

LANG7110 - Research Project

Lecturers: E Kolesova / M East

CULTURAL IDENTITY:

**Developing a sense of Chinese
identity in New Zealand**

By Percy Luen

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Chinese identity in New Zealand-born Chinese

My research essay investigates how Chinese New Zealanders of my age and generation develop a strong identification with their Chinese roots while growing up in New Zealand. At the heart of this essay is a desire to better understand what it means to be Chinese and, on a more personal note, how I came to be the person that I am today.

To best understand the aim of this essay, the background of the author needs introduction. I am a Chinese New Zealander¹. I was born in New Zealand, grew up here, married, raised a family and have lived my whole life here. However, I more strongly identify with Chinese values and culture than New Zealand culture. In my life I have met many, other Chinese New Zealanders, people with similar backgrounds and a similar upbringing who feel the same way I do. We are New Zealanders, but more than that we are Chinese.

Chinese New Zealanders and their identification with their Chinese heritage has always been a topic of interest to me: How do people acquire a strong Chinese cultural identity? My curiosity to find the answer to this question is at the heart of this essay.

¹ I prefer to use the definition of "Chinese New Zealander" meaning "those people who paid the poll tax and their descendants", as utilised by Nigel Murphy in his 19 March 2003 seminar: *Unsmelted Gold. Uncut Jade: Sources and Resources for the study of History of Chinese New Zealanders*, Victoria University of Wellington Stout Research Centre Seminars: Chinese New Zealand, March-June 2003

What is Chinese culture?

The starting point of this essay is to consider: What is Chineseness? What makes a person Chinese? Is there more to being Chinese than simply having ancestors from China? What, if any, values and traits are distinctive to Chinese? When a person with Chinese ancestors lives in a predominantly non-Chinese population their whole life, what connects them to Chinese culture? In addressing these questions it is important to look back to the homeland, China.

The founding roots of Chinese civilisation was along the fertile banks of the Yellow River. It developed into an agricultural based society. The Chinese people are said to have common descent from the Yellow Emperor. While this belief is legendary, nearly all Chinese, around 95 percent, originate from 100 clans². The dominant grouping amongst its ethnic mix are Han people who make up over 90 percent of the Chinese population.

Clans are groupings of people sharing common hereditary or ancestry. In China these clans form the core of whole villages and suburbs. Because of the close relationship with each other the villagers enjoy a great sense of community which could be compared with living in a large extended family.

Against this background it is unsurprising that Chinese traits seem to be centred around family and village community values and ideals. Dr James Ng goes so far as to say: "*The fundamental difference between Chinese and*

² Ng, Dr J. (2003), *Characteristics of Chinese Culture and aspects of Health Care*.
<http://stevenyoung.co.nz/chinesevoice/history/healthcare.htm>

*Western cultures is that Chinese culture promotes the group and stability and Western culture promotes the individual and change*³.

From experience and exposure, Chinese values and characteristics may be identified. Traits of Chinese culture can be regarded as communal in nature and include:

- There is respect for one's parents and elders
- You show trust and loyalty towards one's family and clan
- Be interested and involved in community activities
- Consensus is sought to avoid confrontation
- Be hardworking and thrifty
- Ambition and education is encouraged and valued

Of course these features are not only found in Chinese culture, they are found in all cultures. They can be used to define Chinese culture by considering the the way Chinese adopt and promote these habits and the degree that these habits are valued, taught and learnt.

The focus of my research is on the influences of family upbringing and the Chinese Communities in New Zealand in the development of Chinese cultural identity.

³ Ng, Dr J. (2003), *Characteristics of Chinese Culture and aspects of Health Care*.
<http://stevenyoung.co.nz/chinesevoice/history/healthcare.htm>

Methodology

For my research I interviewed two women and two men, one of whom was myself⁴. All the interviewees were born in New Zealand during 1941 and 1942 to mothers, who had come to New Zealand as war refugees, to join their husbands, who were already in this country. The two women interviewees grew up in Auckland, the male interviewee grew up in Invercargill and I grew up in Gisborne. All the interviewees strongly identify with their Chinese roots, although this identification came at different stages of life.

Using my own experiences as a model, I have compared the similarities and differences in family upbringing and attitudes. I contend that parents play an important role in shaping cultural identity. The research that I have used is anecdotal, as recounted to me during the interviews.

Early childhood

As children, each interviewee was taught to be proud of their Chinese heritage. Our mothers could not speak English so from the time we were born we were immersed in a Chinese family environment. The two women interviewees and myself came from families which were market gardeners. From morning to night our parents would work in the garden and from an early age we would accompany our parents to the paddocks. This was a great bonding experience for both the child and his or her parents. There

⁴ See Appendix 1 for interview questions. Appendix 2 comprises of the interview notes of the interviewee, Percy Luen. For privacy reasons, interview notes for the other interviewees have not been included.

was constant exposure to the Chinese language, as the parents conversed throughout the day in Cantonese.

By the time we were four or five years of age, we were taught to help out by doing simple chores which, as children, we regarded as play. We all learnt by rote our grandfathers' names, our father's names, our own names. We also knew the name of our villages, our counties and the name of our clans. I could write my Chinese name before my English. Chinese was our first language.

The two women interviewees and myself lived in rural situations. There were no close neighbours and we had little contact with English people, other than on occasions when our weekly supplies were bought at the country store or we traded butter coupons for sugar coupons with English neighbours when food and commodities were short during World War II. Up to the age of five years we spoke no English, nor did we mix with other English children.

The effect of an upbringing of this nature until the age of five was profound for the two women interviewees and myself. We learned from an early age to speak Cantonese, the importance of hard work and shared responsibility, thrift, the importance of family. To some extent we observed how Chinese interact with each other and, in limited circumstances, with non-Chinese people. The limited interaction with non-Chinese cultures was, in itself, a lesson.

In comparison, the fourth interviewee came from a fruit shop background. The nature of the business meant that he did not get the same attention as the children in the garden. He was exposed to Chinese language at home and English language in the shop. From this exposure to the English language and people, English became his first language. His exposure to Chinese culture was limited in comparison and the lessons that we learnt in the fields were unknown to him.

Primary School

We all started conventional English school at the age of five years. The sudden exposure to a different, Western, culture was new to the two female interviewees and myself. As Chinese children we tended to mix more easily with other Chinese children.

We learnt to speak English quite quickly and eventually it became the language we used at school. At home, all four interviewees commented that Chinese was still used when talking to our parents but English was the language used when talking to younger siblings. All of our parents considered this a bad influence, as they believed that it undermined our Chinese background. Particularly for those interviewees from a market gardening background, our parents' influence over our actions had significantly diminished as a great many hours were now spent away from home.

The prevalent use of English as a first language by young people soon became a concern of all families in the Chinese Community.

Chinese Schools

Chinese Communities are groupings of Chinese families from a local area. Chinese families living in a region form local associations which are affiliated to the head association, the New Zealand Chinese Association (NZCA), which has its offices in Wellington. There is no obligation on any family to join, but most Chinese families participated in their regional association. The Association, made up of family groups, reinforced the village concept which forms the foundation of community organisation in China. The two women interviewees' families joined the Auckland Chinese Association (ACA), my family joined the Gisborne Chinese Association (GCA). The fourth interviewee's family did not join an Association, as there was none in the area to join. The Chinese population in Invercargill was too small to support an Association of its own. This led to a further erosion of his Chinese skills during his formative years.

Chinese Communities, or Associations, provided, and continues to provide, a forum in which the regional Chinese community could meet and exchange news, address issues, work together to solve issues and provide a sense of belonging.

Even today, Chinese Associations run classes such as calligraphy, music, Tai Chi and Chinese language. They have recreational groups such as

Chinese opera groups and mah jong. They still promote sporting activities and hold inter-association tournaments.

One of the problems recognised and addressed by the various regional Chinese Associations in the 1940s and 1950s was how to preserve Chinese language skills in the younger generations. Through discussion and consensus it was resolved that the best way to tackle the problem was to promote Chinese schools.

During the late 1940s and 1950s many regions established Chinese schools. There were three types of school:

1. **Private:** At private Chinese schools school fees were charged. Some of these schools were subsidised, in whole or in part, by the NZCA.
2. **Through the Church:** Church schools were common. In Chinese Church school, the local Chinese Minister was enlisted to conduct weekly classes.
3. **Chinese Embassy School:** Classes at this school were conducted in Mandarin, as opposed to Cantonese which was, by far, the main language taught at the other two types of school.

The two women interviewees went to an Auckland Chinese Church school, I went to at Private Chinese school and the fourth interviewee did not go to Chinese school.

The three interviewees that went to Chinese school all agreed that the Chinese schools were not completely successful in preserving Chinese

language skills, although for myself it has given me skills in Chinese writing that I would otherwise never have acquired. It was felt by the interviewees that the Chinese schools only slowed down the inevitable influence of the English language. Although the students at Chinese schools were still bilingual, the dominance of the English language was apparent.

Nevertheless, the interviewees that attended Chinese school were of the firm opinion that the early nurturing of our Chinese identity, in particular language skills, in our childhoods and the later reinforcement of our Chinese language by Chinese schools laid a solid basis for us to establish our Chinese identity on.

My fourth interviewee is a paradox. He came to Auckland to work for a village cousin in his late teens in a fruit shop. By then he had scant knowledge of Chinese. Through working for his cousin, eventually meeting and marrying his wife, meeting and working with her family and by participating in the local Chinese Community, he became a fluent Chinese speaker and he has played a prominent part as a member of the ACA and served on the Executive of the Auckland Chinese Growers Association (AGCA).

Unlike the other interviewees, his strong Chinese identity did not evolve in early childhood, but later in his life. Following his move to Auckland, he was exposed to a much larger Chinese population. This, together with the

influence of people who were to become significant in his life encouraged the later development of his language skills and cultural identity.

Chinese Traits

I asked the three other interviewees to rate the traits that I have identified and listed as being Chinese at the beginning of this essay on a scale of one to ten (ten being the highest and therefore very important to Chinese culture). The results were:

- There is respect for one's parents and elders 30
- You show trust and loyalty towards one's family and clan 28
- Be interested and involved in community activities 23
- Consensus is sought to avoid confrontation 28
- Be hardworking and thrifty 25
- Ambition and education is encouraged and valued 30

These results show that the three interviewees either strongly or very strongly identify each of these traits as being traits which are Chinese.

All the interviewees believed that they identify more strongly with their Chinese roots with the passage of time.

Other considerations

While the direct and positive influences of family and Chinese Associations has a definite impact on Chinese culture, it is also relevant to consider the

negative influences which may encourage the development of cultural identity.

Greif⁵ notes that many of the early Chinese immigrants who came to New Zealand to work the Otago gold fields were from California and Australia, having tried their luck in the gold fields of those countries first. In both California and Australia resentment and discrimination was directed towards Chinese gold miners who were willing to work for less profit and longer hours. Thus, when the Otago gold rush brought miners to New Zealand, along with them came long standing prejudices on both the Chinese side and the Western side. Racial harassment and slurs encouraged Chinese to stick together for comfort and protection. In the face of bigotry from one culture, it is unsurprising that a preference for the familiarity of one's own culture arose.

Each of the interviewees recalled examples from their own experiences where they suffered, if not physically, at least mentally from racial prejudice. Name calling, harassment and exclusion were felt by all the interviewees to a greater or lesser extent. While the effect of such actions cannot be measured, the impressions left by such treatment were long felt and, in some cases, still felt today. As with the gold miners, in the face of bigotry, there is a natural tendency to gravitate towards those who may offer comfort and protection, especially if they are your family or clan.

⁵ Greif, SW. (1973) *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*. Singapore: Singapore Offset Printing Pte Ltd, p15.

Conclusion

Despite a geographic distance from China, all the interviewees had a strong sense of attachment to China and a strong identification with Chinese culture.

This sense of identity appears to have been influenced and encouraged by both family and the Chinese Community. Simply put, the influence of other Chinese who have a strong sense of Chinese culture and pride in that culture will encourage the development of a strong cultural identity. For Chinese culture, there is a particular emphasis on community values, which makes the encouragement to develop a strong cultural identity even more potent.

These dual influences can take many shapes and forms, including formal schooling; social interactions; political organisations and through commercial connections. They can be influential at different stages of life, from early childhood to later life. Indeed for the interviewees, age has increased their sense of Chinese cultural identity. Influences can be either positive or negative.

The interviewees while sharing many experiences and feelings each had unique perspectives on Chinese culture. However, by and large, there was a sense that certain communal traits were important features of Chinese culture. These traits, while not exclusive to Chinese people, have a particular prominence in Chinese culture which makes them useful as identifiers of Chinese culture. The interviewees were in agreement that

respect for elders; loyalty to immediate and extended family, including clansfolk; participation in community affairs; avoidance of confrontation; hard work and thrift; and ambition and education characterise Chinese culture.

These basic answers only scratch at the surface of the complex question: How do New Zealand born Chinese of my generation develop a strong identification with our Chinese roots?

Perhaps the real answer lies in the Chinese psyche. The fathers of the two women interviewees and my own father came to New Zealand as sojourners, their intent was never to settle but to eventually return home to China. They were, and always considered themselves to be Chinese. A comment made by one of the woman interviewee's was about when her mother and brother immigrated as refugees to New Zealand to join her father. Her father built a house to accommodate his family. His brief to the builder was: "*Here is 100 pounds, build me a house to accommodate my family, it need not be too permanent, we will be going home to China in a couple of years, after the war*". The yearning to return to the home village and its people, to a life style and environment that has been traditional for many generations is a powerful urge.

Perhaps this sentiment has been engendered in us as well, even though we grew up in New Zealand.

The four of us have each returned to our ancestral villages at least twice
The first visit was, for each of us, out of a sense of obligation to our parents
and also curiosity. The second visit was in reverence and with a sense of
belonging.

For my *Living the Language* Unitec paper last year I went to Tongji University
in Shanghai to study. As part of my culture class I was taught this saying:

叶落归根
yè luò guī gēn

which means "*Fallen leaves return to their roots*". This Chinese cultural
saying is a powerful commentary of the Chinese psyche of not just
maintaining Chinese identity, but Chinese village-clan identity. To be
confronted with this saying, while in China, at this time of my life, served as a
stark reminder that as a young plant I was nurtured in New Zealand, but my
roots are firmly implanted in China. This sentiment was echoed in each of
my interviews by each interviewee.

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APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The overriding question that the interview subjects were asked to bear in mind when answering the questions below was: *How do you, as a New Zealand born Chinese of this generation, develop an identification with your Chinese roots?*

1. How strongly do you identify with your Chinese roots?
2. What was your family's attitude towards being Chinese? Were you encouraged to be proud of your Chinese background?
3. Did your childhood home environment feature prominently in nurturing your Chinese identity?
4. What steps were taken to teach and promote Chinese language and values at home?
5. Was the English language used much at home?
6. Before you started school did your family mix with English families? Did you have any English friends?
7. Do you think that your home environment and the attitudes of parents have a role in shaping identity?
8. Do you think the attitude and environment of your childhood laid a foundation ^{for} ~~to~~ your Chinese roots?
9. When did you first start to learn English?
10. Did you find learning the English language competing with your existing Chinese language background?
11. Did your parents show concern that learning English and mixing in an English environment could be at the expense of your Chinese background?

12. Did the Chinese Community recognise the erosion of Chinese language and values amongst its young people as a community problem? Did the trend become a concern for the whole community?
13. What plan was put in place to counter the trend?
14. Do you consider that a Chinese Community plays an important role when dealing with community issues and this, in turn, draws Chinese people closer together?
15. With a Chinese Community group to affiliate to, do you think your Chinese identity was more enhanced and maintained?
16. Do you still continue to have an association with your local Chinese Community? Does it still have a role to play?
17. Do you think the influence of your home upbringing, reinforced by the support of your Chinese Community, laid the basic foundation for you to build and preserve a strong Chinese identity for yourself?

APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEW NOTES OF PERCY LUEN

My Childhood

I was born in Gisborne at the Edward Murphy Hospital on 11 July 1941, this being the fact, I was not allowed the privilege of becoming a New Zealand citizen until 1947. I was the first New Zealand born child in my family. My family name is 吳 Ng (no general meaning), my given name is 惠仁 meaning kindness and benevolence. I was born third in line from a family of seven children, five of my siblings were born in Gisborne, an older sister and brother were born in China and Hong Kong respectively.

Gisborne was a small rural township in Poverty Bay. It was a rather isolated township as the coast side was fronted by the Pacific Ocean and the other three sides by hilly ranges. The only direct northern entry and egress point by road was through the winding Waioeka Gorge Road which cut through the ranges and was prone to constant landslips. There was no direct rail service, the rail service came north of Gisborne via Hawkes Bay. There was a domestic airfield. The movement of people be they European, Maori or Chinese was minimal and the population grew at a snail's pace. I could hypothesis and say geographically Gisborne could be likened to a mini China , consequently the development of the Chinese community remained stable the influences of the larger based Chinese communities in the cities on the local Chinese community was small.

The Chinese Community

The Chinese community in Gisborne from memory comprised of 28 families and of the 249 war refugee wives who came to New Zealand between 1939 and 1940. Six of them, including my mother were reunited with their husbands in Gisborne. In the 1941 to 1942 period, six children, three boys and three girls became the first born in New Zealand for this group of families. The Chinese population in Gisborne, including the new arrivals, numbered about 100 at the time. Most of the families were involved in market gardening, eight families ran fruit shops and there as a family that ran a Chinese laundry. Of the 28 families 12 were from the clan of Zengcheng and the remainder from the clan of Szeyap. It was a close knit community, consensus was always sought in any major community and private functions. The Szeyap though greater in number did not seek to dominate

community affairs as suggested by Stuart Greif in *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*.⁶

Because of distance and lack of time, there was only occasional contact with other Chinese families. However, whenever there were family celebrations it would become a communal affair, when all families came together not only to celebrate but to help in the preparation as well. These occasions could be reaching the auspicious age of 60 or every subsequent decade, the one month birthday of a newborn child or a wedding. These were the few times I got to socialise with the children who were born about my time.

There was the local chapter of the Gisborne Chinese Association which was affiliated to the New Zealand Chinese Association whose offices were in Wellington. The menfolk would meet there once a month to discuss local issues and issues relating to the Japanese occupation of China and the advent of communism. The whole community was in favour of the Chinese Nationalist Government, the Kuomintang. The anniversary of the founding of the Nationalist Chinese Republic on 10 October 1911, was observed by the Chinese in New Zealand nationally. In Gisborne, it was marked by a community gathering and sports day. Eventually in New Zealand, this led to the establishment of the Double Tenth Sporting Tournament for Chinese youth, a fixture that alternated between Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin annually. This outlet not only provided the Chinese youth in New Zealand with an outlet for youthful exuberance, but also provided opportunities to socialise amongst peers, to develop friendship and perhaps eventually help foster homogenous marriages within the small Chinese New Zealand community. In my parents' generation it was believed absolutely essential to marry within the Chinese community, either New Zealand local or from Hong Kong. In some cases, interracial marriages led to deep rifts between parents and child.

The Chinese community also took an active part within the Gisborne community. The Chinese community, although supporting Gisborne community efforts operated as an "us and them" basis. Our contributions always reflected our Chinese background. In gala events and street parades the Chinese communities Dragon Dance would always feature in the procession. Sometimes a decorated float would

⁶ Greif, SW. (1973) *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*. Singapore: Singapore Offset Printing Pte Ltd

be entered, manned by young ladies in cheong-sarims. Young people were encouraged to volunteer their services in street collections for charities like the Council of Organisation for Relief Services Overseas (CORSO). Fund raising for school fairs were always supported by donations of fruit and produce to support the school and acknowledge the value of education. Though supporting common causes to reflect a united community there was always the underlying current of separatism between Chinese New Zealanders and Western New Zealanders.

In essence, the structure of the Gisborne Chinese community could be likened to a Chinese village, its leaders were the committee members from the Gisborne Chinese Association and its families, though not bound by clan relationships, were united enough to be joined together by ethnic race.

My father was a market gardener, his garden was situated in Makaraka. It was here I spent my first five years, I never knew either sets of my grandparents so my influences during this time were mainly from my parents and my oldest sister who was ten years my senior. My older brother was too young at this time. My father gained entry to New Zealand by paying the £ 100.00 poll tax and passing an English examination, so he had a basic background in English, whilst my mother and sister had no background in English at all. As a result the first five formative years of my life were spent completely in a Chinese background home environment.

During the day Mum and Dad worked tirelessly in the garden while my sister took charge of the household responsibilities of cooking and cleaning. My mother, sister and brother only had temporary visas to stay in New Zealand at the time, so due to the uncertain nature of the situation, my sister did not go to school. In the evening after dinner we would sit around the dining table watching Dad write letters home to China or doing the business accounts still using the traditional Chinese brush pen and inkstone. I would be fascinated by the click click of the abacus as he tallied up the figures. All the entries would be made in Chinese. My mother and sister would be knitting or sewing garments on the treadle sewing machine, all our clothes were homemade other than our shoes and socks. In winter when the nights were longer and Dad was less busy, he would often tell us myths and legends of ancient China, the adventures of the Monkey King was one of my favourites. He also told us of the young son who lay in his father's bed and warming it up before his father went to bed. The story of a young boy who rescued his friend who was drowning in a large

porcelain vase by smashing the vase because he could not reach him from the top. The story of the youngest member of a family, who, even as a child, deemed it virtuous to always take the smallest portion when sharing food with his older siblings. These tales were my early introduction to Chinese culture.

Now and then he would talk about home, Yayao. He would talk about its size and large population, the lychee trees he owned, they were the sweetest in the area, waiting to be sampled when the family returned home, the field he had acquired over the years but more importantly emphasis was always placed on our ancestry and heritage. We were constantly reminded that we were Chinese from Guangdong, our county was Zengcheng, our village was Yayao, our fong (hamlet) was Shangliang, our surname is Ng, our grandfather was Ng Hou Fung, our father is Ng Sik Luen and my name is Ng Wai Ren (Anglicised Chinese name). I had memorised this and could write my Chinese name before my English name by the time I was five. These first few years of exposure to my Chinese background would be the main catalyst in determining my future Chineseness.

My exposure to Europeans during this time was very limited. Our most frequent visitor was our neighbour Cecil Steele, a farmer. Every morning he would leave a billy of fresh milk for us at our door after he had milked his house cow. He was a widower and his only son was killed in the Second World War. He was my father's best English friend and it was he who gave me my English name, in fact, he chose names of all my brothers. Sometimes my father would take us with him when he did the weekly shopping. There was always a cheery salutation from the shopkeepers and often the grocer would give me a handful of broken biscuits or the butcher would give me a saveloy when my father shopped at the shops. The service station was another place we stopped at frequently where I came into contact with English people. I did not come into contact with any English children. At this stage of my life my parents did not need to show concern for me losing my Chineseness. They had already established a basic blueprint for this.

Education

I started school at the same time as my older brother, he was a bit older than five, I was a bit under five. It was planned this way as we had no experience in interacting with New Zealand children and my parents probably thought there was safety in numbers.

I started primary school just before I turned five. My first day was so traumatic that I was taken home. My first two years were spent in the primer classes starting off without knowing a single word of English. I have no recollection of how I learnt English, but by the time I was in standard 1 (year 3) I could communicate in English quite well. I had no problems coping with reading and writing and arithmetic was a strong point. I did not form any close English friendships during my primary years, preferring more to stay within the small circle of Chinese children who were at school with me. I was never encouraged to make English friends and had a total lack of understanding of English culture. I was reluctant to draw any attention to myself in case it raised racial tensions and I had experienced racial taunts from school bullies. However, it was not long before English became the preferred language amongst our group.

The elders of the town and parents were very concerned about this trend and decided to counter this by setting up a Chinese School. In 1950 a Chinese School was set up in Gisborne using the clubrooms of the Gisborne Chinese Association as the classroom. A Chinese teacher and his family were brought out from Hong Kong and the school roll was about 30 children of all ages. The school was open plan, the pupils divided up according to age and school fees were charged to cover the teacher's salary. School hours were 4.00pm to 7.00pm, though in winter it was 4.00pm to 6.00pm Monday to Thursday. On Friday there was no school as it was late night shopping night and most families were busy. On Saturdays and Sundays school was between 9.00am to 5.00pm. This all took place after our English schooling.

Cantonese was the universal dialect used by the community, resulting in lessons being conducted in Cantonese. The curriculum covered all aspects of learning found in a traditional Chinese school, learning new words, reading, memorising and rote reciting of lessons, calligraphy using brush pens and inkstone, and culture classes. In later years this culminated to stage performances of Cantonese opera.

The Chinese school lasted for six years. I had five years of Chinese education. For any young person, not just myself, to spend so many combined hours at English and Chinese education and spare hours helping in the family business, meant that in my childhood there was not much time for other diversions that mainstream New Zealand children enjoyed like sports, hobbies and other recreational activities.

However, I harboured no resentment in having to take part in these long hours of schooling. There was a harmonious relationship between all the pupils as all the pupils' families were acquainted with each other. The older pupils would help the younger ones, we were like an extended family group. We were comfortable with each other, hence, there was no inclination for me to form other friendships outside my Chinese school friends. I spent five years going to Chinese school, but I could not do justice to both. In the early years to intermediate school, attending English and Chinese school was not too great a problem, but with the onset of high school which involved more intensive study and the need to take on a bigger share of the workload at home, attending both schools became more challenging. Living in an English dominated society, it was the English education system that came out on top. I am not disillusioned by the outcome, peer and societal pressure was too strong. If it were not for the five years I spent at Chinese school, I would be poorer for it. On reflection these five years laid the basic foundation for my knowledge in the Chinese written language, another reinforcement of my Chinese roots.

Tradition Culture and Customs

The observance of tradition, customs and culture plays an important role in preserving Chinese identity. I became accustomed to the custom of ancestral worship since my early days. Pictures of my paternal Grandfather and Grandmother were placed on the mantle in the sitting room at which incense was burnt and offerings of food were made. After my father died, his portrait was placed alongside and the same custom was observed and it was the same for my mother when she passed over. My parents are buried in Auckland and during the festivals of Ching Ming and Chung Yerng, my brothers, sisters, their families and my family would gather at their graveside, tidy the graves, burn incense and bring offerings of wine and food.

Most immigrant parents of my parent's generation had a strong desire to keep and maintain their cultural customs, values and mother tongue. This was more so as their dreams to return to China slowly receded with the event of communism. In my parents case it was a dedicated attempt to preserve a way of life that his father and his father's father had known, a family span of 23 generations. I am equally sure that he wanted these cultural customs to be inherited by his children and future generations.