

Chinese Voice 18 June 1998 issue

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When, as Chinese New Zealanders and members of an immigrant-based ethnic community, our lives seem swept in directions we seemingly cannot control, it is sometimes useful to view our circumstances from a more international and historical perspective.

It is useful to remember that we are part of the Chinese Diaspora, the succeeding waves of migrants who have left China in past two hundred or so, to settle not only in other parts of Asia but also in Australasia, Oceania, the Americas, Europe and even Africa. Often the social changes and political pressures that currently impact on our community in NZ are echoed in other Chinese communities around the world. Not only can we derive some comfort from knowing that we share some of our problems with other similar communities, but we can learn from their successes and even their mistakes. Sometimes we need to take heed of warnings from developing political events occurring in other countries; sometimes we can help by adding our voices to protest blatant abuses.

In NZ because we are a smaller, more moderate, relaxed country we sometimes miss out on the "best of the best" but equally we avoided the "worst of the worst" as illustrated by recent events.

In Indonesia, which is undergoing nothing less than a revolution, the Chinese who make up a sizable proportion of the population, are denied some very basic human rights in the name of national unity. They were forbidden to teach their own language and even the use of Chinese personal names. They were barely allowed into the civil service and not allowed to join the armed forces and of course they were not allowed to form political parties. Their participation in the country was limited to the professions and business. As expected they did well in these areas, but when troubles came, the anger of the people was directed at the so-called Chinese merchant classes, who might be nothing more than the owners of the local food shop. The looting, arson and pillage have been widely reported in the international media; but less has been reported about the human rights abuses by the armed forces against the Chinese and the horrific public gang rape and degradation of Chinese girls and women during the riots. What can one do now to help these people? Probably little except to add our voices to a demand for a fair trial of those involved.

Indonesia may be a bit far away, but this week we find out how many seats Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party will get in the Queensland Parliament. Famously derided by David Lange as "yesterday's fish 'n' chip wrapper is today's news" Hanson has managed to connect with the racist streak in white Australia with a "I want everyone to have a fair go" manifesto which is totally incomprehensible on everything except for two items: Asians immigrants are ruining Australia and too much money is being spent on pampering the Aborigines (whom Queenslanders use to rape, hunt and poison in a process little short of genocide.) More than likely the One Nation Party will hold the balance of power in the Parliament with widespread implications for Australian federal politics in general and immigration policy in particular. The Queensland result is a clear signal for the ruling federal coalition to reverse the recent trend towards a more liberal immigration policy, and in part follows a red-neck tendency identified and exploited by the NZ First Party led by someone we all know and love.

So these are the "bad" stories of the moment for communities of the Chinese Diaspora, but there are many positive stories too which are uplifting and pertinent. Until now it has been difficult to learn about these unless they got big enough to hit the mainstream media. However, one new source is a website at <http://www.huaren.org>.

The following are extracts from the Welcome Page:

Thanks for finding us, and welcome to the HUAREN web site.

The important question that needs to be answered is: who are we?

We are a group of individuals who are scattered throughout the world with one goal in common: a passion to promote kinship and understanding among all Overseas Chinese.

Our primary focus is on the welfare of Overseas Chinese: their struggles to gain recognition, to receive fair treatments, to overcome harmful stereotypes, and to experience self-respect and self-worth.

Although our vision is global, the situations in South East Asia warrant special concerns at present.

An important goal of Huaren is to foster a spirit of cooperation among Overseas Chinese and Friends who will voice our concerns towards the sorry plights of our kin in dire need for safety and basic human dignity.

Chinese are estimated to be living in over 136 different countries, making it perhaps the most widespread ethnic group in the world.

We often encounter Chinese-Americans or Chinese-Canadians who know or care little of their counterparts elsewhere. Such ignorance and indifference should be corrected.

Huaren welcomes contributions of personal experience, and stories ranging from overcoming initial difficulties of being cast as "foreigners", to unique insight into inter-ethnic relationships, and to lighter notes on the transformation of Chinese cuisine and travel experience and adventures will all be deeply appreciated.

We hope this web site will provide a convenient meeting place for the Chinese Diaspora and Friends who are interested to share their life experience, both the funny side and the serious side, and to offer help to those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

This web site has extensive information about the Chinese world-wide, their history and their heritage, harrowing stories of their troubles and uplifting stories of their successes. Yes, it is a bit rah rah and American, but is a rich resource that will grow even richer with time. And yes, it includes a section on New Zealand, with contributions from the usual suspects.