

Chinese Voice 6 February 1997 issue

Contributed by Lachlan
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- Triads under the Bed - Politicians and Police looking hard for Triads in NZ
- Year of the Ox - and a review of the Year of the Rat in NZ
- The Shanghai - Historic restaurant demolished for apartment block

Triads Under the Bed

by Steven Young

The mainstream media seems a bit short of anti-Asian news these days: it is again raising the spectre of Triads in New Zealand, when there is almost no evidence, and indeed no news at all. What we do have is Labour MP Phil Goff, raising an alarm, journeying to Hong Kong, and returning to confirm that yes, there is a problem. He then very publicly confers with senior Police and even entices the NZ First Minister of Police Mr Elder, a former Labour colleague, to agree. While Mr Goff may be sincere in his beliefs, one should not forget that he is also the Opposition spokesman for Justice and a possible contender for the Labour leadership.

What hard evidence is there to support the contention that there is a Triad problem? A few idle Asian youngsters in a scuffle, a Vietnamese shoplifting ring and what else? A severed hand in a plastic bag carried around by loan collectors? Please!

Like any large city, Auckland has its share of pimps, gamblers, loan sharks and drug dealers; yet without much evidence, their activities are ascribed to Asian crime syndicates. A solution is then offered: Let's change the immigration rules (again) to exclude this variant of the yellow peril.

Let's look at reality: New Zealand is an open society with an educated population, without much of a Chinatown even in Auckland. The police are uncorrupted, the courts are independent, the country is surrounded by water and the borders are well controlled. Asians make up about 1.5% of the population and their share of the underground economy is correspondingly small. In this environment it is very hard for Asian gangsters to do well. And indeed the Asian crime squad in Auckland actually consists two police officers. (This is probably the same size as the lost pet squad and only one more than the UFO squad.)

Most Asians would support any realistic measures to keep the Triads as far away from these shores as possible. The Asian population does not have a code of silence to protect the Triads, but it is very difficult to report anything if there is nothing to report. But they are as mad as hell about people inventing an Asian crime problem and accusing them of concealing it.

Year of the Ox

by Steven Young

This weekend marks the beginning of the lunar Year of the Ox. The year of the Ox is supposed to be good for settling domestic affairs and ironing out differences. People born in Ox years, 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973 and 1985 are supposed to be conscientious, down to earth, dependable - and stubborn.

Internationally, the previous Year of the Rat has been eventful for overseas Chinese: it was marked by the election of Gary Locke, a Chinese, as Governor of Washington State, and the nomination of Dr David Ho as TIME's Man of the Year for his work on AIDS research. Unfortunately John Huang was entangled in US Presidential fundraising controversy. The mainland Chinese RATtled their sabres in the Straits of Taiwan following elections not to their liking. Locally Pansy Wong has been elected as NZ first Chinese member of Parliament.

The Year of the Ox will Bear witness to the return of Hong Kong to China and the transfer of executive power there to a Chinese person for the first time in a hundred years, although again in controversial circumstances. In the meantime the Dragon is trying to Cow the people of HK by threatening to Monkey with the law on the freedom of assembly.

Internationally we have a "Bullish" economic outlook especially in the Asian Tiger economies while locally the economic outlook is also positive. Winston Peters is Cock-a-hoop after landing the job of deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer but is adopting a fiscally conservative policy somewhat at odds with his earlier stance - one

might say he is proving to be a financial wolf in Sheep's clothing. Dogged by earlier promises, he may later be accused of being a Snake in the grass for renegeing on social expenditure and Horsing around with an informal ATN funding investigation while Rabbiting on about the Winebox which, after three years, is getting to be a "Boar".

The Shanghai Restaurant - the end of an era

reported by Nigel Murphy

edited by Steven Young

Many will be saddened to see the old Shanghai Cafe at the corner of Taranaki Street and Courtenay Place in ruins. Unchanged for nearly 50 years, for many the Shanghai was an institution. The first Chinese restaurant in Wellington to provide Chinese food for the non-Chinese, it was famous for its Ching dynasty decor - all red, green and gold with plastic Chinese lanterns. To suit its European customers it served dinner with a side plate of buttered bread and the tea it served was as strong as its Railways-strength cups. It had a menu nearly as long as the Great Wall which consisted of variations on a few well-ried dishes: chow mein, fried rice, chop suey, egg foo young, and for the connoisseurs - sweet and sour pork and lemon chicken. Dessert was canned lychees and ice cream. This style of food was a deliberate compromise, blending east and west to meet the tastes of its clientele who could also order steak, eggs and chips.

Earlier Chinese restaurants were small and humble, usually located in Haining Street and served only basic fare to Chinese workers and visitors to Wellington. The Shanghai, which opened in 1948 was large, served Europeans and was located in busy Courtenay Place. The original owners were Ng Soon Wah and Joe Lai Choy - the latter a well-known figure in town. He owned the Yuen Tung shop on the corner of Haining and Tory Streets and was known as the "king of Haining Street." Because he was a man of influence in both the European and Chinese communities, all the important Wellingtonians of the day attended the opening of the Shanghai. In 1951 Choy left the partnership and started the Hong Kong Restaurant in Taranaki Street and by the mid-60's there were at least 10 such restaurants in Wellington including the Dragon, Kowloon, Great Wall, and Cathay. However, none could rival the Shanghai for size, class and sophistication, and for 30 years it was the best Chinese restaurant in Wellington by far.

The Shanghai was owned by Ng Soon Wah and his son Thomas Carr Yam Ng until 1956 when it was sold to a cousin Humphrey Ng who ran it until 1972 when it passed into the hands of in-laws of the family KK and Kit Har Yen. In all, three generations of children grew up in the restaurant, riding their bikes among the diners, playing in the kitchen and later tending the till. The Ngs and the Yens grew up with their customers who were patrons for decades. The Shanghai was popular with the Chinese community being a meeting place and the venue for mahjong. Humphrey Ng started a tradition for hand made wonton and noodles and people travelled for miles just for a bowl of its famous wonton soup.

Later a new style of restaurant appeared on the scene: the Lotus, the Yangtse, the Jasmin and the Jade Garden which served an "authentic" style of cooking. Later the wave of new Chinese immigrants brought even more change - yum char style eating, regional cooking and specialised cuisines. But the Shanghai always had its niche and a loyal clientele. The Shanghai never owned its own site and last year became a victim of the boom in inner city apartments. It closed on 29 December 1996 and with it closed a chapter of local Chinese history. But a new Shanghai will open in March further along in Manners Street. The Shanghai is dead - long live the Shanghai!