

Chinese Voice 31 October 1996 issue

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Pansy Wong appointed a List MP after the 1997 elections

by David Fung

It is now confirmed that Pansy Wong is the first Chinese to become an MP in New Zealand. This is an historic event for New Zealand and for the Chinese New Zealanders in particular.

Pansy has attracted a good deal of media attention both before and after the 1996 MMP Election. (She was profiled in the last issue of Chinese Voice just prior to the Elections.) Her credentials and experience in professional and public affairs, her pleasant disposition, youth and energy will serve her well in her new role as Parliamentarian. The Chinese community will watch her progress with great interest.

I asked Pansy Wong recently how she sees herself in her new role in relation to the New Zealand Chinese community. She was conscious of the goodwill and support from the Chinese community throughout the country.

While she was a list MP and not voted in on a Chinese ticket, she regards her election as an MP as symbolic: At last, after more than 130 years, Chinese New Zealanders are being recognized as part of New Zealand, and are willing and able to stand for national and local office. She hopes that her entry into Parliament will encourage other Chinese, particularly the younger generation, to become involved with public and governmental affairs, to learn and to understand the political process of this country and to participate actively so that we are respected in our own right and not to be marginalized.

There will inevitably some unrealistic expectations of her as a Chinese MP. But she sees her role for the Chinese community is that of an effective communication channel. (She is fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin and English). With her empathy to the old and the new Chinese New Zealanders, she could communicate directly and effectively with all sections of the Chinese community, and be available to address their particular issues and concerns.

I mentioned that some of these issues and concerns had led to the formation of the Ethnic Minority Party, would this be a more effective vehicle? She replied: "It would be much better to have a wider perspective and be part of the wider community. It does not matter what political affiliation each of us have as long as we understand the political process and by participating as part of the wider community we will be able to achieve our aims and be respected for our effort. The Ethnic Minority Party, with its narrow focus, had little support from the Chinese community as shown by the polling results."

Pansy will be setting up an office in Wellington in the near future and would be able to see members of her wider constituency in her capacity as an MP. We can expect that she will continue to raise the Chinese community's political awareness. Let's hope there are other aspiring politicians amongst Chinese New Zealanders, willing to take a lead from Pansy and come forward to stand in future elections.

Willie Wong - a fruiterer goes big

by Steven Young

Government workers buying their all-fruit lunches from a gruff Willie Wong can be forgiven for not knowing that the Molesworth Fruit Supply is also one of Wellington's largest fresh fruit and vegetable wholesalers. Willie can be forgiven for being a bit grumpy by lunch time because he has probably been up since 2.30 am, and by 8.00 am has picked up his second truck-load of produce from the markets in Tawa and delivered it.

Willie has been in the fruit and vegetable or food business since his youth. A generation ago, working in the family fruit shop virtually defined the lives of many young Chinese in urban New Zealand, instilling family values, moulding their attitudes, reinforcing their work ethic. With the advent of supermarkets, those who stayed in the industry had to adapt.

So while there may seem a reasonable trade through his shop, 85% of Willie's business is actually supplying restaurants, institutions and the merchant fleet. You might buy most of your meals from cafes nowadays, but it's likely Willie still supplies the produce!

Willie is firmly of the view that the "old" Chinese community has earned its place in New Zealand society through hard work, consistent contribution and service over two, three or even four generations. So the recent heated debate regarding immigration has been a disturbing experience for people like Willie in the established Chinese community.

Yes, young Debbie and Daniel sometimes work in the shop with their mum Loretta, but somehow, it doesn't seem she is grooming them to take over the business.

Jim Joe - a chef goes crazy

by Steven Young

If you look past the hyper-active Warren Joe, dancing from table to table with cups of latte' at the Krazy Lounge, you will often see a Chinese gentleman out back, preparing what could be a very trendy possum ragout and Wardorf Salad. To an older generation of diners, he is instantly recognisable as Jim Joe, former chef at the Lotus, a genuine licensed restaurant in the 70's when most other Chinese establishments were little more than chop suey foundries. Jim learnt his trade in China, and successfully re-interpreted it with local produce to wide acclaim - and enough panache to become a TV chef; and just in time to cater for the newly-educated palates of returning NZ tourists at that time.

To Jim, cooking was more than a job, and he used his skills to support Chinese community fund-raising for the MFC when it was but a glint in Michael Fowler's eyes; and for the Chinese Anglican Church and for the Chinese Sports and Cultural Centre - two huge Chinese community building projects.

But the crash of 1987 and its aftermath eventually took its toll of expensive eateries. Jim moved on, first to the Yangtze, then the Orient Express, always retaining a loyal and hungry following. En route, he learned Thai, Japanese and other styles of cooking as the public taste, perhaps jaded by takeaways, moved away from Chinese food.

Today, the cafe style of food and service is king, and right in the middle of it, Jim Joe, having again quickly learned from masters of the style, is dishing it out - like crazy.