

David Fung

EXHIBITION on the CHINESE in NEW ZEALAND at Te PAPA

Closing ceremony on 31 July 2000

Introduction

Before the opening of Te Papa, back in 1996/97, it was envisioned by the Museum of New Zealand to tell the stories of the minority communities, (that is non Anglo-Saxon and non Maori) by a series of exhibitions depicting the histories of their migration, their settlement and later development in New Zealand. The Chinese being the earliest migrants, and the more numerous of the minority communities, was chosen to be the first group to be exhibited.

The curators of this project approached members of the Chinese community and others who had experience in research on, and had demonstrable interest in the history of the Chinese in New Zealand to advise the Project Team on the creating and the mounting of this Exhibition. Many hours and sessions for consultation were involved and because of these demands, a local team of Chinese was invited. The people involved were Kirsten Wong, Lynette Shum, Steven Young, Chris Cheng, Nigel Murphy, David and Esther Fung. Manying Ip and James Ng being in Auckland and Dunedin respectively acted as distant consultants. This team met with the Museum Project Group on numerous evening meetings, bringing with them their experience, information from their families and friends, historic records and materials towards this project. These meetings which were in some way a catharsis for the Chinese team members were often charged with emotion as well as good humour. Much of the data were unknown to the Museum Project Team, and they experienced a depth of revelation on the factual and emotional aspect of the Chinese history in New Zealand.

The Exhibition was opened in February 1998. Many visitors, especially Chinese New Zealanders, both long established and new were pleased and impressed by a good and well executed display. Many commented that it was about time the story of the Chinese was told and recognised. The Exhibition was finally closed on 31 July, 2000 at a ceremony in Te Papa. It was hoped at the concept stage of the Exhibition that it could be exhibited at other museums in the major cities and other provincial galleries. If you are outside Wellington and have missed seeing the Exhibition, you should ask your local Chinese Community to work with your local museums and galleries and educational institutions to negotiate with Te Papa to make this possible.

Esther Fung

This speech was delivered by David Fung representing the Chinese advisory team at the closing ceremony. On behalf of the team from the Chinese community who advised the staff of Te Papa in the curating of this exhibition about the Chinese, we thank Te Papa in giving expertise, time and space for this Exhibition. We had worked hard and striven to give not only the facts and materials but also our feelings concerning the history of the Chinese in New Zealand. Despite our disappointment, that there was not as much space devoted to it, and that there was not as much emotional impact and humanity coming through as we had hoped for, we were nevertheless pleased that this Exhibition was an important and significant recognition of the place of our people in this land.

In searching for information about Chinese in New Zealand, from the writings of history from Keith Sinclair to the most recent publication of the Historic Atlas of New Zealand, the subject of the Chinese is dismissed in a few sentences; at the most a paragraph. It is therefore of no surprise that New Zealanders including the younger generation of Chinese New Zealanders are on the whole ignorant of the place and the role of the Chinese in New Zealand. This exhibition is therefore a very important first step in redressing this neglect. It has been a good exhibition, and a successful one despite of some of our misgivings.

While this is the end of this particular episode, I trust that this is really the beginning of continuing efforts to research, to develop and to disseminate a truer and fairer history of the Chinese in New Zealand.

The writings of James Ng, Manying Ip and the sterling research done by Nigel Murphy are significant steps towards this goal. It is our earnest hope that the Museum of New Zealand should provide a permanent space for some aspect of Chinese New Zealanders in this Te Papa, Our Place. And that provision should be made for resources, for further study both for schools and for the general public. The Chinese community will and must play our part in promoting scholarship and facilities to achieve this goal. We shall continue to look for expert support and co-operation from Te Papa who had the wisdom and vision to initiate this important Exhibition. Once again we thank you and look forward to working with you in future projects.