Boundaries Research Unit, University of Durham, 18 October 1996, accessed 26 June 2004, <http://www-ibru.dur.ac.uk/docs/senkaku.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Cheng-China Huang, "ICE Case Studies: Diaoyu Islands Dispute", The Inventory of Conflict and the Environment, American University, Washington, June 1997, accessed 26 June 2004, <http://www.american.edu/projects/mandala/TED/ice/DIAOYU.HTM>.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Dzurek, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute".

<sup>6</sup> "Open Letter to President Nixon", May 1971, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Liu to ‘nephew’ T.K. Goh, 9 August 1971, MLMSS 6294/2.

While Liu was still focused on the Tiao Yu Tai islands issue, a series of events occurred which gave 1971 a new focus, or, as Liu termed it, created a ‘climatic change’ for Chinese-Australian relations, through the advent of what had come to be known as “ping-pong diplomacy”:

Since Easter this year, when our Aussie Table Tennis Team visited Peking to play Ping-pong with the Chinese teams and the July 2-12 Whitlam “A.L.P.” Mission to Peking and July-9 invitation by premier Chou En-Lai to U.S. President Nixon to visit Peking.. which may be this year or early 1972 and our Prime Minister, Mr. McMahon’s expressed desire to have a dialogue with Peking too.. after U.S.-Australia’s cold war.. 21 years of it against China, and the mess the Anzus Pact had done in Vietnam and S.E. Asia, it seems that both America and Australia, I mean the two governments have come to realise the futility of it all...

That’s the picture I’m mirroring of the situation now. Let’s hope the old saying: “changing times...changing manners” have at long last come, as I have been thinking of year 1971.. and, by God! it has been a long wait – 1931 to 1971.<sup>8</sup>

Liu wrote of the 40-year wait for Chinese Australians in Australia to be heard and for them to experience improved conditions, and also of the 21-year ‘boycott’ of communist China by Australia and the United States. Liu believed that Whitlam’s 1971 visit to China represented the turning point in this long disappointing period.<sup>9</sup> He hoped that the visit would have flow-on effects for other issues such as the right of Chinese students studying in Australia to remain there after their studies were completed.<sup>10</sup> Whitlam’s engagement with China, while disparaged by many in the Liberal and DLP parties in the period before Nixon’s February 1972 China visit, encouraged Liu to believe that much

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Marina Mar, Liu’s niece, 11 October 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Liu to ‘nephew’ T.K. Goh, 9 August 1971, MLMSS 6294/2.

would change for Chinese Australians if the Labor Party triumphed at the next election.

He wrote to friends in January 1972 of his happiness over the events of 1971:

What an exciting 1971 year of newsy-news we've had relating to China-international understanding, the best we've read since China's liberation, 1949. What with China's Oct-25 entry into the United Nations and China's acceptance of Australia's invitation to "Australia Day" Jan-26 Anniversary gathering at the Hong Kong Trade Commissioner's function and U.S. Pres. Nixon's Mission to Peking Feb-20.. starts 1972 with better and happier news than what we've had the 20 years 1950 to 1970, with China's dignity rising each year, so we go on wishing this and following years growing better and nearer peace the world over.<sup>11</sup>

Liu was particularly impressed by Whitlam's interest in the 'progress' which he observed during his China tour, "building China anew" and recovering in two decades from the pre-1949 "disorderly past". Liu attended an ALP dinner in Liverpool in 1971 at which Whitlam gave a talk on his recent China tour entitled "China Emerges", and Liu agreed with Whitlam's interpretation of the benefits of the cultural revolution in China's reconstruction:

To a great degree, what...you told us, when T.C. and I attended your "A.L.P." Liverpool return-from-China dinner... all bears out that, a better life for all sections of rural, urban and city people now than before, male and female alike for Han and National-minority Chinese and freer from past prejudices and discriminations and mythical superstitions. What's wonderful is that, in so short a period, 1949 to 1973, and particularly since the 1966-1968 nation-wide cultural revolutionary re-adjustments and re-education, [there has been] the re-thinking of the old and young in inter-communication and bridging of age-gaps atop of the 23 years of leap-ahead progress in all round reconstruction in building China anew...<sup>12</sup>

Liu's hopeful feeling was shared by many ethnic organisations, representing people who had felt alienated by years of Liberal government assimilationist policy. The

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Liu to 'Arthur and Ann', January 1972, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>12</sup> Draft letter from Liu to Whitlam, 2 April 1973, MLMSS 6294/10.



policies of the Labor Party, which were ratified and emphasised at events such as the federal Labor conference in June 1971, were appealing because of their anti-racist aims, their incorporation of migrant welfare into the party's overall social welfare strategy, and their focus on integration rather than assimilation.<sup>13</sup>

1971 brought changes to Australia in terms of the more explicit pursuit, by advocates of multiculturalism, for a change in federal policy relative to 'ethnic affairs'. The evolution of this advocacy of alternative forms of social organisation could be traced back nearly 20 years at this point, to the work of sociologist Jean Martin. Martin's doctoral research at the University of Canberra from 1951 to 1954 led to her concluding that the policy of assimilation of migrants was flawed, and that it caused migrant isolation and identity problems, for it was an unachievable aim.<sup>14</sup> Other critics of assimilationism began to emerge in the 1950s, such as David Cox, Walter Lippmann, and Jerzy Zubrzycki, who would later emerge as some of the key actors in the push towards multiculturalism.<sup>15</sup> This critical perspective, for Martin and Zubrzycki, then, in the 1960s, "began to develop from a critique into taking the initial steps towards the conceptualisation of alternative forms and patterns of social organisation."<sup>16</sup> However, by the end of 1970, the key definers were close to, but had still not yet arrived at, producing alternative ideological models for guiding relevant public policy.<sup>17</sup>

Important influences on these critics included international social movements such as the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and much of the language of

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2000, p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

protest in Australia borrowed heavily at this time from this and other movements such as the anti-war struggle. It has been argued that these trends in the United States had far more influence over the development of Australian multiculturalism than the adoption of the Canadian form of multiculturalism between 1969 and 1971. Although the term was coined in Canada, and first used in the *Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* published in 1965, multiculturalism took on different forms in each country, as “events in Canada paralleled developments in Australia but had a negligible impact as a catalyst or source of ideas and concepts.”<sup>18</sup> The Canadian model was a culturally-specific response to, as one Department of Immigration official put it, “appease the French separatists”, and as such it was primarily useful for the Australian multiculturalists to depict their efforts “as part of a trend in English-speaking democracies that had already been successful in one country”.<sup>19</sup> The exchange of ideas was greater between Australia and the United States:

The influence of some of these interest groups and social movements of the 1960s on the majority of key definers and activists of multiculturalism was profound, especially in the cases of those involved in the ethnic rights stream of multiculturalism. Many of the main actors experienced direct association with, or derived inspiration from, these groups and movements. James Jupp, Arthur Faulkner and Des Storer were involved in the activities of the student left. Arthur Faulkner, Alan Matheson and Giovanni Sgro were involved with the anti-Vietnam War movement. Alan Matheson and Brian Howe were influenced by radical leftist trends in theology. Both men visited the United States and imported radical and activist ideas, literature, and experiences.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, “Multicultural Imagined Communities: Cultural difference and national identity in the USA and Australia”, in David Bennett (ed.), *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1998, p. 138; Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, pp. 70-1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

In addition to these interactions, literature was emerging in the United States which directly influenced Australians pushing for change:

The works that had the most impact on the emergence of multiculturalism were those that criticised the ‘melting pot’ model for not working, described the persistence of ethnic groups over time, extolled the rights of minorities to express their ethnicity, or proclaimed the desirability of cultural diversity. By far the most widely read text in this category was the case study by Glazer and Moynihan of the poly-ethnic city of New York, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963).<sup>21</sup>

Another book in this category which influenced Jerzy Zubrzycki and Walter Lippmann was Milton Gordon’s *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), which set out a theoretical framework for assessing and clarifying approaches to immigrant settlement and the treatment of ethnic minorities in ethnically diverse societies like the United States.<sup>22</sup>

The promise of change attracted many people interested in migrant rights to support the Labor Party at the 1972 election.<sup>23</sup> The Labor Party was elected with the anticipation of a change in the attitude towards migrants from an assimilationist to an integrationist orientation, with no mention of pluralism or multiculturalism at that point. Immigration and migrant welfare were not major campaign issues, but the “ALP received favourable attention in the ethnic press, particularly the Greek papers, and managed to attract a greater proportion of ethnic voter support”, and “various ethnic leaders also saw an ALP victory as offering a greater prospect for realising their aims”.<sup>24</sup>

Whitlam’s election quickly gave Liu reason to celebrate:

As I previously wrote, enjoying a piece of my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday cake Jan-29, I felt more at peace in mind with the normalization of Sino-Aussie relations, P.M. Gough Whitlam so quickly brought about on Dec-21

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-3.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Horne, *A Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1980, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, p. 191.

following his election to the prime-ministership Dec-2...<sup>25</sup>

Liu helped organise a banquet on February 5 of the following year, at the Mandarin Club in Sydney, to celebrate the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Australia and the People's Republic of China, to which he invited Prime Minister Whitlam, who did not attend, and Dr. Stephen FitzGerald, who did attend.<sup>26</sup> Liu felt an affinity with Whitlam and later with Al Grassby that he had not felt with any previous Prime Ministers or Ministers for Immigration, that was evident in his letters to Whitlam and Grassby during and after the ALP time in government. In Liu's first draft letter to Whitlam, he told of his mother's mental illness after the birth of his sister, due to her disowning by her parents following her marriage to his Chinese father, a part of his history which he generally told by saying he 'lost' his mother and not specifying how.<sup>27</sup> Liu's letters to Grassby and to Whitlam were always personal and congratulatory, not critical as were many of his other previous letters to government officials.

Liu wrote to Whitlam to offer his support on other matters as well, such as Whitlam's opposition to the nuclear tests of France and China. In this letter, Liu also stated that Whitlam "has done a wonder job in clearing-up the nonsensical bogeys – 'yellow peril and red menace'", and told Whitlam that he had nominated him as Australian of the Year for 1972. He wrote that "Your "A.L.P." Government under your leadership, alike Chairman Mao Tse-tung's 'Thoughts and Quotations' has, indeed, been

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Liu to 'Henry-Margaret and Janice-Willie', 22.3.73, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to 'Henry' from Liu, 29 March 1973, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Liu to Whitlam, 2 April 1973, MLMSS 6294/10.

a good tonic towards international peaceful history...and elation to us Sino-Australians.”<sup>28</sup>

The ‘elation’ felt by the Chinese Australian community almost certainly was also related to the ALP’s prioritising of the scrapping of the White Australia Policy. As soon as his full ministry was sworn in, “Whitlam took the opportunity at a press conference to reiterate his intention to officially end the White Australia Policy, by stating that his Government would consider extending assisted passages to non-Europeans”.<sup>29</sup> In extending the assisted passage scheme to all races, a points system was applied which quantified the value of applicants and sought to remove the most obvious hallmarks of race-based settler selection in immigration procedures and administration.<sup>30</sup> This responsibility became Al Grassby’s as the new Minister for Immigration, and the elimination of remnants of the Policy from migrant selection criteria, travel regulations and citizenship law became his main focus for policy and legislative reform. Grassby began by announcing the elimination of the Policy’s remnants in migrant selection criteria on 31 January 1973, a swift action which “was possible because the practice of the White Australia Policy was largely a policy matter, dependent on ministerial discretion and Departmental policy, and not requiring the amendment of legislation and the consent of Parliament”. The variation of citizenship law was achieved by the passage of the Australian Citizenship Act, 1973, which was intended to remove variations in the eligibility for citizenship between Britons and others, and the Act removed most of the

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<sup>28</sup> Letter from Liu to Whitlam, 28 June 1973, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>29</sup> Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, p. 203.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Shergold, “Australian Immigration Since 1973”, in Frances Milne and Peter Shergold (eds.), *The Great Immigration Debate*, Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia, Sydney, 1984, p. 16.

assimilationist values from the statutes. This “brought about legislation that was more compatible with the notion of a multicultural society”.<sup>31</sup>

Grassby moved to alter travel regulations by introducing a universal simplified visa access scheme, the Easy Visa Scheme, which was announced on 27 May 1973 to begin on 1 September. This scheme was intended to “facilitate the reunion of people overseas with their families” in Australia.<sup>32</sup> This was to occur by making it easier to apply for a visitor’s visa, with the applicant needing only to sign a declaration and show evidence of having purchased a return airfare to Australia.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Grassby decided to tour Asian countries to proclaim the end of the White Australia Policy. As he stated, “it was my feeling that if we were going to reform properly, if we were going to bury the White Australia Policy, and if we had nothing to be ashamed of, then we had a clean face and we should show it.”<sup>34</sup> This scheme was very controversial, and was implemented against the advice of the Department of Immigration. It was later abandoned by the Liberal government.

Immediately following his Asian tour, Grassby travelled to North America, beginning in Canada. He met with several Canadian ministers including the Minister for Manpower and Immigration, and discussed Canadian multiculturalism, among a range of immigration issues. Grassby was not impressed by the Canadian model, nor by the ‘arrogant’ Minister for Manpower and Immigration who, as Grassby’s private secretary

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<sup>31</sup> Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, pp. 221, 253.

<sup>32</sup> Al Grassby, MHR, Labor, Minister for Immigration, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 88, 5 March 1974, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> The Opposition was critical of the fact that no evidence of sufficient funds to support oneself in Australia needed to be shown, thus opening the door to illegal workers. Malcolm Fraser, MHR, Liberal, Shadow Minister for Immigration, in *Parliamentary Debates [Hansard]*, Vol. 88, 14 March 1974, p. 424.

<sup>34</sup> Al Grassby, *The Morning After*, Judicator Publications, Canberra, 1979, p. 67.

recalled later, “looked down on this colourful little man from Australia”.<sup>35</sup> He also had reservations about the British-French divide in the Canadian system and the appropriateness of that model for Australia. As Grassby has said,

I was interested in what the Canadians had done. He [Prime Minister Trudeau] wanted a policy to unite Canada, which had always had problems with the British and the French...One problem is that the Canadian policy is flawed. Trudeau proclaimed that there were two founding nations – the British and the French. To me this seemed to be creating a division at the start. It left out those who were neither British nor French, and where was the place for the natives? I think they were flawed in their multiculturalism. They used to talk about the national mosaic and the founding nations. Who could we talk about as the founding nations in Australia? So when I came back I was interested in developing different ideas.<sup>36</sup>

It would seem that the “place for the natives” was conceived by the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* as just another of the ethnic groups in Canada. The mission statement for the Commission was to recommend “what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of equal partnership between the two founding races, taking into account the contribution made by other ethnic groups”.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the “two founding races” were not Europeans and native Canadians, but the British and the French.

Canadian multiculturalism did not alter Grassby’s evolving concept of the ‘Family of the Nation’, which he continued to put forth as his model for ethnic relations. His overriding emphasis on national unity in his speeches “placed his approach in the tradition of integrationism; although his appreciation of cultural diversity, and the rights of migrant minorities to cultural expression, exceeded that of integrationists and

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<sup>35</sup> Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, p. 224.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Considered*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1989, p. 218.

resembled that of cultural pluralists”.<sup>38</sup> Grassby’s concept was not embraced by his party, or by multiculturalists, but his receptiveness to multicultural ideas helped to establish the basis for the eventual transition towards multiculturalism.<sup>39</sup> Multiculturalism therefore initially emerged around the Whitlam Government, rather than through it, for

far from developing a fully-articulated ideology of state-sponsored cultural pluralism, the Whitlam Government merely provided the preconditions for the emergence of such an ideology...the Whitlam Government did not come to power with the intention of proselytizing cultural pluralism. The lingering impression that it did so is the effect of distorted historical hindsight.<sup>40</sup>

Grassby officially ushered in the era of multiculturalism with his speech “A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future”, delivered on 11 August 1973, although the man responsible for the use of the term ‘Multi-Cultural’ was his speechwriter Jim Houston, the National Groups Officer in the Integration Branch of the Department of Immigration. With this speech, Grassby became the first Minister for Immigration to endorse multiculturalism, but the policy direction outlined in this speech was not followed.<sup>41</sup>

Grassby’s move beyond cultural integration to cultural pluralism impressed William Liu, who wrote to Grassby agreeing with his view:

you know how our Sino-Aussies, as Chinese communities here have disintegrated through integration as Chinese Australians.. I feel, as you do, it is good for us to keep up some identification.. as a means of co-operation in enhancing understanding.. not only here in Australia, but with our ancestral China too – as other groups also do with so many other countries of varying cultural backgrounds.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lopez, The Origins of Multiculturalism, p. 225.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-7.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Castles, et. al., Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1995, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> Lopez, The Origins of Multiculturalism, pp. 243-254.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Liu to Grassby, 5 April 1974, MLMSS 6294/2.



Liu continued to try to participate in government initiatives in order to improve the situation for the Chinese Australian community, but he felt he now had an ally in Al Grassby. One of Liu's first letters from Grassby was in response to Liu's letter regarding the National Population Inquiry, and it was entirely receptive to Liu's comments regarding the National Population Inquiry and the Citizenship Convention. In the letter, Grassby stated that he intended to "abandon completely the old form of Citizenship Convention and instead have a Family of the Nation Convention at which every section of the Australian people will be represented from the Aborigines right through to the present time."<sup>43</sup> Grassby sent his "every good wish and congratulations", and hoped that Liu "would be at the Family of the Nation Convention when it is held in 1975. In the meantime I look forward very much to meeting yourself and members of the newly formed association which I warmly commend and congratulate on coming together in this way."<sup>44</sup>

The association which Grassby referred to was the Australian Chinese Community Association of New South Wales, which was formed in the wake of the National Population Inquiry as the successor to the temporary committee formed to respond to the Inquiry.<sup>45</sup> This was the best result to come out of the Inquiry for the Australian Chinese community in New South Wales, as the Inquiry itself, chaired by Professor Borrie, did not result in any substantial policy changes when it appeared at the end of 1974. It merely reflected the integrationist environment which existed when the

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from Grassby to Liu, 17 October 1973, MLMSS 6294/10. Apparently 'Aborigines' represented the past in Grassby's conception, or where Australia came from, and migrants were the present, which is problematic to say the least, but was a better position than that of many of his predecessors who wished to wipe Aboriginal people out of the past as well.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Inquiry began in 1970, and by 1974, “multiculturalists working in other advisory committees had influenced the ideological content of advice presented in the majority of government reports. Consequently, the recommendations of the Borrie Report seemed out of place” and could not displace multiculturalism.<sup>46</sup>

Liu saw the formation of the Association, which he was closely involved with, as important for community unity. Its official aims were

- 1) To form an organisation to represent and manage the interests of Chinese in immigration, welfare and cultural matters, etc.
- 2) To discuss and adopt the draft constitution.
- 3) To elect the office bearers.

To this Liu added in a typed memorandum (which it appears he sent to Grassby):

...to arouse the community out of its apathy in identifying it as a commendable body in service to our Federal, State and Municipal Governments and Public general welfare...many being bilingual with some cultural background of Asia, especially China...now, as Sino-Australians...voluntarily dedicated to serve Australia, instead of out-doing one another to get rich quick...they become more useful and better Sino-Aussies...with the added fun and life happiness to come.

In the letter which Grassby sent Liu congratulating him on the formation of the Association, Grassby also made use of his knowledge of the Chinese history of his electoral district to associate himself with Liu’s cause, which greatly impressed Liu. Grassby’s interest in particular was the place of migrant groups in the ‘settlement’ of Australia:

I am most anxious to acknowledge the contribution to Australian settlement by the Chinese people. In my own electorate of the Riverina most of the clearing was done by Chinese. The largest inland cities had Chinese as a second language 120 years ago. Chinese people have been

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from Liu to Grassby, 5 April 1974, and “Notice of Chinese Community Public Meeting” enclosed, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>46</sup> Lopez, The Origins of Multiculturalism, pp. 369-70.

part of the history of this country for nearly the whole of our two centuries of existence.<sup>47</sup>

Liu responded with excitement to Grassby's statements on the Riverina Chinese:

That bit, you wrote into your first Oct-17 letter: "...in my own electorate of the Riverina most of the clearing was done by Chinese" and, as I know, no former Canberra Cabinet Minister would bother to mention, whilst knowing, only too well, the commendable good work done by early Chinese in their respective electorates.<sup>48</sup>

Grassby and Liu began a dialogue on Chinese-Australian history which led to, among other interactions, Grassby delivering a speech which Liu had written, to the Fifth Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations.<sup>49</sup> This speech will be discussed later, but this interaction between Liu and Grassby continued throughout Liu's life, from the early letters while Grassby was still Minister for Immigration, through to his time as Commissioner for Community Relations from 1975-1982. Grassby involved Liu in projects such as his idea for an 'Australian ethnic heritage programme', proposed just days before the 1974 election in which Grassby lost his seat. This programme was to be constructed on the basis of participation by the 2,300 ethnic organisations in Australia, and was, as Grassby wrote to Liu, "designed to preserve the cultural riches that you and other migrants have brought with you and make them an integral part of the heritage of all Australians".<sup>50</sup> Specifically, Grassby's press release stated that

The new programme was vital to the development of the three quarters of a million migrant children now attending school in Australia. If they were not going to be driven into cultural ghettos and if there were not to be cultural cripples, then there was a need that there should be a programme

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<sup>47</sup> Letter from Grassby to Liu, 17 October 1973, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Liu to Grassby, 1 November 1973, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>49</sup> William Liu, "Contribution of Chinese Settlers to Australia", 1979, MLMSS 6294/10. Also pamphlet enclosed from 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations, 3 December 1979, MLMSS 6294/18.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Grassby to Liu, 10 May 1974, MLMSS 6294/2.

which enabled them to join us in a truly family sense with a shared history and to share common hopes for the present and common aspirations for the future[...] The programme envisaged co-ordinating the efforts of eight Australian Departments of State and covered new projects in pre-school and at schools dealing with migrant children and there would be a new stress on sensitising teachers to the cultural diversity which is our heritage in 1974.<sup>51</sup>

However, on 18 May 1974, Grassby lost his Riverina seat in the midst of what has been described as a racist smear campaign to oust him from government.<sup>52</sup> There were other important factors, such as the impending loss of the superphosphate bounty, the withdrawal of taxation concessions for full land development costs, and the increase in country telephone charges, which attracted a rural protest vote.<sup>53</sup> But Grassby's personal style antagonised conservative voters, and the abolition of the White Australia Policy was a major issue. The racist hate campaign that was waged against Grassby involved death threats and hate mail, and an effort by many groups opposed to the ending of the White Australia Policy to advertise their opposition to Grassby immediately prior to the election.<sup>54</sup> This racist campaign fundamentally changed the political landscape, for the claims by groups opposed to Grassby's reforms to have the power to 'destroy' their opponents

helped associate the opposition to policies pursued during Grassby's term in office with racism. This association with racism obscured significant distinctions between those who opposed the abolition of the White Australia Policy for overtly racist reasons, and those who supported the White Australia Policy as a means to preserve Australia from racial strife. It also tarnished as socially and morally unacceptable opposition to the Whitlam Government's immigration reforms and Grassby's anti-Anglo-conformism; and detracted from the respectability of supporting the previous Coalition Government's policies that had been part of the political mainstream only

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<sup>51</sup> "The Australian Ethnic Heritage", 8 May 1974, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>52</sup> Grassby, *The Morning After*,

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-114.

eighteen months before.<sup>55</sup>

The loss of Grassby led to Prime Minister Whitlam reverting to a policy he had supported while in Opposition, and announcing the abolition of the Department of Immigration, and the sharing of its functions and responsibilities among other departments. This controversial policy was implemented in part, because Whitlam “regarded the senior officers of the Department of Immigration as the custodians of the White Australia Policy, which he had abolished. He regarded the Department as outmoded and outdated and could see no reason to maintain it; in Whitlam’s assessment, ‘It was past its use-by date!’”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, Whitlam felt that the Federal Government’s responsibility for migrants did not end with recruiting them, and he wished to more closely coordinate education, health and urban services for migrants.<sup>57</sup> The way in which the Department would be dismembered, though, was not yet decided – all that was known was that migrant intake would be attached to the Department of Labour, creating the Department of Labour and Immigration, under Minister Clyde Cameron.

Ultimately, most of the Department’s functions relevant to multiculturalism were transferred to other Departments such as Education and Social Security, which greatly destabilised multiculturalists who were working in areas such as the Immigration Advisory Council, which was abolished. Cameron as Minister for Labour and Immigration,

due to his lack of interest in immigration matters, made no effort to advance multiculturalism or set it back, nor did he retract any of Grassby’s multiculturalist rhetoric. Grassby had not introduced any multicultural

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<sup>55</sup> Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, pp. 335-6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338-9.

<sup>57</sup> James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, VIC, 2002, p. 41.

policies and programs, so there were none for Cameron to administer.<sup>58</sup>

The Ethnic Heritage Program that Grassby had mentioned in two of his speeches lacked formal status in the Department as a submission, and was not taken up.

Concern about the racism which was a factor in Grassby's defeat was an issue in the debate surrounding the Racial Discrimination Bill 1975, which "was largely perceived by its supporters in pre-multiculturalist terms, as a means to eradicate racism rather than as a means to build the multicultural society". Two members of the Labor Party linked their concern with racist groups having an impact on the election, to the passage of the Racial Discrimination Bill which they hoped would "eliminate the possibility of a similar occurrence happening again":

I would like to point out the sort of undesirable people that will have their actions curtailed by legislation like this[...]We will see the end of these vicious, nasty, racist, immigration groups who took such a role in the last election campaign in the electorate of Riverina.<sup>59</sup>

The Racial Discrimination Bill was assented to by the Senate on 3 June 1975, and the Government then took measures to lodge the instrument of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Although this was not the original intent of the legislation, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, along with the Australian Citizenship Act 1973, "provided the legislative basis for the establishment of a multicultural society".<sup>60</sup> It also led to Grassby achieving a permanent position as Commissioner for

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<sup>58</sup> Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, p. 343.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410-2; Mr. Cohen, MHR, Labor, backbencher, *Hansard*, Vol. H of R 94, 8 April 1975, p. 1301. Mr. Enderby, MHR, Labor, Attorney-General, also spoke out on the subject, *Hansard*, Vol H of R 94, 9 April 1975, p. 1409.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 417.

Community Relations, a position he held from 1975 to 1982.<sup>61</sup> Grassby's continuing role in community relations meant that he could focus on strengthening his contacts with ethnic organisations, and this was welcomed by Liu, who continued to write to Grassby. In Liu's 'Melbourne Cup Day' 1977 letter to Grassby, he thanked him for his letter of October 4, and told him about his grandson Richard's business dealings in China. He also thanked him for doing so much for Sino-Aussies and said he would long remember this.<sup>62</sup> In addition, Liu wrote to Grassby on June 20, 1980, thanking him for his "Dear Uncle Willie" letter of June 11, and the copies of three China papers that Grassby sent to him.

You, yourself will become historically remembered for the wonderful contribution you have done as our 1972-75 Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and as 1975-80 Commissioner for Community Relations.. and I add, the finest achievement in easing down past vexatious racialism Australia-wide. I feel that adequately express my old age joy to you.[...] Cheers to you Mr Grassby.. keep up your good work. It will add to your joy in your coming years catching up to my age and happy still I will continue to be till end of my days, in other words – snuff out. Thanks for all past courtesies I'm grateful.<sup>63</sup>

The continuing interaction between Grassby and Liu over the years led to Grassby delivering a speech which Liu had written, for the Fifth Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations in 1979. This interaction is an illustration of the widening impact which Liu's ideas were having as people in politics, the media and business circles began to see him as a leader in his community. However, Liu was now too elderly to travel long distances and speak as he had done in earlier years. Liu's son Bo wrote, "my Dad was invited to participate in the Fifth Annual Lalor Address on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1979

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<sup>61</sup> Al Grassby, *The Tyranny of Prejudice*, AE Press, Melbourne, 1984, dedication.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Liu to Grassby. 1 November 1977, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Liu to Grassby, 20 June 1980, MLMSS 6294/2.

marking the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of the Eureka Stockade”, but Liu did not give the speech. He would not go to Ballarat at the age of 86 to speak, for he was already declining other invitations to attend functions out of Sydney due to his age.<sup>64</sup> As the pamphlet for the event stated, “William Liu was unable to attend the Lalor Address. His paper was read by Mr Grassby assisted by Mrs Yin Ling Brace, who supplied the Chinese words.” The pamphlet also introduced Liu in glowing terms to the audience:

The Second Address has been prepared by the grand inspiration of the Chinese Community of Australia, Mr William Liu, who lives these days in Kingsford, Sydney, and who has set out the history of the Chinese contribution to Australia. No one in Australia could be better charged with the task, as he is an Australian, born in Australia, raised in China and shares the culture of the oldest nation of the world with the youngest people here in Australia.<sup>65</sup>

Liu’s piece, much of which was published as an article in *The Asian* in 1977, was in the form of a mini-history of the Chinese in Australia, and discussed his own role in Chinese Australian history.<sup>66</sup> The primary significance of the speech was the importance placed on the integration of Chinese Australians into Australian history and identity, and as land clearers, ‘settlers’ and ‘pioneers’. To talk of the histories of the migrant groups in Australia was to counteract the assimilationist model, with its privileging of British history in the founding of Australia. But the ‘Chinese pioneer’ model sat uneasily with Liu’s discussion of the “warfare [which] was continued against the Aboriginals for the whole of the century”, and it also sat uneasily with his description of the views of the

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<sup>64</sup> Letter from Bo Liu to Russell Jack, 11 January 1993, MLMSS 6294/17. This is the interpretation that Eric Rolls gives to it, although Shen Yuanfang writes that Liu’s talk was delivered, not that he delivered it. Eric Rolls, *Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1996, p. 263, and Shen Yuanfang, *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2001, p. 131.

<sup>65</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations, 3 December 1979, p. 2, 6294/18.

<sup>66</sup> William Liu, “Australia’s Chinese Connection”, originally written around 1974, MLMSS 6294/5, and “From Manchu to Mao: The Days When Chinese Went Unheard”, *The Asian*, April/May 1977, p. 16, MLMSS 6294/11. *The Asian* was a ‘politically independent’ Melbourne English/Chinese newspaper.



European gold diggers and tradesmen that the Chinese were ‘obnoxious celestials’ who were stealing their gold and jobs.<sup>67</sup> Liu’s speech went further than his previous writing, in arguing that the colonial workers had fought for and obtained comparatively high wages and had “developed a sense of the dignity of manual labor unique in the world”, and therefore that they felt justified in fighting against Asian labourers whom they saw as ‘slaves’.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless his speech on the history of the Chinese in Australia, which Grassby delivered, was one of the first times in which aspects of this history were spoken of in a public forum as central to Australia’s identity and development.

Before the mini-rush of newspapers, television stations and archives to record Liu’s thoughts for posterity occurred, some of Liu’s friends persuaded him to record his thoughts in a more orderly way than his collected letters, an encouragement which helped him produce mini-histories like the above “Australia’s Chinese Connection”. One of the first of the letters encouraging Liu to write a book on his experiences was one originating from the University of Singapore history department:

We were all born into a mad world – conscience means little to some but it pricks you, drives you and carries you away for human decency and humanity. This has happened to you many times and it is a very healthy sign as it shows that you have been alert and alive and young. The most effective way of protest against injustice and wrongs is to fight the war yourself. In this case, to be a good fighter one needs to be a writer putting up a good case and appealing to the conscience of the society. I believe with your lucid writing, experiences in life and wit you could do a marvellous job to write a book on yourself and the society, your affections towards the Sino-Aussie environments and your concern towards Sino-Aussie problems. Buy a rim of quarto-size paper and start recollecting and typing about the belated book with such chapters as Childhood in China and Australia; Youth: Politics, China-Australia Steamship Line and family; Middle Age: Sino-Japanese War and White Australia policy; Retiring: A Sino-Aussie profile; a split personality. You can put your hands on the personal papers and documents – hence no difficulty in using them. Write it up and publish it and if

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<sup>67</sup> Liu, “Contribution of Chinese Settlers to Australia”.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

asked what for, the answer is “for humanity”. Isn’t this a better way of protest, a more effective way of pricking others’ conscience, and moreover, a contribution to the understanding of a Sino-Aussie mentality. Well, my apologies for harping on this as I have not fed up with the hope of getting you to do something more meaningful and concrete. All of us will die one day: the tigers would leave behind their skins while we leave behind our names and works. What say you?<sup>69</sup>

Liu heard the message and had decided by 1972 that he was going to cut back on his activities in order to write a history:

Tell your Dad Louie and In-law Dad Frank that Bill is ‘trying’ to ease off gadabouting to settle down to type a pamphlet on “My Living Reminiscences” on all I can recall about our changing Australia and our ancestral China 1900 to now.. to keep up my typing and thinking exercises and blood circulation stimulation to help keep my body fit and well also my five senses to delay any of them waning and/or get lazy.. as one does at 80.<sup>70</sup>

In 1974, he was still being encouraged by his family to get writing. His grandson Richard mailed a letter to Liu at Honiara, Solomon Islands, where Liu had returned 5 times over the previous two years for relaxation and to visit friends, and was now celebrating his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday:

I particularly read with interest your letter to Aunty Win & Dad (dated 8.3.74) concerning the “future of Chinese in B.S.I.P.” I don’t mind telling you that I always have, & still do experience great difficulty in deciphering your letters, but nevertheless, I persevered with this one & have come to the conclusion that you really should write a book of your memories, thoughts, hopes, experiences, predictions & present anxieties in life, & the world that surrounds it. You’re still a young lad, I know, but it would be wonderful if you could get a publisher to back you up financially etc. (I’m sure this wouldn’t present you with too many problems), collate all those valuable scraps of paper & dedicate a book or two to your son, daughter, wife or perhaps grandchildren. You know, the more I think of it, the more I can imagine how proud we’d feel for you leave us with your collected writings

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<sup>69</sup> Letter from the History Department, University of Singapore, to William Liu, 27 November 1969, MLMSS 6294/2. The author could very likely be Wang Gungwu, who had just met Liu that year at the annual Morrison Lecture at Australian National University, according to Wang’s “The Life of William Liu: Australian and Chinese Perspectives”, in John Hardy (ed.), *Stories of Australian Migration*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1988, p. 112.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Liu to ‘Tina’, 8 May 1972, MLMSS 6294/2.

when your number is called up, if that's not being too irreverent. Anyway, give it some serious thought?<sup>71</sup>

However, the distractions of his life's work were everywhere, even in Honiara, where Liu became involved in the wish of many Solomon Islands Chinese to leave the country before the islands became independent of British control. Many of these Chinese islanders wished to come to Australia, as they were to be forced to hand over their businesses to local employees or liquidate them.<sup>72</sup>

Upon Liu's return to Sydney, he continued advocating on behalf of one Solomon Islands family, the Chows, so that they would be allowed to obtain Australian citizenship and relocate to Sydney. He enlisted the daughters' help to write letters to plead their case for citizenship, writing to them that "Until the Department's rules are changed to become more flexible, we are depending on the discretionary powers of Immigration Minister Mr Cameron".<sup>73</sup>

Liu regularly assisted people of Chinese background that he knew in this way, but he anticipated a time when the newly-formed Australian Chinese Community Association of New South Wales would fill this assistance role:

Now you better understand why I see the need of our 7.7.74 formed Australian Chinese Community A'ssn of N.S.Wales.. as a medium in Sydney, not only for our local community, but also for our B.S.I.P. friends and other neighbouring Islands to have a Central body to handle community matters of mutual concern and why I was glad your Dad made the acquaintance of Hon. Treasurer Hoh Yun-sang for exchange of correspondence, as an added contact. Your family being British Colonial subjects, the Chinese embassy nor its Consulate can intervene to help and it is my hope that the "A.C.C.A'ssn" will eventually be

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<sup>71</sup> Letter from Richard Liu to William Liu, 18 March 1974, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from Dorothy Chow to Mr. H.H. Bartholomeusz, 16 September 1974, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from William Liu to 'Dorothy...Kingsgrove & Claudette at Southport, Q'land', undated but appears in file directly after above 16 September 1974 letter, MLMSS 6294/2.

organised enough to be of service in such matters.<sup>74</sup>

Liu also involved himself in the plight of Vietnamese refugees over the following few years from the collapse of South Vietnam in April 1975, arguing that Australia had a duty to assist the displaced civilians:

...my personal idea is this, that since Australia joined America and did what they did to Vietnam, and as a result they've suffered and these people want to get away from it, I think as a Christian country, I think it is very very appropriate that they could give these refugees welcome – in this way. Where you go to the Middle East and Italy and other countries and you pay passages for Europeans coming to Australia, they come to your shore. These S.E. Asians, there's no expense, they arrive here, they have a desire to come, they have the wish. To them it is like people praying to go to Heaven, only this is coming to Paradise, so I think that they should be welcome.<sup>75</sup>

This attitude of duty was not shared initially by the Labor Government, with Whitlam and Minister for Labour and Immigration Cameron at first reacting by regarding the refugees “as ‘war criminals’, ideologically undesirable but not racially undesirable”:

To Whitlam the South Vietnamese seemed like more anti-Communists who would become a minority refusing to reconcile with the state of the world. Coalition members, including MacKellar and Fraser, pressured the Government in the House of Representatives to change its attitude.<sup>76</sup>

The Government eventually decided to accept several hundred orphans and refugees. This was the visible end of the White Australia Policy, for before this, the Labor Government had restricted immigration so that no substantial visible change in the composition of the Australian population had yet occurred.

Although Liu strongly supported the Whitlam government, he was always prepared to deal with whatever government was in power, and so the dismissal of the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Hazel De Berg, William Liu interview, 1978, MLMSS 6294/3.

Labor Government did not appear as an issue in his letters and papers. The first mention in Liu's papers of the Liberal Government was in fact a positive note on Fraser's continuation of Whitlam's engagement with and interest in China, quoting Fraser as saying, "We are going to learn much from China", which paralleled Whitlam's February 1973 statement that "We can learn from China".<sup>77</sup> Liu elaborated on the comparison between the two statements and what they meant:

I recall our former P.M. Gough Whitlam, M.P. in February, 1973, after his mission to People's China.. broadcasting that "we have much to learn from China"... In July, 1976, as our present P.M. Malcolm Fraser and his Mission were about to fly from Canberra to Beijing-Peking, he also broadcasted that his Mission was going "to learn from China". I have always been tickled to try find out what specifically the two Prime Ministers had in their minds when they made such a wide statement. Could it be their admiration how Chinese leaders have so successfully done so much in stabilising the livelihood of 1-in-5 of the world's people.. now said to reach 1,008-million of the world's 4,600-million population. And, we in Australia with around 15-million people, so rich in resources and having so much industrial strife to contend with in our vast continent of near 3-million sq-miles. And, so true, we hear very little of workers strife-strikes in the 1949-1982 People's China.<sup>78</sup>

Liu was not the only 'ethnic leader' who was happy with the result of the turn of events, and the new Liberal Government. Although there was a great deal of apprehension concerning the receptiveness of the Fraser Government to multiculturalism, Fraser actually embraced the concept, and was the first Parliamentarian to enter the term 'multicultural society' into *Hansard*, on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1974.<sup>79</sup> This was in great part due to the men who advised him and whom Fraser credited with introducing him to multiculturalism, in particular, Spiro Moraitis and George Papadopoulos of the Australian

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<sup>76</sup> Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, pp. 373-4.

<sup>77</sup> William Liu, "People's China 1950-1980", 1 September 1980, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from William Liu to D.C. Carter, 6 November 1982, MLMSS 6294/2.

Greek Welfare Society. With their help, Fraser took steps to introduce multiculturalism into Liberal Party immigration policy, bypassing the official channels as he knew it would get voted down in the State Councils. The final draft was published in the Liberal Party's comprehensive policy statement prepared for the 1974 federal election, *The Way Ahead*, and launched on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1974, representing "the first adoption of multiculturalism as party policy by a major political party".<sup>80</sup> Once in government after the 1975 election, Fraser appointed Michael MacKellar Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, and one of MacKellar's first measures was to reconstruct the Department of Immigration as the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. Early in 1976, MacKellar established the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council, appointing Jerzy Zubrzycki as chairman. The document the council produced, *Australia as a Multicultural Society*, provided the Government with an official statement of multiculturalism, resulting by the late 1970's in cultural pluralism becoming accepted as the mainstream or official version of multiculturalism.<sup>81</sup>

The mainstreaming of cultural pluralism produced an increase in the interest of the media in 'ethnic' historical pieces. This interest resulted at first in a sort of celebratory popular history, reliant on interviews and often with incorrect details. But it was a new trend, as these other histories had been ignored in the past. The earliest interest by the media in Liu's life resulted in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1968, entitled "The Battlers: Sellen and Liu".<sup>82</sup> Editor Helen Frizell had

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<sup>79</sup> This was the only time the term was used during the 28<sup>th</sup> Parliament. Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism*, p. 261.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443-4.

<sup>82</sup> Helen Frizell (ed.), "The Battlers: Sellen and Liu", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 January 1968, MLMSS 6294/11.

heard of Liu because of his incessant letter writing to newspapers and Parliamentarians to change the Australian Citizenship Convention and Good Neighbour Movements to make them more inclusive, and this persistence was the focus of the article, rather than Liu's community's history. This article contained one error, that Liu's "mother was a church organist in China", when she was actually at the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Surry Hills.

From 1976 the production of 'ethnic' historical pieces increased. The "first major book on ethnic groups in Australia", *The Australian Family*, was published in that year, and originally ran in a 12-part series in *The Bulletin*, the magazine which produced it, and had only rejected the phrase "Australia for the White Man", from its masthead 16 years earlier under editor Donald Horne.<sup>83</sup> The article on Liu contained a number of inaccuracies, which perhaps the "12 months' intensive research and writing by some of Australia's top journalists" couldn't remedy as Liu himself was purposefully vague about details such as his mother's date of death. The caption under Liu's photo reads "William Liu, left, was born in Sydney but spent 10 of his early years in China after the death of his English mother", which is incorrect as discussed earlier in chapter two of this thesis. The article also states that Liu was sent to China upon his mother's death in 1899, and remained for 10 years, which is incorrect, as he left for China in 1900 and stayed until 1908.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Trevor Kennedy (ed.), *The Australian Family: a Special Bulletin Project*, Conpress Ltd., Alexandria, 1976 or 1977 (undated, but 'Teachers' College Sydney' library receiving stamp of 1977, and Liu's age in article dates it at either year); Jon Stratton, *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 1998, p. 51.

<sup>84</sup> Transcript of interview with Hazel De Berg for National Library of Australia Oral History Archives, 1978, MLMSS 6294/3.

The next line in the article contains a few inaccuracies: "...the dialect he'd picked up in South China proved to be lucky. It was the dialect of the new Chinese consul in Sydney and he gave William Liu a job as interpreter". Liu's first job as an interpreter was for the consul in Melbourne, and he was not fluent in Mandarin, as was the consul, but Cantonese. He 'interpreted' as best he could given that the majority of the Chinese community in Melbourne spoke Cantonese, but he mainly communicated with the Consul in English.<sup>85</sup>

The article then states that "He married Oi-yok, the daughter of a Chinese hairdresser, and moved to Melbourne as manager of the China-Australia Shipping Line." This statement is almost entirely incorrect, as he married Mabel Quoy, the daughter of a well-to-do produce manager in Sydney, Gilbert Ting Quoy.<sup>86</sup> He also resided in Sydney as the manager of the shipping line.<sup>87</sup> The sweeping statement in the article that "He remembers how, after the war, he and other members of the Chinese community fought to prevent the refugees from being expelled. It was a long fight, but finally it was over, and won. The new Liberal Government of 1949 decided to give amnesty to refugees" also glosses over the hundreds of refugees who were deported, as discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

*The Asian* did better factually with its series of articles on Liu, and he was more forthright about his mother's mental illness:<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> William Liu, "The Chinese in Australia", MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>86</sup> Rolls, *Citizens*, p. 264. In fact, this rendering of the name as Quoy is inaccurate, as 'Gilbert Ting Quoy' is actually Yip Tong Quoy, and Australian authorities mistakenly rendered his last name as Quoy. It is also possible that the person compiling the Bulletin piece confused Liu's father's occupation with his wife's father's occupation, as Liu's father had worked as a barber in Wentworth Avenue. (Interview with Marina Mar, 11 October 2004).

<sup>87</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>88</sup> "From Manchu to Mao: The Days When Chinese Went Unheard", *The Asian*, April/May 1977, p. 16, MLMSS 6294/11.



My mother was assistant organist at the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney. When she married my father she was disowned by her family. They wouldn't go to the wedding or to my birth or my brother's or my sister's. Then the crisis happened. My mother went mental. My father did not know what to do. He had my sister and me sent to Glenn Innes to be looked after by Wong Chee, a Chinese storekeeper, and his family. Later, in 1900, Wong Chee smuggled my brother Charlie and me back to his village.<sup>89</sup>

*The Asian* prefaced its series of articles with a statement on the reason it felt Liu's story was an important one to tell, as it is central to an understanding of Chinese Australian history:

Eighty four years old William Liu is something of a legend. To generations of Australian-born Chinese and Australians, he is known affectionately as Uncle Bill. Born in 1893 at the tail end of the Year of the Dragon, the best year according to Chinese tradition, Mr. Liu has lived under the Manchus, worked for the following Chinese republic and later was one of the first Australians to accept Mao's new China. In 1931 he was one of the four founders of the George E. Morrison Lecture at the Australian National University. He was also one of the organisers of the Australia-China Steamship Line. He met Chairman Mao and Premier Chou on two occasions – and once went out of his way, with Australian author Cyril Pearl, to meet Puyi, the ex-emperor of China. William Liu's life story reads like a history of Australia-China relations. 'THE ASIAN' this month brings you the first in a series of interviews with this lively, frank and happy man.<sup>90</sup>

While this series of articles was being published in *The Asian*, Liu received another recognition from the Australian National University, when the Acting Registrar, J.D. Brocklehurst, wrote to Liu to notify him that "The Council of the University has admitted you, subject to your consent, as a member of our Convocation under a Statute which enables it to enrol persons who have given conspicuous service to the University or who are, in the opinion of Council otherwise outstandingly suitable for membership of

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<sup>89</sup> "From Manchu to Mao: The Days When Chinese Went Unheard", *The Asian*, November 1977, page 9, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Convocation.”<sup>91</sup> This was surprising to Liu, as he was then 85 years of age and “without any academic attainment whatsoever”, but he returned the acceptance form with his name and address, not knowing how to fill it out further as he did not have academic qualifications to list.<sup>92</sup>

Around 1974, as discussed above, Liu had finally made time to organise his thoughts into a coherent mini-history of his own life, and the difficulties of Australian Chinese life relative to discrimination and immigration restriction. This was “Australia’s Chinese Connection”.<sup>93</sup> The fact that he had already begun to formulate an overall ‘story’ of his life by this time had an impact on all further interviews and stories on Liu such as that in *The Asian*, as he tended to re-emphasise the points in his life which he had considered important at this stage. The story about him being the first to put up his hand in class in China to offer to sacrifice his life for China is a trope which appears in “Australia’s Chinese Connection” and “From Manchu to Mao”, as well as in his 1978 interview with Hazel De Berg for the National Library in Canberra, for it was a way for him to clearly express his strong feelings for China and how he was first accepted as Chinese as well as Australian. As mentioned, the story of his mother is told frequently, mostly using the vague term ‘lost’ rather than recounting the specifics of her mental state, allowing the interviewer or reader to think she had died in childbirth or soon after.

Another story which Liu purposely left vague was his recollection of the clerk at F.J. Quinlan’s office, discussed earlier in chapter two, who in fact made racist comments to Liu: “You chows and chinks, we’ll soon rid Australia of the likes of you so we’ll have

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<sup>91</sup> Letter from J.D. Brocklehurst to William Liu, 19 September 1977, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from William Liu to J.D. Brocklehurst, 28 October 1977, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>93</sup> William Liu, “Australia’s Chinese Connection”, originally written around 1974, MLMSS 6294/5.

a pure, white Australia.”<sup>94</sup> Liu almost always retold this story in a more neutral way, as if the clerk was just speculating at the probable end result of the White Australia Policy, and the story appears this way in “Australia’s Chinese Connection” and “From Manchu to Mao”: “He said there would be no more Chinese in Australia by the 1940s because of the Immigration Restriction Act.”<sup>95</sup>

Liu’s interview with Hazel De Berg for the National Library oral history archives came about because of Arthur Calwell’s daughter, Mary Elizabeth Calwell, who wrote to the National Library recommending that they interview Liu, presumably because she knew of Liu’s friendship with Calwell. The NLA wrote to Liu, saying that they

would be delighted if you would agree to record your recollections of the major events in your life and of some of the people you have known, such as Arthur Calwell. Your memories of your childhood in a Chinese village would be particularly interesting and I hope that you would also talk about your business ventures and the changes and problems in the Chinese communities in Melbourne and Sydney over the last sixty years.<sup>96</sup>

Hazel De Berg was the NLA’s “most experienced interviewer”, and it was organised that she would do a series of interviews with Liu, which took from 17 February to 3 May 1978.<sup>97</sup> Liu was allowed to range over the subjects he chose during the earlier stages of the interview, with De Berg prompting him on a few occasions to focus on specific subjects such as why he left the Melbourne Chinese Consulate, and discussing the China-Australia Steamship Line and the pamphlets and books Liu was involved with. During the later stages of the interview, she asked questions about his views on China, Australian immigration policy and Australia in general. Once, when Liu was discussing his

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<sup>94</sup> William Liu, “Persona Non Grata I am in my own native land”, 13 June 1963, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>95</sup> “From Manchu to Mao”.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Graeme Powell of NLA, to William Liu, 10 February 1978, MLMSS 6294/3.

<sup>97</sup> William Liu, memo, MLMSS 6294/3, and De Berg transcript, MLMSS 6294/3.

invitation to join the ANU Convocation and his lack of academic credentials, speculating on the reason for ANU to extend the invitation, De Berg commented on her view of Liu:

I think its because over a very long life you have served this Chinese community and the whole community so very well. It's a sort of honorary thing for you. It's the way you have worked with the Chinese community, the way you have worked for them, the way you have worked for cultural relationships between China and Australia; you are an Australian you know, even if you call yourself a Chinese Australian.<sup>98</sup>

The interview was taped and a transcript typed up, but the transcript is not word-for-word – phrases are added so that it is not clear whether De Berg is explaining things or Liu has added information later. In addition, it requires a Cantonese translation of the bits of songs which Liu sings, as they are recorded in the transcript phonetically and incompletely. Nevertheless, this is the most comprehensive work on Liu available.

Around the same time as the NLA interviews were taking place, Liu received a letter from producer Peter Luck, confirming Liu's agreement by phone to grant Luck an interview for a documentary series on "the amazing history of the Chinese minority population within Australia". Luck does not recall whether he in fact produced this documentary with Hanna-Barbera, whom he was working for at the time. The intent expressed in the letter, though, was to ask Liu questions such as:

How is it that the Chinese peoples have been able to preserve their national identity for so long? How have the Chinese protected themselves against the recurrent waves of racial prejudice that swept Australia? Have there been any lasting exchanges of cultural value between the Chinese and "British Australian communities? It is in those broad areas that we will be seeking your assistance.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> De Berg transcript.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from Peter Luck to William Liu, 28 April 1978, MLMSS 6294/2.

Liu also met with Berwyn Lewis and David Leonard of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) on 8 July 1980, as they had written to him requesting to meet with him and view some ‘original material’ in his possession.<sup>100</sup>

After the National Library interview series was over, Liu’s writings in the next three years were primarily focused upon China, and summing up major changes for China-Australia relations and the Chinese Australian community. He continually expressed amazement that he “never thought he’d survive to type these lines” and see what he felt was the dramatic improvement for Chinese Australians and for China.<sup>101</sup> His feelings on China were expressed during the NLA interview, when De Berg asked him what he thought of the Chinese Republic now:

I suppose one word would cover that – wonderful, because you remember in the early part of our conversation, where Dr Sun Yat Sen told Mrs Liu, myself and four year old son Bo, that China then, in 1921, was rurally bankrupt, illiteracy was high and shackled with so many unequal unholy foreign treaties and the fear of Japan coming; they eventually came 1931 and over-ran China till 1945. Well, China has recovered. Not only that, when the People’s Republic was established in Peking in 1949, October 1, the Chinese National currency was worthless. Now, Chinese currency has remained stable, all these 1950-1978 years. The high illiteracy has changed the other way, most people can read and write, the people are living better, its become a religion with them, to share one another, with minimum food and money, less personal gain and not fame, I think that is wonderful and the people are diligently co-operating and working to reconstruct China.<sup>102</sup>

In a “typing exercise” of Liu’s on September 1, 1980, Liu summed up his thoughts on the specific improvements in China that had come about because of the communist regime:

PEOPLE’S CHINA      1950-1980      So changed: SO much in 30 years...

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<sup>100</sup> Letter from Berwyn Lewis to William Liu, 9 July 1980, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>101</sup> William Liu, “The Canberra 1965 Annual Citizenship Convention”, 1 April 1981, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>102</sup> De Berg transcript.

- 1) The taming and bridging so many nation-wide rivers;
- 2) levelling and terracing many hills for productivity;
- 3) vast improvement of intercommunication-transportation;
- 4) reafforestation of so many valleys and mountains;
- 5) great change in the rising generations lifestyle;
- 6) their diligence in rebuilding a mutual welfare society;
- 7) living simple, frugal, serving one another with so less emphasis on selfish monetary gain or fame;
- 8) nation-wide, at all levels of today's China's society;
- 9) both sex alike and no distinction of ancestral origin;
- 10) and living more in accord with the "Ten Commandments" for survival and peaceful living; so impossible pre-1950.<sup>103</sup>

Liu also wrote of his happiness at seeing a series of countries move to recognise China in the 1970s:

After the 1972 Dec-3 Federal Election and the "A.L.P." Whitlam's Govt's recognition of the People's Republic of China greatly lifted Australia's international status.. remember.. New Zealand promptly followed Australia in normalising relations with Socialist People's China, followed by Canada, France, Japan and most of the member-nations of "U.N.O." and, after further wait of 7 years. U.S. President Jim Carter recognised People's China.<sup>104</sup>

Liu's last political involvement was in lobbying Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Ian MacPhee, while at a dinner at the Mandarin Club on May 23, 1980, to extend the Regularisation of Status Program, which would "enable the great majority of those illegally in Australia at that date to become legal permanent residents".<sup>105</sup> He includes Mac Phee's action in his "great joy" at the events of the past few years:

For our Sino-Australian communities, years 1972-1980 also stands out as our "Golden Decade" since the first Chinese migrants came to N.S. Wales to clear our graziers and wheat farm lands / and fossick for gold in the 1850's in "Sun Gum Sarn" as then known to our forebears – "new gold fields Australia".<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> William Liu, "People's China 1950-1980", 1 September 1980, MLMSS 6294/10.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from William Liu to President D.C Carter of ACCI, 6 November 1982, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Ian MacPhee to Liu, 7 July 1980, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from William Liu to Ian MacPhee, 22 July 1980, MLMSS 6294/2.

Liu's life's work was recognised in the 1982 New Years Honours List, when he was awarded an Order of the British Empire for his "outstanding contribution to fostering friendship between the Australian and Chinese communities and trade between the two countries".<sup>107</sup> Liu was nominated for this honour by his grandson, Richard, and he wrote, the day after his investiture ceremony, that once Richard sent him some of the snaps he took at Government House, his "file will be complete".<sup>108</sup> Liu wrote that the O.B.E. came about because

A long dream I had since I was 20, 1912-14 at the Melbourne Chinese Consulate-General as a clerk-interpreter came true 1972 Dec-21 [?] when the "A.L.P." Dec-3 newly elected normalised Australia-China's friendship. 1981, Easter, Richard set out to get some recognition of that dream and achieved his objective. Great credit to him.<sup>109</sup>

Liu also referred in the letter to his unofficial recognition in the Chinese-Australian community as he signed off "Known to so many as 'Uncle Bill' Goong".

After the awarding of the O.B.E. to Liu was announced, Liu was also named the first Governor of the Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry NSW-ACT.<sup>110</sup> This honour was "a gesture designed to acknowledge [Liu's] sustained contribution to the commercial life of this State":

Not only is this invitation intended in the firm of a most select Honour for past achievements in trade generally but also to express the high hope that your efforts will remain undiminished and that the Chamber and its Membership will derive great benefit from your most profound knowledge experience, and contacts in the NSW-Chinese business world.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Banquet to Celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of William Liu, O.B.E.", 9 March 1983, MLMSS 6294/18.

<sup>108</sup> Letter from William Liu to Bo and Joyce Liu, 30 April 1982, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Letter from D.C. Carter, President ACCI, to William Liu, 21 October 1982, MLMSS 6294/2.

The awarding of the O.B.E. was a momentous occasion for Liu which led him to reflect upon the major events of his life, and one of his responses was a deep pessimism about human relations. In response to an article he came across soon after the O.B.E. announcement, “Russia leads way in nuclear power”, Liu wrote “What grim history the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen! What are the prospects for peaceful coexistence for the rising generations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?”<sup>112</sup> He summarised the “unending world-wide wars to 1982”, and then discussed colonialism and wondered “Is Russia now doing the same in Korea and South-East Asia, in Cuba and Latin America and parts of Africa?”:

Will the Russians meet the same fate as the Romans and-or Japan whose overrunning of China 1931-1945 was ended in August 1945 by the U.S. atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in retaliation for Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 and subsequent expansion in China, South-East Asia and the vast Pacific? What sad history in retrospect! Can Soviet Russia succeed in her ambition for world domination such as Japan attempted with resultant disaster in 1945? The Western powers’ effort to dominate China, like the British domination of India and France’s control of Indo-China, was as futile as Hitler’s and Mussolini’s bid to dominate Europe. So we see the coveting of other people’s land, like the Dutch apartheid policy in South Africa, is ultimately futile.

Liu contrasted this ambition for world domination with what he saw as the peaceful ambitions of the People’s Republic of China, with its Five Principles for World Peace:

The Russians still thumb their noses at China’s Five Principles for world peace:– (1) Non-aggression; (2) Non-interference in other nations internal affairs; (3) Mutual respect as equals; (4) Cooperation to mutual benefit; (5) Joint help to all developing nations for the general welfare of all.

Liu did not see the Russian ‘colonialism’ as being ultimately successful, comparing it with his own failing health:

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<sup>111</sup> Letter from D.C. Carter, President ACCI, to William Liu, 18 February 1982, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>112</sup> William Liu, “What grim history the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen!”, January 1982, MLMSS 6294/10.



Aged 89, an Anglo-Chinese octogenarian, so mentally complicated with age that I tire and get exhausted quickly now – what is more, confused too. Is it any wonder? That's deterioration. That's how Soviet Russia in time will disintegrate. I'm stuck with that belief.

But Liu's ultimate view of human relations at the end of his 'review' was still pessimistic:

Conclusion:– With our never ending world's bubbling troubles, never ever will there be earthly peaceful coexistence. Through the ages from tribal times, the survival instinct has been, as in animals and eagles, to attack others for security.

Personally, though, Liu wrote that he'd been very lucky in his life, in a letter to his son on Melbourne Cup Day, 1982. Liu starts by telling of his first job at the Melbourne Chinese Consulate, and then how he avoided being shot by Thomas Chia while defending Consul-General Huang. He also relates luck in lotteries, as well as his luck avoiding death again in China at the hands of the Japanese:

1932 early Feb. I near got bayoneted by Jap Marine at Hong Kew Markets, North Szechuan [...] Road. What was a close shave. A wonder I wasn't taken away for mass burial [...] That was 50 years ago. Lucky I've been Bo. With Best Wishes from Pop.<sup>113</sup>

Liu reached his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, his 91<sup>st</sup> year as some of his Chinese friends counted it. To honour him, the Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australia China Friendship Society organised a banquet for his birthday, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March at the Tai Yuen Palace in Sussex Street.<sup>114</sup>

Liu died on April 25, 1983. His obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was an article which emphasised his central importance to Sydney's Chinese community:

Mention the name "Uncle Bill" to any member of Sydney's Chinese

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<sup>113</sup> Letter from William Liu to Bo Liu, 2 November 1982, MLMSS 6294/2.

<sup>114</sup> "Banquet to Celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of William Liu, O.B.E.," 9 March 1983, MLMSS 6294/18.

community and the inevitable answer will be a smile of recognition. Mr. William Liu (or Uncle Bill as he is affectionately known) was the leading member of the Chinese Australian community for nine decades – an adopted father and elder statesman until his death last Monday, aged 91.<sup>115</sup>

The article mistakenly gave the year of his birth as 1892 when it was actually 1893, but it was strong on portraying Liu's personality.<sup>116</sup> It is in the quotes from Liu's family and friends in the article that the myth of the 'adopted father' of the community begins to take shape. Liu's caring personality and unique perspective on Chinese Australian relations are attributed by family and friends to his continuing connection to China as well as Australia. Liu's grandson noted in the article that "it was these early years between his arrival in China and his return to Sydney at 16, which formed Mr. Liu's respected knowledge of the Chinese culture and his understanding of the problems facing Chinese in Australia". Liu also returned seven times to China in his lifetime. It was during his 1932 trip that Liu's emotional connection to China was cemented, as he volunteered to help displaced people in Shanghai, which had just been invaded by the Japanese. Liu's friend for 70 years, barrister William Lee, commented in the article that "the episode in Shanghai was indicative of Bill's incredible strength and his love for human beings". As Lee also said, Liu's status in the community also came from his legendary personality, which won him close friends and supporters: "He had a rare combination of a finely developed sense of humour mixed with persistence and aggression – the most wonderful part was his Chinese appreciation of Australian humour. He really could take a joke".

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<sup>115</sup> Paola Totaro, "'Uncle Bill' pioneered path of Australia-China links", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May 1983, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>116</sup> This mistake was the result of confusion on the part of the Herald about Chinese ways of giving a person's age. Liu was born at the tail end of the Year of the Dragon, 29 January 1893, and turned 1 in the Chinese New Year shortly thereafter (Interview with Marina Mar, 11 October 2004).

Liu's unique leadership position was underlined by the sentiments conveyed by Premier Zhao upon his death:

The sentiment of the Chinese community following Mr. Liu's death was probably best described by a telegram from Premier Zhao conveyed to Mr. Liu's family via the Chinese Ambassador, Mr. Lin Ping. "Bill's contributions over a long period of time to the promotion of the understanding between the peoples of China and Australia are highly commended. We are greatly shocked by this sad news and we extend our deepest condolences."<sup>117</sup>

This Golden Decade cemented Liu's mythical position as father of his Sydney Chinese community, as he helped to bring about community pride and political power in the era of multiculturalism. For Liu, the Golden Decade encompassed a series of political events which he saw as dramatically improving the status of the Chinese Australian community. Most important of these events for Liu was Gough Whitlam visiting the People's Republic of China as Opposition Leader, and the subsequent normalising of relations between Australia and the People's Republic once he became Prime Minister. Whitlam's actions represented the beginning of the Golden Decade, and the Decade continued favourably with the scrapping of the White Australia Policy, the development of multiculturalism and its institutionalisation by the Fraser Government. Liu's involvements in lobbying the federal government and developing friendships with ministers, and his increasing involvement in Chinese Australian history projects, also made his Golden Decade successful in his eyes. Liu's work in this period while he approached his 90<sup>th</sup> year assisted in raising his mythical status in the Sydney Chinese community, and ensured that his stature would only grow in the community upon his passing. He was officially recognised in a number of ways before his death, but his

personality and ‘crusade’ are a major part of his legacy. The way in which he is ‘imagined’ after his passing must be examined in order to interrogate Liu’s impact on the Chinese Australian community, and on the Australian identity in general.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

**Chapter Nine**

***“The ‘Don Bradman’ of Australia China Relations”  
or imagining William Liu***

***1983 and beyond***

William Liu approached the end of his life with a great deal of satisfaction at the way in which the Australian government had engaged with China, and renounced the White Australia Policy in favour of a bipartisan acceptance of multiculturalism. Liu had been lobbying for a dramatic change in policy for decades, and he frequently expressed his happiness at the developments. It took less than a year after Liu's death for this improved state of affairs to change dramatically, with the beginning of a backlash against multiculturalism and Asian immigration that would have been deeply troubling for Liu. Despite this ongoing backlash, many have argued that Liu's contribution to the place of the Chinese Australian community in Australia, and to the far-reaching changes in Australia, is lasting and profound. The Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, which Liu helped found, chose to characterise Liu's stature and achievements for an Australian audience through a posthumous press release calling him "The 'Don Bradman' of Australia China Relations".<sup>1</sup> His 'crusade' to end the White Australia Policy, which was inspired by his personal experience of racism and his love for China, was aimed at the highest levels of government in Australia, influencing many other groups to also oppose the Policy, and "laid the foundations for eventual radical change in the Policy".<sup>2</sup> He supported Australia's move toward multiculturalism, while himself transcending this way of relating to Australia via an Anglo core culture – he wanted to fully belong to both China and Australia and move fluidly between the two cultures without being marginalised because of his dual background. This was how he made his greatest impact on people in both countries,

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<sup>1</sup> Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, "The 'Don Bradman' of Australia China Relations", press release, MLMSS 6294/17.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman (friend of Liu's from 1957), 16 September 2004.

through his contribution to moving Australia away from the insular, racist policies that made so many people's lives so difficult.

The backlash could not reverse this change, although it highlighted the importance of continuing Liu's 'crusade' for acceptance of cultural diversity in Australia. Dissent against the arrival of multiculturalist policies was always present, but the bipartisan understanding that the Liberal and Labor parties had, to suppress racist attitudes and not exploit them for electoral gain, was close to being lost when the now-famous Warrnambool speech was delivered by historian Geoffrey Blainey on March 17, 1984.<sup>3</sup> This bipartisanship has been dated to the time of the Whitlam Government's complete scrapping of the White Australia Policy, but is also seen as beginning during the Fraser Government, when large numbers of Vietnamese refugees were accepted, and the Labor party aligned itself with the Government in supporting that policy.<sup>4</sup> Both parties at this stage officially supported multiculturalism, although the official party unity obscured factional differences in the Liberal Party in particular, which became apparent after Blainey's speech made headlines. Bipartisan unity has not been fully reached since the Blainey debate. Blainey's speech, coming as it did in a time of high unemployment, exacerbated the element of fear of immigration creating too much competition for jobs, and assisted some in calling into question the Labor Government's immigration policies.<sup>5</sup>

Much has been written about Blainey's spearheading of "The Great Immigration Debate" of 1984, and the legitimacy accorded to his comments by virtue of his being an

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *All for Australia*, Methuen Haynes, North Ryde, 1984, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Kelly, "Blainey stirs a sleeping issue", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 1984, p. 9; Richard McGregor, "Hawke lashes out at 'gutter racists'", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 1984, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, "Blainey stirs a sleeping issue", p. 9.

historian and a chairman of the Australia-China Council.<sup>6</sup> This cloak of legitimacy made it difficult to question Blainey's predictions, for "when a historian turns to prophecy he is invincible. No one can prove him right or wrong."<sup>7</sup> Blainey claimed to be speaking from his knowledge of Australian history, from his unique perspective of 'ordinary Australians' who have least access to the media.<sup>8</sup> His argument that an increasing number of Australians seemed to be resentful of the number of Asian immigrants coming into the country, and that therefore the Asian intake should be cut, was seen to "give unwarranted respectability to those racists who, unlike Blainey, have opposed the abolition of the White Australia policy from the beginning."<sup>9</sup> This argument also opened the door for Liberal opponents of higher Asian immigration, such as the Opposition spokesman on immigration, Mr. Hodgman, to attack the Hawke Government on the issue of an increased Asian component of Australian immigration in the hope of attracting votes for the Liberals. But Hodgman's approach was attacked by other Liberals, including frontbenchers such as Mr. Steele Hall and Mr Ian Macphee.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, the immigration issue was prevented from becoming a major election issue in 1984, partly due to Prime Minister Hawke's criticism of the Liberals and of Peacock's refusal to restrain Hodgman.

The emergence of this debate, and the first organised opposition to Australia's immigration policies and multicultural policy since the Whitlam government, signalled a major shift from the political climate of William Liu's last years. Liu may have been

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<sup>6</sup> Frances Milne and Peter Shergold (eds.), The Great Immigration Debate, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, Sydney, 1984; letter to the Editor, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 March 1984, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Kathy Laster, "The Historian as Prophet: Geoffrey Blainey and the Asianisation of Australia", Meanjin Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2, June 1984, p. 310.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.



aware of the Australia-China Council's Annual Report for 1981-82, released on 3 March (a copy of a newsletter describing it but dated the month after his death, May, is in Liu's papers), and the views of Geoffrey Blainey, in the introduction to the Report, on Australians' positive attitudes towards China:

Australia's attitudes to China have become more sympathetic in the last ten years, and especially in the last few years. Opinion polls show this change. We cannot be completely sure why public opinion has changed, and we cannot predict whether this is a long-term or a temporary change, but it is a change...there are heartening signs. One sign is the increasing willingness of Australians to welcome immigrants from Asia, whether they are Chinese, Indian or Filipino. Between 1967 and 1979 – the opinion polls suggest – Asian migrants became more and more acceptable. It may well be that Chinese immigrants, especially those who face the public in restaurants and take-away food houses, have done so much to change public opinion towards Asians in general.<sup>11</sup>

While this statement is tempered at the end by a warning of a possible change in attitudes towards Asians if unemployment should increase, Blainey clearly saw no evidence of a backlash, which was largely repressed until he himself opened the debate. If Liu had indeed seen the report before his death, he would not have foreseen Blainey's role the following year, and he would have been greatly disappointed by Blainey's actions.

Therefore, soon after Liu's death, a major shift in Australia relative to the issues Liu held dear to his heart took place, and this was the climate in which the subsequent production of memorial works dedicated to him took place. In November 1984, Wang Gungwu, then of the Australian National University's Research School of Pacific Studies, commenced research on Liu for a paper he was planning to present at a

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<sup>9</sup> Editorial, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 March 1984, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Mike Steketee, "Peacock stalls on immigration", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 July 1984, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> John Paull (ed.), "Australia-China Newsletter", Australia-China Council, Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra, May 1983.

Bicentennial conference his committee was organising. He wrote to Liu's daughter, Winsome Dong, requesting to come to see her to help with his 'portrait' of her father:

I have been asked to contribute a portrait of an exceptional Chinese Australian who may capture in some striking way Chinese society and its problems in Australia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As an admirer of your father, I felt that he would make a fine centrepiece of such a portrait. I recall in particular his association with the Morrison Lecture which I administered here for five years and some of the circular letters he used to send me.<sup>12</sup>

This paper, which remains the only in-depth academic reflection on Liu's contribution to Australia and China, and to the relationship between the two countries, was given in 1988 and published in the collection entitled *Stories of Australian Migration*, along with other articles on issues in Irish, Scottish, German, Italian, Greek, and Vietnamese migration history, and one on the 'European experience of Aboriginal Australia'.<sup>13</sup> Wang's reason for focusing on Liu's story was that he "personified" the "years of heartache and near despair for the Sino-Australian" when the White Australia Policy was in effect – in Liu's lifetime, he "experienced both the early stages of Australian nation-building and the stirrings of modern Chinese nationalism."<sup>14</sup> But more than that, Liu's life work made him a pivotal figure for Wang to write about – perhaps as important as Quong Tart or William Ah Ket (whom Liu worked with at the Melbourne Consulate and later on the Morrison Lectures) but someone much less well known by the general Australian public either in 1988, or today.

Wang identified three stages in Liu's life:

The first pertains to his early life to the age of nineteen in 1912, the second to the tense phase between assimilation and co-existence which lasted until

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<sup>12</sup> Letter from Wang Gungwu to Winsome Dong, 21 November 1984, MLMSS 6294/18.

<sup>13</sup> John Hardy (ed.), *Stories of Australian Migration*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1988.

<sup>14</sup> Wang Gungwu, "The Life of William Liu: Australian and Chinese Perspectives", in John Hardy (ed.), *Stories of Australian Migration*, New South Wales Press, Kensington, 1988, p. 112.

the 1960s, and finally, the new phase of respect for the various ethnic groups in Australia, which he greeted with delight and enjoyed for the last twenty years of his life.<sup>15</sup>

Wang argues that Liu helped the Chinese Australian community to enter this “new phase of respect” through serving it “indefatigably while claiming that it was his duty as an Australian to bring whites and Chinese closer together, to ensure that the Chinese survived in Australia and to make the two countries partners in trade and economic development.”<sup>16</sup> The extent of Liu’s impact on Australia is described by Wang, who writes that “I think it would delight him to know that he might, by his example and persistence, have helped this humanity to thrust forward into the multicultural society that Australia has admitted to having become.”

The importance of Liu’s example for Wang goes well beyond his persistence and campaigns, though, for Wang saw that Liu’s very existence and way of thinking of his identity had a great impact on others. Liu, “the epitome of an assimilated Chinese”, “personified what the nineteenth century proponents of what became the White Australia Policy said was impossible even before Liu was born, as they tried to justify their determined efforts to see the Chinese die out as a distinct people in Australia.”<sup>17</sup> Liu was not just an Australian with a Chinese heritage, he was Chinese, and Australian, with the cultural knowledge of both worlds to interact in both settings.

In the intervening years between Wang’s letter to Winsome Dong and the article’s publication, two other memorial activities took place. A memorial prize in honour of Liu was launched by the Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-3.

Wales (ACCCI) at the University of New South Wales after his death. The ‘W J Liu Esq OBE Memorial Prize for Chinese Studies’ continues to be awarded yearly, and covers both the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Commerce and Economics at UNSW.<sup>18</sup> This prize included a copy of the book *William J. Liu, OBE 1893-1983 – Pathfinder*, which was a way for the ACCCI to educate more people about Liu’s life. In 1988, Liu’s profile was also exhibited in the Bicentennial Exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney throughout the year.<sup>19</sup>

But the year after the publication of Wang’s paper, 1989, saw the beginning of a project much broader in scope, ‘The Late William J. Liu, O.B.E. Memorial Scrolls Project’. This was initiated by the ACCCI cultural committee in March 1989 “with the purpose of illustrating the development of cross cultural trade between Australia and China during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century through the life and example of one man – William Liu – Pathfinder.”<sup>20</sup> The ACCCI initiated this project in response to the example of Wang Gungwu’s conference paper:

During the “Terra Australis to Australia” international conference in Canberra 1988, Professor Wang Gungwu, a former Chairman of the Australia China Council, delivered an address on the life of William Liu. Following that conference Mr. Arthur Locke Chang supported the proposal that a memorial scrolls project be considered.<sup>21</sup>

The Memorial Scrolls project was to consist of twenty-six traditional scroll paintings depicting scenes from William Liu’s life. These were indexed:

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<sup>18</sup> Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, “Presentation of the W J Liu Esq OBE Memorial Prize for Chinese Studies”, 10 April 2003, <http://www.accci.com.au/liupresentation.htm>, accessed 4 November 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Mo Yimei Lone, *William J. Liu, OBE 1893-1983 – Pathfinder*, Pirie Printers Sales Pty. Ltd., Canberra, 1991, caption to scroll 26.

<sup>20</sup> Mo, *Pathfinder*, introduction.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

1. Family background (1893- )
2. Childhood in Canton (1900)
3. Young man in Canton (1907)
4. Education (1909-1912)
5. Working in the Chinese Consulate in Melbourne (1912-1914)
6. Role in Australia-China Steamship Line (1917-1924)
7. Meeting Dr Sun Yat-sen (1921)
8. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce in New South Wales (1928-1933)
9. Morrison Annual Lecture (1931 to date)
10. Talking and writing for Sino-Australian relationship
11. Publication of *White China* (1933)
12. Contribution to the trade between Australia, Hong Kong and China.
13. Promoting Sino-Australian Trade. (1936)
14. Voluntarily participating in the Anti-Japanese War in Shanghai (1937)
15. Helping Chinese war refugees to stay (1947-1950)
16. Establishment of the Australia-China Friendship Society (early 1950's)
17. Appeals for Chinese equal rights in the Annual Australian Citizenship Convention (1954-1966)
18. Struggle for review of the Australian Migration Policy (1958-1966)
19. Contribution to Chinese business establishments. (1930's – 1960's)
20. Participation in the Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales (1976 to date)
21. Award of O.B.E. (1982)
22. Zhao Zhiyang's concern for Liu's health. (1983)
23. Passed away. (1983)
24. Achievement of Chinese Australian businesses
25. Progress of the trade between Australia and China
26. Following Liu's example to further develop Sino-Australian relationships.<sup>22</sup>

The scrolls were painted by the artist Mo Xiangyi, in the Gongbi style, a “meticulous brush technique that delimits details very precisely and without independent or expressive variation”.<sup>23</sup> Gongbi style paintings are often highly coloured and usually depict figural or narrative subjects, more descriptive than the interpretive paintings of the

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<sup>22</sup> Mo, *Pathfinder*, contents page. In the proof copy, some of these dates were different, and someone (probably Bo Liu) had crossed out dates and written what was eventually published in the book (MLMSS 6294/17).

<sup>23</sup> “Gongbi”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9046432>, accessed 4 November 2004.

Xieyi school which feature exaggerated forms and freehand brush work.<sup>24</sup> Thus, to some viewers they can appear “detailed and interesting but rather stiff”, as Eric Rolls described them.<sup>25</sup>

In conjunction with the production of the scrolls, a book was planned which would depict the scrolls and explain the meaning behind them. The book, entitled *William J. Liu, OBE 1893-1983 – Pathfinder*, is an A4 format paperback of 60 pages, in both Chinese and English, with a paragraph or two to describe each of 26 colour illustrations of William Liu’s life and legacy. The book was published in 1991 to coincide with the touring exhibition of 26 scrolls, which was opened by Helen Sham-Ho at the Australian Museum on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1991. The exhibition at the Australian Museum ended on 4 April, and subsequently moved to the Museum of Victoria in conjunction with the Chinese Museum, Melbourne, from 17 September to 24 October 1991, to the Golden Dragon Museum from 31 January to 30 June 1993, to the State Library of New South Wales Mitchell Galleries from 6 September 1993 to 27 February 1994, and to the High Court of Australia from 29 August to 17 September 1994.<sup>26</sup> It had been intended that the scrolls would tour China – at one point the plan was for a Chinese tour from May to October 1994 through 6 Chinese cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shenghen, Xian and Guangzhou, and then a subsequent tour through Hong Kong, Taipei and Singapore.<sup>27</sup> But it appears that this itinerary outside Australia was ultimately not possible for financial reasons. Bo wrote in a letter to Peter Brown, Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy in Beijing, that “We regret to report that due to unforeseen

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<sup>24</sup>“A Brief Introduction to Chinese Traditional Painting”, <http://www.wst.net.cn/English/cnculture/paint.html>, accessed 4 November 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Rolls, *Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1996, p. 265.

<sup>26</sup> Bo Liu, “Places of Exhibition up till 17 Sep., ‘94”, MLMSS 6294/17.

circumstances, including a hitch in sections of Sponsorship financing, the intended itinerary for our “William J Liu, OBE, 1893-1983 – Pathfinder” Exhibitions in China, Hong Kong, Taipei and Singapore have been postponed.”<sup>28</sup> The High Court exhibition was probably planned after the funding for the overseas trip was unavailable. The scrolls are now kept in the archives of the Mitchell Library.

This combined project was considered by the ACCCI to be an appropriate way to memorialise William Liu’s achievements and the moments of his life considered to be the most important. But appropriately, these moments were not just the grand events, such as meeting with Sun Yat Sen – they were also the difficult moments such as the discrimination that Liu’s parents experienced as an interracial couple. This gives the scrolls a more complete feel, as it is not just the proud moments that are depicted.

The ACCCI described the motivation for the scrolls and book project in the foreword to *Pathfinder*:

The most important aspect of the project, as shown in the exhibition of the scrolls and by this publication, is the example set by William Liu, in his lifetime campaigning for the establishment of mutual respect and understanding between the various ethnic groups that today we recognise as multicultural Australia.

The ACCCI hopes that the publication, and the exhibition of the Memorial Scrolls throughout the cities of Australia and China, will continue the work of the late William J. Liu O.B.E., in strengthening the bond of friendship between the peoples of our two nations.<sup>29</sup>

Further to this description in *Pathfinder*, Michael Jones of the ACCCI wrote in a letter to Federal Trade Minister Bob McMullan in 1994 that

The Chamber’s objectives in launching and promoting the Memorial Scrolls

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from Bo Liu to Russell Jack, 17 June 1993, MLMSS 6294/17.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Bo Liu to Peter Brown, 25 March 1994, MLMSS 6294/17.

<sup>29</sup> Mo, *Pathfinder*, preface.

Project are as follows:

1. To honour the life and ideas of William Liu, affectionately known as the ‘father’ of the Chinese community in Australia.
2. To highlight the importance of the contribution of Chinese Australians to Australia’s multicultural society.
3. To emphasise the cross cultural nature of Australia’s trade with Asia and particularly China since Federation.
4. To assist the people of China in their understanding of Australia via the images of their ancestors who migrated to our country.
5. To challenge aspects of historical orthodoxy by telling the story of social activists rather than observers.

The project was therefore conceived of as an instrument of social change as well as a way to honour Liu’s achievements. The press release which called Liu “The ‘Don Bradman’ of Australia China Relations” also makes the argument that “All those Australians who wish to understand their history, and discuss intelligently the question of our identity, cannot do so without knowledge of the Chinese contribution, domestically in terms of multiculturalism, and internationally in terms of our economic integration with Asia.”<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned, this combined project continues to reach a new audience through the gift of *Pathfinder* as part of the “W J Liu Esq OBE Memorial Prize for Chinese Studies”, but since this project, there has not been another sustained examination of Liu’s legacy. Liu features on another gongbi scroll painting, this time a 50 metre long scroll entitled *The Harvest of Endurance* which was sponsored by the Australia-China Friendship Society as a bicentenary project. This scroll consists of 35 frames, covering a

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<sup>30</sup> Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, “The ‘Don Bradman’ of Australia China Relations”, press release, MLMSS 6294/17. It is undated, but probably is from August 1993.



wide span of Chinese Australian history, and one of these features William Liu. The scroll is located at the National Australia Museum, in the National Historical Collection.<sup>31</sup>

Liu also popped up in late 2001 as a cardboard cutout in Sydney's Ultimo Community Centre, as part of *Peoplescape*, which was decorated by children at the Centre's after-school care program. Liu was "chosen for this project due to his efforts in bettering Chinese/Australian relationships".<sup>32</sup> Liu's life-sized image was sent to Canberra to join the national *Peoplescape* exhibition on the lawns of Parliament House between 25 November and 4 December 2001.

The significance of William Liu's life work is something which is acknowledged in a number of recent publications, but not explored in depth. This paradox simultaneously reinforces the depth of Liu's contribution, while leaving the details of his life and his impact on changes in Australia ill-defined. Liu's oral history interview is specifically mentioned in a National Library of Australia article where he is described as a "doyen of Sydney's Chinese community"<sup>33</sup>, and his papers at the Mitchell Library are considered significant and described in greater detail in their synopsis than the treatment he receives when mentioned in any book.<sup>34</sup> As discussed previously, he is mentioned in books such as C.F. Yong's *The New Gold Mountain*, A.C. Palfreeman's *The Administration of the White Australia Policy*, Eric Rolls' *Citizens*, Diana Giese's *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons*, Shen Yuanfang's *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes*, Shirley Fitzgerald's *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, and Janis Wilton's *Hong Yuen and Golden*

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<sup>31</sup> "Harvest of Endurance", [http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/lesson\\_ideas/20010228\\_32.html](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/lesson_ideas/20010228_32.html), accessed 9 November 2004.

<sup>32</sup> *City Quarters*, Issue 17, Summer 2002, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Diana Giese, "Collecting China", *National Library of Australia News*, October 1999, <http://www.nla.gov.au/asian/pub/dgiese.html>, accessed 4 November 2004.

*Threads*, and articles such as Wang Gungwu's "The Life of William Liu: Australian and Chinese Perspectives", and Henry Chan's "From Quong Tarts to Victor Chang: Being Chinese in Australia in the Twentieth Century"<sup>35</sup>. Liu is considered to be an essential part of the story of Chinese Australians, particularly in Sydney, but his story has not been focused upon in the same way that, for example, that of Quong Tart or William Ah Ket has been. Liu is still very much in living memory for many Chinese Australians, and that ensures that "Uncle Billy" often comes up as a topic of conversation or a reference point at gatherings such as Chinese Australian Historical Society days. But his attempts to change Australian immigration policy and communicate, often successfully, with Australian political leaders, are not generally known or written about. This advocacy, along with Liu's promotion of Sino-Australian trade, are arguably his most important legacies, and they reflect the importance he placed on the 'big issues' rather than his own successes as a businessman. As his son wrote, he lived his life devoid of wealth, and this is the material result of his priority in life to help others.<sup>36</sup>

Liu's impact on Australia stemmed from the way in which he constructed his own hybrid identity and related to Anglo Australians and Chinese Australians, as well as the influence he had on policy changes. He believed that the destinies of Australia and China were intertwined, and that China was not the great threat to Australia that it was historically constructed to be. His identity drove him in his work:

I cannot help feeling that Australia's interest is very closely knitted in China's welfare and as one born in Australia of Chinese parentage, it is only natural that

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<sup>34</sup> "William J Liu papers, Admin/Biog Notes", State Library of New South Wales, Picman database, [http://libapp.sl.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/spydus/ENQ/PM/BSEARCH?SCP=&BS=william+liu&BS\\_TYPE=A](http://libapp.sl.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/spydus/ENQ/PM/BSEARCH?SCP=&BS=william+liu&BS_TYPE=A), accessed 4 November 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Chan "From Quong Tarts to Victor Chang: Being Chinese in Australia in the Twentieth Century", CSCSD Public Seminar at the Australian National University, 24 May 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Bo Liu to Russell Jack, 11 January 1993, MLMSS 6294/17.

one would work for the promotion of better understanding between Australians and Chinese.<sup>37</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Two, the discrimination against Liu's parents when they were married, and his mother's subsequent mental breakdown, had a great impact upon his emotional attachment to his work. He hated to see hardship in family life caused by the White Australia Policy when it was entirely avoidable.

Liu's dual background gave him the cultural capital and ability to communicate with government ministers or bureaucrats, Chinese community leaders, Chinese government officials, and many other groups of people to lobby for the changes he wanted to see. Liu's personality and sense of humour made it easier for him to relate to his 'prey':

Oh yes, he was funny about it, in a strange sort of way – it wasn't Anglo-Saxon humour, it was sort of Aussie humour but it was Chinese-Aussie humour, if that explains anything to you at all. Well, you know, down at the Tai Yuen restaurant, he'd treat the Immigration Officers who'd come from Canberra as 'old fellow old mate', and bang 'em on the back and say 'G'day mate!' But then he'd sit down and be very courteous Chinese, and he'd bring out his documentation, and the rice would come and the chopsticks, and then he'd be the courteous Chinese host, but when they first came into the place, he'd bang 'em on the back and say 'G'day mate!' It was that mixture. And it was a mixture that worked. It was friendly-natured, but now I'm putting on my Chinese persona, and I want to be serious about what I'm doing, which is a human thing, because I have a lot of people on my books who are humanly very distressed...<sup>38</sup>

Despite Liu's positive outlook, he could still be seen as a pest by some of the people he was out to influence:

I have thought quite a lot about your problem, and have wondered whether you are adopting the right measures to attain the goal that you have set

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Liu to Mr. W.J. Scully, 8 February 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman, 16 September 2004.

yourself to reach. I have had much to do in my life with putting things over, and I question whether it is wise or of value to be too insistent with those who are expected to make the necessary moves. I should imagine that Mr. Page is a very busy man, and would be irked if he is bothered too much on a subject that is difficult for him to handle in any case. You, of course, know Mr. Page, and I do not. But I know the way you set after me, and also, Mr. Grant. You did not give us breathing space, and the result of such zeal is that the cause may be injured by the exertion of too much pressure. I only mention this to you so that you can judge whether your relations with Mr. Page are bettered or injured by too insistent urging that he do something. Also, I question whether he would care to be overwhelmed with a constant rush of arguments by various people.<sup>39</sup>

However, Liu's friends generally supported his methods, as there wasn't much of an alternative:

Billy's personality? Well, to be honest, most people saw him as a real pain-in-the-whatsit, you know, he was constantly 'at people', and you could see people say 'I'm sick of this, I don't want to talk to that man, go away, I'm not here', and in that sense, he was a real nuisance to people, but he wasn't a noxious nuisance, he was a friendly nuisance. Everybody knew what he was on about, and that his objectives were very reasonable and commendable, but he discovered that the only way he could get anything done was to push push push, annoy annoy annoy, that's what he did so he had this reputation of being as I say a real pain, but an acceptable pain because his objective was good, we all knew it was good.<sup>40</sup>

Liu's methods eventually had an effect: "...he never stopped – he was like a bee in a bottle – he spent all day writing letters to people...The letters had to be answered by somebody, so it was a constant push...I think by the end of the fifties, the beginning of the sixties, he had actually breached the walls..."<sup>41</sup>

Liu also had some unorthodox methods when it came to bringing together the different political elements of the Chinese Australian community. As Secretary of the

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<sup>39</sup> Letter from W.H. Donald to William Liu, 22 April 1939, MLMSS 6294/1.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman, 16 September 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Kuomintang in Sydney, he was asked to call upon Dr. Sun Yat Sen in Canton, and in his 'pink' period as a continuing supporter of China, he met Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Liu reconciled his straddling of the political spectrum by citing his overriding love of China – as his niece recalled, he would say, “I’m only interested in the Chinese people, whatever political affiliations they are. I just want to look after the Chinese people.”<sup>42</sup> Liu was friendly with people on both sides of the divide:

...he had all these contacts divided by the communists, Taiwan. And that’s another point we could make, is that he had to straddle the two sides of Sydney, you had the Kuomintang office down the road, just past Bo’s banana shop, was the office of the Kuomintang, and further up I don’t know where it was in Campbell Street somewhere, was the office of the Chinese Youth League, which was the Communist Chinese front in Sydney... So, within the Chinese community, he had to kind of straddle the gap between the Kuomintang, now representing Taiwan, and the Chinese Communists who saw Mao Tse Tung as the great liberator of the homeland – two very different views of Mao and Communism. He never, in all my conversations with him, he never came out and said “I believe that Mao is the saviour of China and when I go back to China I will go as a Chinese patriot.” He never said that. He always kept a foot in both camps in Sydney.<sup>43</sup>

Liu himself explained his change in political support for the Kuomintang and the Communist regime as based upon what he thought best for China’s development at the time. In the addendum to *White China*, Liu defended the Kuomintang from attack by V.W. Chow, who commented on “its monopoly of power, its seizure of all governmental control”:

...his attack is not justified. Assume that the Kuo Min Tang does control the governmental, the legislative, the executive, the administrative functions – what then? It is not government of the people by the people for the people. It is government of the people for the people by an organisation that is proceeding from revolution, through an essential evolutionary period, towards truly representative government...Mr. Chow offers no workable alternative – that is where the danger lies. If the Nationalist regime was now to be

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Marina Mar, 11 October 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Tony Palfreeman, 16 September 2004.

superseded there would be immediate chaos. The Government is essential at this stage to keep China on an even keel.<sup>44</sup>

When the Communists took over in 1949, Liu also felt this was an appropriate and essential stage in China's development. His slant on the regime was born of his feeling that each stage in China's government was progress from the chaos under the Manchu. Liu was also used to having to work with the material that was available, so to speak, in Australia as well as China. He was forced to deal with whatever government was in power to achieve his aims, and always looked for the positives in their policies.

Liu moved through the life of the White Australia Policy from an isolated critique to finding allies in other reform groups, and ultimately, with government ministers. His advice, once politely (or sometimes rudely) ignored, was toward the end of his life being solicited from the government bodies once charged with upholding the White Australia Policy, now entrusted to promote multiculturalism. His views, once 'fantastic dreams', became part of the political culture in Australia. As a result, he helped to find a place for Chinese Australians central to Australian identity that could not be threatened by the shifting sands of government policy. His writings helped to inscribe "Chineseness into Australianness, as a result of which a Chinese-Australian identity becomes possible."<sup>45</sup>

For this, Liu is called 'the father of the Australian Chinese community'.<sup>46</sup> His incessant lobbying meant he played a major role in preventing the 'extinction' of the Chinese Australian community, by keeping families together in Australia, and thus encouraging people not to 'quit' Australia for China to seek a better life. The fact that he

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<sup>44</sup> J.H.C. Sleeman, *White China*, Published by the author, Sydney, 1933, pp. 315-6.

<sup>45</sup> Shen Yuanfang, *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2001, p. 132.

<sup>46</sup> Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, "The 'Don Bradman' of Australia China Relations", press release, August 1993, MLMSS 6294/17.

was involved in opposing the White Australia Policy almost from the very beginning, and throughout its existence, adds to his image. He “was at the forefront of most of the major events involving the Australian Chinese community between 1912 and 1982.”<sup>47</sup> His long and active political life made him “something of a legend. To generations of Australian-born Chinese and Australians, he is known affectionately as Uncle Bill...William Liu’s life story reads like a history of Australia-China relations.<sup>48</sup> He was also described as “probably the most important Chinese of the twentieth century in Australia.”<sup>49</sup>

This praise for Liu’s life work began to be accorded when he was 35, as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of New South Wales presented him with a “token of remembrance” to convey that

...your enthusiasm towards all charitable movements, social improvements and the fostering of trade between China and Australia has been very valuable indeed and your untiring and recorded efforts to do your share for the Chinese Community for the better understanding of the Chinese people and the people of Australia is a credit for any man to be proud of...<sup>50</sup>

Many others since have offered their praise to Liu for his assistance. Kim Jack, whom Liu had helped to keep his daughters in Australia, wrote that, “As I have mentioned to you before and will do so at all times, we Chinese should be grateful to you for all the work you have done in fighting for recognition of our rights.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, “The ‘Don Bradman’ of Australia China Relations”, press release, August 1993, MLMSS 6294/17.

<sup>48</sup> “From Manchu to Mao”, *The Asian*, November 1977, p. 9, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Rolls, *Citizens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1996, p. 263.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Chinese Chamber of Commerce of New South Wales to William Liu, 1 January 1928, MLMSS 6294/18.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Kim Jack to William Liu, 13 December 1957, MLMSS 6294/10.

Senator Bill O’Chee, speaking at the Melbourne launch of *Pathfinder*, remarked on Liu’s impact on the Chinese Australian people “We Australian Chinese have much to thank pioneers like William Liu for the rights we enjoy today.”<sup>52</sup>

King Fong has commented that Liu played a major role in opposing White Australia Policy restrictions, allowing other members of his community to focus on “the rice and bowl problem”:

We were more concerned for our own survival. We left [the politics] in the hands of Uncle Bill – Billy Liu. He was the most prominent of our elderly members who constantly put pressure on the White Australia [Policy].<sup>53</sup>

Liu, on the other hand, did not worry about material success beyond keeping himself going and having enough money to keep his Kingsford house so he could keep writing letters. As his son Bo wrote of him:

He [William Liu] was born [de]void of wealth and died without wealth, but his genuine endeavours were widely recognised by both Australian and Chinese, and he was often referred to as “elder statesman” and “father of Chinese people in Australia”. He earned deep respect from persons in all walks of life and his dedication to purpose was admired.<sup>54</sup>

Liu’s life work was considered to be important by leaders in China and Australia, and they made statements praising him after his death and at the time that the scrolls exhibitions were staged. Chinese Premier Zhao sent a telegram upon learning of Liu’s passing, which stated: “Bill’s contributions over a long period of time to the promotion of

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<sup>52</sup> Senator Bill O’Chee, *Melbourne News*, 9 November 1993, MLMSS 6294/17.

<sup>53</sup> King Fong, in Shirley Fitzgerald’s *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, State Library of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1996, p. 175.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Bo Liu to Russell Jack, 11 January 1993, MLMSS 6294/17.



the understanding between the peoples of China and Australia are highly commended. We are greatly shocked by this sad news and we extend our deepest condolences.”<sup>55</sup>

Australian Prime Minister Keating, on the occasion of the 1993 Liu exhibition at the High Court, also lauded Liu’s importance to the formation of Australia’s multicultural society:

The contribution that Chinese-Australians such as the humanist and business leader, William Liu, have made to Australian society has been a foundation for the valuable role that Chinese-Australians are playing at present, and will continue to play in the future...I am sure that the scrolls will serve as important reminders that we need to retain and build on the history and wisdom of people such as William Liu, as we move towards the future as a true multicultural society.<sup>56</sup>

Liu’s lasting legacy is the memory of his unique and vibrant personality, which incessantly supported his ‘fantastic dreams’ and ensured they would have a lasting impact on Australia. His dreams were unheard of in his younger days, unacceptable to most Australians, and his wish to belong fully in both China and Australia could have resulted in nothing further than the rejection and disappointment he experienced early in his life. But Liu’s dreams of a fuller relationship between China and Australia, and a happier life for Chinese in Australia, had an impact. Liu contributed through his writing of hundreds of letters to government officials, interested organisations and sympathetic observers, and he also provided assistance behind the scenes to groups such as the Immigration Reform Group. This assistance had a demonstrable impact, as without the case studies that Liu had personal knowledge of, these groups could not have made the effective arguments for changes in policy that they did. Even people such as Kenneth Rivett, who are so often

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<sup>55</sup> Telegram from Chinese Premier Zhao, mentioned in Liu’s obituary, “‘Uncle Bill’ pioneered path of Australia-China links”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May 1983, MLMSS 6294/11.

<sup>56</sup> Congratulatory letter from Prime Minister Keating, August 1993, MLMSS 6294/17.

cited as having a great impact on the end of the White Australia Policy through the Immigration Reform Group, were asking Liu for advice. Liu brought all of these disparate groups, politicians like Calwell, Chinese Nationalists, Australian communists, poor Chinese on the verge of being deported, young activists, wealthy Chinese businessmen, academics, Labor and Liberal, together to a certain extent for a dialogue on how best to create his ideal of 'mutual happiness', and a situation where Australia and China could benefit, rather than creating animosity and suspicion, separation and hurt and lost opportunities. Liu's 'fantastic dreams', ignored, questioned and contested at various stages of his lifelong crusade, have now proven to be remarkably prescient in a society which now defines itself as embodying most of the ideals which Liu championed throughout his long life.



**William Liu (29 January 1893 – 25 April 1983)**



Monty Woolley, publicity photo for the film “The Man Who Came to Dinner and Stayed”, Warner Studios, 1941. Every attempt has been made to ascertain the copyright on this photo.



“Bird’s Eye View of the Nanking Road S’hai”, postcard dated 1936. Large building in upper right is the Sun Company Store, which opened that year. Every attempt has been made to ascertain the copyright on this photo.



William Liu, right, with his mother, Florence Thomas, in a 1923 photo which was taken on the grounds of the Parramatta Mental Asylum. Liu's wife Mabel, and child Bo, are pictured with his brother Charles, and an unidentified man to the left of the photo. Photo courtesy of Marina Mar.



The first escalators in China, in the Sun Company Department Store (now No. 1 Department Store), Nanking Road, Shanghai. Photo taken 2001, property of author.



Arthur Calwell, speaking at Harry Fay's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party in 1962. Calwell had also attended Fay's mother's 91<sup>st</sup> birthday party in 1960, and addressed the crowd in Mandarin, saying that he was looking forward to attending her 101<sup>st</sup> party. Photo courtesy of Marina Mar.





William Liu, with white hair in foreground centre, at Harry Fay's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 1962. Photo courtesy of Marina Mar.



William Liu, centre, in a 1975 family photo. With him are, from top left, Marina Mar, Stewart Mar, Jodi Dong, Howard Liu, Enid Liu, Winsome Dong and husband Richard Dong. In the bottom row from left are Glendon Mar, William Liu, and a grandson of William's brother, Charles Liu. Photo courtesy of Marina Mar.

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