

Varieties of Chinese Experience in the Pacific

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I was born and brought up in Chengdu, China, and my love affair with China has continued to this day. Overseas Chinese communities became the major focus of my academic research first in Cambodia, then in British Columbia, and most recently in the Pacific Island countries.¹ My interest in Chinese communities has always been social and cultural rather than political. The policies and activities of successive Chinese governments have not received attention from me except to the extent that they affected the structure and activities of the Chinese community I was studying. In contrast, much of the recent literature on “Chinese in the Pacific” has been concerned with either the competition between Beijing and Taiwan or with the growing role of China in aid and trade in the region. Not much I have done contributes light on those topics.

When I turned my attention to the South Pacific, it seemed to me that its Chinese communities represented a lacuna in the growing corpus of work on the thirty million Chinese abroad. In terms of books, there were only David Wu’s valuable study on Papua New Guinea, Stuart Greif’s less than satisfactory book on Fiji, Gérald Coppenrath’s outdated book on Tahiti, and Nancy Tom’s fictionalised account of Western Samoa.² I began research with two aims in mind: to fill that lacuna with some useful information and to encourage resident Chinese to research their own communities. In both I have been only minimally successful, although Bessie Ng Kumlin Ali’s recent book on the Chinese in Fiji is a fine addition to the Pacific literature.³

For practical reasons, I decided to limit my research area to Polynesia and Melanesia with the addition of Kiribati and Nauru from Micronesia, but leaving out Papua New Guinea because David Wu and Christine Inglis had already provided adequate studies of that country.⁴ The rest of Micronesia had experienced completely different Chinese migration patterns, as had Hawai’i of course, so my logistic decision was not entirely arbitrary, historically or sociologically.

I soon found that the total population of Chinese in the region was less than 20,000, a very small number indeed, divided among sixteen countries and territories. But I justified my efforts by arguing that this small number actually offered “laboratory conditions” for useful comparisons that would provide valuable insights into the nature of Chinese community in the diaspora.⁵ Trained as a social anthropologist, I saw the comparative method as the heart of sociological methodology. I do not resile from that view today, although the size of the communities in the Pacific and the nature of available material have turned me more into an amateur historian than an insightful sociologist! Nevertheless, looking at such a broad and

¹ When I took the chair of sociology at the University of Canterbury in 1973, I decided, as leader of a team of Kiwi sociologists, to shift my research focus to New Zealand society. Since I had a top-notch graduate student studying the Chinese in New Zealand, I began research on rural community instead

² David Y.H. Wu, *The Chinese in Papua New Guinea, 1880-1980* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1982); Stuart William Greif, *The Overseas Chinese in Fiji* (Taipei: College of Chinese Culture, 1977); Gérald Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti: de l'aversion à l'assimilation 1865-1966* (Paris: Publications de la Société des Océanistes, no. 21, Musée de l'Homme, 1967); and Nancy Y. W. Tom, *The Chinese in Western Samoa, 1875-1985: The Dragon Came from Afar* (Apia: Western Samoa Historical and Cultural Trust, 1986).

³ Bessie Ng Kumlin Ali, *Chinese in Fiji* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2002).

⁴ Wu, *Chinese in Papua New Guinea*, and Christine Inglis, “Social Structure and Patterns of Economic Action: The Chinese in Papua New Guinea,” PhD dissertation, University of London, 1978.

⁵ Bill Willmott, “Economic Role and Cultural Identity of Chinese in Pacific Island Countries,” in *Studies of Ethnic Chinese Economy*, ed. Xiao Xiaojin and Li Dingguo (Shantou: Shantou University Press, 1996), pp. 504-11, esp. p. 504.

diverse region, one cannot but speculate on what it means to be “Chinese” on the little islands of the vast Pacific Ocean, and perhaps my modest work can contribute something to that interesting debate.⁶

Far too often academics seem to lump together Chinese of very different origins, different classes, and even different historical periods. But the disparity between Chinese communities—and within some communities—belies such simple categorisation. Professor Wang Gungwu has helped us by suggesting four different types of Chinese identity based on ethnic, cultural, political, and economic norms. While his model is problematic in various ways, it does warn us against identifying all “Chinese” as culturally or politically identical.⁷ Antagonisms between resident Chinese and newcomers to the Pacific in recent years certainly demonstrate that point clearly. And the activities of Chinese governments (whichever is active in a specific country) often has very little to do with the local Chinese community in that country.

Certainly the Chinese who came into the South Pacific in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were very different from the most recent wave that began in the 1980s. Indeed, earlier migration patterns follow the global history of overseas Chinese migration summarised by Professor Wang Gungwu. In another of his insightful papers, as noted above, Professor Wang has categorised Chinese migration over the last two centuries as falling into four patterns. The first and most persistent pattern is *huashang*, or traders, those who went abroad to seek commercial opportunities. Later in the nineteenth century another type emerged, *huagong*, or overseas worker, most of them contracted to non-Chinese companies. The *huaqiao*, or sojourner, appeared in the first half of the twentieth century and established communities with continuing connections to the motherland, often including both *huashang* and *huagong*. Now a new phenomenon has emerged in the past three decades, that of the *huayi*. This fourth pattern comprises those of Chinese ancestry who are no longer tied to their motherland but move rather freely in the global economy, re-migrating to take advantage of new opportunities.⁸

Even before the first wave, Chinese entered the South Pacific at the end of the eighteenth century as cooks and carpenters on ships seeking sandalwood and *bêche-de-mer*, although no Chinese settled in the islands until the 1840s.⁹ They arrived in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) in 1844 and in New Caledonia in 1846,¹⁰ but there are no descendants of these first-comers among the current Chinese populations of these islands. It was the resolute traders,

⁶ A 1997 paper on this subject entitled “When is Chinese? Ethnicity and Identity among the Chinese in the Pacific Islands,” was never published. Some of it appears here, and I am happy to forward the original to anyone interested.

⁷ Wang Gungwu, “The Study of Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia,” in *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II*, ed. Jennifer W. Cushman and Wang Gungwu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988), pp.1-21, esp. pp.11-16. For an alternative view in the same text see by Charles Hirschman, “Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia: Alternative Perspectives,” pp. 23-31.

⁸ Such peripatetic migration does characterise some of the earlier Chinese in the Pacific Islands, who went first to California, on to the Victoria gold fields and then re-migrated elsewhere in the Pacific to follow perceived advantages. It seems likely, however, that they were strongly linked socially and sentimentally to their villages in China at the time.

⁹ For more on the early history of Chinese in the Pacific, see Bill Willmott, “Origins of the Chinese in the South Pacific,” in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, ed. P. McGregor (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995), pp. 129-140. Chinese lived in the Sandwich Islands (Hawai’i) from as early as 1802, when the first sugar-maker set up his boilers, but Hawai’i lies beyond the limits of this paper. See Bill Willmott, “Chinese contract labour in the Pacific Islands during the nineteenth century,” *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 27, 2 (2004): 161-76, esp. 163.

¹⁰ Bill Willmott, “A History of the Chinese Communities in Eastern Melanesia: Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia” (Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, Working Paper 12, University of Canterbury, 2005), pp. 33, 53.

the huashang, who followed them after the middle of the nineteenth century who became the first Chinese settlers in the South Pacific.¹¹

These first settlers formed the nuclei of small Chinese trading populations that have continued until today in all but two of these countries, their children mixing with more recent arrivals to maintain Chinese communities. The earliest such traders established themselves in Tahiti in 1852, in Levuku (Fiji) in 1855, and possibly in Apia in 1855, while a few settled in Rabaul (German New Guinea) in the late 1870s and some arrived in the Gilbert Islands in 1880 and the Cook Islands in 1882.¹² The exceptions are the contemporary Cook Islands and Kiribati, where the handful of Chinese traders in each area married local women whose children did not invoke their Chinese identity to the extent of maintaining a Chinese presence on the islands, although one or two speak Chinese today.

Following the advent of Chinese traders in various islands, Chinese indentured labour (huagong) was imported in fairly large numbers into French Polynesia (Tahiti and the Marquesas) from 1865, German New Guinea from 1891, German Samoa from 1903, and Nauru and Banaba (Ocean Island) from 1906.¹³ Those going to Tahiti were Hakka, recruited first in Swatow and later in Hong Kong, while those who went to New Guinea were from Singapore, Macao and Swatow, probably including both Hakka and Cantonese. The Chinese labourers in Nauru, Banaba and Samoa were Cantonese from Macao and Hong Kong. One contingent of Chinese indentured labour was also recruited in Macao in 1884 for the nickel mines of New Caledonia, but the experiment was not repeated because other sources of labour proved more economical.¹⁴ As with the traders in the Cook Islands and Gilbert Islands, descendants of the few Chinese labourers who settled with their indigenous wives have disappeared into the Kanak population of New Caledonia.

The third wave of Chinese migration to the Pacific began during the period between the wars, when all these countries except Tonga were French, British, Australian, or New Zealand territories. In six of them (French Polynesia, Western Samoa, Fiji, the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea), huaqiao communities developed that included the Chinese wives and children of traders. The presence of these organised communities provided the opportunity for part-Chinese children of Chinese labourers to participate as Chinese. The major Chinese organisation in the Pacific at this time was the *Guomindang* nationalist political party, absent only from the New Hebrides where a Chinese community organisation was founded instead.¹⁵ The most elaborate community was in Tahiti, where the size of the Chinese population allowed the growth of several Chinese associations including schools and three Guomindangs.¹⁶ A Chinese school was also established in Fiji in 1936.¹⁷

¹¹ Coppenrath, *Chinois de Tahiti*, p. 26; Willmott, "Origins of the Chinese," pp. 130, 138n2; David Y. H. Wu, "The Chinese in New Guinea: The Adaptation of an Immigrant Population," paper presented at the 45th Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (typescript), 1973, pp. 1-34; and Richard Gilson, *The Cook Islands 1820-1950* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1980, p. 51. In the 20th century, the first Chinese came to Solomon Islands in 1912, while the present community in Vanuatu traces its history to the 1912 arrival of Ah Pow (Zhang Yabao), formerly a cook on the government ship, *Euphrosyne*. The first Chinese restaurateur settled in New Caledonia from Tahiti in 1953 to found the contemporary community, the few Chinese traders there in the late 19th century having disappeared by 1926. Tonga had no Chinese residents, after two 1920s Anglican priests left before the start of the Pacific War, until a Taiwanese businessman arrived in 1974. Willmott, "Origins of the Chinese," p. 136; and "Chinese Communities in Eastern Melanesia," pp. 10, 34, 54-56.

¹² That both the Kiribati president Aote Tong and leader of the opposition Harry Tong (two brothers) have a Chinese father indicates the extent to which the descendants of i-Kiribati mothers have become indigenised.

¹³ Willmott, "Chinese contract labour," 166-70.

¹⁴ Willmott, "Chinese Communities in Eastern Melanesia," p. 54.

¹⁵ Willmott, "Chinese Communities in Eastern Melanesia," p. 37. The Guomindang were the political and military opponents of the communists in China, who fled to Taiwan and set up a separate government when defeated by the communists in 1949.

¹⁶ Coppenrath, *Chinois de Tahiti*, pp. 59-63.

¹⁷ Ali, *Chinese in Fiji*, p. 153.

The Pacific War (1941–45) seriously disrupted the Chinese communities in Nauru, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, many of whom were evacuated when the region was occupied by the Japanese. In the other countries, however, the war economy strengthened the position of the Chinese, even though migration was interrupted for two decades (1940–1960). In the following years, some Chinese left Pacific Island regions as they became independent, but strong communities remained in most countries. Now, during the fourth wave of global Chinese migration (*huayi*), they are experiencing economic and demographic growth while, paradoxically, the Chinese associations that structured the communities are in decline. New immigrants are entering from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and Malaysia to diversify these communities and fragment their identities along new dimensions.

From this brief historical review, it can already be seen that diversity separated these communities, with one major demographic difference being historical sex ratios. In Nauru, the Chinese workers were strictly segregated from the indigenous people: but in both Western Samoa and Tahiti, some of the male Chinese labourers lived with island women before the Pacific War. Their offspring were therefore raised in two cultures, for the men maintained a Chinese community which allowed their children to develop a salient Chinese identity (unlike in New Caledonia, Kiribati or the Cook Islands, where the lack of community denied their children any opportunity of maintaining the salience of a Chinese identity).¹⁸ Hence, the Chinese communities in Apia and Papeete today include many who also claim a Polynesian as well as a Chinese heritage.¹⁹ The dearth of intermarriage in most other South Pacific countries makes this complication far less relevant there.

Another demographic variable with cultural implications is the provenance of the Chinese residents in these countries. Many of the nineteenth-century Chinese traders were Hokkien, from the port of Xiamen in Fujian Province. By the turn of the century, however, Cantonese migrants predominated, and most of the veterans of the first and second migration waves are Cantonese. Their language therefore predominates in the South Pacific, except in Tahiti and New Caledonia, where Hakka is spoken because the large number of Hakka labourers linguistically dominated the community in Tahiti, which later provided migrants to New Caledonia.²⁰

Unlike the Southeast Asian Chinese communities, then, and more akin to those in North America, Australia and New Zealand, the Pacific Islands Chinese communities did not manifest much linguistic diversity²¹ to complicate their Chinese identity before about 1975. To

¹⁸ The 1988 census in French Polynesia, the last to distinguish ethnicity, revealed 14% of Chinese had mixed parentage, almost all of them from Polynesian mothers. The total number of people claiming some Chinese ancestry was over 20,000, but most did not consider themselves Chinese. Among Chinese, there were 110 males for every 100 females, and the population was aging as families became smaller and more youth opted for Tahitian identity. Intermarriage is becoming common in Tahiti today.

¹⁹ In Apia, the Chinese community association was organised into 2 wings, one for Chinese and one for part-Chinese, using different languages in their meetings and coming together in a governing committee of 4 Chinese and 4 part-Chinese. This arrangement is not evident in the Chinese associations in Papeete, where divisions occurred along personal and political lines. Bill Willmott, "The South Pacific: Fiji, Nauru, New Caledonia, The Solomon Islands, Tahiti, Tonga, Vanuatu, Western Samoa," in *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, second edition, ed. Lynn Pan (Singapore: Archipelago Press and Landmark Books for the Chinese Heritage Centre, 2006), pp. 292-296, 299-300, 303.

²⁰ Some Chinese in Tahiti take pains to demonstrate their community is not descended from indentured labourers but from the independent traders, who were in Papeete throughout. [See, for example, Sophie Vognin, "La population chinoise de Tahiti au XIXe siècle," in *Le Peuplement du Pacifique et de la Nouvelle-Calédonie au XIXe Siècle (1788-1914). Condamnés, Colons, Convicts, Coolies*, ed. Chàn Dang and Paul de Deckker (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994, pp. 236-37)]. Their arguments are persuasive, which accounts for the careful formulation of my sentence, since the first traders spoke Hokkien and the next came from the Australian goldfields [Willmott, "Origins of the Chinese", p. 134] so would have spoken Cantonese.

²¹ Sometimes called "sub-ethnic". See Wang, "Study of Chinese Identities," p. 17, n5.

be Chinese in Papeete or Nouméa was to speak Hakka, while to be Chinese elsewhere in the Pacific was to speak Cantonese, and the Chinese schools taught in these languages when they were inaugurated.

Today, the situation is far more complicated. In Nuku'alofa, for example, where they are all recent immigrants, the Chinese come from Guangzhou and Hong Kong (Cantonese), Xiamen and Taiwan (Hokkien), Singapore, Shanghai and other parts of China (mandarin), even Inner Mongolia. For some time there was also a team of construction workers from Tianjin. Honiara also has some recent immigrants from Mainland China and Taiwan, and several Malaysian Chinese companies have staff resident there as well. A few Chinese from Mainland China, Taiwan and Malaysia live in Vanuatu along with the Cantonese majority and one or two Hakka families.

Somewhat less ethnically complicated are the Chinese communities in Tahiti and Nouméa, where the French authorities have permitted very little immigration other than a few temporary kitchen staff – all of whom are, however, Cantonese rather than Hakka. Western Samoa remains the most homogeneous, since all the new immigrants, including restaurant workers, are Cantonese, and there is no immigration from Taiwan or Malaysia. In 1992 there were several dozen Chinese workers building the new government office block in Apia, but their separation from the resident Chinese community was almost complete, symbolised and reinforced by the high wire fences surrounding the construction site where they lived.

Incidentally, Dr Tan Chee-Beng once suggested that the one cultural characteristic common to all Chinese communities in the diaspora was the celebration of Chinese New Year.²² Alas, even that criterion can no longer be applied, as my research has discovered that the Chinese in the Solomon Islands celebrate the New Year on January 1st and do not mark the lunar festival in any way.

Economically, too, the Chinese in the Pacific have become more diversified in recent years. Historically, the Chinese in the South Pacific were either indentured labourers or businessmen in the restaurant, retail or import-export trade, extending to inter-island transport in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), and the Cook, Gilbert, and Solomon Islands. In the last ten years, however, economic roles have become far more diverse with the re-emergence of Chinese contract labour and the arrival of Chinese multinational corporations from Malaysia, Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. In addition, some of the children of resident Chinese businessmen have returned from overseas training as professionals (doctors, dentists, accountants, and lawyers). It is therefore no longer possible to fit all Chinese into a narrow economic niche.

Chinese contract labour has been present recently in five of the Pacific Islands countries: Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Western Samoa. The construction team for the government building in Apia, an aid project from the People's Republic of China, was brought on contract from China. Similarly, a new hotel complex near the Nuku'alofa airport was built by a team of about sixty workers contracted from Tianjin.²³ A Chinese construction company has the contract to build a dam on Malekula Island in Vanuatu, and several of the logging companies operating there are also from China, so some Chinese labour has been introduced (but I was unable to determine their numbers). Similarly, in Solomon Islands, of the ten foreign logging companies operating, four are Mainland Chinese, the others are Malaysian and

²² Tan Chee-Beng, "Nation-Building and Being Chinese in a Southeast Asian State: Malaysia," in *Changing Identities of Southeast Asian Chinese*, pp. 139-64.

²³ For the Apia project, see *Islands Business Pacific*, March 1994, 50. It is interesting that the Taiwanese company building the Nuku'alofa hotel contracted its labour from the People's Republic of China in 1992, a combination that would not have been possible even 3 years before.

Taiwanese. Something like 100 workers from Mainland China are involved. In Fiji, Chinese are also working on contract in garment factories.²⁴

None of these workers represents economic competition for the local Chinese residents, who comprise primarily merchants, restaurateurs and professionals. In Tonga, the contract workers are an integral part of the Chinese community, participating in the Chinese association and enjoying daily contact with Chinese in their various businesses. In the other countries, however, they are isolated from the local Chinese, living in fenced compounds or outside the urban centres. They present some embarrassment for the local Chinese communities, since their behaviour, so different from that of the local Chinese, is identified as “Chinese” by the indigenous population.

Perhaps even more difficult for the local Chinese communities is the advent of Southeast Asian and Taiwanese businessmen, often representing large multinational companies. These men (I found no women among them) are identified as Chinese by the resident Chinese, and some have sought connections with the local Chinese community, invoking their common ethnicity as a reason for collaboration. Nevertheless, there is some animosity towards them for various reasons. In Fiji and French Polynesia, local Chinese businesses have already grown and diversified to the extent that the prospecting companies represent direct economic competition, which can easily explain the antagonism. In other countries, however, international loggers and builders are not competing against local companies, as no local Chinese are engaged in these trades. Nevertheless, this foreign presence raises issues for them, because it complicates inter-ethnic relations even more seriously than does the presence of Chinese workers.

One extreme example may suffice to make this point, even though the details must remain anonymous. The example is a Taiwanese businessman who arrived to do business in a country, and managed to charm its prime minister with proposals for major industrial investment. Many of the resident Chinese believed he was a charlatan, perhaps even corrupt, lacking capital of his own and without the business connections to gain large investment funds. The businessman then accused the local Chinese of “ripping off” the country by exporting their profits to Australia rather than investing them locally, an accusation all my informants took pains to demonstrate was false. The local Chinese have therefore been forced to activate their own political connections to defend themselves, and many are concerned that this man's business reputation will rub off on all “Chinese”. This is a case where some might wish publicly to deny their Chinese identity.

Similarly, Tonga has experienced a series of Chinese con-men (from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China), two of them presenting grandiose schemes to the late king, all of whom embarrassed the resident Chinese and annoyed Tongans. In Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, many local Chinese believe the large logging companies will deeply exploit the local population and environment for quick profits and then withdraw, leaving the resident Chinese to face the odium of this “Chinese” behaviour.

It is important to understand that these tensions have not developed along political lines, as they might have done forty years ago between pro-communist and pro-Guomindang factions – or, indeed, a century ago between pro-imperial and pro-republican factions. Such political differences have negligible effects within Chinese communities today.²⁵ Rather, they relate to different experiences and outlooks. The Chinese settlers have adapted to their Pacific

²⁴ Ali, *Chinese in Fiji*, p. 96.

²⁵ For example, when I was in Tonga in 1993, I asked a businessman from Shanghai if having a Taiwanese embassy caused problems. “None at all (*meiyou wenti*),” he replied. “We are all Chinese (*du Zhongguo ren*).” The Kingdom of Tonga Chinese Association (*Zhonghua Huiguan*) unites Chinese from Taiwan and the Mainland.

societies over decades and have developed a localised identity, adopting many aspects of Polynesian or Melanesian culture. They have found economic niches that in most cases have been of benefit to the indigenous population, although often in competition with European traders.²⁶ And most of them began modestly, compelled to work hard and develop good relations with their customers.

In contrast, many of the more recent immigrants come with a get-rich-quick mentality, whether as representatives of global Asian companies or as single men who started working in restaurants and then established their own small enterprises – without the long apprenticeship in Pacific cultures that the previous settlers endured. Consequently, some of their business practices have offended both indigenous and Chinese residents.

Several of the factors mentioned were involved in the burning of Chinatown in Honiara in April 2005 and the destruction of Nuku'alofa's business centre in November 2006. In both cases, an anti-government political demonstration turned into a destructive riot that burned a major part of the commercial centre of town. Unlike Nuku'alofa, where I had discovered considerable resentment of the Chinese already ten years ago, the incident in Honiara took me completely by surprise. There, I had found relations between Solomon Islanders and Chinese had been cordial for decades despite the almost complete absence of intermarriage.²⁷ Resentment had been aroused, however, by rumours that some of the more wealthy Chinese businessmen were closely involved in supporting the current parliamentary leaders, for instance, in giving them free lodging at the Honiara Hotel owned by Sir Tommy Chan. There were also widespread suspicions that some of the aid from Taipei provided the prime minister with a personal slush fund.

While these political issues may have provided some motivation for the riot's leaders, they were able to gain crowd support to loot and torch Chinatown because of growing resentment over new economic roles assumed by some Chinese. Most established Chinese businessmen had maintained good relations with their customers, for some of whom they were wholesale suppliers as well as retailers of imported goods. At the same time they left to Solomon Islanders such enterprises as taxi services, fresh produce and small-goods retail, including stalls selling betel nut and single cigarettes. Newly arrived Chinese, however, began to move into these lines in direct competition with indigenous enterprises. Also, one cannot ignore the fact that Honiara had a growing squatter population that was envious of anyone with property, and the Chinese shops held all the "goods" they coveted.

It is interesting that several of the well-established Chinese businessmen received timely warning of the impending invasion of Chinatown and were able to arrange protection to save their properties from looting and arson. This demonstrates both that the riot was not entirely spontaneous, but was organised by anti-Chinese elements of the political elite, and that some Chinese had established good relations with some in that elite.

The situation in Tonga was somewhat different from the Solomons, although the similarities are also instructive. As in Honiara, the recent movement of Chinese into trades traditionally in the hands of Tongans, such as taxis, food stalls and small dry-goods shops, caused resentment, as did their evident wealth compared to most indigenous Tongans. A major difference, of course, was the fact that the Tongan Chinese community originated very recently, while the Solomon Islands community had been in existence for nearly ninety years.

²⁶ Vociferous denunciations of Chinese traders can be found throughout the 20th century in such magazines as *Pacific Islands Monthly*, complaining that their frugal habits and small profit margins were "unfair" to British and Australian traders and accusing them of unhygienic and corrupt practices.

²⁷ Solomon Islanders call local Chinese "Waku", a Pidgin corruption of the Cantonese *Wahkiu* (*Huaqiao*). I was assured it is not a derogatory term.

Although none of the Chinese community was therefore involved in Tongan politics, their very presence in the country was resented by Tongan democrats because it relied on the king's unpopular policy of selling Tongan residency permits ("passports") that had begun in 1982. Because all of the Chinese were recent immigrants, the protection some of Honiara's Chinese experienced from their indigenous friends was not evident in Nuku'alofa.

It is not possible, in my opinion, to gauge the extent to which the riot in Nuku'alofa can be attributed to anti-Chinese feeling. Demonstrations that started as attacks on the property of unpopular royalty and aristocrats soon enveloped Chinese establishments as well since, unlike Honiara, Nuku'alofa had no Chinatown and many of the larger shops that fell victim to looters and arsonists along the main street were managed by Chinese.

My intention in this paper was to demonstrate that there are significant differences among the Chinese communities in the Pacific Islands that we must not ignore if we are to adequately comprehend current events in the region. Even where things appear similar, historical and demographic differences can affect diverse outcomes both for the Chinese themselves and for the societies affected. Consequently, we need to recognise that there are many varieties of Chinese experience in the Pacific today.