

https://dspace.org/

Shifting Chinese South African identities in Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa

Park, Yoon Jung;

2006-11-14T10:21:26Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1672

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

CHAPTER ONE
SOJOURNERS TO SETTLERS:
EARLY CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHINESE IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction

This chapter seeks to lay the foundations for this study by exploring who the early Chinese immigrants to South Africa were. It asks what their origins were and why they left China. It examines how they found their way to South Africa and once in South Africa, how they were viewed and treated. Most importantly, it asks why and how they transformed from being a community of sojourners into one of permanent settlers in South Africa? In exploring these questions, the chapter provides important material for understanding the earliest phases of Chinese identity formation in South Africa. Firstly, it delineates the contexts in which early Chinese South African identities were shaped and identifies the factors that emerged as particularly relevant to the construction of identities. Secondly, it identifies several of the principal actors engaged in or influencing the construction of Chinese South African identities. Finally, it begins the process, to be pursued throughout this thesis, of identifying the key issues in relation to which Chinese South African constructed their identities

Chinese South African communities formed as a result of tiny waves of arrivals and departures, which took place in the economic interstices of the emerging South African system of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this period, both before and after the discovery of gold, the state and private business interests imported Indian, Chinese, and South-East Asian labour to satisfy the needs of the growing, racially segmented economy. These clashed, to some extent, with the binary (white/European and black/African) imaginaries of the white South African state and created more racial diversification than perhaps was originally envisioned. As a result, the question of granting legal rights to the imported 'ethnic' communities became a subject of constant contention. These communities managed to acquire legal rights through negotiations or, indirectly, as a result of broader social and political developments, only to lose many of those rights in subsequent political reversals. Socio-political developments within China itself served as a powerful influence on this process affecting the emerging local

Chinese community's primary identification, which tended to vacillate between an allegiance to China, on the one hand, and to their adopted home in South Africa, on the other.

The influence of the South African state[1] on identity construction has been emphasised here due to the state's reliance on racial policies, in particular the race-based labour policies and further restrictive racial legislation developed during the capitalist class formation[2] in the late 19th century. Marx (1998), Omi and Winant (1994), and Morsy (1996) and others have written extensively about the role of the state in 'making race' (Marx 1998) or turning race into a salient societal issue. This chapter and two others will interrogate the role of the state in identity formation. The role ranged from state policies of 'wedging' the Chinese in-between white and black labourers, particularly during the short-lived 'Transvaal Experiment', to the periodic 'lumping' of Chinese with Indian as 'Asiatics'[3] for the purposes of restrictive legislation, and policies of wholly excluding Chinese from South Africa through immigration legislation. I outline the various ways in which the South African state circumscribed the identity choices available to early immigrant Chinese. Later, in Chapters Two and Six, I further explore the shifting outlook of the state as it changed its labelling and treatment of the Chinese during the course of apartheid. The South African state is identified herein as one of the principal actors in the construction of Chinese South African identities.

China, both real and mythical, also greatly influenced the early construction of Chinese identities in South Africa. The Chinese state, Chinese political parties and movements, and Chinese politics continued to exert influence on Chinese in South Africa, even decades after Chinese emigrants left China. Through its policies on overseas Chinese and through its agents, the Consul-General and the representatives of the Kuomintang

[1] By state, I use Yudelman's (1984) definition, encompassing all the state institutions – the executive, legislative, civil service, judiciary, police, and army – that make and enforce public policy both symbolically and actually. The state "is a complex of mechanisms of domination and control, with the exclusive legal monopoly on the use of force and a territorial base" (Yudelman 1984:17).
[2] See Bozzoli 1981 and Johnstone 1976 for outlines of the various approaches to nature of the relationship between 'race' and 'capital.'
[3] 'Asiatics' was broad term used in South Africa to refer to anyone with their geographic origins in Asia; most commonly it referred to Indians and Chinese.

(KMT)[4], particularly at times of war and conflict, China maintained a tremendous influence on overseas Chinese in South Africa and beyond. Deeply held beliefs in the myth of a great China contributed to the Chinese state's success in maintaining a continued hold on the Chinese diaspora. Overseas Chinese, including those in South Africa, imagined that they belonged to a once great mythical China. This sense of belonging, combined with fervent desires that China regain its former vaulted position on the world stage, were key elements of early Chinese identities in South Africa. Chinese citizens, particularly those overseas, were seen as 'representatives' of this great Chinese state and heritage. Particular 'Chinese' traits of lawfulness, respectability, and industriousness, with roots firmly embedded in their view of China, remain important to the self-image of Chinese South Africans even today. Other less virtuous features of early Chinese lives in South Africa – gambling, opium dens, violent brawls, and visits to prostitutes – were ignored or deleted from these identity constructions for the sake of propriety. They provided unfortunate evidence contrary to the notion of the great civilisation from whence they came. In this regard, the experience of Chinese South Africans is not unique and in many instances is comparable to the histories of the Chinese diasporas in the Americas, South East Asia, and elsewhere. Chapter Three explores in more detail the effect of the Chinese state and myth on Chinese South African identity.

This chapter will also highlight the role of the Chinese immigrants as social actors in identity construction projects. Early Chinese immigrants played a role in shaping and directing identity construction albeit within the parameters established by the South African state and the powerful myths propagated by the Chinese state. In addition to the main themes mentioned above, several other 'factors' influence identity formation and will feature in this chapter. For example, interactions with other non-white groups in South Africa, particularly with the freed Indian indentured labourers and free Indian immigrants, also influenced emerging Chinese South African identities and will be discussed herein.

[4] The Kuomintang (also Guomindang) is the Nationalist Party of China; hereafter it will be referred to as KMT.

This chapter periodises the historical backdrop to the emergence of the tiny community of South African-born Chinese. Later chapters, based primarily on field research, are built upon the historical and comparative material provided here – both within South African history as well as within a framework of overseas Chinese histories. Three phases are evident in the establishment of a settled Chinese community:

- Firstly, the period between 1652 -1870s covering the importation of tiny numbers of *slaves, convicts, and indentured Chinese labour* to South Africa. This phase did not give rise to the current Chinese community as non-repatriated Chinese assimilated fully into other communities in South Africa;
- Secondly, the period between 1904-1910, the so-called 'Transvaal Experiment' which sought to utilise *Chinese contract miners* and had a powerful influence on the conditions under which the Chinese sojourners resided in South Africa; and
- Finally, the period from the 1870s onwards during which the *sojourners* arrived as free traders, independent of mine labourers, in search of wealth. These migrants at first intended to return to China; however, in most cases these returns did not take place. These sojourners gradually became settlers, the forefathers and mothers of the subjects of this dissertation.

A chronology, located at the beginning of this dissertation, provides, in broad outline, the key Chinese, South African, and specifically Chinese South African events and laws of the historical periods covered herein. My purpose in this discussion is to focus specifically on events and issues that, through this research, have proven significant in the formation of identity for the descendents of early Chinese settlers in South Africa.

Early Chinese to South Africa: 1652-1870s

Convicts, slaves, artisans, and indentured labourers

A very brief description of those early Chinese in South Africa who were *not* the ancestors of my research subjects is required.[5] These Chinese include the convicts and

[5] As noted in the introduction, most of the literature on Chinese in South Africa focuses on the contract miners. The common misconception is that these miners were the forefathers of the South African-born Chinese communities. Therefore, it is necessary to correct these misconceptions and explore the differences between the various groups of Chinese who entered South Africa from its earliest days. This section is not intended to be a detailed historiography of this early period; it merely attempts to introduce the notion that tiny numbers of Chinese were part of the earliest history of South Africa.

company slaves of the Dutch East India Company who controlled the Cape in the mid- to late 16th century, a small number of contract labourers and artisans who came to South Africa in the early and mid-1800s, and the over 63,000 contract miners imported to (and later exported from) South Africa between 1904-1910. While not directly related to the second-, third-, and fourth-generation Chinese South Africans who are the focus of this study, these earlier arrivals to the shores of South Africa are important because the conditions under which they left China as well as their reception in this country had far reaching impact on later Chinese arrivals. These brief histories are necessary to draw a more comprehensive picture of the political, social, and economic environment into which the later Chinese sojourners arrived and the way in which the early South African states of the Cape, the Transvaal, the Free State, and Natal imagined and constructed South Africa *as mainly white*, to the long-term detriment of all other 'race' groups.

Some have speculated that Chinese sailors visited the east and west coasts of South Africa before the year 1300 and mixed with the local Khoikhoi; this is offered as an explanation for the Mongolian characteristics of the Khoikhoi and the conical oriental hats worn by the Basotho in Southern Africa (Yap and Man 1996:1-5). But, the first documented arrivals of Chinese into South Africa occurred from the mid 15th century, when small handfuls of Chinese men, mostly from Java, Batavia, and southern China, entered the Cape's newly established refreshment station as convicts or company slaves of the Dutch East India Company.[6] These convicts and company slaves continued to arrive in small numbers through the late 16th century, never numbering more than about one hundred at a time. Some returned to their home countries in South East Asia or China after their period of servitude. Some eventually became 'Free Blacks'[7] and settled in the Cape, engaged in baking, petty trading, shop keeping, and ships' provisioning. There is evidence of an early Chinese cemetery in Cape Town in a

[6] The Dutch had, by 1641, succeeded in reducing Portuguese influence in South East Asia. Their "mastery over the Indian Ocean proceeded from East to West" (Pineo 1985); they settled and colonized Ceylon in 1636, Mauritius in 1638, and the Cape by 1652. Chinese and Malaysian slaves, convicts, and indentured servants were transported along these same routes. For a more detailed account of European hegemony in the South China seas to the Indian Ocean, see Pineo 1985, chapter one.

[7] Ironically, all these "Free Blacks" were Asians – from India, Ceylon, Indonesia, and China.

government surveyor's map dated 1830, indicating that a handful of Chinese had earlier died in South Africa (Yap and Man 1996:12). It is likely that those who remained in the Cape married and bred into the developing mixed-race community, later know as the 'coloureds', and ceased to exist as a distinct Chinese community.

The slow increase and spread of the white population beyond the Cape and into the hinterland created the need for additional labour. The indigenous Khoikhoi herdsmen and the San (Bushmen) hunters were reluctant to become labourers (Yap and Man 1996:5) so it was primarily Malay slaves and the mixed-race community that provided labour for the growing Cape economy.[8] As the settlers expanded, the need for additional cheap labour prompted contentious proposals for the importation of Chinese labour. Despite opposition, from 1810, small numbers of Chinese artisans were imported. For example, in 1834, several Chinese from St. Helena arrived in Cape Town (Yap and Man 1996:12).

Between 1849 and 1882, the British-controlled colonies of the Cape and Natal experimented with small-scale importation of Chinese labour. Yet again, these projects and proposals for larger-scale importation of Chinese for public works and farming met with bitter opposition and the expression of racial based fears. In its infancy, the Cape was visualised as a settlement exclusively for whites, with a subservient working class made up of native and Malay slaves. The prospect of introducing large numbers of Chinese fell in the face of white settlers' need to be numerically and economically dominant. In October 1882 the Colonial Secretary of the Cape, responding to a farmer's petition to import Chinese labourers wrote:

> I feel bound to say that the Government would regard the introduction of Chinese in any number as a step fatal to the future of this colony, destroying as it would any hope of creating a European population other than capitalists and landowners (in Yap and Man 1996:17).

[8] By the second half of the 19th century, a 'coloured' community of mixed-race people had already formed and these 'coloureds' and native black Africans were providing labour for white farms, public works projects, and, when diamonds were discovered, on the diamond mines. However, proposals for the importation of Chinese labour continued to arise periodically due to continued shortages of labour and desires for a docile, hard-working, and easily-controlled labour force.

Circumstances surrounding Chinese indentured labour were similar in many parts of the colonised world in the second half of the 19th century. Fierce debates raged over importation schemes, the generally poor treatment of the labourers, and fears that Chinese would overrun the colonial whites. The Chinese, in some cases, were seen as instruments necessary to facilitate the control or replacement of non-compliant former slaves. Jan Ryan, writing about the Chinese in colonial Australia, claims the political debate in England over the desirability of Chinese indentured labour to the colonies was quite straightforward: the arguments in support were strictly economic while the arguments against were ideological, based on the notion of white 'English' purity on the colony (Ryan 1995:42-43).[9] She writes that these Chinese labourers were treated as 'commodities' and the transport of indentured Chinese was strictly business; there was little sensitivity or concern for their humanity. In Australia the imposition of restrictive legislation limited Chinese activities in both the goldfields and pearl shell fishing (Ryan 1995:51-52).

In the US from 1866 discussions evaluated the merits of Chinese labour immigration for utilisation in the reconstruction of the South. Labour was required to clear and drain land, build plantations, and work the cotton fields. The arguments promoting Chinese labour revolved around expectations that the Chinese would shun politics and be a docile and apolitical workforce:

> The apolitical noncitizen coolie, it was thought, would be a step back toward the more docile labor conditions of slavery times… the 'Chinamen' would not only provide a cheaper and less troublesome work force but also provide a threatening alternative to intimidate the Negro into resuming his former docile behavior. (Loewen 1988:23)[10]

But southern plantations attracted few Chinese and blacks continued to be the chief exploited human resource.

[9] A number of scholars point out that Ryan's arguments are too simplistic. Depending on class, some whites settlers to Australia, as in South Africa, were in favour of the importation of indentured labour, while others were against (comments made by C. Dugmore and J. Hyslop at a Wits Interdisciplinary Research Seminar presentation of a draft version of this chapter, 9 May 2005).

[10] Loewen 1988 (second edition)

In South Africa, particularly after the discovery of gold in 1886, despite opposition, white industrialists stepped up efforts to import cheap Chinese labour. Yap and Man report that seventy-five Chinese from Mauritius were imported to Natal from 1875, twenty Chinese were privately imported from Foochow to Port Elizabeth in 1881, a further 126 Chinese labourers arrived in Algoa Bay in 1882 from Hong Kong, in addition to smaller groups of labourers sent to various points in the Cape and Natal. Bitter public opposition met each arrival, influenced by the experience of the earlier importation of Indian indentured labour into Natal (see below). This hostility eventually shaped racist legislation that restricted and later prohibited the immigration of any Asians into South Africa (Yap and Man 1996:14-24). Little data is available on what happened to these imported Chinese artisans and labourers. Yap and Man report that by 1887 only two Chinese lived in the barracks of the Point, the quarters adjoining Durban's harbour (Yap and Man 1996:24).

The early experience of Chinese convicts and company slaves reconfirms the South African authorities' social imperative of creating a state sculpted by racial domination. The need for cheap labour forced reluctant whites to accept the importation of small numbers of Chinese to South Africa; however alternate labour supplies and continued opposition ensured that the numbers of Chinese in South Africa remained quite small. Chinese men who remained in South Africa between the mid-15th century and the late 19th century were numerically too insignificant and too scattered to maintain any distinctly Chinese communities. Those who did not return to China in all likelihood married and blended into the mixed-race community.

These early controversies concerning the importation of small numbers of Chinese labourers pale in comparison to the furore surrounding the major project undertaken to import Chinese contract labourers to work in the goldmines of the Transvaal less than two decades later.

The 'Transvaal Experiment': Chinese contract miners

The controversial importation of Chinese contract miners between 1904-1910 has attracted the most scholarly interest and attention of all groups of Chinese to South Africa (Yap and Man 1996:99-117; Richardson 1982; Levy 1982:222-229; Campbell, 1923; Reeves 1954; Ticktin 1978), in part because of the importance of mining to the development of the South African economy.[11] The period in which the Chinese mineworkers arrived in South Africa has been intensely studied and analysed as the foundation period during which the 'ruling class' was formed (see Bozzoli 1981), ideologies consolidated, and the modern South African state shaped. Most authors agree that the labour shortages that followed the end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902[12] and the shortage of cheap unskilled labour were the primary reasons for the 'Transvaal Experiment' (Campbell 1923:165; Yap and Man 1996:103; Richardson 1982: 4-6; Levy 1982).

British plans for confederation in southern Africa played a significant role in the controversy surrounding the importation of Chinese labour to South Africa.[13] The politics surrounding the pre-Union of South Africa had an impact on all parties concerned. The controversy surrounding Chinese labour pitted the mine owners, the Transvaal government, and the Chamber of Mines who all favoured the scheme against non-mining white business[14], white trade unions, and labour who all saw this source of cheap labour as a threat to their jobs (Richardson 1982).

---

[11] Heribert Adam contends that this was "a decisive turning point in South African history" (Adam 1971: 25).

[12] Unskilled black labourers dispersed by the war did not return to the mines. Simultaneously, African peasant agriculture underwent a boom and made remaining on the land extremely worthwhile. They also preferred the less hazardous and more congenial work found in the post-war reconstruction period – on the railways, road building, and harbour improvement. This led to a labour shortage in the flourishing mines (Yap and Man 1996:104).

[13] Following the war of 1899-1902, the two Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic (Transvaal) in 1900 were occupied and later annexed under the Treaty of Vereeniging of 1902. Later in the decade, self-governing status was restored to the Transvaal in 1907 and the Orange River Colony in 1908. In 1910 the Union of South Africa was created (Richardson 1982:4-5).

[14] Charles Dugmore points out that not all white businesses were opposed to the proposal. He claims that the white "shopocracy" in the Transvaal actually supported proposals for the importation of Chinese indentured labour; they saw the labourers as a potential captive customer base. However, they opposed

South Africa's experience with the importation of Indian labour in the 1860s had had a tremendous impact on the Chinese proposal. Indian indentured workers introduced to Natal to work the sugarcane plantations, as British subjects, had won a number of rights, including the right to land once they were freed after ten years of servitude (Harris 1998:277). Many freed labourers started their own farms and businesses, which resulted in economic competition for white farmers and shopkeepers. In 1903, the Chairman of the Anglo-French Group, Sir George Farrar, argued that the labour shortage in Africa necessitated looking elsewhere for workers but he cautioned against bringing in Chinese under the same terms as indentured Indian labour. He said:

> I have seen the evil of the Indians holding land and trading in competition with white people and on no account whatever would I be party to any legislation that permitted this (in Yap and Man 1996:106).

British and South African political parties engaged in fierce battles before and during the Chinese indentured labour controversy. Liberals engaged with others who held racist agendas. Richardson suggests, for example, that a variety of concerns cut across class lines – including the poor conditions under which the Chinese lived and worked involuntarily, allegations of widespread homosexuality amongst Chinese labourers, the prospect of Chinese labourers taking jobs from white registered trade unionists, and a growing racialism in British politics. These concerns cemented otherwise disparate and antagonistic elements within England's Liberal Party in opposition to Chinese mine labour (Richardson 1982:5-6).

In an interesting turn, the existing free Chinese community also resisted the mass importation of labour from China. The tiny Chinese community wrote letters beseeching their compatriots in China to resist relocation to South Africa, citing the onerous discrimination and restrictions placed on the Chinese. In the south of China, the origin of most Chinese settlers, this campaign was highly successful and recruiters failed to obtain sufficient labour from Guangdong (Kwangtung) province. Recruiters

---

the immigration of free Chinese, who would be potential competition in their trade. (Remarks made at the Wits Interdisciplinary Research Seminar presentation of this chapter 9 May 2005).

had to relocate to the Northern provinces where poverty and unemployment provided a ready pool of labour (Yap and Man 1996:99-100).

The mine owners eventually won the complicity of the local administration, the imperial government, and certain sectors of the white community of the Transvaal, by agreeing to place specific constraints on the indenture of Chinese labour. The constraints, which to a small degree relieved white fears for their jobs, explicitly excluded Chinese workers from any skilled mining operations and guaranteed their return to China at the end of their contract periods (Levy 1982:223-224).[15] The conditions under which the Chinese labourers immigrated to the Transvaal were much more restrictive than those that had governed the movement of Chinese into other gold production districts in North America and Australia half a century earlier. In these countries, Chinese moved more freely, without the rigid constraints of contracts between governments (Richardson 1982:166). And the conditions were more restrictive, by explicit design, than those utilised to attract Indian indentured labourers into South Africa in the 1860s.

Between 1904 and 1907, 63, 695 Chinese were imported to South Africa to work in the gold mines of the Witwatersrand (Yap and Man 1996:103). Of those who survived (nearly 1 in 20 lost their lives on the mines, due to work conditions, disease, suicide or murder), nearly all were returned to China at the end of their contract periods as far as can be ascertained (Yap and Man 1996:117-118; Campbell 1923:216). Richardson notes that, "as a result of deaths from accidents and disease contracted during the course of service, discharges purchased by the labourers … and forcible repatriation of so-called 'undesirables,' the maximum number of Chinese in employment … was 53,828 in January of 1907" (Richardson 1982:166).

During the first year of the importation scheme, there were serious problems on the mines. Yap and Man (1996) and Richardson (1982) report that there was ill treatment and physical abuse of miners, related, in large part, to communication and cultural gaps;

[15] Specific constraints and restrictions were provided in two separate statutes: the Mines, Works, and Machinery Ordinance of 1903 and the Transvaal Labour Importation Ordinance (TLIO) No.17 of 1904 (Levy 1982: 224).

the Chinese mineworkers responded with violence, work disturbances, and desertion[16] (Yap and Man 1996:119). Had the violence been contained within the mining compounds, the reaction of white society might have been more limited. However, miners had Sundays off and many 'deserted' the mines. Thus, thousands of off-duty Chinese mineworkers with day or overnight passes to leave their compounds visited Ferreirastown in Johannesburg on Sundays and many attempted to leave the controlled environments of the mining compounds altogether (Yap and Man 1996:122). Between 1905 and 1906, charges against the Chinese included desertion, forgery, theft, housebreaking, fraud, gambling, public violence, common assault, murder, and possession of dangerous weapons (Yap and Man 1996:127). Illicit trafficking of opium and use of white prostitutes, the latter illegal under Immorality Ordinance (no. 46 of 1903), formed the basis of further legal contraventions (Yap and Man 1996:126). Yap and Man write: "The ever-increasing scale of desertions and crimes committed by the Chinese labourers spread terror among the residents of the Transvaal" (Yap and Man 1996:127). In response, there were mass protests requesting that the repatriation of the labourers and 'open season' was declared on the Chinese – whites were empowered to shoot or arrest any Chinese found outside the Transvaal (Yap and Man 1996:127).

Despite the numerous problems on the mining compounds and the growing opposition, the Chinese contract labourers contributed toward the doubling of South African gold production between 1904 and 1910. The value increased from £12 million to more than £30 million during those years (Yap and Man 1996:134-135). The experiment also resulted in political fallout in England as well as in the Transvaal.[17] Increasing political opposition and the availability of rising numbers of black labourers resulted in the phasing out of the experiment with Chinese labour between June 1907 and February 1910, despite mine owners' protests (Yap and Man 1996:131).

[16] There were 21,205 cases of unlawful absence in the working population of less than 50,000 in the first year of the 'Transvaal Experiment' (Yap and Man 1996:126).

[17] In January 1906, the British Liberal Party in collaboration with the Labour Party managed to oust the Conservatives as the British electorate reacted to charges of Chinese slavery and flogging in South Africa. In the Transvaal, in the general elections of February 1907, Afrikaner and British workers united in opposition to the continued importation of Chinese labour voted the Het Volk Party into power.

In the history of racist legislation in South Africa, it is worth noting the establishment of the first industrial colour bars was specifically to exclude *Chinese* from skilled occupations. The extension of these colour bars to encompass all of black labour occurred at a later point.[18] In addition, because the Chinese earned less than blacks, upon repatriation of the Chinese labourers, the mine owners were able to lower the wages of the black labourers to pre-war levels (Yap and Man 1996:135; also Levy 1982). In other words, "the presence of Chinese labour helped to break African bargaining power" (Levy 1982:226). According to Levy:

> An enduring feature of the 'Asian exercise' was that the legislation initially introduced to allay white anxieties served subsequently to entrench a permanent racial wage and work bar in the country. The legislation served to secure and institutionalise the Chamber's labour structure (Levy 1982:225).

The presence of large numbers of Chinese contract miners in South Africa, with their foreign looks and long plaited pigtails, also exacerbated existing anti-Chinese racism. Yap and Man argue that:

> Sweeping generalisations on Chinese morality, attitudes and habits were made in countless press reports and long-standing fears of the economic threat posed by Chinese traders periodically surfaced. Such unwelcome publicity doubtless did little to aid local Chinese in their fight against anti-Asiatic legislation (Yap and Man 1996:135)

Consequent fears of vast numbers of miners freed in South Africa led directly to the Chinese Exclusion Act in the Cape, the first and only specifically anti-Chinese legislation in South Africa. Politicians passed similar restrictive immigration legislation in Natal and later in the Union of South Africa. Additional pieces of racist legislation not only barred Chinese mine workers from skilled mining operations, but also prevented them from acquiring licenses to deal in liquor, mining, trading, hawking, building, and fixed property[19] (Levy 1982:224). These laws had a tremendous impact on the free Chinese in South Africa in that they: "certainly retarded the growth and development of the Chinese community…" (Yap and Man 1996:135).

[18] The TLIO clarified the ambiguity of the work category 'unskilled labour' laid out in the Mines, Works and Machinery Ordinance of 1903 by providing a comprehensive schedule of 56 occupations from which Asian migrants were excluded (Levy 1982:224).

[19] These were the provisions of the Transvaal Labour Importation Ordinance (TLIO).

The history of the early Chinese in South Africa indicates that the establishment of the precedents for the unequal treatment of Chinese in South Africa occurred very early on, as a response to the visualisation of South Africa by its white settlers and its white governments as a white-dominated country. Undoubtedly divisions existed amongst South African whites between different political and economic interests, but as Yudelman points out, "perhaps the only thing they agreed upon was the necessity to maintain the subordinate position of Blacks" (Yudelman 1984:34). In fact, various segments of the white population agreed upon the need to entrench the subordinate position of blacks, Chinese, Indians, and all other 'non-whites'. The 'Transvaal Experiment' resulted in both the first colour bar legislation as well as the reduction of the cost of black labour, further entrenching their subordinate position once the Chinese were repatriated. As Yudelman argues, both the Anglophiles and the British imperialists played a crucial role in laying down both the administrative and the ideological foundations for modern institutionalised race discrimination (Yudelman 1984:14).

The Sojourners

Today's 'local' Chinese, as they refer to themselves, are neither the descendents of the very earliest handful of Chinese convicts, slaves, and artisans, nor of the indentured mineworkers. Furthermore, they seek to distinguish themselves from the new Chinese immigrants who started arriving in South Africa in late 1970s from Taiwan and later from Hong Kong and mainland China. They form a distinct group, descendants of independent immigrants who arrived in South Africa from 1870 onwards. Unlike the mineworkers, they originated in two areas of China, approximately 400 kilometres apart in the Guangdong (Kwangtung) province of South China.[20] They arrived in South Africa as independent, free immigrants intending to make their fortunes and return to China. Their departure from China, subsequent resistance to increasing restrictive

[20] The Chinese in Mississippi also arrived from Canton in South China, the region which for centuries sent millions of traders and emigrants out into the world (Loewen 1988, Pan 1994). Studies have indicated that the young men of this region are influenced by a pre-departure socialisation (Robert Park in Loewen 1988) that emphasises their emigration as a customary means of adding to the family's fortunes and success (in Loewen 1988:27).

South African legislation, and gradual construction of a Chinese South African identity form the basis of the following analysis.

Why did they leave China?

The abolition of slavery led to small- and large-scale importation of Chinese labour in many parts of the world in the mid-19th century. Western imperialism had reached its zenith at this time and required labour to exploit virgin lands in the Americas and Australasia. However, slave labour was no longer available. At the same time, a series of coastal wars shook China (Pineo1985:1; G. Wang 2000:60-61). China, experiencing natural disasters on top of local and international political ones complied with the labour demands of the 'new world' by providing manpower to the developing colonies.[21] About a decade later, in 1866, the Qing court changed its view and policies of Chinese overseas and lifted the century-old ban on foreign travel, allowing Chinese to legally leave the country in search of work. Some labourers left China under state-sponsored contracts with other nations as 'coolie' or indentured labourers; others followed independently. Pineo notes that while slavery had officially ended, its legacy endured influencing the treatment of the 'coolies' in the indentured labour system; they continued to suffer under servile working conditions, and from prejudice. Free immigrants connected by place of origin to the indentured workers were also disparaged (Pineo 1985:2). These free immigrants, artisans, and traders frequently followed the indentured workers to serve the specific needs of the indentured Chinese communities.

The impetus for immigrants to leave China, from the mid-19th century onward, was particularly great. South China was affected by a combination of political, economic, and natural forces including: the Opium Wars and the civil upheaval that followed, drought and famine, the loss of Canton's trading monopoly resulting in hundreds of thousands of job-losses, and the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-1864 during which more than twenty million died (Pan 1994, Wang 2000, Zia 2000). The Cantonese sojourners, who scattered across the globe, came mainly from villages south of Canton (Guangzhou) – villages within a twenty-kilometre radius of one another. The Hakka

[21] In particular, with the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, China was forced to open up five ports to Western powers and allow Western labour brokers access to their surplus populations.

who comprised the second group of immigrants from south China, were mainly from Moiyean (Mei Hsien or Meixian) in northeast Kwangtung (Guangdong). According to Pan, more than two million Chinese left China during the second half of the 19th century (Pan 1994:43).

As incentives to leave south China mounted, the outside world beckoned with discoveries of gold and rumours of great wealth. Initially the Chinese from south China immigrated to South East Asia via Hong Kong; they went to British Malaya, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia as independent artisans, merchants, and (voluntarily) as contract labourers. From 1848, discoveries of gold enticed Chinese further away from their homes. California was the first 'Gold Mountain' or *Gam Saan* in Cantonese. Later discoveries of gold occurred in British Colombia, Canada, in Melbourne Australia, in Otago New Zealand and from the 1880s, in South Africa. Leaving the gold mines, some Chinese went to work on railroads and sugar plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean. Pan (1994) and Pineo (1985) explain that many of the Chinese in Africa and the Indian Ocean islands arrived via Mauritius[22], moving gradually from there to Reunion, the Seychelles, Madagascar, and South Africa. Pan also writes that Chinese found their way into central and southern Africa helping to lay railways in the Belgian Congo, Mozambique, and French West Africa; and to Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now Tanzania) in search of sea ships (Pan 1994:61-63).

The great lure in South Africa was gold. Most of these early predominantly male Chinese immigrants ventured out initially as sojourners – as lone men or in small groups of two or three. All had hopes of acquiring riches and returning to China as wealthy men. Interviewees described this process: Dan, 53, reported that his grandfathers on both sides came from China. His paternal grandfather came out to South Africa when he was about 23, probably toward the end of the 19th century,

[22] Pineo writes that as early as 1834 owners of sugar plantations in Mauritius looked to India and China to supply agricultural labourers. The indentured labour system was set up as a substitute to slavery. Chinese contract labourers were introduced to Mauritius in the early 1940s. They made up only a small percentage of the total number of labourers recruited from India and East Africa – only 10,000 out of 450,000 (Pineo 1985:23). She explains that the majority of Chinese settlers arrived in Mauritius as free immigrants.

intending to return to China. However, the riches never materialised and Chinese politics further impeded his return:

> He thought this was the place he would make his riches and go back to China. The idea was to go back to China eventually. But then, of course, Mao Tse Tung came along, and he had people in China – his family, his mother, his sisters – (but) he didn't go back. He'd just send money on a regular basis back to China.

Andrew, 63, reported that his father came over when he was very young, sometime around 1914 to work in the mines. His arrival to South Africa was not strictly legal. Andrew stated:

> He was very poor in China. He heard about the goldmines in Johannesburg and thought he should try to help his family. He was a stowaway; he went to Hong Kong and then got on another boat to Mozambique. Came across Swaziland and then arrived in South Africa. A foster father took him in and he became a 'paper son'[23]– legalised here.

Reports exist of miners from California and Australia arriving in the Transvaal (Yap and Man 1996:73). Further accounts depict people who mistakenly believed they were headed to the Gold Rush in California but landed in South Africa. Much of the confusion resulted from the Cantonese names for these places: California, the Transvaal, and Australia were all referred to in Cantonese as 'gold mountain'. Darryl Accone, in *All Under Heaven*, addresses this confusion in an imagined conversation between his great grandfather and an innkeeper near Canton, in which the innkeeper spells out the dangers of giving only the name 'Gold Mountain' as the destination:

> "Aha…but you know that sometimes people land in the wrong country, when they take passage and say only 'Kum Saan'. For there is also a gold mountain in Australia, in a place they call Melbourne. I have heard it from a Hakka miner that he set off for this Namfeechow (Africa) but was put on shore in Mei-Kwok, America – ha, ha. Said to me it was not enough to say Kum Saan – you must say New Gold Mountain, Soen Kum Saan. Then you must watch which way the ship sails from Hong Kong. If it turns south-east, you are going to Australia; west, you are heading for Africa. So, sir, watch out for the correct way." (Accone 2004:33)

[23] To be explained below.

South African immigration routes and patterns

The paths to South Africa varied. Alfred, 48, reported that his family travelled from China to Singapore and then to Mauritius[24] before arriving in South Africa. Pauline, 60, reported that her mother came via Mozambique and her father from India:

> Well, my mother is actually from Mozambique…I don't know much of my mother's history, but her parents…she was born there…And my father is from India…we don't know much about his family, but what we heard is that he's from a very big family in Calcutta – a Chinese family. But he left and came to Mozambique and that's how he met my mother.

Immigration restrictions prevented new immigrants from entering South Africa unless they were directly related to Chinese already in South Africa. Unmarried bachelors or other childless men would sponsor young men – nephews or unrelated young men from their village – by providing falsified documentation that these young men were their sons. This practice came to be referred to as 'paper sons'. Both Alfred's father and uncle were 'paper sons', adopted from China to come and help in the family business:

> My paternal grandfather was in Mauritius for a while. (He eventually) ended up in Durban in the early 1900s. He set up shop and then went back to China to find a wife and moved back to South Africa. His first wife died and he had only daughters with his second wife, so both my dad and uncle were 'adopted' from China, became 'paper sons' and were brought to South Africa.

The practice was also widespread in the US and other countries with strict immigration regulations.

As in other countries, the gradual growth of the Chinese community occurred by a process of chain migration – Chinese migrants, related by common dialect and place of origin, tended to concentrate in the same areas in the receiving countries (see G. Wang 2000). Kinship bonds resulted in concentrations of Cantonese and Moiyeanese in different parts of South Africa: Cantonese were more numerous in the Transvaal, while

[24] Pineo explains that toward the end of the 19th century the sugar industry in Mauritius was in crisis and sank into an economic depression. The Chinese community of petty traders was hard hit by the depression and facing competition from the more numerous Indian traders, many immigrated to neighbouring countries (Pineo 1985:24). Sino-Mauritians blazed the trail, but most others came to South Africa directly from China using Port-Louis as a temporary port of call – for one month up to two years – en route to their final destination (Pineo 1985:25). Pineo compares the role of Port-Louis in the Western Indian Ocean to the same role played a century earlier by Singapore for the great Chinese diaspora in South East Asia (Pineo 1985:25).

the Moiyeanese predominated in coastal towns. The immigration pattern of the Chinese immigrants was similar to that followed by many other immigrants to the New World: boys and young men came out first; women arrived later – as wives of the men who had come out earlier. Several of the interviewees relayed stories of their grandfathers or fathers' arrivals in South Africa. The patterns they described were all quite similar:

> My grandfather came over and grandmother stayed in China. They had two daughters and one son, my father. The eldest daughter stayed in China. My father came to South Africa and later travelled back to China (to find a wife)… Grandfather bought the shop for dad. He hoped to make some money and go back to the village and settle down. That's what every Chinese thought. (He) never spoke a word of English…No, he died (here); he never went back. Grandmother never came over; she stayed in China. (She) died in the late 40s, just before or after the Communists. (I) Never knew her. (Frank, 62)

> My grandfather and great uncle came from China at the turn of the century and started a little shop. He went back to China to find a wife and start a family. Both my mother and father were born in China. Father came out in 1922, when he was 13 years old. Mother immigrated in 1928 as a young girl. (John, 61)

These descriptions highlight a pattern of regular movement between China and South Africa, despite immigration and travel restrictions. In addition, there was movement between South Africa and other New World destinations; a few of the Chinese immigrants arrived in South Africa from California or Australia (Yap and Man 1996:73). Some of these early immigrants came to South Africa and later returned permanently to China. It was not merely a permanent uni-directional movement out of China into South Africa.

Ties to China during this period were strong, strengthened by the backwards and forwards movement between the two countries and the continued arrivals of new immigrants, albeit in small numbers. Without fail, the Chinese in South Africa all sent money back to their immediate and extended families in China and remittances played a large role in supporting the economies of the sending regions in south China. Those young men who could afford to pay for their passage returned to China for wives. Married men went back to China to fetch wives and children once suitably settled in South Africa. These patterns repeated for at least two generations.

Often, families already settled in South Africa would send one or two children back to China for their education. A couple of interviewees went back to school in China. Several also mentioned that their parents went to China to receive a Chinese education. These movements were frequently interrupted by major political events in China, affecting border closures and the safety of those travelling:

> Grandfather had immigrated to South Africa in the mid-1920s. He had a shop in Mafikeng, made money, returned to Canton in 1936 or 37. Then, when the Japanese invaded (later in 1937), grandfather brought the children back to South Africa. Dad was 9 years old. (James, 42)

The majority of these early Chinese immigrants continued to struggle financially and they remained, in effect, sojourners – physically overseas but with their hearts still in China. They were Chinese people in a foreign land. The hostile reception meted out affected the strength of their Chinese identity in South Africa. Many of these Chinese arrived in South Africa illegally, with falsified documents or as stowaways. Their precarious status in South Africa as unwanted and sometimes illegal immigrants, combined with their undeniable differences from other South African groups, their difficulties with the local languages, and the discrimination they faced on a daily basis had great impact on identity construction. There was a constant tension between their desires to remain unobtrusive and their high visibility due to their physical difference from other South Africans. Remaining quiet, law-abiding, humble, passive, and invisible were important to their very survival in the early days in South Africa. Later chapters discuss these behavioural qualities that remain key elements in their constructed identities.

The pattern of sojourning ended permanently in 1948/49 with the Communist victory in China and the Nationalist Party victory in South Africa; these two key political events forever changed the nature of the Chinese South African community. The discussion concerning these changes follows in later chapters. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the Chinese sojourners before these two coinciding events.

Who were these early immigrants?

Ethnically the Chinese who arrived in South Africa were Cantonese and Moiyeanese (or Hakka); the two groups spoke different dialects and practiced different customs. These two groups, while viewed by outsiders as 'Chinese' had strained relations in their home province. They brought this animosity with them to South Africa, to the extent that they even settled in different parts of the country. The ethnic differences between the two groups lasted well into the 1940s with intermarriage between the two groups rare and discouraged for decades (Yap and Man 1996:35). These ethnic differences, while not very significant today, were one of a number of factors that influenced early identity construction. For at least two generations, this ethnic cleavage reduced their ability to work more effectively together to combat discrimination and resulted in a general lack of integration with other groups in South Africa.[25]

Interview and survey data, on first glance appeared to support the notion that the earliest immigrants generally had little or no education, corroborating early theories about the illiterate, peasant background of early Chinese immigrants. For example, Rick, 60, reported that both his Chinese-born parents were illiterate. William, 57, reported that his father only had four years of education when he arrived in South Africa. Mark, 54, spoke proudly of his 85-year-old mother-in-law who without knowing a word of English managed to run a shop with the aid of a pointer stick. He also spoke about his own mother who still cannot read or write English or Chinese, but had the spirit to travel to South Africa on her own.[26]

There were, however, some exceptions; these exceptions indicate that early Chinese immigrants were neither the poorest nor the most illiterate of South China. A few of the interviewees reported that their parents or grandparents were literate in Chinese.

[25] Christine Ho writes that the lack of cultural homogeneity in Trinidad and Guyana led to fragmentation and factionalisation between the Cantonese and the Hakka; this combined with other factors – population size, distribution of the population, rates of intermarriage – led to a higher degree of creolisation in those communities than in the Chinese communities of Jamaica where there was ethnic solidarity amongst the Hakka and greater retention of elements of cultural distinctiveness (Ho 1989: 3-25).

[26] One must also take into consideration that in those days very few had the ability to read and write in Chinese. A formal education in China was a privilege set aside for a select few who either showed the capacity for learning or had the connections to gain access to higher learning.

Donna, 60, reported that both her uncle and grandfather could write and read in Chinese: "…and we found out that my uncle used to write letters for everybody. My husband's father also used to do that, as well. Both dads were of the few who were educated." Those few who could read and write provided valuable services to the rest of the community by reading and writing letters to family and friends in China and communicating information from the Chinese newspapers that found their way to Africa.

Because of the immigration restrictions placed on Chinese, any Chinese who wanted entry into the Union had to prove that he had been resident in South Africa prior to the law's passing *or* show proficiency in a European language. It is therefore reasonable to assume that while the immigrants who arrived prior to the turn of the century were mostly illiterate, *after* the imposition of restrictions, only the literate were permitted entry as first-time immigrants. Others permitted entry had to provide evidence of previous residence or, perhaps, have direct relations to a resident Chinese, thus the practice of 'paper sons.'

Christianity was one means of laying claims to South African residence. From the inception of the Chinese Mission School in 1918, Chinese parents seemed to be aware of the larger significance of becoming Christian:

> Community elders took the view that Christianity was one means by which Chinese could strengthen their claims to remaining in South Africa … Proof of identification and particularly residence was of importance in terms of the 1904 Chinese Exclusion Act which regulated the movement of Chinese into and out of the Cape Province" (Yap and Man 1996:284).

Having baptismal papers was a way of securing their place in South Africa and quite a few Chinese chose to give up their Chinese beliefs[27], at least on paper, in return for further evidence of their South African residence.

The scant literature on Chinese South Africans corroborates my revised assertion that the Chinese who immigrated to South Africa were not, in fact, the poorest of the poor in

[27] Traditionally Buddhist.

China. They had a number of advantages, which indicates a resource base. In the first place, connected, as they were to the news of the 'New World', they knew about the various gold rushes in California, Australia, and South Africa. They maintained communications with family members and people from their villages who had earlier ventured forth. In addition, they had enough money for passage to South Africa.[28] Some, like Accone's great-grandfather, Langshi, travelled to South Africa on the invitation of Chinese who had already settled in the Witwatersrand area, to serve the existing community with his skills as a traditional healer (Accone 2004). Loewen's study of Chinese in the Mississippi further confirms that the emigrant families of South China were neither the poorest nor part of landed gentry. They were mostly peasant or artisan families, who, because of their emigrant connections and their remittances, were better off than the mass of rural Chinese (Loewen 1988:28). Most arrived with some capital, sometimes enough to start a small grocery. More often, a relative or friend already established sponsored the newcomer.

Most of these early immigrants made their living as minor shopkeepers, traders, or general dealers and occasionally by farming. Few ran native eating-houses[29], butcheries, fahfee games[30], or started dressmaking / tailoring businesses. Only one of the interviewees reported that he had a more advantageous start in life. Cyril, 70, claimed that his father was an industrialist who acquired his start from fahfee money[31]:

> They were shopkeepers…(but) my father was the only industrialist that started in South Africa. He had a brickfield – that makes bricks. And he contracted houses of his own. And he had a crusher that used to crush bones and he used to mix that with the cement. He was a big industrialist. He didn't have a lot of money. My grandfather had a bit of money and he opened up a grocery shop. But he (my father) didn't fancy the grocery shop, so he closed it down and he

[28] It was also common practice to take out loans to cover passage; even in these instances, there would have to be trusted contacts with resources and some collateral or other assurance that the loans would be repaid within a reasonable time.
[29] See Titlestad (1984) for a discussion on the Chinese participation in the 'kaffir' eating houses.
[30] Fahfee is a form of gambling; it is illegal in South Africa. It is an informal game of chance involving bets placed on a series of numbers, between 1 and 36, much like a lottery. Brought to South Africa by early Chinese immigrants, it continues to be run mostly by Chinese South African families, although recent conversations indicate that new Chinese immigrants seem to be taking over as Chinese South Africans move into the professional classes. (For more detail see Krige 2004.)
[31] It is highly likely that many others also ran fahfee games; however, for reasons mentioned earlier, many of my research subjects left these details out of the interviews either purposefully or because they, too, were ignorant of the illicit activities of their parents and grandparents.

> started all these other things… My grandfather had come before us. He came and he was running a racket. You know, the Chinese run these fahfee…he had a numbers game and he put the family on its feet.

The earliest Chinese clubs in South Africa appear to have catered for literate people. In addition to gambling and other forms of recreation, almost all of these clubs had libraries and sitting rooms, subscriptions to Chinese newspapers, and collections of Chinese books for their members to read. It was via these papers, journals, and books that the Chinese in South Africa stayed abreast of news from China. One can also see, from the neatly suited gentlemen in early photographs that these men were of some means *and* wished to be seen as 'civilised'. A 1906 photograph of nine representatives of Chinese groups from the Cape Colony who constituted the Cape Colony Chinese Association was ornately embellished with Chinese writing on a banner above and on the pillars to each side of a group of suited gentlemen – with ties and flowers on their lapels. The inscriptions read:

> We who now live in the South Africa temporarily face unjust laws. We are being driven out because the Ch'ing government is weak… We miss our homeland, China. We hope our people will waken, strengthen, and conquer the world… Nothing is impossible. Everything depends on enthusiasm… We each have our duty to remember the best traditions of our ancestors and to see to our future (in Yap and Man 1996:68).

Such public 'projections', I would argue, served to bolster their image and further the construction of a particular identity – of a civilised and respectable people. Excluded from these community histories and images are the gambling activities, the opium dens, the visits to local prostitutes, the relations with black and coloured South Africans, and the (limited) degree of intermarriage. These aspects of community life did not fit with the identity that early Chinese South Africans projected and imagined for themselves. In the first decades of the 20th century, these Chinese clubs often provided the only opportunities to meet and socialise with other Chinese. These served as havens in an otherwise hostile, foreign environment.

A hostile reception

The gradual settlement of Chinese in the Cape, Natal, and the ZAR (later Transvaal) met with a hostile reception (Yap and Man 1996:42). From their first arrival in the mid-

1800s and for nearly a century discrimination and racist legislation kept the numbers of Chinese low, restricted further immigration, and placed controls on the existing Chinese community (Yap and Man 1996:62, 76-84; Smedley 1980b:20-21; Tung 1947). Early Chinese immigrants to other Western countries including the United States and Australia received similarly harsh treatment well into the mid-20th century (see, for example, Takaki 1993, Zia 2000, Lowe 1996).

Table 1.1 shows the early Chinese population of South Africa, excluding the Chinese indentured mineworkers, by region. While the numbers were tiny, both in real and relative terms, the reaction was unduly harsh: Chinese throughout the various colonies and states of early South Africa met with fear and hatred based primarily on race.

Table 1.1
Early Chinese Populations, excluding Chinese mineworkers, by region**

	1891	**1904**
Natal Province	77	165
Kimberley	185	245 (inc. 31 in Mafikeng)
Eastern Cape	19	806*
Cape Town and surrounds	11	328
Cape Province	215	1379
Transvaal Province	121	1012
Total	413	2,556

* These numbers swelled between 1891 and 1904 with the addition of labourers and artisans from Mauritius.
** All figures are based on census data extracted from Yap and Man 1996:46-87.

There were, however, regional differences in the treatment accorded to Chinese. The Orange Free State did not permit settlement of 'Asiatics' until 1986. From 1854, the law forbade 'Asiatics' from owning property or becoming citizens; these were rights reserved for whites only. In 1891, a law further prohibited any 'Asiatic' from living within the province; transiting 'Asiatics' were permitted within its borders for only 72 hours.[32]

[32] These and other laws are all listed on the chronology at the front of this dissertation.

Chinese first arrived in the South African Republic (ZAR) in the 1870s and 1880s lured by the prospects of digging for gold. In July 1876, seven Chinese were among the prospectors who converged on Pilgrims' Rest. Their appearance triggered alarm based on the "rather extensive immigration of Chinese in Australia and California" (Yap and Man 1996:73-74). The enactment of laws to deny digging licenses to all but white prospectors was a quick response to expressed concerns. The Johannesburg business community led the anti-'Asiatic' sentiment. From 1855, no person of colour could become a citizen and only citizens could own land. Law 3 of 1885 excluded Chinese from citizenship. From 1888 to 1899, fears of invasion of Indian traders resulted in the passing of a series of laws to prohibit or restrict 'Asiatics' in residence and in trade; these included pass laws.[33] The targets of most of the legislation was the Indian community of South Africa but the Chinese, having a loosely-defined common geographical origin – Asia – were grouped together with the Indians under the general category of 'Asiatic' and subject to the same race-based discriminatory legislation (Harris 1998:279).

The 1891 census shows that there were 215 Chinese in the Cape Colony; most of these lived in Kimberley.[34] Generally, the Chinese in the Cape enjoyed more rights than Chinese in the ZAR. For example, property ownership was permissible and if they were property owners, they could register to vote in parliamentary elections.[35] Nevertheless, the Chinese were often targets of abuse, antagonism, and racial slurs. The media, in particular, regularly published the threats of 'yellow invasion' or 'Chinese deluge'. Chinese traders were targets of abuse by the towns' white traders "who cast slurs of their race and cried 'unfair competition'" (Yap and Man 1996:50).

[33] One of these laws required registration with the district magistrate within eight days of arrival in the Province and a few of £25. Indians, as British subjects, protested. After protracted correspondence between the ZAR and the British governments, the 1887 laws were amended to allow Asiatics to buy fixed property in streets or locations set aside for them; in addition, the registration fee was lowered to £3.
[34] Kimberley is also the only town with almost equal numbers of both Cantonese and Moiyeanese; because of the small numbers of Chinese, these two groups appear to have lived together relatively harmoniously.
[35] In 1905, 1907, and 1913 at least twelve Chinese were registered to vote in the Port Elizabeth electoral division (Yap and Man 1996:60).

In the early 1900s, the Cape Colony passed a number of laws that severely restricted Chinese immigration. The first of these was the Immigration Restriction Act of 1902, which effectively barred most 'Asiatics' by demanding that prospective immigrants pass a literacy test in a European language. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 went a step further and specifically prohibited Chinese from entering and residing in the Cape Colony and instituted a comprehensive system of registration and control; the law required 'certificates of exemption' to be carried by all Chinese in the Cape, to be renewed yearly. The law denied Chinese citizenship and required fingerprint identification. The passage of this law again related to fears that the Transvaal's indentured Chinese miners would flood into the Cape (Harris 1998, Yap and Man 1996). Despite the protests of the Chinese, the South African government kept the act in place and for almost three decades virtually halted any new Chinese immigration to the Cape.

In Natal, alarm at the growth of the Indian population[36], resulted in legal steps against all 'Asiatics', including Chinese. In 1897, laws were passed to restrict immigration and trading; later, in 1904, another law placed restrictions on transit. The immigration legislation required that all new immigrants pass a European language test, as in the Cape. Yap and Man's archival research uncovered that between 1900 and 1904, 752 Chinese were refused entry and only 54 were admitted, either because they passed the education test or because they could prove that they had previously resided in South Africa (Yap and Man 1996:44). They also write that appeals to bring relatives into Natal failed. Those residing in Natal had to obtain domicile certificates to re-enter the colony. The Transit Immigrants Act (no. 7 of 1904) followed requiring the confinement of all contract labourers in compounds while in Natal; the law further prohibited anyone in the colony from harbouring or employing such Chinese. The law also had a direct impact on free Chinese in Natal, requiring them to furnish fingerprints for a special domicile certificate to be carried at all times. Chinese residents objected to giving

[36] By 1891 the population of Natal was as follows: 470,000 blacks, 45,000 whites, 46,000 Indians, 77 Chinese. The Indian population exploded with the importation of indentured labour followed by the immigration of the Indian trading classes and had already surpassed the population of whites in Natal causing great alarm. For more on Indian indentured labour to Natal see Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000

fingerprints. In China, fingerprints identified criminals alone; the fingerprint requirement was seen as a slur on their good, moral character.[37] By 1904, there were approximately 165 Chinese left in Natal (Yap and Man 1996:44). Despite other restrictions on trade and immigration, Chinese in Natal owned land and fixed property from 1896.

Early census figures indicate that there were few Chinese women in South Africa in the early days of Chinese immigration to the country. Loewen's study of Chinese in Mississippi indicates that there, too, the numbers of women remained low for the first several decades of Chinese immigration. He argues that both Chinese families and US immigration laws made it difficult for Chinese women to go overseas. The "hostage value of the wife and children" kept each sojourner bound to his financial obligations and eventual return to the homeland. This pattern, he asserts, retarded assimilation (Loewen 1988:29; see also Takaki 1993 and Zia 2000). In South Africa, no doubt the same Chinese customs impeded women from emigrating, exacerbated by restrictive immigration laws. It was not until the 1930s that the number of Chinese women in South Africa went over one thousand. Table 1.2 below shows the Chinese population in South Africa during census years between 1904 and 1946; the table excludes the close to 64,000 indentured workers.

Table 1.2
Chinese in South Africa, 1904 – 1946

	1904	**1921**	**1936**	**1946**
Male	2434	1487	1882	2463
Female	23	341	1062	1877
Total	**2457**	**1828**	**2944**	**4340**

Source: South African Office of Census and Statistics
Compiled from data found in various chapters of Yap and Man 1996

The table indicates a decline in the numbers of Chinese between 1904 and 1921. Yap and Man attribute this decline to immigrants' return to China, immigrants' death in South Africa, and the rejection of many potential immigrants through the Cape's Chinese Exclusion Act (1904) and later, under the Union's 1913 Immigration Act.

[37] This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

However, the numbers of women increased after that probably because many men, determined to stay in South Africa, brought in wives. By 1936, this plus natural population growth substantially increased the total number of Chinese in South Africa to nearly 3,000.

The immigration of Chinese to a whole variety of places brought them into contact with pre-existing constructions of race and identity, and with states that sought to embed race in the state and in law. As Anthony Marx points out, state policies are historically imbedded and 'make race' (Marx 1998:2). We see the process of racial construction occurring in both the US and Australia where Chinese immigration to Australia (see Ryan 1995) and the US (Takaki 1993) was also restricted by law. In the US, alien land laws of 1913, 1920, and 1923 prohibited Asian immigrants from owning land and other property making them into "aliens ineligible to citizenship" (Lowe 1996:13). Lowe argues that the period from 1850 up through the Second World War was a period of legal exclusions, political disenfranchisement, labour exploitation, and internment for Asian-origin groups in the US (Lowe 1996:9-14). Both Lowe and Takaki explain that racial constructions of America formed the basis of the treatment of Chinese. Takaki, for example, argues that white businessmen were able to "degrade the Chinese into a subservient labouring caste" because of the "dominant ideology that defined America as a racially homogenous society and Americans as white" (Takaki 1993:204). He further argues that the "status of racial inferiority assigned to the Chinese had been prefigured in the Black and Indian past" (Takaki 1993:204).

In South Africa, similar racial dynamics and specific anti-Asian and anti-Chinese legislation of the first half of the 20th century, reinforced earlier racist legislation and reflected the ideologies of the white governments (including the British government). In addition, it reflected the outlook of the white settler societies of the early colonies of South Africa, although, as the brief survey above indicates, despite early white imaginaries of a 'white South Africa', there was no master plan to keep South Africa white. Indeed, racial policies were negotiated, contested, and re-negotiated between various parties. The construction of race was a work in progress and despite the

existence of overarching racial ideologies, there were times when factors other than race became more salient. National economic imperatives could divert the state from these ideologies, while haphazard implementation frequently followed newly established state policies. State views and treatment of particular race groups were mercurial, flexing and changing over time.[38] Nevertheless, the broad tapestry throughout the 20th century was towards a construction of 'Chinese' or 'Asians' as a racially distinct group, warranting distinctive treatment by law and custom. A multiplicity of petty and substantive laws inflicted discrimination on this tiny group of people.

State views of Asians were neither consistent nor entirely based on racial ideologies. The differences in the treatment accorded to Chinese and Japanese in South Africa, for example, offer a dramatic example of the inconsistencies of state policies, in this case, due to economic interests[39]. The Japanese were exempted from 'non-white' status and granted special privileges. As early as 1928, the formal incorporation of the 'improved' status of Japanese was written into law with the Liquor Act, which exempted Japanese from the definition of 'Asiatic', thereby allowing them the possession of alcohol and admission into public bars. Stemming, in large part, from the trade relations in the early part of the 20th century between Japan and Great Britain as well as Japan and South Africa, the Japanese gained rights as 'honorary whites'. The Chinese protested against such differentiation, arguing that, "on the international front, Chinese were placed on the same footing as Japanese" (Yap and Man 1996:247); at the core of their protests was the very honour of the 'great China' of their imaginaries. Protesting against racist treatment became a way of reclaiming honour lost, fighting off the shame of their official second-class status.

[38] This argument will be taken up again in Chapter Two.
[39] In the early years of the 20th century, the Japanese faced the same restrictions as all 'Asiatics' as far as immigration, freedom of movement, and property rights. However, between 1910 and 1920, Japan had become the second largest export market for South African goods, just after the UK. By 1933, Japan also became on of six major suppliers of goods to the Union of South Africa. For these reasons, the Japanese requested and received special treatment.

Chinese organisations and resistance

Indeed, it would appear that the Chinese protested most pieces of racist legislation and discrimination (Yap and Man 1996). In each instance, Chinese individuals and groups, independently or through the offices of the Chinese Consul-General, occasionally as British subjects, and increasingly as long-time residents of South Africa, protested and petitioned against their treatment. In the process, they took decisive steps in beginning the construction of a fresh identity in their newly adopted country, an identity as industrious, law-abiding, civilised, and respectable people, who would not act in disruptive ways but who, nevertheless, rejected their construction by the state as a separate, inferior race. Quiet diplomacy, petitions, and letters were typical of the way in which the Chinese community fought against what they deemed unfair and unjust treatment in South Africa. The only exception to the quiet diplomacy practiced was their once-off participation with the Indians in the passive resistance campaigns led by Mahatma Gandhi.

As early as the 1880s, the Chinese community sent letters and petitions to government officials. In 1887, 420 Chinese asked to be allowed to remain in Johannesburg to trade in the face of attempts to remove them. In 1890, a group of Chinese defended themselves publicly, stating that they merely wished to work and trade legitimately, that some were naturalised British subjects, and that they paid their rates and taxes (Yap and Man 1996:50). In 1898, 172 Chinese petitioned the government to ease restrictions claiming that the Chinese were "an order-loving nation, always ready to obey the laws of the land that they reside in and also faithfully paying all taxes and never getting involved in politics…" (Yap and Man 1996: 82).

In response to the Cape's Chinese Exclusion Act (1904), again the Chinese protested. Regional Chinese associations wrote letters and appealed directly to the Cape Colony government. They raised money to send delegates to London to petition the Chinese Minister. Furthermore, they sent appeals through the Imperial Chinese Consulate-General. The acting Consul-General, Liu Ngai, argued that the Chinese Exclusion Act constituted class legislation, which placed "an undeserved stigma on the subjects of a nation in amity with Great Britain." The Cape Prime Minister, John X. Merriman,

replied that the current situation was a "conflict of civilisations." He wrote that the Chinese,

> … their matchless industry, their intelligence, and their proverbial integrity command admiration of all who have studied their economic history" however, the introduction of Chinese civilisation into South Africa was no more desirable than a European settlement in China" (in Yap and Man 1996:69).

Some government decision-makers acknowledged Chinese industriousness and integrity and recognised China as one of the world's great civilisations. However, South African whites in a position to be economically threatened by the Chinese were not as enlightened. In some ways, the very arguments utilised to support Chinese rights, in particular their reputation for frugality and hard work, reinforced the fears of the white working and trading classes. If the Chinese could live on virtually nothing and work longer hours, surely they could undersell the white tradesman.

Chinese organisations (see Table 1.3 below) led much of the community's activism. There is evidence of Chinese community organisations from as early as 1895, when the Chinese Benevolent Society or *Kaiyin Fee Gon* was formed as the social hub of the Kimberley Chinese community (Yap and Man 1996:208). These organisations provided support systems for settlers and according to Yap and Man, "a network of compatriots who spoke a common dialect and who shared the same experience in trying to fit into a foreign land" (Yap and Man 1996:208). Some were purely social in nature and offered a variety of recreational facilities, the opportunity to meet over a game of billiards or *mahjong*, read Chinese newspapers, or ask a more educated compatriot to write Chinese letters home to China. Several of the clubs also organised burials or offered a monthly venue for the draw of the 'fee' or *hui* money-lending scheme. However, several of these community organisations directed their attention and efforts to the restrictions imposed on the Chinese and concentrated on improving their position in South Africa. In addition, from 1920, the Kuomintang (KMT) established branches in most South African cities (Yap and Man 1996:208).

Table 1.3 Early Chinese Organisations in South Africa		
Organisation	**City**	**Year established**
The Cantonese Club	Johannesburg	1898
The Transvaal Chinese Association (TCA)	Johannesburg	1903
The Transvaal Chinese United Club (United)	Johannesburg	1909
The Chinese Association of Natal	Durban	1909
The Cape Town Chinese Association	Cape Town	1902
The Port Elizabeth Chinese Association	Port Elizabeth	1905
The Uitenhage Chinese Association	Uitenhage	1904

Chairman Lai Mun James of the Cantonese Club explained its purpose in a speech in 1903:

> Firstly: For the education and information of our Cantonese people as also to bring about harmony and brotherhood amongst them which must tend to their welfare, and success in the country… Our people are very much given to Civilisation and want to see its cause promoted, and our ideas are similar to those of the Europeans, and we submit ourselves to the same laws and regulations as the Europeans do (in Yap and Man 1996:89)

The Transvaal Chinese Association (TCA) formed the core of political activity in the Transvaal during the early part of the 1900s. Unknown to most South Africans, including many in the Chinese South African community, members of the TCA actively participated in the passive resistance campaigns with the Indian resisters during "the five years between 1906 and 1911 (which) marked the most turbulent times in the history of the community" (Yap and Man 1996:137; see also Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000). Led by Mahatma Gandhi during this sojourn in South Africa the 'free' Transvaal Chinese together with the local Indian community committed to opposing the new 'fingerprint' Asiatic registration law of the Transvaal. Many willingly went to jail, forfeiting their means of livelihood and risking deportation to give effect to this opposition.

Why did they participate in this active protest? Yap and Man suggest the mineworkers' experiences of physical abuse and ill treatment at the hands of the white mineworker managers and supervisors, particularly in the first year following their arrival, influenced the free Chinese who wanted to ensure that they were treated differently

(Yap and Man 1996:144). White, who did not distinguish between the free traders and the indentured mine workers, indiscriminately attacked the free Chinese. They were also faced the Hetvolk Party who wanted to send *all Chinese*, indentured and free, back to China. Yap and Man posit a possible rapid deterioration in circumstances as the stimulus for joining the protests. The use of diplomatic channels had achieved little. Others suggested the impending union of the colonies led Chinese to hope that under the British government they would be better off than they had been under Boer rule.[40]

Under such conditions, the Chinese South Africans found Gandhi's arguments, about being treated as members of a 'civilisation' versus their current treatment as criminals, appealing. Fingerprinting, in particular, would bring disgrace to oneself and to China; fighting, in this instance, would be the virtuous path (Yap and Man 1996:44). The Chinese objections to the law, initially made via the Imperial Chinese Consul-General for South Africa, were that the registration law would inflict "a degrading stigma on the subjects of a *civilised* nation." (Yap and Man 1996:139; italics added) While the Indians used their status as British subjects in their appeals, the Chinese called for fair treatment based on the international treaty obligations between two foreign powers. In other words, they made their appeals as 'upstanding' Chinese nationals in South Africa. Again, their honour as members of a friendly and equal nation, and, moreover, as part of the great Chinese civilisation were at stake.

Chinese participation in the passive resistance campaign led to arrests, imprisonment, and deportation. Over the course of the resistance campaign, out of a population of approximately one thousand, over one hundred and fifty men were imprisoned and dozens deported. Many of the leaders of the Chinese resistance were deported at least once. Most found their way back to South Africa, often to face imprisonment. The threat of deportation became the true test of their commitment to resistance. While they were fighting for rights, ostensibly as foreign nationals, they were also determined to remain in South Africa, even under harsh restrictions.

[40] From discussion following a Wits Interdisciplinary Research Seminar presentation of earlier draft of this chapter on 9 May 2005.

A critical consequence of Chinese participation in the resistance was an almost irrevocable split within the Chinese community. In 1909, a dispute between the resisters and the other camp, the non-resisters, erupted in violence as opposing factions attacked each other in Chinatown with guns, knives, sticks, stones, and iron bars. Four were hospitalised and twenty-nine arrested. In the aftermath of the riot, the Transvaal Chinese Association retained its nominal role as the community's representative body. The Cantonese Club, seen as home for the passive resisters, split from the Transvaal Chinese United Club, formed by members of the 'party of compliance'; this split lasted for decades. The rift was further consolidated along ethnic lines: since most Moiyeanese belonged to the Cantonese Club,[41] none were accepted as members of the United Club.

What lessons did the Chinese learn from their participation in the passive resistance campaign? When Indians renewed passive resistance in 1913, the Chinese did not participate. The principle issue of the renewed campaign, the recognition of Indian marriages and the waiver of the £3 tax imposed on indentured labourers in Natal did not directly affect the Chinese. Furthermore, five years of struggle, hardship, and minimal achievement had exhausted community enthusiasm. While they may have won the moral victory, they paid an extremely high cost and 'Asiatics' remained second-class citizens for many decades. The greatest impact, however, was that the Chinese never again took a visible role in any protests or confrontational political action, independently or with another South African ethnic group. They became a separate, quiet, and law-abiding community. Much has been written about the political construction of pan-ethnic groups (see Padilla 1986; Tajima 1996; Grueso, Rosero, and Escobar 1998). Over subsequent years, the South African government provided sufficient impetus for further collective action through numerous other laws that 'lumped' Chinese with Indians as 'Asiatics' or under the broad banner of 'coloured', and yet, the Chinese chose an independent route. The Chinese community in South Africa, in the aftermath of their experiences with the passive resistance campaign and the consequent intra-community strife, was as determined as ever to resist

[41] The Moiyeanese belonged to the Cantonese Club because they were from Canton, not because they were ethnic Cantonese.

discrimination; however, they chose less public and more solitary action as their platform for resistance.

While campaigns involving public confrontation ended for the Chinese, the leaders of the various regional organisations continued in subsequent years to engage with various government bodies petitioning for the removal of restrictions and the granting of more rights for the Chinese. Frequently, they directed their appeals through the Chinese Consul-General, because the community felt that the diplomatic representatives had the ear of government. Initially, the twin legs of the community's high standard of living and China's 5000-year-old civilisation, "which made the Chinese the equal of any Western culture" (Yap and Man 1996:231) continued to form the foundation of their arguments. As long as they were treated as inferior, their leadership was determined to fight, albeit quietly and peacefully, to regain lost honour.

Sojourners or settlers?

The tendency of resistance to take a more nationalistic form in this period was part of a larger trend. This was a generation which came to and remained in South Africa but which did not develop a deeply local identity immediately. Three key events in China – unification, the rise of the Chinese nationalists (Kuomintang or the KMT) and the Sino-Japanese war – were critical to the formation of identity for this generation. A year after the Cape Colony, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State join to form the Union of South Africa, revolutionary groups led by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen overthrow the Ch'ing dynasty and found the Republic of China, in 1911. This event caused great excitement and a rise in Chinese nationalism amongst Chinese overseas, including those in South Africa. The establishment of branches of the KMT from 1920 in most of South Africa's larger cities further heightened identification with Chinese nationalism while inhibiting the development of South African identity. This was similar to what happened elsewhere in the world, wherever there was a sizeable Chinese community (Pan 1994, G.Wang 2000, L.Wang and G.Wang, eds., 1998a and 1998b). Many of the members of the Chinese clubs also had membership in their local branches of the KMT.

An opening speech at one of the KMT branches, called for the Chinese in South Africa to offer their patriotism to China, urging:

> … unswerving support to President Sun Yat Sen in his attempt to reunite China into a single, world power. Delegates were called upon to swear allegiance to the republic and to offer for the cause their lives and property (in Yap and Man 1996:245).

The card-carrying members of the KMT were, clearly, still patriotic to China and viewed themselves as overseas Chinese. Just one or two decades later, however, younger Chinese, many of them born in South Africa, were forming their own social clubs, which emphasised Western sports, music, and entertainment. In this next generation, were they still sojourners or had they become settlers in South Africa?

In many ways, attachment to their motherland was unquestionable amongst the early immigrants from China. Most of the single men had left behind parents, siblings, other relatives and friends in China. Accone's grandfather, Ah Kwok/Ah Leong never returned to China; he lived most of his life in South Africa, from the time he was a boy of fourteen. However, according to Accone, his grandfather continued to see himself as a Chinese national. Accone wrote:

> It was a matter of circumstance. Once his children were born, the possibility of a return receded. And then came the grandchildren. Because he had lost one family, in the sense of never again seeing his mother, brothers and sisters, I think Ah Kwok/Ah Leong was reluctant to risk losing another. Also, Gertie (Accone's grandmother) had bad associations with journeying to China and, to a degree, living there (in the sense that her idyllic time in the village was punctuated by the death of her father). Besides all those factors, returning to China during National Party rule in SA would have proved difficult, if not impossible. He never viewed himself as South African. China was home, not here (e-mail communication 4 June 2004).

While there is no data as to the amount of money sent from South Africa to China, it is clear from Yap and Man's historical account, reinforced in the interviews, that most early Chinese made remittances. Frequent travel, despite travel restrictions, between South Africa and China, kept social and emotional ties intact. The KMT branches ensured that the politics of China remained very much a part of the everyday lives of these early settlers.

Traditional sojourning "was a state of mind, a residual affirmation of the sojourners ultimate identification with China" (G. Wang 2000:54). However, sojourning depends on regular contact with the home country or at least frequent access to objects from home: "it cannot survive if the sojourners see no prospect of returning home" (G. Wang 2000:51). Regular movement to and from China, so frequent amongst earlier immigrants, became increasingly problematic both due to South African restrictions as well as the wars and political strife in China itself. As numbers of Chinese born in South Africa increased and the travel back to China decreased, the sojourner community began its transformation into a settler community. Table 1.4 below shows the Chinese in South Africa by birthplace.

Table 1.4
Chinese in South Africa, by Birthplace

	1921	**1936**	**1946**
Born in China	1409	1648	1878
Born in South Africa	419	1296	2462
Total	1828	2944	4340

From Yap and Man 1996: 209 / Source: South Africa. Office of Census and Statistics.

By the 1936 census, the numbers of Chinese born in South Africa already numbered over 1,000. By the 1946 census, the numbers of Chinese born in South Africa outnumbered those born in China. Between 1936 and 1946, the number of Chinese born in South Africa almost doubled. Older Chinese settlers remained engaged in affairs of China. They followed events through newspapers and letters from home. Simultaneously, through their community organisations and through the Consul General they fought for their rights in South Africa. Was this *still* a matter of regaining lost honour as members of the great Chinese civilisation? Or had they begun to fight for rights as South Africans?

According to Yap and Man,

> The first generations of settlers retained firm ties with their homeland, some dreaming of returning there one day, but all hoping that China would regain its prestige as a strong and independent country. Many who had ventured abroad believed the discrimination they encountered was closely tied to the world's perception of China, at the turn of the century, as weak, corrupt, and powerless (Yap and Man 1996:207).

Yap and Man would argue, then, that there was a link between the willingness to fight discrimination in South Africa and Chineseness. Early statements of various Chinese leaders would support the argument that they were, in fact, demanding better treatment *for Chinese as Chinese nationals* and as citizens of a country with which South Africa (and perhaps more importantly, Britain, at the time) had trade relations as equal partners. In fact, in their earlier protests against the Asiatic Registration Law and later the Immigrants Registration Act the Chinese passive resisters saw their participation as part of their duty to maintain the honour of the "great Asiatic nation, China" (Yap and Man 1996:137). At the same time, these men were fighting to remain, live, and work in South Africa. I would argue that, gradually, the length of residence in South Africa and their behaviour as good citizens became the primary rationale for their demands for rights and better treatment [42] in South Africa.

Early petitions for citizenship did in fact occur. As early as 1884, lawyers enquired into the possibility of Chinese becoming citizens. In 1886, nineteen Chinese petitioned the Governor of Natal to allow them to become naturalised British citizens. They argued that they had resided in Natal for several years, and they described themselves as "quiet, sober and industrious men" (Yap and Man 1996:43). The request was considered but remained in abeyance. Throughout the first three decades of the 20th century, dozens of Chinese made petitions for rights as citizens of South Africa; these men had quite evidently decided to settle in South Africa.

The participation in the passive resistance campaign and the activities of the numerous Chinese organisations provide further evidence that there were many Chinese willing to fight for their rights in South Africa. The introduction of Chinese women as wives to South Africa fundamentally changed the nature of the community. As Accone mentioned, once there were children and grandchildren resident in South Africa, reasons for returning to China became less and less important. The first decades of the 20th century were marked, in the Chinese community, by "the business of survival…and by a desire to secure the future" (Yap and Man 1996:171). Men who had come before and

[42] I use 'citizens' here in the broadest sense and not in a legal sense.

established themselves went back to China to fetch their wives and children. Those who were single returned to find brides to join them. They were now concerned with "how to ensure their livelihood, how to educate their children, how to retain their Chinese heritage yet also become part of a society essentially western, and often as alien to them as they were to it" (Yap and Man 1996:171). In other words, this community was already attempting to create a niche for themselves in the country that had become their adopted home.

The Transvaal Chinese Association (TCA) in a memorandum to the Feetham Commission investigating legal and illegal occupation of land as it pertained to the 1932 Asiatic Land Tenure Act wrote:

> We claim to be law-abiding and we take pride in being self-supported… Though we have referred to ourselves herein as citizens of the Chinese Republic it is the desire of most, if not all, of us *to settle here and regard this our home*; and even though we may never be granted full rights of citizenship in so far as franchise … we must … work for the good of the country as a whole, and the greater our rights in the country, the greater our interest, and consequently the greater our endeavour for the good of the land of our adoption. We desire, as citizens of a friendly nation, to be treated with justice and humanity by a friendly, civilised nation (in Yap and Man 1996:187; italics added).

The memorandum clearly stated that while they argue as citizens of a friendly nation, they want to settle in South Africa, they consider South Africa home, and they want to work for the good of the country. The leadership of the TCA appealed to the friendly and civilised leaders of South Africa to treat the Chinese fairly and give them greater rights for the good of South Africa, the land of their adoption.

The sojourner mentality often discussed in overseas Chinese literature was, in the case of South Africa, a relatively short-lived phenomenon. Certainly, some of the earlier and older Chinese immigrants continued to hold on to dreams that they would one day return with their accumulated wealth to China. Practically speaking, however, the riches they sought in South Africa were elusive and there was seldom enough money to return to China in the manner of which they dreamed. Restrictive immigration legislation made travel to and fro difficult. Moreover, as the community evolved from

one of single men to one of two-parent families with children, so, too, the Chinese went from being sojourners to settlers. However, Asian politics interfered with the general direction of shifting identification from China to South Africa, with a series of events forcing the focus to return repeatedly to China.

In the early 1930s, at a time when a generation of Chinese in South Africa had begun to identify with South Africa (through time of residence and developing family structures), the Sino-Japanese War began. Even more than the unification of China two decades earlier or the on-going activities of the KMT, the attack on China by Japan fired a latent nationalism and patriotism toward China. Yap and Man state, "Living as they had for years on the edge of South African society, the Chinese responded with alacrity to the opportunity to 'belong' in some way to a struggle in far-off China" (Yap and Man 1996:256). They report that, "throughout the war years Chinese, young and old, were caught up in unprecedented fund-raising activities as they sought to show support for their far-off motherland" (Yap and Man 1996:245). Wang concurs that the height of Chinese nationalism was reached both in and outside China during the Sino-Japanese War and World War Two (G. Wang 2000:73). Wang reports that in South East Asia the Japanese occupation in most of the region between 1941 and 1945 was, in many ways, responsible for the resinisation of many local-born Chinese because it highlighted the commonality of Chinese, regardless of whether they were China or local-born (G. Wang 2000:85).

Interviewees' comments supported these conclusions about the renewed patriotism to China. Paul, 66, stated that the older Chinese supported the Chinese revolution and were engaged in the war efforts. He said:

> Especially the older generation – my dad's or my grandpa's time. Even in those years, things were linked to the Chinese revolution. You know, the local Chinese were supporting the revolution as well. Also, the anti-Japanese war, they contributed a lot.

Racial discrimination in South Africa and a war in China had a pincer effect, renewing patriotism toward China and redirecting the Chinese community from cementing their South Africa-identification to becoming more fervently identified with China. Treated,

at best, as second-class citizens in South Africa, they knew that they were not welcome; but because of the war, they could not return to China. However, they could retain their identity as Chinese. Anthony Marx suggests that the consolidation of white rule and a unified state in South Africa encouraged cross-language, cross-ethnic, and cross-class identity and mobilisation amongst blacks (Marx 1998:194); in other words, racism and, in particular, institutionalised racism consolidated black opposition and strengthened racial identity. In the face of racism and discrimination, a number of other authors have also observed that ethnic minorities tend to "cling to the culture of his own ethnic group" (Paul C.P. Sui in Loewen 1988:30). Unable to return to China, denied full citizenship in South Africa, they retained a strong sense of Chinese identity and began to forge new identities as Chinese South Africans.

Conclusion: the beginnings of a constructed Chinese South African identity

This overview of the early immigration from China to South Africa supports a number of conclusions about identity and identity construction. There was ample evidence of race discrimination. Its many successive rulers imagined South Africa as a white state. Notwithstanding the importance of tensions between the two dominant groups of white settlers – the English and the Boer – and their overriding preoccupation with subordinating the black African population, the earliest governments clearly established who was to be included and who was excluded in the colonies in the formulation of their citizenship and immigration laws. Potential Chinese immigrants faced restrictions on entering the colonies of South Africa, first because of fears after the experience of Indian indentured labourers and later due to fears of Chinese indentured labour. Various immigration restrictions limited the pace of growth of the community and the overall size of the Chinese community.

The few Chinese who were permitted entry into the Cape and Natal colonies and the South African Republic (ZAR) were confronted with further restrictions placed on movement, residence, and trade. Again, most of these laws were designed with Indians in mind. By the 1940s, although over forty percent of the almost 3,000 Chinese were

born in South Africa, they had no political rights and were restricted in trade, education, public transportation, property rights, and freedom of movement by various laws.

The numerous protests and petitions of the Chinese against discriminatory treatment are indicative of some degree of education and empowerment. Their efforts to fight against mistreatment and the arguments put forward by the Chinese constitute their early attempts at constructing a new Chinese identity in South Africa. Notions of honour and shame, mentioned numerous times in interviews, prove useful to understanding the construction of identity of the Chinese immigrants to South Africa. In terms of socio-economic class, we concluded above that while most immigrants from China were probably illiterate and poor, they were not from the poorest segments of Guangdong (Kwangtung) society. Rather, they were people with some means and with contacts abroad. In fact, a few were literate not only in Chinese but also in a European language. In China, they may have been people with some socio-economic standing. In coming to South Africa, they had economic aspirations. However, their reception in South Africa was harsh. The earliest arrivals, with intentions of 'striking it rich' through working in the gold mines, were not even permitted to hold gold digging licenses. These early immigrants, in moving to South Africa, had lost whatever position they might have had in China. They could not return to China as poor men without admitting failure and losing their honour. Their only recourse was to continue to work hard and educate their children to secure future success in a foreign land. The virtues of hard work and value of education remain lynchpins of Chinese South African identity. Their arguments for better treatment in South Africa consistently emphasised their solid, law-abiding, hard-working character and their membership in a civilized, friendly nation.

In terms of political identity and strategy, the lessons learned in the aftermath of the Chinese participation in the passive resistance campaign have also had long-lasting effects. The Chinese South Africans interviewed for this project constantly described their community as quiet, passive, and apolitical. They explained that they learned their passivity from their parents. Contrary to these self-assessments, the leadership of the Chinese South African community has always been quite vocal and quite political. The

strategies however, changed from collective action with other ethnic groups to engaging, in quiet diplomacy and negotiations with decision-makers on their own. The leaders of the Chinese South African community engaged in constant and solitary battles to regain honour lost as second-class citizens of South Africa, fighting for rights, privileges, concessions, and generally better treatment for Chinese in South Africa.

Discrimination and exclusion succeeded in slowing the early formation of attachments to South Africa and further entrenching Chinese identity. Key political events in China from the mid-19th century through to the 1911 founding of the Chinese Republic, the unification under the Nationalists in 1928, the 1931 Sino-Japanese War, followed by the Second World War further influenced the Chinese outside of China. For those in South Africa, these tumultuous turns in Chinese history during the 19th and 20th centuries periodically opened and closed doors to their sojourns. At the same time, they re-ignited Chinese nationalism at times when they might have become more South Africa-identified. Chinese political movements, such as the KMT, the offices of the Consul-General, and Chinese state policies regarding overseas Chinese also played roles in encouraging the continued loyalties of overseas Chinese, urging them to remain filial.

Their belief that China was great and that Chinese people, wherever they were, had to maintain this greatness passed from the first 'free' Chinese immigrants to South Africa to their descendents. Many scholars of overseas Chinese write about the continuing power of the myth of the "sons of the yellow emperor" (see, for example, Louie 2004, Dirlik in Hu de-Hart 1999, Wang Gungwu 2000, Tu 1991/94). This myth of a 'great China' and a great Chinese people continues to hold great sway over current generations of Chinese South Africans. Alfred, 48, stated:

> (The) older generations of Chinese (those who came over) carried themselves in a way that said, 'we are better than anyone else – act like it all the time. You know, 'the chosen people' syndrome. Even as a child, I would constantly remind myself that China was the most populous country, had the longest surviving civilization, the greatest man-made artefact…etc., etc., ad nauseam.

Many Chinese felt that their discriminatory treatment in South Africa was directly related to global perceptions about the decline of China from the mid-19th century. I

would argue further that these perceptions motivated them to think of themselves as 'more civilized' than the rest. The Chinese in South Africa felt they had to counter the shame of their treatment as second-class citizens and the decline of China by regaining some honour through their individual accomplishments. In the early days, they fought for rights and better treatment of Chinese as foreign nationals and members of the 'great China'. Later, they continued to fight for rights as South Africans. Their belief in the myth of a 'great China' and their deeply held belief in Chinese superiority and the need to regain lost honour motivated Chinese to behave 'properly' and to strive to improve their position in South Africa.

When South Africa entered World War Two with China acknowledged as an ally, the white leaders of South Africa's wider war efforts invited Chinese in South Africa to participate. China's position during the war and the activities of the local Chinese focused greater attention on the Chinese position in South Africa. From 1942 onwards, numerous media articles penned by liberal whites focused on the 'unjust' discriminatory measures imposed on the Chinese. They argued that since China was an ally, the Chinese residents of South Africa should receive better treatment. They also pointed out that by the 1940s over 40% of the Chinese were born in South Africa (Yap and Man 1996: 273-274). At the end of World War Two, Chinese in South Africa were optimistic that the post-war period would bring more freedoms and greater equality to their small community. Certainly, the Chinese in North America, whose histories up to this point had much in common with the history of Chinese in South Africa, benefited from post-war changes and liberalisation. The Chinese of South Africa, having worked side-by-side with white South Africans on the war effort, with China as a staunch ally, assumed that the few privileges that they had begun to receive during the early 1940s would continue.

Instead, by the end of the 1940s, a pincer of drastic changes based on the fates of two very different nationalist parties literally trapped the Chinese in South Africa. By 1948, the South African Nationalist Party won power in the national elections. In the following year, the Chinese Nationalists were forced to flee mainland China for

Formosa Island, defeated by the Chinese Communists. While China's doors were effectively closed to them, they were 'stuck' in South Africa, facing the extension and entrenchment of racial restrictions.