



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/3179
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

Title:

Address for 75th Anniversary of Chung Wah Society (unedited typed transcript)

Please acknowledge the source as:
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/3179

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

Hon. Don Dunstan

Ron thank you very much, that was a tremendously kind introduction. I am reminded of an occasion when after somewhat indiscrete remarks by Lady Venithen in Adelaide Sir Malcolm Sargent said to Lady Venithen you are very kind but I think you exaggerate my attributes. I am tremendously glad to be here in what I think is a developing and most important cultural centre in Australia. I came some time ago to look at the first development in this area and that was the opening of the Art Gallery, at that time that was the only example of what was to happen here, but what is happening in Perth is the development of an intergrated cultural centre which I think is going to be unique in this country, I want to compliment you on it because I think it is an example and of great importance.

Thank you also to the Chung Wah Society for asking me here tonight. I was enthused to come because at the moment in Australia as I will tell you a bit later I am engaged on a course which I think is important to the Chinese history in Australia and which the outline which will be the culmination of what I have to say tonight.

I was a little bit foxed as a matter of fact about the title of this address, an ocker's view of ^{Chinese in} Australia. I have never actually counted myself as being an ocker I am from time to time now seen on television in Victorian advertisements with I hope a certain degree of style and they are in some contrast the things the very successful advertisements put up by the Australian Tourist Commission with Paul Hogan putting over a rather different image and people from time to time have protested about Paul Hogan doing this kind of thing, he is an extremely effective advertiser. When his advertisements went up in England doing an ocker thing in England, Carlton United Brewery captured ten percent of the English beer market which meant that John Elliot immediately called it the Carlton United Brewery and he is very good at that sort of thing.

I don't know that that particular image is entirely typical of Australia. What has happened in the past in Australia is people looking at the Chinese Community has been widely varied, there has been rejection and acceptance at a wide difference in attitudes within the community.

I suppose one of the most extra-ordinary examples of this but one which in a way has summed up the end evailance of Australian society towards the Chinese people who lived within it was the late Arthur Colwell.

Arthur Colwell was a man of some self taught ariadition. He was fascinated by the Chinese Community of his Melbourne constituency and he was a close friend of many of them. He learnt enough Mandarin to talk

some fairly rudimentary Mandarin to people on occasions when he frequented restaurants on Little Bourke Street. He was one of those people who said some of my best friends are Chinese and yet he was the absolutely die hard proponent of the White Australia Policy and he and I fell into great differences about this. I don't think I need to relate this evening the kinds of things that he said to me in some what hysterical fashion from time to time within the Labor Party when I was proposing eventually with some success on a motion which he had to second the abolition of the White Australia Policy from the Labor Party's platform. He was emotionally bound up in the Policy which he had administered as Minister for Immigration and where he said such subtle things as two wongs don't make a white. This was an extra-ordinary attitude, he was close to and loved the Chinese and yet on a matter of major public policy took this extra-ordinary antagonistic attitude and said we can't have any more of them here and that I think sums up what had happened in Australian history about the Chinese who were here amongst the European majority. I think the best way to record what has happened over this whole period is simply not try to sum up the average attitude within the community but rather to record and demonstrate the prevailing attitudes by what actually happened.

The first Chinese migration of any consequence to this community was of indentured labourers. They politely call them I noticed in the exhibition as contract labourers but they were indentured, they came here at fairly low pay rates on indentures which bound them to work within the community for a specific pay rate for a particular period. Those were the early migrants, Chinese migrants to this state and to the rest of Australia. Poor Chinese migrants were brought in at a time when convict labour was being cut off from England and the early migration was well before the gold rush at a time when there were not a great many free settlers in Australia. In 1840 there were only 7,000 free settlers in this country and shortly afterwards the Chinese indentured labourers arrived in some quantity not many here in Western Australia but quite a number in Victoria and there was some distress and unrest at that time because the indentured labourers brought in on contracts which had them paid less than the free settlers were paid and that was the beginning of unrest of our Chinese migration. But the big unrest occurred at the time of the gold rushes. Once gold was found in Victoria there was an immediate migration to this country of a considerable number of Chinese and they came on a very different basis from those people who came from elsewhere in the world, came largely as individuals. The Chinese came as

organised groups for the most part, they were recruited largely from they say our provinces and they came in groups and were met at the Port organised by the local societies into self-help groups and took off to the goldfields that way. There were immediate problems on the goldfields because of the differences in social organisation and attitudes between the Chinese and the majority Caucasians who were on the goldfields. In the first place the Chinese were organised, they were carefully organised in groups from the moment they arrived at Port. and they were self-help groups, they were people who have been organised to see to it that they cared for those who were in trouble if somebody fell ill then the rest of them would pay for him and his dues back to the society from which they came and they worked in groups not for the most part as individuals, whereas the Caucasian miners were very much loners. They had a different method of mining and at the outset the Chinese worked over the mulikeeps from previous mining and gained gold from it and that caused a considerable amount of resentment immediately. Their living conditions were markedly different, they lived in groups, they kept what livestock they were able to assemble in their living quarters. They set out to grow vegetables immediately but following traditional Chinese agricultural practice they used human excrement as fertilizer, all of us have read of the history of Chinese agriculture known that this is standard practice and one of the best known of the Western Chinese authoresses has talked about how her family had the great concession for the Klowaca and that was an extremely important financial consideration within their city. This was regarded as extremely unpleasant and to be rejected by the European community which simply did not understand this kind of practice. They did not come with women neither did most of the European miners of course but the fact that there were no women amongst them that the women were left in China and in fact they were returning to their families in due season was regarded as strange and impliably immoral. They did have from time to time Opium and Opium dens were obvious within the mining areas. It was rather strange I suppose for Europeans who were responsible for forcing Opium on China to be taking this particular attitude that this was a frightful thing to be introducing into a European community when the whole war that had been forced upon the Chinese over the importation of Opium had been the responsibility of the British Empire, however, they were condemned for it. Gambling they were very fond of, so were the Caucasians but it didn't seem to have quite the concentrated condemnation of the puritan community that the Chinese managed to gather. In

...4/

addition to that they had different attitudes to use of water in mining and from time to time great troubles occurred about whether the Chinese were polluting the water in course of mining operations. All of these things led to tension in the mining areas and the result was from time to time a series of very severe riots in which the Chinese were the victims and these were quite widespread from Bendigo, Lamming Flat in Bathurst in Beachworth there were riots which caused enormous assaults upon the Chinese, the persons, the property, Chinese were scalped, killed, murdered, it was really an extra-ordinarily bad scene and prominent Chinese in Australia reflected that if the same sort of thing happened in Shanghai or Canton enormous reparation would have been demanded by Her Majesty's government but in Australia it was regarded as a minor incident.

The Chinese in consequence took on even more strongly the advice that had been tendered to them by the say up and other societies who had met them at the wharfs when they arrived, That was to keep a low profile. The Chinese in most of these situations even with the tremendous depredations which occurred to them in the Northern Queensland area where they were the majority population of the miners. Their attitude was it is better to be passive to retire not to fight back simply to keep as low a profile as possible but to fit into the community and that has over the period of Chinese history in Australia remained very much a guiding principle with the Chinese community. There has been a tendency to keep a low profile not to cause waves, not to be publicists, but to go about one's business within the community.

After the mining period the majority of the miners returned to China and the Australian Chinese population steadily declined until the second world war. A number of course remained, they were engaged considerably in agricultural work, the Chinese had been responsible for the clearing of the land, for much of tobacco and banana planting in Australia and throughout the community they had particular avocations which they followed and into which they tended to be forced given the discriminatory legislation which was passed against Chinese during the mining period. The discriminatory legislation of course was very heavy, the Chinese were forced into paying for immigration into this country at a multiple of what other immigrants had to pay to get into the colonies. The first of these Acts were passed in Victoria and then of course pressure was put upon the other states to pass similar discriminatory legislation because once the shippers discovered that they had to pay ten pounds for a Chinese migrant arriving in Port Philip Bay they proceeded to go to

...5/

Gitchen Bay in South Australia unload there people at Robe and the Chinese then went across the state boarder on a long march from Robe to Beachworth which was a pretty terrible track but nevertheless they made it and subsequently South Australia was induced to pass discriminatory immigration laws in this way. I think Western Australia was about the last to do anything of this kind because there was not quite the pressure, they didn't get unloaded in Fremantle and treck across the Nullabor. and then of course at the time of Federation the Chinese immigration laws were passed the White Australia Policy was up as the first principle in the platform of the Labor Party and in the Conservative areas as well, it was quite clear that racial immigration policies would be enforced. and it didn't stop with this, discriminatory labour laws were passed as Attorney General in South Australian in 1965 I had a research worker work out how much was honour statute books still discriminating against the Chinese. There are about five pieces of legislation which specifically discriminated on racial grounds against Chinese in Australia which I had to remove from the statute books then, but Chinese were forced into avocations where even then they had to stamp there work with a fact that it was performed by Asian labour. The discrimination against the Chinese in the history of Australia has been worse than in the case of any other migrant ethnic minority. Now what happened there after, well Chinese as I said were involved in agricultural work and they were in commerce, in commerce they were often very successful, it is significant that it was a Chinese group in Australia which introduced to Hong Kong and to Shanghai the department store. It actually came from Australia, department stores have been developed here, they didn't exist at that time in Hong Kong and Shanghai and it was an Australian group of Chinese who took the department store principle to Hong Kong and Shanghai. There were merchants, people in commerce in Australia, people in the professions in the Chinese community who were extremely popular socially through the community, people like Kwon Cart in Sydney had a very significant influence in the whole community and they were extremely popular, well regarded and at times had great testimonial dinners to them from the community. They were successful, socialised well and were accepted but what was the general attitude of the Australian community to the people who were in commerce or who were John Chinaman running a market garden in a country town or in a city in Australia, the people who ran the Chinese laundries or the people who ran the cabinet makers shops with material produced with a careful stamp on it in accordance with the law.

The attitude was no longer one of the dreadful xenophobia that had been known in the last century. Dreadful xenophobia it was, it wasn't just a matter of those riots which I have talked about. People like Will Lane who was accorded the palm as being the idealistic socialist of this country, one of the most successful journalists this country has ever seen, a great writer in the Bulletin and the Worker and the originator of the new Australia settlement in Paraguáy. The settlement of socialist brotherhood of new Australia which was going to provide a new world for the Australian settlers because they couldn't get that sort of thing from the prejudice and divided community in Australia where trades unions were condemned and where trades unionists were threatened with being shot by Judges. Will Lane wrote the most dreadful xenophobic material about the Chinese in this country and his ravings would have made writings in Mein Kampf look mild. That sort of thing existed within the community late last century but as the pressure of the Chinese upon the resources of the country lessened so that they were a small proportion of the population not creating any problems about economic pressure of any kind then the hatred lessened. There was discrimination but there was not active persecution. During the most of this century what simply happened was that those who were Australian Chinese were accepted in this country on sufferance as being necocitizens. Some were accorded of the palm as I have said about Kwon Cart and the others but the majority was simply regarded as people who lived in the community but were a bitter part from the rest and the White Australia Policy was still regarded until after the last war as being an essential feature of Australian society because Australian society maintained the attitude that we had to have a homogeneous Caucasian community with an Anglo-Saxon Celtic majority providing the standard of conformity which the whole of the rest of the community must subscribe.

After the last war that attitude began to change, the first change came because of the migration programme, it didn't alter Arthur Colwell's years even though he was responsible for that post-war migration programme but what happened in Australia was that there was a tremendous influx of people, they were Caucasian sure, but they were some how different. They were not following the pattern of the Anglo-Saxon Celtic majority who were here and that majority learnt to live with people whose social attitudes and activities were different from there own and they not only learnt to live with that they began to learn to value it and so there was an enormous sea change that occurred in attitudes within Australia

at that time. Fortunately also at that time we were part of the Columba Plan and a great number of Asian students came here during the period of the early migration and the presence of those students amongst the Australian community started to alter attitudes amongst the community. People realised that they didn't really need to work on what had been the traditional Anglo-Saxon Celtic attitude and that was what you didn't know you feared. It was realised that you could socialise with, enjoy, honour, understand, gain from people who were different from yourselves and that was a tremendous lesson to the Australian community. When I was first a member of Parliament in South Australia I was in a district which was the centre of much of the Southern European migration to South Australia at the time. The Italians and the Greeks came in and took over the houses of the ockers of Norwood and there were a great many tensions at the time. because I welcomed the migrants I was campaigned against and condemned by some of the community. But for the most part of that campaign didn't work, people soon came to realise that the Australian community was being enriched by the added diversity which was being given to it and as that happened and as the students had there affect also upon that very community in Norwood a great change in attitude occurred. I was able in 1967 to put through an Act in South Australia which was first of its kind in this country, the Prohibition of Racial Discrimination Act, it wasn't an enormously effective piece of legislation it meant that anybody who discriminated in employment, in housing and in the giving of public facilities against anyone on the grounds of their race or country of origin was committing an offence and of course the offences were rather difficult to prove but the fact that the community made that declaration was quite significant. The change was such that we were in fact able to get rid of the White Australia Policy and the change came over the Australian community that attitudes publicly expressed of racial derision or racial discrimination lacked respectability, what had been respectable before the first and second world wars was no longer respectable. What was accepted in the Australian community very widely was that the appreciation of diversity the according of human dignity to people of different races, cultures and background was an essential basis of the democracy which we were seeking in this country. and so it was possible for us formally to abolish the White Australia Policy. It was unfortunate that that very moment when we abolished discrimination on racial grounds in immigration came at the same time that we ceased recruitment in immigration to Australia, so that the countries of Asia can rightly look upon our

change in policy with a certain degree of cynosism and to say well thats all very well if you don't discriminate formally on any racial basis any more or you don't require people to take dictation test or a light meter over them to see if they conform to the requirements of Australia but under the restrictive immigration policy a very significant part of immigration is on the basis of family reunion and how much family reunion is going to occur for the Asian people who are here in Australia since they are so small a proportion of the total population so some degree of discrimination occurs simply because of that historic fact. However, it is true that there has been this very considerable change in Australia, and the changes now being celebrated by this very event that we are engaged in here in Western Australia. As I have said over a long period the Chinese community in Australia felt the need to keep a low profile. It doesn't need to anymore, the Chinese community in Australia made an enormous contribution to development of this country and that contribution which was great has been one of the supressed historical facts of this country. If you look at the history books upon which our children are taught very little is said about the enormous Chinese contribution to this country but that it was enormous is true. It is time that story was told, its time its the right of Australians to know what the history was. Now that is being demonstrated at the moment in this exhibition in Western Australia, the contribution which was made here by Chinese in this community which has been long and considerable is being celebrated here. Nationally we have commenced with the support of the Australia-China Council a exercise which is Australia wide it is centred in Victoria simply because the Chinese community in Australia has accepted that there is one historic Chinese community which has been centre in one place in Australia with continuous occupation in concentration and that is in Melbourne's Historic Chinese Precinct. So the centre of this operation is in the Chinese Precinct in Melbourne and that is a national museum of Chinese-Australian history. The museum of Chinese-Australia history is not just a Victorian operation it is providing an education centre and archival centre and an education outrigged centre which can then use the resources throughout Australia of Australian-Chinese history to tour exhibitions and education outrigged programmes so that people in Australia will be told this story that they ought to have known and yet haven't to date known. There is alot of research work to be done, alot of development to do, we opened with the support of the Victorian Federal Governments last Friday, this museum of Chinese-Australian history in Melbourne and we have a friends group established here in Western Australia.

The kind of exhibition which you have here in Western Australia at the moment is the sort of thing that is proposed to be used in the National Museum and to tour Australia because everyone should get the opportunity to know about their history. Many of you will know that I have said some pretty pungent things in the past about Aboriginal history in Australia and how it is treated. Of all the migrant communities, the Chinese community is the one whose history has been most suppressed and where the discrimination was greatest. Its time we today in Australia know about it because the knowledge affects how we are going to act as a community in the future. If we really do have the knowledge, if we have the appreciation that this country has its richness through the diversity of its heritage then we really need to sell that message and I am sure with your co-operation and interest we are going to be able to do so.

Question and Answers

1. Well you and I are migrants both though I may be a fifth generation Australian I wasn't born here but what I am saying is that this is what I believe is the Australian gift. Ocker I am not certain about, but Australian yes.

2. I have a great deal of respect for Geoff Blainey as historian in this country and I like him as a person, I can only say that I was deeply saddened by what occurred in his public statement. I do not understand why he said what he did and I can see no basis in evidence for the contentions he put forward.

3. I have campaigned in Darwin almost as much as in Western Australia. Well I was asked today on T.V. whether it was possible to have a Chinese Premier in Western Australia and I said why not there have been Chinese

Mayors of Darwin.

4. Can he see a Chinese politician entering the political arena of Western Australia or Australia?

Yes certainly it just depends upon a Chinese politician coming forward. There has been a tendency in the Chinese community to look to other areas within the community rather than the political one but I see no reason why not and I am sure that a Chinese political candidate would go with acceptance within the community.

5. Arthur was tremendously, emotionally committed to the White Australia Policy, I had to fight within the Party for years about the White Australia Policy which I was in fundamental disagreement and I can only tell you that Arthur said some very unpleasant things to me about my contentions on this score and getting rid of the words of this Policy. Yes he was committed to it emotionally and again it was a strange contradiction in the man, he had a great many friends in the Chinese community, very close to many of them but his attitude was that Australia couldn't fit any more of them in here. Now how do you work that out I don't know, it was an emotional thing with Arthur not a rational one and it was sad because we used to be friends, we didn't end up being friends.

6. Well I think that in these circumstances one simply keeps on insisting, after all you are an Australian so you can insist to other Australians about that fact. I think that in many ways however, there has been a considerable change about this and that its only certain areas of the Australian community which now take the attitude somehow or another that you are not an Australian. I can remember when I first became a member of Parliament my political opponents went round my district putting

...11/

round door to door the furphy that I was not an Australian but having been born in Fiji I was in fact a Melonesian orphan half cast bastard. My kids really sort of picked that up, they used to say, knock, knock, who's there? Melony, Melony who, Melonesian orphan half cast bastard. I used to take some joy in going along to the Adelaide City Council where some of these people had been going round saying this sort of thing were members and at the ceremony that they had to celebrate Colonel Light every year at the Adelaide City Council, they drank his health with a special port and a special cake in honour of Colonel Light, I used to hudge them and say you do remember that he was a Malay orphan half cast bastard, don't you? Well now, my opponents thought that was going to lose me votes going around saying that sort of thing, it wasn't true I wouldn't have minded if it were, it just wasn't in history but years later when I married a very beautiful Chinese lady I didn't find in the community people going around saying you dreadful non-Australian marrying somebody like that all I got was envy which I thought was just.

7. Well quite frankly ignore them, I really don't think you should go and write other slogans I don't think you need to. Inevitably in any community graffiti will occur from those people in the community who are inadequate and feel that they have to take out their aggression publicly some how. I don't think you should worry about it, I can appreciate how it hurts at times, I see things which are written up which are directed at you that way but frankly after years of having people process round outside my office saying "sack Dunstan and export him", you can put up with that after a while.

8. Well yes that's to form an effective Chinese community here to express the pride of a Chinese descended community in Australia and its place in this total community. What we are about in multiculturalism in Australia is to take pride in the diversity of our cultural background

and heritage, this is enormous. One of my fundamental disagreements with Lee Kwon Yu is that he has sort in Singapore to make a conforming community within quite narrow boundaries. I don't believe that that's where the richness of democracy lies, I believe that the richness of democracy lies in its diversity and we have here as a continent in an Asian area and where the majority of our interests are going to lie within the total Pacific basin. We have a tremendous heritage to draw on and we need your pride and your help to do it Australia and I don't think that any more the Chinese community should be taking a low profile, it should be taking its place.

9. I appreciate the difficulty that you talk on what has to happen is that people in the Asian communities in Australia are prepared to make a move themselves. I need just to give an example about this. South Australia in 1893 became the second place in the world to give votes for women; a right for women to stand up in Parliament and it took until 1967 for a woman to be elected to Parliament in South Australia. The fact is until that date few women had stood, now the opportunities are there, the problems for the Asian communities is that they have felt so put upon, so the right ups have put down that they haven't then stood up and said right we are about to be counted. Now it is a two way thing, in fact the opportunities, the opportunities for support are there. Today there are people from the Italian and the Greek groups in Parliament in Australia. It wouldn't have seemed possible for them fifteen years ago but they are certainly there in Parliaments in Australia now. There is no reason why if you are prepared to get up and say yes I am going to have a go that that won't happen. Now I know it's tough, inevitably with what has happened about Asian communities in Australia in the past one feels diffident and concerned. But let me say there are those people in the community who have got plenty of concern to see that it does happen if you are prepared to do it, but we must have those from the communities who are prepared to risk their necks because risking their necks is what it's about, I can tell you there is an old saying of Arthur Colwell's which I think is one of the truest things he ever said "if you want to be in politics in Australia you've got to realise that you may be a rooster today and a feather duster tomorrow".