

2006 Newsletter of the Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora

About the CSCSD

The Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora is the only academic centre in the southern hemisphere that promotes research on people of Chinese descent in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. The Centre seeks to stimulate scholarship that reflects the diversity of cultures, places, and political economies in this region, and to contribute critically to the field of knowledge. In particular, the CSCSD seeks to encourage scholarship that goes beyond stereotypes of exploring the multifaceted historical and contemporary nature of Chinese diaspora experience in the "South Seas" (the Nanyang), its various interfaces with indigenous people and states, its multiple standings in economies, societies and politics, and its global positioning.

Although based in the Division of Pacific and Asian History, the Centre is committed to promoting studies of the Australian Chinese community as well as investigating Chinese in other Pacific states, in particular in seeking to locate their history within the larger narrative of the Chinese southern diaspora. Instead of adhering to the old, conventional narrative framework of Chinese diaspora as a tale of how a unique "Chineseness" manifested at different times and places, the CSCSD proposes to pursue a regionally and geographically oriented approach, to help free the study of overseas Chinese from its nationalist straight jacket and from the invented tradition of a unified Chinese essence.

As part of The Australian National University, the CSCSD also co-operates with the Asia-Pacific College to co-sponsor an undergraduate course on Chinese southern diaspora every second year.

For more information about the Centre, please consult our website.

Creating the Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora

Anthony Reid

(Speech delivered at the Inaugural CSCSD Lecture, 26 February 1999)

There is a legend in India about the first migration of Parsee refugees from Iran many centuries ago. Their leader was brought to the King by a minister who denounced them, and demanded their expulsion because the country was already full. The Parsee leader asked for a glass of milk, filled to the brim; then took a pinch of sugar and sprinkled it in. Noting that it had not overflowed he presented the glass to the king saying, "You are the milk, we are the sugar; you will know of our presence only by the sweetness which suffuses the whole".

This is diaspora at its best, in a fashion we know well in Australia. The rich abundance of cultures and ideas has manifestly savoured and sweetened Australian society. The violent demonstrations by the Kurdish PKK movement around the world last week show a less attractive face of modern diasporas, equally part of their nature in our time. The extraordinary mobility of populations in the globalising world, together with the core of instant communications around that world, have given a new urgency to a very old phenomenon - a spatially dispersed minority which nevertheless feels some kinship or has that kinship thrust upon it by a hostile environment.

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There is a theoretical and a practical story of how we came to establish this Centre. Theoretical: Faith in the sovereignty and internal coherence of the nation state has weakened, and all sorts of other forms of community are finding legitimacy again. Many, more than ever, still intermarry, or find their children culturally remote from them as they adjust to a host society. It is their multiple options, possibilities and transactions that demand attention, and the new Centre has been established to focus on them. So much for one contested word, 'diaspora', the strength of which is, as the modern literature that has grown around it stresses, precisely the ambivalences and pluralities of multiple identities.

Another contested word is our title is 'Chinese', which we somehow use to include some purely English-speaking Australians, purely Indonesian-speaking Indonesians, purely Thai-speaking Thais, and a range of multilingual others speaking a variety of languages deriving from south China, north China, Southeast Asia and England. The one thing virtually unknown in this 'Chinese' diaspora category is a monolingual Chinese-speaker. What gives the unsatisfactory everyday term some analytical usefulness is the tension it creates, in all those of Chinese or partly Chinese descent outside China, between heritage and environment.

In our part of the world, the Chinese and the British (or Anglo-Irish) have been the two most important diasporas. We do not (yet) have centres studying the British diaspora because Australian studies itself is largely concerned with this. The British, specifically the English, built states wherever they went and this is their greatest legacy. Chinese migrants had learned from long experience to expect little of governments, and to rely much on the networks of kinship, culture and trust. For a millennium in Southeast Asia, and a century and a half in Australia and the Southwest Pacific, these Chinese played the role of economic innovators and cultural minorities, challenging dominant cultures by their otherness, their skills, and their ability to tame hostile frontiers. They deserve sustained study, and we hope this Centre will, over the long term, to provide it.

I mentioned a practical reason, also, for the foundation of the Centre that explains why it has happened here and now. The study of Chinese outside China at the Australian National University has a long history, going back to Patrick FitzGerald and Charles Price, but it's fair to say the ANU became a world leader in the field when Professor Wang Gungwu came here in 1968 as the second occupant of the chair of Far Eastern History. He attracted a number of outstanding students from Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia, including Yong Chin Fatt, Yeng Ching-hwang, Steven Fitzgerald, and Ng Chin-keong. He also brought Jennifer Cushman to Canberra in 1976. Jennifer was then a young graduate student working on Thailand-China connections. She remained, until her premature death in 1989, wholly concerned with Chinese in Southeast Asia and Australia and worked with Wang Gungwu in a number of important book projects.

Jennifer's sudden death, not long after Professor Wang's departure for Hong Kong, deprived us of our two key scholars in this area but also, in a curious way, galvanised us into action. We organised a series of lectures in honour of Jennifer, which may have pushed both Craig Reynolds and I further into this field than we would otherwise have gone. Those lectures became a successful book in 1996, *Sojourners and Settlers*, published by Allen and Unwin. We also launched a memorial fund, which we used to help younger scholars in the field of Sino-Southeast Asian Studies visit the ANU or Cornell, the other university Jennifer cared about.

In 1996 another of our former ANU colleagues, Ben Batson, died suddenly and tragically in Singapore where he was lecturing at the National University of Singapore. He had helped and supported us with the Jennifer Cushman Fund and the memorial lectures, probably as much because of his affection for Jennifer as for his admiration for our goals. He very generously left US\$100,000 in his will for the Jennifer Cushman Fund. It is that bequest, in addition to a grant in 1998 from the Chiang Ching kuo

Foundation of Taiwan, which has made this Centre possible. We will use these funds for a variety of scholarly goals, including for lectures, workshops, and Visiting Fellowships. The Centre will also help support a biennial course on Chinese southern diaspora in the Faculty of Asian Studies, a happy reinvention of a course first taught by Wang Gungwu and Jennifer Cushman.

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At the time of this speech, Anthony Reid was the Professor of Southeast Asian History in the Division of Pacific and Asian History of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. He is now Director of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.

CSCSD Activities in 2006

Two-day workshop. In February 2006, the CSCSD helped to organise the second Water Frontier workshop over two days in Phuket, Thailand. This Australian Research Council funded project, directed by Professor Carl Trocki, of the Queensland University of Technology, and Dr Li Tana, of the ANU, is exploring the shared histories of southern Chinese traders, settlers, and local peoples in the long coastal region, and its riverine hinterland, that stretches from the Mekong delta to the Malay world. Setting aside and looking beyond narrow state-centred and nationalist histories of this region, the project has been considering this area and southern China as parts of a single geographical ensemble, and a single economic zone woven together by the regular itineraries of thousands of junk traders.

The project invited several eminent scholars, as well as a number of final year, or recently completed, doctoral students, to present or discuss papers on various topics concerning the Chinese and the economic history of this general area in the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Papers were presented by Dr Li Tana, Dr Nola Cooke and Mr Yeetuan Wong of the ANU, Ms Tracy Barrett of Cornell University, Professor Baas Terweil and Dr Thomas Engelbert of Hamburg University, Professor Ng Chin Keong, Dr Kwee Hui Kian and Mr Clement Liew of the National University of Singapore, Professor Carl Trocki of QUT, and Mr Philip King of the University of Wollongong. Discussants were Professor Anthony Reid of the Asia Research Institute, NUS, for the first day, and Professor Howard Dick of Melbourne University for the second.

Several of the papers read at the workshop were subsequently accepted, in revised versions, for publication in this volume of *CSDS*.

Visiting Scholar. Unfortunately, the CSCSD's designated Visiting Scholar for the second half of 2006, Mr David Chng from Singapore, fell ill shortly before taking up the position and had to withdraw.

Between 1 March and 1 June 2005, the Centre's Visiting Scholar was Dr Paul Van Dyke, who worked with Dr Li Tana on eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century trade links between Canton and Southeast Asia.

Undergraduate course on Chinese southern diaphora. A one-semester course on Chinese southern diaspora was taught in 2006, by Niv Avileiri and Michael Godely. The course will be offered again in 2008. Mr Andrew Chua, a Filipino Chinese student, won the Jennifer Cushman Prize for High Achievement (A\$ 200).

Forthcoming activities

One-day workshop. The CSCSD is principal organiser and part-sponsor (along with the Centre of Excellence in Asia-Pacific Studies and the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, both of ANU) of a one-day workshop at ANU on 9 February 2007 entitled "Chinese in the Pacific: Where to Now?"

The workshop will consider aspects of contemporary Chinese diaspora in Australia, New Zealand, and the southwest Pacific ranging from demographic issues of Chinese migration and community building through to an examination of what the recent sharp rise in diplomatic interest in island states, from both China and Taiwan, might mean for the future of the southwest Pacific.

The speakers dealing with Australia and New Zealand are

- Professor Graeme Hugo of Adelaide University,
- Dr Paul Jones of Melbourne University,
- Associate Professor Manying Ip of the University of Auckland.

The speakers dealing with the island states and Chinese communities are

- Emeritus Professor Bill Willmott, formerly of Canterbury University (Christchurch),
- Emeritus Professor Ron Crocombe, formerly of the University of the South Pacific,
- Professor James Chin, formerly of the University of PNG and currently with the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

Considering broader diplomatic and foreign affairs implications are

- Mr Michael Powles, former NZ head of mission in China and Fiji,
- Mr Graeme Dobell, ABC journalist specialising in foreign affairs and the Pacific.

The PRC political attaché at the Canberra embassy, Ms Ou Boqing, will also speak.

For more information, including a program and registration form, please consult the CSCSD, PAH or RSPAS websites. While entry is free, the organisers would appreciate it if interested parties would register via the electronic form on the CSCSD website. All interested persons are invited to attend, from 9 am, at the Conference Room of University House, located in The Australian National University campus, at the corner of Balmain Crescent and Liversidge Street, Acton.