

The Fourth Wave: Chinese in the Pacific Islands in the Twenty-First Century

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The Pacific Islands have seen four main waves of people who came through what is now the nation of China at some stage of the multi-millennia journey of all of them from the Middle East to the Pacific Islands.

The Austronesian Connection¹

The first Austronesians to reach the Pacific Islands were those whose ancestors left the area of modern China more than 10,000 years ago to occupy the island of modern Taiwan, which was connected to the Chinese mainland until 8000 or so years ago. Those on the mainland were displaced by Han Chinese, but Austronesians remained the only people on Taiwan until the 1500s. Some of them left Taiwan up to 6000 years ago and expanded slowly through what are now the eastern Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Pacific Islands.

Austronesians were not the first people in the Islands. Papuans preceded them by about 40,000 years, in what are now West Papua, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, and the Torres Strait Islands. Papuans are still the most numerous Pacific Islanders by far, although Austronesians are more widespread. In that long journey past China and Taiwan, the Austronesians evolved into a new people, with elements of Papuan and probably other genes and cultural traits incorporated in them. During the past 5000 years they spread throughout what is now Polynesia, Micronesia and coastal Melanesia.

The passage through China and then Taiwan was irrelevant for Austronesians from the time they left, but is now relevant to relations with Taiwan, where many Austronesians still live. During the past twenty years, social, cultural and political relations have begun, based on similarities of language, culture and recent history. It is an interesting example of the politics of history, as Austronesians have closer historical connections with the Philippines, but that has not been activated.

Chinese in the Era of European Colonization: Workers and Traders

When Spaniards got to Manila in the 1500s there was a colony of Chinese traders married into the Filipino community, and for the next 250 years Spanish galleons carried some Filipino-Chinese crew. Probably most indigenous Chamorro people of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands carry some of that genetic heritage but are not identified in any way as Chinese.

From the late 1700s British and other European ships were calling at Chinese ports in the trade with Australia and the Pacific Islands, and many picked up some crew there. Then Chinese were recruited for plantation work and other tasks throughout the Islands. Europeans monopolized power roles in government, wholesaling, banking, international shipping, and religion, so many Chinese worked, saved, invested and succeeded in retailing, market gardening and technical services. Emphasis on education led many of their descendants to various professions. The importance of retailing is exemplified in French Polynesia where going to a shop is generally spoken of, whether speaking in Tahitian or French, as “going to the Chinese” (“haere ‘i te toa Tinito”, or “on va au Chinois”).

¹ Austronesian is a language group which spread from its southern China and Taiwan homeland to embrace a huge region from Madagascar to Rapanui (Easter Island). This dispersal took place mainly between 5000 and 1000 years ago.

Chinese in the Pacific after World War II: From the Islands to the West, and from Southeast Asia to the Islands

By World War II, Chinese were the most widespread Asians in the Pacific Islands, while the most widespread Europeans were British. The constraints on population movements formerly imposed by colonial governments are changing as indigenous leaders define new parameters since independence.

Independence in the Islands was characterized by ethnic nationalism that many Asian settlers felt threatened by. At the same time Canada, New Zealand, USA, and then Australia became more open to Chinese migrants from the Islands, and many went. New Chinese came from Taiwan and Hong Kong in fishing and commerce, from Southeast Asia in forestry and business, and a few from both in hotels and tourism.

Chinese from the Mainland since the Opening of China in the 1980s

The remainder of this paper will focus on this fourth wave, beginning by identifying the various categories of people involved. In the early stages these were mainly low-skilled workers in factories, timber, fishing, agriculture, and mining. More recently retailing, food service, professions (including diplomatic and political), crime, and military activity have become significant. After discussing these groups, the paper will consider future possibilities raised by their presence.

Factory workers

The largest employers are garment factories in the Northern Mariana Islands. The workers are mostly women indentured from China but the owners are mainly ethnic Chinese men from Hong Kong or China who have become US citizens in recent years. Other Chinese factory workers, also mainly women, work in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and in small numbers elsewhere. Housing of minimal standard is provided. Work hours are usually long, and few have English or other languages to communicate with local people.

The garments and other manufactures are exported to the USA, Europe, Australia, or New Zealand under access agreements that are unlikely to last owing to pressure from the World Trade Organisation. Wages and transport costs are higher than in China or Vietnam, so this work is likely to reduce in the Islands, and some factories have already closed.

When factories close, by no means all those who lose jobs return to China. Some have found other work; others have "got lost" or remain "under cover", like those who are members of the religious group Falun Dafa (which is banned in Mainland China). Overall, factory workers are likely to reduce in number.

Fishermen

The largest category of deep-sea fishermen throughout the Islands are recruited from Mainland China but work on Taiwanese, Korean and other vessels, although recently the number of vessels owned in China is increasing.

I had assumed they would be coastal people from fishing communities but one owner told me that was not so, because most coastal people have better options in China, and they know deep-sea fishing is arduous, Spartan and low paid. So they recruit far inland, among people who have few other options and no knowledge of the conditions. When they arrive they are sent on a long fishing trip for several weeks of agonizing initiation. When full, the ship comes to port in the morning, unloads fish, loads fuel and stores, and is often required to sail by nightfall. Some are in port for longer, but conditions are severe by modern standards (though better than on European ships in the Pacific in the 1800s).

Fishermen are supposed to return to China after their contracts end, although it is alleged that a few do not. Most fishermen have little contact with the people of the Islands. Few speak English or have skills that are wanted ashore. In some ports Chinese prostitutes are imported to service the crews, reducing even that contact.

In principle, Pacific Islands governments want fishing work for their people, but few local people want it (nor would I or most others who have a choice). As China's economy rises some of this work may shift to lower income countries like Vietnam and Myanmar, but given China's population and increasing ownership of the fleet, Chinese may be the main fishermen in this region for some time.

Timber Workers

In West Papua, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, the largest share of timber is extracted by ethnic Chinese Malaysian firms employing Malay, Filipino, Indonesian, and Chinese workers. The timber is being extracted at faster than sustainable rates, so the life of the industry at present levels is limited. However, it may lengthen as demand pushes prices up and technology improves, enabling logging of areas that are now uneconomic owing to distance or difficult terrain.

As with factory workers, not all return. No data are available on how many move illegally from timber work to other occupations and settle, but some well-informed people believe the number is considerable. With China having surpassed Japan as the main market for Pacific Islands' timber, a continuing flow of Chinese people is expected in this industry and a proportion will remain in the Islands.

Construction Workers

Many timber workers are ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia but construction workers are mostly from China, come to build prestigious sovereignty symbols in the most prominent places under Chinese aid to Islands governments that recognize China rather than Taiwan. They include parliament buildings (Federated States of Micronesia or FSM), government headquarters (Samoa and Vanuatu), justice and police buildings (Cook Islands), presidential palaces (FSM), inter-government headquarters (of the Melanesian Spearhead Group of prime ministers and presidents of Melanesia), and the Western Pacific Tuna Commission in Pohnpei, as well as the public attraction, sports stadiums, that China has built in FSM, Fiji, PNG and Samoa and promises to build elsewhere. The buildings give China public relations value but also generate some worries about reciprocity. Whereas other donors, including Taiwan, use local construction workers as far as possible, China uses entirely staff from China. That causes some resentment.

Farmers

The largest concentration of agriculturalists is in Fiji where many early Chinese settlers were farmers. But most of them and their descendants moved to town in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, or the USA. In Hawai'i too, most Chinese farmers have moved to urban occupations there or on the US mainland. Most Chinese farmers in Tahiti migrated to Pape'ete or to the USA, New Zealand or Europe

However, many new Chinese farmers have arrived in several Islands countries and have taken over much commercial gardening, even where indigenous landowners are unemployed or underemployed. There is good potential for Chinese commercial farmers in the Islands, increasingly to supply specialty products for export. Their numbers are expected to increase.

Miners

Chinese participation in mining in the region has become more proactive over time. In the 1800s and early 1900s Chinese miners worked in Nauru, Caroline Islands, New Caledonia, Makatea (French Polynesia), and elsewhere, but that stopped decades ago. Now China's need for minerals for its booming industries led to the acquisition of rights to mine nickel and cobalt at Ramu, and gold at Mt. Kare in PNG. The first 700 technicians and specialists arrived from China in recent months for that project, which has a minimum life-span of forty years.

Mining sites are often in isolated places and to a degree self-segregating, but a mixed Papua New Guinean and Chinese workforce has been agreed to for that mine. China is one of several countries seeking more mining rights in Melanesia, so Chinese miners are likely to be more numerous.

Business Owners and Investors

These have been mainly in fishing, timber, retailing, food services, and hotels, but the range of interests is widening. From the 1970s they were mainly ethnic Chinese from Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, or from Indonesia in the case of PNG. Now China's government and entrepreneurs are becoming major investors.

The largest and most recent is the US\$1 billion investment by China's Metallurgical and Construction Company in Ramu nickel-cobalt mine. China is a partner with British and Japanese interests in the world's largest natural gas project, at Tangguh in West Papua. China's National Oil Development Company agreed in 2006 to explore for and exploit oil and gas in PNG and West Papua.

Many Chinese businesses in the Islands rely on trade with China. A common pattern is for some of the family to stay in Hong Kong and/or China to handle that side of the trade, with others in the Islands. Chinese are expanding from retailing and services to the full spectrum of businesses. Many more are expected in these roles. One field that is likely to see a huge increase of Chinese is as owners of hotels, restaurants, vehicles, ships, aeroplanes, and communications services.

Tourists and Personnel in Travel Services

From the mid-1970s, Japan relaxed restrictions on overseas travel and from then on "Asia-Pacific tourism became the story of the expansion of Japanese tourism, with its distinctive modalities and geopolitics", followed in the 1990s by the East Asian Korea and Taiwan.²

Today over 1,500,000 Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean tourists visit Guam, the Northern Marianas and Palau annually. Investors from those countries own hotels, airlines and related services, and staff from those countries service those industries. Some of the largest have recently been bought by ethnic Chinese to prepare for China's recently opened flow of tourists, which is expected to become the largest flow to the Pacific Islands. Taiwan is already the largest source of tourists to Palau. The travel industry is expected to be the largest Chinese presence in the Islands within a decade or two, first in the north Pacific Islands, then in the south. Saipan, closest to China, already receives direct tourist flights from Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing. Some Chinese Harbin aircraft are already in service in the Islands, and there is some Chinese shareholding in airlines.

Diplomats and Other Officials

China has more diplomatic staff than any other nation in the Islands, even though it only has diplomats in the eight Islands countries with which it has relations. Taiwan has staff in the six

² Lonny Carlisle, "The Political Economy of Tourism and Tourist Development in Micronesia," paper presented at the European Society for Oceanists Conference, Leiden, 1991, p. 1.

countries it has relations with. In addition, some Malaysian and Singaporean diplomats are ethnic Chinese. China and Taiwan also have many other officials in the Islands as experts, advisers and in other roles. Chinese and Taiwanese diplomats interfere in Islands politics more than those of any other country except Australia in the South Pacific and USA in the North.

Military and Strategic Personnel

China takes a keen interest in military, police and other strategic and sovereignty-related activities. Though not yet on the scale of Australia, New Zealand or the USA, China (and to a lesser extent several other Asian nations) invites Pacific Islander military and police to conferences and for training in China, sends Chinese trainers to the Islands (beginning with physical education), and supplies buildings and equipment for military, police and judicial services.

The north Pacific Islands (Micronesia) have seen political-military-strategic-territorial competition between Spain, Germany, Japan, and the USA over the past 130 years. The south Pacific Islands have seen the equivalent between Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan. China is a new actor in this competition for influence and power and, if its economy continues to grow faster than those of its competitors, it is likely to involve many more Chinese military people in the Islands, playing a more assertive role. But it will be some time before they equal the massive US military presence in Guam and the Marshall Islands and smaller ones elsewhere. France has substantial military facilities in French Polynesia and New Caledonia, and Australia has military attaches or advisers throughout the region.

Other Professionals

The first such people to arrive since independence were from Taiwan and Southeast Asia but they were a very small proportion of the Chinese who originated in those areas. China and Taiwan supply some doctors and other health professionals to countries that recognize them diplomatically, as well as experts in agriculture, technology and other fields. Apart from government, independent Chinese professionals are increasingly found in Oceania as accountants, technicians, information technologists, and in other fields.

Students and Researchers

The first Chinese to come to study went to islands closest to China and Taiwan. Thus the College of the Northern Marianas, Eucon International College, University of Guam, Guam Community College, and Palau Community College all sought students from Asia from the 1990s. Japan, Korea and the Philippines were the main sources, but some came from China and Taiwan.

Central Queensland University (CQU) earns income by attracting Asian students to Australia, particularly ethnic Chinese from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore. When more applied than the Australian government would allow, CQU set up a campus in Fiji for those who wanted an Australian degree but could not be directly admitted. Students who studied for one or two years in Fiji could complete in Australia. The university sold the Fiji operation to a franchising company and standards fell, while military coups in Fiji in 2000 and 2006 led to few being attracted.

Some scam “universities” have also been set up. Soon Kyung Park of Korea opened Saipan University in the Northern Marianas in 2003, with students from China who prepaid US\$7,000 to \$10,000 each, on the promise of splendid teaching facilities, luxury accommodation with television, refrigerator, phone, and computer in each room, and high-paid work in Saipan – none of which materialized. The “university” had no books and only one computer. Park was

gaoled for nine years for defrauding Chinese students. He also set up Tinian University and American International University in Guam, with equally glorious (non-existent) campuses. These are far from the only “scam” universities set up in the islands to defraud Chinese and other Asian students.

Educational exchanges between the Islands and Asia range from those for school children to those for senior scholars. They have been most extensive with Japan, but a steady flow of Chinese is expected, though possibly fewer than the number of Islanders going to China and Taiwan. Some, having had the experience, will stay or continue the association with the Islands and Islanders.

Research is closely related to political, economic and strategic interests of the sending nation. The Australian National University began with a School of Pacific Studies because in World War II Australia was disadvantaged by a lack of knowledge about, and of people with experience in, the Islands. This school (now of Pacific and Asian Studies, reflecting changed national priorities) still serves this role, as do various research grants and institutions. As with most big countries, US research in the Islands has also been closely tied to US national interests. Now that China seems to be aiming to replace Australia as the major influence in the South Pacific and the USA in the North Pacific, we will see more Chinese researchers.

Religious and Other Philosophical Advocates

Earlier Chinese immigrants either practiced their own faiths or adopted the dominant Christianity of the host community. The first who proselytized were some Chinese Anglican and Catholic priests in Tonga and Fiji from the 1920s.

The most prominent Chinese religious presence today is Falun Dafa (or Falun Gong), which appeared in the late 1990s in the Northern Marianas. Falun Dafa members are now present in several Islands countries, and are harassed and intimidated by Chinese officials. Harassment is more difficult in the Northern Marianas because it is a Commonwealth of the USA, and some Falun Dafa members have been given refugee status because they will be persecuted if they return to China.

Representatives of Buddhist or Confucian-related movements are arriving in the Islands. The leading one is Soka Gakkai from Japan, but it is expected others from China will also be represented before long.

Criminals: A Growing Menace

The greatest increase in crime since 1990 has been by recent Chinese immigrants, whereas long-established Chinese had a reputation throughout the Pacific Islands as perhaps the most law-abiding ethnic category. Smuggling of drugs, weapons and illegal immigrants, money laundering, fraud, extortion, forced prostitution, and other activities are easy in Pacific Islands countries that cannot afford extensive police and other protective services.

Crimes by Islanders against Chinese and other Asians are escalating, probably for several reasons: because they are seen as an easy target; are richer; or are resented for competing for jobs or business opportunities, or for corrupting politicians and officials, and extracting wealth without contributing to the community (including avoiding taxes, import duties and other charges, as well as lacking in community participation). In Solomon Islands' civil disturbances from the late 1990s, Chinese businessmen were constantly extorted, often by police and the Malaita Eagles militia that controlled the capital during the ethnic dispute. However, Solomon Islanders (including former Prime Minister Bartholemew Ulufa'alu) believe the civil disturbances were consciously aggravated by certain Chinese entrepreneurs who sought to topple a government that wanted them to pay their taxes and obey the law.

Here are some examples. Six drunk, off-duty policemen assaulted Chinese businessman Frankie Gui who has lived twenty-five years in PNG and owns the Kwik Shop chain. They shot rifles at his feet, probably to coerce a “donation” from him, but Mr Gui complained because he had already given the police so much cash and fuel.³

A senior Solomon Islands official told me in 2001 that his brother led the destruction of the head office and machinery of the Malaysian–Chinese logging firm Golden Springs because they were destroying forests, reefs and rivers on his island. He said that before long the whole of Chinatown would be burned down. It was.

Many Chinese fishing boats left Chuuk (FSM) in the 1990s because of demands by Chuukese for cigarettes, liquor and other payments for “protection”. In Majuro (Marshall Islands), five Chinese businesses were burned down in a very short time. The Northern Marianas sees high levels of violent crime by local youth against Asians, much of it to pay for drug addiction.

Crimes against the then 300 Chinese in Tonga (almost all in business) became so serious in 1999 that Prime Minister Vaea made a public appeal to stop it. Two years later the police minister ordered Chinese shopkeepers and their families to leave within one year “for their own protection”, because of violence against them. That order was not carried out and some wonder whether it was intended to be, as it intimidated the Chinese and made them more vulnerable to “gift-giving” or extortion. They did not leave. At that time of strongly expressed public opposition to Chinese, the late King (who had Chinese business partners, as did the crown prince and the princess) told parliament that Tonga needed another 4000 Chinese.

Riots in November 2006, in protest at government delays in implementing constitutional reform, led to the destruction and looting of most Chinese businesses in the capital along with assets of the royal family and prime minister. Ethnic Chinese citizens of Tonga took refuge in the embassy of China, which chartered a plane and flew out 200 of them. Tonga’s commissioner of police referred to “a struggle against the Chinese,” saying “the removal of Chinese retailers was one of the reasons behind the looting and burning”.⁴

Chinese market gardeners in Fiji are often attacked or robbed, but the president of the Chinese Association said they did not seek police help for fear of reprisals and had to accept harassment as a “way of life”. One Chinese farmer was attacked five times in two months and killed in the sixth.⁵

In PNG in 2002 the Chinese ambassador, police commissioner and head of foreign affairs all complained that Chinese were victims of more violence than others.⁶ That seems to be the case in many Pacific Islands countries. However, Chinese Buddhists have been little affected by discrimination and violence due to religious intolerance, whereas Hindus and Muslims have suffered.

Crimes by Chinese against Chinese, usually competing gangs, include kidnapping, extortion, intimidation, torture and other violence, such as a Chinese prostitute chopped into pieces in Suva for not obeying her criminal masters. Torture is practiced, as with the Chinese shopkeeper whose head was chopped off in PNG, or the three Chinese businessmen and a Fijian guard murdered at a fish factory in Fiji in 2003, discovered with burns and body parts severed. Hong Kong police and Interpol described this as a dispute between criminal gangs.

³ *The National*, 23 November 2004.

⁴ *Pacific Island Report*, 19 November 2006.

⁵ *Fiji Times*, 31 May and 19 December 2005.

⁶ *Pacific Island Report*, 11 September 2002.

Five Chinese shopkeepers were murdered in Port Moresby alone in 2001, some by disgruntled former employees. Many murders of Chinese and other Asian business people in PNG remain unsolved. In a crackdown on Chinese criminals in Port Moresby in 2004, police raided seven shops and detained twenty-eight illegal immigrants who were smuggling people and cargo, producing pornography, selling guns and drugs, running illegal brothels, gambling and money laundering, and bribing officials. However, the police themselves then looted the shops, after which they were followed by local looters! Investigation revealed collusion between some police, officials and the arrested men.

Prostitution is a controversial area. In the same way that Chinese are the largest category of immigrant factory workers, fishermen and farmers, they also form the largest number of immigrant prostitutes. Many are enticed by offers of attractive jobs, only to find on arrival that they are forced into prostitution by criminal gangs. A 1994 World Health Organization study in Saipan found most prostitutes there to be Filipina; but a 2006 study by the College of Micronesia estimated that 90 per cent of 1500 prostitutes were by then Chinese.⁷ In 2007 the Fiji military dictatorship deported some Chinese prostitutes.

Recent immigrants from China cause a disproportionate share of crime in the Islands. One Asian ambassador complained to me about media and public complaints of “Asian crime”, whereas he said it is “mainly Chinese but we all get blamed for it”. The relationship between China’s embassies and government and Chinese criminal leaders (and some Islander politicians) is often questioned. Many Papua New Guineans complain of apparently supportive relations between Chinese crime and the Chinese embassy. Without full cooperation from the government of China it will be hard to stop. But if that help is given, and local policing made more effective, Chinese people will be more readily accepted.

A Presence from Afar: Television, Radio, Print Media, and Educational Materials

No longer do people have to be present to participate in Pacific Islands societies. Media influences were once exclusively Western, but now China is the only foreign country with its own television stations in Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu – broadcasting CCTV Channel 9 in English. It plans to provide this service to all countries with which it has relations, giving an alternative source of information and interpretations. It is one of a range of actions to familiarize Pacific peoples with Chinese perspectives.

Part-Chinese: “How Chinese is Chinese?”

Genetic and cultural assimilation of Chinese seamen, plantation workers, miners, businessmen and others occurred in varying degrees throughout the Pacific Islands. Those who self-identify and/or are identified by others as part-Chinese tend to be people with more recently arrived Chinese fathers or grandfathers and Pacific Islander mothers, and who have maintained some degree of Chinese identity.

Persons of part-Chinese ancestry occupy disproportionately important roles in many Islands nations (as do many part-Japanese in the north Pacific Islands and part-Europeans throughout – multiple linkages give advantages in situations of international interaction). They include Sir Julius Chan, who was twice prime minister of PNG, Anote Tong who is the current president of Kiribati, Gaston Tong Sang who is president of French Polynesia, Jim Ah Koy who was finance minister in Fiji, and at least two other heads of Pacific Islands’ governments who do not discuss their Chinese heritage. Part-Chinese have also been disproportionately successful in commerce and recently in the professions.

⁷ *Marianas Variety*, 7 December 2006.

Past, Present and Future Receptivity to China and Chinese

The most common questions in this regard are about ethnic relations, yet they are the most difficult to answer accurately. Perception and reality differ for each person and each context, with who is asking and why; but answers must be attempted here as it is an issue of wide public interest. Some people object to classification by ethnicity or nationality, but these categories are widely used by governments and people in the region. Much public discourse concerns ethnicity, both within indigenous communities and between them and immigrants, despite ideological assertions by expatriates that ethnicity is “false consciousness”.

Harmonious relations are less likely the more immigrants differ from their hosts in physique, clothes, religion, language, privilege, property and behavior. Are their numbers seen as a threat? Are they seen as providing skills or services, or as taking jobs and opportunities? How positive or negative is the media image of their nation of origin? Stereotypes are caricatures that usually contain elements of validity, and how positive or negative they are at any time reflects underlying relations between people.

Fiji's Vice-President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi observed that Fiji was “full of prejudices” and called for tolerance because differences are easier to emphasize than similarities.⁸ Tensions due to alleged Chinese corruption and crime are more widespread than those involving other ethnicities.

Telecommunications and air travel make it easier for immigrants to maintain contact with home and interact less with local communities or learn local languages. Education and media can enhance inter-cultural understanding but have not yet done so very much. The correlation between nationality and identity is high among Japanese in the Islands, but among Chinese there is wide variation.

Speed of entry can be a big factor, as can competition for work, business or access to land, as the Marshall Islands' experience shows. The rapid increase in Chinese in Majuro from the mid-1990s “sparked an unprecedented backlash [with ...] concern that aggressive Chinese will ... put Marshallese out of business and into the unemployment line”. Bitter anti-Chinese sentiments were expressed, and one said that “the rank and file hate the Chinese but the leaders look after them”. Political leaders have to think of UN obligations and diplomatic pressures, but some are personally obligated for favors, and some chiefs have evicted Marshallese from land to rent it to Chinese (although other chiefs refuse to do so). Resentment of foreigners shifted from Filipinos, who had been there longer, married Marshallese, shared the same religion, and were more integrated, to the newcomers.⁹

Chinese and Taiwanese dominance of business is “a significant political issue, fostering complaints from the public and debate [in parliament] and land values skyrocketing”.¹⁰ Palauans resent “the grip on their country by foreign mostly Chinese businessmen”.¹¹ A government study in Bougainville confirmed public concern about an influx of illegal Chinese businessmen who had not registered, did not have work permits or visas, and exported their money.¹²

PNG's former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sir Ebia Olewale, complained of Malaysian companies (owned by ethnic Chinese) importing drivers, cooks and others to do

⁸ *Fiji Times*, April 2001.

⁹ Quotes from *Pacific Islands Monthly*, December 1997.

¹⁰ *Islands Business*, March 2005: 13.

¹¹ *Islands Business*, January 2003: 17.

¹² *PNG Post-Courier* 21 July 2005.

work that Papua New Guineans wanted.¹³ Former PNG ambassador Powes Parkop said ethnic Chinese were taking over the commercial sector.¹⁴ Similar comments could be cited by the hundreds.

In the Northern Marianas, the US official in charge of relations there said 91 per cent of non-government jobs were held by foreigners. "Why would local businesses hire local people when they can easily bring people from China, the Philippines, Bangladesh etc and exploit them ... if they complain they are threatened with deportation". He abhorred the consequent high unemployment and poverty among Micronesians, noting that 5000 to 10,000 of the 35,000 foreign workers were there illegally.¹⁵ The resentment one hears among local people is understandable, and is one reason so many migrate to the USA. Over 90 per cent of Palau's private sector workforce consists of foreigners who are "viewed negatively" by most Palauans and are "targets of petty and sometimes violent crimes".¹⁶

Tonga sees a "rising tide of resentment aimed at ... Chinese" due to their growing control of the economy and tendency to invest profits abroad.¹⁷ Akilisi Pohiva, leader of the elected members of the Tongan parliament, feared they would make Tongans second-class citizens. But he accepted that those who bought passports during the era of passport-selling should be allowed to stay and encouraged Tongans to absorb them in their communities by marriage. He also met representatives of the Chinese community "to find ways to live peacefully together ... and shape a new Tonga".¹⁸

Relations are better in Samoa, partly because many Samoans are part-Chinese and full Chinese are few. But in January 2005 an acrimonious debate took place in parliament over the number of new Chinese being allowed to enter and buy land and businesses that "should" remain with local people. The governor of American Samoa was concerned by the "groundswell of anti-Asian feeling".¹⁹

In Solomon Islands much acrimonious anti-Chinese gossip has been heard for years, about their control of small business, alleged corruption and contempt for Solomon Islanders. This was reflected by the Guadalcanal Network Forum www.tutuvatu.com, in which of fifty topics discussed between 6 Aug 2004 and 12 Jan 2005, those on Chinese received 2.5 times more (mostly critical) responses than the average.

Education is a key area of interaction. Chinese in several countries sent their children to government schools but also to Chinese lessons in late afternoons and weekends, for language and cultural instruction. Where numbers were too few to merit separate classes, relations between ethnic communities seem to have been easier.

Most village traders were Chinese; most customers Islanders. Tensions were reduced by laws prohibiting the suing of Islanders for debt, and many Chinese traders earned a positive reputation by contributing to community activities. Since the 1960s many local Chinese in PNG have financed children of Melanesian friends at high schools in Australia.

¹³ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, October 1997:28.

¹⁴ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, October 1997:30.

¹⁵ *Pacific Daily News*, 21 November 1997.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2004: Palau* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2005).

¹⁷ *Islands Business*, January 2005, p.13, plus many similar statements, written and verbal.

¹⁸ *Pacnews*, 24 June 2005.

¹⁹ *Samoa Observer*, 9 February 2005. As in other countries, there are accusations that decision-makers are bribed or compromised.

US Department of State reports on human rights for 2004 note the high incidence of injuries and beatings of Pacific Islander crew by officers, and the non-payment of wages, on Chinese and Taiwanese (and one might add Korean) fishing vessels. This too has been widely reported for years.

A UMR Insight poll in 1999 showed twice as many New Zealanders had positive attitudes to Japan than negative ones, but the opposite was true for China – over three times as many had negative attitudes. China was perceived more negatively than any country except Serbia, which had just been forced to end its oppression of Kosovo.²⁰ My impression is that this trend is common in the Pacific Islands also, except among selected elites who receive benefits from the government of China or Chinese entrepreneurs. In the early 1900s Japanese had the highest status among Asians in the Islands – as colonial powers, both Germany and France had treated Japanese legally as Europeans, with all the privileges that accorded. A generation ago the opposite was true, when resentment of Japanese for their role in World War II was high, and Chinese were seen in a positive light. Since then Japanese have worked hard and successfully to create a positive image. China's oppression of Tibet, bullying of Taiwan and recently of some Islands nations, and Chinese crime locally, seem to have reversed the trend to the disadvantage of Chinese people. Attitudes to long-established Chinese in Oceania remain more positive than those to China and its government.

Some tensions manifest at a political level. Onguglo, leader of PNG's Black Action Party, campaigned on a platform of accusing foreign businesses of taking wealth from the nation. He did not win, but had considerable influence, due partly to resentment at the influx of Chinese and Korean businessmen in the area.²¹ Chinese immigration is a political issue in many Islands nations, although ethnic tensions are probably no higher in the Islands than elsewhere in similar circumstances.²²

Most publicity concerns problems for Islander hosts, but Asian immigrants have concerns too. Palau's minimum wage law applies only to Palauans. Most private sector workers are Asians, who get less pay and protection. Many Pacific Islands countries disadvantage Asians by laws and practices that restrict their access to work, land, voting rights, and other advantages.

Inter-ethnic marriage tends to be higher where immigrants are few and scattered, have little contact with their country of origin, few of their own women (most Chinese immigrants were men), fewest legal or social barriers, and a common religion, language, income levels, and interests. Thus in the early days in many places there were no Chinese women. Individual traders, of whom there were often only one or two Chinese or Europeans in most villages of many countries in the 1800s and until the mid 1900s, had wives or partners in the host community.

Potentials for the future

What factors are likely to correlate with changes in Chinese migration to the region? It is possible to list them as follows.

1. *Freedom of exit.* Exit was strictly limited but is now more freely allowed and likely to be more so.

²⁰ UMR Insight Poll, April 1999.

²¹ Bill Standish, "Elections in Simbu: Towards Gunpoint Democracy?", in *The 1992 PNG Elections: Change and Continuity in Electoral Politics*, ed. Yaw Saffu (Canberra: Australian National University, 1996), pp. 277-322, esp. p. 292.

²² See, for example, *Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism in South and Southeast Asia: Causes, Dynamics, and Solutions*, ed. Rajat Ganguly and Ian Macduff (London: Sage Publications, 2003).

2. *Freedom of entry.* This was most strictly controlled by Tonga, where the constitution for over 100 years precluded any Asian from becoming a citizen. Once this was lifted in the 1990s, Chinese became the most numerous new citizens of Tonga, as they are in most Pacific Islands countries.

3. *Population pressure to leave.* With dense population and a deteriorating environment, emigration will be attractive to many Chinese.

4. *Access.* This is variable, but in the past twenty years has in many cases been accentuated by illegal entry and bribery.

5. *Receptivity.* The generally cordial relations with long-established Chinese in the Islands are much less common with recent arrivals.

6. *Funds to invest.* With very high rates of personal and national savings, China now has funds to invest.

7. *Demand for investment.* Every Island government seeks investment and the Pacific Islands Forum office in Beijing has that as one of its top priorities.

8. *Bringing skills in demand.* Skills in short supply were previously sought from Western nations, but now increasingly from lower cost sources. The largest source for many occupations in recent decades has been the Philippines, but the proportion from China is increasing rapidly and likely to continue to do so.

Conclusion

The Pacific Islands are on the cusp of a paradigm shift from the past 200 years, during which English-speaking Europeans were the dominant external presence, to one in which Asians, mostly ethnic Chinese, will be the main external influence. A growing proportion of such people is likely to be at high skill, high power levels. This is neither good nor bad, it is happening; but few Islander people, governments, educational, or media institutions are giving adequate thought and action to prepare to derive maximum benefit from the shift.