

Christian Churches and Chinese Community Culture in Australia: Opportunity for Confucius Institutes to Enter Into Australian Chinese Communities

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Abstract

Through investigation on the Australian Chinese history and its current situation, Australian Chinese society and their activities in the case of Melbourne area and case study, it could be concluded that the Christian Churches in Chinese communities have provided a platform, a spiritual home for Chinese people and other new settlers who first arrived Australia. Church activities have become one of the ways for Australian Chinese to proactively join in the dominant culture of developed capitalist countries while maintaining the traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, Confucius Institutes aiming at promoting Chinese language and spreading Chinese culture, might carry out activities by virtue of Chinese Christian Churches, and take them as opportunities to merge in the diversified culture of Australia.

Key words: Australia (Melbourne); Christian church; Chinese community; Confucius institutes

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INTRODUCTION

Why most Chinese people staying abroad have chosen Christian Churches but tried their best to maintain their

cultural tradition consciously in the environment where diversified cultures co-existed? This paper has chosen 11 Chinese families staying abroad coming from different areas of China as the targets of investigation and research, and it is hoped that such investigation and research may provoke people's thinking.

1. HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION OF AUSTRALIAN CHINESE

According to historical records, as early as 1848 years ago, there were traces of Chinese in Australia. However, they are small in quantity and most of them were servants and artists mainly concentrated in Church and preacher's families. Large numbers of Chinese had arrived Australia in 1848. From 1848 to 1890, more than 100,000 Chinese entered into Australia, and they were mainly engaged in mining and agriculture. Thereafter, with the implementation of the White Australia Policy, the numbers of Chinese in Australia had been reduced drastically and by 1901, only 30,000 Chinese left. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Labor Government had abolished the discriminatory White Australia Policy under the leadership of Whitlam, and consequently, the Chinese immigrants had increased year by year and the mount of Chinese capital moving to Australia became larger and larger. Especially in the recent decades, the immigrants from Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan are on increasing year after year.

No one knows exactly how many Chinese live in Australia. Usually, if counted in blood, there was about more than 600,000, while if counted by Chinese language and its dialect speaking, the number was about 300,000. Australian Chinese have the following features: a) Most early Chinese immigrants, under the pressure of living, have less education and are at low cultural level; while, for the recent decades, most Chinese immigrants are technicians with higher education and certain professional

technical knowledge, hence witnessing a entirely improved quality. b) They have an actively pioneering spirit. c) The closed relationship with overseas Chinese countries and regions had driven and promoted the relations of economics and trade between Australia and those countries and regions. d) Chinese people tend to participate in politics. Their participation have not only maintained the benefits of communities, but also reflected the consciousness of joining in Australia and jointly building homes in Australia.

2. AUSTRALIAN CHINESE SOCIETIES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

In Australia, Chinese social organizations have a growing influence on Chinese societies. In Melbourne only, there are hundreds of Chinese groups active in every aspect in Chinese communities. Chinese societies in Australian could generally be divided into several classes: Firstly, commerce chambers with the main purpose of promoting industry, trade and commerce. Such as Australian Oversea Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Chinese Associations and so on. Those chambers consist of Chinese entrepreneurs, technical elites, and successful businessmen from different fields who have made outstanding achievements. Secondly, political societies founded for realizing certain political orientation like the Australian Chinese Association of Libertarian Party (its founding president was Chan'e Liao, a Liberal candidate of Victoria), Melbourne Hongmen Minzhi Dang. Thirdly, Chinese professional associations consisting of professionals and educators, such as Australian Chinese Science and Technology Association, Australian Chinese Engineer Association, Melbourne Chinese Writer Association and Victoria Chinese Teacher Association. Fourthly, other associations with regional or blood ties, such as Shanghai Association, Sichuan Association, Hainan Association, Chao Zhou Association. Fifthly, religious societies formed by the religious faiths, such as Australian Chinese Christian Institute, Chinese Catholic Church, Brisbane Vietnam Buddha Home, Golden Coast Chinese Christ Fellowship.

Chinese communities and societies often use the force from all fields to organize featured activities of Chinese culture with local government. For example, the celebration of Easter in Bendigo is named the Huge Golden Mountain in Victoria, which attracts thousands of visitors, and the celebration covers parade of dragon dance and lion dance; the Spring Festival Dancing Party is held once a year in West Australian Chinese Hall; the Oversea Chinese Youth Union holds the mid-autumn carnival and Darling Harbor dragon boat race; the Australia Chinese medicine acupuncture associations jointly push the legislation on Chinese medicine in Victoria. Other activities include Hong Kong movie

festival, Kong Fu shows, abacus classes, Chinese essay contests.

Australian Chinese is one of the biggest ethnic unions in Australia. All big cities in Australia have Chinese communities, and the biggest ones are located in busy central cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Among them, Christian Chinese Church has played an essential role in pushing Chinese to integrate in Australian mainstream society while maintaining Chinese culture.

3. INTEGRATION AND MAINTAINING CHINESE CULTURE IN MELBOURNE

3.1 Survey of Melbourne

Victoria is located in the south-east of Australian continent as the smallest state in Australia, which is also a state with the largest population in Australia, with the highest level of industry and most advanced agriculture and animal husbandry. Melbourne, as the capital city of Victoria, was found in 1834. At that time, Victoria was the queen and Melbourne was the prime minister of Britain. Golden mine was founded in Victoria's inland area in 1851, hence making Melbourne famous. Melbourne is the second largest city in Australia, and also the second biggest center of education, culture and finance in Australia. The city boasts rich culture and its clothing, art, music, television production, movie and dance have a leading role in the whole country, hence named the Designing Capital of Australia. Melbourne has blended culture and nature successfully and awarded the Best City for Human Living in the World for years by the Population Action International. Among the 4 million Melbourne citizens are 300,000 Chinese.

China Town in Melbourne is of Chinese characteristics, and the Chinese style archway has carried the inscription Melbourne China Town. It is said that there are 1,600 Chinese restaurants in Australia, one third of which are in Melbourne. Apart from catering, the economic pillar of Chinese communities in Melbourne, over 300,000 Chinese residing in Melbourne also bring about new business opportunities. Besides Chinese restaurants and Chinese supermarkets in China Town, Chinese people open more and more immigration companies, overseas education consulting companies, accounting firms and law firms. Once arriving, new immigrants may solve everything without speaking English as they could find professional Chinese service companies in China Town or densely Chinese populated communities. There are lots of Chinese business centers appearing one after another in the remote suburbs like Box Hill, Doncaster and Glen Waverley. Furthermore, a large number of Chinese people live around universities. More and more Chinese gather in those areas, hence forming numerous Chinese communities in Melbourne.

3.2 Chinese Christian Churches and Their Activities in Melbourne

Melbourne has the fame of Church City in southern hemisphere and there are plenty of large churches left from Victoria Age in different styles, including the famous Wesley Chapel, St Paul's Church, Scots' Church, St Patrick's Cathedral, and St Michael's Uniting Church.

There are about 70 Chinese churches in Melbourne, and where there are Chinese settlements there are Chinese churches. A Chinese church has 50 to 300 persons on average; and most of them were from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, with the number of women more than men. The New Life Church is the biggest Chinese church in Melbourne. Besides, MST (Melbourne School of Theology) runs MST Chinese, a Chinese theological church.

The church activities every week include Prayer Meeting on Wednesday, Youth Fellowship on Friday, Sunday Worship and Children Sunday School and Adults Fellowship and Women Fellowship every month. At the age of advanced internet communication, Chinese churches have created their own sites, such as: <http://www.acme.org.au>, <http://www.rhemachurch.com.au>, <http://www.mcgcchurch.org>, <http://www.huaentang.org.au>, <http://mccc-cs.com>, <http://church.oursweb.net>.

Below are chosen several typical cases of immigrant families to analyze the reasons why they profess a religion or not. Meanwhile, those cases have shown that most immigrating Australian Chinese who have studied and accepted all kinds of symbols including Australian social norms, value, meanings and language via Christian churches. While those Chinese recognize the so-called mainstream culture (as represented by Christian religion), the maintenance of Chinese culture is also completed through Christian churches, a kind of special organizations. The Christian churches in Chinese communities have formed a unique worship procedure which has merged western religious tradition and Chinese tradition, and such procedure has been accepted by Australian Chinese. The Christian churches have played an important role in the culture of Chinese communities.

3.3 Stories of Chinese Immigrants: Eleven Cases

Case 1: A couple from Peking

This couple has arrived in Australia accidentally and they have a hard time of one to two years in Sydney before they come to Melbourne. Then, they take over a Fish & Chip from an Australian old lady, and hence they have a relatively stable life. They have four children. This couple has a bachelor degree from universities in Beijing, and now they have joined in Australian nationality and become Australian citizens. On weekdays, they are busy in company affairs and take care of four children. While they send their children to study Chinese in New Gold Mountain Chinese school on weekends, they barely have time to take part in church activities. This couple has accepted

orthodox Chinese mainland education, and they hold the attitude opposing the Christian religion consciously.

Case 2: A couple from Henan

Both of this couple hold bachelor degree in English language, and the wife has passed the Australian NATTI translation test and immigrated to Australia successfully. The husband has done many jobs after he arrives in Australia, and he becomes a construction worker with nice incomes. The wife has entered into the English department of RMIT University and become an English teacher because she has excellent ability for English language. They hold different attitudes toward their children's education as one of them insists that their children should study Chinese and accept Chinese culture and another has a negative attitude towards the Chinese culture. They communicate with their children all in English at home; the children never study Chinese from outside or participate in any other specialized classes. And none of them has religious worship.

Case 3: A person from Shanghai

June is a woman from Shanghai, and she has come to Australia to study in the 1980s. She had studied engineering course originally with English proficiency, and she had many foreign friends with the ability of deep communications. But she and her Australian husband's eldest daughter were engaged in arts. For supporting the child, June had registered and founded the ACAF which opened an art dialogue between China and Australia. She had no religious belief. All her friends were from art, finance and political circles. She was an international fly woman and went back and forth between different countries and was in Australia only two or three months a year. While June had an understanding of the Christianity without opposing it and she had no time to go to the church with busy work. She said that she would not go to a Chinese church even if she believes in religion as she was unwilling to blend with Chinese people.

Case 4: A person from northeast China

Miss Chou has a daughter, who came to Australia to study nursing in the 90's and after graduation she stays in Australia. Miss Chou's and her husband immigrated to Australia after the graduation of her sister, and this couple had little education and Chou had worked in canteen of China when she was young, and washed clothes for others to earn some extra income usually. After arriving Australia, she has worked in a little store opened by her friend since she does not understand English. Chou's husband does not work and has nothing to do, and he has to drive out to fish with several Chinese friends sometimes. Chou is very diligent and she and her husband have a good relationship with others. They have grown vegetables on weekends, and have rarely gone to church without religious belief.

Case 5: Cambodian Chinese

Yang comes from Chaozhou, China, and he was born in Cambodia. He has arrived in Australia after fleeing

from the calamities with his parents in early times. As his mother was an overseas Chinese leader in Australia, he had been invited to attend the Founding Ceremony of Australia. He could speak Cambodian language, Cantonese, but his mandarin and English were not fluent. His family of four people were all lived in the city, the eldest son worked in an emergency center, the younger son studied in a university. Yang with his wife had bought a plot of land in the northern suburb of Melbourne near a university to run a fast food shop. Going out early and coming back at dusk, they work cautiously and conscientiously. Their religious belief is Buddhism, and both of them are devout Buddhists.

Case 6: A person from Gansu

Masha was from Lanzhou, Gansu, China. Her parents had divorced when she was very young, and she had lived with her father. Unfortunately, her father was dead when she was in high school. Six years ago, she had studied in Australia and her major was education. After the graduation, most of her Chinese classmates were back to China as they could not find jobs in Australia, while she had tried tremendous efforts to get a PR from a church school finally. Therefore, she believed that it was Jesus that had helped her, which made her a dedicated Christian. She has gone to church and met her friends there every week.

Case 7: A couple from Fujian

This couple has stayed in Australia for 5 years as technical immigrants. Both of them had been working for 2 or 3 years in China after they graduated from universities. They have 3 children after getting married continuously. As their English was not good and their children were young, the wife did not work and the husband worked on a construction site, going out in the morning and returning in the evening every day. All the family was dedicate Christians, they went to friends' home for gathering on weekdays, reading bible and telling testimony. On Sunday, they took the children to a nearby Chinese church, most members of which were from Fujian. The adults did worship, while specialized church members would organize children to study and sing English songs, telling bible stories and doing reading and drawing.

Case 8: A person from Hong Kong

Venus was born in Hong Kong and also grown up there. She had once been in Australia with her parents when she was two years old as her father had gotten a scholarship from a university of Hong Kong that supported him in studying in Australia for doctorate of veterinary. Venus had immigrated to Australia for study in her high school time before entering a university in Australia, when her major was the science of international relations, minor in law. She is excellent in both oral and written English, and can speak Cantonese and mandarin. She believes in Christian but does not go church very often.

Case 9: A Taiwanese

ZHW and his whole family are Christians including his wife, one son and one daughter. They are the backbone of a church as they can talk and sing. ZHW could play guitar, his daughter could play piano, and his wife has leg problems but can sing very well. They have heard that there was a very old castle in Australia when they were in Taiwan, and they wanted to buy it as a church by raising money. However, when they arrived in Australia and had a field trip there, they found the maintenance cost was more expensive than the castle's value. Therefore, they have to 'beg' all the people around all the time for realizing their church dream.

Case 10: Malaysian Chinese

Catherine's ancestral home was in Guangdong, and she with her husband immigrated to Australia from Malaysia. She has three daughters, all of them have grown up in Australia and all of them have nice jobs, while none of them has a suitable boyfriend. Before she came to Australia, Catherine had worked in a Malaysian bank. After immigration, she has worked for several big banks in Australia successively. And she is good at English with fluent mandarin, open-minded with a helping hand. All her family is Christian. Now, she works in a bank near a university, and due to this job she has known many Chinese students and visiting scholars. People who have gotten her help are invited to join in church activities by her passion.

Case 11: Vietnamese Chinese

Paul is Vietnamese Chinese who has a family of four, his daughter is a lawyer and his son has mental illness. The church funded and run by him lies between Melbourne University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University, which is a family church. That church is not very big with few people including 46 adults and 12 children. During adults' gathering activities, the children would be organized by special persons to sing some Christian songs and teach them to drawing and playing musical instruments. The Christians would visit the home for the elderly hospital daily to promote Chinese filial culture.

The heroes in the above-mentioned 11 cases are Chinese from Chinese mainland (cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7), Hong Kong (case 8), Taiwan (case 9) and Southeast Asian (cases 5, 10 and 11) Chinese's immigrating family. Cases 1-5 show that they had no religious belief as most of them were busy with life and business with no time and energy to attend church activities, although they had chances to know all kinds of people every day. However, Yang, the Cambodian Chinese, had his religious belief because his ancestors were Buddhists. Cases 6-11 show that they are Christian. It could be seen easily that the Chinese family from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia were close to Christianity naturally as the education and culture they accepted from childhood were open. They were already Christians before they immigrated to Australia,

and after arriving in Australia, they even persuaded and helped other Chinese to become Christians. The heroes in cases 6 and 7 were from Mainland China, and they had too many difficulties as first-generation immigrants, having a lonely life with no friends. The help from church made them feel that they had found an organization from which they could get a kind of warmth of home. From a self-closed environment to a lively group seemingly familiar, and from being without religious belief to become devoted Christians, their life had goals and their souls were consoled. The church has become an important place where they make friends and study, which has inspired their passions to survive in hard circumstances. With the help from church activities, adults could communicate with friends in Chinese, seek job chances and know the society in Australia, while children could play together, learn music, drawing, English, Chinese or even their native dialect in China.

Besides, by observing church activities, this paper has found that there are few second generations from rich Chinese families or officials in Australia participating in church activities as most of them has no time and mood to care the Christianity, without the need to go to churches. Furthermore, the immigrants of corrupt officials do not want or dare to expose their identities.

In summary, during the process of contacting Melbourne Chinese churches, we feel that ordinary overseas Chinese have no recognitions, especially for those starting new life in Australia who needs help but with few friends. For them, churches have become a place to make friends and get help. Churches have provided a place for activities and a spiritual home for ordinary overseas Chinese and immigrants who were newcomers. Through church activities, they could know the Australian society, gain more information, while reviewing the past and getting to know all the events of China, hence encouraging each other and hugging each other to get warm. Western ethos and Chinese ethos have intertwined here, and the consciousness of blending into the mainstream and the consciousness of maintaining Chinese traditions are also converged here. All in all, churches become an important part of their lives, especially for those Chinese who have few friends and relatives, and churches have also provided a kind of space of growing and living for children. As *The Diary of Actual Life of Oversea Study in Australia* records: “when arriving in Melbourne, I would go to local Chinese churches for consoling because not adapting to the life here with few friends...” and “I would go to churches occasionally, especially in the time of homesick”. The Chinese who lives in Australia have blended their local culture and western culture actively via activities of religious societies like Christian churches, which make a state of peaceful coexistence.

Remarks: Opportunity for Confucius Institutes to Enter into the Australia Chinese Communities.

The Australian Chinese would speak Chinese during church activities. Their local dialects mainly including Cantonese, Southern Fujian Dialect and Hakka were frequently used in home, and when communicating with relatives, friends, neighbors and colleagues. And the new generation of immigrants speaks mandarin. Within the development of China's politics and economics, more and more second generations or even the third generations of immigrants study mandarin also at schools. Some priests would conduct sermons in Cantonese or mandarin, and sometimes they would read the Bible in different languages in different periods. The adults would arrange children studying English and Chinese (in Sunday Schools) during their church activities. It is easy to see that Chinese Christian churches have provided a natural advantageous atmosphere for language study.

If Confucius Institutes could undertake Chinese language training and Chinese culture activities by virtue of Chinese Christian churches in the Chinese communities, more people might get to know Confucius Institute and promote them on the one hand, and on the other hand, Confucius Institutes could also help Chinese children learn Chinese language, train more Chinese teachers and maintain and promote Chinese traditional culture much better. It is one of the favorable ways to cooperate with Chinese Christian churches for Confucius Institutes to enter Australian communities. Such promotion could start from the closest Chinese communities, and via open libraries, video resources, tour shows, itinerant exhibitions, tour public-speaking, Confucius Institutes could organize people to visit China in delegation, hence attracting Chinese Christian churches to help each other and carry out all kinds of language communication and culture activities. Confucius Institutes could even make use of the existing local interpersonal networks of Chinese Christian churches to penetrate into other communities, societies and enterprises in Australia, hence extending their influence more and more widely. Through such penetration by layers, as a result, Confucius Institutes could close the distance between different cultures.

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