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Edited by Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope

REDEFINING THE MAINSTREAM
PROCEEDINGS OF THE DIVERSITY CONFERENCE 2001

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Paper Presented at The Second National Conference on
Reconciliation, Multiculturalism, Immigration and Human Rights

Geelong Waterfront, Victoria, Australia
30 Nov – 1 Dec 2001

Offprint from:

Redefining the Mainstream
Proceedings of the Diversity Conference 2001

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Abstract

The study of social movements in Australia has typically focussed on the big issues - environment, peace and women's movement. More recently, ethnic issues, particularly that of indigenous people, have come to the forefront. However, much of Australian history is still one-dimensional and monochromic. In this paper, I will examine the collective efforts of the Chinese in Australia to construct their social and political identities. The paper will examine the growth of community organisations within the Chinese community and present an analysis of one particular organisation. This paper seeks to challenge the view that the Chinese are apolitical and also to engage with the structural research blinkers informing research on Chinese in Australia. It argues that to redefine the mainstream, social researchers and activists also need to 'rediscover' and redevelop their tools of historical and social understanding.

Introduction

The study of social movements has in the main coalesced around peace, environmental and women's movements. Of late, indigenous peoples have come into their own constituting a genuine social change movement but very little is known of other ethnic groups, their efficacy (or lack of) and their impact on Australia. Australia has historically defined itself via settlement, triumph and achievements in the face of great adversity. And yet, this history as many have pointed out is mono-cultural and masculinist (Schaeffer, 1988; Huggins, 1998; White, 1981). Others have been written out or 'whited out', and when they are not, they are subordinated to the task of History, the history of great men or the 'great struggles'¹.

The Chinese (and Asians) in Australia have had a bad press. They have been the yellow peril, the evil empire, represent an invasion and a force to be feared. Geoffrey Blainey sparked a debate in the 1980s and in the late 1990s and present day Australia, they are again invoked as the problems plaguing Australia, at least by Pauline Hanson's One Nation. And yet, this interest in the Chinese is partial. There is no accounting or active interest in their organisations, their welfare or their role in the political processes². Indeed, many Chinese-Australians have participated in a broad

¹ In *The Politics of Identity in Australia*, the editor, Geoffrey Stokes, and his contributors produced a powerful critique of Australian identity via the discourses of struggles surrounding identity. Gender, sexuality, Aboriginality and multiculturalism were all covered but sadly, there were no critical insights on the Chinese or Asians in Australia. There was instead a discussion of an Australian identity refracted through Asia. Indeed, most discussions today centred on this vexatious issue of 'Asian-Australian identity' nexus – see for example. Ang, et. al. (Ed.) (2000)

² Interest in the Chinese are mainly confined to discussions of demographics and settlement patterns or confined to discussions of migration, in particular those pertaining to intake numbers, characteristics and skills. See for example, Chen (2000); Inglis, et al. (1998); Inglis & Wu (1992). Even in discussions

range of political activities and protests. Since the 1960s, they have been active in the students' movement, the peace movement (through anti-war and anti-nuclear activities); the environmental movement, women's movements and supported human rights and indigenous peoples' struggles both in Australia and elsewhere. Many held key positions in these movements and partook in both national and international fora and activities but have been both invisible and overlooked in accounts of social change and social movements in Australia (Burgmann, 1993) even in those events in which they have played a major role (Stephens, 1998; Gerster and Bassett, 1991). There are a few notable exceptions e.g. Shirley Fitzgerald (1996) in her analysis of the Chinese in Sydney, draws our attention to the activities of some Chinese-Australians in the labour movement³. In the main, the Chinese and their contributions are still 'whited out' in our histories, in our institutions and they are continually victims in our histories.

The disinterest in the Chinese and their organisations is not an accident of history. It is historically rooted. Having barred them from settling with a series of exclusion laws, Australians expected that the Chinese question will not ever arise and for a time, this belief was justifiable given the small numbers living in the country and a general lack of interest in them (As a result of discriminatory legislations, the population was 6,404 at the time of the 1947 Australian Census, reaching 19,971 in 1976 or less than 0.2% of the total population

[<http://www.dima.gov.au/statistics/infosummary/textversion/china.htm>]).

Furthermore, even though many Chinese have their forebears in the country for several generations, they are still perceived as foreigners, physically and culturally, whose issues and concerns are therefore irrelevant to the rest of society. Many who have had some Chinese ancestry were also not informed of their histories and only now, some are reclaiming their past slowly and painstakingly. Contradictorily, the Chinese are also perceived as a model minority that is, the one group to have successfully integrated into Australian society despite seemingly insurmountable racial barriers. Presumably they have been able to do this because of some innate cultural values. Given this historical backdrop and the common assumptions that Australian race relations involve mainly Anglos and Aboriginal peoples, and that the Chinese are apolitical, we can reasonably ask why we would be interested in the Chinese-Australian community as a social movement?

Social movements, as some writers have pointed out, suffers from 'conceptual stretch' (Pakulski, 1991: xiv). Some analysts have stressed the premise of change undertaken through some form of collective action (Abercrombie et. al, 1988; Blumer, 1946). Others have pointed to the continuous push for change via a commonly held value-driven agenda by members and anti-systemic in nature (Inglehart, 1977; Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1989; Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). Yet, others have drawn our attention to the class dimensions of social movements (Lipset, 1959; Cotgrove & Duff, 1980).

which impacted directly on the Chinese and the Asian community e.g. on Hansonism, the Chinese and Asians are still invisible. See the otherwise excellent collections by Grant (1997) and Leach et. al (2000).

³ Elaine Thompson (1994) provided an excellent account and critique of 'mateship' and egalitarianism in Australia. As she puts it: "one thing is clear: Australian workers did not embrace the Chinese within their egalitarian ways" (Thompson, 1994: 33)

In this paper, I adopt a more limited view. Social movements are seen here as efforts ‘by unconventional groups that have varying degrees of formal organisation...to produce or prevent radical or reformist type of change (Wood and Jackson, 1982:3). Here, I am concerned, like Tilly (1978) and others, primarily with the realisation of effective opportunity structure for change and/or reform within the social polity (McAdam, 1996; Tarrow, 1994). In this paper, I will show that Chinese-Australians as a group has historically stood outside the institutionalised framework of Australian society but via its collective efforts, organisation, mobilisation and intervention in the political process, has been able to effect change in mainstream society, institutions and practices. I will argue that via their participation in public protests, activities, campaigns and a plethora of other political acts, many Chinese-Australians have also started numerous organisations. This has facilitated and encouraged Chinese-Australian to participate actively in Australian social and political life. While the organisational formats of Chinese-Australian participatory activities may vary, the ultimate goals have been constant and the same: to gain greater recognition and equality for Chinese-Australians. In this paper, I look (LOOK) at the activities of a Chinese-Australian community organisation, Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS), arguing that it has created and opened up new social and democratic spaces for the Chinese community in Australia. I suggest that its success is due in part to its leadership who were able to organise themselves strategically and engage state institutions and the community. In so doing, they have influenced and affected public policies and their outcomes.

From Private to Public Welfare

Generally, there is a lack of research interest in the welfare of Chinese-Australians was negligible, if not, non-existent. There is the issue of racism, quaintness and the genuine lack of interest in the Chinese community – there were larger questions of class, great men and socio-economic transformations affecting the country. In this scheme of things, the study and the problems of Australian-Chinese ranked rather low in the scheme of things. And of course, there were the additional problems of access and language.

Chinatown and the Chinese community have been traditionally seen as a quaint place comprising chaos, disorder and industry. It was held by the media and many academics that the Chinese were a self-help group of successful businessmen, studious and obedient children, hierarchies made legitimate by tradition and were a generally docile, contented, respectable populace. This perception is held because very little is written on the economics and politics of Chinatown; the perceptions held are largely urban myths drawn from some anecdotal accounts of ‘rich’ Chinese (usually fleeing some countries). This perception is generalised and repeated, reified and becomes ‘truth’ rendered by populist media commentators and their supporters.

There is also the view that Chinese-Australians have fewer problems than other groups; they were the ‘model minority’. Many Australians believe that Chinese-Australians are generally well-off and even if they are not, because of their thrift and hard work, are able to transcend the barriers in their way. This myth of the ‘model minority’ has meant that the community’s problems were unacknowledged. In conjunction with ethnic pride and belief in self-help, the Chinese community reinforced this myth of success which provided the bulwark against the wider

community's interest if it was so piqued. Potentially, these forces maintains a sustaining and powerful myth and disarms many who tried to understand the circuits of power within the community.

Thus, commentators and analysts have pointed out that before the 1960s, traditional associations were the principal welfare institutions among the Chinese in Australia. Destitute Chinese could rely on family and district associations for relief and assistance (Yong, 1977). Because of this private assistance (and pride), few Chinese became public welfare clients⁴. As the principal agents for the disbursement of mutual aid, the established leaders of territorial and clan organisations wielded considerable power and control over the community.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, because of changing social and political attitudes and exacerbated by the influx of 'new Chinese' immigrants (from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia as against the earlier wave of Chinese immigrants who largely came from Southern China), the traditional Chinese kin-affiliated organisations found their roles supplanted. As the Chinese-Australian population grew and as the 'new Chinese' immigrants sought to access new unmet needs and services, the traditional organisations were seen as antiquated, irrelevant or impotent. Some of these new Chinese immigrants were activists and individuals who were aware, astute and willing to act for the collective benefit of the Chinese community in Australia. They were comfortable with their ethnicity but more importantly, were knowledgeable about the problems confronting their people and willing to adopt strategies to deal with them. They have also acquired much valuable organisational skills via participation in protest movements and various other political activities. Many of these community activists were influenced by the broader rhetoric of rights and multiculturalism, had higher education, held professional positions and guided by the corporate values of their professions as much as their values. They wanted to integrate their community into the existing social order and worked pragmatically improve conditions and obtain some economic justice for Chinese residents in Australia. They also shared a political perspective that considered the pursuit of political empowerment as an inherent feature of a democratic pluralist society. As Chinese-Australians, they understood the value of traditional-Chinese style politics well enough to bring about change in the community. As educated individuals, they understood how to work in the mainstream⁵ and its institutions to help the Chinese community.

The traditional organisations and elites, slow to respond to the new unmet needs and the new merging group of Chinese professionals and activists, found themselves

⁴ This myth is indeed strong and maintained by many Chinese and generally, many Asians. They often proclaimed their industry and berated the 'Australian' for their laziness and yet, an analysis of the welfare figures will show that there is a readily and sizeable group of Chinese and Asian immigrants on welfare. Their numbers have caused concern and prompted governments to cut back on welfare benefits to 'new immigrants'.

⁵ The mainstream here refers to primarily the 'western, liberal' views permeating and under-girding Australian society. It is a discourse often rendered by 'conservative' politicians which asserts the primacy of one set of core values deemed to be universally shared and deemed to be the norm in Australia. This one-dimensional view of Australian culture has led the Australian state to pursue programmes which are not 'comfortable' with differences. Historically, this has included the dispossession of and the massacres of the indigenous peoples, the proscription of Asian settlers to Australia and the 'blackbirding' of Kanaks and other Pacific Islanders to various parts of the country as sources of exploitable labour.

slowly marginalised. Unable to muster the necessary money to provide these ‘new’ welfare activities, e.g. translating and language services, child care services amongst others, new Chinese immigrants sought assistance from governments and the new organisations for support and advice. Governments found that in order to respond to growing demand for its services, it had to craft the appropriate response and soon took to funding ethno-specific services and organisations. Of late, this trend has been reversed and funding for generic universal and accessible services has been the government’s defining funding criteria. Because of this ‘push’ to reduce government spending and the imprimatur for external funding, the Australian-Chinese community saw significant shifts in strategies, changing power and organisational structures of the Chinese community.

This shift underscored the need for effective organisations and in particular, the ability to deal and negotiate successfully with government bureaucracies. It also calls for a more and acculturated and professional approach to services and welfare management. The traditional elites and groups who generally engaged gatekeepers to serve as their spokespersons, found themselves eclipsed by the energy and effectiveness of the new Chinese professional and community activists. The latter organised themselves, procured government funding and negotiated the political system; as articulate and politically sophisticated spokespeople, they became de facto representatives.

Funding Services

The 1960s and the 1970s were periods of profound change in Australia. From the granting of citizenship to its indigenous peoples to the ‘dismantling’ of the White Australia Policy, Australia also saw new social welfare initiatives, e.g. funding for child care and ethno-specific services. Government expenditure consequently grew significantly. Via multiculturalism, many Asian and Chinese-Australian organisations began to seek community change through participation in government-funded programmes. Government funds provided start-up money for these new welfare activities and services, the majority of which serve multiethnic groups⁶.

Despite government cutbacks on welfare expenditure in recent years, government continues to be the main source of financial support for Asian- and Chinese-Australian social services agencies. According to the Chairperson of one major Chinese-Australian organisation, the organisation “receives 80% of its revenues from government sources” (Personal communication with Kenneth Kwok, Chairperson of Australian Chinese Community Association). In contrast, private funding has been inconsequential (notwithstanding the view that traditional Chinese associations had provided welfare services to its members) . Moreover, there is no real history of private philanthropy in Australia and even when funds are available, most of the funds are channelled into church-based charities (e.g. World Vision, St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Smith Family); high profile health foundations e.g. cancer research, heart foundations; sporting bodies; children’s foundations and other established charities (http://www.midg.com.au/okeefe/html/res_giving_trends.html). Although there are no available statistics (either from the government or private

⁶ This is especially the case in child care services. In aged care and women’s services, the ‘clients’ tend to seek out more ethno-specific services and agencies.

sources, including Philanthropy Australia), it is held by many Asian activists and also members of the Asian community that only a disproportionately small share of private grant monies are allocated to ethnic groups, in particular, the Asian population.

There is a multitude of reasons for this view of private philanthropy. Apart from the tyranny of the 'model minority' thesis, Chinese-Australians were tarred with the ignominy of parsimony. Since the Chinese do not help themselves, it was reasoned that others have no such obligation to do so. Sadly, these views of the Chinese are misguided and based on misperceptions. These misperceptions are borne out of ignorance and are based on 'historical knowledge' of first-generation Chinese-Australians, who were typically too poor to give because they were paid less than non-Chinese; many were also locked into servitude. Indeed, historically, huge sums of money were raised when the 'proper appeal' is made e.g. in building of the Chinese temples at Glebe and Lion Street (in Alexandria), the aftermath of the recent Taiwanese earthquake and the recent floods in China.

The Funding Game

Social service organisations typically have big budgets and depend on external sources for funding. Because staff (many are highly educated and professionally-trained) have to be paid and they tend to have more clients who are generally from the working class and depend on them for services, it is little wonder that most of these organisations are preoccupied with survival. Most of their financial support comes from public sources, particularly governments.

Because of this, some analysts (Wong & Pan, 2001; Jakubowicz, 1989) have pointed out that a dependence on government funding can divide, weaken and also control community groups and organisations, pitting one against another and making it impossible for them to cooperate. This is especially true in the context of fiscal restraint and where professionalism, performance indicators and accountability come into the calculus of funding. Organisational track record becomes an indicator for funding success, hence large agencies typically receive the most funding over inexperienced and untrained. Conflicts between these different organisations become inevitable and have led to charges of subversion and standover tactics.

Critics also charged government funding for transforming self-reliant groups and organisations into dependent ones (Wong & Pan, 2001). Community activists, it is argued, are transformed into de facto government employees and dissent is monitored, managed and governed. Excessive criticisms of government policies will typically result in 'punishment' (non-funding) and organisations typically do not cross the line, either in fear of retribution or to protect and to ensure continual funding for their constituents.

Reliance on government funding can also affect the activities and the services offered by community groups. Monies are earmarked for targeted services, and often, organisations have to modify their programmes to fit the funds available. Even when they are successful, these organisations are dependent on successive rounds of funding and if these funds are not renewed or replaced, the programmes eventually expired even though the problem it dealt with remained. The drive for funds can thus be an end in itself. Community groups and organisations are thus disciplined by the

funding and market mechanisms which binds them in an asymmetrical relationship with the funders.

Community activists learnt that relying on government largess placed them and the people they served at risk, and therefore emphasised self-reliance. Still, they recognise that an interventionist federal government with progressive social policies can contribute to the well-being of minority communities. Through government's funding and involvement in the Australian-Chinese community, Chinese-Australian organisations have helped many people to find some means to improve their lives and to settle and integrate refugees and new immigrants into an ethnically pluralist Australia.

The New Class of Chinese Professionals

Because of growing professionalism, ability to negotiate with government bureaucracies and to procure funding for their organisations, the 'new' community activists in effect, constitute a new elite, deriving political power from their control of these new community-based organisations. They gradually assumed the traditional elites' role as representatives of the Australian-Chinese community and spokespeople to the wider community. Part of their political influence and social status resulted simply from their being university-educated professionals who headed major community organisations, but their ability to attract significant resources also made them a force to be reckoned with.

To members of their own community, they are seen as having the ability to work with and understand government bureaucracies (and presumably the dominant society, although that is less certain) and also an aptitude for gaining access to decision-makers. Since they served mainly the working class, providing direct services that strengthened immigrants' chances of survival in Australian society, they also command the moral high ground within the community and vis-à-vis the government. These leaders are also shrewd enough to establish at least a working relationship with other elements in the community, including the traditional elites. Via their efforts and organising, they were able to institutionalise their organisations and make them an integral part of the Australian and Chinese communities.

The Growth of CASS⁷

The above discussion suggests that the 'new' community associations and organisations are often led by middle-class leaders who having received some form of financial security typically, gravitate to their own communities, searching for some affinity, some roots. Generally, these groups are often run by volunteers and become imbricated in the funding game. In so doing, they also become more professionalised and also gained social, cultural and political legitimacy. Indeed, the organisation studied here, CASS shares some of these characteristics.

CASS began life out of frustration, desire for change, opportunity and the prevailing socio-political context in Australia in the 1980s. A group of young professional and

⁷ The study of CASS involves a series of dialogues and discussions with the CASS Chairperson, CASS Board members, its staff and also via both participation in CASS's events, meetings and access to organisational documents. What follows is an interpretive analysis of these 'records'.

‘politically active’⁸ Chinese-Australians who were experiencing problems securing reliable and professional child care in Chinatown, Sydney met and via a series of public meetings, formed an organisation. Since then, its leadership has organically planned and developed the organisation, winning bipartisan political support and respect. Today, it has become a one-stop multi-purpose services agency, linking the community with the broader Australian community. With an annual budget of about AUD\$3 million, CASS runs three childcare centres, operates a community care programme for the elderly and a range of other welfare-oriented and educational programmes. At its recent twentieth anniversary celebrations, politicians from Australia’s two main parties lauded its achievements. The Premier of New South Wales, calls CASS a committed and sophisticated organisation while the Federal Opposition Senator, Tsjen Tsebin (standing in for the Minister Philip Ruddock) commended its self-reliant and self-help platforms. All speakers on the day praised CASS’s professionalism and its ability to negotiate the bureaucratic and political process, as it seeks to advance and represents the interests of its constituents, the Chinese community in New South Wales.

CASS had a difficult birth. Whilst comprised of political and community activists, most had been advocates and campaigners, with very little institutional background and experiences. Moreover, many had very little experiences and knowledge of governmental structure, institutions and practices⁹. There was also (and still is) very little knowledge and information on the Chinese community and its welfare needs.

During its formative period, CASS therefore had to overcome a number of these obstacles before it could deliver services to its putative clients. First, it had to assess the community’s needs, articulate them and negotiate the political and professional barriers so necessary for governmental funding. It also had to spend considerable effort in reaching out to the Chinese community which it aims to service, developing rapport with them and educating them about CASS’s services. This necessitates also working through its relationship with the traditional Chinese elites in Sydney.

In the beginning, because there was no reliable data to work from, the appointed management group started the laborious and difficult task of needs assessment. It did this via public meetings and the conduct of numerous surveys (including a 1,000 people phone survey, factory surveys, door-to-door visits) to gauge needs of the Chinese community. The group then made their first submission to the Federal Government for funding in 1981. Because of the prevailing economic downturn and their lack of credibility (with no track record in running any community-based projects), their submission although well-received, was rejected.

During this phase, CASS encountered the classic problem of a new organisation: its purpose was only dimly understood; its staff was for the most part untrained; and its initial board of directors was politically weak so support was limited. To funding agencies, it was untried and untested. It could have easily folded but CASS and its leadership rallied and developed a new and alternative strategy. They opted for a

⁸ Some of the founding members of CASS had been previously engaged in community groups and student politics during the 1960s and 1970s.

⁹ Notwithstanding the traditional Chinese associations, information on needs were non-existent. This could be attributed to a number of reasons which we have canvassed earlier: ethnic pride; new services and the closed and ‘elitist’ nature of these organisations.

matching and cooperative venture with government agencies, becoming a referral organisation, matching appropriate carers with children of Chinese families. They also worked on a programme to provide training to both mainstream and Chinese carers to ensure quality standards were met. Because they were 'pioneers' in providing bicultural services and training (this was in the early 1980s), they were well-received by the community and demand for their services grew rapidly.

Buoyed by this success and having gained some invaluable experiences from their last submission to government, the group applied for funding again in March 1983. This time, they were successful and they received their first funding and by the end of the second year of their operations, CASS received funding to operate three childcare centres.

Realising the 'disciplinary' potential of government funding¹⁰ and that such a dependency could harm their constituents' interests, CASS began to work on a strategy seeking self-reliance, autonomy and independence. It recognised very quickly that it needed its own home base to work from and developed its plan to build or acquire a facility¹¹. Fortuitously, they found a site in Campsie (which is now their headquarters). After a series of fund-raising activities and with a bank loan, they acquired the site, refurbished it and commenced operations.

Although quality and affordable child care was in great demand, when CASS commenced its operations, uptake was slow and in the first quarter of operations, they were only half-full. A series of campaigning and publicity saw the numbers increase and soon, CASS found itself taking on new challenges. From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, CASS established new child care centres, commenced work on elderly hostels for the Chinese community and operated a counselling and education centre. Today, CASS employs some 80 staff; runs three child care centres; operates a community care programme for the elderly; operates Chinese schools; conducts and coordinates various programmes for women and youths, provides a range of settlement services, counselling services and training for migrants. It also runs and operates the Academy of Art, providing cultural and artistic activities to both the wider community and its members.

Explaining CASS's Success

CASS's success can be attributed to a number of factors. First, there was a group of committed, active and talented leadership. Via their 'formative experiences' in Australia and 'new (socio-political) values', through their management and leadership skills and its army of volunteers, CASS transformed itself from a new fledgling organisation to one that actively promotes the interests of its constituents¹². It has

¹⁰ It is reasoned that because community groups received government funding, they quickly become beholden to the government and are less likely to be critical of government's policies for fear of funding cuts and reprisals.

¹¹ According to Cass's chairperson, Henry Pan (who remarkably had held the position since its birth), this was because they felt they did not want to have their 'services and businesses' disrupted by lease arrangements. They had to ensure stability and continuity of their services if they were to win community support for their project. Moreover, the building could also serve as a platform through which 'similar' supportive services could be developed and offered.

¹² Various writers have written of these 'formative experiences' and 'new values'. See, in particular, the important discussion by Parkin (1968). He identifies three key elements: the class component of

focused on providing integrated personal services enabling its constituents to move to self-sufficiency, or in the case of the aged and ill, to programmes that allow them to live with a measure of decency. Thus, it offered adult education courses, day care, support services for the elderly, youth counselling, housing mediation and even a modest cultural arts programme that provided workshops and free concerts for various age.

Second, the social and political climate then played a critical role. CASS started its campaign in the 'shadow' of multiculturalism. The earlier Galbally Report had flagged the need for a more 'sensitive' and culturally-attuned social polity and both the state and Federal Government went some way to adopt some of these recommendations, especially the need to work with ethnic community groups and funding ethno-specific services. This momentum accelerated with the election of the new federal Labor government. This alone, however, could not account for the growth of CASS. CASS's leadership demonstrated its skills and ability to work with and through the government's bureaucracies. This is most evident in its relationship with the New South Wales government. Over the last twenty years, CASS had demonstrated its capacity to work with both mainstream political parties (as each had held political office during the last twenty years), receiving both funding and support for its activities and services. It had been able to negotiate the different tiers of government and the undergirding political ideologies of governments.

The efficacy of CASS's leadership is also reflected in the period of tighter fiscal control and governments' cutbacks of social services. With governments' emphases on greater austerity, greater accountability and tight control, organisations seeking access to government funds have to comply with these new initiatives. CASS has able to respond and comply with and meet all these additional demands, and today, it continues to grow, both organisationally and also in terms of the provision of services. Its professionalism, management, staff and the infrastructure it has developed has stood it in good stead. They have enabled the organisation to become extremely adept and successful at winning and securing funds for its activities. It also demonstrated that CASS has developed the technical ability and in-depth knowledge of funding agencies to allow it to negotiate and tap the many varied available financial sources, making it one of the largest social service agency in Sydney's Chinese community.

It is clear from our discussion that CASS has been a success and that there are useful lessons for community activists and organisations. It has shown how critical and skilled leadership can prevail upon and enlarge existing 'political opportunities' for its members. In the case of CASS, it shows that via its involvement and negotiations with existing political and institutional practices, it was able to change some existing practices and also create new institutions. These institutions have helped to mitigate the deprivations of the ghetto, helping individuals to survive, families to maintain their cohesion and communities to thrive by providing counselling services, welfare

'middle-class' radicalism; the nature of strong value commitments and idealism rather than ideologies; and the 'bandwagon effect' of attracting members. For discussions of new values, Inglehart (1977) and Cotgrove and Duff (1980) are particularly useful. Bourdieu (1985) and Eyerman and Jamison (1991) point to the critical role played by intellectuals in defining praxis and in the latter, in shaping social movements'. In the case of CASS, it would be true that its programmes and actions were shaped by a group of middle-class radicals with 'new values' and predominantly professional and intellectually-driven and drawn.

assistance, recreational facilities and employment opportunities. In the process, these institutions have also mobilised communities, challenged and eclipsed the traditional organisations, becoming a new political force in their own right and consequently, democratising the political processes. The case of CASS also shows how a critical awareness of the political economy of servicing arrangements and the need for community organisations to craft a funding strategy enabling self-reliance, autonomy and independence.

Conclusion

Historically, the Chinese in Australia have been excluded from equal protection under the law and even though discriminatory laws have been erased from the statute books or lapsed from non-use, the legacy of inequality and injustice continued. They have been excluded from the nation's economic and political life, in the workplace, the media and other mainstream institutions. Together with the Aborigines, they unmask the hypocrisy of the belief that Australia is the land of the free and a land of opportunity, a belief which is so central to its national ideology.

Despite being excluded from the Australian imagination, denied social and political participation (until very recently), and being 'whited out' historically, the Chinese (together with other racial minorities) had shown great resilience and strength. They have demonstrated that despite the odds, they have the will, tenacity and resources to organise themselves and partake in the social and political processes under-girding present day Australia. This is especially evident from the activities of the 'new' Chinese community activists. These activists have the collective vision of creating non-profit public interest and community groups to service and advance the community's interests. These organisations provide an ideological framework in which the Chinese could resolve their ambivalence about being Chinese in Australia and also to affirm their identity as Chinese-Australians. Furthermore, these activists showed that they had the practical competence needed to realise it and unlike cultural nationalists, fewer fears of being co-opted by the mainstream. They were also better prepared to institutionalise their organisation in the Chinese community. In so doing, they have been able to create enlarged social spaces for their communities, enabling them to participate in the broader Australian community. Thus, without necessarily intending to do so, these activists and organisations have validated ethnic pluralism. Instead of increasing social fragmentation and tribalism, as might be feared, via their activities, groups like CASS have helped to enlarge the definition of who can be an Australian by serving as an effective means for Chinese-Australians to assert on their own terms, their right to belong to this society and to be treated as respected and responsible members of it.

Finally, organisations like CASS and their activities have also challenge and put paid to a few myths surrounding the Chinese-Australian community. Clearly, the thesis of the 'model minority' cannot hold; the Chinese-Australian community, similar to other communities, have varying needs and that because it may have been 'invisible' does not mean that it is not there nor are services not required.

Also importantly, CASS and other like organisations have demonstrated that Chinese-Australians are clearly not apolitical (a fact many Australian politicians are well

aware of but chose to underplay)¹³. Via their mobilisation, organisations, and their interventions in Australian public institutions, they have unwittingly been a social movement creating and fostering greater pluralism, participation and actively engaged in 'citizenship' struggles. Consequently, Australian public life and spheres are and have been irrevocably changed. Sadly, this role has not been appreciated, acknowledged and often ignored in accounts of social movements and social and political change in Australia. Accounts of Australian public policies continue to be either 'black' or 'white' and fails to appreciate that other groups can and have played critical roles. The practices these organisations spawned can also provide valuable lessons in crafting new policy alternatives. One such arena is that of self-reliance and autonomy and the case of CASS suggests that imagination, skills, commitment and strategic thinking and practice can lead to new discursive practices. Despite their 'seemingly ordinariness', groups like CASS challenge and extend the boundaries of conventional politics and prevailing political cultures. Their 'integration' into the 'mainstream' necessitates a political accommodation and a shift in political calculus, and cannot be so easily dismissed for students of social and political change.

¹³ Indeed, the political saliency of the Chinese in Australia has been recognised by many politicians, although often underplayed. In his address to the dinner organised by the Chinese-Australian Forum, 26 July 1999, the Treasurer, Peter Costello talked of his decision to attend the function even though his staff reminded him of the many pressing concerns he faced - a new tax (the Goods and Service Tax), preparing for the float of Telstra, a Prime Ministerial birthday function and the review of business taxation. See <http://www.treasurer.gov.au/treasurer/speeches/1999/005.asp>.

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First published in Australia in 2002 by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd at
<http://DiversityConference.Publisher-Site.com>

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ISBN 1 86335 526 X (print)

ISBN 1 86335 527 8 (PDF)

Cover design by Diana Kalantzis