

# Introduction

Hans Everts

The basic message, which underscores the appearance of this Special Issue of the *Journal*, is one of celebration. A celebration of the cultural diversity which Chinese migrants, recent and earlier, have brought to New Zealand. A celebration that so many of them have sought to make New Zealand their home and contribute to the well-being of our country. A celebration of the values they bring – a commitment to strong family relationships, to educational achievement and to economic success. A celebration of their tolerance and resilience in the face of challenge. A celebration of their rich cultural tradition and narrative – as expressed in religious faiths, festivals, foods, music and art. And a celebration of the community resources they themselves have developed to enhance the quality of personal and relational functioning of Chinese migrants – as evident in the listing of resources in the final chapter, and in the production of this very document. It is against that strongly positive message that this Special Issue is placed. Because the predominantly successful story of Chinese migration into New Zealand has come at a cost. It is this cost which is examined in the articles that follow, and which challenges us all

to find solutions which celebrate the continued successful interweaving of cultures in New Zealand.

The actual impulse for writing this Special Issue resource came from the process of large-scale immigration by Chinese from a number of Asian countries during the 1990s. Stimulated by government policy, such immigrants came from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the People's Republic of China, Malaysia and other countries to the tune of some 36,000 between 1991 and 1996 alone. While some have settled in different parts of New Zealand, 62% of recent Chinese migrants live in the Auckland region. Their arrival has signalled a process of multiple and challenging, if not painful, adjustments for individuals and families involved – as well as for New Zealand counsellors, educators and communities. Economically, many Chinese immigrants have struck unexpected difficulties created by New Zealand's small labour market and difficult economic circumstances during the latter part of the decade. On smaller incomes than anticipated, if not unemployed, many breadwinners have struggled to make ends meet. Consequently a significant number of family

breadwinners have found themselves forced to return to their country of origin to remain financially viable – creating “astronaut” families in the process, where spouses are often separated from one another and parents from children, leaving temporary households of family segments. In some cases both parents spend lengthy periods of time in their country of origin, leaving a “household of children”, which is held together by the eldest sibling, who acts as a parent and authority figure.

Changes in the lifestyle of Chinese immigrants have been numerous. Starting with the need to speak a second language within the wider community, families find themselves faced with challenges to their cultural values, living circumstances, and opportunities for social and recreational activity. While some such challenges are of a positive nature, they nevertheless require courage and energy if they are to be addressed successfully. Most families have left behind their accustomed network of extended social contacts, which had provided them with support and help with the care of children, as well as the elderly. New networks take time to develop. Traditional gender roles and the distribution of power between parents are challenged, as are the expectations and strategies of child rearing. Such major adjustments required of families are exacerbated by the absence of the father in astronaut families, leaving the

mother or, in some cases, the eldest sibling as the primary source of family stability and guidance. At school, children are faced with a foreign language of instruction, a different organisational structure and curriculum, differences in the goals and methods of teaching, and an alien peer group. School personnel on their part have often operated in an environment that has had little to offer in terms of educational policy and organisational resources when faced with a large influx of Chinese students.

To relate effectively to these new students, counsellors, educators and other helping professionals are faced with several challenges. In the first place, it is necessary for them to understand the *cultural context* from which students and their families have come. What are the subtle but powerful values and expectations that operate for these students and their families? What are the major changes in family relationships that children struggle with over a period of years? What are the expectations and learning style which students bring with them into New Zealand classrooms?

In the second place, it is important for counsellors and educators to appreciate how their *interaction style* impacts on Chinese immigrant children at different stages of their adaptation to life in New Zealand. What relational strategies are alien or even counter-productive to a Chinese immigrant student? And how can counsellors and other helping

professionals contribute to the implementation of educational policy at local level to meet the requirements of both cultures?

Finally, it is necessary to know *what kind of help is appropriate* when Chinese immigrant children experience more serious adjustment problems. What kind of counselling models, resources and strategies are effective with such children and are inclusive of both cultural differences and similarities? What should counsellors avoid in terms of helping strategies, and why? What resources are available in the wider community when specialist help is required? A considerable amount of this publication is devoted to counselling as it applies to Chinese immigrant students and their families.

Much of the research and writing that has gone into this Special Issue has been carried out by a unique group of mature Chinese students who have undertaken selected graduate programmes at the University of Auckland. All relatively recent immigrants themselves, they have chosen to train as helping professionals and educators at Masters or Doctorate level. Their aim has been to equip themselves with the knowledge and skill required to aid other Chinese immigrants in adapting to life in New Zealand without losing their poignant cultural traits and values, in maintaining personal integrity and family cohesion, and in settling successfully into school. The Counsellor Education Programme

and the School of Education have been honoured to work with this group of mature professionals, and have fully supported the professional initiatives and research undertaken by them from which this publication has resulted.

The Special Issue is the outcome of the group's collaboration over two years. It draws on international research findings, the professional expertise of group members, as well as their personal experience. While the primary focus is on family relationships and school functioning, it is hoped that the articles in this Special Issue will provide a perspective on wider topics of adjustment and mental health, and a basis for further research. The reader will find a measure of overlap in the content of articles. This arose out of the independent manner in which contributors approached topics selected. When the articles were collated, it was decided to leave such overlap rather than sacrifice the flow and integrity of individual articles. And, beyond a certain point, idiosyncrasies of grammar and syntax were left in the text – recognition of the challenges of working across at least two languages!

Taken together, then, the Special Issue's goals are to provide:

- Information about Chinese cultural traditions
- Information on the nature of the recent waves of Chinese immigrants
- Information on adaptation problems experienced by children and parents

- An analysis of educational policy in relation to migration
- Guidelines on appropriate counselling with students involved
- Guidelines on the provision of special education support
- Information on available resource material and organisations.