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SEYIPS' 50TH

Steven Young

The New Zealand Seyip Association recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1949.

CLAN ORGANISATION

Before the recent mass influx of new immigrants, the Seyip Association was one of three organisations to which nearly every Chinese person in New Zealand nominally belonged. Membership of these organisations (the Poon Far Association and the Tung Jung Association being the other two) was based on the geographical location of ones ancestral village in Guangdong province in southern China. The region covered by these three organisations was the main source of migrants not only to New Zealand but also to Australia, Canada and the United States during the Gold Rush and the period following, in a slow process of chain migration. There are local Seyip Associations each of these countries.

SOCIAL WELFARE

These three clan organisations (and their predecessor organisations) provided a form of social welfare and support for single Chinese men and later Chinese families in the early days when loneliness, hardship and racial discrimination was commonplace and "dogs and Chinese" were not allowed into many public facilities. These associations arranged accommodation for new arrivals and often loans, jobs and interpreters. In later years they provided a venue for social gatherings, the celebration of traditional festivals and other community activities, in a period when Chinese were barely accepted in New Zealand society.

FIRST BUILDING

In 1929 the Seyip Clansmen's Library was set up in Wellington to look after the interests of Seyip people, but it was not until 1950 that a national organisation was born, and a building purchased. This building in Vivian Street now houses the Petit Lyon restaurant. In it, escalopes of pork fillet served on a bed of bok choy and field mushrooms with a soy, garlic and ginger jus is nothing new, it probably had a more humble name: pork chop suey. The dormitory was where the fine dining salon is now located and no doubt the guests, then as now, had to eat what was created by Chef - no choices.

ADAPTING

Fifty years on, with members now well-established, there is little need for its welfare functions. The Association now has new premises in Ghuznee Street which serves as a centre for fortnightly social gatherings and the teaching of putong hua (mandarin language). President Ken Chan says that the Association also has plans for extensions to the building to better provide for the elderly and the younger generation. Members now have the time and the means to visit Seyip sister organisations around the Pacific basin, re-visit their ancestral homes to help the younger generation find their roots and participate at many levels of local community affairs.

Ken Chan - lateral thinker

Ken Chan has been President of the NZ Seyip Association for a long time - 30 years in fact. Stories from his life illustrate his lively approach to living: Wellington College schoolboy Ken wanted to enlist to fight for NZ at a time Chinese was barred from the Armed Forces. Bounced several times by the recruiting sergeant, he got one of the customers at his father's Thorndon laundry to sign his papers - the Chief Justice of New Zealand. During a pilgrimage to China in the early '50s he given a bit of roughing up by Communist cadre and detained 3 years as a suspected member of the "landlord class". English-educated Ken took the opportunity to learn the local language and surprised his father with reports of his predicament in Chinese. Always vocal in his support of China

as a member of the family of nations even under communist rule, he attracted the attention of Brigadier Gilbert of the dreaded Security Intelligence Service (SIS) who planted an agent outside his house. In the middle of winter Ken invited the agent inside for a real good look and a cup of tea.

RECKONING WITH THE PAST - contemporary Chinese painting

For those who missed this exhibition of contemporary Chinese paintings in Palmerston North (and our write-up in the December issue of Chinese Voice) this is your very last chance. The paintings will be in New Plymouth 1 May to 13 June 1999 at the Govett-Brewster Gallery. (Ask the local arts pooh bas why the exhibition by-passed Wellington.) The paintings are said to be reflect the search for history, continuity and identity in a culture subjected to massive change. They are also said to be painted expressly for favourable criticism by Western cogniscenti.

OBITUARY

WINSTON HWANG, a leader of the local Taiwanese community, president of the Hwa Guang Society, and a Vice-Chairman of the Asian Committee of the NZ National Party passed away 9 April 1999.