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

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

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CHAPTER FOUR
THE *WHITENING* AND UPWARD MOBILITY OF CHINESE SOUTH AFRICANS: SHIFTING RACE, CLASS, AND SOCIAL POSITION

Introduction

The concessions the South African state gradually made to the small Chinese community have been discussed. These included permission to: utilise white facilities, send their children to white schools, and move into white areas. This chapter provides the physical, material evidence of rising class and social position attained by this small community, in part, by the openings created by those concessions and privileges. This chapter will show how, over the course of three generations, the Chinese South Africans gradually moved from their humble origins as uneducated immigrants working as corner grocers to become a relatively highly educated, largely professional, solidly middle class group, increasingly accepted by white society as equals. Their legal position as 'non-whites' remained unchanged until 1994, nonetheless they came progressively to be regarded by 'whites' and 'non-whites' alike *as white* or 'honorary white.'

Can upward mobility and social acceptance by the white power group change racial identity? Karen Brodkin Sacks, in tackling a similar question about how the Jews in America became 'white', attempts to determine which came first. In the post-World War Two period in America, Jews, Irish, Italians, Poles, and the Portuguese shifted position from being regarded as second-class citizens and 'non-white' to being accepted by the settled English Americans as 'white'. Sacks asks: did they become 'white' *because* they became middle class? Or "did their incorporation into an expanded version of Whiteness open up the economic door to middle class status?" (Sacks 1996:86). This chapter seeks to address these same questions with regard to the tiny Chinese South African community by examining some of the material shifts in the lives of Chinese South Africans from the 1940s through the 1990s.

Contested interpretations of racial and ethnic identity and the complex intertwining nature of class and race during apartheid South Africa have complicated attempts to redefine Chinese as 'white'. In a 1960s study of the Chinese in the Mississippi Delta, Loewen found that the Delta Chinese had been completely acculturated and assimilated,

to the extent that the school district identifies them as 'white', carried a 'W' on their drivers' licenses, and even held leadership positions in white institutions. However, their racial distinctiveness remained "an immutable and immediately visible characteristic" and they never enjoyed full equality (Loewen 1988:170, 96). In South Africa, apartheid laws clearly defined the Chinese as 'non-white'. Their identity – the way they viewed themselves and their labelling by others – was, however, increasingly muddled and ever changing. The apartheid era was a confusing time for Chinese. By law they were 'non-white' but in practice they were increasingly 'honorary white'. Throughout their lives, they received conflicting and changing social messages about who they were and where they fit in South African society. This chapter seeks to understand these seemingly contradictory aspects of their lives by identifying specific shifts in their social positions and locating them in time.

In addition to the clear differences between age/generational groups (or cohorts, as I will refer to them) that became evident, this study revealed further differences based on place (locality/region), many of these related to the size and proportion of the Chinese community vis-à-vis the dominant white community in each place; therefore it will also be necessary to locate these shifts by place/space. The section immediately following this introduction will identify some of the key traits of each of the three cohorts I have identified. Following this I will examine the shifts in education, occupation, residence, and relationships as experienced by these three cohorts. While I will make periodic references to theoretical and comparative materials, especially those that refer to the relationships between class, race, and ethnicity, this chapter is primarily based on information from the interviews and the surveys.

Three cohorts of Chinese South Africans

The research indicates that the differential impact of changing levels of both discrimination and concessions on interviewees over the course of apartheid led to various forms of Chinese South African identity. Three distinct groups or cohorts, distinguished by age and generation, emerged. I have, for descriptive purposes, identified these groups as follows: the first cohort, the *shopkeepers*, is made up of second-generation Chinese South Africans who are aged 60 and older; the second cohort, the *fence-sitters*, are also mostly second-generation, between the ages of 35 and

59; and the last cohort, the *bananas*,[1] are primarily third generation, aged 34 and younger.

The *shopkeepers* were born in the 1920s and 1930s. While born in South Africa to immigrant parents, they were treated largely as foreigners – sometimes better than other 'non-whites', but more commonly as second-class 'citizens'.[2] Both the South African and the Chinese states regarded them as Chinese nationals, and throughout most of their adult lives, the Chinese Consul-General acted as their representative. The *shopkeepers* came of age during the height of apartheid and all of them experienced discrimination and oppression, although these levels varied from city to city. They were, amongst those interviewed, the most deeply affected by apartheid legislation and their treatment at the hands of the South African state. As 'non-whites' by legal definition, this cohort of Chinese South Africans experienced, first-hand, apartheid-era exclusions; they were prohibited from using public facilities; barred from white hospitals, schools, technical colleges; and forced to operate under a permit system for university, public transportation, residence, and business.

This group also experienced the gradual 'loosening' of apartheid restrictions by way of concessions and privileges. A few managed to earn tertiary degrees and became professionals or tradesmen; most, however, continued to work as shopkeepers or in unskilled or semi-skilled positions in factories, retail shops, or offices. Officially, their status as 'non-white' remained unchanged and their treatment as second-class citizens dominated their memories.[3] Despite the concessions they experienced from the 1960s and 1970s, it was their experiences of exclusions that had greatest impact on the *shopkeepers'* identities and attitudes about South Africa.

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[1] These 'names' will be explained below.

[2] 'Citizens' here is used in the loosest sense, in that they were general members of the society. After a thorough reading of relevant secondary materials, it is still unclear as to exactly when the Chinese were considered South African citizens. As with most of the materials on Chinese, they are mixed together with one or another group or missing entirely. What was clear, however, was that during the apartheid years, the National Party government consistently deferred to the Chinese Consul-General on all matters pertaining to the local South African-born Chinese community, as did all the governments before them. It was only in 1994 that Chinese South Africans together with all other previously disadvantaged 'non-whites' were granted the franchise and full citizenship rights.

[3] Just as the *shopkeepers* held on to an imagined vision of the great China of their heritage, they also seemed to hold onto their memories of their suffering under apartheid, and in some cases, idealised images of how much better things were for them before apartheid.

The *fence-sitters* were born from the 1940s through the early 1960s. Most were also second-generation Chinese South Africans. They were born into an apartheid state and experienced some discrimination; however, as a group, they also had the advantage of concessions and privileges. Increasing numbers of *fence-sitters* moved from behind shop counters into other occupations. The *fence-sitters* grew up balancing parental stories of oppression in South Africa with stories about China's greatness, all the while experiencing greater and greater openings in a climate of political violence and uncertainty. Their identities reflect these complex and confusing experiences. As they lost their Chinese language abilities, they began to regard themselves, culturally, as increasingly westernised. Neither completely 'white' nor 'non-white', and yet not 'very Chinese'[4], they were, of all the cohorts, most ambiguous about their identities, their loyalties, and their place in South Africa. They often described themselves as 'sitting on the fence'.

The members of the last cohort, the *bananas,* were born in the late 1960s through the 1970s. By school age, many of the barriers of apartheid had been dismantled, at least with regard to the Chinese, providing them access to white South Africa. They had little to no experience of apartheid-era discrimination. Apart from those who attended Chinese schools in Pretoria or Port Elizabeth, the remainder grew up in white schools with white friends. Almost all of them attended university. Few spoke any Chinese. Few participated in Chinese community activities. While some continued observing Chinese festivals, few understood the meaning of such festivals. They were, by their own definition, *bananas*: yellow on the outside, white on the inside.

While there are inevitably individual differences within each of these cohorts, this study shows that the most significant differences occurred between these three cohorts, as these three cohorts of Chinese South Africans experienced, in very different ways, shifts in education, occupation, residence, and relationships. This following section will begin

[4] The notion of 'Chinese' as a knowable and quantifiable essence was quite common amongst the interviewees and judging themselves against this definition of Chinese, most found the Chinese South Africans lacking, their Chineseness diminished. The next chapter will discuss the cultural and ethnic aspects of Chinese identity and further examine the Chinese South Africans' essentialist views of Chinese culture.

an analysis of these shifts, examining the different levels and types of education experienced by members of the three cohorts and identifying some of the consequences of these shifts.

Education

Educational shifts served as one of the principal precursors to many subsequent social, occupational, and economic shifts in the Chinese South African community. Changing Chinese perceptions about education paralleled a growing acceptance, both official and unofficial, of Chinese in white South Africa, creating the platform for growing elasticity and the gradual removal of educational restrictions over the course of two generations.

Up until the 1940s Chinese parents believed their children should learn Chinese at home, at a local Chinese school, or in China, while learning 'just enough' English or Afrikaans, at a local 'Western' or Chinese school to run the family business. The result was an education that was neither fully Chinese nor fully Western. In the early 1950s, particularly after the 1953 passage of the Immigrants Regulation Amendment Act, travel to and from China became increasingly difficult and Chinese education in China was no longer feasible. With a return to China cut off by the Communist takeover, and the ever-expanding institutionalisation of apartheid in South Africa, Chinese parents' attitudes concerning their children's education underwent drastic changes. As discriminatory apartheid legislation threatened the community's future, a solid education came to be seen as a priority (Yap and Man 1996:279). The rationale for the emphasis on education was to seek greater mobility in the professions and thereby bypass the uncertainties of the Group Areas Act and its impact on trading (Smedley 1980:192-195) and other apartheid laws. The consequences were threefold: the establishment of Chinese high schools; increased efforts to get their children admitted to private, white schools; and a general push for increased tertiary education.

General educational shifts

The experiences of the three cohorts reflect the staggered nature of these shifts in parents' educational priorities as well as changes in government policies and the practices of private and public educational institutions. Table 4.1 below provides a

summary of educational levels by cohort and age group and demonstrates the differences between the three groups of interviewees.

Table 4.1
Educational Shifts, by cohort and age group

Cohort	Age Range	Number	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education
shopkeepers	70 and older	4	4 Coloured	3 Coloured 1 Private white	3 None 1 University (medical school)
shopkeepers	60-69	18	8 Chinese 9 Coloured 1 in China 1 Private white	9 Chinese 6 Coloured 2 in China 4 Commercial college or private lessons 2 Private white *	11 None 2 Teacher Training or other technical college 5 University
Subtotal[5]		**22**	**23**	**27**	**22**
fence-sitters	50-59	11	1 Chinese 7 Coloured 2 Indian 1 Private white	6 Coloured 3 Commercial college or night school 2 Private white	4 None 4 Technical college or trade apprentice 5 University #
fence-sitters	40-49	15	9 Chinese 2 Coloured 1 Indian 6 Private white	4 Chinese 10 Private white 1 Commercial college	1 None 3 Teacher training or other technical college 12 University **
fence-sitters	35-39	4	1 Chinese 3 Private white	1 Chinese 4 Private white	1 None 3 University
Subtotal		**30**	**33**	**31**	**33**
bananas	30-34	4	2 Chinese 2 Private white	1 Chinese 3 Private white	4 University
bananas	25-29	9	4 Chinese 2 Private white 3 White government	4 Chinese 3 Private white 2 White government	1 None 8 University
bananas	20-24	2	2 Chinese	1 Private white 1 White government	2 University
Subtotal		**15**	**15**	**15**	**15**

* 8 dropped out before graduating; # 2 dropped out without earning degree;
** 1 dropped out without earning degree

The table emphasises a continuum of changes in access to higher and better education; the older the person the lower the education, while the youngest received more and better education. Those embedded between these two experienced increasing education

[5] Some of the subtotals are higher than the total number of interviewees indicating that a number of interviewees transferred schools, sometimes more than once, before finishing their school careers. This occurred with some regularity, especially amongst the older interviewees.

opportunities moving gradually from the perceived poorer 'non-white' schools to the very best of the 'white' schools as their strategy to guarantee access to university.

Survey respondents also had high levels of education: 39% reported that they completed their tertiary education, while an additional 22% reported to have earned some sort of post-graduate degree or diploma[6] and another 15% had completed some tertiary education[7]. The survey also indicated that there was a strong correlation between levels of education with both age and generation, with younger, third-generation respondents generally completing more years of education than the older, second-generation ones. There was also a strong correlation between the types of schools attended with age and generation. For example, eight out of the ten respondents who attended Coloured primary schools were between the ages of 50-69, whereas 65% of those who attended a white government primary school were between the ages of 18-29.

The survey data on type of schools attended was corroborated by the interviews and confirmed by the secondary literature. Older interviewees, particularly those in the *shopkeepers'* cohort had lower levels of education and attended mostly coloured, Indian, or Chinese schools. Few attended university. Education may have become prioritised but it remained fraught with financial and practical challenges. The *shopkeepers* during the 1940s and 1950s were particularly disadvantaged. Frank M, 62, grew up in the outskirts of Johannesburg and attended a series of substandard schools for his primary and secondary education. Prohibited from attending the white government school closest to his home, he endured the hardship of travelling long distances by public transportation, facing the daily risk of removal from white trains and buses in order to complete his schooling. He said:

> The closest school was a white school, but we were not allowed to go there, so I went to a 'coloured' school. Classes were held in a chapel. There were more 'coloureds' than Chinese. Maybe four grades in one room. Then I transferred to the Chinese school, but this was worse because then I had to travel by trains to get there. I stayed at the Chinese school for two years and then went to

[6] There was likely some confusion around the use of the term 'post-graduate'. While I had originally intended to ascertain the extent of post-university graduate education, many of the respondents possibly understood 'post-graduate' to mean post-high school graduation. I have, therefore, analysed the data in keeping with the local usage of the term.

[7] This figure may contain a number of those who 'dropped out' of university, but the vast majority of these survey respondents were young people still in university or other tertiary educational institutions.

> colleges.[8] This was even worse because we were forced to learn in 'parrot' style – they teach you how to pass and you pass. It was not a real foundation for learning.

Lily Changfoot, in an autobiography published in 1982, spoke of her trials taking the train from Magaliesburg into Johannesburg, a distance of approximately 60 kilometres, in order to attend the Chinese school in town. She wrote of "running the gauntlet" everyday (Changfoot 1982:87). Lily's and Frank's experiences appear to be typical of others who grew up in the Transvaal (now Gauteng Province, which incorporates both Johannesburg and Pretoria). In other parts of the country, most *shopkeepers* received their primary education at 'coloured' schools or Chinese schools[9] and completed their secondary education at 'coloured' schools, as none of the Chinese schools offered secondary tuition at the time.

Economic hardship prevented many older Chinese South Africans from completing their schooling. Several interviewees were forced to leave school early because of family circumstances. James K (67), Steve (61), Richard (62), and Michael (66) left school without matriculating to contribute to their family businesses. James K reports:

> I went to a 'coloured' primary school through standard 5; we were not permitted to go elsewhere … My father passed away when I was 14 and I had to quit school to go to work … in my generation, few went as far as matric. Only one or two out of a thousand became medical doctors. (There were) no opportunities then.

The *fence-sitters* had mixed experiences. Except those who had access to Chinese high schools, several of which were opened during their school years, most attended private white church schools or paid a premium to matriculate from commercial colleges. Very few continued to attend Indian or 'coloured' schools. By the time the *bananas* were of school age, most attended private white schools, although those in Pretoria and Port Elizabeth continued to attend the Chinese schools in those cities. The youngest of the *bananas*, particularly those in smaller towns, were often the first Chinese admitted into

[8] By 'colleges' he refers to private, commercial colleges that assist pupils (n South Africa, the term 'pupils' is used for primary and secondary level students) to pass their matriculation (or graduation) examinations. Officially 'white', many of these private commercial colleges permitted 'non-whites' admission. Fees for such institutions were often quite high.

[9] A few may have also been educated in Indian schools. While none of the 'shopkeepers' attended Indian schools, several in the second cohort did.

white government schools. Finally, the *fence-sitters* and the *bananas* went, in relatively large numbers, to university.

Over the years, the value of having a Chinese education has waned. This following section examines the trajectory of Chinese education in South Africa.

A Chinese education

Both Louie (2004) and Pan (1994) write that for Chinese sojourners around the globe, a Chinese education was a necessary part of retaining Chinese culture and identity. The parents of these interviewees, particularly amongst the eldest of the first cohort, still exhibited signs of this sojourner mentality. During the 1920s through the early 1940s, parents with the financial means sent their children to their home villages in China. Such was the perceived value of a 'proper' Chinese education, that there were even stories of men who had married black or 'coloured' South African women and then sent both wives and children to China to learn Chinese (Yap and Man 1996:280). One of the emigrated Chinese South Africans, Allen (70) explained:

> It was traditional amongst the Chinese in the old days to send their sons back to the Far East to learn the language, assimilate the culture…and we didn't come back until we were in our teens…My dad sent my late brother and myself to Hong Kong.

Several of the younger *fence-sitter* interviewees stated that their parents went to China for their schooling. Jacob, 57, reported that both his parents went to China to study. Of the *shopkeepers* group, Paul D (66) and Richard (62) travelled to China for a few years of schooling. Donna, 60, reported that her brother went to Hong Kong to study and live with aunt at the age of 16. Barbara S, 64, also had two brothers sent to China in 1957 for school. Sherine, 63, stated that her husband also studied in China.

Political events in China and South Africa at the end of the 1940s interrupted these routine back-and-forth cycles between China and South Africa. Consequently, the Chinese community in South Africa had to reconsider their educational options and plan for a future in South Africa. The alternate path to 'remaining Chinese' in South Africa was to educate their children in local Chinese schools. Between 1918 and 1955, twelve Chinese schools were established, with varying degrees of success, in virtually every

and town of South African that had a Chinese population of more than one hundred. Table 4.2 lists all the Chinese schools in South Africa and provides a brief history for each.[10]

Initially the focus of these schools was developing literacy in Chinese and learning about Chinese cultural traditions. Several of the Chinese schools were linked to the Chinese Nationalist party (KMT) and thus in the 1930s and 1940s with rising Chinese nationalism: "inculcating into children patriotism towards China, Dr. Sun Yat Sen, and the Kuomintang" (Yap and Man 1996:280). However, the shift in thinking about education as a means to mobility engendered a need to be proficient in English. In the 1950s several Chinese high schools were established, enabling Chinese to extend the length of their school careers and eventually pursue tertiary education. Gradually, as priorities continued to shift and immigration laws made the importation of Chinese teachers increasingly difficult, the actual proportion of Chinese to English teaching in the class decreased until ultimately the vast majority of younger generation lost their ability to read and write Chinese.[11]

[10] For a more complete history of the Chinese schools see Yap and Man 1996, Chapter Ten.
[11] In Port Elizabeth the policy had been three hours of English tuition and three hours of Chinese tuition. "This worked well for maintaining Chinese culture and identity but was not practical for life in South Africa … this education policy was abandoned because pupils' English standards were low. They experienced problems in high school … So, after 1950, … policy was to provide a western-style higher education with the unavoidable consequential cultural disintegration" (interview with Mr. S Kim Sing, in Yap and Man 1996:470). The loss of Chinese language ability is still perceived as a cultural crisis within the community. Many of the older interviewees lamented this loss.

Table 4.2 Chinese Schools in South Africa				
School Name/s	**City / Town**	**Date established (closed)**	**Number of students at inception / at peak**	**Affiliations**
Chinese Mission School / Chinese Primary School (1932) / aka Queen Street School	Port Elizabeth / in town	1918	8 / 212	Moi Yean Commercial Assn. (until 1950), St. Mark's Anglican Mission (until 1932), Eastern Province Chinese Assn. (in 1951), Cape Education Dept. (1958)
Eastern Province Primary School	Port Elizabeth / Kabega	1939 (1948)	9 / 40	Eastern Province Chinese Assn. breakaway group
Chinese Educational Institute / Assumption Chinese College	Port Elizabeth / Schauderville	1950 (1970)	8 / 120	Catholic Bishop
Chinese High School	Port Elizabeth / Kabega	1951	90 / ?	Eastern province Chinese Assn., Cape Education Dept. (1958)
Note: In 1973 the Chinese Primary and Chinese High School amalgamated. In the late 1990s it was renamed Morningside High School. While it is still operational today, it appears that the student body is now predominantly Black.				
Overseas Chinese School / Johannesburg Chinese School	Johannesburg/ Ferreirastown	1928	30 / 120	KMT (with property purchased in the name of then Consul-General)
KuoTing School	Johannesburg/ Ferrierastown	1940	30 / ?	Consul-General
Note: In 1943 the two Johannesburg schools amalgamated. In 1950 they moved to Doornfontein. In 1981 they moved to Brampton Park. As with the PE Chinese school, while the Johannesburg Chinese School still exists, it is now run by the government and has predominantly Black student population.				
Kliptown Chinese School	Kliptown	1948 (early 1970s)	20 / 90	Catholic Church
Pretoria Chinese School	Pretoria / Boom Street	1934	34 / 150 (?)	Privately funded
Kimberley Chinese School	Kimberley / York Street	1945 (1947)	?	Moi Yean and KMT clubs
Uitenhage Chinese School	Uitenhage	1944 (1949)	16 / 20	Privately funded
East London Chinese School	East London / Southerwood	1946 (mid 1960s)	70 / 80	Privately funded
Cape Town Chinese School	Palmyra Road to Claremont to Mowbray	1943 (1980)	24 / ?	Privately funded

Compiled from information in Yap and Man 1996:289-303

Several of the Chinese schools were not sustainable beyond a few years. Chinese populations in many of the small towns were simply too small to either justify or support a fully operational Chinese school. The increasing tendency for parents to send their children to private, white schools, and the decline of the general Chinese South African population[12], resulted in a continuing drop in student populations at most of the Chinese schools. A couple of the schools, notably the Kliptown Chinese School, managed to stay open through the early 1970s with the assistance of the Catholic Church. The only three that remain open to date are the Chinese schools in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth. The government took over the administration of the Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth 'Chinese' schools in the mid- to late 1990s; today, these schools have predominantly black student bodies and have lost most of their 'Chinese' character. The Pretoria Chinese School is the only one that continues to operate today. It operates as a private school, continues to teach Chinese language and culture, attempts to instil Chinese values, and has several Chinese teachers. Due to its reputation for academic excellence and discipline it has attracted both Chinese and non-Chinese pupils, many from the surrounding international communities.

Admission into white schools

As early as the mid-1930s and the early 1940s a handful of the wealthier Chinese parents sought and obtained admission to some of the most select schools in the country for their children. These included in Johannesburg: Marist Brothers College (1933), Belgravia Convent (1937), End Street Convent, Redhill, Kingsmead, Parktown School, The Ridge, St. John's, St. Andrews. Others included St. Andrew's in Grahamstown, and Michaelhouse in Natal. As segregated schooling was an integral part of the social fabric even before apartheid, admission for Chinese was a "privilege, dependent on the goodwill or willingness of each school's principal or governing board to 'bend the rules.'" (Yap and Man 1996:303). Costly school fees and limited openings ensured that during the first few decades of their 'opening' for Chinese, only a handful could take advantage of these privileges. However, as Chinese parents discovered that a private

[12] This drop in the school-aged population can be attributed to high rates of emigration, low rates of marriage of those in the 30-49 age range (to be discussed later in this chapter), and a declining number of children per family.

school education ensured a child's entry into university, many parents pressed for admissions and made financial sacrifices for the children.[13]

As legislation enforcing apartheid mounted in the 1950s private schools faced pressures to enforce strict segregation; nonetheless, growing numbers of Chinese maintained access to private schools. Father Michael Tuohy, a Catholic priest who worked very closely with the Chinese community in South Africa from the mid-1950s spoke of the government pressure to expel Chinese students from white Catholic schools. He wrote in a document entitled *The Chinese Apostolate* that while a few refused to accept Chinese because of their 'racialism' the majority of the Catholic schools around the country defended their Chinese students (Tuohy 1987:5) and continued to admit them. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, as unofficial attitudes about Chinese changed and they became increasingly accepted socially, more and more private church schools began to admit Chinese students. In Cape Town St. Cyprian's and St. George's opened their doors to Chinese; at about the same time Catholic schools in Durban opened for Chinese students (Yap and Man 1996:305).

Many interviews corroborated observations that Chinese South Africans harboured the desire for 'white' education and revealed the perception that such schools offered a superior education. They confirmed that parents did indeed make great efforts to get their children admitted to these 'good' schools. Peter K, 55, explained how his father fought for the admission of Chinese into Anglican schools and Mark, 54, spoke of his removal from his 'coloured' school in his last year of secondary education.

> When we matriculated…in the year I was due to matriculate, I was taken out of the 'coloured' school by my dad and went to what we would call a class college where you had to pay a premium in fees if you wanted to write the exam. The reason for that was there were two different education systems: one was the Coloured Affairs Department and the other was the Cape Education Department…

[13] These 'sacrifices' are typical of first generation Asian immigrant parents in America. While public school education is the US is free, many immigrant parents skimp and save to cover the costs of tertiary education, working long hours, taking on second jobs, and taking out numerous loans in order to secure their future.

Parental perceptions about the quality of education at the different types of schools and the potential affects on future prospects also had an impact on Mark's education.

> Now the fear was, for our parents, that if we had to go anywhere with the Coloured Affairs certificate, we would be looked down upon. So my dad scraped and said every one of us would…we all got our matriculation certificate at a white school.

As Margaret, 52, explained, once the doors of the private, white schools and colleges opened to the Chinese, that the main factor in determining whether or not one attended a private school or a government school was money.

> Initially with the apartheid (sic.) there were very, very few Chinese who went to private schools. The cost was very high and there was a quota system imposed by the government for the private schools…when I was ready to go to high school, my elder brothers and sisters were working and my father then enrolled us into the convent. My sisters and myself, we were transferred from an Indian school to the convent school. The youngest went straight to convent school from primary.

Table 4.1 indicates that only three of the *shopkeepers* were able to attend private white school and even then, only at the secondary level, but over the next two decades 16 out of the 30 *fence-sitters* were able to attend private white schools for their secondary education. This is, possibly, an indication that by the 1960s and 1970s Chinese families had greater means to pay for private education. In addition, experiences such as Margaret's – where older siblings contributed financially to the family's overall finances enabling younger siblings to attend expensive private white schools – were widespread, particularly in large families with six or more children. She also refers to the gradual nature of the opening of white schools for the Chinese: while her elder siblings matriculated[14] from Indian schools, she was able to attend a white school for her secondary education, and her younger siblings went directly to a white convent for primary school.

These Chinese South Africans were often the first and the only 'non-whites' at these private, white schools and later at government schools. Aware that their admission was a privilege, they were under constant pressure from their parents and teachers to

[14] 'Matriculated' is the South African term for graduated, often used in its abbreviated version 'matric'.

perform and behave; they were pressured to be good role models with the future of all younger Chinese dependent on their behaviour and performance. Alan (mid-40s) reported that at his white school, the Chinese were 'on show' as there were only six of them. He spoke of the pressures and repercussions of life based on 'by permit only' privileges. The Chinese students, he said, had to perform:

> You were pioneers. If you spoiled it, you spoil it for all the other Chinese to follow. It was my first time mixing with white kids. We set up the 'opening' for others." Eight out of 15 of the 'bananas' cohort did attend a private (white) school, largely Catholic, for some portion of their primary or secondary education.

The high cost of private school education drove Chinese parents to seek entrée for their children into less expensive white government schools, considered to offer better education than the Indian or 'coloured' government schools. The early 1970s gave rise to special concessions for Chinese children to attend white government schools in the small towns of Queenstown and then Kimberley. Chinese were the first 'non-whites' admitted into white government schools. Many of the other small towns in the Cape followed suit in the following years. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chinese admission to white government schools was commonplace (Yap and Man 1996:306). Five out of the fifteen *bananas* attended a white government school for some portion of their primary or secondary education. Of these, most were from smaller cities with small Chinese South African communities where they integrated into white government schools earlier than in the bigger towns and cities due to their small numbers. Loewen reached a similar conclusion in his study of Chinese in the Mississippi Delta; there was greater acceptance of Chinese in smaller towns with small numbers of Chinese (Loewen 1988).

Increased racial mixing came in the 1980s and early 1990s. Patricia (29) from East London reported that toward the end of her school years in the 1980s both the convent school and the government high school in East London became multi-racial, accepting black students as well as Chinese. Veronica, 26, attended Waverley Girls High School in Johannesburg where most of her classmates were white. When she was at Waverley there was one other Chinese girl at the school. She explained that the year she matriculated in/around 1990, Waverley had its first large intake of black and Chinese

students. Again, as with the admission of Chinese into private white and later white government schools, smaller towns were often ahead of larger cities by several years in terms of the multi-racial integration of schools.

Tertiary education

Prior to World War Two, tertiary education for 'non-whites' was virtually inaccessible. Technical colleges excluded them, as did most universities in the country. The two 'open' universities – the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) – admitted only a handful of 'non-whites' before 1939. Most 'non-whites' who wished to pursue a tertiary education had to travel overseas; however, the outbreak of World War Two made it impossible for them to engage in professional studies overseas. In response, the South African government made scholarships available to train 'non-white' students in medicine so that these graduates could serve their own communities. Starting with a modest four in 1939, by 1945 there were 87 'non-whites' at Wits and UCT medical schools (Yap and Man 1996:307). Between 1941 and 1947, just over a dozen Chinese enrolled in tertiary institutions. Most enrolled in medicine, architecture, engineering, and science. They were primarily from Durban, East London, Kimberley, and Port Elizabeth[15], predominantly Moiyeanese, and all second- or third-generation Chinese South Africans (Yap and Man 1996:308).

The implementation of apartheid legislation reversed some of the gains that the Chinese South Africans had made in tertiary education earlier. Further restrictions came in the form of a veto on studying dentistry, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, or speech therapy until the late 1960s. Tighter quotas followed. Chinese who wanted to study nursing in the 1940s, 1950s or 1960s had to do so overseas because of difficulties in getting admitted to nursing schools locally and complications around gaining practical experience[16]. Chinese were not permitted access into the trades until the 1970s. Wits Medical School set stringent quotas in 1953. In addition, with the passage of the

[15] These would be considerate medium-sized cities, smaller than Johannesburg or Cape Town, but still commercial centres.

[16] Apartheid laws prohibited 'non-white' doctors and nurses from 'practicing' on white patients. Furthermore, racial disparities in facilities ensured that the 'non-white' hospitals, where Chinese might be able to practice, were inferior.

Extension of University Education Act (No. 45 of 1959) Chinese had to apply for permits to attend university; while some interviewees surmised that these were mere formalities, this need for permits remained in place until the early 1980s (Yap and Man 1996:309-312).

It is somewhat surprising, given the above, to find about one-third of the *shopkeepers* managed to attain a tertiary education. Four attended Wits: one in engineering, one in medicine, one in architecture, and the last in biochemistry. Another two completed their degrees through the University of South Africa (Unisa): one in accounting and the other in commerce. In addition, Rick earned two degrees: a CIS (chartered secretary) and a CFA (commercial & financial accountant), and Barbara attended a teacher training college.[17] In contrast, of the survey respondents only 22% of those with tertiary education were 50 or older, and two of these attended the University of the Western Cape, the only 'coloured' tertiary institution in the country.

Interviews supported the historical data regarding permits and quotas. Albert, 73, was one of the earliest Chinese admitted into medical school, graduating from Wits Medical School in 1956 / 1957. He reported that he attended medical school on permit and under a strict quota system:

> During my time, there was a quota system and we had two Chinese every year. That was about 30 – 40 years ago. And only two Chinese were admitted (to the medical school). And the other races, ethnic groups, there was also a quota system (for them).

In addition to quota and permit systems, the Chinese also faced additional complex transportation barriers for those attending universities in a different province from their own. William, 57, reported that he went to UCT to do architecture. His brother, who studied dentistry at Wits had to contend with permits to travel between provinces as well as permits to do his studies. He explained:

[17] Interviewees seem to have higher levels of education than both the broader Chinese South African population as well as the general population. This is likely due to my use of the 'snowball' method locating research subjects. I was probably 'led' to interview those with better educations by others in the interest of presenting the Chinese community in the best possible light.

> My brother did dentistry at Wits. He had to … report that he's a gentleman of standing or whatever[18], and used to go to the railway station and had to get to the other side. And when he got to the other side, he had to report to the police station, which was crazy. When he was going from Cape to Transvaal.

Despite the various hurdles, many of these older Chinese South Africans were determined to get a tertiary education. Those facing financial hardships showed particular determination. They frequently worked for several years before they did their tertiary education. Aaron (62), for example, started university after working at shop with his parents for ten years. Joel (early 60s) worked in the family business for thirteen years while doing a correspondence architecture course through London. He received a diploma but never wrote his final exams for the degree because his father passed away and he had to help support his two younger brothers. After he married, he went to work for his father-in-law and did a part-time commerce degree through Unisa. He eventually left the family business to do additional training and today works as professional consultant in his field.

Although the survey did not indicate any significant differences in levels and types of education based on gender, the interview brought some of these issues to light. Gender differences in the levels of education existed especially amongst the *shopkeepers* and to a lesser extent, the *fence-sitters*. Many Chinese women were not encouraged to complete their secondary education. Fewer still, managed to get any tertiary education. The interviewees attributed these gender differences to traditional Chinese values. For example, Paul D, 66, reported that,

> Of my younger brothers and sisters, four out of the 7 boys went to university and graduated. My sisters (however) were only allowed to finish matric – Chinese values again… I think the older kind (of Chinese) were not keen for the girls to further (their) studies, but they wanted the boys to go.

Despite these cultural barriers, a significant number of women of this age cohort managed to graduate with university degrees. This imbalance of men and women at university level continued to correct itself over the years such that, by the time I

[18] As a further testament to the 'foreigner' status of the Chinese, it was the Chinese Consul-General who had to 'vouch' for the character of Chinese South Africans wishing to travel between provinces. These inter-provincial travel permits were required until the mid-1980s.

conducted my survey, women outnumbered men in terms of university degrees, 40% to 37%, as well as in post-graduate diplomas, 29% to 15%.

These shifts can partially be attributed to the fact that by the 1960s, most of the white, English-speaking universities in South Africa had opened their doors to Chinese on a permit-basis and under a quota system. Information from both the interviews and the surveys would seem to corroborate information that Chinese South Africans, as a group, have a very high level of education. According to both Smedley (1980) and Yap and Man (1996) the Chinese have some of the highest levels of education in the country. The 2001 Census indicates, for example, that of all persons aged 20 or older, 21.68% of whites have some completed some tertiary education as compared to the higher figures indicated herein for the Chinese. For 'Black/Africans', 'Coloureds', and 'Indian/Asian' (which may or may not include Chinese)[19] these numbers are significantly lower, at 2.81%, 2.86%, and 9.92% respectively. While the quantitative data contained in this research document is only descriptive, and taking into consideration the over-representation of highly educated research subjects, there is, nonetheless, overwhelming evidence that well over half of Chinese South Africans[20] have completed a tertiary education.

While many *fence-sitters* went to university, they, too, experienced some discrimination, albeit less than the *shopkeepers*. After attending private, white schools and gaining the acceptance of their white teachers and peers, the necessity of special permits, quotas, and ministerial consent to attend university was a source of frustration and concern. Cheryl, in her mid-50s, remarked that the quota and permit systems were not really barriers to tertiary education for the Chinese because their numbers were so small. Even if Cheryl's remarks are a more accurate reflection of the true nature of quota and permit systems as they applied *in practice* to the Chinese, the psychological

[19] In making inquiries about the numbers of Chinese admitted to Wits, I was told that Chinese South Africans were often classified as White for statistical purposes. It is possible that this also happened with the Census data. In general, because the Chinese population of South Africa has remained so small, statistics on them are difficult to find and often quite inaccurate.

[20] The combined numbers of those who have completed a tertiary degree, those who are currently engaged in or completed some tertiary education, and those who have completed some type of post-graduate diploma on the survey comes to 76%. In terms of the interviewees, over 57% completed some tertiary education.

and social impact of such systems is undeniable: they served as constant reminders of their official 'non-white' status, their inferiority in law, and the tenuousness of their privileges and concessions.

The choice of discipline was also dictated, in part, by the apartheid climate. In terms of what they studied, parental and community influence pushed most of the *fence sitters* into a few, select disciplines that were seen as acceptable career paths, among them, medicine, physical sciences, pharmacy, and accounting. Cheryl said,

> The choice of discipline was always dependent on the limitations of the job market in apartheid climate; the course that you enrolled in – it was always toward being self-employed. Because you wouldn't be able to get that job outside…something where you could be your own boss. Where you didn't have to be employed.

Despite the acceptance of white peers and white teachers at their primary and secondary schools, as they entered university they experienced a keen awareness that the basis of their lives was one of privilege rather than entrenched rights. Furthermore, they were fully aware that they would face discrimination in the workforce. They made consequent career choices with their parental caveats and their own experiences of discrimination in mind.

In contrast, the *bananas* had little experience of discrimination in higher education and with the exception of one; all were enrolled in or had graduated from university. These youngest interviewees received their degrees from a broad range of institutions across the county whereas most of the older graduates attended Wits and UCT, the two largest English-language universities in the country. The trend toward professional degrees appears to continue with the youngest *bananas*, as indicated in a recent issue of *Vinculum*, the newsletter of the Catholic Chinese Welfare Association (No. 146, July 2002). Interviewees also indicated a broadening of academic subjects and professional choices with this youngest cohort.

Consequences of education amongst whites

Attaining a university education was the route toward gaining respectability; it also became the path toward proving that Chinese could be on par with whites. Deborah, 44, remarked:

> Because our history of going through apartheid, we wanted to prove to the whites that we were equal to them…we felt that getting an education, a university degree and that kind of thing was important…and showing the whites that we were equal and going out and working amongst them, to show them.

An unforeseen consequence of attendance at private church schools was the spread of Christianity in the Chinese community. This process began as early as 1918[21], when Chinese identified some of the strategic advantages of becoming Christian such as the use of baptismal papers as a means of laying claims to South African residence, particularly important when Chinese immigration was restricted (Yap and Man 1996:305). Chinese South Africans today are either Catholic or Anglican. This is directly attributable to the fact that both churches have long provided education for Chinese pupils. Mission sisters assisted Chinese organisations in establishing Chinese schools, and later they were the first to admit Chinese into their private white schools; furthermore, "Admissions to private schools run by religious denominations was often dependent on the child or the parents belonging to that particular faith" (Yap and Man 1996:305). Thus, as Father Tuohy wrote: "These same Catholic schools played no small part in bringing the Chinese into the Church" (Tuohy 1987:5).

The pattern of conversion to Christianity in the Chinese South African community was similar to that which characterised the Christianisation of Chinese in America. In the US at the turn of the century churches played a prominent role in 'acculturating' individual Chinese to American society. Churches proselytised and taught English classes; and immigrants who strove to assume American ways found themselves brought into membership of white society through their conversion to Christianity (Pan 1994:104). The Chinese in the Mississippi Delta viewed conversion to Christianity as a means to their greater goal – social acceptance by whites. Loewen writes:

[21] This was the year that the Chinese Mission School was founded.

> Gradually, however, the Chinese realized that the mission offered them crucial aid in their drive toward full participation in the white society, for it provided a way to show whites that the Chinese were not heathen but had an acceptable and distinctly non-Negro Christian religion" (Loewen 1988:84).

But Christianisation in South Africa was a by-product of the desire for better education and higher education on their way up the socio-economic ladder and respectability. If, in the process, this also helped them become further acculturated into white South Africa, it was, in some ways, accidental.

The impact of the increasingly better 'white' education and the concomitant contact with whites also shifted social contact from predominantly Chinese on Chinese to greater interaction with whites. The *bananas* cohort social circles grew ever more racially mixed. This shift in social environment and relationships subsequently led to gradual changes in both Chinese language ability and culture: many Chinese interviewed have lost their ability to speak a Chinese language and other aspects of Chinese culture have gradually changed.[22] Perhaps the most obvious and immediate result of a tertiary education was an occupational shift into the professions. A university degree guaranteed a higher level of financial security and social status; with the *fence-sitter* cohort the Chinese South Africans became firmly entrenched in the middle classes of South Africa.

Occupation

One of the most striking features of the Chinese South African community is the degree of occupational mobility they attained within just two generations. This was clearly the result of a variety of factors, not the least of which was education. Growing social acceptance amongst whites made this climb feasible, while both the openings and limitations of apartheid determined, to some extent, the directions of these occupational shifts. Culture and ethnicity, too, played a role, although the impact of these is less clear. In some ways, these occupational shifts are simply the end-product of the initial shifts in the thinking of Chinese parents about the necessity for better and higher educational attainment. The initial goal was to achieve greater social and economic

[22] The interviewees spoke often of the decline of their Chinese culture. The 'loss' of their culture will be discussed more critically in the next chapter.

security in South Africa; professionalisation provided a better platform to leave South Africa and find work elsewhere, should the need arise. Table 4.3 below lists interviewee occupations by cohort and age group.

Table 4.3
Chinese South African Occupations
By cohort and age group

Cohort	Age Range	Number	Shopkeeper	Teaching, Trade, Other	Professional
shopkeepers	70 +	4	2	1 bookmaker	1 medical doctor
shopkeepers	60-69	18	6 (3 retired)	1 ins. broker 1 factory worker 1 retail 1 preschool 2 homemaker	2 accountant 1 elec. eng. 1 lab tech 1 architect 1 comp. consult.
Subtotal		**22**	**8**	**7**	**7**
fence-sitters	50-59	11	4[23]	3 electricians 1 prop. mgmt. 1 film industry	1 civil/struct eng 1 finan. mgr. 1 medical doctor 1 architect
fence-sitters	40-49	15	1 fahfee	1 sales, phtgrphr. 1 masseuse 1 bank admin. 1 crdit.cont./bank	2 finan. mgr. 1 tax lawyer 1 educ specialist 1 publishing 2 accountant 1 pharmacist 1 lab scientist
fence-sitters	36-39	4	1	0	1 comp. tech. 1 accountant 1 pharmacist
Subtotal		**30**	**6**	**9**	**16**
bananas	30-35	4	1[24]	1 homemaker[25]	1 h.r. mgr 1 cost acct/
bananas	26-29	6		1 croupier/casino	1 accountant 1 finan. srvcs 1 indust. engnr. 1 h.r.mgr. 1 info specialist
bananas	20-25	5		1 university (music)	1 prod. mgr. 1 comp. progmr. 1 accountant 1 web design
Subtotal		**15**	**1**	**3**	**11**

[23] A couple of the interviewees had day jobs and also owned cafes or catering businesses that were operated within the family and on evenings and weekends. This explains why the total number of occupations is higher than the total number of interviewees.
[24] Trained as a lawyer. Currently studying computers and helping out at the family shop.
[25] Worked in human resource management and quit to be a stay-at-home mother.

As a result of slightly higher educational levels, the interview subjects generally had higher levels of professional achievement than the survey population. Survey results on occupation, similar to the data on education, are likely more indicative of the broader population of second generation Chinese South Africans than the interview findings. The survey responses on both occupation and job title correlated with both age and generation. Viewed by age group, 60% of those 70 or older were shopkeepers and the remaining 40% retired. Half of those in the 50-69 age group were also shopkeepers. There were also related correlations between occupation and educational levels: those with lower levels of education were concentrated in the small business / shop-keeping sector. Smedley found similar shifts, with growing numbers of professionals especially amongst the younger generations (Smedley 1980:195-204).

Amongst the first cohort, those who are still shopkeepers inherited parents' shops, farms, and butcheries. Some expanded these businesses into retail clothing, dressmaking, restaurants, and catering/take-away businesses. In quite a few of these cases, unable to achieve upward mobility through education, they enhanced the profitability of the business. For example, Melvin, 72, reported that he took over his parents' small shop; years later, he handed the business to one of his sons. Three generations have now owned this still existing business with each son expanding and improving upon his father's work.[26]

As mentioned before, quite a few of the *shopkeepers* were removed from high school to help in the family business or to work to contribute to supporting the family. This was the case for James K (67), Steve (61), Richard (62), and Michael (66). Richard, for example, reports that he started as a shopkeeper while still at school, helping a distant cousin at his shop after school and weekends. In most families of this era, at least one or two children in each family 'inherited' the family business while the other, usually younger children, were encouraged to study. Sherine (63), for example, reports that she and husband own a grocery shop and an ice cream factory.

[26] Both Melvin and his son live in upper middle class, predominantly white areas. They travel internationally at least once a year and have additional disposable income. In other words, while they are still technically shopkeepers they have clearly joined the ranks of the established middle classes.

> My parents owned a shop. Of the eleven kids in the family, the six eldest are still involved in shops or cafes, grocery stores, or supermarkets. Of the younger siblings, one sister is in marketing, three brothers are in insurance, and one brother works as a manager for a hardware store.

The split between the older and the younger siblings reflects both broader societal changes as well as the shifts in a single family's class position as the older siblings contributed to support the younger ones with the costs of higher education enabling them to move out of the shops.

As the first generation to experience tertiary education, a substantial number of those in the *shopkeepers* cohort were also the first generation to suffer discrimination in the workplace. They experienced closed doors and glass ceilings. In response to the occupational discrimination, one could emigrate or one could persevere. Almost every one of the *shopkeepers* mentioned that family and friends had emigrated because of discrimination in the workplace.[27] Those who stayed had to work within the boundaries established by the apartheid state. Workplace restrictions put limitations on both long-term career achievement and financial reward for all professionals. For example, the law banned Chinese South African doctors from practicing medicine on white patients and their salaries were lower than those of white medical practitioners. Albert started a private practice but could only do so in a black area. He recalled:

> I did my housemanship or practical training at McCord's Hospital in Durban. You know the post-mortem? If there was a white body, they would announce publicly that all non-whites must leave the room. It was so bad! … Later, I moved back to Port Elizabeth and opened a private practice. My patients were mostly black with a sprinkling of whites and other races. My practice was in a black area.[28]

Rick, one of the two accountants in this group, spoke of the challenges encountered by the first of the Chinese South African professionals when he and his peers were first entering the workforce.

> Those days – it was the apartheid years – we battled. And you know, with Chinese people, they always like their kids to be doctors or lawyers or whatever…because when we grew up…you weren't even allowed to become a

[27] There will be a further discussion of the emigration of Chinese South Africans in Chapter Seven.
[28] Legally the Chinese, as non-whites, were not permitted to practice medicine on whites. The 'sprinkling' of white patients mentioned here is likely made up of poorer whites who could better afford the services of a non-white doctor.

> motor mechanic, nothing, no trade. I remember this one Chinese guy, after battling, was the first articled clerk. In those days you can't (sic) get articled. Maybe that was the reason we had to go overseas to work.

The educational and occupational achievements of the *shopkeepers* generation – in the face of the odds stacked against them – are a testament to their refusal to be second-class citizens, secure a better future, earn respectability, increase their social status, overcome shame, and regain honour lost.

The next cohort, the *fence-sitters*, benefited from the interventions of their parents who insisted on the necessity for economic upward mobility and financial independence of their children. James L (42) explained:

> Okay, let's go back to that BSC – behind the shop counters – a lot of my people, the Chinese people, my parents and their contemporaries, pushed their children to become professionals and that would take them away from the townships into becoming doctors, people with B.Scs., and B.Comms., accountants, whatever. That's all primarily economically driven into areas that would give them upward mobility – economic upward mobility.

Of the *fence-sitters* sixteen are professionals; another eleven work in the trades, in secretarial, service, or teaching positions and other mid-level semi-professional occupations[29]; and four are still full-time shopkeepers/café owners.[30] It is perhaps surprising to find that a few *fence-sitters* still run shops or family business after the push for higher education. Mike W (36) and Nelson (42), both from Kimberley, took over family businesses. In Mike's case, he runs the family café business with his youngest brother. Nelson pulls fahfee[31] for a living, carrying on the family business started by his

[29] Several of these individuals have higher degrees, for example Alice in microbiology and Alan in zoology, which they are not currently using.
[30] I have counted Nelson, who pulls fahfee for a living in this last category. Although he probably makes as much or more money than any of the professionals, he did not complete his university education, and his occupation is still considered illegal in South Africa. Alan, who was working as a photographer and in sales, has, since the time of our interview, gone back to the shop to assist his aging father.
[31] Fahfee is a form of gambling popularised by Chinese in many parts of the world. It is a lottery or numbers game that works on a system of 36 numbers, each of which has a designated symbol. Yap and Man claim that fahfee and selling liquor became an alternate source of income for many Chinese shopkeepers who were displaced by the Groups Areas Act in the 1950s. While illegal, for those with no formal western education and limited English literacy, these activities offered a potentially lucrative living (Yap and Man 1996:387-388).

grandfather decades earlier when Chinese had fewer occupational options[32]. According to one of the older interviewees, these few were the ones who could not or did not go to university. In his view, it was the easy way out:

> Those who've gone into the family business – it's generally those who didn't go any further professionally, you know, with the education and that…they finished school and didn't go to university and that, (so) what can you do? The family business was there. You just continued with it. And that gives them security. Generally, it's because they didn't go to university and get an education, so your business is a ready-made business and you just continue with it. It's just natural. So you still have a few of them doing that.

Occupationally, during the 1960s and 1970s, barriers for Chinese South Africans were still evident. Some professional paths, while not entirely closed to Chinese, offered only limited opportunities. Chinese doctors and nurses were not permitted to treat whites; consequently they were limited to practicing in 'non-white' (and by definition, inferior) hospitals and clinics. A few went into private practice. Others, thwarted in their careers, chose to emigrate. The restrictions in job opportunities meant that technical and vocational education remained closed to Chinese until the 1970s. Dan (53) reported an inordinately long waiting period to become an electrician and even then suffered humiliation in the workplace. Tim (58), the other electrician of the group, reported:

> It was taboo (at the time) to employ 'non-whites' in the trades…You could work illegally, but you'd never get your diploma…So, my cousin and I were the first two Chinese that I know of in the whole Cape area…in Johannesburg there was the only one that I know of that was in the trade at the time.

Chinese, as 'non-whites', could not hold any supervisory position over whites; opportunities for promotions were consequently limited. Mary M (44) explained an apparent discussion concerning her as a candidate for promotion to supervisor level, but she said; "I never heard about it until years later. (I was told) 'No. How do you think the other whites are going to accept taking orders from a Chinese?' I never got it."

By the time the *bananas* cohort emerged, things had changed. By far the best educated of all, these young people had little to no experience of apartheid-era discrimination and

[32] It is worth noting that both of Nelson's brothers finished university and are currently working as professionals, both in the computer technology sector.

they seem to have slipped, quite comfortably, into the middle class. Occupationally, they migrated from medicine, science, and engineering into business, computer programming, and information technology as well as fields such as human resources and design. Thus, during the course of the 20th century, the Chinese South Africans have successfully undertaken a class shift, from running small shops into the professional class.

There was a corresponding rise in income and as incomes increased, Chinese South Africans, beginning with the *shopkeepers*, began moving into more affluent, white areas. The one exception to this movement into white areas took place in Port Elizabeth, where Kabega Park, the one Chinese group area, was proclaimed, built, and occupied by Chinese. Perhaps more astonishing, given the timeframe, is that Chinese South Africans became accepted by white South Africa. Linda Human (nee Smedley) in her PhD thesis devotes an entire chapter to the attitudes of the white South African population to the Chinese in this country, based on earlier research conducted in the mid- to late 1970s under the auspices of the HSRC. She concludes that the majority of White South Africans are socially accepting of Chinese people (Smedley 1980b). As they increasingly schooled, lived, and shared amenities with whites, social circles shifted from primarily Chinese (and in some cases Coloured) to mixed, including both Chinese and white. By the time the *fence-sitters* and the *bananas* entered the workforce, these social trends were firmly entrenched. The next section will briefly cover the residential mobility of the Chinese South Africans, followed by a more detailed examination of their shifting primary relationships.

Residential mobility

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the tiny Chinese communities in small towns such as East London were not greatly affected by the Group Areas Act; local whites and the small resident Chinese community advocated that the few Chinese in the city be "left to continue the service they have long rendered the European community, without danger to the principles embodied in the Act" (Yap and Man 1996:338). The residents of Kabega Park – the only declared and established Chinese group area in the country – were also relatively secure that they would, once moved into the group area, be left in

peace. For the remainder of the Chinese in South Africa, having no group area caused tremendous hardships. For approximately twenty years, between 1955 and 1975, in terms of the Groups Areas Act, the Chinese were turned into 'displaced persons', with no legally-defined place to reside. Many Chinese lost homes and businesses as some of the areas where they resided were set aside for other groups and other areas were demolished as a result of 'slum clearances'.

Chinese were persistent in their objections to the application of the Groups Areas Act, and managed to secure some concessions from the authorities in the 1960s and 1970s. As their social status improved with both educational and professional achievements, greater numbers of Chinese South Africans began to move, literally, into white South Africa. Initially, white owners turned a blind eye to Chinese tenants. From 1971, the Department of Community Development permits opened the doors to white areas, with the proviso that none of the immediate neighbours objected.

Initially, these moves into areas designated for occupation by 'whites only' entailed the often humiliating process of going, door-to-door, to ask neighbours if the Chinese family could move in next door/across the street. Jane, 39, described her family's ordeal, going around to all the neighbours "to let them know that you were Chinese" when they wanted to move from Wynberg to Kew. Deborah's family also had experiences with housing permits.

> First we wanted to buy a house in Kensington, (and) permit turned down…What used to happen with the Group Areas is (that) before, when Chinese first wanted to buy a house, you, yourself had to go and ask the neighbours to the left and right and across the road. But eventually, the Department of Community Development, they then went to ask the neighbours.

Deborah, 44, also provided an overview of how the Chinese South Africans gradually moved into white areas.

> What happened to the Chinese is that they moved into these kind of grey areas like Doornfontein, Mayfair, and Belgravia – those are all kind of grey areas where there was no strict apartheid. You didn't say it was designated a Black, white, Coloured, or Indian area, so the Chinese lived in those grey areas. Thereafter, when we were able to buy homes, a lot of Chinese bought homes in these areas.

Despite the frustrations and humiliation of living by permit, Smedley reported that nearly 90% of Chinese lived in white areas. Her research on Chinese in the mid- to late 1970s confirms these research results with regard to both the increasing acceptance of Chinese by the majority of white South Africans (Smedley 1980:31-47) and increasing identification of Chinese socially, educationally, occupationally, and residentially with white South African society (Smedley 1980:iv). Reporting on two studies conducted in 1975 and 1978 of white attitudes toward Chinese, white South Africans seemed to have no objection to Chinese (of more or less the same level of development) living nearby, taking part in sports together, being admitted to white cinemas, working together, or having Chinese children in the same schools (Smedley 1980:42).

By the late 1970s the granting of permits for Chinese to live in 'white' areas was seen as a mere formality. In May 1985, an amendment to the Group Areas Act, enabled the Chinese to acquire, hold, or occupy property in 'white' areas without permits. While there were still some experiences of apartheid discrimination, by the time the *fence-sitters* were adults, Chinese South Africans had achieved a generally high level of acceptance into white South Africa. As a result of the educational, occupational, and residential shifts, Chinese South Africans began to experience shifts in their primary relationships, with friends, in dating, and even in marriage.

Primary relationships

Chinese South Africans experienced a substantial increase in social contact with whites in places ranging from schools to the workplace. Chinese South Africans' primary relationships gradually shifted from only Chinese to include whites. Younger *fence-sitters'* and *bananas'* social circles widened even further to include Indian, coloured, and even black friends and social acquaintances. Human also notes the "changing level of contact between Chinese and Whites from very low in early decades of the century to extremely high levels between school children at the time of the study" (Human 1980:253).

Friends

Of the survey respondents just over 28% described their closest friends as mostly Chinese, almost 9% reported having mostly white friends, and 33% said their friends were mostly Chinese and white. Amongst the remainder, close to 9% named Indians, Chinese, and/or whites (as a mixed group) as their closest friends, and 12% reported that their friends were a mixed group from all the racial groups in South Africa. There were, as with all the survey data, some important differences when analysed by age. Older respondents were more likely to have mostly Chinese friends, but amongst the oldest group, in the 60-69 age category, 17% also reported having 'coloured' friends. Middle-aged respondents were more likely to have more white or white and Chinese friends. And, predictably, the youngest respondents were most likely to have the most racially mixed group of friends. There was also a significant correlation between educational levels and close friends, the general trend indicating that the higher the level of education, the more racially mixed groups of friends. The opposite was also true: 75% of those with lowest levels of education reported having mostly Chinese friends.

The secondary literature also notes these social shifts; for example, Smedley writes that amongst the younger Chinese there was more mixing with whites: "The younger generation tend to form more intimate relationships with whites on the basis of mutual attraction, common interests, friendship, and perhaps even love" (Smedley 1980:253).

Interviews, too, reflected these gradual changes, with a few interesting exceptions. Amongst the oldest cohort of interviewees, the *shopkeepers*, there were very few who reported having only Chinese friends; this is likely a result of their higher levels of education. As seen in the above survey correlation, higher educational levels were associated with more mixed social circles. There were also a number of significant regional differences, especially evident amongst those who grew up in small towns and for those who attended Chinese schools.

Only three of *shopkeepers* cohort reported that all their closest friends were Chinese; all three remarked that apartheid had an insulating effect on their community. Rick, 60, explained that despite growing up in mixed race areas of Johannesburg, apartheid laws

and segregated schooling, in particular, had a restrictive impact on their attitudes and behaviour. He stated that while growing up all his friends were Chinese:

> I actually didn't make any friends with a different race group (sic). All my friends were Chinese. I don't know if the reason was because you went to a Chinese school and we were all Chinese. You didn't have any other race group. You kind of mixed with your own people…My growing up, I was luckier than the other guys that were staying in the locations because…Market Street was quite near town, so the area where I grew up, it was multi-racial – there were Coloureds, there were Indians, but…the strange thing (was) I never had Indian friends. All Chinese friends…I think it is because of the system. Like you are Chinese and you went to the Chinese school…take for example the Immorality Act – if you, for example, went out with a white girl, you could be arrested.[33]

John K, 61, from Port Elizabeth agreed that while they were growing up, the Chinese remained relatively closed off from other people. No doubt, parents, too, played a large role, encouraging their children to play with other Chinese and avoid potential trouble. John K said:

> All weekends were spent with our schoolmates. All week it was sports…we used to spend our time playing cricket and lazing around…all Chinese. We never mixed with anyone else…This is the reason I think all my brothers and sisters all married Chinese…We tend to always stick with our own.

These interviewees reflect both the general insularity of the Chinese community of the pre-World War Two days and the impact, later, of apartheid laws. Earlier segregation had already separated groups by race; apartheid legislation increased the scope and stringency of the separation. Both Tim (58) and Cheryl (mid-50s) of the *fence-sitters* cohort also spoke of the general insularity of Chinese community but said that apartheid was only partly to blame. Cheryl also recognised the Chinese community pressures to stick to their own. She said:

> It's the same with us now, being second generation. We're brought up in the 'coloured' schools. We were cut-off from socialising with the white population. But when we came home from school, we cut ourselves off from the 'non-whites', although personally, myself, I didn't (sic). But this is general of most Chinese. As a result, the Chinese became a very closed society.

[33] It is worth noting that Rick, who passed away quite suddenly in 2004, seemed to have broadened his social circles later in his life. His funeral service was notably filled with several white, black, and 'coloured' mourners, sitting side-by-side with Chinese family and friends.

Tim agreed with her statement but added that one of the reasons the Chinese stayed together was as a response to oppression. He said:

> Well, you see, if you're a persecuted race…we used to stick together. We all went to the same parties…I suppose it's natural. When you're a persecuted race, you stick together.

According to these two interviewees, apartheid era discrimination had a cohesive effect on the Chinese. With greater concessions for the Chinese community, the younger *fence-sitters* and the *bananas* did not have the 'glue' of apartheid to keep the community closed off and isolated; the result was greater and greater social mixing with whites.

Almost all of the *fence-sitters* said that their friends were mixed. Only one of the *fence-sitters* reported having only Chinese friends.[34] About five members said that they had no close Chinese South African friends. Age, type of schools attended, university attendance, and residential area explain these differences. For example, those whose education and social environment was predominantly Chinese maintain their closest relationships with other Chinese South Africans. This group experienced quite a shock when they went to university and mixed with white South Africans for the first time. Deborah, 48, spoke about growing up in racially divided Johannesburg, attending the Chinese school, and being surprised at university:

> When I came to university, I had a culture shock…(friendships are) on an individual basis now, not on a racial basis. But growing up, (it) was definitely on a racial basis. You know, we played sports amongst us (sic). We did not play against the whites…when we played against other schools, (it was) against the Pretoria Chinese School…I think it's just a natural inclination of sticking to your own.

Amongst the youngest cohort, the bananas, almost all of them reported having more mixed groups of friends, usually including some Chinese. However, several of the interviewees reported that they were no longer comfortable in predominantly Chinese

[34] Lily, in her mid-40s, was one of the mixed-race Chinese interviewed for this project. Of all the interviewees, she held very strong views about being Chinese, having only Chinese friends, attending all of the Chinese community functions, and retaining Chinese practices, values and even superstitions. Her views were almost defensive, as if claiming and proclaiming her membership in the community, an exaggerated version of Joel's earlier comments about needing to retain and announce one's Chineseness.

settings, such was their immersion into white South African society. For example, Patricia (29) stated: "by the time I left high school, I felt I didn't have much in common with other Chinese." Jane (21), from Pretoria, while acknowledging that she does not completely fit in with her mostly white friends, stated that she is not comfortable within the Chinese community: "Even going to these occasions where Chinese people get together…I feel completely out – like this is not where I belong." Eleanor (25), too, reported to feeling out of place with other Chinese; "I did try to get involved with the Chinese youth there, and I found them very different…I just don't have a lot in common with them."

Reflecting the changes of a multi-racial democratic nation, there is one final and notable shift in terms of friendships: the youngest of the *bananas* are increasingly mixing with South Africans of all colours. The youngest member of this group experienced more racially diverse social environments than those just several years older resulting in greater integration amongst the youngest South Africans. For example, while most of the *bananas* reported having mostly white friends, Bradley, in his mid-20s and one of the youngest interviewees reported that his friends were a mixed group. In his own words,

> Outside of school, I had a couple of Chinese friends…and I have had one best friend for the past ten years; he's a Chinese guy…other than that my other friends have been from every race under the sun…because of the schools I went to, I mixed with a lot of other different people.

These changes in social relations took place relatively gradually and consistently, as changes in other realms – education, residence, and occupation – took place. The only anomalies occurred in smaller towns with small Chinese communities. For example, while most older Chinese South Africans were comfortably ensconced in all-Chinese social circles, several of my *shopkeeper* interviewees reported that they mixed with both Chinese and non-Chinese. Steve, Donna, and Aaron, all in their early 60s, reported that they spend more social time with non-Chinese colleagues and friends from work than with fellow Chinese South Africans. It is worth noting that all three had moved out of the Chinese shops and were working in predominantly non-Chinese settings. All three are from smaller towns.

Loewen concludes that the social position of a town's Chinese could be predicted *without error* by the number of Chinese in town and its total population. He notes the acceptance of Chinese in small towns was better than in larger ones as evidenced by the numbers of Chinese with membership and leadership positions in white establishments and the higher rate of interracial dating. He offers two demographic explanations: (a) in smaller towns, with a small number of Chinese families, Chinese must look outside their group for full social lives, and (b) in small towns, there are generally higher levels of interaction between Chinese and white (Loewen 1988:96-97).

Chinese communities in Kimberley and Port Elizabeth, medium-sized cities by South African standards, have small Chinese communities. The primary difference between these communities and, for example, the much larger community in Johannesburg, was economic position. There were significant numbers of Chinese who had moved, quite early, into the middle class either through their small businesses or later, in professional capacities. Loewen, too, argues that the economic success of the Chinese in Mississippi was a major factor of their social mobility. He wrote that the affluence of the Chinese contrasted with Black destitution was further impressed upon whites by their conspicuous consumption and the conspicuous contributions to white charities (Loewen 1988:98).

It was noted earlier in Chapter Two that Chinese South Africans, as part of their strategy for gaining additional privileges and concessions, made numerous efforts over the years to woo white South African community leaders and decision makers. They gave to white charities and held functions with white guests-of-honour in order to show them that the Chinese lifestyle was not dissimilar from their own and that the Chinese heritage and culture was rich and worthy of admiration. The impact of such events, held before and during apartheid, would certainly have been greater in smaller towns than in large cities. The result, as indicated by the interviewees in Port Elizabeth, Kimberley, as well as in other smaller towns, was considerable professional and social mixing prior to and even after the implementation of apartheid laws.

The small and often decreasing numbers of Chinese South Africans in smaller towns and cities around South Africa[35] have also affected younger generations. Interviewees from East London and Kimberley explained how the small number of Chinese in their age group resulted in their moving into white social circles. Eleanor, 25, reported that there were only about fifty local Chinese families in Kimberley, with only about one Chinese child per grade. She viewed it as 'natural' that she would have mostly white friends. Patricia, 29, grew up in East London and explained:

> From the point of being Chinese, there were very few Chinese children. There was an average of two or three per standard. Because of that, we *naturally* (italics added) integrated with the white children (but) it wasn't quite full integration. Certainly there were a lot of preconceptions as to how we would be; for example, you had to be brainy…(but) I think they were pretty accepting of the fact that we were Chinese.

Both comments raise numerous questions about the coalescing nature of race, class, and position. Patricia and Eleanor both assume that Chinese will 'naturally' integrate with the white children, precluding any possibility of mixing with the black or 'coloured' children in the area. For them, class sets them apart from the blacks and 'coloureds' in their social environments. For most of the *bananas* the class shift, aspired to by her parents' generation, had already occurred and they saw themselves, without question, as middle class. The vast majority of children in the same or higher classes were white and one would 'naturally' associate with them and not with children from lower classes and lower position. In addition to this explanation, however, it is impossible to ignore the presence of racism in these remarks. These young people appear to exhibit was what Loewen (1988) refers to as 'non-reflective' racism, learned from their increasingly white social environment. This racism is further informed by a sense of uniqueness and superiority in their Chineseness, learned from the parents and grandparents. Their casual comments indicate the Chinese South Africans, especially the younger ones, are embedded in white South Africa both socially and culturally.

[35] Interviews and surveys indicated that Chinese South African communities in smaller cities and towns in South Africa are increasingly shrinking due to both migration to larger cities as well as emigration out of South Africa. Most young Chinese South Africans interested in tertiary education are forced to leave their small town homes; few return.

Social environment had a powerful impact on friendships as indicated by the four *bananas* who reported that they had mostly Chinese friends. Three out of these four grew up in a Kabega Park, attended the Chinese high school, and continue to live in the area. Andrew A, 26, who now works mostly with white colleagues, reported that his closest friends were Chinese – people with whom he grew up. In his own words:

> That would be a social reason – because being in the community, I haven't really ventured far out…I have grown up with them. They are all from the community, still live here. No one has moved from their parents' house (sic), so it is from those circumstances (that) they are my closest friends.

Gary's experience reinforces the argument that social environment is one of the key factors influencing the racial make-up of their friends. In moving from Port Elizabeth to Johannesburg, his social circle changed dramatically: his friends in Johannesburg are mostly white, while in Port Elizabeth his friends are almost all Chinese. One of the older interviewees, Michael T (66) also commented on the effects of growing up in the only Chinese group area on his relationships. He said that he had no Western, white friends: "You see, as a result of Kabega Park, we were such a small community and our community is very closed, in that we kept to ourselves." The four young people from Pretoria also reinforce this argument: all four interviewees from the Pretoria area report that most of their friends are white. The impact of social environment is also seen in dating relationships as shown below.

Dating

The surveys indicated that dating relationships were also correlated to age and generation. Between 65–83% of those 50 or older have dated only other Chinese South Africans. An additional 5–17% dated other (non-South African) Chinese. While there were no respondents in the 70 + group who reported dating whites, these numbers generally rise with a decrease in age. For example, about 13% between the ages of 60–69 reported dating whites, while about 29% between the ages of 50–59 reported the same. In stark contrast, between 57–67% between the ages of 18–39 reported dating whites. In general, second generation respondents were more likely to date exclusively within their own ethnic community, while third generation respondents were much more likely to date white and other non-Chinese.

Dating outside the Chinese community was a major taboo for most of the older *shopkeepers* and very few acknowledged having done so.[36] But, not surprisingly, for the *fence sitters* it seems to have been a little more acceptable. Most of this group freely admitted that when they were younger they ventured outside of the Chinese community to date whites. Paul C (mid-40s) who is today a leader in the Chinese South African community and who is married to a Chinese South African confirmed that in his youth he had dated several non-Chinese women and that most Chinese men of his age had done the same. The dating had been acceptable to their fathers, provided it did not lead to anything 'more serious'. He said:

> I've dated non-Chinese. I've brought non-Chinese girls home – white and coloured girls. And every time I did my dad would call me into the room and say, 'fine, friends, but never consider marrying that person.' That was the only discussion we'd ever have and it happened every time I brought a new person home. It was fine to date, but just don't consider marriage…I think most of the guys in their 50s and 60s have dated non-Chinese girls, so I don't think that's a big thing.

Some single women of the *fence-sitter* cohort also spoke about their dating experiences and the possibility of out-marriage. The cultural taboos against marrying outside the community continue to hold some power over them. Tammy (44), currently single, is not sure she wants marriage. She dated one or two Chinese men and was interested in a white man from her church but later ended the relationship:

> You know, we were brought up like you can't look at other groups. It's just the Chinese and we were brought up that way…You know, my dad, he didn't even like Moiyeanese![37] And life is strange because my sister is married to an English guy. And I think if my dad knew she had married an English guy, he would come out of his grave now. I mean, my mom still goes on about what would my dad think!

Margaret, 52, is also unmarried. In her age bracket she is the only single person. She reported that she has dated mostly white men, but that this had not been a straightforward matter:

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[36] Given the incidence of mixed marriages and mixed-race Chinese in the community, it clearly did occur; however, given the strong cultural taboos against inter-racial dating and its illegality at the time, very few of the older interviewees reported to mixed-race dating.

[37] As we saw in Chapter One, the Chinese in South Africa are divided into two primary ethnic groups: the Cantonese and the Hakka (or Moiyeanese). In earlier generations, particularly with first-generation immigrants, the divide between these two groups was great and there were taboos against mingling outside your ethnic/language group.

> In those days, the apartheid days, we wouldn't dare go out with a westerner. (However), even in those days, when I was a teenager and I started going out with men, it was with westerners only, but they wanted to be very careful. Apart from the law that you had to be careful about, …I found that in certain social circles, I could sense the objection of my presence amongst them…I was the first one to start going out with foreigners and my mother didn't speak to me for a year! … I was always scared to bring my western friends home because my mother was very critical of the western world.

Parental disapproval and community taboos against mixed-race relationships remain in place in many cases. James said,

> My mother has always disapproved of all my girlfriends because they're all white. Really. That's the long and short of it…(But I have) no close Chinese friends. White, coloured; not many black; Indian; no Chinese. Okay, relatives. But in terms of numbers: white, coloured, Indian, black… But that also come through professional contacts…not many Chinese in the arts… In these fine arts classes there were no Chinese women in my classes for four years. They're all mainly white women.

Inter-racial dating, particularly with whites, became more common and less taboo with the *bananas* cohort. Two of the younger women from Pretoria reported that their current boyfriends were Afrikaners. Mary H, 23, said that her parents were struggling with the situation, but she believed they were 'coming around'. Jane, 21, said that her mother was understanding and wanted her to make her own mistakes but that her grandmother had very different notions:

> My grandmother has this sort of idea that I am going to find this young, professional Chinese guy who will be able to support me financially and you know, (so I can) teach and be supported and stuff.

The social constraints of living in small towns came into evidence again in the dating profiles. Eleanor, 25, stated simply: "There were no Chinese boys to date. (Well,) there were three, but they weren't interested in Chinese girls." She reported that she went out with one Chinese boy, but all her other boyfriends have been white. She also stated that her parents disapproved.

While the parents of the *bananas* seemed reluctantly tolerant of the fact that their children were dating whites, they were less so if they crossed colour lines into the black

or coloured communities. Michael F, 33, said: "I told my mom that my nephew is dating a black girlfriend and my mom nearly died."

In more recent times, social contact amongst the youngest Chinese South Africans has expanded to new immigrant Chinese and other 'non-white' South Africans. Eleanor reported that in Cape Town there is a now "a lot more mixing" between local Chinese and Taiwanese communities. She said; "a lot of the younger (local) Chinese girls are dating Taiwanese guys." She also reported that her sisters, several years younger than her, have dated young men from both coloured and black communities, something not done amongst her friends. Eleanor explained that by the time her sisters went to school around the 1994 elections, schools were more open and mixed. The five years that separated her from her sisters resulted in a significant difference in their experiences.

Marriage

With friendship and dating data so closely linked to age and generation, it was predictable that out-marriage data would also be correlated to age and generation. In fact, of the survey respondents, 100% of those 60 or older married Chinese (both Chinese South African or other Chinese), while approximately 78% of those aged 50-59 married Chinese. In the next youngest age group, those 40-49, the percentages go down to 60%; and further down to 47% for those 30-39. In terms of mixed marriages: 22% in the 50-59 age group, 40% in the 40-49 age group, and 53% of those 30-39. Kibria, reporting on exogamy rates amongst US-born Asians found that in 1980 the rate was 34.7%; in 1990 this went up to 40.1% (Lee and Fernandez 1998 in Kibria 2002:169). While these rates are comparable to the one's found in this study, Kibria notes that part of the rise between 1980 and 1990 was due to a rise in intra-Asian marriages, or those between different Asian groups. This was not the case in this study.

In addition to broad social taboos against racial mixing and apartheid-era legal prohibitions against the marriage of 'whites' to 'non-whites', the Chinese community maintained its own stringent taboos against out-marriage; as indicated above, these have gradually declined. Racism within the Chinese community dictated that intermarriage with black, coloured, or Indian was not encouraged or openly discussed. Various

Chinese clubs and Chinese schools actively discriminated against mixed-race Chinese in the earliest days of the Chinese community in South Africa in the early part of the twentieth century (Yap and Man 1996:234, 291).[38] The combination of the Chinese superiority myth perpetuating a 'pure blood' essentialist view of Chineseness, anti-miscegenation laws, and the mores of the times deemed mixed relationships *and* the children that resulted from them a shameful part of their history in South Africa.

Interviewees did not openly discuss intermarriage and miscegenation; however, it became quite evident, from anecdotal information that it occurred even amongst the earliest immigrant generation of Chinese in spite of the taboos. Many single men, unable to return to China to find wives, married local women, usually from the local 'coloured' community. There was also some mixing between Chinese and white, as early as the turn of the century. Darryl Accone, for example, writes of the marriage between his Chinese great grandfather and his white (Prussian) great grandmother and the impact of the mixed blood in his family, particularly on his grandmother and his mother.

During the course of this research, I heard numerous stories and conjectures about Chinese ancestors within 'coloured' families. Comments about these Chinese-'coloured' unions seemed to indicate that these historic mixed-race Chinese had been excluded from the Chinese community and merged into the larger 'coloured' community. A number of interviewees, however, reported that while the treatment of current mixed-race Chinese was problematic, most of them remained within the Chinese community. Emotional or mythical ties may have bound these mixed-race Chinese to the Chinese community, but it is more likely that the primary rationale was practical: during apartheid, Chinese had higher social status and benefited from more privileges than other 'non-whites'.

[38] Loewen (1971, 1988) devotes a chapter to mixed marriages in his book on the Chinese in Mississippi. He reports that prior to the 1940s there were perhaps 20-30% of Chinese men with Black women. From the end of WWII, however, because of the Chinese "campaign" to raise the status of their community, Chinese-Black couples were socially isolated and tremendous pressure was put on Chinese men to end these relationships. So successful was this "campaign" that since 1940 no new Chinese-Black marriages have taken place and only about a dozen (or about 5%) of such relationships existed at the time of his study.

One of the emigrated interviewees, Allen (70) described his treatment as a mixed-race Chinese child. He stated; "My grandmother was Dutch – and in school we were called 'half brains.' In Chinese we were called '12 o'clock' because we were halfway between here and there." Allen insisted that mixed-race Chinese always identified with the Chinese community. He said, simply, that this was a matter of privileges within the apartheid system: Chinese had greater opportunities and privileges than 'coloureds'.

> Although they try to identify themselves with the Chinese, the Chinese usually reject them, because assuming they are more on the coloured side, but to identify with the Chinese you would be given more privileges. The racial classification was more partial to the Chinese rather than the coloureds.

Given the highly race-conscious climate of apartheid, the truest explanation of where mixed-race Chinese were positioned may be quite simple: those who 'looked coloured' were relegated to the 'coloured' community and those who 'looked Chinese' attempted to find places for themselves within the Chinese community. A cursory glance at the bizarre 'reclassifications' of racial category from 1972 to 1990 from statistics extracted from the Department of Interior Annual Reports indicates that in that period while only thirteen Chinese were 'reclassified' as 'Cape Coloured', 58 were 'reclassified' from 'Cape Coloured' to Chinese (Yap and Man 1996:318-319). The majority of 'reclassification' applications arose from individuals of mixed descent and from people marrying across colour lines. Racism was clearly a factor in determining the place of mixed-race Chinese. This racism existed both structurally, in terms of the apartheid state, specifically with the racial classification and group areas laws, and internally within the value systems of both the white ruling society and the Chinese South African community.

During apartheid, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages (1949) and the Immorality Amendment Act (1950 and 1957) prohibited marriage between 'whites' and 'non-whites'; classed as 'non-whites', Chinese South Africans were affected. Those who married outside their race groups risked prosecution under various other laws that affected residence, co-habitation, and the classification of their children. The contravention of laws against mixed marriages occurred in a variety of ways. A few

interviewees spoke of relatives who had crossed into Zimbabwe or Swaziland to get married, though the law expressly stated that such marriages were invalid in South Africa. Rick, 60, reported that both his sisters-in-law married white South Africans in the 1960s. He said:

> They had to go to Swaziland to get married and ended up in Zimbabwe…the reason being (that) in those days Chinese couldn't…you know…they had this immorality act. Whites can only marry whites and Chinese were regarded as non-whites.

There were a few Catholic and Anglican priests in South Africa who took risks and performed marriages between Chinese and whites. Father Tuohy, mentioned earlier, was one of these. He wrote:

> Inevitably, the time came when I was asked to perform such marriages. I turned to Bishop's offices to ask for guidance and was told that if I did them, then the Diocese would know nothing about them. As a Government Marriage Officer, I was aware of the penalties involved in performing such marriages or helping such couples to be married outside the Republic. Yet the prohibition of such marriages was a gross violation of the rights of the individual. It was the right of every Catholic to be married in the Church…I decided to go ahead and perform such marriages, even though the Church would not back me up in case of trouble with the authorities … While such marriages were forbidden by law, I did about eighteen of them. My conscience left me no option (Tuohy 1987:18).

To legalise marriage across 'white'/'non-white' colour line, the 'white' partner had to move 'downwards' taking on the classification of his or her spouse. For the purposes of the Group Areas Act, a 'white' man marrying a Chinese woman became part of the 'Chinese' group, while a woman of any group marrying a Chinese man became officially 'Chinese'. A Chinese woman who married outside of the 'white' or 'Chinese' group was excluded from the definition of 'Chinese' (Yap and Man 1996:368-369). In the course of my interviews, I came across two cases of Chinese South African men marrying white South African women. In order to marry under South African law, these women changed their identity documents to become Chinese. Others, like Nelson, 42, had a church service and co-habited, but remained legally unmarried until such time as the laws changed.[39] In 1985 the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act was repealed.

[39] This was because his white wife did not want to be reclassified as Chinese; instead she kept her maiden name until the laws were changed and they could finally go through the courts register their marriage.

Rather than risk prosecution and opprobrium during these difficult years, many mixed couples chose to emigrate. Barbara explained that five out of eleven children in her family married whites and subsequently emigrated.

> My sisters eloped and went overseas, so there was nothing my parents could do. Others got married and informed parents afterward. Two sisters went to Zimbabwe to get married and they emigrated from there. Others went overseas and then married since it was illegal, at the time, to marry white.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the general idea of out-marriage was still frowned upon by most parents. Almost all of the *fence-sitters* faced parental disapproval at their interracial unions. Cheryl, in her mid-50s, spoke of her parents' admonitions: "'Don't marry a white!' 'Don't marry a black!' this was from our parents. Your parents didn't want you to marry white. They didn't want you to marry coloured." Significantly a high number of people in the *fence-sitters* cohort remained unmarried. Amongst the interviewees, three out of four *fence-sitters* in their thirties are still single, as are almost half those in their forties[40]. These numbers, amongst survey respondents were slightly lower, but still significant: 27% of those between 30-39 remained unmarried and 19% of those between 40-49 were not married. This disproportionately high number of single people, especially in the 40-49 age bracket might be partially explained by the scarcity of potential marriage partners due to the small size of and increasingly relatedness within the Chinese community.

Having completed over 70 interviews with Chinese South Africans it became very clear that there was a high degree of connectedness amongst the various community members. Many were related by marriage or blood even across the country. While some of this can be explained by my use of the referral method of selecting interviewees, a large part is due to the small size of the community, which, over the last two – three decades has remained at between 10,000 – 12,000. The key question with regard to these middle-aged unmarried Chinese South Africans is: as many of their peers were marrying whites, why did they not do the same? The answer, I believe, is that this cohort, particularly those in their forties, remains extremely conflicted about their identities. Powerful Chinese social taboos against out-marriage and pro-ethnic

[40] One of the 'fence-sitters' who remains single was Margaret who was 52.

identity clash head-on with the effects of increased social contact with white South Africans and the dearth of potential Chinese mates; as a result, they remain single.

Younger Chinese South Africans, of the *fence-sitter* and *bananas* cohorts, seem much less affected by the taboos against exogamy. Increased social contact with whites in their friendship and dating relationships has led, inevitably, to a rise in Chinese-white marriages. Patricia, 29, married a white South African. A history of older siblings marrying whites eased her path to marriage. She explained:

> Let me tell you about my family. I am the last of nine children; one is deceased. Between my eldest sister and me there is a 19-year age gap. Before I could marry…my youngest brother who is older than me got married to a white South African. And within a space of about two or three years, my other two brothers got married to white (women)…so I suppose by that time, my parents were more open to the idea…One of the things that worried them was (that) the rates of divorce in inter-racial marriages was quite high – it's about three-quarters for the marriages…and certainly there is a lot of concern…mainly in terms of family culture – how they will relate to their in-laws, what they share in common…And I guess also because the divide between people is rather great – sometimes the whites don't understand the language and they certainly don't understand the Chinese culture, so it is difficult. But I think they basically accept him.

While she has married outside the Chinese South African community, Patricia claimed: "with fellow Chinese peers, there is still a tendency towards Chinese still to marry Chinese …There is a general sense that you cannot or should not be with whites." Patricia also said that most Chinese have a racial hierarchy of preference, marriage to white may be tolerated, but marriage to Indian, coloured, or black (in that order) is still considered taboo. Kibria (2002) writes about a similar hierarchy of preference amongst her second-generation Chinese and Korean American subjects. Virtually all the parents wanted them, ideally, to marry fellow ethnics. If this was not possible, there was a ranking of preferences, usually starting with other Asians, followed by whites, then Latinos. Blacks were not included on this list.[41]

[41] The ranking was sometimes shifted slightly to take in class and other differences. For example, Filipinos and Vietnamese, perceived to be both physically and culturally very different from Chinese and Koreans, and of lower class, were ranked below whites (Kibria 2002)

Despite her claims about intra-marriage amongst her peers, Patricia acknowledged that these tendencies appear to be changing. As evidence, she reported that in the last six years she has attended two Chinese/Chinese weddings and six inter-racial (Chinese/white) weddings.

This study also revealed regional differences in rates of and attitudes toward out-marriage. According to Gary A, 25, the Chinese community in Port Elizabeth is more mixed with Indian and 'coloured' communities; there have been, historically, more inter-racial marriages.[42] He reported that his uncle is married to a coloured woman. In his generation, the family trend of exogamy has continued: both of Gary's sisters married white men and he is in a live-in relationship with a white woman. Barbara, 31, supports Gary's claim about the higher levels of intermarriage in the coastal towns. She said that in Port Elizabeth, (even) in earlier generations, there was more inter-marriage, mostly between the Chinese and the coloured communities. .

Regional differences can similarly be found with the Pretoria-raised interviewees. All of the Pretoria women interviewed were either married to or dating Afrikaans men. Veronica, 26, explained that, initially, her family was not happy but they have eventually come to accept her marriage and her husband. Out-marriage also seemed to be common in her family: one uncle married a Taiwanese and of her other more distant relatives, one married an Afrikaner, one a German, and another an Englishman and another a Canadian.

Because of the small size of the Chinese South African community and the shrinking number of potential Chinese partners there was a growing sense of the inevitability of more out-marriage. Tim, 58, said that it was inevitable that there would be more and more intermarriage over time. He said, "The Chinese community is so small (that) the chances of Chinese boys meeting Chinese girls and vice versa (are) very slim, so you end up with more intermarriage with other groups, and it will affect the whole culture eventually."

[42] This would coincide with the fact that these communities have much smaller Chinese communities as compared to Johannesburg thereby increasing the likelihood of out-marriage. It also corroborates Loewen's points about increased social mixing in small towns with small Chinese populations.

Conclusion: 'Chinese' or 'white'?

This chapter has shown that in the space of merely two generations, the tiny Chinese South African community shifted from being a relatively insular community of mostly poorly educated shopkeepers to being a highly educated group of professionals who experience high levels of social acceptance by white South Africans. This study has identified three distinct cohorts of Chinese South Africans based on their different experiences of apartheid and apartheid-era concessions. We observed shifts in education, occupation, residence, and social relationships.

Educational shifts took place after drastic political changes in China and South Africa forced the Chinese community to re-examine their views on the education of their children, which, up to that point had been haphazard, neither completely Chinese nor completely western. Cut-off from any return to China and facing increasing levels of discrimination in South Africa, Chinese parents decided to put their energies into improving the quality and increasing the duration of their children's education by establishing Chinese secondary schools, gaining admission to private white schools, and encouraging university attendance as a means of increasing their security in South Africa. Older Chinese South Africans attended a few years of Chinese or 'coloured' school before returning to work behind the shop counters. However, as a result of these shifts combined with increased social opening for Chinese, the younger cohorts of Chinese South Africans increasingly matriculated from white schools and graduated from white universities. The majority of Chinese South Africans also converted to Christianity, in part, to gain entry to church-run private schools.

Educational shifts led to further changes in the occupations of Chinese South Africans. While the older generations were mostly shopkeepers, almost all of the two younger cohorts have become professionals. Choice of professional career was affected by apartheid insofar as the *fence-sitters* were directed towards professions that could offer independent employment and mobility – medicine, sciences, accounting, and engineering. The members of the youngest cohort, the *bananas*, less affected by apartheid restrictions, have been much freer to choose from a broader range of careers,

which now include, in addition to computer sciences and business, arts and social sciences.

As Chinese South Africans increasingly mixed with whites at schools, in university classes, and at work, they also began to move, literally, into white residential areas, and mix socially with whites. In these areas, as well, there were differences based on age and generation. Older Chinese South Africans were more likely to have more Chinese friends and marry other Chinese, whereas the younger ones have mixed more freely with whites, and in more recent years, with other 'non-white' South Africans.

This chapter began with a question: can this type of upward mobility and social acceptance change racial identity? It has been pointed out that the South African state, on several occasions when apartheid was in crisis, actually offered to legally incorporate the Chinese into the 'white' category and allow them the vote from 'white' voter rolls. On each of these occasions, the Chinese South African community refused. Perhaps, then, what is so unique about the Chinese South Africans is that re-classification as 'white' held no intrinsic attraction. As other South Africans increasingly viewed them as 'white', they did not. There was an insistence, even while socialising with white friends, dating across the race line, and desiring 'white' rights, to maintain their Chinese ethnic identity. Human also made note of this while commenting on the increasing social contact between Chinese and white South Africans: "Such contact would appear, however, to be constantly tempered by the fact that the Chinese, whilst desiring equal rights with whites, are equally insistent with respect to the maintenance of their own 'Chinese' identity" (Human 1980:253).

In contrast to the Delta Chinese whose main goal was to achieve white status, the South African Chinese simply wanted better education and increased security in South Africa. The goal was never complete assimilation with whites but rather 'white' rights and increased economic security. The higher levels of education were a means of moving into the professions, and the occupational shifts were a means to increased security in South Africa *or* if they chose, in some other country. Christianisation and increased social contact with whites were, in large extent, by products of these other shifts.

We shall see that in spite of the high degree of upward social and economic mobility, efforts to preserve Chinese culture, regret over the loss of Chinese language and traditions, pride in Chinese heritage set the Chinese South Africans apart, for example, from the Delta Chinese. While they wanted 'white' rights, they did not want to be 'white'. They wanted to retain some, however limited and residual, claim to a 'Chinese' culture and identity. The next chapter will pursue this point by addressing the ethnic and cultural identity of the Chinese South Africans