

The Changing Face of Chinese New Zealanders

Allen Chang's memories of his grandfather Chun Moon Ching [George] and his father Chun Jor Poi [Albert] and a personal account from his son Chun Wei Sing [Roger]
 An adaptation of a paper presented by Allen Chang in February 2000 at the:
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The Changing Face of Chinese New Zealanders: Four generations of a family

By Allen Chang and Roger Chang

This is the story of four generations of a Chinese New Zealand family. In many ways the experiences are fairly typical. The elder Chang was born in one of the five traditional home counties from which almost all the pre-1987 Chinese New Zealand families claim ancestral roots. Under normal circumstances, Chang may have stayed in his home village forever, were it not for the gruelling combination of poverty, natural disaster and civil unrest that permeated southern China in the mid to late 1800s. These conditions fuelled a massive wave of migration, now termed the Chinese diaspora.

When Chang left China in 1883, he was just one of thousands who left in search of a paying livelihood. In Chang's case, this livelihood turned out to be a business opportunity in the small rural town of Hawera. Today, there are well over 80 direct descendants of the elder Chang, (George Ah Chang or Chun Moon-ching).

In this revealing story, George Ah Chang's grandson, Allen, and his great-grandson Roger, tell the lives of successive generations of Changs. From the elder Chang, whose life was a complex weave of small town New Zealand, life in Sun-gai village in the Jung Seng county in southern China and the big city life of Guangzhou, one of China's major cities, to his great-grandson who presents an ambivalent and yet entirely modern story of an uncertain identity.

Each life story resonates with the experience of an entire generation and, in doing so, captures fragments of over 100 years of change.

George Ah Chang (Chun Moon-ching 1863-1945) Born Sun-gai, China

The first Chang migrant, like his compatriots, was a sojourner. His primary interest was in making money to support his family in China, and saving enough capital to return to China as a man of means. It was a risky undertaking and there were many who didn't return to China, whose businesses, health or morale failed. Chang, however, was one of the successful ones. Like many of his compatriots he led a double life, with family and businesses both in New Zealand and China. Although he spent much of his life in New Zealand, Chang and others like him lived in a very Chinese world. Partly this was personality and the difficulty surmounting cultural barriers. However, there was also the racism of the host community. Chang lived in times when anti-Chinese feeling in New Zealand was at its most virulent. He would certainly have experienced racism on a day-to-day basis. This may explain why he, and others, regularly returned to China and why he maintained his very traditional rural values, in the face of changing times and circumstances.

The patriarch of my family was my paternal grandfather, George Ah Chang, or in Chinese, Chun Moon-ching. Born in 1863 in the village of Sun-gai, Jung Seng county, he was one of five sons of Chun Sik-gway, a poor villager. Life was extremely hard in those times and many went to seek their fortunes overseas.

My grandfather came to New Zealand in 1883 at 20 years old. He was following in his older brother's footsteps.

Although the older brother returned to China he still has a number of descendants living in New Zealand, many with the surname Bing.

My grandfather chose the Taranaki town of Hawera in which to settle. It was, perhaps, a case of chain migration. In fact, many of the families from Sun-gai village first settled in Hawera.

As well as a new home my grandfather got a new name. His name is registered on his naturalisation certificate as Ah Chang because that is how it sounded to the clerk and the family name has become known as [Ah] Chang to this day. 'Ah' was commonly added to the personal names of Chinese migrants by customs officials. It is generally applied to someone of inferior status and has subsequently been dropped by many Chinese New Zealand families.

Of course, on arriving in New Zealand, my grandfather would have paid the £10 poll-tax. The poll-tax was levied on all Chinese migrants in an attempt to curb Chinese migration to New Zealand. It did not apply to any other ethnic group. It was perhaps because of the poll-tax that my grandfather was naturalised in 1895. The wives of naturalised Chinese were exempt from the tax, which in 1896 was raised to the then huge sum of £100. My grandfather's first wife migrated to New Zealand only a few years after in 1898. She was required to pay the £100. The records show that a refund was made in 1905 to Ah Chang, because the "marriage paper proved naturalised Chinese". This was also the year that my grandfather was naturalised, and it was also the year in which my paternal grandmother, grandfather's wife No.2 arrived in New Zealand.

In Hawera, my grandfather set up a small goods store. A newspaper advertisement from the Hawera Star dated

1899, shows he sold goods such as "pure Ceylon tea, sugar, Van Houten cocoa, Colman's mustard, kerosene, wheat, oats and chaff". The advertisement also states that he was an agent for his brother Chin Ting's vegetable garden and flower seeds, and that he was a cash buyer of "wood fungus". This fungus, which was prolific in Taranaki at the time, was highly prized in China. A thriving export trade initiated by dairying pioneer Chew Chong was said to have pulled Taranaki through the 1880s depression. The store amply supported my grandfather's first wife and their two children, George and Veta. Veta was born in Hawera in 1900 and was given the name Poon Gum, meaning pot of gold, because grandfather was doing well in his business.

In 1912 Chang moved his whole family to Wellington. It must have been a good move because by 1918 he had made enough to return to China so the children could get a Chinese education. Family legend has it that wife No 1 did not like it in New Zealand, and when she arrived back in China she persuaded grandfather to take a second wife who would return with him to New Zealand. Life must have been difficult for her. There were very few Chinese women in the country and she would have been quite isolated. In addition, there was a very strong anti-Chinese sentiment at the time.

My paternal grandmother, Lo Tim, was wife No 2. She came to New Zealand in 1905 and bore my grandfather five children; three sons and two daughters. The first three, Albert (my father), Norman and Dolly were born in Hawera. My paternal grandmother was 20 and my grandfather was 46 at the time of their marriage. The first wife and their two children stayed in China, supported by my grandfather.

Of his European friends we can only guess, but as with all the Sun-gai men of that generation, he was instrumental in helping others to come to New Zealand. His brother, James Chin Ting (Chun Moon-ting), the founding President of the Tung Jung Association, had helped him to bring his wife to New Zealand and both brothers likewise helped other couples. Wives of naturalised Chinese men were exempt from the poll-tax. However, marriage in China was not recognised in New Zealand so married couples wishing to avoid payment of poll-tax had to go through another, western, marriage ceremony. This was usually done on arrival in New Zealand, or in Sydney, prior to arrival in New Zealand.

After 13 years in Hawera and six in Wellington, my grandfather returned to China in 1918. With the proceeds of his business in New Zealand he became quite well-to-do. He had a house in Sun-gai village that I have visited and it appears unchanged from the early 1900s. I am also told that he owned a number of houses and property in Guangzhou city. He had become a prominent man.

The wedding of his daughter Veta in 1922 was testament to this and there are still people living today who remember the occasion. The wedding was given added weight because of my grandfather's long absence and the fact that the marriage involved two well-known New Zealand migrant families from the same district. People from the village remember my Aunt Veta as a beautiful, refined young woman who was well-brought up in the Confucian tradition and who always put herself out to help family.

Veta's elder brother George also married, but in New Zealand. His wife Betty was a European New Zealander who was later very supportive of my parents when they came back to New Zealand.

All through the 1920s my grandfather developed his business interests in China. By the early 1930s he had a fleet of buses in the provincial capital Guangzhou. Among the drivers were two of his sons, my father and his brother.

By this time, my grandfather was the patriarch of a large and somewhat complex family. Following the death of his second wife, my grandfather married his third wife.

The families lived separately. It is said that wife No1 did not like the second wife's children and made her husband build another house for them. This was in Harm Har Larn in Guangzhou city.

A highlight of my grandfather's life was in 1934, when Hong was born - the first fully Chinese grandson on the male side. My grandfather doted on him and he was so spoiled they say, that he ruled the household. If he wanted to be fed standing in the rain, they fed him standing in the rain. If he cried, everybody in the house took turns to make him stop crying.

To all others of his family, however, he remained a formidable character.

My Aunt Betty's husband Ray recalls that when they were courting, he would sometimes bring my Aunt home late and he had a signal for tapping on the front gate so that only the servant would come to the door. If grandfather had caught him, he would have had a roasting.

When the whole family ate in the house, all the children, their wives and husbands, had to keep quiet while grandfather rambled on and philosophised about life in China and in New Zealand. "He was pretty strict—when you were at the dinner table. Nobody dared to talk and you just ate your rice and left the table as soon as you were finished because he would talk all the time," said Uncle Ray.

His days in China, however, were numbered. In 1937 Japan invaded China and, confronted by war, my grandfather chose to return to New Zealand after some 20 years in China. His third wife remained in China to look after his affairs. In New Zealand he lived in turn with his two sons, Norman and Albert, and celebrated his 80th birthday in Motueka with his extended family. Not all of his extended family could be there, but even so there were numerous children and grandchildren who were.

Although I remember very little about him, he apparently used to babysit my sister Esme and me while my parents worked in their shop. He used to sneak chocolate fish and lollies from the shop for us when he took us for walks around the town. This was a great treat as they were rationed during the war. Age had not weakened his control over the family. When he was sick, his daughters and daughters-in-law took turns to come and nurse him in Motueka.

My grandfather died in 1945 at the age of 82 and was one of the first Chinese to be cremated in Nelson. His ashes were kept in the council chambers and every year on ANZAC Day the family would go and bai sang, or pay respects. Grandfather's ashes were taken back to China by his oldest son George and buried in the ancestral burial site in Sun-gai village. My cousin, Uncle George's oldest daughter, Sui Qun, tends the grave and maintains it with money sent back by different relatives. Only the names of his first two wives are inscribed alongside his.

Albert Ah Chang (Chun Jor-poi 1908-1994) Born Hawera, New Zealand
The lives of the first generation of this era are also characterised by the leading of two lives, one in China and one in New Zealand. It was extremely common for New Zealand-born children to be taken back to China for a Chinese education. As such, many of this generation had a disrupted education. Being brought up in two places, however, prepared them for life in two countries. Albert's experience of life on the main trunk line in the central North Island in the 1920s, is about as Kiwi as it gets—in the traditional sense. For New Zealanders it was a formative era, and one that evokes an incredible amount of nostalgia—thanks to the work of the writer Frank Sargeson. In fact Sargeson was Albert Ah Chang's contemporary and, incidentally, also spent time as a market gardener.

And yet the Albert whose English was honed in upcountry pubs was also the Albert who had an arranged marriage and was a filial and obedient son. The combination of Kiwi heartland and Chinese tradition was unique to this generation.

It was also this generation that experienced the full brunt of the massive social and economic changes of the 20th century. For these people, the turning point in so many ways was World War II. Not only did the war force many to make a definitive choice between living in New Zealand or China, but the Government's war refugee quota enabled men in New Zealand to be joined by their wives and children. For many years it was very difficult for families to migrate here. The community changed from being largely male, to being family oriented. Attitudes changed as well. For those who made the choice, New Zealand was truly home.

The war also brought a thaw in anti-Chinese attitudes. This is vividly illustrated in Albert's relationship with the rest of the Motueka community. Opportunities for Chinese grew, but for Albert's generation the changes came too late in terms of working life. For the most part, hard physical labour was the norm. Being up before dawn to get to the markets and closing the shop at midnight was a commonplace experience, at least up until the 1950s. The changes were all for the benefit of the following generations.

The third child of George Ah Chang, the first from his second marriage, was Albert, my father. Born in Hawera in 1908, the family moved to Wellington in 1912. My father would often talk about growing up and going to school in Wellington. He was not a scholar and would often get into trouble for doing naughty things, like riding on the backs of trams along Courtenay Place to Clyde Quay school so that he wouldn't have to pay the fare. His fare money would be spent on going to the pictures or buying things to eat. He described himself as a bit of a larrikin.

After Albert's mother became ill following the birth of her youngest daughter Betty his father decided to take the whole family back to China. They returned in 1918 when Albert was 10. Although he enjoyed going back to China he later regretted that his education suffered as a result. He was barely literate in English, having missed school for all sorts of reasons, and he could not read Chinese—at the age of 10 it was too late for him to catch up to others in his age group. As an older man, he complained that he was neither one nor the other. In 1925 Albert returned to New Zealand. He was 17 years old. He spent the following three years working in places like Mangaweka, Taihape and Utiku—all small railway towns. He told stories of friends working in fruit shops, and how he cooked for all the workers. Saturday nights would find him and his friends boarding the trains for Taihape to have some fun. Albert's English language was learnt in the pubs of New Zealand and every other word was "bloody" this and "bloody" that, but he had a great sense of humour. People liked him and he knew how to get people's support. I would describe him as very cunning when it came to his business dealings with fruit and vegetable growers.

In 1928 he was recalled to China by his father who had arranged a marriage for him with the daughter of a friend from the neighbouring town of Sun-tong. My mother Ng Yee-kun [King] and my father were married in October 1928. In an era of arranged marriages, my father actually admitted that he loved my mother before they married. This was highly unusual.

Albert stayed in China for two years following his marriage and in 1930 was sent back to New Zealand. For three years he worked at various jobs, but eventually, being separated from his wife, Yee-kun, was too much, and he returned to China. My brother Hong was born the following year, 1934, and my sister Moya not too long after. The China days, however, were short-lived. In 1936 George, his father, sent both him and his brother Norman back to New Zealand. At about this time the Japanese were invading China, and New Zealand had relaxed its immigration laws to allow an annual quota of 10 permits for the wives and children of New Zealand-born Chinese men to come to New Zealand.

Yee-kun's passage was booked on the Awatea, but on arrival in February 1938, the couple had to go through another marriage ceremony in the registrar's office in Wellington because their Chinese marriage was not recognised.

Albert was working with his older brother George in Waimate at the time and he took his family there when they first arrived. In her short stay with my Uncle George's family, my mother, Yee-kun, was impressed by the industriousness and devotion of George's European wife Betty. I myself remember Betty in later years, sitting up all hours of the night ironing clothes and darning socks long after the shop had closed and all the family had gone to bed. Her husband George was also a tireless worker, like all of my father's family.

By this time, Albert's younger brother Norman had settled in Nelson and was running a very successful fruit and vegetable business. He persuaded Albert to settle in Motueka. Another cousin, Chan Bing-tai, had also settled in Blenheim in the early 1930s and this helped him decide on Motueka—a small hop and tobacco-growing area in the South Island. There were no other Chinese living in Motueka at the time and Yee-kun spoke no English.

Life was hard for the family in those days. I have vivid memories of my parents getting up well before we did each day, and my father, Albert, doing two trips to Nelson in his little truck, bringing stock back before the shop actually opened. While Albert was travelling, Yee-kun would be washing carrots, lettuces, parsnips and cabbages in freezing cold water, and stacking them on the shelves ready for opening. I recall her being ridiculed on numerous occasions for her lack of English. "Solly, no banana" was a popular catchcry. The shop never closed until the last picture session finished at midnight, just in case someone might want to buy a pack of cigarettes on the way home. Those were indeed tough times.

In the early days, the family suffered from the anti-Chinese attitude of the community. Many of the Motueka locals resented a Chinese family moving into their town. Although a New Zealander by birth, Albert was not allowed to buy a house (although there was a willing seller), so the family slept at the back of the shop in a shed. As there were no laws against New Zealand-born Chinese owning land, this must have been a simple case of personal prejudice.

Thankfully a few influential people who recognised them for what they were and their value to the community befriended Albert and Yee-kun. It was through the efforts of the Town Clerk and the local constabulary that the family became established and respected, and were permitted to buy a house. All this seems hypocritical because Albert was required to serve as a member of the Home Guard during World War Two.

The focus of the couple's energies was the shop. It was the shop that made the money needed for the family to have a better life. Money was seen as a key ingredient because it brought access to education and other opportunities. Albert often spoke of his father George's wish for his grandchildren to be better educated than he was and go to university. I recall my father saying how much pleasure my graduation would have given grandfather.

For the family the shop was much more than a job, it was a whole way of life. In fact the shop saved Albert from being drafted during the war. His was considered an essential service to the community.

The business grew and became well established. I recall hearing his accountant say, in the mid-1950s that the turnover and net profit percentage was on a par with similar businesses in the bigger cities, like Auckland. Albert developed both the retail and wholesale side of the business and, at its height, he supplied shops, hotels, restaurants and businesses throughout the wider Nelson and Takaka region. He often bought a whole crop from growers and shipped produce to markets around New Zealand in much the same way as supermarkets do today. His packing number P183 was well known to buyers.

As the business developed and the family took on more responsibility Albert was able to relax and spend more time in the community. He was a generous man and helped people as much as he could. Much to everyone's amazement Albert joined the Lions, and for many years he ran the spinning wheel, banked the cash, arranged the rosters and held the position of treasurer and almoner. He declined the position of president because of his lack of English-reading skills. Yee-kun joined in with many of the social activities and through these contacts the couple widened their circle of friends. On his retirement from the shop and prior to leaving Motueka he was referred to as the 'unofficial Mayor of Motueka'.

Throughout their life in Motueka, Albert and Yee-kun looked forward to the family gatherings, and occasional trips to Wellington for weddings, celebrations and betting on the races. They also gained considerable pleasure from their children and grandchildren. They were looking forward to travelling overseas together after retirement, but sadly this was not to be as Yee-kun passed away soon after they left the shop and moved to Lower Hutt. Albert lived for nearly eight years following Yee-kun's death. Although beginning to show signs of Alzheimers Disease, the family persuaded Albert to return to China for a visit in 1992. He enjoyed the trip and for the years until he died he would remember the house where he was a young man and where his baby son was doted on by his father and his family.

Allen Chang (Chun Gu-kerng) Born 1942, Motueka, New Zealand

The first generation to identify themselves as Chinese New Zealanders, as opposed to New Zealand Chinese, were those who grew up during the 1940s and 50s. Unlike their forebears, New Zealand was the only home that they knew. Despite this, almost all of them grew up with a strong feeling of 'Chineseness', although what that constitutes varies enormously. At the very least it was a feeling of being different. These feelings were fuelled by schoolyard taunts—lingering echoes of the virulent racism of the previous decades. Many children, like Allen, had childhoods that revolved around the family shop. As Allen says, 'The shop was a way of life. English friends never seemed to understand this concept.' 'The shop' or the family business, with its emphasis on hard work and communal living, was a defining feature of this generation's Chinese New Zealand identity.

Yet this was a generation that was destined to leave the shop behind. It was this generation which was able to fulfil many of the earlier migrants' expectations in terms of education. Many went on to successful professional careers, aided by parental support and an ever-more receptive white New Zealand. This was the era of integration, a time of both opportunity and loss. (It was in this period that the community's Chinese language skills started to decline).

Unfortunately, it was often only the younger children who could take up the opportunities. Older children frequently

needed to help in the family business.

Allen's story, although brief and modest with regard to his professional career and his wide-ranging community activities, alludes to many of the experiences common to this generation. In particular, the vivid stories of his early family life in the shop show the great influence that these experiences had. The obvious pleasure his parents got from his academic success shows the strength of parental expectations and how these were taken on by the new generation. Finally, like many of his generation, he has developed an interest in family history. In doing so, he joins thousands of others of all ethnicities, each seeking to establish their own particularly New Zealand identities.

As a child I was always aware of my Chinese background and upbringing. Motueka was a small town of around 3,000 people. We were the only Chinese family, although at weekends the families in Nelson and Blenheim invariably got together. I saw and experienced the anti-Chinese attitudes both in the shop and at school. Frequently we were subjected to taunts like 'Ching Chong Chinamen' — these simply firmed our resolve to show others that we could and would be better than them. In this respect the attitudes being expressed against Chinese have probably been very beneficial and have helped Chinese to attain greater heights in the western world than perhaps might have been the case. Later in life I found many similarities between Chinese and Maori values — certainly those directly related to family.

In his earlier years it seemed that Dad left Mum to bring up the family because he was so focused on the business. She was the one who talked with us and guided us through life. She clothed and fed us and, for me anyway, tried to teach me to read and write Chinese, but was not successful. I remember she sent back to China for Chinese readers to teach me, but the only Chinese characters I could recognise were the numbers and that was because they were on the Mah-jong blocks. Mah-jong was a favourite occupation when all the family gathered. Every weekend we would drive over to Nelson or to Blenheim to meet up with the cousins, and the adults would play mah-jong. There would be lots of food and at about midnight the adults would bundle us kids into the trucks and vans and drive over the narrow, winding roads back home. Usually one of us got sick. My mother would often talk with me in Chinese and explain things to me. Mum's education in China had been limited, but she tried to pass on the Confucian ideals of family. Her scary stories of people drugging children and kidnapping them were her attempts to remind me that I had to be careful in a hostile world. As a child my parents encouraged us to join community groups and for many years I was a member of cubs and scouts. Despite the urging from friends at school, I never felt comfortable joining bible class or youth groups, even though it seemed the thing to do at the time.

When not at school we worked in the shop, serving customers, bagging up peas and potatoes or delivering orders on the shop bike. I used to hide behind the shop counter when teachers came into the shop. I was afraid to serve them because of the authority figures they represented. We used to sort and repackage cases and cases of bananas before the days of quality control. Driving the truck through the paddocks of watermelons and deliberately dropping the odd one or two was a memorable pleasure.

For us, the shop was a way of life. English friends never seemed to understand this concept. In retrospect, the opportunities that the shop gave us; the business experience and handling money, were really valuable. The strength and commitment that Mum and Dad showed taught us a lot and moulded our lives.

It was not just hard work. We did have a lot of fun. My sister Esme and I used the shop and the buildings around it as a playground. We did mischievous things like filling empty brown ginger beer bottles with unspeakable liquids, replacing the caps and then putting the bottles back on the shelves for sale. I don't think they were ever sold. My father's licence would have been revoked for sure if anybody had reported it.

We all had to work in the shop after school. My older brother and sisters and their spouses all helped in the shop at different periods and even though I had graduated from university and had a job teaching in another town, I was expected to come home and help when I was on holiday. The one year we did not come home to help over the busy Christmas period, it was made quite clear that Dad disapproved and we never dared to miss another year. It was understood that if the family helped in the business, the business would see that they did not starve. Fortunately for me, being the second son, there was not as much pressure to continue working in the fruit shop as there was on my older brother, who had to forgo his desire to be an accountant or have a career in the air force, to work in the shop. I suspect that these expectations and tensions still exist in Chinese New Zealand families that run family businesses of this type.

At school I worked hard, kept out of trouble, or tried to, and joined in with as many activities as possible. At secondary school I was appointed head prefect and in my final year was awarded the Dux prize. For Motueka High School this was very significant, but perhaps compared to city schools it was not. Certainly in my first few days at Canterbury University I soon realised that the cloistered surroundings of Motueka were indeed very small. My parents celebrated my school achievements with considerable satisfaction and the headmaster was actually able to get them to attend the presentation. This was the only time that I could remember them setting foot in the school.

I took part in a range of sports — hockey, tennis, table tennis, badminton and held the various positions of vice-captain and captain. I also represented Nelson in hockey and tennis. My parents were very proud to see me graduate. They were even more pleased when I was appointed deputy principal of Tauhara College and later as principal of Makora College in Masterton. I suspect that they saw me as achieving some of the goals that my grandfather had set many years ago. I do know that the Chinese community in Masterton took great pride in the fact that the principal of one of their secondary schools was Chinese. I think that being raised in a predominantly European community influenced my attitudes towards other Chinese

people. I have never felt any difficulty relating to family, but it was not until some time after I moved to Wellington that I became more relaxed and comfortable with other Chinese. This is despite the encouragement received from my parents and their strong desire that I should marry a Chinese girl—which is what has happened.

As I have grown older and after travelling to China on an AFS (American Field Service Scholarship) study tour, I have developed a greater interest in the history of my family. I met my cousin in China and we visited Sun-gai village to pay our respects at my grandfather's grave. We also saw his house which is virtually unchanged after all these years. Experiences such as these led to me to oversee the first Sun-gai village reunion in Wellington in 1996. A second reunion was held in Auckland in 1998, at which the booklet Sun Gai Village and the New Zealand Connection was released.

Roger Chang (Chun Wei-sing) Born 1976, Rotorua, New Zealand.

The fourth and final generation represented here is, like previous generations, unique in its own experience. In many ways, theirs is a less straight-forward story, perhaps because there has been less time to put it into historical perspective. Certainly the generation whose formative years fell between 1970 and 1987 have their own issues—much of them to do with identity. At the core is the simple fact that although they may have felt like complete Kiwis, and perhaps been third-generation New Zealanders or more, they were still 'different' in the eyes of many white New Zealanders. They were of course even more 'different'—even outlandish—to Chinese from China, Taiwan or Hong Kong. A popular derogatory term of the time was 'banana', white on the inside, yellow on the outside.

Common experiences in this generation include feeling embarrassed at being different, or being ashamed of being Chinese, feeling alienated or profoundly 'different' from everyone else, Chinese or otherwise, and anger at stereotypes (all Chinese are good at maths, for example). For some, the most difficult experience was the subtle non-acceptance of white New Zealanders. To many in those less multi-ethnic times, you weren't a real New Zealander unless you were white or Maori—no matter how long you'd been in New Zealand. It was this kind of sentiment which fuelled the Asian backlash of the early to mid-1990s.

Roger's story, which he tells in his own words, reflects many of these generational issues. His shock, for example, that others saw him as different, and his struggle for acceptance in the face of being cast by teachers as the 'brainy Asian' (another aspect of the 'model minority' stereotype). He also comments on how others have viewed his choice of study. Ironically, like many others of his generation, it is the all-New Zealand love of sport which has connected Roger with the wider Chinese community, just as it brought together a previous generation of young Chinese New Zealanders, like his father.

There is, however, another level in this very honest text that conveys more complex ambiguities, along with a genuine sense of unease. It is an ambivalence characteristic of a generation who was told to do the impossible—to be Chinese and to be a white New Zealander.

The last 10 to 15 years have brought great changes to New Zealand and Chinese New Zealanders in particular. In general, we have all grown more tolerant of difference. Partly this has been caused by the influx of new Chinese migrants which has forced New Zealanders, including the established Chinese community, to re-evaluate old beliefs. Partly, it just seems to be the way the world is going—people are travelling more, and they have more access to ideas from around the world through the Internet, cable TV and even the goods available in shops. This increased tolerance, one hopes, will translate into a reaffirmation of difference in the coming generation.

Growing up in a truly multicultural society presents different challenges throughout childhood and through to adolescence. As a child I first went to school in Taupo and quickly blended in with the younger children. It was an area not known (then) for its Chinese community. I did not feel Asian, Chinese or different in any other way. I was just a kid going to a school. My family went on Kiwi holidays to beaches, drove around the country in big old cars, the kids ate ice cream and got car sick, Dad wore stubbies, Mum wore plastic sandals, and I had a bowl cut.

I did not actually identify with being 'Chinese' until I was about nine, when I had the fact pushed directly in front of me. There's nothing like being confronted by racial ignorants to affirm your cultural identity.

When we moved to Masterton it was a new town for everyone, and we discovered that we'd entered into hostile territory. I quickly discovered in my early teens that I was treated differently by different groups. As a student I was pampered by the teachers for my supposed 'Asian intellect', but I was also continually confronted by social clique challenges which I had not yet encountered, or been warned about.

This continued for many years, and when I finally began to feel accepted, my family moved again—to Wellington. When I arrived in Wellington, I had to begin another battle of acceptance. Unlike many other Asian students I did not prefer academic study, and instead enjoyed the teamwork of sports and physical activity. I excelled at canoe polo, representing New Zealand at a junior international level in Australia.

I also joined a local Chinese club (Chinese Dragons Sports and Social), my first experience of the Chinese community outside of my extended family. This club played basketball, a sport that I had participated in during my time in Masterton. However, as most of the kids my age had been playing since they were eight or nine, they had already formed a much better grasp of the game. I progressed through the club's grades, each year getting better, and being awarded a most improved player award is still a highlight for me. Despite my successes I still found it hard to be accepted on a social level. I put this down to my own social insecurities and also being moved around during critical phases in my childhood.

Throughout school I maintained average grades, and went on to Victoria University. I had intended to major in

technology at Massey, but decided to go to Victoria to study sociology instead, graduating with a BA in 1998. This had been considered an odd move, as most Asian students are assumed to move through commerce, law, technology, languages and medical-related areas. I noticed this immediately while attending classes. Most times, I was the only Asian present. The fact that I was the only male Asian was not lost on me either.

When I started university, I also started to take a greater interest in the Dragons club, and volunteered to join the committee when membership appeared to falter. I have served in various offices, including vice-chairperson and club secretary, newsletter editor and volleyball chairperson. I have also been involved with Chinese Easter Tournament preparations. In hindsight, it appears that I have emulated my father's activities somewhat!

At the present time, I enjoy being Chinese. It gives me a different perspective on situations, and it also allows the luxury of the positive stereotypes (hardworking, honest and so on) that society practically hands me. On the negative side, I do still have to deal with those who consider Chinese and other Asians to be inferior. In the past, I may have dealt with this violently (taking advantage of my size), but in today's world you cannot always let your emotions guide your actions. I find retaliation only fuels the fire.

One of the best experiences I had was going to Taiwan as part of a Taipei-sponsored cultural trip. This introduced me to Chinese people from New Zealand, Australia, Singapore and South Africa. The idea of Chinese South Africans was completely alien to me, and the experience served to widen my view of the world, as well as my travelling ambitions. This trip was a much-needed confidence booster, and I was once again thrust into a group of people with whom I had nothing in common but my genes.

Growing up in New Zealand has allowed me a unique perspective on being Chinese. I have had opportunities here that I would not have had if I had been born in China or somewhere else. I may not have had the social-acceptance challenge, but I may also have been able to converse in Cantonese (or Mandarin)—something I regret my parents not having taught me. However, New Zealand is by far one of the safest and most balanced countries in the world, and I consider myself to be a full Kiwi, through and through.

End.