

Pepe Choong

Contributed by Lachlan
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Dear Steven,

First off; thank you for your insightful and enlightening website. I discovered your website though Manying while working on a research project last year. I am presently working on Diasporic Chinese Immigrant mothers and Kiwi Daughters for my thesis so the subject of Chinese New Zealanders is one of my passions. I just want you to know that we, and I believe I speak for the many Chinese New Zealanders who have visited your website, appreciate your time and dedication. You deserve an award !!!!

It is strange that I have never clung on to my Chinese heritage as much as I have until the Xenophobia of the early 1990's. In the past, I have always considered myself an Overseas Chinese as well as a New Zealander but the two identities were somehow mutually exclusive of each other until I had to justify my place and identity as a Chinese New Zealander in the height of the xenophobia. In fact, the xenophobia sparked off a return to my eastern roots, it made me ponder on issues of identity as a diasporic Chinese struggling with notions of geographic, spiritual and emotional homelands.

I wouldn't dare claim I know perfectly well the indignities the old immigrants suffered when they came during the gold rush era but I would sincerely say, I share and understand the intrinsic essence of what it means to be a Chinese-- a hypervisible minority living among white culture. Don't get me wrong, I love New Zealand, It is home and my kids are extremely proud Chinese New Zealanders. We love it and both my kids are N.Z born.

During the Asian backlash, some "old" Chinese immigrants and I mean second, third and fourth generation Chinese New Zealanders felt that the "new" Asian immigrants from Asia were partly responsible for the backlash. True or false, it divided the Chinese community and I who have been brought up in Malaysia, did my tertiary edu. in Canada and finally settling in N.Z and calling it home, was heartbroken. Yet, in some ways, it brought many of us together. To me, one of the most amazing facts about being a Chinese is the fact that regardless of where we call our geographical home, our Confucian values have remained timeless and one of the main attributes is the feeling of "clanship". As a Chinese, anyone who are my parents' age group was naturally an aunty or uncle. I have taught my children to address all my Chinese friends as aunty and uncle and my pakeha friends as "Mr and Mrs." or if they prefer by their first names. When my daughter was 7 she wrote in her diary writing at school that she is very lucky because she has the most aunts and uncles than anybody in her class.

I am a fairly recent immigrant having lived in N.Z for only slightly more than 15 years and I cannot claim to speak for others but watching and listening to Helen Clarke's apology on the news and Holmes programme brought tears to my eyes even though none in my family has paid the poll tax but I feel, as all Chinese New Zealanders must feel that at last, our government has recognized a wrong and is big enough to admit it and apologized even if it took over a hundred years. IT is such a positive step forward and I feel especially proud that our small nation is the first nation to apologize and is in the process of taking steps to rectify its mistakes.

Let us hope, America, Canada and Australia will follow suit.

I am and will always remain a proud Chinese New Zealander,
Pepe Choong.