

Community history, Chinese
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Angela Chan (b. 1956)

She was the first Australian-born Chinese woman to be admitted as a barrister, and was Chair from 1994-97 of the Ethnic Communities Council of New South Wales

(Summary of interview with Diana Giese, ORAL TRC 3583, 1997, *Chinese Australian Oral History Partnership/Post-War Chinese Australians*, National Library of Australia; see also interview with her uncle King Fong, ORAL TRC 3260, 1995)

She discusses her childhood and upbringing in the working class Sydney suburb of Alexandria, with neighbours of many different backgrounds. She witnessed discrimination against Aboriginal people in nearby Redfern. Her father owned restaurants and her mother, a nurturing feminist, encouraged interests such as music and languages. At Marrickville Girls' High School in the late 1960s she encountered a number of inspiring teachers. She had spoken Cantonese at home before she went to school and after being encouraged to speak English there, lost most of her first language. Her classmates were from many different backgrounds, including Greek, Turkish and Yugoslav.

Her grandfather had left China when the Japanese invaded, going to Fiji where he started a general store serving the American Navy during World War II. The family decided to live in Sydney, New South Wales, rather than returning to China to reclaim their land, because of the Revolution that resulted in the coming to power of the People's Republic of China.

Angela Chan's sense of Chinese-ness was fostered through an obligation to community service, as well as cultural activities such as Lion Dancing and Qingming ceremonies for the dead at Rookwood Cemetery. She remembers her grandfather's funeral and big weddings and family gatherings. Being Chinese in Australia, she says, 'means belonging to a group of people who have had to fight in this country to survive'.

She strove for excellence through education, another Chinese cultural trait. With her mother's encouragement to become financially independent, she went to the University of Wollongong.

She speaks of the formation and role of the Ethnic Communities Council: lobbying the Senate on immigration regulations; campaigning for 15 per cent representation of non-English-speaking people on state government Boards and in the SES; the settlement needs of newly-arrived migrant workers and their children, and their rights to receive social security; and building strategic alliances with the Trades and Labor Council and the Australian Conservation Foundation. She speaks of 'ethnic' as a term encompassing people of all backgrounds, 'including the English': 'if you are not ethnic then you must be a monster from outer space'. She discusses the importance of people speaking with a united voice. She notes the organisation's role in Aboriginal reconciliation after the Wik decision and in relation to the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, and the alliance of Aboriginal Land Councils, ethnic communities and churches.

She sees multiculturalism as an inclusive policy embracing Indigenous people, non-English-speakers and those with English as a first language. She advocates a Multiculturalism Act, an anti-racist forum and the importance of education.