Towards British-Chinese futures: a social geography of second generation young Chinese people in London

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This thesis is primarily concerned with the cultural identities of second generation British-Chinese people located within the urban context of London. There are two chief reasons why London is the setting of the study. One, it has the largest Chinese population of any city in Britain, accounting for over a third of the British total. Second, its Chinatown acts as an economic hub for Chinese social and cultural activity for the South East region. It is argued that the conditions of Chinese settlement in London allow for the formation of Chinese collectivities and identities characterised by a high level of heterogeneity. One of the principal aims of the research is to demonstrate how pre-existing writing on 'new ethnicities' in Britain may be applicable to Chinese youth. Using a mixed qualitative research methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted with both first and second generation Chinese settlers, comprised of a core sample of twenty-one second generation Chinese informants and ten of their parents. Complementing the interviews were a series of participant observation studies at sites relevant to the 'Chinese community'. The research shows that young Chinese people in London are redefining notions of self and identity through a protracted negotiation between the contrasting terrains of Chineseness and Britishness. This general theme is explored in four different ways: through experiences of work (what are the effects on Chinese children who feel obliged to help out their parents?); community (how do Chinese people understand their relationship to the 'community'?); gender (how does the experience of growing up in Britain differ for young Chinese men and women?); and identity (how do young Chinese people cope with growing up in isolated circumstances?). Through these research questions, an analysis that cross-cuts social dimensions of class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and generation emerges to illuminate the changing nature of contemporary British-Chinese life.
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For Mum and Dad
and the kids.
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Introduction

It is like a finger pointing away to the moon . . . don’t concentrate on the finger or you will miss all that heavenly glory (Bruce Lee 1973, Enter The Dragon)

During the summer of 1998, men’s lifestyle magazines Arena (July/August 1998) and Esquire (May 1998) commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Bruce Lee’s death by publishing articles that featured the enigmatic martial artist. The resurgence of media interest in the martial arts occurred simultaneously with a kung-fu cinema season on Channel Four which showcased the mastery of the legend himself. The popular appeal of Bruce Lee is such that one of his films, Enter The Dragon, is said to be one of the 20 most profitable pictures in the history of cinema (Arena, July/August 1998). Whether or not remembering Lee’s death is responsible for the current interest in various genres of the martial arts or is merely a trendy whim that reflects a general postmodern nostalgic impulse for things retro, however, does little to inform us of the Chinese presence in Britain. Accompanying the vogue for kung-fu has been a burgeoning interest in the ordering of household objects in British homes according to the principles of Feng Shui, a tradition rooted in Chinese culture.\(^1\) Constructions of Chineseness that expropriate Chinese cultural practices without a knowing regard of its people symbolise how the Chinese are popularly perceived in Britain. The words of Frantz Fanon, in Black Skin, White Masks, signify what is implicated:

\(^1\) The proliferation of books on the topic and the launch of a lifestyle magazine entitled ‘Feng Shui’ devoted entirely to the subject is an indication that its appeal is growing.
the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self (quoted in Hall, 1990: 233).

What the images of kung-fu icons and Feng Shui lifestyles capture in the British imagination is an external Chineseness or, in Stuart Hall’s (1990: 223) words, ‘this “look”, from - so to speak - the place of the Other, fixes us . . . in the ambivalence of its desire.’ A generation of young Chinese people, however, have used these same images for purposes of their own. Relevant here is how an emerging generation of British-Chinese artists, such as Yuen Fong Ling2 and one of my informants Steve, have appropriated the fighting spirit of Bruce Lee to construct a sense of being British-Chinese (see Plates 1.1 and 1.2).3 Making sense of the different meanings attached to various versions of Chineseness, whether from an extrinsic or internal perspective, form the crux of the current study. The motivation for the current study is both personal and political. As Stuart Hall asks, ‘how can we stage this dialogue so that, finally, we can place it . . . rather than being forever placed by it?’ This study is an attempt. It is about understanding the relationships between contrasting notions of Chineseness written from the standpoint of a British-Chinese person.

The silent minority?

Despite a history of settlement in the United Kingdom that has spanned over a century, the Chinese have maintained a marginal status in the study of ethnic and racial groups in Britain. The visibility of Chinatowns in Britain’s major industrial cities and the prevalence of Chinese catering establishments in virtually every British town, raise the

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2 Yuen Fong Ling’s artwork is featured in Parker (1998).
3 Street art, or what has popularly termed ‘graffiti’, is one of the different forms of art that Steve practises. His varied selection of stencils in particular have caught my attention. One of the stencils he has created is one of Bruce Lee, crafted out of pieces of metal shaped and wielded together.
Plate 1.1: Bruce Lee stencil, Steve 1999

Plate 1.2: Bruce Lee stencil in situ, London 1999
issue of why discourses of 'race' in Britain largely omit the Chinese. Although it is generally acknowledged that various 'black' communities face greater social inequity and inequality than other ethnic minority groups in Britain, where the Chinese are positioned in this framework remains unclear. A lack of collective political agency together with the focus of Chinese economic activity in Britain's catering trade are arguably factors to account for the alterity of Britain's Chinese population. While a literature on Chinese settlement in Britain undoubtedly exists, much of the earlier work seems irrelevant to present day concerns (Watson 1977, Shang 1984, for example). A central tenet of this body of writing is the emphasis on describing how earlier generations of Chinese settlers have adapted to life in a different country. They could only speculate on how younger generations would proceed in the future. As previous studies on the Chinese in Britain have already examined the first generation of Chinese settlers who predominantly arrived as economic migrants, it is important to study the first generation of Chinese born and raised in this country. Much can be learnt from their experiences. For these reasons, the current research accommodates the views of the first generation, but is very much concerned with the second generation.

Chinese collectivities have, in the past, been perceived as enclosed and insular, preferring to remain detached from wider society (Watson 1977). This image of the Chinese in Britain has persisted. Baker (1994: 300-301) writes:

[1]t is clear that many of the Chinese in Britain lead lonely, frustrated lives, deprived for much of the time of the social contact which they would have had in their native environment, ill at ease in the host society which is inaccessible to them for linguistic and work reasons, and ignorant both of its attractions and of the benefits which it should and indeed often does offer.

Although this is perhaps true for many migrants of the earlier generation, the focus of attention of previous research on the first generation predominantly employed in the catering trade emphasized this by lending support to the view that cultures are stable and unchanging entities whose values are directly transmitted to the next generation. An
objective of this study is to interrogate this essentialist and static conception of culture. To paraphrase Stuart Hall 'Cultural identity. . . is a matter of “becoming”' as well as of “being”' (1990: 225). By studying two generations together, differences and change are more easily discerned. Young Chinese people in Britain make sense of their circumstances in ways which differ from the experiences of their parents. Their parents, for example, did not grow up in urban, multi-ethnic constituencies where they were racially identifiable. This study intends to map the negotiations that characterize the day-to-day lives of Chinese youth in Britain.

More recently, the work of David Parker (1995) and Miri Song (1995, 1997a and b) on young Chinese people in Britain has emerged to complement preceding work. In their respective projects, various aspects of the cultural identities of young Chinese people have been examined, utilizing the role of the catering trade in the lives of Chinese youth as a common point of reference. Parker’s (1995) benchmark study, especially, has deservedly generated attention. The range of identities that were being formed by young Chinese people in Britain was a crucial element of his work. On the basis of a broad-based national study he argued that the options for cultural identity facing his respondents were relatively restricted. In turn, Miri Song (1995, 1997a and b) has demonstrated how the catering trade informs various aspects of Chinese peoples lives. Amongst other things, Song (1997a) has studied how the cultural identities of young Chinese people differ between siblings within particular families running Chinese takeaway businesses. In Song’s research, her subjects designated their siblings with ‘good’ or ‘bad’ identities according to how much work they did for their parents in the catering trade. Those children who did not help out in the takeaway were regarded as ‘bad’ and becoming ‘more and more English’. Song (1995, 1997b) has also examined the role of Chinese women and young children in sustaining family catering enterprises.

The current study attempts to incorporate the formative experiences of young Chinese people helping out parents in the catering trade with an evaluation of their participation within wider social structures and to ask how crucial the site of the Chinese
takeaway is to subject formation. In doing this, one of the principal aims of the research is to discuss the applicability of pre-existing writing on 'new ethnicities' in Britain to Chinese youth. Few studies, with the exception of Parker (1995), have explicitly considered the role of Chinese young people in the inter-cultural dialogues that are fissuring commonsense notions of the fixity of identities (Gilroy 1987). The current picture is a confused one. Back (1996), for example, noted the exclusion of Vietnamese youth from the inter-racial peer groups that were being formed in his study set in South London. In Parker's view, notions of cultural hybridity were to be cautioned against with regard to the different circumstances confronting Chinese youth. He writes:

"The dispersed nature of Chinese settlement and the employment in ethnically homogenous, socially isolated circumstances requires a relativization of some of the prevalent paradigms in recent research into cultural identity formation in Britain. The stress on hybridity and multiplicity and the fluid interpenetration of cultural realms needs to be tempered. In the case of young Chinese in Britain the demographic and social resources for a syncretic British based culture are just not available at present (1995: 102)."

That the Chinese occupy an ambiguous space in Britain's racial hierarchy will be further investigated in this research. In simple terms, I will illustrate how Chinese youth formulate identities according to their specific economic, social or cultural locations. For example, it is likely that a Chinese youth obliged to work for his parents in a takeaway in a rural part of Britain will have a different conception of identity to a young Chinese woman training to be a dentist in London. Such a dichotomy, although purely hypothetical, illustrates the differences in gender, geography, generation, age and class that simultaneously separates and lumps together disparate groups of Chinese in Britain. That these boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference further complicates matters. I posit that young Chinese people in London are redefining notions of self and identity, a process that has necessitated negotiation between contrasting terrains of Chineseness and a wider, more inclusive,
concept of Britishness that embraces other racialized groups, as theorized by figures such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Les Back.

Many of the issues that have flowed from previous analyses of the Chinese in Britain have been pursued on a wide and general canvas. The work of previous researchers has raised key questions which the current study addresses from a contemporary, multi-racial context. One of the aims of the current project is to narrow down the focus of study to encompass the intersubjective cultural practices and meanings which characterize the everyday lives of Chinese people living in contemporary London. By adopting this approach, further understandings of British-Chinese identities that are sympathetic to the complexity of subject formation may be obtained. Accordingly, a methodology that is sensitive to these concerns has been developed (see chapter 2). The following paragraphs attempt to outline my concerns in terms of geography, gender, economic position, and migration history.

The emphasis on London as the setting for the study is important as this city contains the largest number of Chinese settlers of any city in Britain, accounting for over a third of the British total. In addition, its chief Chinatown in the Soho district acts as an economic hub for Chinese social and cultural activity for the whole of the south-east region, where around two-thirds of Britain's Chinese population of almost 157,000 currently reside. It is argued that the situation facing Chinese people living in London allows for configurations of Chinese collectivities to occur that are characterised by higher levels of heterogeneity and border crossing. By this, I mean that greater scope exists for Chinese people to manoeuvre, whether on an individual or collective basis. A chief consideration of the current study is to examine how Chinese people, especially youth, collectively employ their extended social networks and ethnic resources in the city to mitigate their perceived isolation in other spheres of everyday life. Put another way, how does living in London influence the formation of identities? Are culturally essentialist identities strategically used in this social and cultural context? Does living in London
allow for more diverse forms of subject formation to flourish? A core theme is to explore the role of London in shaping the formation of British-Chinese identities.

Recent thinking on 'race' has pointed to the centrality of gender in accounting for differences in the lived experiences of ethnic minorities in Britain (Mirza 1997). While there is a literature on the work of Chinese women in sustaining the economic viability of family-based catering enterprises (Song, 1995), a corresponding emphasis on the nature of Chinese masculinities in Britain has yet to emerge. Indeed, few existing studies explore the experiences of the British-Chinese from a gendered perspective.

A central issue in recent research is how young Chinese people cope with growing up in relatively isolated circumstances (Parker 1995, for example). The loneliness that many Chinese youth experience is a result of two forces that have been pivotal in shaping postwar Chinese settlement in Britain. First, a succession of restrictionary immigration policies designed to minimize the arrival of foreigners to Britain have, on the whole, succeeded in limiting the arrival of Chinese migrants (see below). Second, the concentration of Chinese economic activity in the British catering trade has resulted in a spatially dispersed population as Chinese business owners expanded into provincial areas to gain a foothold in the market. It has been suggested that young Chinese people, in certain contexts, confront particular dilemmas growing up working in the catering trade in family owned enterprises (Parker 1995, Song 1997a and b). A predicament facing many Chinese children is the prospect of working for parents from an early age. How do Chinese youth understand their obligations to help out their parents? How does helping out parents during unsociable hours affect the lives of young Chinese people outside of the catering trade? The study will contribute to existing writing on how Chinese children negotiate their roles in family businesses.

Whether the Chinese have been successful in Britain has been an overriding topic for some authors. Recent literature on the Chinese paints a contradictory picture of their fortunes. The work of David Parker and Miri Song implicitly incorporates a view that

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4 According to figures obtained from the 1991 census.
Chinese participation in the catering trade has socially impinged upon the lives of young Chinese people. In contrast, Cheng (1996: 178) in her detailed statistical analysis of data from the 1991 census reached the following conclusion, ‘the profile of the Chinese in Britain is one of a successful ethnic minority.’ What this study attempts to understand is how the contrasting domains of the cultural, economic and social intersect.

One of the features noted by Cheng (1996) in her research was the increasing numbers of Chinese people employed in professional white collar occupations. It is probable that the more educated younger generation of Chinese are employed in these positions. Yet, the Chinese catering trade and its associated ethnic labour market remains as the main source of employment for the Chinese in Britain. Estimates of the numbers working in the ethnic economy vary from 90 per cent (Home Affairs Committee 1985) to 55 per cent (Cheng 1996). In the context of the present study, the majority of the second generation informants in the study had either helped out parents in family enterprises or had worked part-time in the catering trade. Crucially, nearly all of the young people I interviewed expressed a wish to pursue careers in the wider labour market. Moreover, most of the parents I spoke to had spent their entire working lives in Britain employed in the Chinese ethnic economy. Thus, one of the issues to be assessed is how working in a markedly distinct ethnic economy affects the lives of different generations of Chinese people.

At this point some clarification is necessary to distinguish between the different migration histories of individuals that together constitute the Chinese diaspora in London. A characteristic of the diasporic Chinese ‘community’ in London is the disparate origins of its peoples, all of whom have contrasting motives for settling in London. Traditionally, Britain’s Chinese hail from the rural hinterlands of Hong Kong, coming to Britain to work in the catering trade (Watson 1977). The situation in the late 1990s has changed somewhat. Currently, the Chinese population in London comprises political refugees from Vietnam, a transient population of overseas students from various parts of South-East Asia and, most interestingly, undocumented workers from the southern Chinese
province of Fujian. These groups, together with the British-born Chinese (hereafter, "BBCs"), have fundamentally transformed how the 'Chinese community' is internally conceptualised (see chapter 4). Recently, ideas of 'community' in the social sciences have increasingly become subject to scrutiny. Inter alia I suggest that the concept of 'the Chinese community' is problematic and, to this end, I will explore the ways in which Chinese people define their relationship to a wider Chinese collectivity. It is worth noting that the informants in this project are drawn from pre-existing networks of contacts, all of whom were either born here or originate from earlier waves of Chinese migration to Britain. There are methodological implications of this which will be further discussed in chapter two. It is important now to discuss how such a 'diasporic' social formation can be understood.

Geography, 'race' and diaspora

When carrying out this research it was necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, which increasingly reflects the way geographers have studied 'racial' issues in recent years. I have drawn upon theoretical concepts from sociology, anthropology and cultural studies to ground my analysis. It is necessary to discuss briefly how the study fits into recent developments in the study of 'race' in geography to understand the theoretical underpinnings of the project.

Within geography the study of 'race' since the 1960s has been marked by several paradigmatic changes. Traditionally, empiricism and positivism have dominated the study of 'racial' issues in the discipline, an influence whose legacy has remained to this day. Bonnett argues that the origins of empiricist geographies may be stretched back to the turn of the century where 'racial geographers' would 'amass sets of “objective” “racial” data' (1996: 866). During the post-war movement of the 1960s and early 1970s empiricist approaches to studying 'racial' issues attained hegemonic status. This can be
correlated with the period of large-scale non-white immigration to the United Kingdom. Prompted by the arrival of visibly different racialized minorities, geographers of the period were chiefly interested in mapping areas of non-white settlement and devising various indices to measure racial segregation. The prevalence of the empiricist and positivist traditions during this era coincided with a quantitative revolution occurring within the discipline at the time. From the mid-1970s onwards, however, many social geographers began to critique positivistic viewpoints for being theoretically and empirically narrow (Jackson and Smith 1981, for example). While empiricist geographies continued to influence the discipline, a discernible shift in the study of ‘race’ in geography was to commence. It is rather ironic, then, that the introduction of a self-defined ethnicity question into the 1991 census enabled geographers using GIS (Geographical Information Systems) technologies to accurately map the geographical concentrations of ethnic minority populations (Peach 1996, for example).

The 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a series of attempts by geographers to engage with wider philosophical concerns, expanding the geographical perspective on ‘race’. One of the main features of this period was the willingness of geographers to open a dialogue with sociologists and social theory. Instead of simply studying various aspects of racial segregation attempts were made to analyse the social, cultural and economic interactions of different ethnic groups, summarily known as the study of ‘race’ relations (Bonnett 1996). In terms of methodology, the expansion of empirical focus also led to changing attitudes amongst geographers towards using ‘soft’ qualitative research methods (Jackson and Smith 1984, for example). Concomitant with the interdisciplinary ambitions of the geography of ‘race’ in this period was a sub-disciplinary crisis of identity. As geographers had become associated with distinctive and specialized topics of study, producing work that could be said to have emanated from many branches of the social sciences was considered to be problematic by some.

From the mid-1980s, social geographers began to reconceptualise the subfield further with a focus on a social constructionist approach. During this era, the legacy of
empiricist approaches to racial studies receded as the social constructionist paradigm achieved precedence. Interdisciplinary boundaries became increasingly blurred as social scientists from within and outside geography realised the significance of spatial analysis in understanding the development of different racial identities. However, as Bonnett (1996) argues, a degree of ambiguity persists as to what social constructionists in the sub-discipline are trying to achieve. In his view, ‘social constructionism is a broad and, as yet, rather ill-defined current. The term may be understood, loosely, as referring to the interrogation of the formation of sociospatial meaning’ (1996: 872). Adherents to theories of social construction abandoned empiricist approaches to privilege the study of racism within the sub-field (Jackson 1987, for example). While this reorientation provided a new identity for the sub-discipline, social geographers remained uncertain of where they were positioned in relation to disciplinary boundaries. Thus Bonnett (1996: 874) observes that there is ‘a paradoxical concern to maintain and justify the existence of a distinctive and discrete “geographical contribution” to “racial” studies on the one hand, while, on the other, suggesting that racialization process is inherently geographical and cannot be properly understood otherwise.’

Yet the move towards interdisciplinarity has obviously benefitted the current research. It would have been unthinkable twenty five years ago for a study of this nature to be considered ‘geography’. While this project incorporates aspects of the paradigms discussed above, some of the approaches seem irrelevant to the focus of the present study. An interdisciplinary approach is clearly required to understand the everyday lives and cultural identities of young Chinese people in Britain. In order to fully grasp how the Chinese are situated in relation to other overseas Chinese ‘communities’ and to perceive how they are positioned vis-à-vis Britain’s ethnic groups, it is essential for this research to move beyond conventional boundaries of a narrowly-conceived geography and to embrace alternative theoretical concepts.

More recently, as a way of understanding these complexities, the concept of ‘diaspora’ has aroused interest amongst geographers. Its meanings, however, are subject
to dispute (Clifford 1994, for example). Contemporary theorists have appropriated the term diaspora in contrasting ways. In the past, the term ‘diaspora’ was mobilised to refer to the condition of a people living outside of their traditional homeland. Nowadays, in much of cultural theory, however, diaspora has come to signify a general sense of displacement, as well as a challenge to the limits of existing boundaries. Safran’s (1991: 83-84) notion of diaspora, with its six defining features is perhaps the most specific model. While many theorists regard Safran’s conception of diaspora as being too narrow, widening the theoretical discussion has increased the possibility of disjuncture between ‘invocations of diaspora theories, diasporic discourses, and distinct historical experiences of diaspora’ (Clifford 1994: 302). With this in mind, I will discuss the applicability of diaspora to the current study.

**The British-Chinese and the Chinese ‘diaspora’**

It is estimated that in 1990 there were approximately 37 million overseas Chinese settled in 136 countries on all the major continents (Poston, Mao and Yu 1994). Of the total figure of 37 million Chinese living overseas, almost 90 percent (32.3 million) are resident in Asia. Chinese migration, however, to countries of the 'West' is unlike the relatively short movements across Asia. Migration to the 'West' implies great upheaval for many immigrants because the migration is differentiated along ethnic, cultural and social lines. Taking this into consideration, I will primarily contrast the experiences of the Chinese in Britain to Chinese collectivites living in other ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries.

---

5 These six features include: a history of migration, memories of a place of origins, alienation in the host country, a 'homing' desire, ongoing support of the homeland, and a sense of collective identity as a group. In accordance to this classification, Safran (1991: 84) writes, ‘we may legitimately speak of the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them conforms to the “ideal type” of the Jewish diaspora.’

6 In Poston, Mao and Yu’s (1994) classification, the use of the term ‘overseas Chinese’ refers to persons of Chinese descent living outside the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan.
Although the number of 157,000 Chinese living in Britain is relatively small, the significance of cultural, economic, psychic and social connections to ancestral homelands in East Asia in the lives of Chinese people living in Britain is pertinent for many. These connections were, in the past, maintained through visits, expensive phone calls or by the consumption of popular forms of Hong Kong culture, whether by renting videotapes of Chinese soap operas or by purchasing Chinese music cassettes (Parker 1995). Accelerated time-space compression (Harvey 1989) prompted by the globalization of telecommunications means that global Chinese communities can now be linked instantaneously. Thus Chinese families in Britain can access Chinese language satellite channels such as CNE or TVB, a subsidiary of one of the major Hong Kong television stations, which have a Chinese audience all over Europe. Alternatively, it is possible for family members residing in Hong Kong, London, New York, San Francisco or Vancouver to communicate with each other via the Internet or e-mail. The diaspora cultures that are created from the fusion and mixing of different cultural elements are, arguably, precisely what give the term ‘diaspora’ such wide-ranging analytical purchase.

Indeed, it is generally agreed that the concept of diaspora challenges ideas of fixed origins and proposes that diasporic peoples may have connections to several different places that they may call ‘home’. In examining the subtext of ‘home’ which the term diaspora embodies, Brah (1996: 180) makes a clear-cut distinction. She argues that diaspora, ‘while taking account of a homing desire . . . is not the same thing as desire for a “homeland.”’ This characteristic is worth noting since not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return.’

Equally important is the significance of ‘home’ in the country of arrival or settlement. The concept of diaspora enables us to better understand what Brah (1996: 183) calls the ‘historically variable forms of relationality within and between diasporic formations.’ In other words, by examining how different groups are relationally positioned in a given context, we are able to deconstruct the regimes of power which operate to differentiate one group from another. Making this point is neccessary, since
the Chinese in Britain are not only marginalised in relation to the discourse of ‘race’ in Britain, but are also often overlooked in discussions of the Chinese diaspora (Ong 1999, for example).

As discussed above, the concept of ‘new ethnicities’ is important to the current study. Both Stuart Hall (1990) and Paul Gilroy (1993) refer to a notion of ‘diasporic culture’ to examine the complex interconnections which encompass intercultural exchanges and transnational linkages through which cultures are both transmitted and translated to produce new ethnicities. In much of this literature attention has been focused on the redefinitional and transgressive nature of Asian and Black British-based youth cultures. A latent optimism underpins much of this recent writing. The ensuing cultures of hybridity are celebrated and regarded as being progressive outcomes of diasporic processes. This study is partly in agreement with the view of diaspora that disrupts the fixity of national boundaries.

Modern Chinese transnationalism, however, reveals a whole range of cultural politics and strategies undertaken by Chinese individuals to further capitalist accumulation rather than to challenge it or racism (Ong and Nonini 1997, Ong 1999). Diasporic Chinese mobility has resulted in disparate cultural formations that have warranted study. The arrival of wealthy Hong Kong migrants in Vancouver who have transformed the social and cultural fabric of certain elite neighbourhoods present an interesting case study (Ley 1995, Mitchell 1997, for example). Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific Rim, professionals from Taiwan have settled in the neighbourhood of Monterey Park in Los Angeles, transformed its commercial landscape, and challenged pre-existing Anglo hegemony by winning control of its city council (Waldinger and Tseng, 1992). More alarmingly, the grounding of a cargo steamer, the Golden Venture, just outside New York harbour with almost 300 would be illegal immigrants on board from the southern Chinese province of Fujian revealed the extent of criminal syndicates specialising in the smuggling of undocumented aliens to mainstream America. Undoubtedly, had the Golden
Venture episode gone unnoticed, these undocumented workers would have ended up being employed by local Chinese entrepreneurs for minimal wages (Kwong 1997).

What these brief examples illustrate is the inequalities that have resulted from the expansion of Chinese transnational capitalism. Diasporic populations, as well as producing new identities and ethnicities, can also introduce into nation states new forms of oppression and exploitation, or revive older forms. In the case of illegal migrant workers from Southern China, their plight has been described as an involvement in a modern day slave trade (Kwong 1997). At the other extreme, privileged overseas Chinese investors who keep their families in North America while sustaining business connections in Asia, are able to escape disciplining by the state because of their extraterritorial status and economic clout. Therefore, as Ong and Nonini (1997: 326) assert, ‘one should not assume that what is diasporic, fluid, border-crossing, or hybrid is intrinsically subversive of power structures.’

The various journeys that together constitute the Chinese diaspora incorporate many similarities in their experiences of migration, yet are obviously internally differentiated. In order to conceive how the Chinese in Britain are situated in relation to the diaspora it is essential to draw comparisons with diasporized Chinese populations elsewhere. For example, the Chinese in Britain have a different, albeit related, history to Chinese people in the USA, South East Asia or Australia: what conditions do Chinese settlers face in these countries? How do the settlement patterns of Chinese people in these countries differ? What functions do the various Chinatowns in these countries provide? These questions offer an indication of how Chinese diasporic cultural formations are nuanced. Given these differences, how is it possible to incorporate the British-Chinese into the ‘Chinese diaspora’? The answer depends crucially upon how the relationships between the various locations of the Chinese diaspora are conceptualised.

Brah (1996) has suggested that the various migrations that together constitute a diaspora must be historicised if the concept is to serve as a useful heuristic device. In what follows I will give overviews of Chinese settlement in Australia, Canada and the
United States and compare the experiences of Chinese settlement in these countries to the migration history of the Chinese in Britain. To understand the historical circumstances that have shaped the formation of overseas Chinese communities one must comprehend the effects of immigration control. In this regard, British immigration policies have been instrumental in determining the nature of Chinese settlement in Britain. Looking at table 1.1 it can be seen that, in around 1990, of the four countries in the table Britain had the fewest Chinese people. Furthermore, from the decade 1980-1990 Britain’s Chinese population achieved the slowest rate of growth, from 91,000 in 1983 to 157,000 during 1991. Worth noting is the spectacular growth of the number of Chinese in the United States and Canada, from 806,000 and 289,200 around 1980 to 1,645,500 and 680,000 in 1990 respectively. The characteristics of the British-Chinese mark them out as being, at the same time, similar and different from other Chinese communities in diaspora. Yet their fewer numbers have undoubtedly affected the development of Chinese collectivites in Britain. The point of this discussion is to highlight how formations of Chinese diasporic ‘communities’ differ according to where they are located.

Table 1.1: Distribution of overseas Chinese in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, c. 1980 and 1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year (circa 1990)</th>
<th>Total population (millions)</th>
<th>Number of overseas Chinese (thousands)</th>
<th>Year (circa 1980)</th>
<th>Number of overseas Chinese (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>249.6</td>
<td>1645.5</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>806.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>289.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>300.0</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>122.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>156.9</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chinese in Australia

Immigration has been a driving force behind Australia's development ever since the British arrival in 1788. Australia, along with Canada and to an extent New Zealand, are currently recognised as countries at the forefront of nondiscriminatory immigration policies. In addition, Australia is now regarded as a multicultural society (Castles 1995). However, this is only a relatively recent phenomenon. Between the 1880s and the 1960s, Australia intentionally isolated itself from its geographical region by overtly maintaining its 'White Australia' policy. As the name implies, non-European migrants were effectively excluded from Australian society under the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. Indeed, measures specifically limiting the entry of Chinese immigrants to Australia were introduced earlier. The racial bias of that era was founded upon popular notions of racial superiority.

It was the Chinese, who first arrived on Australian shores soon after the discovery of gold in 1851, who laid the foundations for the White Australia policy. The mining of gold created an international community of gold miners as they moved from one gold field or country to another. There was a majority of whites in the profession, where English was the primary language. The lack of acceptance of Chinese social and cultural norms resulted in a belief amongst European workers that Chinese labourers, as well as entering their territory, generally depreciated working and living conditions on the goldfield (Hawkins 1991). A reaction to the anxieties created by newly-arrived Chinese immigrants was the implementation of preliminary restrictions which began in the 1850s and 1860s, although they were minor and temporary in their effect. These measures, however, eventually led to the adoption of fairly uniform restrictive measures in 1888. During this decade colonists increasingly believed that exclusion was the only viable option to reduce
the inflow of Chinese immigrants - a situation which largely prevailed right up to the 1970s (Hawkins 1991).

A gradual loosening of immigration regulation led to the eventual cessation of the White Australia policy under the incoming Labour government, led by Gough Whitlam in 1973. An indication of the relaxation of policy was provided by measures such as the Colombo Plan of 1951 which allowed into Australia Chinese students mainly from Malaysia and Singapore. More important was the South Australia Act of 1966 which outlawed racial discrimination under a variety of state and federal laws. Whitlam was credited with introducing a points system of selection for immigrants, not unlike the points schemes of Canada and the United States discussed below, which placed emphasis on family reunification and education.

The White Australia policy became dysfunctional in several respects: growing prosperity in Europe in the years following World War II reduced the scope of immigration intake from European nations; the policy alienated newly independent Asian states; and it restricted the thinking of Australians to a world view unduly focused on its colonial power - Britain. While some of these factors served to increase American influence, most of them underlined the pre-eminence of geographical proximity to Asia as a factor in Australian reorientation (Jupp 1995).

Today about 25 percent of the Australian population are of non-British origin, while over 15 percent were born overseas in non-English speaking countries. Table 1.2 highlights the extent to which the Asian-born population of Australia has increased. In particular, the largest group of Asian migrants, in rank order, are now from Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong, India and mainland China. India excepted, it is almost certain that all of these countries latterly mentioned include a significant number of immigrants of Chinese descent (Jupp 1995).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China (Mainland)</td>
<td>26,760</td>
<td>37,468</td>
<td>77,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>15,717</td>
<td>28,293</td>
<td>57,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>41,657</td>
<td>47,816</td>
<td>60,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>31,598</td>
<td>47,802</td>
<td>71,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>15,431</td>
<td>33,727</td>
<td>73,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>41,097</td>
<td>83,048</td>
<td>121,813</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although 1973 marked a watershed in terms of the formal dismantling of the White Australia policy, the growing proportion of Chinese settlers in modern Australia is also attributable to the development of immigration policy to cater for refugees. The advent of the Liberal-National government under Malcolm Fraser in December 1975 clarified Australia's position in relation to the emerging Vietnamese refugee crisis. Fraser's government agreed to accept more Indochinese and publicly declared that 'Australia fully recognises its humanitarian commitment, and responsibility to admit, refugees for resettlement' (quoted in Price 1993: 12). In total, Australia has resettled over 147,000 Indochinese refugees (the third highest intake after the US and Canada), which includes 27,000 or so entering under family reunion and other categories. In relative terms, though, Australia received the highest proportion of Indochinese relative to its own population (Ongley and Pearson, 1995).

A product of Australia's recent nondiscriminatory immigration policy is a heterogeneous Chinese population. The 1991 census reveals that people of Chinese origin form the largest Asian born category, as they did in the nineteenth century. Table 1.3 indicates the country of origin of Cantonese speakers, the largest Chinese language group.
in Australia. It reveals a variety of source countries, overwhelmingly from Asia (Jupp 1995).

Table 1.3: Birthplaces of Cantonese-speakers in Australia: 1991.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>48,611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>34,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>21,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>21,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>4,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>1,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>1,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macau</td>
<td>1,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All others</td>
<td>6,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155,976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Patterns of occupational structure for the Chinese in Australia reflect the heterogeneity of Chinese immigrants. Rising standards for entry into Australia since 1975 have fostered the arrival of a category of migrants who are highly qualified and well educated. These immigrants have, on the whole, acquired more prestigious occupations than the native born (see table 1.4). What emerges from table 1.4 is that immigrants who fit into the latter category are predominantly from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. One can also deduce from table 1.4 that the majority of refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were not employed in professional occupations. Instead these settlers were less qualified and much more likely to enter traditional manual trades than those who came voluntarily (Jupp 1995). Immigration of Chinese professionals has to a large extent fulfilled the objective of Australian immigration policy to accommodate
highly skilled migrants. Chinese migration to North America, which will be considered next, shares a similarity with the experience of Chinese migration to Australia.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Chinese in Canada

Canada as a country of contemporary Chinese migration is particularly well documented. Much has been written about the arrival of high income Chinese households from Hong Kong who have settled in elite residential areas in Vancouver (Mitchell 1997, for example). Canada’s ability to attract large numbers of Hong Kong’s professional and entreprenuerial classes is for the most part attributable to its immigration policies. But for almost nine decades prior to 1967, restrictionist immigration laws, similar to those in Australia, were in operation, which at times almost cancelled out all Chinese immigration to Canada.
Canada's Chinese population dates back to 1858, the beginning of the Canadian gold rush in British Columbia. The earliest Chinese settlers in Canada originated from the southern Chinese Province of Guandong. As the mining of gold ceased to be a profitable activity, the Chinese found alternative employment as domestic servants, coal miners’ helpers and as seasonal workers in newly-established salmon canning industries. Increased Chinese involvement in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) heightened anti-Chinese sentiment. Faced with the prospect of an influx of Chinese to work on the CPR, British Columbia passed laws in 1878 banning the Chinese from working on provincial public works. Regardless, John A. Macdonald’s government continued to allow the CPR to employ Chinese workers, resulting in as many as 17,000 Chinese workers arriving in British Columbia between 1881 and 1884 (Tan and Roy 1985).

With the eventual completion of the CPR in 1884, the large numbers of new arrivals sought other forms of work. Their association with strike-breaking in the coal mines contributed to worsening relations between local Canadians and the Chinese. A sequence of measures were gradually introduced to restrict the inflow of Chinese migrants to Canada. From 1884, the authorities of British Columbia, amongst other measures, imposed a head tax of $10 on all Chinese entering the province. This led to the imposition of a federal law that implemented a $50 head tax on all Chinese entering Canada after 1 January 1886. Chinese immigration to Canada continued despite increments in the head tax rate to a level of $500, imposed in 1904 (Wickberg 1982). In response to public pressure across Canada, the Federal government in 1923 substituted the head tax with a new anti-Chinese immigration act. After 1923, hostility directed at the Chinese waned as the new exclusionary policy effectively ended all Chinese immigration. Reference to table 1.5 reveals that between 1926 and 1945 only seven Chinese persons legally entered Canada.
Table 1.5: Chinese immigration to Canada.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Chinese immigration</th>
<th>% of total Chinese immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926-1945</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-1950</td>
<td>2,534</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1955</td>
<td>11,143</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-1960</td>
<td>9,747</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1965</td>
<td>11,785</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1970</td>
<td>33,618</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1975</td>
<td>56,713</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Tan and Roy (1985:7)

Only in 1947 was the 1923 Act repealed. The new immigration laws however, when applied to the Chinese, were in many ways still discriminatory. Only Chinese people who were Canadian citizens were eligible for family reunion, which was restricted to wives and minor children. In addition, Canada was widely welcoming immigrants from Europe, principally refugees from Eastern Europe after World War II. Only in 1967, with the introduction of a points system to screen the suitability of potential migrants, were the Chinese on a par with all other prospective immigrants to Canada. A consequent surge in Chinese migration to Canada ensued. From table 1.5, one can observe that in the period 1966-1970, 33,618 Chinese persons immigrated to Canada, a figure almost three times greater than that of the previous period 1961-1965. Chinese movement to Canada after 1967 continued this upward trend, with 56,713 persons arriving during 1971-1975. As well as arriving from the traditional source countries of Southeast Asia, Chinese people from the Caribbean, South America and Southern Africa have all settled in Canada. During the peak years of immigration in the 1970s - between 1972 and 1978 - the bulk of Chinese immigrants, about 77 per cent, entered Canada from Hong Kong, though it is likely that some stopped there en route from Mainland China (Tan and Roy 1985).
Recent immigration legislation has ensured that the Canadian-Chinese population is far from homogenous. As well as middle class Canadian-Chinese of the second and third generations, recent inflows have comprised of refugees from South-East Asia. The introduction of a business immigrant programme in 1978, and expanded in 1986, has proved successful in attracting overseas Chinese, particularly wealthy investors from Hong Kong who hoped to establish citizenship in another country prior to the cessation of British sovereignty in 1997. Owing considerably to the success of the business immigrant programme, emigration from Hong Kong to Canada increased markedly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is claimed that in 1992, half of the migrants entering Canada under the business immigrant programme were from Hong Kong, with Taiwan in second position. Vancouver received a disproportionate number of the new arriving migrants from Hong Kong, from barely a thousand in 1986, to 8,664 in 1992 (Ley 1995). Amongst other things, the Hong Kong Chinese were held responsible for driving up property prices in Vancouver’s real estate market and destroying the natural-looking landscapes of upper and middle-class residential areas.

The general Chinese migrants have tended to settle in the major metropolitan centres of Canada. Toronto and Vancouver together account for the majority of Canada's Chinese population. In Toronto alone, the number of Chinese increased from 8,000 to 106,000 between 1966 and 1986, ranking it amongst the largest Chinese-populated cities in North America. Other cities such as Montreal, Calgary and Edmonton also contain a significant Chinese presence. Their inclination to concentrate principally in the metropolitan areas has ultimately guided Chinese business growth to ethnic enclave areas (Chan 1992). Thus, in Toronto there is one classic Chinatown and four others in suburban areas, all located adjacent to recently congregated Chinese communities. The phenomenon of suburban Chinatowns, in particular, is also a feature of the social and cultural formations of Chinese populations in the United States that will now be discussed.
The Chinese in the United States

In the United States there are over 1.6 million overseas Chinese, which constitutes over half of the entire Chinese population in the Americas. Chinese migration to the United States, like the situation in Australia and Canada, is characterised by different waves of immigration. The Chinese have been resident in the U.S. ever since the Californian gold-rush sparked a labour shortage in the mid-nineteenth century. Chinese 'coolie' labour were imported to work in the mines and on railroads. However, white antagonism directed towards the Chinese resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 being passed. Combined with the 1875 statute barring the entry of Chinese prostitutes and an anti-miscegenation law enacted in California during 1880, the 1882 Act further deprived Chinese male labourers of the opportunity to marry and have children (Hing 1993).\(^7\)

Unsurprisingly, as in other Anglo-Saxon countries, there was an extreme gender imbalance between men and women immigrants. By 1890, the male to female ratio of Chinese migrants was 27:1. The exclusionary policies implemented in the State of California set a precedent for exclusionary immigration policies towards Chinese people in other settler colonies, most notably Australia and Canada. As a consequence, the exclusion laws resulted in a decline in the Chinese American population from over 100,000 in 1882 to just over 85,000 in 1920 (see table 1.6). The passage of the 1924 Immigration Act further curtailed Chinese migration to the United States by rendering them 'ineligible for citizenship' (Hing 1993: 47).

\(^7\) According to Hing (1993:45) the 1875 statute 'quite nearly treated all Chinese women as prostitutes.'
Table 1.6: Comparison of Chinese-American population with immigration by decade, 1860-1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade ending</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Immigration in prior decade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>34,933</td>
<td>41,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>105,465</td>
<td>123,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>118,746</td>
<td>14,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>85,202</td>
<td>2,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>106,334</td>
<td>4,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>150,005</td>
<td>16,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>237,292</td>
<td>25,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>436,062</td>
<td>109,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>812,178</td>
<td>237,793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,645,472</td>
<td>446,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Hing (1993: 48).

After World War II, the introduction of new immigration reforms together with the Chinese Revolution of 1949, provided the stimulus of the second wave of Chinese immigration to the United States. The 1943 Chinese Repealer made family reunification possible. Approximately 30,000 refugees fled to the U.S. with their immediate relatives. The next fifteen years witnessed the admission of a further 60,000 Chinese immigrants, the majority of whom were Science and Engineering graduates who were able to obtain immigrant status by virtue of their professional skills (Waldinger and Tseng 1992).

Even within these two early waves of immigration, the socio-economic characteristics and settlement patterns of the migrants varied sharply. The initial migrants were typically from the southern coastal province of Guandong, largely illiterate and speaking similar dialects. Discrimination and anti-Chinese legislation excluded them from the mainstream economy. Instead, this group of Chinese were forced to regroup into Chinatowns and were confined to menial trades with low financial rewards where they posed little threat to the dominant white population. In contrast, the second wave was characterised by individuals who were better educated and well informed. Amongst this
group there were many professionally trained Nationalist government officials, members of the business elite and intellectuals. Their origins were from a variety of areas in China and Taiwan. Settlement patterns were different too. Although the major urban centres were the primary destinations for the second wave of immigrants, they often found employment and residence outside the Chinatowns, which served them as a marketplace for food and recreation.

In 1965 the Immigration and Nationality Act abolished both the country of origin quotas and the exclusions against Asian immigrants, thus ending some eighty years of bias against the Chinese. A 20,000 person quota for any country of the world was also set. This Act was largely responsible for the third wave of Chinese immigration, which commenced in 1965. Entry into the U.S. under the new immigration law was conditional upon two criteria: links with family members already resident in the United States, or possessing scarce occupational skills. Well educated Chinese professionals initially migrated to the U.S. and established a population base. This facilitated a chain migration that enabled family members to migrate on the basis of family preferences. The relaxing of policy led to a resultant surge in the Chinese population, from 237,292 persons in the decade ending 1960 to 1,645,472 persons in the decade ending 1990 (Hing 1993).

Accompanying the growth of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. there has been considerable intra-ethnic diversity. Waldinger and Tseng (1992) compared the Chinese communities of New York and Los Angeles. Distinctions were drawn between settlement patterns, functioning of the ethnic economy and the local political structure in the two cities. Their main findings were that these distinctions were in a large part influenced by the place of origin of these Chinese immigrants. Highly educated professionals dominated the Taiwanese inflow of Chinese migrants to Los Angeles, of which 42 percent entered the U.S. under the occupational preference category. In contrast, 83 percent of immigrants from the Peoples Republic of China entered the U.S. under family preferences and their ties to relatives led them to reside in New York.
From the 1990 census, there were almost 240,000 Chinese people recorded to be living in New York City. Of this figure, the boroughs of Manhattan (71,723), Brooklyn (68,191) and Queens (86,885) accounted for 95 percent of New York's Chinese population (Lin 1998). While earlier waves of Chinese migrants initially settled in the core Chinatown on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, residential decentralization resulted in the formation of numerous satellite Chinatowns in the outer boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens. Notable concentrations of Chinese settlement have sprung up in the neighbourhoods of Corona, Elmhurst and Flushing in the borough of Queens and in Bay Ridge, Sheepshead Bay and Sunset Park in Brooklyn.

Of all the diasporic Chinese communities, it is perhaps the example of Chinese migrants in the United States that present the most interesting case study. The subject has spawned a voluminous literature that demonstrates the heterogeneity in terms of class, gender, generation, and ethnic origin of this diasporic formation (Lowe 1996, Ong 1999, for example). Successive waves of Chinese immigration to the U.S. have generated diverse cultural and social formations that are manifest at a local, regional, national and international level. To be Chinese in the United States encompasses an array of subject positions. For instance, one could be an undocumented worker from China, a wealthy investor from Hong Kong or Taiwan, a second or third generation middle-class American-Chinese youth allied to a pan-ethnic Asian-American project, an overseas student, or an Indo-Chinese refugee. The recent waves of migrants are largely responsible for the diversity that characterizes Chinese settlement in the United States. What will emerge from the review of Chinese settlement in Britain that follows is that Britain's Chinese collectivities have developed along qualitatively and quantitatively different lines.
Chinese settlement in Britain

In the previous discussion of Chinese settlement in the countries of Australia, Canada and the United States I outlined how the state, through various restrictionary immigration procedures, could, directly or indirectly, regulate the growth of Chinese populations. I showed that in the countries considered above measures were initially introduced to minimise the inflow of Chinese immigrants. The gradual relaxing of immigration policies in the three countries resulted in the arrival of significant numbers of Chinese migrants. In this section I will highlight the differences between Chinese settlement in Britain and the countries already discussed. This section is split into two main parts. First, I provide a brief demographic profile of the Chinese in Britain and consider the implications of the ‘ethnicity’ question in the 1991 Census. Second, I examine the history of Chinese settlement in Britain and will investigate how immigration legislation has shaped the formation of Britain’s contemporary Chinese population.

The Census of Great Britain in 1991 asked a question on ethnicity. This enabled official statistics to report an accurate number of the Chinese in Britain for the first time. Prior to the 1991 Census, available data on the size of Britain’s Chinese population were based on estimates either from local councils (Home Affairs Committee 1985), the Labour Force Survey or from the country of birth of the head of household figures given in previous censuses. The figures obtained from these sources provided inaccurate and therefore unsatisfactory information about Chinese communities living in Britain (Cheng 1996).

A long debate as to whether or not an ethnic group question should be included in the census culminated in the introduction of the ‘ethnicity’ question in 1991. An ethnic group question had been considered for the 1981 Census, but was not considered appropriate, partly due to political sensitivity and ethnic consumer resistance during the piloting stage. In the 1971 Census, the question had been circumvented, not entirely successfully, by asking a question on the birthplace of parents. Ethnicity was implied
from the total of those with both parents born in a given country. In the 1951 and 1961 censuses, birthplace was the only measure of ethnicity. As a result, the ethnicity question is unique to the 1991 Census, and there are no earlier census data with which to make direct comparisons. Although the 1991 Census was the first to ask a direct ethnic question, two official government surveys - the Labour Force Survey and the General Household Survey - had regularly asked such questions during the 1980s. The surveys, however, were small in relation to the 100 per cent coverage of the census and collected relatively small ethnic samples within their broader coverage (Peach 1996).

Uncontroversial, however, the ‘ethnicity’ question was not. While birthplace is an unambiguous category, ethnicity is not strictly amenable to static categorisation. Ratcliffe (1996:4) argues that ‘when we use the terms “ethnicity”, “ethnic group” or “ethnic origin” we are in effect employing a simplified pragmatic interpretation of the term “ethnic”, combined with an acceptance that the process of racialisation is part of the allocative equation.’ Bearing this in mind, in a sense, the census question did not even measure ‘ethnicity’. The emphasis was on categorising the non-European minority groups, while aggregating the European population into a single white group.

The census of 1991 recorded a total of 156,938 ‘Chinese’ persons living in the UK. From table 1.7, the Chinese form the smallest ethnic minority group identified in the census. From table 1.8, it can be seen that the highest number of Chinese migrants arrived in Britain from Hong Kong and are by far the most dominant ethnic Chinese group in Britain, comprising over a third of the Chinese total. This group of Chinese in Britain, more than any other, has fashioned the ways in which Chinese people are conceptualised by the majority population. The rest are from Malaysia, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Vietnam and drawn from about 80 countries all over the world. Only 28 per cent were born in Britain, which reflects the relatively youthful nature of the Chinese ethnic minority group. The average Chinese person in Britain is 29 years old - nine years younger than the average white person. The mean age of an immigrant Chinese is 36, and
that of a British-born Chinese, 13 (Cheng 1996). This is perhaps a reflection of Britain’s immigration policies which will be examined below.

Table 1.7: Ethnic distribution in the 1991 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>51,873,792</td>
<td>93.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Caribbean</td>
<td>499,964</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-African</td>
<td>212,362</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Other</td>
<td>178,401</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>840,255</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>476,555</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>162,835</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>156,938</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Asian</td>
<td>197,534</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Other</td>
<td>290,206</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons born in Ireland</td>
<td>837,464</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55,726,306</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1.8: Country of origin of Chinese, Great Britain, 1991.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>44,635</td>
<td>28.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>53,473</td>
<td>34.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia/Singapore</td>
<td>20,001</td>
<td>12.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (and Taiwan)</td>
<td>20,141</td>
<td>12.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>9,448</td>
<td>6.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parts of the world</td>
<td>9,248</td>
<td>11.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156,938</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That the Chinese population is a young one is revealed in figure 1.1. The population pyramid for the Chinese migrants has a narrow base, a very wide middle position and a tapering top. There is a concentration of people in the intermediate age cohorts with relatively few over the age of 60. The pyramid for the second generation Chinese is, however, a very different shape. It has a wide base that tapers into a narrow top and consists mainly of Chinese youth and young adults. The majority of these are likely to be in full-time education or at an early stage in their career (Cheng 1996).

A balanced gender distribution is a characteristic of the Chinese in Britain. Of the 156,938 Chinese identified in the census, 77,669 are males and 79,269 are females, equivalent to 102 women for every 100 men. However, the sex ratios for the Chinese population in Britain vary according to the country of origin. Table 1.9 presents the sex ratios for four sub-groups of Chinese people. Striking differences in sex distributions amongst Britain’s Chinese population are evident. The Chinese born in Hong Kong are the only group with an excess of men over women. In stark contrast, for the Chinese born in South East Asia there are 161 females to 100 males! Chinese migration from South East Asia is clearly dominated by females. Many of these women have fairly good qualifications and came to work in the British health professions (Cheng, 1996).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Sex ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>100:102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese born in UK</td>
<td>100:108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese born in Hong Kong</td>
<td>100:99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese born in South East Asia</td>
<td>100:161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese born in other parts of the world</td>
<td>100:139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>100:98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>100:94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>100:92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>100:100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.1: Comparison of Chinese and total population age/sex pyramids, Great Britain, 1991

Source: Cheng (1996: 166)
The association of the Chinese with the catering trade is well known, yet the actual numbers of Chinese employed in catering is subject to dispute. Past estimates have ranged from 90 per cent (Home Affairs Committee, 1985) to 67 per cent (Cheng 1994). The census, on the other hand, indicates that around 55 per cent of Britain’s Chinese population are employed in distribution, which includes a sub-category for restaurants, snack bars, cafes and other eating places. This category accounted for 41 per cent of the Chinese in Britain, differing markedly from the total quoted in the Home Affairs Committee report (1985). Figure 1.2 reveals that only about a quarter of the Chinese are actually self-employed, even though the Chinese are by far the most likely ethnic group to be self-employed. Moreover, the industrial distribution varies with ethnic origins. For instance, 58 per cent of the Hong Kong-born Chinese and 42 per cent of the Chinese born in other parts of the world work in the catering industry. However, only 10 per cent of the South East Asian Chinese fall into this category (Cheng 1996).

The settlement patterns of the Chinese in Britain reflects their involvement with the catering trade. Even Watson (1977: 181), writing twenty years ago, noted that ‘it is now almost impossible to find a town in England (and, increasingly, in Scotland) with a population of 5000 or more that does not have at least one Chinese restaurant or takeaway shop.’ The nature of the catering trade precludes concentrated settlement, so Chinese families are dispersed throughout most towns, suburbs and villages of Great Britain in search of viable catchment areas for their businesses. As a result of this, the Chinese are a relatively dispersed ethnic group. Reference to figures 1.3 and 1.4 reveals that the Chinese have populated all regions of Britain, although there is a notable clustering of settlement in the South East and London, which constitutes almost two-thirds of Britain’s Chinese population. London contains over a third of the Chinese population in Britain alone.
The history of Chinese migration to Britain

Two main periods of Chinese migration to Britain may be identified. The first begins in the eighteenth century and ends just after the second world war, and the second starts around 1950. The sequence is not typical of the general pattern of Chinese migration, though its causes have much in common with those which lead to movement to other parts of the world (Baker 1994).

The early settlers

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the Chinese began to make an impression on Britain's burgeoning immigrant population. Chinese emigration was fuelled partly by overpopulation and poverty in China and by the demand for cheap 'coolie' labour emanating from the discovery of gold in mid nineteenth-century America and Australia. While there were no gold mines in Britain, there was a demand for Chinese labour resulting from emerging trade links with the Far East. The Treaties of Nanking in 1842 and Peking in 1860 opened up China to British trade, with the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 contributing further to an increase in Far Eastern trade. It was in shipping that the majority of Britain's early Chinese settlers were employed. On these ships there existed a demand for stokers, occupations filled mainly by Chinese. Such jobs were not attractive to Europeans since this trade necessitated men spending long periods away from home. As a result, isolated pockets of Chinese people became established in port cities such as Liverpool, London and Cardiff.

Although the Chinese constituted a relatively small proportion of Britain's immigrant population they were not necessarily immune to controversy. Like the Irish, the Chinese were commonly thought of as working for low wages. Indeed, their wages were lower than any other settlers in Britain (Walvin, 1984). It was no coincidence that it was this factor which at first made Chinese 'coolies' ideal for those occupations which
Figure 1.2: Percentage of the economically active who are self-employed, Great Britain, 1991

Source: Peach (1996: 19)
Figure 1.3: Distribution of the Chinese population in Britain, 1991

Source: 1991 Census
Figure 1.4: Distribution of the Chinese population in London, 1991

were labour intensive. The Chinese minority initially encountered instances of suspicion and mistrust from white seamen, who considered the Chinese to be a cheap and docile form of labour.

A sense of the prevailing attitudes to the Chinese as a source of cheap labour are described by a young Beatrix Potter, who, writing in 1888, described the women of East London as the 'Chinamen of this class, they accept work at any wage' (quoted in Walvin 1984: 68). She was not alone in advancing this view of the Chinese. The Times newspaper of the 4th April 1873 commented that ‘in the present discontent of our coal miners it may not be inopportune to state what is the amount received by their Chinese brethren’ (quoted in Holmes 1988: 78). A fear of the Chinese as providers of cheap labour certainly prevailed in late nineteenth-century Britain. However, it was in the shipping industry with its relatively high number of Chinese hands that the most vociferous antagonism emerged. An edition of the Maritime Review in 1911 informed its readers that ‘you know, we know and they know that the Chinaman isn’t worth a toss as a seaman’ (quoted in May 1978: 116).

When the demographic evidence is examined it becomes apparent that any panic was greatly exaggerated. In Britain in 1871 the maximum number of Chinese aliens was 207, which by 1911 had only risen to 1319, although such returns most probably underestimate the size of Britain's Chinese minority. For instance, other Chinese born in Hong Kong would be subsumed under the undifferentiated category whose birthplaces were given as the British colonies and dependencies. In any case, the numbers of Chinese emigrating to Britain were insignificant in comparison with the Chinese who emigrated to the United States and Australia (Holmes, 1988). Additionally, the passing of the 1905 Aliens Act after a lengthy debate eventually curtailed the immigration of alien Chinese into Britain shortly after the Great War.

The 1905 Act was a significant piece of legislation. It was the first real attempt to regulate the inflow of foreigners to the UK. For the Chinese it was also distinct in that unlike Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, arrival of Chinese
immigrants was not the catalyst for discriminatory legislation. Instead this unenviable position belonged to the Eastern European Jews who immigrated to London in large numbers in the latter part of the nineteenth century. However, the 1905 Act was easily circumvented, which in large part was attributable to the non-oppressive ways it was administered by the incoming Liberal government.

However, with war imminent in 1914 more stringent measures replaced the 1905 Act. The Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 and its renewal in 1919 enacted a number of parliamentary orders which remained in force until the Immigration Act of 1971. The main features of the 1914 and 1919 Acts were that they introduced commonly used notions of work permits and deportation. Entry also became conditional upon the discretion of an immigration officer. The Act did not apply to British subjects, so the possibility exists that Chinese emigration may have continued from British colonies in the Far East.

While disquiet about the Chinese was suppressed, it never entirely evaporated. During the inter-war years Chinese seamen were still the focus of some hostile attention, but fewer instances of hostility directed towards Chinese people were recorded. Public attention switched to the widespread social and economic problems of that era. Indeed, during 1942, faced with the need for seamen in World War II, restrictions imposed on 'coloured' aliens in the Special Restrictions Order of 1925 were revoked. Chinese sailors contributed significantly to the supply lines secured by the merchant navy. During the latter part of 1942, recognition of the use of aliens in the British war effort resulted in amendments to the 1914 British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act. With the conclusion of World War II, the majority of Chinese seamen who had served on merchant ships were repatriated. Nevertheless, this outflow was more than compensated by an inflow of Chinese immigrants (Holmes 1988).
The most significant wave of Chinese immigration to the United Kingdom commenced in the post-war period and the number eventually involved was largely unanticipated when it started. This period marks the beginning of mass migration of Chinese persons to Britain. The British Nationality Act of 1948 facilitated this influx of Chinese immigrants, although in comparison to migrants from the Caribbean and South Asia this migration flow was smaller. The census of 1971 noted 96,035 persons of Chinese origin (from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and China), whereas the enumerated populations of West Indian and South Asian (Indian and Pakistani) origin were 299,580 and 406,430 persons respectively (Rees 1993).

Under the 1948 Act Commonwealth citizens could enter the UK without restriction, thereby enabling Hong Kong citizens especially the right of abode on the UK. But while all Commonwealth citizens had the right to reside in Britain, the specific character of the 1948 Act excluded the migration of Chinese persons from a range of source countries in the Far East. In this respect, Hong Kong Chinese were fortunate in that they had the choice to emigrate if they desired. Discriminatory policies towards Chinese people in the traditional countries of immigration - Australia, Canada and the USA - were still in operation in this period and acted as a barrier to migration for many Chinese elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

The option to emigrate to the UK for residents of Hong Kong was increasingly exercised as refugees from the mainland added to economic competition in agriculture and forced out some of the more conservative class who turned to emigration as an alternative to adapting to new agricultural techniques (Jones 1979). Increasing economic prosperity in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s also played a role. During this period the British increasingly began to change their eating habits and developed a taste for foreign cuisine. In the decade between 1956 and 1965 the Chinese restaurant trade grew rapidly and was fed by a simultaneous rise in immigration from Hong Kong (Watson 1977). Family and
kin members, mainly from an agricultural background, were recruited by Chinese restaurant owners to work in the rapidly expanding catering sector. However, the Chinese restaurant boom was not to produce an unlimited flow of immigrants. Government intervention through the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act was to represent a watershed in the development of Britain's Chinese population.

While the Chinese were not necessarily the prime objects of immigration control, there were undoubtedly ramifications for those already resident in the UK. The passing of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act together with the fading of the Chinese restaurant boom in the late 1960s had the effect of limiting the employment that could be generated in the Chinese restaurant trade. Faced with these circumstances, many Chinese re-migrated into continental Europe to further their business interests. Holland, Germany, Belgium and some Scandinavian countries were the main recipient countries of these Chinese persons (Watson 1977).

The implementation of the 1962 legislation occurred against a background of intensified politicisation and growing public awareness of the race and immigration issue. Whereas previously immigration control was merely a topic discussed either locally or within government departments, the race riots of 1958 in Nottingham and Notting Hill provided the stimulus to bring these issues to national prominence (Solomos 1989). Although there was widespread condemnation of the violence, the riots provided ammunition for the lobbyists for immigration controls. Indeed, it appeared that large sections of the British public favoured immigration controls. A poll conducted by the Daily Express soon after the riots was quoted by Cyril Osbourne - the notorious campaigner against black immigration - in parliamentary debate. It found that 79.1% of a national sample was in favour of controls, with the figure being even higher in London at 81.5% (Layton-Henry 1992: 40).

The riots signified a taste of what was to occur. In 1964, Smethwick provided the setting for the next episode in British history to shape immigration policy (Solomos 1989, Layton-Henry 1992). During the 1964 general election, Peter Griffiths, the Conservative
candidate, defeated the Labour shadow Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker - widely perceived as a liberal on immigration - in the battle for Smethwick. Griffiths’ victory was attributed to the way in which he defended the interests of the local white majority population and was characterised by his refusal to condemn slogans such as “If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour.” The events in Smethwick, and the success of anti-immigrant candidates in Southall and Birmingham Perry Bar, reinforced the views of the lobby for immigration control that the general public supported them. As a consequence of Smethwick, it could be argued that both major political parties realised the potential of the race and immigration issue. Enoch Powell exploited this fully with his ignominious ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in April 1968. Virtually overnight he was elevated into the mould of most popular Conservative politician. Powell’s explosive speeches also fostered the emergence of far right groups such as the National Front (Layton-Henry 1992). The establishment of immigration as an electoral issue led to pressure for more immigration control.

The 1962 Act was, therefore, the first in a series of measures which reduced the preferential status of coloured immigrants from Commonwealth countries. The immigration white paper of 1965, the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1968 and the Immigration Act of 1971 closely followed suit. Still, while the 1962 legislation was the first real attempt to limit the inflow of Commonwealth immigrants in the post-war period, it was largely unsuccessful in curbing Chinese migration to the UK. Coleman (1994: 52) asserts that ‘most New Commonwealth immigrants in the UK, especially from the Indian subcontinent and almost all Africans and Chinese, have arrived after the ineffective controls of the 1962 Act.’

Although the 1962 Act removed the automatic right of citizenship from Commonwealth citizens and introduced a system of employment vouchers in order to be able to enter the UK, the Chinese already resident here were in a position to further the immigration chain. The Act initially provided for three types of employment vouchers. One of these categories provided for Commonwealth citizens who had a specific job to
come to in Britain (Solomos 1989). As previously implied, the proliferation of Chinese catering businesses enabled Chinese restauranteurs to sponsor the entry into Britain of family members in Hong Kong. This requirement of having a job in advance facilitated the concentration of Chinese settlers in catering through systems of chain migration, word of mouth and family connections. In addition, the composition of the allocation of employment vouchers may have benefited the entry of Chinese. In the latter part of the 1960s and early part of the 1970s, a disproportionate number of permits was issued to workers in the hotel and catering industry. Furthermore, Commonwealth citizens who had entered the UK before the 1st January 1973 and settled were entitled to bring in their wives, their children under 18 and, in isolated cases, other close dependants (Rees 1982). These factors accounted for the continued growth of Britain’s Chinese population despite the 1962 legislation.

This position proved untenable with the advent of the Immigration Act of 1971. The 1971 Act introduced the notion of patrials which, put simply, meant that people with close connections to the UK either through birth or descent would be free from all controls (Layton-Henry 1992). Patriality redefined the concept of citizenship by differentiating between citizens of the UK and colonies who were ‘patrial’ and therefore had the right to settle in Britain and non-patrials who did not (Solomos 1989). These provisions gave the government complete control over the immigration of non-patrials and ended the rights of non-white Commonwealth citizens to immigrate and settle in the UK. Despite the implementation of concessionary rules to administer the 1971 Act, automatic entry for wives and children of men already established in the UK was no longer permitted. A consequent ‘beat the ban’ wave of immigration of dependents from Hong Kong occurred, such that between 1971 and 1973, when the Act came into force, dependents comprised upwards of 90 percent of total immigration (Baxter 1988).

The race and immigration debate raged on throughout the 1970s and culminated with Mrs Thatcher’s famous ‘swamping’ statement in 1978 for a ‘World in Action’ programme which contributed towards a decline in the National Front vote in the 1979
general election. The election of Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 witnessed a further stage in the development of immigration policy, which involved a tightening of controls. Yet the supposed corollary of this - a strengthening of race relations policy - did not occur in the years of Conservative government (Solomos 1989, Layton-Henry 1992).

The 1981 British Nationality Act was the cornerstone of immigration policy under the Thatcher regime. It sought to redefine British citizenship. Citizenship of the UK and the Commonwealth under the 1981 Act was divided into three categories: British citizenship, citizenship of the British Dependent Territories, and British Overseas citizenship. The first guaranteed unlimited access to Britain, but was not easily acquired. Broadly speaking, one had to be a paternal to be accorded this status. The remaining categories were forms of citizenship which did not guarantee a right of abode. When applied to Hong Kong citizens, the 1981 Act was significant. Layton-Henry (1992: 191) speculates that the 1981 reforms were implemented because, in the longer term, the government was concerned about the prospect of increasing pressure to immigrate coming from Hong Kong, given that the British lease on most of the territory would run out in 1997.

The national debate that occurred on the 1997 issue, on whether or not British citizenship rights should be conferred to Hong Kong residents, evoked images from earlier debates about immigration, particularly through the attempts by populist Conservative politicians such as Norman Tebbit to use the issue as a means of emphasising their commitment to the values and interests of the white British majority. Both Conservative and Labour politicians have seen the electoral value of taking a hard or at least an ambiguous line on immigration. But it is also clear that the debate about immigration is as much about the protection of British identity from the threat of cultural pluralism as it is about the potential number of immigrants (Solomos 1993).

Although full residential rights in the United Kingdom for all Hong Kong citizens was not granted, provisions were enacted under the the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act of 1990. Despite the implementation of the 1990 Act allowing 50,000 heads of
households to enter the United Kingdom under a points system, the take up remains low. Instead, wealthy Chinese migrants have largely opted to emigrate to North America, in the process transforming the social and cultural fabric of many North American cities (Ong 1999). The reluctance of professionals from Hong Kong to come to Britain together with the lukewarm reception offered by the British authorities to this potential stream of migrants has meant that the ethnic composition of Britain’s Chinese population has remained relatively unchanged for almost two decades. Apart from the arrival of refugees from the Vietnamese war during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and an unknown quantity of undocumented workers from Fujian Province, Chinese people from the New Territories of Hong Kong have continued to be the most dominant ethnic Chinese group in Britain (see table 1.8). Indeed, recent British immigration policy has been central in determining the growth and ethnic diversity of its Chinese population. Compared to the vast and varied contemporary Chinese populations of Australia, Canada and the United States, Britain’s Chinese population would appear motionless.

Ultimately, the overall effect of British immigration legislation on its Chinese population has been quite ambiguous. Unlike Australia, Canada or the United States, British immigration legislation did not specifically target the Chinese. The 1905 Aliens Act, which was the first real attempt to limit the inflow of foreigners by the British government, barely affected the entry of Chinese immigrants to the UK. In any case, Chinese migrants were far more likely to immigrate to North America and Australia. Prior to World War II, Britain’s Chinese community remained small in absolute and relative terms. The most significant piece of legislation that has impinged upon the development of Britain’s Chinese population is the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act. While the 1948 British Nationality Act gave all Commonwealth citizens the right to settle in Britain, the more restrictive 1962 Act laid the foundations for the development of Britain’s post war Chinese population. A consequence of the selective nature of the 1962 legislation was that only Commonwealth citizens with a specific job to come to were allowed into Britain under an employment voucher scheme which replaced the hitherto unrestricted entry for
Commonwealth citizens under the 1948 provision. Thus the Chinese already resident here were in a position to further the immigration chain, which consolidated their presence in the catering trade. The work voucher scheme, and the need to work for a sponsoring employer for a minimum of four years after arrival in the UK, ensured that the embryonic concentration in the catering sector became a permanent one.

Structure of the thesis

In summing up, the aim of this chapter has been to put my research on Chinese people in Britain into context. To address the questions outlined in this introduction the remainder of the study is divided into six chapters. The next chapter (chapter 2) examines the methodology for the research and assesses the suitability of qualitative research methods for the study. I will look at the implications of my role as a British-Chinese person doing this research and introduce the participants in the study. Questions of employment will be addressed in chapter 3. I consider the experiences of my first and second generation informants working in the catering trade. More specifically, the second half of the chapter focuses on how the second generation negotiate their work roles helping out their parents in the catering trade. Further, I will also provide a preliminary account of how my second generation informants have fared in the wider British labour market. In chapter 4, I deconstruct the notion of ‘the Chinese community’ and look into the relevance of referring to ‘the community’ as a singular unified entity which that term implies. By looking at my informants’ attitudes towards Chinatown as a marker of ‘community’, intra-ethnic relations, and the extent of their social networks, an idea of the lived experiences of the Britain-Chinese and how they relate to a unitary conception of ‘community’ will be gleaned. A central theme of the chapter is ‘belonging’ and I will examine the various ways in which group affiliation is constructed. In chapter 5, I investigate the nature of British-Chinese identities. First, the various ways in which
Chinese cultural practices have been appropriated and how this has affected the representation of Chinese people will be examined. Second, I look more closely at how young British-Chinese people formulate their identities. Central to this discussion is the applicability of ideas of 'new ethnicities' to Chinese youth in London. Chapter 6 is an exploratory chapter that considers the topic of gender in the research. I suggest that representations of Chinese men and women are crucial in shaping gendered identities. Furthermore, through an analysis of my informants' attitudes towards endogamous and exogamous relationships, an insight into British-Chinese femininities and masculinities will emerge. Finally, chapter 7 pulls together the core issues in the study, summarizes its main findings and suggests future research agendas for studies of the Chinese in Britain.
Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology which was employed in this research. The qualitative research methods I utilized will be examined along with the reasons why I chose these tools and what was gained from using them. The chapter is divided into four broad sections. First, I will briefly consider the implications of using a qualititative methodology and contemplate the ways in which this research may be considered to be an ethnography. Second, I discuss, in turn, the relevance of using in-depth interviewing, focus groups and participant observation in this study. Third, I talk about my positionality in relation to the research and my informants. Finally, an indication of the social characteristics of my sample will be provided.

Differentiating between qualitative research and ethnography

There appears to be some differentiation between the roles of a qualitative researcher specialising in interviewing and an ethnographer. While there is a distinction between the ways in which these two types of researchers undertake their research, the boundaries between the two are often blurred. For example, Fontana and Frey (1994: 365) note that 'as Lofland points out, the two [in-depth interviewing and participant observation] go hand in hand, and many of the data gathered in participant observation come from informal interviewing in the field.' While Cook and Crang (1995) in their Doing Ethnographies make no explicit statement as to what constitutes 'ethnographic interviewing', they do speak of ethnographic interviews. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), however, differentiate between the way in which ethnographers and survey interviewers ask questions. The main difference is not,
as is sometimes suggested, that one form of interviewing is 'structured' and the other is 'unstructured'. All interviews, like any other kind of social interaction, are structured by both researcher and informant. The important distinction to be made is between standardised and reflexive interviewing. Ethnographers do not decide beforehand the questions they want to ask, though they may enter the interview with a list of issues to be covered. Nor do ethnographers restrict themselves to a single mode of questioning. On different occasions, or at different points in the same interview, the approach may be non-directive or directive, depending on the function that the questioning is intended to serve (112-113).

When applied to my research, my work would be considered not ethnographic in the sense that when interviewing my subjects I have asked them pre-established questions from a set list. Also I have required them to fill out some elementary details about themselves prior to their being interviewed, features of survey research. But it could be judged ethnographic in that the questions have been both of a non-directive and directive nature. So, according to the criteria set by Hammersley and Atkinson, my study, whilst quite ethnographic, falls short of a full-blown ethnographic study. This is an important point to make since many practitioners of the social sciences, especially those who favour quantitative methods, tend to dismiss ethnography as being inappropriate on the grounds that the data and findings it produces are 'subjective', mere idiosyncratic impressions that cannot provide a solid foundation for rigorous scientific analysis.¹

Indeed, qualitative research as a whole has in the past been treated as a relatively minor methodology to be used. Consider the following extract from an early text:

The inspection of nonquantified data may be particularly helpful if it is done periodically throughout a study rather than postponed to the end of the statistical analysis. Frequently a single incident noted by a perceptive observer contains the clue to an understanding of a phenomenon. If the social scientist becomes aware of this implication at a moment when he (sic) can still add to his material or exploit further the data he has already collected, he may considerably enrich the quality of his conclusions (Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook quoted in Silverman 1993: 20, author's emphasis).
In the above extract, the authors refer to ‘nonquantified’ data and speak of statistical analysis, implicitly referring to the monolithic status of quantitative methodology in the social sciences. It was not until the 1970s that social scientists mounted a sustained attack on positivism.

Within geography, Jackson and Smith (1984) paved the way for a reconceptualisation of methodology in social geography. In their work, they reasoned that:

Social geography is approaching an hiatus which demands that its practitioners and students explore the links between the development of theory and empirical research with growing urgency and increasing care. Philosophically, social geographers are being urged to consider a wide range of alternatives to the positivistic assumptions which formerly guided the great majority of geographical research. Theoretical debate frequently appears ungrounded, only tangentially related to the complexities of actual research. Methodologically, too, in the haste to employ a growing range of available techniques and approaches, empirical research has run the risk of being unrelated to an appropriate philosophical context (1984: 1).

However, while ethnographic studies were envisaged by Jackson and Smith to provide a way forward for social geography, geographers have tended to prioritise certain ways of doing ethnographic research. The move toward interdisciplinarity in geography has undoubtedly fostered an increase in empirical qualitative research in geography, but on the whole, participant observation has most often been used in conjunction with other qualitative research methods, most notably interviewing. With the exception of a few distinguished studies (Crang 1994, for example), participant observation has rarely featured as the primary research tool used by geographers. This is despite Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1983) sentiment that:

all social research takes the form of participant observation: it involves participating in the social world, in whatever role, and reflecting on the products of that participation. Irrespective of the method employed, it is not fundamentally different from other forms of practical everyday activity, though of course it is closer in character to some than to others. As participants in the social world we are still able, at least in anticipation or retrospect, to observe our activities ‘from the outside’ as objects in the world (16-17).

Up until this stage, the terms ethnography and participant observation have been used interchangeably. Although the two are connected, there are subtleties in meaning between these research methods. Indeed, definition of the term ethnography has been subject to controversy (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In effect, ethnography relies substantially or partly on participant observation and, for some it refers to a philosophical paradigm to which one makes a total commitment, while for others it designates a method that one uses as and when appropriate. The use of ethnography in my study lies somewhere near the latter extreme and will be discussed in greater detail below. The epistemological concerns expressed about methodology in this section stem from a personal responsibility towards reflexivity and positionality. I will now turn my attention to the role of particular research methods in the study.

**Interviewing**

A series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews form the core of this study. This interview technique has been chosen primarily because it offers greater breadth than more structured interviewing. In a structured interview setting there is very little flexibility in the way questions are asked or answered. This would be detrimental to my study since, in the main, it seeks a diversity of experiences. This approach is allied to a research programme involving tape-recorded interviews with 21 key second generation respondents and ten of their parents (the social dimensions of this sample are discussed below), whose conversations were transcribed and coded for later analysis. Where it was possible the interviews were conducted at the homes of my informants. The interviews with the parents of my second generation informants, however, often took place while they were at work in the catering trade and were mostly conducted in Cantonese, as some of the parents did not speak fluent English.

I interviewed all the informants around the themes of labour markets, ‘the Chinese community’ and British-Chinese identities, but since the study was primarily
concerned with the lived realities of the second generation, the questions were devised with them in mind (see appendix for a list of questions). The aim of interviewing the parents was not only gain an insight into the experiences of the first generation but also get an idea of the parent culture. Following the methodological stance adopted by Cook and Crang (1995: 36) my role as a researcher in the interview context was not intended to be that of the ‘detached scientific observer’ who could extract relatively ‘unbiased data’ from the participants. Rather, the stress was on a level of intersubjective understanding where it was the intention that the interviewees felt comfortable in expressing their views on the topics to be researched.

Background reading enabled me to set a clear agenda of the topics to be considered. This served to ensure that I covered the main points in each interview, that there was some uniformity across them, and that my respondents were, to a certain extent, allowed to raise their own issues for discussion and potential inclusion in my continually modified checklist of questions (Burgess 1992). Such a strategy, it has been argued, is vital to life history work where a broad knowledge of events and institutional structures which are likely to have impacted on a person’s lifecourse can be an advantage, a situation enabled particularly if the interviewer has to a certain extent also lived through these (Miles and Crush 1993). But, because of the ways in which the initial interviews were situated, they only offered a limited insight into the worlds of interviewees. More intense and rigorous research methods were thus required to complement the initial interviews.

Once the first round of interviews was conducted, interviewees were asked if they wanted to participate further in the research. Initially, I wanted to set up a series of multiple interviews with my second generation informants so that, after repeated visits over a period of time, an informal interview context could develop. However, in practice this was not entirely feasible since a few of the informants, for various reasons, were unable to commit themselves further to the fieldwork. As a result, it was almost impossible to accommodate an equivalence of viewpoints from my research subjects. Inevitably, the accounts of some individuals may have been prioritised over other interviewees who remained more distant and less known. While
this approach obviously limits knowledge, given the intended depth of the study, such discrepancies were perhaps to be expected. In defence of this approach, all of the data generated from the preliminary interviews were useful in that they were the primary source of evidence and I was able to scrutinise these accounts in the light of further evidence and conflicting viewpoints.

For those individuals who were willing to provide less restricted access to their everyday lives, their insights were indispensable to understanding some of the complex issues of this study. As Cook and Crang (1995: 46) assert:

interactions which are much more like informal conversations can usually be developed in which both parties feel more able both to reveal their often undecided, ambiguous, and contradictory feelings about the matter in hand and to challenge each other about these in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. And, it is this ‘atmosphere’ which is the most valuable product of this approach to interviewing.

On top of the preliminary semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were staged, the informal conversations and unstructured interviews that took place facilitated, to some extent, synergy in the research process. To this end, it became possible to generate data that was guided by the informants themselves. For example, it was through prolonged contact with the men in the study that issues of Chinese masculinity came to light that I had not previously considered in the planning of this project.

A flexible research strategy such as this was beneficial for the study, in particular for the sections that focused on the formation of identities. With identity being such a fluid and dynamic entity it would have been unreasonable to expect my respondents, unless highly rehearsed, to know what, why, and how their identities are formed. The different ways in which interviews and informal conversations were used during the period of fieldwork allowed the time and opportunity for my informants and me to voice concerns in the perplexing field of identity formation. Through dialogue with my interviewees over a number of visits, sufficient knowledge and trust was developed for both parties to speculate on, and to discuss, what processes and structures underpin issues of identity formation.
Thus, it was always my intention to develop a rapport with the participants in the study that deviated from the 'ideal' of being 'a cool, distant and rational interviewer.' Due to the relatively detailed nature of my research, adopting such an approach was paramount. Anne Oakley (1981) has argued that researchers should not only admit that they contribute their own ideas and feelings into routine conversations, but that they are morally obliged to do so as part of a necessary dismantling of the traditionally hierarchical and exploitative research encounter. For these reasons, researchers who are concerned with such ethical and moral issues in their work may feel more at ease interviewing relatively few people on a number of different occasions in order to try to develop such relationships (Cook and Crang 1995). Taking this into account, together with the way in which I was positioned in relation to my informants (see below), I felt obliged to incorporate the research subjects into the study as well as I could. It was suggested at an early stage in the research that conducting focus groups would be a good way of accommodating my concerns and to corroborate the material from the initial interviews. I will now discuss how I integrated focus groups into the methodology.

Focus groups

Supplementing the open-ended interviews in the study were some group interviews or focus groups. Focus groups are becoming increasingly attractive as a qualitative research method for social scientists and geographers (Burgess et al. 1988a and b, Goss and Leinbach 1996, for example). However, due to their relatively recent introduction into the discipline, there exists little consensus on how to do focus groups 'properly'. Rather, the choice of method on how to do focus groups has been governed by the objectives of the research (Jackson and Holbrook 1996). The purpose of this section to establish some guidelines on how I incorporated focus groups into the study.

A chief argument for the inclusion of focus groups in the current study is that they act as a medium through which participants become actively involved in the research process. As Goss and Leinbach (1996: 115-116) succinctly put it:
Focus groups are... potentially generative of historical-hermeneutic and critical-emancipatory forms of knowledge, developed within the research process by and for its subjects, as opposed to the empirical-analytical form of knowledge that is appropriated from those subjects and developed for the instrumental purposes of the researcher and institutional social science.

It will be demonstrated that group interviews assume many different forms and deserve consideration because they can provide another level of data gathering or a perspective on the research problem not available through individual interviews (Fontana and Frey 1994). Goss and Leinbach (1996: 115) argue that 'group discussion itself provides valuable insight into social relations and that the “stories” produced in the collaborative performance of a focus group better reflect the social nature of knowledge than a summation of individual narratives extracted in interviews.' The focus groups were set-up to follow on from the one-to-one interviews that were completed. Participants for the focus groups were selected from the core sample of twenty-one second generation informants and were encouraged to bring along their friends (see table 2.1). With the exception of group 2, the groups were mainly comprised of my interviewees.

Table 2.1: Participants in the focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(held at Karch's flat)</td>
<td>(held at Tony's student lodgings)</td>
<td>(held at Steve's flat)</td>
<td>(held at Trung's house)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karch*</td>
<td>Jason*</td>
<td>Steve*</td>
<td>Billy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kue</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Sue*</td>
<td>Trung*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai*</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Kit*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>Khoung*</td>
<td>Kwok*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes core sample interviewee

Interestingly, a number of the informants that I interviewed expressed a wish to participate in focus groups. As one respondent who relished the prospect of taking
part in a discussion group commented "everyone’s opinions can bounce off one another". Goss and Leinbach (1996: 116-117) point out that:

we believe that the main advantage of focus group discussions is that both the researcher and the research subjects may simultaneously obtain insights and understanding of particular social situations during the process of research.

Practitioners of focus groups recognise the social, synergistic and heuristic effects of focus groups in doing research (Goss and Leinbach 1996, Cook and Crang 1995, for example). Goss and Leinbach (1996) also report that focus groups are potentially empowering for the participants. Citing Bulmer they say that:

A small group of individuals, brought together as a discussion or resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample. Such a group, discussing collectively their sphere of life and probing into it as they meet one another’s disagreements, will do more to lift the veils covering the sphere of life than any device I know of (1996: 115).

In setting up the focus groups I encountered a few problems. Due to the extent of scattered Chinese settlement in London, it was practical to hold once-only focus groups. Arranging the focus groups proved to be very time consuming as I not only had to inform participants beforehand, but also arrange suitable times and places where everyone could meet. Burgess et al (1988a and b) have argued convincingly for the use of in-depth small groups, but with the limited time I had to undertake the fieldwork only four once-only group discussions were conducted, all of which were tape-recorded. Systematically transcribing the focus groups verbatim, however, was problematic as I had to contend with the variable sound conditions of the setting, and at times it was difficult to distinguish between the different, and sometimes competing, voices of the participants. Due to these largely unforeseen circumstances, I ended up only partly transcribing the group discussions.

In setting up the focus groups, I also had to consider many scenarios that may have affected the quality of the data that was collected. I had to take into consideration variables such as the ideal group size, the social composition of groups and whether or
not I should have recruited groups comprised of strangers or people who are familiar with one another. On the latter point, it is often thought that recruiting already-existing groups is best avoided since there may be personal dynamics at work that the researcher will not be aware of which can have a significant bearing on what is said and who says it (Cook and Crang 1995). On the other hand, Holbrook and Jackson (1996) in their focus group research on shopping and identity advocated the use of 'natural' groups, where participants in their group discussions all knew one another.

There were a number of problems which arose when I had to decide who to select and how to arrange the participants for the focus groups. Ultimately, I chose to organise three groups (groups 1, 2 and 4) who were part of a larger social network and one group (group 3) comprised of individuals that were not all acquainted with one another. All of the groups consisted of second generation informants and in terms of the ratio of men to women, there was gender imbalance in that men predominated. The size of each group varied from four to six participants. Group size was important in affecting the range and depth of discussion. Accounts vary as to what constitutes the ideal group size, but around eight to ten group members are frequently cited. However, successful focus groups have been conducted with as few as three participants, which includes the researcher (Longhurst 1996). I deliberately wanted smaller groups so that they could be lively enough to prevent people from being intimidated and not speaking.

Group dynamics undoubtedly shaped the quality and quantity of the data received. Certain individuals were more dominant during the focus groups than others, and my role as a moderator was to encourage the frank and fluent discussion of the topics in question, and to facilitate a free exchange of ideas. In achieving this, as with setting up the personal interviews, a certain amount of pre-planning was required. As a prop for discussion, groups 2, 3 and 4 were asked to watch a short film that had been broadcast on a national television network, entitled Canto Fever, which focused on the lives of three British-Chinese students in Manchester. Further, a list of topics to be discussed was drawn up and distributed to potential participants. This was achieved in two ways. Through a kind of network approach, I encouraged some of my
core informants to circulate them to their friends, while others were sent a copy of a list of the issues to be considered. The themes that were developed for discussion in the focus groups were as follows: representation of Chinese people in mainstream British society; whether or not we belong to a ‘Chinese community’; how ‘English/British’ are we?; how ‘Chinese’ are we?; the influence of Hong Kong popular culture on identity formation; inter-ethnic relationships; growing up in the catering trade.

Triangulating the interviews and the focus groups were a series of participant observation studies at various sites that I felt to be relevant to ‘the Chinese community’. As well as adding an extra dimension to the research, I wanted to include some participant observation studies to give a sense of the day-to-day experiences of British-Chinese people. In this regard, Claire Alexander’s (1996: 20) feelings mirror mine for the inclusion of participant observation in the research, ‘It was, and remains, my feeling that there is missing from the majority of work on ethnic groups in Britain any sense of the subjects as ‘real’ people, in all their complexity of experience and attitudes.’

**Participant observation**

The ‘subjective’ claims attributed to ethnography by quantitative social scientists have already been discussed briefly, but it may be argued that it is this very subjectivity that gives ethnography its reliability (Cook and Crang 1995). I did not expect to be told the absolute ‘truth’ by my respondents, rather my aim was to weave together individual accounts to produce a set of *inter-subjective truths*, to understand why so many versions of events are produced and recited. It is the ways in which people make sense of the events around them, and render these ‘true’ in their own terms, that is most revealing about how their and our lives are embroiled in larger social, cultural, economic and political processes. As Cook and Crang assert, ‘rather than being a source of weakness, the always already positioned and intersubjective
nature of ethnography can be seen as a strength out of which more rigorous understandings can be built' (1995: 12). The chief purpose of including participant observation in the research was akin to the thinking behind the methodology of Back's (1996) work, which was:

to try to get an appreciation of the way young people articulated their notions of identity and ethnicity, but also the way identity was acted out within the context of . . . interactions. . . I developed a close appreciation of both what young people said with regard to race, ethnicity and racism but also what they did in the context of interactions with peers (1996: 22).

The participant observation was carried out at a number of settings. These included: two Chinese language schools - one located in Soho, central London and the other in north-east London - the Chinese community centre in Soho, various Chinese discos held within London, and a number of Chinese catering establishments at which I worked. Where it was possible, attendance at each site followed a routinised schedule. I initially enrolled to study Chinese at a Chinese community institution in Soho during September 1996, which took place every Sunday. At this Chinese language school, which I attended for a whole year, I was in a class learning Cantonese with mature students of varying ability. In the following year, September 1997, I went to learn Chinese at a Chinese community centre in north-east London where I was placed in a class of mainly juniors from eight to fourteen. At this school in particular I became disillusioned with the way in which certain cultural values were transmitted and I decided to leave after three months.

My involvement in the Chinese community centre stemmed from my association with another community institution, the British-Chinese Artists Association (BCAA). I had became acquainted with the project co-ordinator of the BCAA who suggested that I undertake a period of fieldwork at the Chinese community centre. During the first year of fieldwork, once Chinese school had finished, for the remainder of the Sunday afternoon I would go to the community centre to make observations. At the community centre I was unofficially doing voluntary work which lasted two months.
As well as doing participant observation at these different Chinese community organisations, I sporadically went to Chinese discos, where I was often accompanied by some of the informants in this research. In addition, I also held part-time jobs at various Chinese catering establishments where I worked at the weekends (see chapter 3, box 3.1). It is noteworthy to add that observing the subjects in these environments was part of my everyday life. My own personal circumstances played a role in the kinds of access and negotiations that took place in these spaces. Through a prolonged engagement with these spaces, I was able to refine my understandings of how these settings influence the ways in which notions of Chinese employment, ‘community’ and British-Chinese identity are constructed. Significantly, my participation in these settings with other individuals enabled me to gain important insights into the internal differentiations that exist within the entity of ‘the Chinese community’, a term which the study examines in some depth (see Chapter 4).

During the course of research it transpired that some of the settings that I studied were not compatible with the aims of the project. Thus, in the second Chinese school where I was a student, I opted out after three months because it was impossible for me to interact effectively with my classmates, most of whom were more than ten years younger than I was. At the Chinese community centre, I became frustrated with the irregularity of attendance by the young Chinese people who went there. It became difficult to build up a rapport with the Chinese youth who did go to the centre. In addition, the activities and services provided by the centre were not solely for young people. For the current study, I felt that it would be more productive to research settings frequented by second generation Chinese people.

Prior to starting this research I had completed an undergraduate dissertation on ‘The Geography of Chinese Gangs in London.’ This study was concerned mainly with Chinese masculinities and during my undergraduate years I became aware of how these Chinese discos tended to be dominated by the presence of young men. At the time, my face was identifiable amongst regulars within this Chinese social scene, and I felt at ease initiating conversations with many of these individuals. Therefore, for those who interacted in this scene habitually it was possible to forge links with many individuals.
This was beneficial, in that I had selective access to appropriate groups of people who were concerned with and/or involved in the politics of my research. In many ways, this enabled me to encourage those who I considered to have interesting things to say to participate in the research. Indeed, it was through some of the pre-existing contacts that I had forged that some of the informants into the current study were drawn. In this way the study adopted a theoretical sampling approach, as outlined by Cook and Crang:

[I]t is not the sheer number, 'typicality' or 'representativeness' of people approached which matters, but the quality and positionality of the information that they can offer (1995: 11, authors' emphasis).

The nature of the research dictated that the participant observation was largely situated within a youth context. In choosing to include participant observation in the research, it was important that I clarified what I looking for in the field. However, most of the ethnographic texts I consulted gave me little sense of what was actually observed. The emphasis seems to be placed on what was said. Speech is obviously important, but it is important to recognise that a great deal of what is important to observe is unspoken (Whyte 1984). With this in mind, my record consisted of a set of observational notes from each setting. At the Chinese school, I initially recorded the people who were in my class, who was present every week, who sat where, with whom, the kinds of social interactions that took place and the subject matters broached. As the research progressed, however, it dawned upon me that I was making notes on phenomena that were not appropriate to the objectives of the research. I switched my attention to making notes on the kinds of information that were transmitted to the class by the teachers. The reason for doing this was that I was better able to understand how notions of 'community' and 'nation' were conveyed and I was able to discuss with some of my classmates how they understood these ideas. However, the phenomena that I recorded at the Chinese discos differed from the notes I took at the Chinese language school. Here, a note of common features such
as: age, dress code, gender, language spoken (and by whom) and how many Chinese people present were made. Additionally, I looked for the styles of music that were being played, the different ‘types’ of Chinese people present, and the degree of acknowledgment or animosity between various groups.

There are a number of reasons why I chose the settings mentioned above. First, I wanted to explore the various notions of ‘community’ espoused in these settings. Second, they were all spheres in which I had a personal involvement, albeit some more than others. Third, as will be explained later, the spaces that were selected had their own particular characteristics, all of which served ‘the Chinese community’ in distinct ways. Fourth, related to the latter point, the decision to research all the sites mentioned above was to seek out viewpoints from additional, differently positioned groups. My argument for this approach was that, as outlined in the introduction, most of the previous work on the Chinese in Britain had in some form or another used the catering trade as a starting point for interpretation. Adopting a mixed-methodology is consistent with the aims of the current project. While the catering trade figures in my research (especially chapter 3), the emphasis was for this research to move beyond the takeaway counter. Thus, although having only a marginal role, the participant observation was an integral part of my research.

My role as a researcher in each setting varied in involvement. There are a number of issues to be highlighted. Central to this study is how I was perceived by the participants in the research. As Bhatti (1999: 11) noted in her ethnographic study of Asian children ‘it is important for researchers to be aware of the ways in which their personal attributes might affect the response of those being studied.’ I have already discussed above how my role as a participant observer in each setting differed. Of the four modes through which observers may gather data, I occupied what I considered to be a ‘participant-as-observer’ and ‘observer-as-participant’ position (Adler and Adler, 1994: 379). This gave me the necessary balance between involvement with detachment, familiarity with strangeness and closeness with distance. The latter point

"I was able to interview two of my classmates from the first Chinese language school that I attended for the research. In addition, one of the other informants started attending the Chinese school after I had informed her that I was learning Chinese."
is an important one, since I did not want to take the lead of Robert Johnson, a black sociologist who studied the black community of Elmira, New York. In his terms he felt that, 'I began as a non-participating observer and ended up as a non-observing participant' (from Whyte, 1984: 28-29). In doing the participant observation, separating my personal and professional domains sometimes proved problematic. At times, it was difficult to lose the attachment which helped to preserve 'objectivity'. Indeed, the data presented in this study were, in many ways, intimately connected to how I was perceived by my informants. The research worked on different levels simultaneously and was affected by my age, sex, my 'Chineseness', as well as more intangible aspects, such as my behaviour around different people. In short, my positionality was significant in determining the outcome of this study. It is to this issue that I now switch my attention.

On being a male British-Chinese researcher

Much debate has revolved around the epistemological and methodological implications of occupying an 'insider' or 'outsider' position as a researcher (Merton, 1972). My concern here is with the ways in which knowledge is produced. Power is inescapably bound up with the production of knowledge and representation. Therefore, the production of ethnographic knowledge is an inherently political act. In the past, the classic texts of ethnography have often inscribed a radical distinction between the author and the other (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1995). Accompanying the paradigmatic changes over the previous two decades in the social sciences has been an increasing awareness of how researchers may shape research encounters. Thus, Jackson (1985: 170) claims that:

While such an emphasis has frequently been justified on the grounds of providing a sympathetic interpretation of apparently alien lifestyles and 'foreign' cultures, this liberal interpretation of the social scientist's role is now increasingly under attack. The inadvertent role of the academic in perpetuating
the ideologies which contribute to the oppression of minority groups has now been repeatedly
demonstrated such that ethnographers can no longer hide behind the shield of their benign intentions.

While studies of various youth cultures have benefitted from the qualitative revolution
that has occurred in certain branches of the social sciences (Back 1996, for example),
research on the Chinese in Britain that attempt to capture the researcher as an equally
positioned, interconnected and integral part of the social and cultural relations under
study are rare. A conscious endeavouer of mine since the inception of the research was
to lose the masculine scientific stance that emphasized the cool, calm and collected
demeanour of the detached fieldworker. However, I was also aware of how by
asserting this right to cultural and racial insiderism, my study would be perceived as an
‘insider’s’ account. I most certainly did not want to be conceptualised in this way,
but, my position as a Chinese person doing research on the Chinese in Britain
invariably promoted this stance. Les Back (1996) has critiqued this standpoint:

I have become increasingly suspicious of those - particularly in discussions of working-class culture -
who claim ‘insider status’ through invoking a kind of radical credentialism. It seems to me that such
rhetorical moves are little more than micro-political gestures determined by the politics of the academy.
More disturbingly, invoking insider status can result in intellectuals and ethnographers claiming a
privileged right to speak for ‘the people’. This merely dresses bourgeois ethnographic authority in the
new clothes of ersatz ‘radicalism’.

Reading Back’s words prompted me to think reflexively on my relationships to the
participants in the study at an early stage of the research. Sharing a common
background with the research subjects presented dilemmas that are often not
considered. Ultimately, the tension that underlay my relations to my informants
remains largely unexplored. Despite occupying what appears to be an ‘insider’
position, there are a number of aspects to my position as a British-Chinese researcher
doing research on the Chinese in Britain and how this may have affected the gathering
of material that need to be discussed. Entangled with this apprehension about
reflexivity is the increased awareness of how racial and ethnic differences shape the
relationships between the researcher and researched (Back 1996, Alexander 1996).
This has occurred in response to 'black' analysts' concerns that issues of 'race' have been neglected by white researchers and that their findings may not apply to ethnic minority groups, or may misrepresent them. In the case of white people interviewing black people, the difference in 'race' between interviewer and respondent is usually perceived in phenotypical terms, which as well as including skin colour, embraces notable differences in power and privilege between the two groups. One of the key difficulties of the literature on research involving racial and ethnic difference is that racialised categories applied to the researcher and the researched are conceptualised in terms that are too rigid and homogenous. 'Black' juxtaposed to 'white' does not easily accommodate individuals who share a mixed cultural heritage or common class background and suggests too unitary an experience of ethnic minority status. As Parker and Song (1995: 243) point out:

surprisingly little attention has been given to how the cultural identities of researchers may shape the research situations of ethnic minority researchers interviewing persons of the same or partially shared racial and/or ethnic background. . . Dichotomised rubrics such as 'black/white' or 'insider/outsider' are inadequate to capture the complex and multi faceted experiences of some researchers, such as ourselves, who find themselves neither total 'insiders' nor 'outsiders' in relation to the individuals they interview (emphasis added, see also Chung 1990).

While broadly in agreement with Parker and Song, what advantages and/or difficulties are there for researchers who share some racial/ethnic commonality with their respondents? During the research, I became acutely aware of where I was positioned in relation to the participants in the study. That I shared important characteristics with my informants was unquestionable. Similar to myself the majority of informants had grown up in isolation from other Chinese people, and in many ways felt obliged to help out parents in the catering trade. At the same time, on occasions,

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iii An interesting example is provided for the Chinese diaspora by Betty Lee Sung, who is renowned for her work on the Chinese in the United States. In a book review of Kay Anderson's (1991) *Vancouver's Chinatown*, Sung openly disagreed with the principal tenet of Anderson's work, which had hitherto been generally well received by geographers who acknowledged her social constructionist approach to 'race'. Sung (1993: 438) argued that 'the propensity to recreate familiar surroundings and retain the Chinese culture are the strongest factors in the creation of Chinatowns.' Sung's viewpoint stands in marked contrast to Anderson's theory that Chinatown is (in part) a social construction of white European society.
my sense of difference was keenly felt, especially in the company of individuals whose command of Chinese was better than mine (Ang, 1994). This occurred frequently at the Chinese takeaways and restaurants where I worked during the research. Typically, the kitchen staff or the families that I worked for, who usually did not speak much English, would either help or correct my pronunciation of various Chinese terms and phrases. Such cultural practices served to highlight my difference as being more 'westernised'.

It is important to stress that my personal history growing up, 'helping out' parents in the catering trade with Chinese friends from similar backgrounds, did play a role in providing access to certain settings and informants. Although all the informants knew that I was conducting research, my presence at a host of settings where young British-Chinese people would meet socially was rarely interrogated. My informants were largely cooperative and allowed me to go to places where I witnessed a range of attitudes and practices. In this respect, my command of spoken Cantonese was useful in that I was able to interview the parents of some of my informants who did not speak fluent English.

Both David Parker and Miri Song in their studies of young Chinese people in Britain expressed problems of access to young Chinese people. Song (1997b: 696) acknowledged 'the difficulty in finding Chinese young people and parents who would agree to the long and personal interviews which were required.' In addition to the problems of access experienced by Song, Parker (1993: 93) reported the 'lack of organised spaces for meeting young Chinese people and building up an extended rapport with a select group.' This was less of a hindrance in the current study. I had access to informants through pre-existing networks of contacts. Prior to beginning this study my social network of Chinese people extended beyond immediate family and friends. During the period of research these friendships were, in some ways, consolidated and new ties were established with other Chinese individuals. However, the fact that all the participants in the study knew that I was undertaking investigative research may have affected their behaviours towards the researcher. As Minh-Ha (1997: 418) explains:
the moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out.

Another social dimension to consider is that of ethnic origin. The heterogeneity of the Chinese population in London made it impossible to put together a sample that was representative of all the ethnic Chinese groups. Since the research is concerned with the everyday realities of British-Chinese youth, the emphasis of the current study is on individuals who have established themselves and settled in Britain. All of the second generation informants had spent most of their lives in Britain and most often stated ancestral homelands in China, Hong Kong or Vietnam.

A further important social feature to be considered in my research is that of gender. At the outset of the research, I was aware that there were epistemological issues associated with the gender relations between the researcher and the researched, methodological concerns raised by feminists. A preliminary effort to deal with gender difference in the study was attempted by gathering a sample that was equally representative of both sexes. However, as the research progressed it became clear that in doing research on young Chinese people, a balance had to be struck between inquiry and reflexivity. Gender dynamics structured my research encounters with the young Chinese women in the study. It was unreasonable to expect all the young women to agree to repeat one-on-one interviews and for me to participate in their everyday lives. In addition, the women that I spoke to were, at times, not willing to talk about aspects of their personal lives. The kinds of access I was able to negotiate between Chinese young men and women varied. For instance, while the men readily disclosed their views on inter-racial relationships, the women were less forthcoming (see chapter 6). The prevalent gender inequalities, however, were not necessarily a barrier to the research. I had known some of the women I interviewed prior to the research and in some cases this facilitated an open dialogue. In contrast, the men were more willing to provide less restricted access to their everyday lives. Characteristically, I was more accepted amongst the men and there were less restrictions governing my behaviour.
towards the male research subjects, which occurred in large part through routine facets of male bonding. For these reasons the research may have privileged the accounts of young Chinese men.

In the remainder of the chapter I will introduce the main participants in the study. The point of this exercise is to provide an account of how I gained access to the informants and to enable the reader to get a brief insight into the lives of the respondents.

The informants (snapshot profile, May 1997)

* denotes that I interviewed one of the parents of these respondents.

Andy is 29 and held the position of Development Co-ordinator at the British Chinese Arts Association. It was at one of the arts events organised by Andy that I met him. His formative years were spent in Shropshire against the backdrop of the catering trade. Although he moved to London in his early twenties, his two elder sisters remained back in his home town. Having arrived in London, he lived in Chinatown for four years and worked for a variety of Chinese business owners before ending up in his current position, an organisation which he helped set up.

Ann* is 22 and lives in a suburban part of west London. She was born in Britain and her parents are from the New Territories of Hong Kong. I became acquainted with Ann through Jason and was initially interested in approaching her to become an informant because, at the time, she was involved in a relationship with a Caucasian male. Ann could be considered to be one of the ‘lucky ones’ in that even though her parents had their own Chinese restaurant, she and her brother did not have to help out regularly. On the occasions that I met Ann - usually at Chinese discos - the ‘Hatfield Bunch’, an informal group of British-Chinese young Chinese people, were in attendance too.
Catherine* is 23 and was born here. Her mother was born in Malaysia and her father is from Hong Kong. She had aspirations to be a fashion designer and having completed her final year on a BA in fashion design at university in Kent was hopeful of accomplishing her goal. Catherine has had some involvement with the catering trade, which began when she was fifteen. She would work periodically at the weekends for her father, who has in the past owned or part owned catering businesses in Hertfordshire, Essex and now in a London suburb adjacent to Essex. It was through studying for ‘A’ levels at college that I got to know Catherine.

Fay* is 22 and was born in Britain. It was through Kwok that I got to meet Fay, who at one stage was at the same college in Essex as Kwok. She was living in a relatively rural area in Essex, where her parents owned a fish and chip shop. Like many of the others, she was expected to help out at the weekends. At the time I interviewed her she was studying at a university in north London for an accounts degree.

Ivy* is 22 and was born here. I met Ivy through Puncho who knew her from a tour they were on that went to Hong Kong and China organised by a Chinese community organisation. She recently obtained a first class Honours degree in Anatomy from Liverpool and during the period of fieldwork she spent a year in China taking an acupuncture course and learning Mandarin. She spent her early years growing up in a south-west London suburb.

Jason* is 23 and was born in Britain. I got to meet Jason through Sue’s elder brother who was in many ways a fringe member of the ‘Hatfield Bunch’. Growing up in Ealing, west London, Jason told me that he spent most of his time with English friends. Going to university, however, changed that and he became an integral part of the ‘Hatfield bunch’ - a large social network of British-Chinese students, the core members of which attended the University of Hertfordshire at Hatfield. At times when I was invited along to social get-togethers of the group, there would be as many as twenty people present. He was in the process of finishing his degree course.
Karch* is 24. Born in Hong Kong, hailing from a notorious estate in South London, Karch has immersed himself in black musical forms, especially hip-hop. His musical interests, which as well as earning him regular work as a DJ at Chinese disco events have resulted in him forging many inter-ethnic friendships. It was at Chinese discos that my association with Karch began five years ago. At the time of the fieldwork, he was taking a year out from a sound engineering course and working at a travel agents in Chinatown and as a part time delivery driver for a Chinese takeaway.

Khuong is 25 and was born in Vietnam and arrived in Britain in the early 1980s. Initially he lived in a housing estate near Ashford, Kent, which was not a pleasant experience. His parents then bought a catering business in Canterbury in which Khuong, as the eldest son, felt obliged to work. He remembers having to come from university at the weekends to help out. He has now left the takeaway in Kent and was working as a publishing assistant, living in Central London. It was through Steve that I met Khoung, who knew him from their college days together in Kent.

King* is 24 and was born here. He left Britain for Hong Kong during 1995 and was working as a graphic designer. King grew up in Croydon, occasionally helping out in the family restaurant, a duty he shared with his two elder brothers. In fact, it was through my association with his one of his elder brothers that I got to know King. Amongst the informants, he was one of a few who remained generally upbeat about their experiences in the catering trade and spoke wholeheartedly about working in the family restaurant. However, at the time of the fieldwork, he had no plans to return to England in the foreseeable future.

Kit is 21 and was born in Harlow, Essex. I got to know Kit through Kwok who knew her because he was part of their social network. She told me that during her youth she spent a lot of time moving around. After living in various parts of London her parents eventually settled in a North London suburb. She lives in the living quarters above the
fish and chip shop which her parents own and was still expected to help out at the weekends, which she often lamented. She was about to finish a degree in advertising from a London university and was contemplating a move to Hong Kong in search of work.

Kwok is 23. Born in Vietnam, Kwok’s ancestral roots are in Southern China, a village near the city of Guangzhou. Having arrived in Britain in the early 1980s, he has spent almost all of his time living in a large town in Essex. Despite the distance, since his mid-teens he has regularly travelled to London to visit and entertain his Chinese friends. He was studying at Middlesex university. I was introduced to Kwok by mutual friends.

Nick* is 24 and it was through him that I got to meet Jason. They know each other very well. Prior to the research I had known Nick for three years and, largely through playing football, we had managed to keep in touch. During the period of fieldwork, Nick was helping out his mother full-time in the family take-away in a west London suburb and studying for a computer degree at Hatfield.

Puncho is 23 and was unemployed. He was up until recently helping out in the family takeaway business which his family have held for the past twenty or so years in the same location on the London/Essex border. Of all the informants, Puncho was one of the most resolute in advocating that in some ways he was not ‘Chinese’. Indeed, his peer group consisted of individuals from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. It was through mutual white English friends at college in Essex that I got to know Puncho better.

Sai is 25, born in London and was training to be an accountant with a well-known city-based firm. He graduated from QMW in 1994 and, despite this connection, it was through Trung that I was introduced to Sai. He was living at home in Streatham, south London and had aspirations to emigrate to Hong Kong, where his girlfriend was living.
I was informed by Sai that he had helped out his parents in the takeaway from a young age. The impression that Sai gave me was that he was very interested to maintain his sense of Chinese cultural identity and in my company strived to do so.

**Sau Wah** is 22, was born here and lives in Kingston, Surrey, with her younger sister and mother. She was in the process of completing a business studies degree at a university in Central London and it was through Ivy that I met Sau Wah. One of her main concerns was trying to strike a balance between the Chinese and western cultures. This was further impressed on her by a recent visit to Hong Kong, which she openly admitted to not enjoying. From what she told me, she was committed to making Britain her ‘home’.

**Steve** is 26, was born in Scotland and went back to Hong Kong to live until he was 12. He subsequently came back to Britain and developed an interest in breakdancing and hip-hop music. His parents run a catering business in Kent and it was Steve’s desire to leave the takeaway which resulted in him moving up to west London. I met Steve through his elder sister whom I met through mutual friends. With the exception of Khoung, who Steve had known for a long time, Steve did not appear to be concerned with socialising in Chinese friendship groups.

**Sue** is 22 and was born in Hong Kong, she arrived in Britain at the age of one when her family decided to leave Hong Kong. Her family has a takeaway in Orpington, Kent, where Sue regularly helped out from the age of thirteen. I initially met Sue through her cousin King. It was through Sue’s elder brother that I was introduced to Jason who was part of the ‘Hatfield Bunch’. Sue was one of the most vocal in airing her views about how the catering trade had affected her sense of self. She was studying for an Art and Philosophy degree at a university in north London and had plans to go to Hong Kong to live on a trial basis.
Trung is 24, was born in Vietnam and could be considered to be an anomaly in the research in that he was not ethnically Chinese. I met Trung through mutual friends. At times he would pointedly let me know that he was 'pure Vietnamese' from the south of the country, a rarity in Britain. Despite this, he held many links to the 'Chinese community'. Trung's family when they arrived in Britain lived in Cambridge. After a while, they decided to move to Dulwich, south London, where the family home has been for the past decade or so. Trung, however, left home at seventeen to work in the catering trade and has lived in a variety of locations in the British Isles. He was in the final year of an accounting course at a north London university.

Wai is 25. Having completing a Master's course at one of the prestigious London colleges, Wei Ming was working with a firm of computer consultants in West London. It was at the first Chinese school I attended that I met Wei Ming. Even though we both attended the Chinese school he made it clear that his association with the 'Chinese community' was tenuous, claiming that he knew very few Chinese people apart from his family. From what he told me, during his spare time he would help out in his parents' Chinese grocery shop in south London.

Will is 26, was born here and has lived in East London all his life. His brother now owns the family takeaway in Stratford, where Will began 'helping out' when he was nine. He has had many spells working in the catering trade for his family and for other Chinese employers. Although he has a wide network of Chinese friends which stretch back a long time, at the time of the fieldwork he was working as a publishing manager for a firm specialising in producing magazines for an African, Caribbean and Asian readership.

Yin is 25 and was born in Britain. Her parents once owned a takeaway in a popular south coast town where Yin worked until she was eighteen. At eighteen, she left to study in London and has lived there since. Although Yin told me that during her time

"Robinson (1993) claims that of the Vietnamese people resettled in Britain, three-quarters were ethnic
in her home town she was intimately involved with the small Chinese contingent there, she was less involved with Chinese collectivities in London. I got to know her through Sue’s cousin, who Yin once dated. At the time of the fieldwork, she was working for a medical research company.

Summary

In summary, the methodology for the core of my study involved a qualitative research methodology and adopted a mixed-methods approach. A series of open-ended depth interviews with a select group of individuals formed the basis of the study. Participant observation supported these interviews and was used to validate the interview data. Focus groups were conducted to triangulate these research tools. It is important to note that the research was not representative of all the Chinese in Britain. The sample chosen for my study inevitably prioritised certain groups of ethnic Chinese people due to time constraints. This limitation, together with those of limited resources and the intensity of the fieldwork, meant that the study remained small-scale and sharply focused.

A note on using the quotes from the interviews

Whenever a Cantonese word appears in an interview extract, I have highlighted the word(s) in italics and an English translation is provided in brackets immediately following the word. For example lee ho ma? [how are you?].

... denotes a pause

[... ] denotes that part of the quote was left out.

Chinese mainly from the north.
Appendix 1: List of questions for interviewees

Age?
Male or female?
Where were you born?
How long have you been resident in Britain?
Is most of your immediate family also resident in Britain?
If not, where do they live?
How old are they?
What formal qualifications do you possess?

a.) Labour market(s)
What is your current occupation?
What have been your previous forms of employment?
How did you get your previous jobs?
How difficult was it to get another job?
Why did you change jobs?
Are you satisfied with your labour market position in Britain?
Have you ever worked in the Chinese catering trade: How old were you at the time?
Why did you work in the catering trade?
Were you working for your family or for another employer?
On average how many hours a week did you work in the catering trade?
Did/do you work in the kitchen or serve the public?
Would you consider your experiences in the catering trade to be positive or negative?
What occupation would you like to have in the future?
Do you think it would be possible for you to attain this position?
Will you stay in this country or do you plan to settle elsewhere?
Do you see yourself changing your current position in the future?
In what ways have the Chinese been ‘successful’ in Britain?
b.) The Chinese ‘community’

How often do you meet Chinese people apart from your family?
What nationalities are the majority of your friends?
Has this always been the case?
How long have you known your present circle of friends?
Do all your friends live nearby or do you have to travel in order to meet?
What do you have in common with your friends?
How do you spend your time with your friends?
How often do you frequent places where there are lots of Chinese people?
In what ways is there a sense of solidarity amongst the Chinese in Britain?
Do you associate with Chinese from other ethnic backgrounds?
How do you think the Chinese are perceived in Britain?
How often would you spend time with your family?
How close are you to your parents?
What Chinese associations, clubs, organisations or societies do you belong to?
How much influence do these institutions have in your life?
What is your understanding of the term the ‘Chinese community’?
How is the ‘Chinese community’ relevant to you?
Do you view Britain as ‘home’?
Do you think that your parents/children feel the same way?
How long have you lived in London?
What kind of an attachment do you have to London?

c.) British-Chinese identity: How ‘Chinese’ are the Chinese in Britain?

How often do you visit your ancestral ‘homeland’? (i.e. Hong Kong, China, Vietnam, etc.)
What kind of an attachment do you have to this place?
How would you describe your national identity?
How ‘Chinese’ do you consider yourself to be?
Do you speak any Chinese dialect(s)?
Can you read and write Chinese?
In what settings would you speak Chinese?
How often do you read Chinese newspapers and magazines?
What are your favourite leisure activities?
Do you play mahjong?
How often do you watch Chinese films, soap operas, etc?
Do you listen to Chinese music?
How much time do you devote to these activities?
Would your ideal partner be someone of Chinese descent?
Would you consider having a relationship with someone not Chinese?
How do you think your parents would react?
Have you faced any problems being of Chinese background?
Have you ever encountered racial abuse or discrimination?
In what ways, if any, have you experienced this?
What effect has this had upon your experience of life in Britain?
How do you think future generations of Chinese here will progress?
Work

A successful minority?

Writing for the Evening Standard (23rd November 1998), in an article entitled 'Why the Chinese are the richest Brits', George Walden states that 'No-one should be surprised to learn that, according to the Institute for Social and Economic Research at Essex University, the Chinese have become the highest earners in Britain, ahead not just of Anglo-Saxons, but also other Asians.' To account for why the Chinese have prospered in Britain, he invoked the familiar discourse of 'Asian values' and asserted that 'to say that the Chinese appear predisposed to work hard and make money is something of an understatement.' It is striking, however, that in the remainder of the article there is no mention of the economic participation of Chinese people in the British catering trade. The appeal of the ubiquitous Chinese restaurant/takeaway is such that it has now become a permanent fixture in the landscape of Britain's small town high streets and the Chinatowns of larger metropolitan centres. Instead, the focus of attention in Walden's piece is the entrepreneurial spirit of Chinese people, which is assumed to be intrinsic:

Attitudes to capitalism and a healthy entrepreneurial spirit also have a lot to do with religion . . . There is no inhibition against profit-making, and the importance of the family and respect for elders have given Chinese people a focus for their spirit of enterprise (Evening Standard 23rd November 1998).
The portrayal of the Chinese in Britain as an industrious minority conforms to what John Gabriel (1994: 45) has written concerning the construction of images and how ‘these effectively pathologise all cultural deviations from what is assumed to be the (white Eurocentric) norm.’ Cheng’s (1996) findings confirm the view that the Chinese in Britain have fared well in economic terms. In her study, which involved a detailed analysis of data from the 1991 census, a favourable impression of the Chinese emerges. She asserts that ‘the profile of the Chinese in Britain is one of a successful ethnic minority’ (Cheng 1996: 178). Without wanting to deny this conception of Chinese people, I would like in this chapter to examine further some of the pre-conditions of upward Chinese mobility in the sphere of employment. Recent academic work on Chinese people in Britain’s catering trade paints a contrasting picture of their economic fortunes and the social costs of achieving material wealth (Baxter and Raw 1988, Parker 1994, Song 1995). A disparity between the economic statistics and lived realities of Chinese employment in Britain unquestionably exists. Through an examination of Chinese participation in the British labour market I will assess the social relations of their changing forms of employment.

First and foremost, the Chinese presence in Britain is perceived to be synonymous with the catering trade (for example, Watson 1977 and Song 1995). I want to argue that this assumption has hidden a more complex picture. The catering trade and its ethnic labour market are central to Chinese employment in Britain, but attention must be given to internal differences within the catering trade and to the opportunities that exist beyond the take-away counter. Estimates of the number of Chinese people employed in catering range from around 90 per cent (Home Affairs Committee 1985) to about 67 per cent (Cheng 1996). Of the 156,938 Chinese persons identified in the UK census, the 53,473 who arrived in Britain from Hong Kong are by far the most dominant ethnic Chinese group in Britain, comprising over a third of the Chinese total (see table 1.8). This group of ethnic Chinese most likely consists of individuals from clan-based villages in the

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1 The term ‘Asian values’, prior to the recent economic collapse in the Far East of Asia, was often used by western commentators - especially economists - to explain the economic growth in the region in
New Territories of Hong Kong who are employed in the British catering trade (Baker 1968, Watson 1977). Thus, Chinese settlers in Britain emanating from the rural hinterlands of Hong Kong are largely responsible for the connection that is often drawn between Chinese people and food. From the census, around 55 per cent of Britain’s Chinese population are employed in distribution. Within this group, a significant majority are employed in a single industry - restaurants, snack bars, cafes and other eating places (Cheng 1996). According to Cheng, ‘41 per cent of the Chinese work in this single industry [and] the industrial distribution varies with ethnic origin. For instance, 58 per cent of the Hong Kong-born Chinese and 42 per cent of the Chinese born in other parts of the world work in this industry. However, only 10 per cent of the South East Asian Chinese fall into this category’ (1996: 172). Indeed, as will be noted below, the ethnic origin of Chinese migrants in Britain is influential in determining occupational choice. The association of the Chinese with the catering trade means that of all the ethnic groups in Britain they are the most likely to be self-employed (see figure 1.2). However, the fact that only about a quarter of the Chinese in Britain are actually self-employed means that there is a range of internally differentiated forms of employment – restaurant owners, families running take-aways, full-time kitchen staff, part time workers – and associated levels of material wealth within the catering sector.

Data from the census of 1991 demonstrates that the Chinese population in Britain are engaged in a greater range of occupations than previously thought. Table 3.1 reveals some striking differences in the distribution of socio-economic class between the Chinese and the British. Both Chinese men and women are over-represented in Class I, i.e. professional occupations, and are under-represented in partly skilled or unskilled jobs. Aside from these similarities, there is a gender differential between Chinese men and women in Class II, Class III (N) and Class III (M) - managerial and technical occupations, non-manual skilled and manual skilled jobs respectively. While Chinese women are more likely to be employed in Class II and Class III (M) occupations than Caucasian women,

essentialist cultural terms.
the opposite applies for Chinese men. For non-manual skilled jobs, Chinese men are over-represented and Chinese women under-represented in comparison to their white counterparts. These statistics suggest that further study is required on the employment of Chinese people outside the ethnic economy. Table 3.1 provides evidence to suggest that the Chinese are not confined to working in the catering trade. In particular, for Chinese men and women, well over a third are employed in Class I and II occupations which are very unlikely to involve work in the catering sector.

Table 3.1: Socio-economic group for males and females, Whites and Chinese, Great Britain, 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically active</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIIN</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIM</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus the focus of this chapter is both on the catering trade and the opportunities that exist outside the ethnic labour market. The nature of the Chinese ethnic economy in Britain is such that it is able to provide for workers that under normal circumstances would be excluded from the British labour market. In this respect, Chinese ethnic businesses play a vital role in sustaining the economic livelihoods of a substantial proportion of Chinese settlers in Britain and as the framework within which much of their
lives are lived. The capacity of the ethnic economy to absorb excess labour has transformed Britain's 'Chinese community' in recent years. Various inflows of Chinese migrants to Britain have changed the ethnic composition of the Chinese population. The arrival of refugees from Vietnam during the early 1980s, many whom were of Chinese origin bolstered the numbers working in the catering trade (Shang 1984). An influx of migrants - mainly from the province of Fujian in Southern China - who have been able to find employment in the British catering sector has also been discerned.2 From this, as well as supporting long-established Chinese families in Britain, the catering trade has developed along with Chinese ethnic economies elsewhere in the diaspora to become entangled within webs of Chinese transnationalism that extend far beyond national boundaries (Ong and Nonini 1997).

One of the defining features of the Chinese catering trade in Britain is the structuring of its labour market. Gaining employment in Britain's Chinese catering trade is largely organised through informal networks of social contacts, consisting of friends and extended family. Job vacancies are usually circulated by word-of-mouth. A consequence of this is that the need for formal procedures (such as interviews and CVs) to secure work are bypassed. Instead, more personal and informal ways of assessing whether a potential candidate is suitable for the job are used. Often, an employer will hire someone on the strength of being recommended by a mutual acquaintance. Many of the informants were in a position to get work in the catering trade if they wanted. Certainly, most of my second generation informants had at some stage worked or 'helped out' in the Chinese ethnic economy to supplement their incomes. The lack of regulations governing the Chinese ethnic economy in general and the relative ease with which vacancies are filled in the catering trade has shaped the development of Britain's Chinese communities. Chan (1986) has reported the lack of organised industrial bodies, such as trade unions, in the

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2 While I have no formal sources to validate this claim, media attention has been drawn to kidnap cases involving undocumented migrants, where other Chinese people are held hostage. BBC2 aired a documentary during the summer of 1998 reporting this alarming trend. It is, however, impossible to be precise about the numbers of workers employed illegally in Britain.
catering sector. Also, as a result of the expansion of Britain's Chinese catering trade, pockets of Chinese settlement have materialized in unlikely rural destinations and it is through Chinese social networks that job vacancies are usually filled.

The first section of the chapter considers the first generation of Chinese settlers in the British catering trade and the laborious work that they undertook to construct this ethnic economy. It considers their attitudes to working in this sector and their reasons for staying in the catering trade. The second section looks at the social and cultural relations of working for parents in restaurants and take-aways. It has been ascertained that the catering trade is a pivotal setting where the identities of British-Chinese young people are formulated (Parker 1994, Song 1997a and b). The vast majority of my second generation informants once 'helped out' their parents, and the section considers the forms of negotiation that occur in the family workplace and with customers at the take-away counter. The third section examines the possibilities for young Chinese people outside the catering trade. The situation that they face is a choice between staying in the catering trade and entering the wider British labour market. The former offers readily available and flexible work in familiar surroundings for reasonable pay, but also means long hours and trying conditions. The latter offers freedom from familial obligations and a variety of career options but brings with it the potential for limited upward economic mobility due to racism. A further option is to emigrate to Hong Kong. The section investigates how the informants think through the career options that are available to them.

As well as using the interview transcripts, this chapter draws upon material from the participant observation at the different Chinese catering establishments at which I worked. This ethnographic research was done in order to obtain further insights into the social relations of the catering trade (see box 3.1). At times I will utilise my experiences of work to support some of the accounts of my informants.
Box 3.1: Working in the catering trade

1.) Wong Kee's (Family-run take-away, North-East London suburb. 8/95-2/96). I worked here initially on a Saturday but after a while switched my shift to a Sunday. I was part of a pool of around eight part-time staff, with two of us working at the weekend and one part-timer coming in during each off-peak weekday night. It was particularly traumatic working here since it got very busy on a Saturday and the customers would get agitated at times. During especially busy periods, the owner would call down his two young daughters to help out.

2.) Hot Woks (Take-away, East London. 3/96-7/96). I was introduced to the job by my eldest brother and worked on a Saturday night. In comparison to the other places that I worked in, this place was the least busy. However, because only the owner and I were on duty, I had to be multi-skilled to do the job effectively. This involved undertaking tasks in the kitchen and on the take-away counter.

3.) Joyful Diner (Restaurant, Essex. 2/98-9/98). Of all the places that I worked in, this was the most complex to observe. It was the largest establishment, where on busy nights a workforce of thirty-five (around fifteen part-timers) would be on duty and the Joyful Diner could accommodate over 400 diners. I usually worked every Saturday although I was occasionally required to come in on a Friday night. I got the job through one of my informants, Kwok, who told me that this particular restaurant were always on the lookout for people to work. To start with I was serving drinks, but after a while I was moved into the kitchen and my role switched to bringing out the food. As an intermediary between the kitchen and the ‘outside’ I was able to foster relations with both kitchen and waiting staff.

4.) Shanghai Chef (Family-run take-away, Essex. 10/98-2/99). I acquired this job through one of my cousins who informed me that the regular part-timer had left and asked me if I wanted to work. I worked at the weekends and there were seven of us who were all part of an extended family. It was the only place that I worked at which did not necessitate face-to-face contact with customers.

NB: The names of the take-aways and restaurant are pseudonyms.
First generation attitudes towards work

A succession of restrictive British immigration policies that channelled Chinese migrants from Hong Kong into the catering trade restricted employment opportunities in the British labour market for the majority of first generation settlers (Baxter and Raw 1988). All of the parents that I spoke to had spent most of their working lives resident in Britain, which in one case amounted to almost forty years. Of these ten informants, all, with the sole exception of Mr Yuen, had at some stage during their lives worked in the catering trade. Apart from Mrs Wong, the majority were currently working in the catering sector (see table 3.2). Mrs Wong also differed from the other parents who worked in the catering trade in that she had worked as a nurse in a succession of hospitals upon her arrival in Britain. Although she did not work in the catering trade, it is significant that she was self-employed in the Chinese ethnic economy as an acupuncturist. It has been suggested that owning ethnic small businesses is a viable route to upward economic mobility for migrant groups (Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward 1990). From table 3.2, it can be seen that ethnic entrepreneurship is a prominent feature of the sample. Seven of the first generation informants were currently running businesses, with six of these being in the catering trade.

The autonomy gained from owning a Chinese catering establishment was, in many ways, deemed to be empowering. However, from the first generation Chinese catering business owners that I interviewed, there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction about the labour-intensive aspect of their working lives:

K: So what are your views on working in the catering trade?
Mrs Au: I've got to do it to survive but I don't really like doing it. You haven't got much of a life (Interview, 17 September 1997).
Table 3.2: First generation settlers and work histories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Job description</th>
<th>Date started</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Ho</td>
<td>Helped out in brother’s restaurant, Herts and owns Chinese restaurant, South London</td>
<td>1968, 1976</td>
<td>8 years, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Lam</td>
<td>Teacher in Hong Kong and housewife</td>
<td>1969, 1972</td>
<td>3 years, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Yuen</td>
<td>Casual work outside the catering sector</td>
<td>N/A, N/A</td>
<td>N/A, N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Man</td>
<td>Helped out in father’s restaurant, Central London and Chinese restaurant, North London</td>
<td>1967, 1970, 1988</td>
<td>3 years, 1 year, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Cheung</td>
<td>Helped out at brother’s restaurant, West London and Chinese restaurant, South-West London</td>
<td>1971, 1984</td>
<td>3 years, 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Leung</td>
<td>Chinese take-away, Borehamwood and Chinese take-away business, West London</td>
<td>1972, 1986</td>
<td>2 years, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Au</td>
<td>Garment tailoring (at home) and Chinese take-away business</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>10+ years, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Wong</td>
<td>Watford general hospital, Ashford hospital, University College hospital, London and private acupuncture practise</td>
<td>1968, 1971, 1973, 1974</td>
<td>3 years, 2 years, 1 year, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs S Lam</td>
<td>Chinese restaurant, Germany and Chinese take-away, South London and Chinese restaurant, Central London</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table is not supposed to be an exhaustive account of the work histories of my first generation informants. Insofar that table 3.2 documents periods of employment for my first generation informants. I am also aware that it is a restricted version of events in that there are inconsistencies reported for some of the informants. For some of the women informants especially, relevant information has been omitted since they were not actively in full-time employment throughout the duration of their working lives. Indeed, a number of the women reported of the necessity to combine work roles with domestic responsibilities. However, the inclusion of table 3.2 is necessary as it illuminates how dependent the vast majority of my first generation informants were on the catering trade for their economic livelihoods.
K: How do you feel about working in the catering trade?
Mr Leung: Not much really. I mean I'm 'fed up' [said in English] but most people doing this are 'fed up' as well (Interview, 23 September 1997).

One of the drawbacks of working in the catering trade is the long hours. On top of working during trading time, additional tasks behind the scenes must be completed to ensure that the evening progresses smoothly. To be an efficiently run establishment, relatively mundane tasks such as shredding meats and vegetables and the preparation of various foodstuffs, such as noodles, rice and sauces, must be performed in advance of opening time. Working practices differ according to whether an individual works in a take-away or restaurant. For example, the burden of work is generally shared between family members in small family-run take-aways/restaurants (Song 1995, 1997b), while in larger restaurants, roles are divided according to whether staff work in the kitchen or on the 'outside' (Chung 1990). Therefore, there are significant variations in the lifestyles of individuals working in different positions in the catering trade. It is likely that kitchen hands work more arduously than waiters or counter assistants who, typically, only have to work during trading time. The amount of work to be done in any particular catering establishment is dependent on the volume of business. At the busy take-aways and restaurants that I worked at, I was informed that at times, many kitchen workers started work around mid-morning and did not finish until past midnight, after the completion of cleaning-up chores. It is not uncommon, then, for full-time kitchen workers in the catering trade to work up to fourteen hours a day, five to six days a week.

When asked why they did not enter other occupations to avoid the toil of working in Chinese catering businesses, most of the first generation settlers revealed that they did not have many options available to them. Mr Leung explained this to me succinctly:

K: If you had the opportunity to work in another field would you do it?
L: Yes, but you've got to be familiar with the field first otherwise no-one's going to employ you. We came over from Hong Kong where we used to work in the fields, so there was nothing else for us to do.
K: But Asians and Afro-Caribbean people worked for British employers when they came over.
L: It wasn’t the same for black and Asian people though, they were in a better position than us because they grew up in different circumstances and they spoke English as well. Whereas with Chinese people most of them didn’t know any English. So what was the point of working for a western employer? For a start the pay wasn’t as good. The only disadvantage is that the hours are long but you don’t spend any money, so it’s easier to save (Interview, 23 September 1997).

Mr Leung’s view supports earlier research on the Chinese in Britain that shows the economic opportunism of post-war Chinese settlers from Hong Kong (Watson 1977). In this regard, the Chinese ethnic economy has been instrumental in securing the livelihoods of Chinese settlers. Most of the early recruits into the catering trade entered Britain via networks of chain migration organised by clan members from the New Territories of Hong Kong (Ng 1968, Watson 1977). The migration histories of most of my first generation informants must be understood within these parameters. Given the context of Chinese migration to Britain to work in the catering trade, it is not surprising that few of them felt that they were overtly discriminated against in the labour market, Mrs Wong excepted. Among the parents that I spoke to, three spoke fluent English and Mrs Wong’s language skills enabled her to work for British employers. However, her primary work experiences in Britain had perhaps informed her sceptical outlook for future generations of young Chinese people. She told me, ‘I’m hoping the younger generation will realise that they have to fight for their success. Do not sit back’ (Interview, July 1996).

The Chinese ethnic economy has largely been effective in shielding its workers from the vicissitudes of economic recession. Yet, while employment in the catering trade was the norm for most of the first generation informants, a few regretted not having the chance to work elsewhere:

I want my children to study as much as they can so they won’t be restricted to doing just one type of job, i.e. the catering trade. If you’ve got an education you should work outside [the catering trade]. It’s like with us, we didn’t have much of an education, when the kids were young we had to look after the children at home and give them love and devotion. Now the children are older, but I still can’t speak [English] so I’m stuck here and will be doing this until I retire (Mrs Au, interview, 17 September 1997).
After getting married, you've got a family, you have to look after the family, your husband and that sort of thing and after... well my children are still young but you can't go out and work, unless you've got someone to look after your kids (Mrs Man, interview, 24 September 1997).

For Mrs Man, a parent of one of my second generation informants, the likelihood of her working in the British labour market lessened when she went to help out her father at his restaurant. Her example demonstrates how Chinese people are bound by tradition towards respecting elders which often entails ‘helping out’ parents (see below). In her case, the sense of obligation was acutely felt. When questioned about whether she had ever worked for a British employer, she replied:

No, because when I was about to go to university my father’s business wasn’t doing that well so I had to go there to help out. I couldn’t stay on, I had to go and help my dad. So I didn’t get the opportunity to go to university (Interview, 24 September 1997).

Mrs Man started helping out in her father’s restaurant from the age of nineteen. As a result of not being able to go to university it can be inferred that Mrs Man’s labour in the Chinese ethnic economy had had an impact on her career path. After leaving the family business she worked for a Singaporean Chinese business owner. Following that she spent six months living in Hong Kong, when on her return to Britain she helped out her father again for a further year. Subsequently, she got married and remained in the ethnic economy, culminating in her purchasing a catering enterprise, where she has worked to this day. In Mrs Man’s case, her labour was crucial in sustaining the viability of her father’s business. Baxter and Raw (1988) have argued that the emergence of global fast food retailers in the 1970s forced Chinese restauranteurs to cut costs as a result of increased competition. Many Chinese business owners responded by opening take-aways which relied on the labour of Chinese women and children for survival (Song 1995).

Mrs Man is actually a second generation settler, but to simplify matters I have included her here as a first generation settler.
The employment profile of my first generation sample is characterised by a marked over-representation in the Chinese ethnic economy, which is a reflection of Chinese employment in Britain as a whole amongst this age group. While the first generation were limited by their educational achievements, language skills and familial commitments in pursuing alternative careers, the second generation are gradually challenging the view that the focus of Chinese economic activity in Britain is in the catering trade. However, the situation facing many young British-Chinese people helping out parents in the catering trade is often not a pleasant one. The next section looks at how second generation Chinese people negotiate their work roles within the family and how identities are constructed across the take-away counter. It is to the second generation perspective that I will now turn.

Second generation British-Chinese and 'work'

The remainder of the chapter focuses attention on the experiences of work for second generation British-Chinese people. I am primarily concerned with how 'helping out' parents from an early age in Chinese takeaway businesses has shaped my informants' perceptions of employment either in the catering trade or the wider labour market. This section comprises two broad themes. First, the role of the catering trade in the lives of second generation Chinese will be examined. Acknowledging the labour of children in Chinese catering businesses in Britain is imperative in understanding the formation of second generation British-Chinese identities (Parker 1994). Through an investigation into how Chinese children's labour in family businesses are shaped by family obligations and how young Chinese are affected by their interactions with a predominantly English clientele, a picture will be painted of the profound influence the catering trade has had on the lives of second generation British-Chinese. What will emerge is that gender assumes a key position in the formation of British-Chinese identities in the catering trade. In the
final section, I will look at the career choices available to my second generation and consider why some young British-Chinese people are exercising their right to work in their ancestral homeland, the former British colony of Hong Kong.

Obligations: the role of young Chinese people in family businesses

Existing research on the Chinese in Britain has touched upon the issue of young Chinese ‘helping out’ their parents in catering businesses. What emerges from the literature is that Chinese youth are expected to help out their parents and it is intimated that there is a stigma associated with this labour. Song (1997b) has argued convincingly that young Chinese people ‘help out’ in family-owned take-aways as part of a ‘family work contract’, the terms of which are negotiable over time. A defining feature of the family work contract is that a commitment towards family responsibilities underpins the labour of Chinese children in family catering businesses. The aim of the current section is to highlight the ways in which helping out affects the social relations of young Chinese people growing up in Britain.

Unlike other occupations where the distinction between employer-employee is clearly demarcated, young Chinese people feel that they are expected to ‘help out’ their parents (see box 3.2). Whether they are pressurised by parents or feel obliged to help out, Chinese young people in various ways understand their labour to be necessary. It is important to understand the different meanings attached to helping out parents for second generation Chinese youth. Three-quarters of my sample had ‘helped out’ their parents, invariably beginning from a young age, with one informant starting at the age of eight. The tasks that Chinese children usually carry out in Chinese family businesses vary over time. From what I was told, they were initially required to do manual chores, such as preparing prawns and
Box 3.2: Working for parents

K: Was there an obligation for you to work in the catering trade?
C: I think I just wanted the extra money. First of all I was forced into it, do you know what I mean? Being my dad’s restaurant and all that. I mean I didn’t want to do it, but I had to do it because if I hadn’t of done it . . .
K: Did he force you?
C: Yeah, I think it’s just part of your life really. Your dad does it, you do it. You have no choice do you?
(Catherine, interview, 13 April 1997).

I: Did you have to work?
K: Yeah I had to work because . . .
I: Couldn’t you get out of it?
K: No, because it’s just that sort of guilt on your mind because you don’t want to see your mum and dad do it, you know what I mean? And you want to do it because at times you don’t want to do it, you just want to chuck it, but you have to, because it’s your family (Khoung, interview, 28 April 1997).

Because there was a month before the takeaway officially opened . . . you do all the cleaning out, the decorations, the menus, the opening times and we all took part in that. That was good because you’re obliged to help your parents. And it was like a family business. But when it officially opened, we all helped out but it didn’t hit you until about a year afterwards working on Fridays and Saturdays. The mundanity of it all gets to you like any other job that is routine based. The main conflict I had was that I didn’t have a choice in it. I just used to sit there. (Sue, interview, 21 October 1996).
cleaning activities that were not seen by customers. As they got older, the level of responsibility increased and the burden intensified. As well as having to serve customers - which thrust other constraints upon Chinese youth (see below) - they were, in families where parents did not speak English, also often relied upon to mediate in complex business matters, translating for their parents (Song 1995, 1997b). In many cases, helping out parents was unavoidable since certain Chinese households in Britain have their living quarters above the business premises. In this respect, the domains of work and home are intimately connected.

For those of my informants who were expected to help out, it could be said that their labour for parents was predestined in the sense that Chinese catering establishments safeguard the welfare of a substantial proportion of Chinese households in Britain. The popularity of ethnic cuisines in Britain, coupled with the implementation of restrictive immigration legislation ensured that the focus of Chinese economic activity remained in the catering trade (Baxter and Raw 1988). Khoung’s personal narrative of how he arrived at helping out his parents is representative of many second generation Chinese in Britain:

We started off having a restaurant. Well my dad worked in a takeaway for years and years and years and then we got our own restaurant. We were partners with someone (Interview, 28 April 1997).

Sue conveys how she felt when it dawned upon her that she and her two brothers would be expected to help out in their newly acquired shop:

What happened was I started at thirteen and it was still . . . it’s really funny how it happened. At the beginning it was quite exciting getting a new shop because none of us had really experienced it, it was an exciting prospect but when it actually happened and we moved in and realised we had to help out, none of us realised that it was automatic, that we had to help out (Interview, 21 October 1996. My emphasis).

By helping out behind the scenes, parents were able to ensure that they were not seen to be violating British legislation that prevents children from being employed. According to Song (1997b: 712-3), ‘no child under 13 can be employed, except young farmers at least 10 years old, as well as young actors. Children cannot work before 7:00 a.m. or after 7:00 p.m., or during school hours on any school day, nor can children work more than two hours on any school day or on a Sunday.’
After initially working for a Chinese employer for several years, the male head of Chinese families would most often invest savings into a take-away business which routinely relied on family labour for survival. The transition from working elsewhere in the ethnic economy to being self-employed for Chinese men had a pronounced impact on families, of which children helping out was only one of the more salient features. It is not surprising then that patriarchal relations characterise the running of Chinese family take-aways, although this authority is often contested (Song 1995).

Aside from the obvious physical and emotional demands of working for parents, some of my informants were also concerned that ‘helping out’ was adversely affecting family relationships. Working and living in close proximity with parents was a source of conflict for Sue:

The beginning yeah, when we started washing the potatoes and like cleaning and peeling prawns, then you realise ‘this is boring or this is the downside’. My parents never told me that this was going to happen. It’s quite funny. You know when you’re moving, it’s a new change but I wasn’t equipped. My parents never said we’re getting a new shop now and these are the opening times. I never realised how much it would affect the family, my family relationships, my mum and dad’s relationship . . . you didn’t realise how much of an intrusion the shop was. I just remember being really excited about moving but at the same time I didn’t like it because it was such a change (Interview, 21 October 1996. My emphasis).

The taken for granted aspect of Chinese children’s labour in family take-away enterprises has in the past been overlooked. At one of the take-aways in which I worked, during busy periods, my boss would not hesitate to call down his two young daughters, who would usually be upstairs, to help out (see Box 3.1). They would arrive downstairs to undertake various tasks such as answering the phone to take the food orders of customers, pressing the lids of food containers, and packing food orders into plastic bags. From what I gathered this occurred quite frequently. Their mother told me that during the week when it was less busy, the young sisters would take alternate turns to come downstairs to help out (participant observation, Wong Kee’s). These working practices
are partly attributable to the closeness of working together as a family unit and the interweaving of helping out and domestic chores (Parker 1994). In Sue’s case, having to see her father regularly took some adjusting to since prior to their takeaway opening she would see him only once a week, on his day off from working elsewhere in the Chinese sector. As Sue put it, ‘it just seemed a bit strange seeing my dad everyday . . . I just wasn’t used to it really’ (Interview, 21 October 1996). Another example of some of the complexities that arise from helping out parents is provided by King:

I can look back and say that it was alright. But there were days when you have arguments with your parents because you were at each others’ throats all the time and obviously you can’t argue with your parents because it’s like they’re your parents. What can you say, you know? You disagree with them and you argue but at the end of the day they’re always right aren’t they? (Interview, 7 October 1996).

That there are limits to patriarchal authority in Chinese families running take-away businesses results in negotiations that determine the allocation of work roles between women and children (Song 1995). Amongst those I spoke to, it was common for family responsibilities to be divided between siblings. Oldest children would at first bear the brunt of responsibility in the take-away, but as they left home to live elsewhere or go to university, the burden shifted and younger siblings took over the helm. Khoung was the eldest child in his family and he described how his obligations toward his family changed as he reached adulthood:

I: At what age did you stop working?
K: I went away to study and I came back.
I: How old was you?
K: Nineteen. Because when I went away, I went away to do my degree [. . .] my brothers grew up, they took over.
I: Did you still have to work there when it was like . . . ?
K: Yeah, when it was busy on Saturdays, I used to come back, help out occasionally. Drive back weekends, that’s how I earned my money really (Interview, 28 April 1997).

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5 Miri Song is an exception. In her work she has written extensively on the role of Chinese women and children in the survival of Chinese catering businesses.
Becoming older usually conferred a greater degree of autonomy for my second generation informants. Attending university provided many with their first opportunity of leaving behind family obligations. Going to university meant that Khoung was able to relinquish his duties to his parents. Despite being away, however, he would still occasionally come back at weekends to help out. Here, the distinction between helping out and working for parents becomes blurred. Song makes the distinction that, 'helping out involved work which was meaningful in itself, and which was normatively prescribed, while work was seen in terms of delimited employment in an impersonal context. Helping out implied goodwill and a willingness to contribute one’s labour' (1997b: 698). It is worth pointing out that most of my informants were paid by their parents to help out. They were also, in some sense, remunerated for their labour by parents providing financial aid with the cost of various goods and services, such as higher education and cars. In this regard, family take-aways assume a key role in the economic sustenance of young Chinese people.

Attitudes towards helping out parents were, however, undoubtedly ambivalent. On the one hand, all of the informants who had helped out their parents acknowledged that they had a duty to do so, but at the same time a minority vented their frustration at having to be at the take-away at the weekends. Helping out at the weekends inevitably imposed restrictions on the lifestyles of Chinese youth. Sue, in particular, spoke to me in detail about having to work at the weekends and the repercussions on her social life at the time:

K: Did you feel obliged to work there then?
S: Yes, because you work it out. They’re your parents and this is it. That happened around fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, say when you’re in your teenage prime. You’re into your social groups, like at school I settled down by then . . . It’s like all white teenagers go out Friday and Saturday evenings and you want to be part of that and it was like, you’d have to go ‘Nah, I’ve got to work in my parents’ takeaway’ (Interview, 21 October 1996).

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It is implied by Sue that not being able to socialise at the weekends with peers from school was considered to be a hindrance. This was an underlying sentiment expressed by many of my informants, although it would be fair to say that they rationalised not being able to socialise at the weekends in contrasting ways. For Sue, having to simultaneously manage her responsibility to her parents working in the takeaway and wanting to go out with English friends resulted in tension at home. Due to the demands of schoolwork during the week, she felt that the most suitable time to socialise with her schoolfriends was at the weekends when her peer group would get together. In the following extract, Sue reveals some of the contradictions involved with her labour in her parents' take-away:

S: It wasn't a situation that I wanted. That's what I'm saying, it was like I didn't choose to work there, but at the same time I was emotionally obliged to work there because if I didn't work, who would? No-one, no-one.
K: Which puts you in an awkward situation.
S: Precisely. That's why I felt like I was in a trap. Plus I wasn't mature enough to understand my parents' situation at the time because I was looking at one point of view which is my selfish point of view, which a lot of kids think at that age
K: Yes, but what were you supposed to do?
S: Only after sixteen that I learned a lot of hard lessons, did I at least understand my parents and their situation. So I didn't feel as bad. But only because at that age after sixteen I could have my own sense of freedom because I could go out after ten you see. But it was a difficult process (Interview, 21 October 1996).

Gaining the right to go out with her English friends was, as Sue describes, a 'difficult process'. Helping out parents undoubtedly imposes restrictions on the social lives of young Chinese people in Britain. It is probable that the participation of Chinese youth in inter-ethnic peer groups is held in check by their labour at uncongenial times. In this way the take-away inhibits the formation of new ethnicities for young Chinese people by restricting their participation in dialogues that propagate inter-cultural mixing (see chapter 6).

While it could be said that few relished the prospect of helping out parents, it was a fairly common ploy amongst my informants to reflect on their time spent helping out in
the take-away in a positive light. Helping out parents, in some cases, not only ensured the survival of family enterprises but the benevolence of some Chinese children was also instrumental in strengthening family relationships. The acquisition of ‘good’ reputations by some siblings in Chinese families was deemed to be beneficial (Song 1997a). Yin epitomized the image of a ‘good’ child. When asked if she looked back on her time in the take-away with regret, she replied:

Not really, because it got me into university and everything and that’s where I really made up for it. That’s where I started socialising and I’d come back at weekends and work and during the week I’d study and go out and stuff. It didn’t bother me too much. I had a good time and did my family bit and kept everyone happy (Interview, 3 January 1997).

In addition, for informants such as Sai, the advantages gained from helping out parents outweighed not being able to enjoy leisurely pursuits. He told me that:

Obviously I wanted to have a good time, but then again, when you look back . . . when you look back, when you’re older, as an adult you try to make positive things that easily could be seen negatively. The best example is time spent in the takeaway. You think ‘damn’ I wasted so much time when I could’ve been partying . . . But then again you look at the positive side and you say ‘look, what have I learnt?’ you try to have a, you try to gain some constructive sense of what you mean, and that’s like becoming more streetwise, seeing more people, knowing how to sell things (Interview, 1 May 1997).

Chinese young people are bound by family obligations to help out their parents in the catering trade. This can mean working in the evenings after school and at unsociable times at weekends. Although one or two of my informants expressed dissatisfaction with helping out parents, they were also to some extent able to negotiate their work roles within the family business. While some informants spoke of the benefits of earning extra money, others remembered relishing the prospect of being able to leave their family responsibilities behind once they went to university. This ambivalence towards the economic benefits and the social costs of ‘helping out’ are well expressed by Sue.
But like . . . I enjoyed working there. There's no point just moaning and groaning like 'I wish was out clubbing with my mates and spending money on beer and all that'. It was good though. I made the most of it. It taught me how to, it's when you first deal with customers and everything and how to talk to people, what to expect behind the bar. It's not like a skill which is really basic. You learn the fundamentals in that department (Interview, 7 October 1996).

This quote usefully leads us to the other set of negotiations involved in helping out in the catering trade, dealing with customers. The next section argues that the experiences of Chinese young people behind the take-away counter are important in negotiating their gendered position in Britain society.

**Dealing with the public**

As well as having to cope with the burden of working for parents from an early age, it has been asserted that Chinese youth who 'help out' are especially vulnerable in their encounters with the wider British public (Parker 1994). It is thought that the isolated location of Chinese catering businesses in many areas exposes Chinese youth to a greater risk of facing racialized incidents. While the potential for racist name-calling to occur in the setting of the catering trade undoubtedly persists, it is imperative to be aware of the context-specific circumstances in which this takes place. From the current findings, it would seem that young Chinese people experience working behind the take-away counter in markedly different ways, which is structured by the dimensions of geography, gender and age. Being subject to racist taunts in the catering trade may presumably have a debilitating effect on some young people (Parker 1994). It would be misleading to assume, however, that young Chinese experience unruly behaviour from customers in a uniform way. My informants commonly adopted coping strategies to deal with rowdy individuals in the take-away and through which more positive notions of self could be negotiated. Significantly, these strategies were gendered.
The issue of gender in Chinese catering businesses is often broached (Baxter and Raw 1988, Chung 1990, Parker 1994, Song 1995) but, the role of women in sustaining Chinese ethnic businesses notwithstanding, little is known about how Chinese women are affected by their interactions with the English public in the catering trade. From existing literature on the topic, there is uncertainty about how Chinese women cope with the pressures of handling customers. On the one hand, Parker (1995: 93) has suggested that 'working on the [take-away] counter in an isolated family business late at night is one of the most vulnerable jobs in the world, particularly for a young Chinese woman.' Meanwhile, Chung in her study of gender in a Chinese restaurant has indicated that observing gendered phenomena in the setting of the catering trade is not as forthcoming as it would seem. She points out that:

Gender is indeed pervasive in the restaurant as elsewhere, but precisely because it is everywhere, paradoxically, its everyday forms are 'unseen' as such. It is not a self-evident presence but is rather interwoven with other aspects of interaction . . . (Chung 1990: 202).

Amongst other things, Chung has noted that it was problematic to define instances of gender and for her it was easier to record incidents that contained an ethnic aspect, since the impact of racist name-calling is more readily felt. This section aims to show how race and gender are interconnected in the setting of the take-away. For the purpose of the current study, it is worth noting that most of the young Chinese people in my sample encountered racist name-calling in the catering trade. However, it is probable that young Chinese women working behind the take-away counter are more susceptible to certain types of harassment than young men. Of the eight young women I interviewed for this study, only Yin explicitly talked about how she handled awkward customers:

They'd come in and be drunk and give you verbal abuse and call you 'chinky' and they'd expect you just to sit there and take it. I used to think 'don't you come in here and give me that shit, get out, I'm not serving you!' After a while, it took time but it got through to their heads that I wasn't going to take this crap from them. If they wanted to get served, they had to respect me. You know otherwise you can just sod
off and get your curry sauce and chips somewhere else. And then after a while they would used to come in and be legless and they would be nice and they used to joke: 'oh, I remember when I used to come in and you said that if I didn't behave you would chop my penis off'. I suppose you've just got to fight it in a comical way. If you get too aggressive, then you know you get into fights or whatever. If I was a bloke I'd probably get into loads of fights (Interview, 3 January 1997).

Yin helped out at her parents’ take-away located in one of Britain’s south coast towns. On top of being subject to racist abuse, I was informed that she would also receive unwanted sexual advances. Yin’s firm use of humour and threat was an effective way of warding off hostile situations. She was able to resist passive versions of Chinese femininity by responding in a confrontational manner, while recognising that because she was a woman, and because of her knowing use of comedy, her challenges were unlikely to be taken up.

Typically, the unpleasant incidents recalled by my informants were, more often than not, perpetrated by a significant minority of customers who were inebriated at the time. The relative spatial isolation of many Chinese take-aways in Britain make them a soft target for drunken individuals, who have little regard for the welfare of young Chinese people who usually have to serve them. In the context of the present study, the male informants reported contrasting narratives of their time dealing with English customers.

From box 3.3, it can be seen how working in the catering trade influences the ways in which young Chinese people’s identities are formulated. It is also clear that this does not occur in a straightforward way. Andy seemed resigned to accept racialised and problematic relationships between take-away owners and some of their customers. Will simply shrugged off racist gibes. Khoung, on the other hand, implied that he derived personal satisfaction from insulting customers whom he considered to be unpleasant.

6 The random behaviour of drunk men was a persistent worry at one of the take-aways where I worked (Wong Kee’s, see box 3.1), which happened to be situated opposite a pub with a bad reputation locally. During one episode, a group of young Caucasian males repeatedly kicked the main front door of the take-away until the glass smashed. This incident was triggered by a minor disagreement with the owner.
Box 3.3 Handling drunk customers

K: In what ways did that affect your experience of growing up in Britain?
A: Well it brought to mind the direct experience of what my mother and father did when they was world
in the takeaway which I was too young to remember. I used to go to the takeaway, I was bought up in the
takeaway, but we didn’t live there. I just followed my mum and dad to work every night and played in the
takeaway whilst they worked. It wasn’t until I became a waiter, until I realised what it involved, having to
serve the public. Being round the corner from a local discotheque on a Friday and Saturday night.
K: Is there anything that you’d like to disclose?
A: Apart from the
that it’s nothing new under the sun. But when you’re the local Asian or Chinese
round the corner from the local disco, then you see the worst dregs of society come in all fully tanked up and
just ready to wind you up really (Andy, interview, 6 April 1997).

K: In the shop, did you have any bad experiences there?
W: No, not really, I mean I had a fight in there once. He didn’t call me a ‘chink’ or anything like that. It
was because I refused a loan to him. You know . . . you get some odd people pulling eye gestures and
things like that when they’ve had too much to drink. But um . . . deep down you just laugh it off really
(Will, interview, 18 April 1997).
I find it very difficult and I find it quite a laugh. [ . . . ] I could take the mickey and find it such fun, have a
wicked laugh, much more than them. But, I have got a problem sometimes, yeah with like the drunks and
stuff, that’s just part of the job. You just have to deal with it (Khoung, interview, 28 April 1997).

The frequency of abuse that my informants received in the catering trade was in
part determined by the geographical location of Chinese businesses. It would appear that
isolated Chinese catering establishments in small towns away from metropolitan centres
are more vulnerable than Chinese take-aways in areas with a large multi-ethnic
population. Kin remained fairly upbeat about his time spent helping out in the family
restaurant:

Customers are alright. It got to the stage . . . I mean my mum and dad, how they grew up and their
mannerisms are totally different to how we are and if you get, I don’t know, young or old people
(customers), you know you can adapt to it. Or if someone’s drunk, you change the situation and apply
yourself. Where I see my parents they’ll be oblivious to what’s going on and you go [puts on a laddish accent] ‘alright mate!’ ‘You talk how they do and get to get on with them and everything’s alright and fair enough. I wanted what’s best for the business you know (Interview, 7 October 1996. My emphasis).

Kin therefore developed a distinctive way of handling customers which was at variance to the more conventional method adopted by his parents. Kin deployed a certain form of masculinity to cultivate an amicable and familiar demeanour which he used effectively to negotiate a rapport with the diners at his parents’ restaurant. His upbringing in a racially diverse part of South London was perhaps a significant factor in Kin’s ability to get on well with customers. By embracing the argot of South London youth, he was able to transfer his strategies of participating in inter-racial dialogues at school to the domain of helping out parents (Back 1996). Despite his efforts, the restaurant was never entirely trouble free:

You get the drunk idiots that come in and everything and you get the odd drunk that goes [puts on a laddish accent] ‘oh we’ll go for a chinky then!’ and all that. That’s what I’m saying why we’re different to our parents. See, if because with our parents, see if someone came in and started doing that they’d take the piss big time, but seeing as you’re young yeah, you’ve lived here all your life so you know what’s going on. So fair enough if they give you some [aggravation], you give it back don’t you? So that’s why when we had all us lads working there, you had K, me, Y, M, there was reason not to mess [. . . ] with us because there was a fair gathering of us . . . when they used to work there, they’re not as leery because they ‘know’ and if they do [cause trouble] I’ll just have to deal with them. We’ve had people who try to run out of the place (Interview, 7 October 1996).

Kin’s reconciliatory stance was essential in maintaining harmonious staff-customer interactions. Yet, if any difficult situations arose the availability of elder male siblings and close friends to help out at the weekend was considered by him to be advantageous in that he and his brothers were at hand to defuse any hostility. In any case, the presence of some young Chinese males in the restaurant was often enough of a deterrent to individuals intent on causing harm. This threat of the deployment of violence was quite different to Yin’s comic threats. In each case, the racialised relationships between young Chinese people working in the catering trade and troublesome customers are always gendered
through both the forms of racism that they encounter and the coping strategies that they adopt.

Just as helping out parents was not necessarily understood in wholly negative terms, my informants' interactions with customers could also be positive ones. In Will's case, working in the take-away enabled him to be well-known in his locality, something of which he was obviously proud:

on the streets in Stratford, I'm not being big-headed, but I think about 40 percent of the people know me. And we're talking about the whole of Stratford, mainly because one I was the first Chinese person to study at my school and they all remember me, all their mums and dads, their children remember me, their friends, I just think, I go and nod my head all the time. This is mainly from the shop as well, where you meet people (Interview, 18 April 1997).

In other cases, the relationships that my informants constructed with customers were meaningful ones that were consolidated over a long period of time. The take-away counter is not, therefore, necessarily only a barrier to the formation of positive relationships between British-Chinese young people and white customers, but also a meeting ground where, under the right circumstances, productive and rewarding contact can be maintained. This, however, is not enough to keep young Chinese people in the catering trade.

**Beyond the take-away?**

Presented with a choice between staying in the catering trade and entering the wider British labour market, young Chinese people, it would seem, are choosing the latter option. Similar to the findings of other recent studies on young Chinese people in Britain (Parker 1995, Song 1997b), few expressed a desire to remain in the catering trade. For instance, Steve told me that:
It's just out of choice to kind of get out of it [the catering trade], but there's still a lot of Chinese influences in what I do and how I live my life that comes through... It's played an important role in that. But I think that the more important areas in my life are kind of almost lacked you know. I feel so, if I didn't grow up in the takeaway... it could all be so different, do you know what I mean? (Interview, 24 March 1997).

Steve's comments about leaving the catering trade reflect a general consensus amongst young British-Chinese people in London. As noted in the previous section, the stresses of helping out parents and the pressures associated with handling the English public are a decisive factor for many second generation Chinese wanting to escape the confines of the takeaway. Despite the appeal of readily available work for many of the informants (see box 3.4), most of them rejected the idea of working in the catering trade as a career. Most frequently, my informants cited the long, antisocial hours, and the arduous work as the main reasons for not wanting full-time employment in the sector.

In this final section, I examine how the vast majority of the informants think through their decisions to pursue careers beyond the catering trade. The reasons mentioned by my informants for wanting to leave the catering trade are complex and many, and in the following subsection I will summarise their responses. At the time of writing, three of the young men in the study were employed in the catering sector. By focusing on a case study of one of the informants, a better understanding of why some young Chinese people choose to stay in the catering trade will emerge. Of all the second generation Chinese people I spoke to, eighteen of the twenty-one informants were currently employed outside the Chinese ethnic economy (see table 3.3). The final part of the chapter looks at how some of the informants have fared in their occupations outside of the catering sector. A central issue is the perceived threat of racism in the workplace and how my informants have adapted to employment in the wider British labour market. While a minority of British-born Chinese have emigrated to Hong Kong in search of work (Parker 1998), most of my informants it seemed were committed to staying in Britain.
Box 3.4: Obtaining work in the Chinese catering trade

I: What about catering jobs in Chinese takeaways and restaurants?
K: I've worked here and there.
I: How many have you done apart from the family one?
K: Let me see, about three or four.
I: How easy was it to get these jobs?
K: It was easy to get the Chinese jobs.
I: How did you get them?
K: First one was my auntie, second was Fat Piggy's. I had a mate who was a manager of the pub who had the franchise and he got me the job. That was through mates. Third one was a restaurant in Canterbury, this bloke, he's a friend and I was talking to him, bumped into him and he said, 'how are you?' and sort of just got talking and we liked each other and I said 'have you got any work?' and he gave me some work. Then, the last one was a Vietnamese restaurant up the road from here. I just got it because I rang up and said I was Sino-Vietnamese [. . .]. All four jobs that I've had are just through something, or a situation which was just there (Khoung, interview, 28 April 1997).

K: Have you worked in the catering trade?
C: Yes, since I was 15. I started working in a restaurant.
K: How did you get that job?
C: That was my family's in Letchworth.
K: How many catering trade jobs have you had?
C: Three, in Letchworth, Upshire and Waltham Abbey.
K: How did you get the job in Upshire?
C: It was one of my dad's friends, so they got me a job there because I needed one.
K: So it was quite easy then?
C: It was easy. I think that once you get to know them it's alright (Catherine, interview, 13 April 1997).

K: How many jobs have you had in the catering trade?
T: No, I've had too many . . . I'd say between 5-10.
K: How easy it was to get these jobs?
T: Very easy I think, well quite easy.
K: What did it involve?
T: It was just through friends. The reason I got the job was because I didn't really have to make an effort to find the job, it just came when I wanted it. The pay was good. It's quite good when you're young to travel around the country, work in different places, meet different people. That's the reason I done it anyway.
K: Was there any reason why you changed jobs?
T: It's part of the culture isn't it? Working in the restaurant, you tend to move on, you get set in one place for too long it gets boring. The only way you can last in that type of job is by moving on, meeting different people (Trung, interview, 21 April 1997).
Table 3.3 Current occupational status of second generation informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy (31)</td>
<td>Charity work</td>
<td>Ann (24)</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason (25)</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Catherine (25)</td>
<td>Freelance design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karch (26)</td>
<td>Catering trade</td>
<td>Fay (24)</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoung (27)</td>
<td>Graphic design</td>
<td>Ivy (24)</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King (26)</td>
<td>Graphic design (Hong Kong based)</td>
<td>Kit (24)</td>
<td>IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwok (25)</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Sau Wah (24)</td>
<td>Temp work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick (26)</td>
<td>Catering trade</td>
<td>Sue (24)</td>
<td>Artist (Hong Kong based)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puncho (25)</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Yin (27)</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trung (26)</td>
<td>Catering trade</td>
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<td>Sai (28)</td>
<td>City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve (25)</td>
<td>Freelance design</td>
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<td>Wei (24)</td>
<td>IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will (24)</td>
<td>Media</td>
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</table>

* Snapshot profile, May 1999.

That few young Chinese people are contemplating owning catering enterprises or working in the catering sector full-time, could be regarded as an intriguing matter. Since most of the informants had either helped out their parents from a very young age or had worked in the catering trade part-time at the weekends, sufficient knowledge would have been accumulated to set up catering enterprises of their own. Certainly, my second generation informants were fairly unanimous in the view that their parents’ generation had been successful:

a lot of my immediate family and friends that I know, mostly own Chinese takeaways or are restauranteurs, whatever, you know? And they’ve all done very well. They’ve all pretty much come over to England with
Despite the perceived success of the first generation, the fact that relatively few young Chinese people want to emulate their parents raises interesting issues. In this respect, it is almost certain that being raised in Britain helping out parents in the catering trade in conjunction with the opportunities available to young Chinese people schooled in Britain has had an influence on the career choices that my informants opt for. Additionally, from the first generation informants that I spoke to, they were unanimous in agreeing that their progeny should engage in occupations other than the catering trade.

Various reasons were outlined by my informants for wanting to leave the catering trade. The emphasis on a shift away from the take-away counter by second generation Chinese was underlined by Catherine:

K: How do you see the second generation going?
C: I don't think they're going to aim for what their parents did, do you know what I mean? Sort of like material and money minded, they're just going to go for what they enjoy doing. Whether it's in the arts or whatever you know, because all my parents ever wanted was for me to go into business, accounting, earn some money (Interview, 13 April 1997).

Catherine believed that the second generation of young Chinese would pursue occupations that they were interested in. However, to some extent, she also felt obliged to meet her parents’ level of expectation for her career. Certainly, parents had an instrumental role to play in determining that my informants should work outside the catering sector. Jason told me that, 'because I'm in this country, they [his parents] assume that I shouldn’t work where English people look down on us [. . . ] they don’t want me to work in the same field. It’s a qualification thing’ (Interview, 27 March 1997). Leaving behind the racialized images of working in the Chinese catering businesses was an important consideration in the career paths of my informants. Will equated working in the sector to stereotypical notions of being ‘Chinese’ in Britain:
K: [...] are there any reasons why you left the catering trade?

W: It's not me. I'm one of the Chinese which are classed as British. I think the catering trade isn't me. I want my social life, yeah? I think a lot of people who class themselves as Chinese in Britain, who are born in Britain, but class themselves as Chinese work in a Chinese takeaway. I really feel that (Interview, 18 April 1997).

Will's reluctance to persevere in the ethnic economy was linked to his conceptualisation of nationhood. Being 'British' for him encompassed an implicit notion of employment that excluded the negative connotations surrounding work in the catering trade. His remarks signify the extent to which work in the sector is conceived of in disagreeable terms by many second generation Chinese. On top of wanting to avoid the dogged working conditions that many first generation settlers endured, most of my informants were aware of the stigma attached to the catering trade. Indeed, the patronizing tones in which the Chinese have been represented in Britain is to some extent predicated on an assumption that they are a homogenous mass overwhelmingly employed in an ethnically differentiated labour market.²

Foremost in the minds of many second generation informants as they leave the catering trade is a yearning for a change in lifestyle. Having witnessed and experienced firsthand the emotional and physical demands of working in family-run catering enterprises, it is little surprise that few of my informants wanted to remain in the Chinese ethnic economy. Yin evaluated her prospective labour market position in the following way:

It's just kind of OK. So you've got a takeaway, you've got a nice car, a nice house. But at the end of the day, you're still going to be like working in the takeaway, unsociable hours whatever. Second generation, you go to university, get yourself a fairly good job, be more independent ... basically I suppose that at the end of the day, yes, you will be working for an English person or whatever but it's for yourself but in a different sense to say owning your own business (Interview, 3 January 1997).
Assessing trade-offs between remaining in the catering trade helping out parents and working for British employers essentially formed the crux of future career decisions for my second generation informants. For Yin, the hard labour associated with the catering industry and the potential of gaining substantial pecuniary rewards, or the acquisition of luxury consumer goods was juxtaposed to the merits of leading a relatively autonomous way of life. That the catering sector offered only limited opportunities for career advancement was also a source of concern for Will:

I was forced to work in the takeaway and I just didn’t like it. I thought I had many more talents than just holding a wok... I just think if you've been given a chance and you work hard and just say, say to the boss, 'I may be a little bit thick but if you can teach me more', just don't fear of working too hard and getting paid too less because I know the time will come round (Interview, 18 April 1997).

In deciding to leave the catering trade, a differential in aspirations between generations of Chinese people in Britain is readily apparent. From the findings of the current study, the majority of young Chinese people accept that their occupational futures lie beyond the Chinese catering trade. Not so long ago, the prospect of working in the ethnic economy loomed large for a significant proportion of young Chinese (Chan 1986). That now appears to be changing.

Case study: Trung – choosing the catering trade

For second generation Chinese people with a British education the ethnic resources provided by the catering trade could be regarded as having a kind of safety net function. Unlike the first generation who were often restricted to working in the Chinese ethnic economy, British-Chinese people have the option of working in the catering trade if they

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Parker demonstrates (1995: 66-69) how stereotypes of food have influenced British perceptions of Chinese
wish. Indeed, the opportunity for waged employment in the sector is an attractive option for some, especially for those seeking part-time work. One of my informants, Trung, was more willing than others to consider the option of work in the Chinese ethnic economy:

[T]hat is what is so great about the Chinese community you see. I mean if you don’t make it through society in general, you’ve got the Chinese community to fall back onto. Whereas with English people if they don’t make it, what have they got to fall back on? (Interview, 21 April 1997).

Trung, who happened to be Vietnamese, had worked at several catering establishments throughout Britain (see box 3.2). In comparison with the other Chinese informants, Trung did not help out his parents in a family catering enterprise, instead he sought employment in the Chinese ethnic economy for reasons that were not disclosed. Being employed in the catering trade enabled him to work part-time at the weekends and study at university during the week. He told me that during the summer vacation he would work sixty to seventy hours a week, full-time. From what I gathered, although the hours were long he continued to work in the sector because he was accustomed to the lifestyle:

T: I find it easier to work in a Chinese environment.
K: Is there any reason behind that?
T: Just because I’m so familiar with it and so used to it than I would find it working in a predominantly white environment.
K: Why’s that?
T: I suppose because I’ve been hanging around with Chinese people too long, I’d say, I’m losing touch, do you know what I mean? (Interview, 21 April 1997).

Amongst my informants, Trung was atypical in choosing to work in the catering trade. In particular, although he did not say so, he seemed to prefer the informal working environment and flexible conditions of the catering sector over employment elsewhere.

people living in Britain.

Trung repeatedly made the point of telling me that he was ‘pure’ Vietnamese. The majority of Chinese settlers who arrived in Britain from Vietnam are of ethnic Chinese descent.

This statement may seem contradictory. Although individuals who work in the Chinese catering trade inevitably work long hours, much camaraderie exists between employees. On the whole, the lack of
Trung was also able to utilize the social contacts he gained from having worked in the sector to find work where and when he wanted it (see box 3.2). Even though he was able to manipulate his labour market position, he was keenly aware of the negative externally-held perceptions of the catering trade. Despite having a comprehensive insight into how the catering trade functioned, he considered that, 'I didn’t really progress’ (Interview, 21 April 1997). Despite this, overall, employment in the wider labour market held little appeal for Trung:

K: Why did you work in the catering trade?
T: Like I told you it just came . . .
K: Why didn’t you get a job outside the catering trade?
T: I have tried that, the pay wasn’t good. I didn’t like the type of discipline you could call it, you know all these rules and procedures you had to follow and I didn’t like that (Interview, 21 April 1997).

For Trung having a mainstream job was not attractive and it is significant that, at the time of writing, he has pooled resources together with some friends to open a catering enterprise. Of all the informants only he has opted for this route so far. In this respect, for Trung, the benefits of being employed in the catering trade outweighed the prospect of working for a Western employer where the greater freedom that he enjoyed was, to an extent, a source of empowerment for him. Min Zhou in her study of New York’s Chinatown investigated the rationale behind investment in the enclave by well-educated American-Chinese settlers. She writes, ‘presumed racism is, perhaps, one of the reasons (other than economic) why the well-educated choose to participate in the enclave . . . enclave participation is both economically rational and emotionally understandable’ (1992: 143). Trung’s decision to work in the Chinese ethnic economy can be understood in these terms. Racism was never explicitly mentioned by Trung and to presume that it played a role in his course of action to remain in the catering trade is premature. However, procedure concerning personal conduct in the sector contributes towards a generally informal working environment. As Crang in his study of a theme restaurant in southeast England points out, ‘. . . the work we did was certainly often boring, definitely poorly paid, but cannot be simply castigated as joyless drudgery; it was not utilitarian, it could be a laugh’ (1994: ).
that the ethnic economy in Britain is able to shield its workers from the effects of racism in the workplace is meaningful, alongside the particular economic benefits — the availability of ready work and the informal working environment — that it confers.

*Working outside the catering trade*

Research on how young Chinese people have actually progressed in the British employment market remains sketchy. A thorough review of the subject, with one or two noticeable exceptions, has yet to materialise (Chan 1986, Pang 1993). This body of literature has tended to reproduce culturalist explanations to account for the uncertainty of young Chinese people's career aspirations. Given that the Chinese population in Britain is a relatively young one, it is perhaps little surprise that relatively few Chinese have entered the wider job market. Chan's (1986) study of the employment prospects of Chinese youth in Britain, written over a decade ago, warned of pessimistic scenarios. He writes that:

The prospect of unemployment concerns Chinese youth. They are confused as to how to face this situation. The prospects of alternative employment for them are limited, nor are they very keen on it. The lack of employment prospects, coupled with exposure to western values in schools, has created tension amongst young and old in the Chinese community. The youths are increasingly challenging the role and authority of the older generation and are also demanding new roles for themselves which conflict with the roles expected of them by their parents. This has created a certain amount of deviancy among Chinese youth and if this tendency goes unchecked, it could lead to delinquency (1986: 14).

The fact that the vast majority of my second generation informants are looking to professions other than in the ethnic economy connotes a change of attitude towards occupational choice by young Chinese people in London (see table 3.3). What I will do in this final section is to examine my informants' attitudes to working outside the catering

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10 I use the term American-Chinese loosely here.
trade. It must be noted, however, that the findings of this section are largely exploratory and merely provide an indication of the trends that characterise British-Chinese employment outside the catering trade. Another limitation of the study was that I was unable to gain access to their working environments and my line of questioning during the interviews may have introduced a degree of bias. The employment prospects of young Chinese people in Britain deserves more attention than the speculative account offered here. It is with this in mind that the reader should advance.

Where it was possible, I questioned my second generation informants about their experiences of work for British employers, with racism in the workplace being a central topic of discussion. Rather than experiencing racism in a uniform way, it will be demonstrated that my informants displayed ambiguous attitudes towards racism in the workplace. As well as entering the wider British labour market or continuing in the catering trade, young British-Chinese people have the further option of emigrating to Hong Kong in search of work. I discuss the attitudes of my informants towards the possibility of living and working in Hong Kong.

Probing around the role of racism in the workplace, it transpired that young Chinese people are generally divided about the whole issue. Many were aware that working for British employers entailed alternative struggles, which were perhaps informed by their knowledge of racial disadvantage in the British labour market (Brah 1996). It is difficult to assess with any precision how my informants were affected by racism since during the period of fieldwork most of them were either in full-time education or at the beginning of their careers. Though, for many of them, racism was perceived to be manifest, most often at the stage of applying for jobs (see box 3.5).

Khoung, Andy and Will were all employed in occupations other than in the catering trade. Their experiences of employment in the British labour market had undoubtedly resulted in them adopting a more pragmatic stance towards their careers in Britain. Perceived racism did not affect my informants in an unitary way. The people I spoke to rationalised their experiences of racism on an individual level. For Khoung, his
perception of racism was connected to his self-ascribed 'paranoia'. In simple terms, what Khoung referred to when he spoke of his paranoia when applying for jobs was his inability to decode the intent behind certain work-related scenarios. In applying for different job vacancies, the issue for Khoung was having to distinguish between whether or not he was a victim of racial discrimination in not getting a job, or perhaps simply that his professional credentials were not sufficient to acquire the position. In Andy’s case, it is inferred that he handled any prospect of racism by not raising his career expectations too high, which may have held his career in check. Will, on the other hand, questioned why he was not recruited for certain jobs, even though he felt that he was suitably qualified.

Encountering racialized banter in the workplace and how best to deal with it was also a concern for some of my informants. When I asked Yin if she felt discriminated against at work, she replied:

They do it in a jokey way. ‘Yin my old china’ or whatever but it’s a pet name, not on a really nasty sort of level. But obviously they know that I’m different and say things like [puts on a pronounced English accent] ‘so then Chinese new year, what year is it this year?’ I say ‘I don’t know, I’ll have to ask my mum’ and they’ll say ‘but surely you must know!’ (Interview, 3 January 1997).

The impact of racialised teasing on young Chinese people varies with context (see chapter 5). In the sphere of working in the British labour market, the potential for racialised banter to be mobilised against isolated young Chinese people marks them out as being different and possibly heightens their sense of being Chinese. For Yin, the teasing was deemed to be fairly innocuous and she accepted it ‘in a jokey way’. Yin’s strategy was to go along with it, which it is assumed fostered good relations at work. That she was subjected to racialised teasing in the first place put her in an awkward situation. To an extent, while such behaviour promotes a certain level of camaraderie in the workplace, the largely unintended effects of racialised banter places young Chinese people in a vulnerable position. In encountering racist teasing at work how should young Chinese people
Box 3.5: Perceptions of racism

Kh: [. . .] maybe that’s my paranoia playing again, but sometimes I do think there is a better position here for an English guy or better position here for an English girl, rather than a Chinese.

Ki: You really think that?

Kh: Because the people that have interviewed you for them on, it’s not just your workload, you know what you can do, it’s also what you look like (Khoung, interview, 28 April 1997).

K: What sort of impact has this [racism] had upon your life in Britain?

A: At my age I’m 29 and I came to London in 1987, so that was about when I was 19. I think that a person like me survives by learning a lot by in a sense being very realistic to the extent that I’d say that you need a healthy dose of cynicism when you embark on anything (Andy, interview, 6 April 1997).

If I could work for a British company, I will work for one, there is no doubt about it. I just haven’t been given the chance to work for a British company. I have been to interviews and I send my CV. But I just find it... me and my friends have been through the same things. We just like um “hold on here, I can do that job, I could probably do it better than him, but why am I not getting through?”(Will, interview, 18 April 1997).

I have a lot of friends who have gone for interviews and basically because of their skin colour they have been refused a job or they’ve worked for a place and they’ve done exactly what they’ve had to do, reaching figures, and they haven’t had a pay rise or been promoted. It will take a long time because I think there is a lot of jealousy of Chinese people. Being Chinese is like, it’s like a lot of people expect you to be rich anyway. The public think that because you automatically own a takeaway, you’re automatically rich, why did you come out, ‘I would love to own a business’. That’s the comment I get. The family runs a business, they must be rich, you know (Will, interview, 18 April 1997).
respond? Should they counter by engaging in teasing duels, thereby leaving open the possibility of racialised teasing to occur in the future, or should they not say anything and risk alienation by fellow co-workers? How best to deal with working in wider labour markets will be a relevant issue for upcoming generations of young Chinese people.

Some of these tensions were raised by Sai, one of the male informants, who worked for a renowned financial institution in the City of London:

[O]ne thing that I can associate with, one thing that was difficult which was not related to my race as such but related to my culture is because I come from a takeaway background. Working in the city it's much more different. But that's more to do with my upbringing than anything else, rather than I'm Chinese. But you can relate it to some extent, the Chinese takeaway, if you see what I mean. Chinese takeaway, streetwise... while the City is supposed to be all posh [starts talking in a posh accent] it's not really like that, but they have a different sense of humour. So in terms of that association, it can be quite difficult. But you just go along and you get used to it. It took me one and a half years to adapt. Why do you ask, do I have to put some artificial face on? You have to. If you don't, you have the feelings of a loner. You don't want to have the feelings of a loner. Everyone wants to be part of a group, no-one wants to be a loner, no matter who you are. So ultimately you have to find some sort of identity which is somewhere compatible with the rest of the group (Interview, 1 May 1997).

Sai regarded his Chinese catering background to be at odds with his job in London's financial district. A concern of his was that the social and cultural values that had sustained him during his time in the catering trade were contrary to the prevailing work codes and ethics at his office workplace. His appropriation of a posh accent in the extract above, parodied the distinction between his contrasting work domains. In order to fit into his working environment at the office, Sai had to renegotiate his identity not just around the issue of racial difference but also the ways that that form of difference is structured by class distinctions and the associated gender relations of fitting into a particular social group.

The ramifications of how Chinese young people are affected by racism in the workplace are uncertain. What is apparent from this research is that young Chinese people are seeking work in the wider labour market and to this end they have been made
aware of the ways in which racism may shape their careers, but without in any certain terms being sure of where it is happening and where it is not. It is perhaps likely that my informants understood racism at work through ongoing popular discussions, highlighted by the media, of racial disadvantage in the British labour market. Central in dealing with this situation are the capabilities and constraints gained from helping out in the catering trade. Pang (1993) has suggested that young Chinese people are in some way adversely affected by their previous experience and unable to deal with the transition to the cultural politics of employment in a British corporate environment. However, in the light of Sai and Sue’s positive valuations of what they learnt about dealing with customers and ‘knowing how to sell things’, it can be argued that the catering trade also offers some basis for coping strategies at work outside the take-away.

As well as choosing between the Chinese catering trade and entering the British labour market, many young British-Chinese people with ancestral origins in Hong Kong are entitled to work in the former British colony. It has been suggested that Chinese young people are increasingly exercising this option (Parker 1998). In the current study, a significant proportion of the sample had contemplated returning to Hong Kong in search of employment, but at the time of writing only two were working out there. At the time of conducting the interviews, King was already living in Hong Kong and had been out there the longest, since the summer of 1995.11 Sue and Sai both stated their plans to leave Britain though, of the pair, so far only Sue has embarked on her plan to live in Hong Kong.

Their reasons for leaving Britain given in Box 3.6 focus on how they regarded Britain as a place to work. Sai, Sue, and King all felt that the opportunities available to them in Hong Kong outweighed the prospect of staying in Britain. An aspect to consider in their intentions to leave Britain is their perception of the limitations structuring their working lives in Britain. All three felt that Britain did not have much to offer them in the future or, in certain cases, that they did not want to offer much to Britain in the future.
Their views on wanting to go to Hong Kong were shaped by how they felt about living in Britain more generally. As Sue put it ‘I don’t feel quite right in this country or quite happy in this country’. Jason and Steve, on the other hand, were less receptive to the idea of going to Hong Kong. In Jason’s case, the disjuncture between going to Hong Kong on holiday was contrasted to the reality of actually living there, while Steve remained adamant that London was central to his conception of self. Going to Hong Kong is never a simple choice, it is governed by individuals’ assessments of the economic, social and cultural possibilities in Britain and Asia.

In Sai’s case, he clearly felt that going to Hong Kong would circumvent the barriers to career advancement in Britain:

S: I don’t think I’m going to reach management level in Britain.
K: Why do you think that though?
S: How many Chinese people do you see reaching management level?
K: But isn’t it down to people like you to change that, the next generation as it were?
S: How long do you have to wait? I mean I haven’t got the patience to wait, why wait when you can go over to Hong Kong and become a manager straight away (Interview, 1 May 1997).

His belief that he would eventually emigrate was strengthened by the social and cultural connections he maintained with Hong Kong. During the interview, he reiterated his fondness for Hong Kong, ‘I like it . . . it’s buzzing it’s fast, there’s activity at the end of the day . . . my soul is just telling me it’s time for a change. I want something more. Doesn’t satisfy me anymore’ (Interview, 1 May 1997). However, it is paradoxical that, at the time of writing, Sai is thinking of expansion after having successfully launched a catering business during the autumn of 1998, in a county north of London. Having grown up helping out his parents in a take-away, working in the City of London after graduating from university, expressing a wish to emigrate to Hong Kong and now being a partner in a Chinese catering enterprise, Sai’s career has in some ways come full circle. This career

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11 I interviewed King when he returned to London for a personal visit during October 1996.
Box 3.6: Going to Hong Kong to work

S: I have intentions to leave. After one and a half years I intend to leave. Once I qualify as chartered accountant, I’m getting out of here. Why? I’ve been to Hong Kong, K [interjects] Isn’t that perhaps a contradiction of what you saying about wanting to contribute towards British society? S: I think some people, I wasn’t saying that about myself. For me, I’m simply working in the City to build up a career in Asia-Pacific. I believe in Asia-Pacific. I believe that’s where there is money to be made. That’s where the future lies. I don’t want to associate with Britain really (Sai. Interview, 1 May, 1997).

A few years ago I used to think, I couldn’t think more internationally but now England’s bought me up, I’ve had an education in England. But I don’t feel . . . I don’t feel quite right in this country or quite happy in this country. I don’t feel I could input much into this country because I don’t think that I’m appreciated or, or that they deserve my input. I’m saying this now because this is how I feel now with the situation and everything (Sue. Interview, 21 October 1996).

Kim: Could you tell me why you decided to go to Hong Kong to work? King: England is . . . I think there is scope to learn, but I don’t know. At the time when I left, it was like there wasn’t much happening and things haven’t picked up that much since . . . and I was a young lad. I haven’t seen the world, I thought fair enough, why not? (King. Interview, 7 October 1996).

K: Could you go back to Hong Kong to work? J: Hard to say. It’s a fine line between you go over there for a holiday and obviously it always seems better than it is over here. We’re not used to it. There’s different things to discover (Jason. Interview, 27 March 1997).

K: Wouldn’t you like to go out to Hong Kong? S: It’s impossible you know. I don’t know, well I do know. My work and the things that I do, I need London in a way around me, I think to . . . for it to come into my work, you know? I think if I moved to Hong Kong [. . .] over here I can relax more. In London, you can relax and you can chill, live life and I’m not forced into making loads of money and stuff. In Hong Kong it’s totally different and I don’t know if I could live there (Steve. Interview, 24 March 1997).
path encapsulates the work routes and employment choices that are available to young Chinese people in Britain.

**Conclusion**

The sphere of employment for young British-Chinese people is characterised by a trichotomy between Chinese people working in the ethnic economy, occupations in the wider British labour market and the opportunity for some of working in Hong Kong. While little is known about the last two groups, available research indicates that Chinese young people employed in these sectors are working in professional occupations.

There are several reasons why the catering trade has been the focus of this chapter. A legacy of employment in the ethnic economy amongst the Chinese in Britain has, to a large extent, insulated them from the hazards faced by other ethnic minorities during periods of economic downturn. By creating a niche in Britain’s catering trade, the Chinese have procured for themselves a high level of self-sufficiency (Watson, 1977). An outcome of this is the perceived ‘success’ of the Chinese, which although contentious, in many cases is entirely justified. For many of the early Chinese settlers in Britain emanating from humble origins in the rural New Territories of Hong Kong and southern China, they have indeed benefited financially from working in the catering trade. The pivot of Chinese economic activity in the catering trade has, however, not occurred without consequence. Past commentators on the Chinese in Britain have highlighted the exploitative labour conditions of the sector (Baker 1994, for example) and the concentration of Chinese youth, women and illegal economic migrants from southern China at the lower end of the ethnic economy in poorly paid positions is a concern.

In this study, attention has been given to the role of young Chinese people in sustaining Chinese catering businesses. Whether or not they should be ‘helping out’ parents is a critical issue. I have demonstrated how most of my second generation informants were relied upon to help out, and in some cases their labour was crucial to the
survival of family businesses. Helping out inevitably imposed restrictions on the lives of the young Chinese people that I interviewed. The role of negotiation with parents and in handling customers is central to how the lives of second generation British-Chinese people are shaped. Based on their experiences in the catering trade many expressed a wish to work outside the ethnic economy. It is credible to say that even though the Chinese catering trade remains the focus of Chinese economic activity in Britain, British-Chinese young people in London are redefining notions of Chinese employment. Since the Chinese population in Britain is a relatively young one, it remains to be seen how future generations of Chinese will perform in the British labour market. How Britain’s Chinese ethnic economy will respond to a flight of British-born Chinese from the catering trade is another consideration.
I wrote these words for everyone who struggles in their youth, who won’t accept deception instead of what is truth (Lauryn Hill, *Everything is Everything*)

Introduction

In the focus groups that I organised, participants were asked to watch a fifteen-minute short film, *Canto-fever*, directed by Rosalind Tsang and aired on Channel 4 periodically during the course of 1997. In showing the short film to the discussion groups, the intention was to provoke the participants into thinking about their involvement in ‘the Chinese community’ - a term that hitherto remains largely unquestioned. This particular docu-film was chosen because it highlights the role of Hong Kong popular culture in the formation of British-Chinese identities (Parker 1995). The film focuses intimately on a core of three British-Chinese individuals, Gillian, Michael and Hung who form part of a social network of British-Chinese students at Manchester Metropolitan University. Following the group around Manchester, the film examines their attitudes towards Canto-pop music and documents various aspects of their social lives, oscillating between sites such as a Chinese society meeting at the university, a nightclub, various locations within Manchester’s Chinatown and domestic settings. That the film centres upon the lives of young British-Chinese people around each other is significant. There is minimal interaction with other ‘races’. Interspersed between traditionally-held views on
endogamous relationships, love, marriage and helping out parents in the catering trade from the cast are clips of Canto-pop music videos that feature famous Hong Kong Chinese pop stars. Exemplifying the inherent sense of Chinese cultural nationalism and solidarity prevalent in the film is the final scene which features a gathering of approximately fifteen young British-Chinese people huddled together, laughing and joking, intimately singing along karoke-style to a Canto-pop anthem.

During the course of the focus groups some of the participants voiced their anxiety about the way the individuals in Canto-fever were held to be representatives of British-Chinese youth:

Billy: That made me cringe.
Kim: What makes you cringe though?
Billy: ‘Cos they’re not cool are they?
Kit: Yeah, but if you were into the things what they’re into . . .
Billy: No, they’re nerds, you can see that . . .
Ted: No, it’s because they live in the real world (Focus group, 25 November 1997).

To an extent my informants in the focus groups acknowledged the real life actuality of Canto-fever. Yet there were obvious differences in how the participants watched the short film. In the dialogue above, Billy displayed an aversion to what he saw, while the others, Kit and Ted, were seemingly not as critical of the film’s real life actors. While it was not said, what Billy objected to was the unidimensional portrayal of Chinese youth in terms that are familiar and overworked. In Canto-fever, British-Chinese youth are seen as an insular and unassimilable bunch, their lives centred upon helping out parents in the catering trade. Billy’s opposition to Canto-fever may be contrasted to Ted’s more defensive reaction that ‘they live in the real world’. The polarization of the informants’ viewpoints obscured otherwise similar age, ethnic and occupational backgrounds. In one of the other focus groups that were held, the following conversation took place:

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1 Canto-fever is perhaps a sequel to China Dolls, produced by the same director. China Dolls was shown as part of of Channel Four’s Tribe Time series and was nominated for an RTS award as ‘Best
Kim: How representative would you say that film [Canto-fever] is of us?

Sonia: Exactly!

Sue: This is how I see it. When I see films like that it's true, because I know friends that are like that but at the same time me viewing it, I always feel like an outsider viewing in even though we look the same . . . (Focus group, 18 November 1997).

Sue's latter point, her self-attributed status as a similar-looking 'outsider', captures the essence of this chapter - the internally differentiated social relations that exist within a racially identifiable entity. Her comments signify, to some degree, opposed ways of 'being Chinese'. These are not related in any simple way to external perceptions of the Chinese in Britain, but to standpoints within and in relation to 'the Chinese community' on the part of British-Chinese themselves. The reaction of Sue and Sonia to my line of questioning was, in a sense, an acknowledgement that they occupy alternative stances to the subjects in Canto-fever.

In this chapter, I examine in greater detail these internal definitions and differentiations that contradict externally held perceptions of 'the Chinese community'. Previous studies have characterised the Chinese in Britain as a homogenous entity emanating from the catering trade who rigidly adhere to traditional values (Baker 1994, Shang 1984, Watson 1977). This work did not establish decisively whether or not there is a 'Chinese community'. Watson, for example, viewed the Hong Kong villagers he studied as conceiving of themselves as belonging to a single loosely-organised 'community' associated with the catering trade (1977: 195). Indeed, the idea of a close-knit 'Chinese community' is a term often used to characterise the existence of Chinese people in Britain and symbolised by Chinatowns and Chinese catering establishments throughout the country (Broady 1955). These definitions, however, are far from value-free social scientific statements. Kibria (1998: 941) asserts that:

racial boundaries reflect relations of power, in particular the ability of the dominant group to construct and impose definitions upon others. At the same time, those who are categorized cannot be simply understood as passive recipients of externally imposed definitions.

Following this, the current chapter is concerned with the social relations that divide Chinese people within Britain and the ways in which my second generation informants understand their own forms of sociability and solidarity. The emergence of second and third generation Chinese combined with the arrival of significant numbers of overseas students of Chinese descent and Vietnamese settlers from the early 1980s has produced a 'Chinese community' far more heterogeneous than is commonly thought. This chapter explore this heterogeneity in various ways. The first section looks at the role of Chinatown in constructing a unitary sense of 'the Chinese community' and deconstructs this idea from the perspective of my informants for whom it is positioned much more specifically in relation to particular groups of Chinese people. The next section continues this fragmentation of 'the Chinese community' by examining inter-ethnic differences. This replacement of a singular 'Chinese community' with a plurality of partial and overlapping collectives, groupings and forms of solidarity is explored in the next three sections through considering the social bonds underpinning intra-ethnic friendship groups; the spaces, sites and settings of British-Chinese sociability; and the contextual politics of speaking Chinese in Britain. Each of these investigations considers the ways in which the boundaries of these 'partial communities' are marked. In the final section, I broaden the discussion to encompass national boundaries. I examine the attitudes of my informants towards belonging in Britain or parental homelands.

Chinatown as a symbol of 'community'

The perception of a distinct 'Chinese community' in Britain has been sustained in the popular imagination by the ubiquity and tangible presence of Chinatowns in British cities and throughout the diaspora. Essentially, this view of the 'Chinese community' has resulted in the creation of a set of boundaries that highlights cultural difference and serves to equate 'community' with 'race'. While it is undeniable that Chinatowns provide for some of the needs of Chinese people in Britain, and a basis for the
profitability of some Chinese businesses, the cost is that their existence may provide legitimation for the view that there is a discernible ‘Chinese community’ that is visible, locatable and different. From an external vantage point this facilitates targeting and labeling processes, while within the Chinese population of Britain its dominant image requires individuals to position themselves in relation to its meanings.

Given the visibility and, in terms of geographical location, the centrality of London’s Chinatown, it is not surprising that it acts as a central point of reference for Chinese people in London. Individual perceptions of its meaning in terms of ‘community’ were, however, very much a matter of personal interpretation. Chinatown exists as one of many different sites and spaces where my informants were able to maintain a connection, however minimal, to some sense of ‘the community’. These feelings of belonging and dislocation are always experienced through particular cultural practices and social relations.

Especially significant are the cultural meanings attached to going *yum cha* in Chinatown and the social and cultural functions that this ritual confers. ‘Yum cha’ - ‘drink tea’ - is an activity rooted in traditional cultural practices that can be likened to having a sociable breakfast or lunch. The custom involves consuming various *dim sum* (literally meaning ‘little pieces of heart’ or dumplings) with Chinese tea. However, its transformation in diaspora has resulted in local variations. For example, In Hong Kong, people may participate in *yum cha* every morning and may go as early as 7am to local ‘tea houses’ or restaurants. In this respect, *yum cha* may be thought of as breakfast rather than lunch. Typically, in London, restaurants that serve *dim sum* open at lunchtime and cater for fewer numbers. My informants would rarely go *yum cha* more than once a week. One of the informants, Sue, outlined her reasons for going to Chinatown:

The only reason to go out to Chinatown now would be to go *yum cha* [drink tea] on Sundays with my mum or dad and cousins. Or back then, there was one summer where me and J were friends and we used to meet out there every Sunday to go *yum cha*, hang around the Trocadero, but then grew tired of it because there’s no meaning for it anymore (Interview, 21 October 1996).
The two activities listed by Sue of *yum cha* and to ‘hang around the Trocadero’ were relevant in maintaining Sue’s recent and past visits to Chinatown. To those who I spoke to, *yum cha* was undertaken for a variety of reasons. For Sue, the purpose of going *yum cha* was primarily social in nature - she mentioned how she would go *yum cha* with her family, cousins and friends. The role of restaurants in Chinatown specialising in dim sum, as well as having an economic function, also facilitates other social and cultural transactions that take place to support a partial notion of ‘community’ that rests upon its role as a meeting place.

Furthermore, the meeting places of Chinatown are differentiated by generation. Sunday is often Chinatown’s busiest day. Sue’s acknowledgement that there was one summer where she would go to Chinatown every Sunday to meet her friend and ‘hang around’ in the Trocadero is important. It provides testimony to the breadth of functions that Chinatown and its surroundings provide for different individuals. The Trocadero is a West End landmark immediately adjacent to Chinatown and located between the busy stretch of Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus. It is significant as a meeting place on Sunday for Chinese youths in London. In this regard, London’s Chinatown, more specifically hanging around the Trocadero, was influential in Sue’s personal conception of identity during her formative years. It is likely that the presence of significant numbers of Chinese youth at this setting enabled her to initially come into contact with other young Chinese people. In this regard, Chinatown as a social arena is one of many sites where Chinese people congregate in discernible numbers, but those groupings are differentiated by age and the relationships between them. The different generations of Chinese people that use Chinatown on Sundays may came together in family gatherings at certain restaurants, but they also utilise different parts of Chinatown and its immediate surroundings for quite different purposes and attach quite different meanings to them.

Chinatown’s external standing as the most conspicuous marker of ‘the Chinese community’ in Britain was interrogated by the majority of my informants. If Chinatown was taken as being representative of ‘the Chinese community’ as a whole,
then most of my second generation interviewees considered themselves to be exempt from belonging to that ‘community’. Sue’s comments exemplified this stance:

Chinatown is just like for tourists. It’s just a street [. . .] it doesn’t bring much of a Chinese community together, it’s just solely for yum cha, buy Chinese food from the supermarket and have some kind of belonging. But at the same time, maybe Chinese people don’t appreciate how little they’ve got. But at the same time it’s quite meagre what little we have got (Interview, 21 October 1996).

Chinatown’s appeal for tourists was highlighted by Sue, and has been the subject of academic attention (Anderson 1991) For her, Chinatown was considered to have a limited range of social functions that did not sustain a ‘community’. Yet, given that, Chinatown’s role in providing basic cultural goods and services for Britain’s Chinese population was deemed to be important in the light of how little there was to sustain them. This distinction was also crucial in Andy’s conception of Chinatown:

Chinatown doesn’t have any intrinsic human community, I would thoroughly agree that it’s an economic community that thrives on business as a cohesive element between people, but without business in Chinatown there is no interaction and very little motivation for that because it’s a commercial place. Go to Chinatown, and I have actually lived there for five years, and you’ll find that after 9pm or so, apart from the restaurants that stay open, “the Chinese community”, in inverted commas, goes home to the suburbs, like Rickmansworth if they happen to be the owner of the supermarket or, if they are not, if they are just a supermarket working class labourer, then they’ll just go home to a place like Dulwich (Interview, 6 April 1997).

Even though London’s Chinatown is popularly regarded as a symbol of Britain’s Chinese presence, its character differs to Chinatowns elsewhere in diaspora. The non-residential status of London’s Chinatown was the mainstay of Andy’s argument that it was not part of any ‘intrinsic human community’. Unlike its larger counterparts in North America, where residents of Chinatown live and work within the same area (Zhou 1992), London’s Chinatown was conceptualised and exists in more narrow terms.

The limitations placed on the role of Chinatown by my second generation informants also meant that ‘community’ was generally regarded as being increasingly
fragmented. Central to my informants' understandings of 'community' was a notion of mutual help. As Yin put it, 'community in my eyes would be where you would help each other out and meet on a daily basis at a club or whatever' (Interview, 3 January 1997). This notion of 'community' certainly underpinned Puncho's conception of the term:

P: I think the Chinese community is in a sense a small world where you know one person and they'll know someone else and it's kind of interlinked and in that sense it's more of a community, whereas in Britain, in general, I'd say there's not so much of a Chinese community.

K: So does a Chinese community in Britain exist?

P: Yeah, I'd say it does. But not in regards to Chinatown. There is a Chinatown community but a lot of it's to do with family (Interview, 28 June 1996).

Puncho, like Andy and Yin, implicitly emphasized how Chinatown appeared to be devoid of the cultural values and support structures that are thought to be a chief characteristic of 'the Chinese community'. This sense of an absence of mutual systems of help, support and understanding existing within Chinatown is contrary to widely held perceptions of the close-knit and insular 'Chinese community' so beloved of past researchers on the Chinese. However, this is likely to be because these informants did not involve themselves with organisations and institutions set up to serve the Chinese in London, organisations that operate with a strong notion of 'community' values.

At its widest extent 'the Chinese community' was regarded by Steve as embracing all realms of Chinese activity. When asked whether or not he thought a 'Chinese community' existed he replied, 'there's loads of Chinese communities . . . there's loads of party going out Chinese communities, there's loads of gambling communities, there's loads of like, you know, take-away communities, families, all that sort of thing (Interview, 24 March 1997). The breakdown of Britain's Chinese population into these different entities by Steve would seem to highlight the uncertainties of using the term 'the Chinese community'. Instead of viewing 'the Chinese community' as a unitary entity, located in Chinatown and with a single set of values, my informants saw communities as existing on a variety of levels, for various
purposes. Chinatown, therefore, simply acts as a setting, although perhaps the most prominent, where conflicting notions of ‘community’ come into contact with each other. Steve’s characterisation of what might be called ‘partial communities’ that the Chinese belong to can be further explored through understanding inter-ethnic and other cultural differences.

**The heterogeneity of Britain’s Chinese population**

Far from constituting an undifferentiated mass of people, Britain’s Chinese population comprises collectivities from a diversity of class, ethnic and social backgrounds. While the diversity of Britain’s Chinese population is increasingly acknowledged (Parker 1995), there has been little sustained analysis of the intra-community dynamics that persist amongst the Chinese in Britain. An overwhelming emphasis has been placed on settlers from Hong Kong who have concentrated in the catering trade for their economic livelihoods (Baker 1994, Shang 1984, Watson 1977). The experiences of Vietnamese settlers in Britain, many of whom are of ethnic Chinese origin, remain relatively underresearched. Further, the arrival of significant numbers of undocumented workers from southern China and overseas Chinese students contribute towards an increasingly heterogenous Chinese population in London. What this section attempts to do is to highlight some of the differences that exist between the distinct groups of Chinese people that reside in London.

It is worth indicating that even amongst the earlier postwar waves of Chinese migration to Britain there existed a history of internal differences. Watson (1977: 205) has noted how there has been a history of tension in the New Territories of Hong Kong between Cantonese-speaking *Punti* (‘native settlers’) and the *Hakka* (‘guest people’), who as well as being able to speak Cantonese have their own distinctive language. Economic participation by both groups in Britain’s catering trade has, however, extinguished some of the hostility that once existed between them (Watson 1977). This has, however, been replaced by other tensions.
Amongst the second generation informants, an issue that aroused conversation during the interviews was their attitudes towards overseas Chinese students from Hong Kong (see also chapter 5). Undoubtedly, the presence of large numbers of overseas Chinese students in Britain originating from China, Hong Kong and Malaysia, swell the numbers of Britain’s Chinese population. Yet it was unclear how this disparate group of students identified with Britain’s Chinese collectivities. Certainly, to my knowledge, the chief informants in the study did not socialise with overseas students. On the whole, the upbringing of my informants in British circumstances was a key motive for maintaining their distance from these groups. It was on this basis that Steve felt that he could differentiate between different types of young Chinese people:

The real thing is you can always tell just by looking at them, do you know what I mean? It’s like when you get a real like Hong Kong kind of Chinese or BBC Chinese, yeah, they will dress in that certain style, you know... you know! Then when you get someone who’s a bit more of a westernised BBC, they’ll dress differently, they’ll come across straight away you know (Interview, 24 March 1997. My emphasis).

Steve’s certainty that he could tell apart distinct collectives of young Chinese people depended on his understandings of the different ways in which dress codes functioned as a marker of identity. Steve’s lumping together of individuals who were, according to his personal classification, ‘Hong Kong kind of Chinese’ and ‘BBC Chinese’ signified the extent to which Steve regarded the latter group as identifying with Hong Kong culture and differentiated them, within the category of ‘BBC’, from a ‘westernised BBC’. What Steve had to say testifies to how transnational and diasporic movements disrupt the meanings attached to ‘the Chinese community’.

Attention given to conflict amongst the Chinese in Britain has also centred upon the relations between Vietnamese settlers and the earlier Chinese migrants from the New Territories of Hong Kong (Shang 1984). What Shang observed was the unease that grew between the two groups from competition for employment in the Chinese

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2 According to Li et al (1995) students from Hong Kong and Malaysia consistently made up the largest body of overseas students in further and higher education in Britain, ranging from 5700 to 7700 in full time education over the period 1981-1992.
ethnic economy. Indeed, some of the informants I spoke to who arrived in Britain as refugees in the early 1980s, spoke about their mistreatment from the Hong Kong Chinese who worked in the British catering trade. Khoung told me:

If you’re a Vietnamese refugee, you’re still seen as a paddy field nobody from a very unsuccessful group. They [the New Territories Chinese] cannot identify with it. The racism I’m talking about from the Chinese, because they’re from Hong Kong and they always have money or they always have a successful belonging, they all feel more sophisticated than this group (Interview 28 April 1997).

Khoung, who is from the north of Vietnam, is ethnic Chinese and speaks Cantonese fluently. What he experienced from Chinese settlers from rural Hong Kong poses a challenge to the meaning of a singular unified ‘Chinese community’. Trung also believed that earlier generations of Chinese settlers in Britain remained hostile towards Vietnamese refugees. According to him, ‘the reason why we [Vietnamese and Chinese people] don’t get along in this country . . . there is a lot of Hong Kong people that look down on other Chinese people’ (Interview, 21 April 1997). Furthermore, Trung made it clear to me that his sentiments were not only directed at Britain’s early Chinese settlers in the catering trade, but also at overseas students from Hong Kong.

Overall, Vietnamese settlers in Britain occupy an uncertain position in relation to ‘the community’. Even though the majority of ethnic Chinese settlers from Vietnam perceived themselves as being ‘Chinese’ they were unable to meet the incumbent expectations set by the predominant Hong Kong Chinese population of belonging to ‘the Chinese community’. To this end, membership is delineated along the lines of class, cultural, ethnic and racial differences. This is despite the fact that three quarters of Britain’s population of Vietnamese refugees are ethnic Chinese from the north of the country.3 Trung, who is from the south of the country, could be regarded as quite

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3 Robinson (1993: 137) identifies that ‘the exodus of Vietnamese has taken place in two waves, with a variety of migration vintages. The first wave comprised those who left Vietnam immediately before or after the fall of Saigon in May 1975 and were predominantly ethnic Vietnamese from the south of the reunited country. The second wave began to leave Vietnam in mid-1978 and consisted of ethnic Chinese who were coming under increasing pressure from the government as relations between Vietnam and China deteriorated into the Third Indo-China War. This wave was made of people from the north and the south.’ There are estimates that there are now thought to be between 22,000 and 24,000 Vietnamese in the UK.
exceptional in that he was not Chinese and did not speak Cantonese. During the interviews and the time that I spent with him he would regularly assert that he was ‘pure’ Vietnamese, which he considered to be something of an anomaly. I wanted to explore his relationships to his Vietnamese peers:

K: Do you hang out with your Vietnamese friends?
T: Yes I do, but the problem with England is that a lot of Vietnamese people in England are half Chinese anyway yeah? It’s rare to find a 100 per cent Vietnamese person. I’m a one hundred per cent Vietnamese and most of my Vietnamese friends are half Chinese . . . if you go to America, you don’t get questions like are you part of the Chinese community? The question that will be asked is are you part of a Vietnamese community? (Interview 21 April 1997).

It may be presumed that, partly as a response to discriminatory attitudes from Hong Kong Chinese, Trung considered himself to belong to a Vietnamese community. When questioned on why he thought he was part of a Vietnamese community as opposed to ‘the Chinese community’, he replied, ‘Well for a start there is the culture thing . . . ’ (Interview, 21 April 1997). Trung informed me that there was a separate Vietnamese social structure that he was involved in, but which I did not research. I was told that the Vietnamese had their own social clubs in certain areas of south London, where Vietnamese people would meet. As well as being part of a separate Vietnamese-based social network, Trung, like other Vietnamese, also played a part in forms of Chinese sociability. By stressing a commonality with the Chinese, he was able to ally himself politically with Chinese people, but at the same time he could articulate a distinct Vietnamese identity when and where it suited him.

Trung’s comments denote the hegemonic position that the Hong Kong Chinese occupy in relation to ‘the Chinese community’. What Kibria (1998: 948) refers to as ‘competing ethnic-specific interests’ may explain the ambiguities of Trung’s position in relation to his set of belongings to ‘the community’. While Trung was evidently concerned with asserting his right to belonging to a Vietnamese collectivity, external pressures of relative population size and racism meant that this collectivity was largely subsumed within ‘the Chinese community’. That Trung mentioned the
situation of the Vietnamese in America is significant. It may be deduced that his relationship to ‘the Chinese community’ was influenced by the situation in the United States, where it can be assumed that the boundaries that mark the Vietnamese from the Chinese are more pronounced.

Nevertheless, Trung continued to maintain friendships with Chinese individuals. It was through Trung that I met Sai, one of the other British-Chinese informants in the study. At the time of the fieldwork Trung was also on good terms with Billy, another British-Chinese person who was involved in the following dialogue:

Billy: When you talk about community, I don’t think the Chinese people I’ve come across from Hong Kong, don’t act as if it’s a Chinese community.
Kim: You think so?
Billy: But in south London where I’ve seen Trung and his friends, they act as if they are a community. I mean I see the way you [referring to Trung] are . . .
Trung: I take the opposite view. I think the Hong Kongers have more of a sense of community, particularly the overseas Hong Kongers. I think they have a stronger sense of community (Focus group, 25 November 1997).

Highlighting the ethnic and racial fragmentation of ‘the Chinese community’, Billy felt that Trung’s friends in south London operated as a community more effectively than Chinese people from Hong Kong. Trung, on the other hand was of the contrary opinion. Here ‘community’ seems to be a way of describing social relations that are more easily attributable to others than oneself. However, central to the informants’ reflections on ‘community’ were the issues of solidarity, boundaries and group membership which offer a way of conceptualising how collectivities are formed and how individuals relate to each other. The issue of solidarity and the ways in which ‘partial Chinese communities’, as opposed to ‘the Chinese community’, are shaped and fashioned will be discussed next.
Group solidarity

This section examines the solidarity of Chinese people in Britain and, drawing from the socialising preferences of my informants, gives an idea of the cohesiveness of groups within Britain's Chinese population. My respondents differed in their commitment to socialising with fellow Chinese people. However, despite the dispersed nature of Chinese settlement in London, most of my informants were prepared to travel relatively long distances outside their local areas in order to socialize with their Chinese friends. For instance, at the weekends Puncho would regularly travel from his suburban home in Essex to play football in west London for a Chinese team. His team mates were predominantly Chinese and they would compete in a league of Chinese teams. Puncho's association with a 'Chinese' team playing football in a 'Chinese' league, could be seen to reinforce notions of 'community' by binding Chinese collectives participating in shared sporting interests. Yet the assembling of Chinese football teams did not automatically mean that the links established from playing football were extended into other social arenas. When questioned about his relationships with his footballing peers, Puncho told me:

P: I always see them about and that's as far as it goes really, they're just team mates.
K: They haven't much influence in your life then?
P: Not really. They might know people I know, but the only time I'll see them on a regular basis will be at football (Interview, 28 June 1996).

What can be inferred is that Puncho's football team mates were only part of his wider social network of Chinese friends. His capacity to move from one group of Chinese friends to the next points to the fluidity of barriers that exist between groups within 'the Chinese community'. Generally, the perception of these barriers were very much open to negotiation, which allowed for young Chinese people to be potentially acquainted with several different groups of Chinese friends. Puncho's awareness of how inter-group barriers amongst his Chinese friends were easily transcended also made it possible for him to alternate between his Chinese and non-Chinese sets of
friends when he wanted to: 'sometimes I don’t see Chinese mates for a long time and then sometimes they’re the only people I see’ (Interview, 28 June 1996). Puncho’s relationships to his social network could be considered to be quite typical of many informants in the study. Indeed, Will would actively flit from one group of ‘friends’ to another group of ‘friends’. He described himself in the following terms, ‘Well, basically I’m like a floater as well. I wouldn’t say that I’ve got a present bunch of mates, because I go from one bunch to the next’ (Interview, 18 April 1997). Therefore, in relation to these loose bonds of sociability, young Chinese people are able to construct friendship networks which, if not completely transcending racialised boundaries, are not entirely limited by them.

However, in other cases, there was a closer attention to a paramount ‘Chinese’ identity as a way of structuring friendships and defining group membership. For example, some of the other informants chose to maintain groups of Chinese friends for reasons of pursuing a strategic cultural politics. The ‘Hatfield bunch’, a group of Chinese young men and women, with its core members at one stage being part of the Chinese society at the University of Hertfordshire, can be used to exemplify this. Solidarity was key in maintaining the group, both in terms of their relationships to each other as individuals and to their idea of ‘the community’. The group mainly consisted of around ten young Chinese men and other fringe members which included girlfriends. During their time at university, most of the Hatfield bunch were living together in student residences and the impression I got was that through these bonds more deep and meaningful relationships were sustained. Jason, who introduced me to the group, claimed not to know any Chinese people when he was younger. He told me:

Now I look at it, why did I drop my own type of people just to hang out with the other [white] group? Just because I used to think it was really cool. Their idea of thinking is more liberated yeah, it’s not so constrained. Now I understand that at the end of the day it’s Chinese people I can trust (Interview 28 March 1997).
Jason’s retreat from largely having a group of white English friends to being a key member of the Hatfield bunch may be viewed as a response to his perception that he was not being fully accepted amongst his white peers. A personal project of his was to get British-Chinese people together, since ‘I want to see a massive network of people who can bounce ideas off each other and learn from people’s experiences’ (Interview, 28 March 1997). Membership of the Hatfield bunch appeared to be relatively flexible with the group expanding and contracting its ranks in a way that they deemed appropriate. Certainly, through the influence of Jason and his benevolence towards his Chinese friends, I felt that the Hatfield bunch had expanded its boundaries to include people such as myself and Jason’s network of Chinese friends prior to going to university. That Jason was concerned to consolidate his social network of Chinese friends raises interesting issues. For him, going to Hong Kong with several members of the group resulted in a sense of solidarity that he found personally rewarding:

Going to Hong Kong, it really united us. Whereas over here we all knew each other, quite close, but it wasn’t like every time we’d meet up. So everyone was like really friendly and got more and more close and that really gave me a buzz (Interview, 28 March 1997).

The excursion of the Hatfield bunch to Hong Kong during the summer of 1996 after many of them had graduated from university was considered by Jason to be the pinnacle of group solidarity. Since leaving university in 1996, however, most of the Hatfield bunch have gone back to their parental homes across a wide area of London and its surrounding districts. As many entered full-time employment, opportunities to meet on a regular basis declined. It is significant that although many of the Hatfield bunch had graduated they would still meet up on special occasions, such as birthdays or occasionally attend Chinese discos. Moreover, some of the group would regularly go ten-pin bowling at Heathrow bowls, near Heathrow airport at the weekends after midnight.

During the period of fieldwork I intermittently went to Heathrow with the Hatfield bunch. From what I saw, and what Jason told me, the Hatfield bunch would
go most Friday evenings and travel to Heathrow from other parts of west London where many of his friends lived. Usually members of the group would bring their partners and while many would bowl others would sit around, have something to eat and catch up on the latest gossip. Now and then other members of the Hatfield bunch who resided in areas outside west London would travel down from as far as Enfield, Milton Keynes and Southend to be with the group. Even though Jason seemed to be committed to keeping the group together, in some ways it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to achieve his aim. The boundaries of group membership also differed according to setting. At the social spaces frequented by young Chinese people, such as Chinese discos, group solidarity became ambiguous:

I want to see it [uniting the Hatfield bunch] happen, but it's harder as well. You know you go to a club, we go to all those Chinese dos and stuff. It's like when your friend knows someone, no-one's going to go up to you and say 'Hello, how are you? What's your name?' whatever, unless a girl is interested in you (Interview 28 March 1997).

The interactions that occurred between members of the Hatfield bunch and others in Chinese social arenas often meant that group boundaries dissolved. It could be said that the solidarity of the Hatfield bunch was most evident outside Chinese social contexts. Indeed, what underpinned the group's sense of solidarity towards each other as individuals and the idea of 'community' was a gendered commitment towards asserting a British-Chinese group identity within a British context. Although it was never mentioned, I also suspected that a motive for preserving the group was to counter the effects of racism through a way of thinking that stressed safety in numbers.

The relevance of a strategic cultural politics for young British-Chinese people in maintaining connections with each other is important. For Jason, keeping the Hatfield bunch together was essential. Additionally, it is likely that this strategic politics was more of a concern for the young men, rather than young women in the study (see chapter 6). These strategies can be seen within the more loosely bounded and multicultural friendships considered earlier. When questioned on why he continued his Chinese friendships, Puncho replied 'on the whole, just generalising, I
feel more at home with Chinese people’ (Interview, 28 June 1996). However, far from exclusively socialising with Chinese groups, Puncho’s social network comprised of a circle of mixed friends. In addition, Jason told me, ‘when you talk about solidarity I don’t mean that we should all unite and stay amongst ourselves. I think that’s wrong’ (Interview, 28 March 1997). The move towards a collective consciousness, highlighted by the actions of Jason and Puncho, has resulted in young Chinese people articulating new ways of being British-Chinese. Jason’s motives for maintaining the Hatfield bunch and Puncho’s reasons for wanting to sustain his links to his Chinese friends cannot simply be understood in terms of a cultural essentialism. By maintaining the solidarity of Chinese friendship groups it was possible to assert a ‘Chinese’ identity in response to potential exclusion from other peer groups. Racism is central to this process (see chapter 5). It is also part of the reason for the existence of a series of largely separate social spaces frequented by young Chinese people. The next section examines some of these spaces which were used by my informants, and considers what they offer to young Chinese people and the forms of solidarity and differentiation that they exhibit.

Chinese social arenas

In the previous section, I examined the nature of the relationships that occur amongst and between young British-Chinese people. I concluded by saying that a strategic cultural politics was involved in the continuation of some Chinese groups, such as the Hatfield bunch. I also touched upon the ways in which Chinese social structures were relevant in shaping how young Chinese people understand their relationships to ‘the community’. The purpose of this section is not only to examine what settings constitute the Chinese social structure in London, but also to highlight the ways in which they influence and internally disrupt constructions of a singular ‘community’.

The takeaway provides the most obvious site of subject formation for young Chinese people (Parker 1995, Song 1997b). As discussed in chapter 3, a large
proportion of the sample in my study had at some stage in their lives ‘helped out’
parents in the takeaway. It was argued that their experiences and negotiations with
parents and customers in the catering trade were formative in their lives. I
demonstrated how some of the informants rebelled against parents as a way of
escaping the obligations of helping out, while others sought various coping strategies
to deal with drunk customers. Depending on changing circumstances, working in the
takeaway from a young age may serve to strengthen a sense of cultural identity
influenced by exposure to Chinese cultural practices and traditions from parents.
Growing up in a take-away setting may have been influential in determining the
socialising preferences of some of my informants. Sai had helped out in his parents’
takeaway since he was eleven and, from what he told me, he felt that it was the norm
to be around Chinese people:

It's inherent . . . I mean, I feel it's natural, for a wong pee fu [yellow skin person] to hang around with
a wong pee fu, very natural, I don't know what it is, it's just mother nature I suppose [. . . ]
(Interview, 1 May 1997).

The attitudes of individuals like Sai are perhaps instrumental in configuring the
development of Chinese social spaces. Indeed, the popularity of some of these places
is signalled by Will’s description of Rowan’s, a snooker and ten-pin bowling complex
in north London:

I wouldn't say I specialise in going to a place where I meet Chinese people, but I would say that I just
know there would be Chinese people there or oriental people. A great example would be Finsbury
Park, we went about two months ago on a Sunday afternoon and it was a case of what other races we
could spot except for the workers (Interview, 18 April 1997).

Places like Rowan’s on a Sunday and the nightclubs which host Chinese discos (see
below) are turned into spaces which are dominated by young Chinese people.

These recreational spaces can be divided into public and private domains. On a
private level, my informants, especially the Hatfield bunch, would visit each others’
homes for various social reasons. Among other informants, some of them would also
visit Chinese friends to gamble. It has been noted that gambling is common pastime amongst the Chinese (Ng 1968, Taylor 1987, Watson 1977), and a handful of my male informants were particularly interested in gambling. Mahjong, a traditional Chinese game involving differently ordered tiles with four participants, and assorted card games were especially popular. Will told me that he and his Chinese friends would often stage Mahjong parties at their homes which would often last several hours. Gambling, however, was not restricted to the private sphere. Countless times I witnessed Chinese people gambling at sites such as casinos, snooker clubs and amongst the staff of the Joyful Diner where I worked (participant observation, Joyful Diner).

It was in public that gambling was most conspicuous and became most serious, since gambling in private domestic settings was often social in nature. On a few occasions, I was able to observe at first hand how preoccupied some Chinese men were with gambling. One of the informants, Trung, particularly liked to gamble. At an early stage of the research I met Trung once a week to play snooker at snooker clubs dotted around south London. As well as playing snooker, Trung would also gamble. On one occasion, Trung took me to a snooker club in Norwood early one Sunday morning where I was led into a concealed room at the back of the club which contained twenty Chinese men of various ages, ranging from in their early twenties to late forties. The focus of attention was a poker table containing ten players, where it was not uncommon for the pot to exceed two hundred pounds in the course of a game. At other times, Trung would play card games at a club in Camberwell with his younger counterparts where the stakes were not as high, but the sessions, so Trung told me, often lasted more than twenty-four hours (participant observation, south London snooker clubs).

These spaces are, on the whole, used by particular social groups. The forms of sociability that they offer are based around male interactions which may extend across generational boundaries, but tend to be confined within the class relations of the catering trade. Other Chinese people, who are either excluded from or do not wish to
participate in these activities, can however pursue involvement in other ‘partial communities’.

For the second generation, Chinese discos are conceivably the most well-known social arena. They best illuminate the prevalence of a cultural exclusivity that can be linked to an ideology of ‘community’ amongst Chinese youth in London, as well as revealing the internal fissures within that imagined entity. Over recent years, the proliferation of Chinese discos meant that I was able to attend eight during the course of the fieldwork (see table 4.1). The Chinese disco events listed in table 4.1 are by no means an exhaustive account of the number of Chinese discos that occurred over the period February 1996 to September 1997. These events, which were often hosted at renowned London nightclubs together with the number of people that attended each night underline the popularity of Chinese discos amongst second generation youth.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Nightclub</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance (approximate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 February 1996</td>
<td>Emporium</td>
<td>behind Regent Street</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 April 1996</td>
<td>Leisure Lounge</td>
<td>Holborn</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 November 1996</td>
<td>Camden Palace</td>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 December 1996</td>
<td>The Complex</td>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 February 1997</td>
<td>Adrenalin Village</td>
<td>Battersea</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 June 1997</td>
<td>The End</td>
<td>Covent Garden</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 September 1997</td>
<td>Ministry of Sound</td>
<td>Elephant and Castle</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 September 1997</td>
<td>Hanover Grand</td>
<td>near Oxford Circus</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: participant observation notes.

During the course of the research, I was present at Chinese discos which were all well attended and regularly attracted crowds of 300-400 and, on two occasions, in excess of a thousand people. As far as I could tell, the main difference between Chinese discos and their ‘western’ equivalents in London was the differentiation in terms of the racial and ethnic composition of the crowd. In terms of the music that
was played at these events, it encompassed a variety of current dance music genres, ranging from popular black musical forms to house music. There was no Chinese music or Canto-pop mixed in with the largely mainstream commercial dance music that tended to be played.

The willingness of Chinese youth to pay upwards of ten pounds for admission to these events, which more often than not were staged midweek, raises questions as to why young Chinese people go to these nights rather than attend cheaper alternatives elsewhere in the West End of London. When I asked Trung why he preferred going to Chinese discos, he replied ‘it’s just that you meet more Chinese girls and you probably know more people there’ (Interview, 21 April 1997). Indeed, Trung’s comments have much in common with many of the other male informants in the study, in that there was a clear preference to meet sexual partners of the same ‘race’ (see chapter 6).

From what I observed there was generally a greater number of Chinese men at these discos than young women. This was noted by King, who felt that the excessive presence of young men, for the most part, contributed to a hostile atmosphere:

I’ve been to loads of [Chinese] do’s. You’ve seen the aggressiveness when you go to Chinese discos. . . when you go to a Chinese nightclub it’s not like people go to have a good time do they? People go in there looking hard, trying to make situations bad and trying to undermine each other and trying to control other people about power, and it’s like they go to these places and just stand there (Interview 7 October 1996).

Given recent discussions on the role of youth cultures in the creation of a new cultural confidence amongst British-Asians (see chapter 5), it is conceivable that Chinese discos could be regarded as being the key site of young British-Chinese sociability in Britain. However, they are also known amongst young Chinese people as being the scene of tensions between the participants. King noted that it became customary to experience non-verbal threats that at times culminated in scuffles. On two or three occasions, I witnessed fights breaking out amongst young Chinese men, which seemed to be a consequence of petty disputes. That King was aware of the negative and confrontational attitudes that some young Chinese men held towards each other is
significant. What he had to say testifies to the ways in which Chinese youth masculinities operate and are manifest in these spaces. The nature of British-Chinese masculinity is the subject of inquiry in chapter 6.

On the basis of what King said, and from what I observed, it would be premature to regard Chinese discos as contributing towards a new found cultural confidence amongst second generation British-Chinese people. While the majority of the male respondents felt comfortable socialising with Chinese peers in these spaces, some of the other informants were not as keen to use them. Amongst the informants who did not participate in them, varying distancing strategies were utilised to position themselves in relation to the young Chinese people that did. This was manifest in different ways. When I asked Catherine for her views on going to Chinese discos, she had this to say:

I think the Chinese scene is much more commercial [...] The scene that I'm into it's like, well not underground but like underground in comparison to what the Chinese people like. They sort of like all that really shitty music. I like something a bit more tasteful (Interview, 13 April 1997).

The distancing strategy used by Catherine revolved around manipulating a refined image based upon her awareness of contemporary youth cultures. This set her apart from the more negative elements associated with unfashionable images of Chinese youth and was replaced with an image of a discerning trendsetter, not conforming to a mainstream culture. Catherine’s actions point to the formulation of identities among young British-Chinese people that are more individualistic rather than geared towards a Chinese collective. The distinctions between various personal conceptions of identity are investigated more fully in chapter 5.

In the past, however, Catherine had been much more a part of these Chinese social spaces and social relations. Her current stance was, in part, a rejection of this:

From what I found, the people I used to, because when I was a bit younger I used to always just hang out with Chinese people yeah, since I've been at university I don't. I've found that they're very competitive and very bitchy and there's always some backstabbing and that's what I didn't like especially with Chinese girls (Interview, 13 April 1997).
Going to university to study design and losing regular contact with her family and her Chinese peers enabled Catherine to formulate her current attitudes towards other Chinese people. She emphasized the incompatibility of her disparate ‘Chinese’ and ‘English’ lifestyles, as she put it ‘with English people, I can relate to them as in my taste, what I like, where I like to go and sort of like culture wise. With Chinese it’s like a different sort of bonding ‘(Interview, 13 April 1997). That she acknowledges ‘the different sort of bonding’ she shared with other Chinese people is significant. Regardless of Catherine’s reluctance to participate in certain Chinese social spaces, she nonetheless held an allegiance to a ‘Chinese’ identity, which enabled her to occupy a particular position in relation to other Chinese people. The ways in which young British-Chinese people are able to manipulate the boundaries between different Chinese collectivities raises interesting issues.

Some of the informants had become disillusioned with the cultural practises and actions associated with a general Chinese collectivity. Sue expressed the following sentiment in regard to meeting her young Chinese counterparts:

I find it quite superficial to speak to a Chinese person purely because they’re Chinese because it sort of means you’re not talking to them as a person, but you’re talking to them because they’ve got the same colour skin (Interview 21 October 1996).

For Sue, any presumptions of shared interests simply on the basis of being ‘Chinese’ were being dismantled. The distancing strategies that she operated were essential in deconstructing her sense of ‘the community’ and functioned in a number of ways. Sue recalled one incident where she met a Chinese male with the same surname during her first year at university - the significance of sharing a Chinese surname being that a connection is often established to a common place of origin in China or Hong Kong. After initially getting on well, she realised that ‘there was no common link to talk to him about’ (Interview, 21 October 1996). Sue felt that they could not relate in any way, despite the racial and surname commonalities that they shared. On other occasions, she and her little brother Ming would ‘sometimes take pleasure in cussing [insulting] Chinese people we see in England, like how ‘sad’ they are’ (Interview, 21
October 1996). Furthermore, Sue was equally dismissive of Hong Kong Chinese students who she thought 'tended to stare at you a lot' (Interview, 21 October 1996).

The complexity of these differentiations and negotiations within the social relations of young Chinese people in Britain is signalled by Steve who asserts both his knowledge of these spaces and his distance from them:

It's all part of Chinese culture isn't it? I mean all the stuff that you get them being into it, and all them sort of like sub-fractions of their little groups and their people are all part of it, and in a way I'm part of it but I don't really know it, do you know what I mean? I'm just like a viewer. I know what's going on and what they're doing but out of choice, I'm not into what they're into. It's like vice versa, they're not into what I'm into (Interview, March 1997).

Overall, therefore, young Chinese people are involved in social networks which, on the one hand, can involve fluid movements between different groups of friends and different social spaces, and on the other, and for certain people, are highly differentiated in terms of culture, taste and lifestyle. The construction and selection of these 'partial communities' can be seen both in the example of the Hatfield bunch's strategic cultural politics and Catherine and Sue's distancing strategies. Indeed, all Chinese social spaces are partial and fragmented rather than catering for a singular 'Chinese community'. Snooker clubs and Chinese discos cater for particular groups of Chinese people structured predominantly by gender, age and class. At the same time, it is important to recognise that the forms of solidarity that exist amongst Chinese youth in Britain need to be complex and to shift according to context. The next section will show that this is also true of the ways in which language is used.

Language

In the previous section, I examined the sociability of British-Chinese friendship groups and looked at the social spaces which young Chinese frequent. What emerged was that the barriers of group membership were generally fluid, but could also harden into group exclusivity. This section examines the role of language in promoting a sense
of being 'Chinese' in Britain. What is of interest to the present discussion is not the linguistic aspects of language use but rather how language operates culturally and politically in maintaining an allegiance with, or distancing people from, a Chinese collectivity in Britain.

My informants spoke a variety of Chinese dialects, ranging from Putonghua ('common language' or Mandarin), wai toe hua ('village language'), Hakka and standard Cantonese. Trung also spoke Vietnamese. In spite of the regional variations in languages spoken, Cantonese has become the intermediary language amongst Chinese people in Britain. Most of the informants spoke Cantonese, but their proficiency in the language varied. Chinese languages were frequently spoken at home. However, even within this sphere their use varied between parents and siblings:

K: How do you communicate with your mum and dad then?
P: Hakka.
K: What about when you talk to your sisters?
P: I speak English to my sisters (Puncho. Interview, 28 June 1996).

In Puncho's case he had to speak Chinese to his parents since they did not speak fluent English. This situation, whereby parents are able to use their children as English-speaking intermediaries, has been common in the past (Song 1997b). However, over half of my informants' parents had a good command of English. Even so, in households where both parents and offspring spoke English, Chinese was still used, as Jason explains:

K: So when you speak at home do you speak . . . ?
J: [intervenes] Mixed, mainly Chinese because my parents have always tried to speak to me in Chinese so I can maintain the mother tongue (Interview, 28 March 1997).

It is in this way that Chinese languages were still used in families where parents spoke English, to preserve a sense of cultural identity. Further, some parents would make considerable attempts to ensure that their children possessed some reading and writing
skills in Chinese. However, parents often had little time or, due to their own lack of education, felt ill-equipped or unqualified to teach their children (Tsow 1984).

All of the second generation British-Chinese had become accustomed to speaking English in their daily lives. As well as with their siblings, it is commonplace for second generation British-Chinese to communicate with each other in English. This, however, was a source of concern. Many spoke Chinese in a way which distinguished them from overseas Chinese people as not being native Chinese speakers. For some, like Karch, the type of Chinese they spoke could be characterised as a pidgin variety:

The thing is, like you’re talking Chinese, but you’re thinking English. You’re saying your words, but the way you’re structuring your grammar is English grammar isn’t it? So that makes it hard. So being the person that I am, if I’m talking to a Chinese person and he speaks English and Chinese, I’m going to talk to him in English (Interview, 5 November 1996).

This perceived lack of proficiency in Chinese language was uppermost in the minds of many of them who were conscious that somehow they were less ‘Chinese’ because they didn’t speak Chinese fluently (Ang 1994):

K: You sort of mention that you don’t speak Chinese as well as you could do, does that in a sense bother you?
Yin: Well, yes because it should be, I should be able to speak it fluently without a flaw, but it’s difficult being like bought up in England and everything. And if you don’t see your family that much and you’re surrounded by English people then there’s not much use for it unless say you go to Chinatown or you go home (Yin. Interview, 3 January 1997).

K: Do you speak Chinese to your friends?
I: Not very much because I don’t know that much, it’s just easy to communicate in English, you just get to express yourself.
K: Does it bother you?
I: Yes it does. It bothers me not particularly with English-speaking Chinese mates but if I was like mates with someone who doesn’t know English very well, it’d bother me that I couldn’t speak Cantonese and Mandarin or something to them fluently (Ivy. Interview, 30 October 1996).
In contrast, those who were able to speak a Chinese language fluently could use it as a marker of personal identity:

The Chinese community, why do I feel that I belong? It's because I speak Cantonese, I don't associate myself, what I'm trying to say is that I'm not like a typical BBC, who is born here and simply speaks English, refuses to speak their own mother language. I feel I'm more than that (Sai. Interview, 1 May 1997).

As a result, individuals who were not able to speak Chinese were viewed as being 'white on the inside, yellow on the outside'. The terms used are varied but include 'banana' or 'jook sing' [bamboo] (see also chapter 5). In this regard, speaking Chinese was central to the notion of 'Chineseness' held by my informants. In not speaking the language, they felt limited in cultural terms, to the collectivities in which they could belong.

Chinese children's language skills were perhaps even more important to their parents. Taylor (1987: 175) asserts that 'amongst the Chinese in the UK, language is the main vehicle for the transmission of culture to the second generation. Chinese parents are evidently concerned that their children should not grow up ignorant of Chinese cultural traditions, and that they should also have pride in their cultural roots.' As a result, at some stage in their lives, the majority of my informants attended Chinese language classes.

During the research I attended two Chinese schools operated by what could be regarded as 'Chinese community' associations. The objective of attending these schools every Sunday was not for the sole purpose of improving my Chinese language skills, but also to acquire a sense of the ways in which these institutions function. At the first school, located in a part of Soho near London's Chinatown, I was in a class of around ten mature students, where I was among the youngest in the class. For the other school that I attended, situated in north-east London as part of a Chinese community centre, my classmates were typically aged in their pre-teens. The two schools offered contrasting learning environments. It is my contention that language schools have a significant role in transmitting cultural values to the Chinese people.
who attend them, which in turn may affect the participation of young Chinese people in friendship groups.

At the school in Soho, where I was a pupil for two terms, each lasting four months, I participated in a programme for learning Cantonese specially tailored for adults. I was informed by my teacher Mrs Wong, the mother of one of my informants, that this course was unique to the Chinese ‘community’ association concerned. In this regard, learning Chinese at this location was more a matter of choice on the part of my classmates who wanted to acquire further Chinese language skills. To this end, my continuation of studies at this place partially reflected my curiosity to explore the possibilities of my cultural heritage (participant observation, Chinese school, Soho).

My experience of learning Chinese at the second school was quite different. Here, our instructor was a Cantonese-speaking, young woman born in Hong Kong. I left soon after enrolling because her teaching methods disturbed me. In between dictating extracts of Chinese text into Cantonese for us, she would regularly impose her Chinese cultural beliefs on the pupils. For example, a noteworthy episode occurred when she announced to the class that ‘if you don’t learn how to speak Chinese, you won’t be considered as a Chinese person!’ (participant observation, 9 November 1997, Chinese school, north-east London). Taking into account the youthfulness of my classmates, it can easily be imagined how the assertion of culturally essentialist values in this sphere are perhaps internalized by young Chinese people.

Baker (1994: 302) has noted that ‘the students who attend these Sunday schools do not all do so voluntarily; some of them are reluctantly forced into it by their parents.’ While I could not ascertain for sure if all of my younger counterparts at the second language school were there out of choice, it would seem that few relished the prospect. Questioning my informants about their past experiences of Chinese language schools generally revealed a series of social and cultural conflicts. Central to their responses was how going to Chinese school added to their educational burden. Will told me that he stopped going to classes because there was ‘a lot to learn, and as

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4 I am aware that there are Chinese language courses operated by non-‘community’ organisations, such as those offered at various universities in London.
you know Chinese is probably one of the hardest languages to learn. Speaking is, like, completely different to writing it’ (Interview 18 April 1997). Sue, stopped going to Chinese language classes because of other priorities:

it was a stuffy classroom, there was like thirty-five to a class, I didn’t learn anything and also it was the beginning of my GCSEs started so I wanted to concentrate on that (Interview, 21 October 1996).

Even though parents were generally enthusiastic about sending their children to Chinese language classes, most of my informants stopped attending Chinese language classes at a relatively early age. However, the importance of having Chinese language skills was stressed by most of the informants. For King, he expressed an element of regret for leaving Chinese school:

Kim: Why did you stop going to Chinese school?
King: That’s where cultures clashed I suppose. That’s where my parents wanted something which was . . . the right thing to do I suppose (Interview, 7 October 1996).

All young Chinese people growing up in Britain confront the exigencies of language use in their lives. For some, this may signal a more absolute commitment towards being Chinese, as evidenced by what Sai had to say above. However, the limitations of this are expressed by Trung, who was concerned about the forms of exclusivity that speaking Cantonese might promote in certain contexts:

T: I’d say that if you go to university, you’d see all the other races, yeah, speaking English, but all the Chinese students yeah, they speak Cantonese in front of like other races. I just think that it makes them . . . it isolates them from other races, whenever they do that. It makes them unsociable.
K: Isn’t it up to them though?
T: Well yeah, I’d say that Chinese people, that means like they can’t complain when they say ‘oh, white people won’t accept me’ when they go around speaking Cantonese in front of white people. I mean would you approach another race if you see them speak another language? You’ll be intimidated, you’ll be a bit reluctant. So I’m just saying that if you don’t make an effort, you deserve what you get (Interview, 28 April 1997).
Others, such as Karch (as quoted above), realised that their use of the Chinese language varied between contexts and had developed a kind of hybrid way of speaking Chinese. These hybrid forms of language use are common amongst young Chinese people. Amongst all of the informants, English was mainly spoken. However, some of the time, the male informants would interject with Chinese phrases, using swearing terms or emphasizing tags, such as ‘lee yo mo gow chor? [are you sure about that?] at the end of sentences. These cultural tactics were often used by the young men for different purposes.

In some ways, mixing up forms of Cantonese and English languages, while enabling a British-Chinese sensibility also reinforced a sense of cultural exclusivity. Indeed, the use of Chinese was situational and could be manipulated to an individual’s advantage. For example, when Yin was asked if she would speak Chinese to her Chinese friends, she replied, ‘Sometimes I might break into it, say if I don’t want an English person to hear’ (Interview 3 January 1997). Similarly, Khoung told me that:

When I’m in takeaways and restaurants, food parties, I can talk to my friends in Chinese about that person over there, do you know what I mean? [laughter] That sort of idea (28 April 1997).

In addition, the use of Chinese language was utilised to strengthen allegiances to the friendship groups and social spaces already outlined above. Certainly, through the use of language my informants were able to adopt flexible positionings which some were well aware of. As Khoung put it, you can ‘turn your disadvantages into advantages’ (Interview, 28 April 1997).

In this section, I have discussed the relevance of Chinese language use in sustaining a sense of being ‘Chinese’ in Britain. Speaking Chinese was an issue that concerned most of the informants and its use in certain contexts raises questions about the levels of belonging to both British or Chinese collectivities. It is to the wider theme of national belonging that it is the focus of the final section of this chapter. I will give a preliminary account of my informants’ attitudes towards nationhood.
Belonging?

For my informants, the question of national identity produced a variety of responses. All the second generation Chinese I spoke to had spent most of their lives living in London and more than half of them were born in Britain. While the vast majority identified themselves as being British, or British-Chinese, further probing revealed that there was a divergence between what informants intended by identifying themselves as being ‘British’ and what being ‘British’ actually entailed for them. There existed significant differences as to why the people I spoke to identified themselves as being British. Both Mrs Wong, a first generation settler resident in Britain for over thirty years and Sai, a second generation informant, regarded their Britishness in a similarly limited way:

On paper, legally, I'm absolutely British because I do not hold a Chinese passport. But emotionally . . . I think this is the current situation all over the world, you mainly have an identity of where you are. It's not just the Chinese [. . .]. Emotionally I feel Chinese all the time (Mrs Wong. Interview 21 July 1996).

K: So are you British then?
S: In my passport I am. But I feel inside I am jung gok yun [a Chinese person] (Sai. Interview, 1 May 1997).

Mrs Wong’s perception of being ‘British’ contrasts with her daughter Ivy’s view of being British. Ivy’s self-identification was based on her view that Britain was ‘home’, albeit ‘not roots wise’ (Interview, 30 October 1996). When asked why she thought of Britain as being home, she replied:

I've always lived here, grown up here . . . it's just home. I wouldn’t say that I belong here, it's just like wherever I grew up, you know that would be home and I would be attached to that . . . (Interview 30 October 1996).

However, even where Britain was thought of as ‘home’, my informants did not perceive themselves as ‘British’ beyond the formalities of citizenship. In the following extract, Karch and Kue summed up their respective positions:
Kue: Why should I say I'm British? Although I live in this country, I’ve got a British passport that’s it. I wasn’t born here and my parents are not white, they’re like Chinese.

Kim: That’s interesting. Karch, why do you think that you’re British then?

Karch: Growing up in this country, you know? British customs, British education, you know? Saying that though, I take in Kue’s point as well because we’ve got all that, British passport and all that but to the white man, we’re just another slanty eyed . . . do you know what I mean? (Focus group, October 23 1997).

Kue was exceptional amongst the informants in that her reluctance to classify herself as ‘British’ was based on her belief that ‘British’ and ‘Chinese’ were mutually exclusive categories. While Karch was open to the possibility of identifying with being ‘British’, ultimately he believed that there were limits to how ‘British’ he could be. For him, the barrier was considered to be primarily one based on phenotypical difference.

It is perhaps no surprise then that ‘English’ was considered even less of an appropriate tag than ‘British’. When I asked Karch if he thought of himself as ‘English’, he replied, ‘No, not English, but English conjures up images of English you know, white people, church of England, playing cricket, eating roast beef’ (Interview, 5 November 1996). Karch’s reluctance to label himself as English was predicated on his view that Chinese people only have a minor role in Britain’s society. What Karch was rejecting was an English national identity centred upon particular cultural characteristics rather than an always already plural Britishness based on the less exacting criteria for political citizenship (Jeater 1992). Andy’s comments exemplify this:

K: Do you see yourself as being British?
A: Nationality wise, yes.
K: How about being English?
A: No, not really English. I mean I don’t, as much as I haven’t had an orthodox Cantonese Chinese upbringing, I can also say that I haven’t had an orthodox English upbringing apart from having to go through the English education system and knowing more about say British or English social customs than I do about Chinese ones (Interview, 6 April 1997).
In this way, cultural processes of inclusion and exclusion act as a boundary limiting the extent of identification with being ‘English’. As Karch succinctly put it, ‘I grew up here, but you have to ask yourself, do you belong here though?’ (Interview, 5 November 1996).⁵

However, the majority of second generation informants’ experiences of visiting parental homelands did not offer any simpler resolutions to the question of national identity and belonging. Although all of my informants had visited their parental homelands, this did not necessarily mean that they felt at ease. Typically most of my informants had visited their ancestral homelands two or three times, with some ‘going back’ every year or two. In addition, some of those I interviewed had lived in Hong Kong or Vietnam for a number of years in their youth and, more interestingly, some were planning to emigrate (see chapter 3). All were aware of the significance of these trips in maintaining their sense of cultural identity. However, attitudes towards parental homelands were filled with ambivalence. Indeed, most of the informants claimed that they felt more at ease and comfortable in Britain.

When asked if she viewed Britain as being her ‘home’, Yin replied, ‘Yes I do, because I was born here, and because of the way I’ve been brought up this has now become my home. Even though, like the English people or whatever say “Go back to China that’s where you belong”’ (Interview, 3 January 1997). Yin’s surer sense of belonging in Britain was, in part, due to her reflections on the time she had spent living in Hong Kong when she was younger. Yin had returned to Hong Kong with her family when she was eleven. This was due to her parents desire ‘to go back to try and make a go of things out there . . . but it didn’t work’ (Interview, 3 January 1997). After living there for a couple of years, the family decided to return to England. That Yin and her family returned so soon after leaving Britain is significant. Although it was not entirely clear why her parents chose to come back to Britain it may have been related to her and her little sister’s earlier upbringing in Britain. The time Yin spent at school in

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⁵ Sue expressed a similar view, ‘with English people they just see you as negative or positive, you’re just Chinese and that’s it. I just think that’s as far as it goes for the majority of English people, they’ll just see you as being Chinese, they won’t really consider you to be British, they just see you as Chinese’ (Interview, 21 October 1996).
Hong Kong was particularly unpleasant. She recalled how even at such a young age she was singled out for differential treatment:

I had a few friends who liked me for who I was, what I was and everything, but at the same time I encountered a lot of racial prejudice even with like Chinese people who have said I'm a foreigner, I'm a ghostie [white person], go back to England where you belong (Interview, 3 January 1997).

Visits back to ancestral homelands were, on the whole, considered to be important in establishing a ‘true’ sense of self. The presence of family in these places also provided a motive for travelling. Will would go ‘back’ to Hong Kong every year to visit his two sisters and nieces for ‘family bonding’ (Interview, 18 April 1997). However, despite the relatively close bonds he maintained with other family members in Hong Kong, his view of living in Britain did not appear to be restricted:

I just feel homesick when I go to Hong Kong really. I feel homesick after two weeks. I miss Britain. I miss the people that I know, the public, I just miss the atmosphere of Britain. I know it’s a completely different atmosphere in Hong Kong, but I’m used to the lifestyle that I’ve got here (Interview, 18 April 1997).

Indeed, for most of the informants, visits to parental homelands did not impose strains on their relationships towards Britain. Catherine was especially positive about her attachment to Britain, more specifically to London. She had visited her mother’s place of upbringing in Malaysia and did not like it there, saying that ‘It’s too strict if you know what I mean. I couldn’t handle it [. . . ] I just found it a bit too strict with what you’ve got to wear and stuff, you know?’ (Interview, 13 April 1997). She had also visited Hong Kong where she had an aunt and had worked there for three months during the summer of 1996. When asked if she felt more of an attachment to Hong Kong or Malaysia, she told me that, ‘it’s just the same I think’ (Interview, 13 April 1997).

It is significant that many of my informants were well aware of how they were perceived in ancestral homelands as ‘outsiders’, which was instrumental for them in regarding Britain as ‘home’. Jason, who had visited Hong Kong with the Hatfield bunch, was conscious of how he did not really fit in:
When I was over in Hong Kong, I felt good about myself, looking at the other culture, trying to assimilate with the people over there. But then our relatives are saying you are like bananas, yellow on the outside, you don’t know anything about Chinese people (Interview, 27 March 1997, my emphasis).

The meanings attached to ‘home’ for my informants were very much a matter of individual perception. ‘Home’ for the majority of those I spoke to was defined against the role of being an outsider in parental homelands, and informed by the cultural limitations of being ‘British’. The question of nationhood for my informants, with the exception of Kue quoted above, was never about absolute choices between choosing Britain or ancestral homelands. In the final section of the chapter, I look at how young Chinese people are reformulating their attitudes towards nationhood in ways that embrace aspects of their dual heritages.

**BBCs**

As demonstrated in the previous section, my informants’ attitudes towards Britain and parental homelands were largely ambiguous and contradictory. In recognising that they were not fully accepted in the homelands of their parents, many of the informants were willing to label themselves as ‘British’ in conjunction with other terms. However, adopting these labeling processes did not result in any straightforward way of viewing self-designations of national identity. For Catherine, a strategic element existed in her perspective of nationhood:

K: How would you describe your national identity?
C: British. I would say I’m British, but when you think about it, I’m actually British-Chinese, do you know what I mean? But I would say I’m British, but then again sometimes I would say that I’m Chinese, I don’t know! It just depends, what comes out first really.
K: Could you expand on that?
C: When a Chinese person asks me whether or not I’m Chinese or Japanese, I say I’m Chinese, I don’t say that I’m English. But, like, if a normal person asks me where I’m from, I’ll say I’m from England, I’m British (Interview, 13 April 1997).

Of the various self-identifications, ‘British-Chinese’ is gaining more popularity amongst second generation Chinese youth. While there existed some reluctance amongst those I interviewed to adopt the classification ‘British’, many were willing to designate themselves as ‘BBCs’ (British Born Chinese). ‘BBC’ is most often used to differentiate between Chinese raised in Britain from Chinese elsewhere in the diaspora, and its various meanings encapsulate a Chinese cultural politics. Sue gave me a personal account of her understanding of the term:

S: When I use the term BBC I use it in a humorous context. I use it for easy classification to differ me from Hong Kong locals. [ . . . ]
K: Interesting point . . .
S: But I use it as a humour thing because if you think about it, the term BBC isn’t really used unless it’s a Chinese context. I don’t think the term is generally used unless it’s within BBCs and ABCs [American born Chinese] because abbreviations happen within you know, it’s a knowledge thing. White people don’t use it do they? They wouldn’t say my friend’s a BBC, they would just say my Chinese friend is from London (Interview, 21 October 1996).

The term ‘BBC’ in its present usage probably originated from Hong Kong, where it was devised to distinguish between diverse populations of ethnic Chinese groups living there. Parker (1998) has asserted that young Chinese people living in Hong Kong are more familiar with the label since their presence in the former British colony is more keenly felt as diasporised subjects. Sue also noted how within a ‘Chinese context’, Chinese people born in America would be known as ‘ABCs’ (American born Chinese).6 It is meaningful that, in turn, Sue referred to native Hong Kongers as ‘locals’. In this way, the labels ‘locals’, ‘ABC’ and ‘BBC’ are mobilized within a system of racial classification that occurs amongst peoples of the Chinese diaspora. As Sue points out ‘it’s a knowledge thing. White people don’t use it, do they?’

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6 To my knowledge, Chinese individuals born in Canada are also known as ‘CBCs’ (Canadian Born Chinese).
Yet, the term ‘BBC’ has a somewhat contradictory status, being mobilised simultaneously as a term of endearment and deprecation within the British-Chinese population resident here and overseas. Some of the informants, such as Jason, would use the term in a way that suggests the arrival of British-Chinese collective identities:

J: I did like it [Hong Kong], it’s busier compared to over here and I was meeting more people, like BBCs. It just seems so easy, everyone’s like really really friendly. Over here, it’s well bad I don’t know why.
K: Have you got any ideas why?
J: People are shy, whereas over there, they see, I mean speaking to BBCs who have been working over there, they’re not big big fans of Hong Kong, it’s just like when they know there’s another BBC, it’ll be like ‘yeah safe!’ you know (Interview, 27 March 1997).

Jason’s perception of what being a BBC in Hong Kong entailed signals new possibilities of being British-Chinese. These emerging solidarities in Hong Kong were partially maintained through living in a culturally different context where bonds were formed through shared ties of upbringing in Britain. However, an important issue for Jason was how these forms of sociability were apparently not manifest in Britain. This topic will be examined in the next chapter.

By accepting the designation of BBC my informants were confirming their status as overseas Chinese people. In some ways there is a derogatory element involved in using the term since it implies that individuals who are classified as BBCs are somehow less ‘authentic’ in cultural terms which was a source of concern for some. Many were aware of the negative connotations of the term. This was recognised by Andy:

when it [BBC] is said in a fashion which says that you are not authentic Chinese, well then I’d say ‘well you have to be right in that sense because I live in Britain, I was bought up in Britain, what do you expect? Do you expect me to be a Mainland farmer in London? It’s more about saying something about the other person and how they think than you (Interview, 6 April 1997).

However, the inherent contradictions of using the label were highlighted by what Sue had to say:
The way I see BBCs is, you know, when I said I was half English and half Chinese. But then sometimes I have to remind them that I was born in Hong Kong, but you could call me a BBC because I was bought up in England (Interview, 21 October 1996).

Sue’s self-designation as a BBC is misleading, since Sue was actually born in Hong Kong. For her, identifying with growing up in British circumstances was central in her appropriating the term, ‘I wasn’t born here but I spent most of my life here so I might as well have been born here. That’s why I don’t mind being called BBC because I don’t remember anything from zero to one and a half years old in Hong Kong’ (Interview, 21 October 1996). Her recognition that she was not, in the strict sense of the term, a BBC is significant. In a sense Sue was privileging her claim to Britishness over a kind of cultural kudos placed on being born in Hong Kong. That Sue had moved to Hong Kong to live is ironic. The attitudes of my informants towards Britain are clearly complex and shifting.

In examining my respondents’ attitudes towards national identity it has emerged that although ‘British’ was a label often used, it was subject to different meanings. Many of my informants considered themselves to be BBCs and the recognition of this points to their status as diasporised subjects. Yet others felt that they were only British in terms of a narrowly defined official form of citizenship. It is not surprising, then, that few would identify themselves as being ‘English’.

Conclusion

I have shown that the notion of ‘the Chinese community’ in Britain is problematic. Rather than conceptualising ‘the community’ as a singular whole entity that encapsulates all the Chinese in Britain, it is more appropriate to conceive of a series of overlapping ‘partial communities’ that encompass disparate groups of Chinese people. Throughout the discussion I have attempted to demonstrate that internal differentiations fissure external conceptions of ‘the Chinese community’. By
deconstructing popularly held conceptions of ‘the community’, I was able to highlight the divisions that exist within Britain’s Chinese population.

London’s Chinatown in Soho supports a notion of ‘the Chinese community’ reinforced by its visibility and central location. However, on the whole, my informants felt that Chinatown was not representative of ‘the Chinese community’. Chinatown was largely regarded as a meeting place which as well as providing a range of goods, services and social functions for London’s Chinese population also served as a base for Chinese retailers and restauranteurs to do business. Further, inter-ethnic differences structure the social relations that occur amongst Britain’s Chinese population. The different groups of ethnic Chinese were illuminated and some of the tensions that exist between Vietnamese settlers and Hong Kong Chinese people were recorded.

Amongst the ‘partial communities’ that I looked at, the role of solidarity within these groups was very much a matter of individual perception. While some of the informants preferred to maintain a relatively large social network, facilitated by the fluid boundaries existing between groups of young Chinese people, others, such as members of the Hatfield bunch, were concerned with socialising in one main group of British-Chinese friends. The Chinese social arenas that my informants visited were elementary in sustaining an external perception of collective unity. Yet the tension that was deemed to exist at Chinese discos revealed the extent of internal divisions within Chinese youth in London. I also considered how the use of language serves as a marker of individual participation in Chinese peer groups. The role of Chinese language schools in establishing a sense of being ‘Chinese’ was also considered. From a preliminary investigation into my informants’ attitudes towards nationhood, it was discovered that most of the informants had a contradictory sense of belonging in Britain. The tensions that were revealed from this line of inquiry suggest that although bonds with ancestral homelands are maintained, my informants on the whole felt that Britain was ‘home’.

Jason’s comments capture the overall state that existed amongst my informants of being ‘in-between’ these two places:
They [Hong Kong people] don't like us because they think 'Oh yeah your parents have gone over made some money, come over and just spend their money over here and stuff, and at the end of the day you've got a passport to go wherever you want, whereas we're stuck over here.' That pisses me off and that's when my British side starts coming out . . . but then over here I don't feel so proud of being British because it's like . . . we don't get accepted so much. At the end of the day they [English people] still see you as inferior because you are Chinese, this is not your country, you were born here, but this is not your country (Jason. Interview, 27 March 1997).

Jason's comments highlight the dilemmas that many young Chinese people find themselves in as diasporised peoples. While most of my informants accepted that Britain was 'home', this did not necessarily mean that they felt that they belonged in Britain. In the next chapter, I will examine subject formation amongst young Chinese people in Britain and look at how my informants formulated their cultural identities.
Identity

The resort to ethnic absolutism can only be a source of weakness in the long run. It is already a source of inertia and confusion (Gilroy 1994: 15).

You know what I want to think of myself? As a human being. Because... I know what it sounds like, as Confucius say, but under the sky under the heaven man, there is but one family. It just so happens that people are different (Bruce Lee interviewed in 1969).

Just recently I ran into Shorty Henderson on Seventh Avenue. We were laughing about a fellow whom the riot had left with the nickname of 'left feet'. In a scramble in a woman's shoe store, somehow he'd grabbed five shoes, all of them for left feet! And we laughed about the scared little Chinese whose restaurant didn't have a hand laid on it because the rioters just about convulsed laughing when they saw the sign the Chinese had hastily stuck on his front door: me colored too (Malcolm X quoted in Haley 1968: 203).

In the previous chapter, an idea of how young Chinese people negotiate the contrasting terrains of Britishness and Chineseness began to emerge. By examining my informants' perspectives on self-perceptions of national identity it was established that their partial belongings in Britain and parental homelands were complex and ambiguous. In this discussion, I further explore the protracted negotiations that have taken place between Britishness and Chineseness for my informants. This chapter seeks to situate the experiences of Chinese youth: first, with regard to practises of representation; second, in terms of their relationships to British society. More specifically, the second half of the chapter will focus on diverse elements of British-based Chinese identities and look at the
ways in which my informants’ formulations of identity were either similar to, or at variance with, dominant conceptions of second generation Chinese identities.

**Representation**

Recent writing on new ethnicities in Britain has focused on the inter-cultural dialogues occurring amongst British youth (Back 1996, for example). On the whole, the literature has highlighted the pivotal role of British-based youth cultures which have drawn on influences from the Caribbean and, more recently, South Asia. Even though markers of the Chinese presence in Britain, most notably the Chinese catering trade and Chinatowns, exist aplenty it is only relatively recently that the question of British-Chinese identity and what this might entail has been mentioned (Parker 1998 for example). Prior to this, description of the Chinese population in Britain as being a ‘silent minority’ would no doubt be appropriate.

Hall (1988) has demonstrated that the issue of representation was central to the emergence of new ethnicities. It is my contention that practices of representation in Britain which feature Chinese people and culture have affected the development of British-Chinese identities. This is an outcome not only of the nature of existing images but also of a lack of opposition from within Chinese communities towards these images. The formation of black communities of resistance which transformed the experience of oppression into a field of antagonism contributed to a recomposition of relations of power at all levels of society. A ‘new black visibility’, created during the mid-1980s, brought about change within the institutions that constitute the public culture, and were a result of the initiatives around the rallying call for black representation (Mercer 1994). Nowhere is this more evident than in the spheres of film, music and television (Cashmore 1997, for example).
While black cultural forms have traditionally influenced popular British youth culture and, in the process, enabled black youth to negotiate alternative positionings (Gilroy 1987), there is mounting evidence to suggest that young Asians are redefining what it means to be British too. Randeep Ramesh writing in the *Independent* on the 1st March 1998, in an article entitled ‘British, Asian and hip’ has commented on how ‘British Asians are emerging on a cultural scene that has barely recognised their existence, let alone talent.’ The successes of the BBC2 comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me* and *Cornershop*’s single ‘Brimful of Asha’, with its Punjabi lyrics and Asian lead singer and which peaked at No. 1 in the British pop music charts, bear witness to this new found cultural confidence amongst British-Asian youth. In addition, the arrival of a British-Asian sensibility is further proof of a new mode of cultural expression and is evidenced by the rise of the ‘Asian underground’, a collective of DJs, musicians and producers who produce what has been termed ‘Asian breakbeat’ music at various clubnights.¹

*Contemporary representations of Chinese people in Britain: re-presenting the Other*

Broadly speaking two distinct sets of representations of Chinese people may be discerned which have historically assumed different forms: firstly, a phase characterised by direct hostility coinciding with the arrival of significant numbers of Chinese settlers in Britain from the late nineteenth century onwards; secondly, relatively recent forms of representation which celebrate and commodify Oriental cultures, and which include contemporary perceptions of Chinese people. It is worth noting that both sets of representations continue to inform current attitudes on Chinese people in Britain.

As discussed in chapter 1, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the threat of the ‘yellow peril’ was widely disseminated throughout Anglo-Saxon countries. This centred upon tales of shrewd, opium-smoking Chinamen with sexual

¹ See *2nd Generation* magazine for an insight into the British-Asian sub-culture phenomenon.
preferences for young white girls. The Chinaman of the time was exemplified by the evil Fu Manchu, a fictional character created by the famous novelist Sax Rohmer. Moreover, the slums that real Chinese settlers inhabited in these countries were the subject of much ridicule. This contributed to their status as undesirables and led to the imposition of exclusionary immigration laws restricting their numbers into the United States, Canada and Australia. More recently, in the context of the contemporary diaspora Chinese people have been the subject of unwanted attention over the 'monster house' debate in Vancouver, Canada (Mitchell 1997, for example), and during the 1998 Australian elections, where Chinese settlers were targeted by Pauline Hanson and her 'one nation' policy.

Complementing this Sinophobia is an admiration for Chinese and other Oriental traditions. What bell hooks (1992) calls the 'commodification of Otherness' has flourished through an interest in hitherto neglected aspects of Oriental cultures. An article in the Sunday Times magazine supplement of February 1st 1998, outlines the formation of a Far-Eastern pop group called Jungk to rival the Spice Girls, and comprising 'a group of five, female, kung-fu-expert models' (my emphasis). In the article, entitled "wok’n’roll", the author Lisa Verrico expresses an approval of Oriental culture, stating that 'we are, it seems, in love with all things far eastern.'

A further example of the way in which Oriental cultures have been commodified is through the medium of food. The increasing visibility of Japanese-influenced noodle and sushi restaurants in London and familiarity of establishments such as Wagamama and Yo! Sushi is indicative of their success. In a similar vein, 'Pacific-Rim cuisine' or 'fusion cooking' which combines ingredients from the East and West has risen in status. A recent ten part TV series for BBC2 during 1998 featured the American-Chinese celebrity chef Ken Hom enthusing about the cuisine from various Pacific-Rim locations.

Elsewhere the mystical and exotic qualities of Chinese customs such as feng shui, herbal remedies and tai chi are appreciated and appropriated by western culture. The current fad for feng shui has added an extra dimension to lifestyle publications, even
resulting in a monthly magazine of the same name! Periodic screenings of old Kung fu films featuring internationally known stars such as Jackie Chan, Jet Li and the legendary Bruce Lee on Channel Four add flavour to the revival of interest in the martial arts: a recent Levi jeans advert featured a kung-fu kicking Chinese frontman; Kung-fu night appeared on BBC2 during summer 1997; African-American hip-hop acts such as Wu-Tang Clan and Jeru the Damaja spotlight Kung-fu in their music. In addition, the influence of Chinese costume on British high street fashion is evidenced by teenage girls wearing traditional *cheong sam* dresses. The increasing demand for alternative medicine has resulted in a proliferation of Chinese medical shops specialising in herbal remedies.

Bell hooks (1992) has noted how exploring desire for the Other is expressed, manipulated and transformed by encounters with difference, and that the different is a critical terrain. Although the appropriation and commodification of oriental cultures is potentially liberating for its peoples, it remains to be seen whether or not Chinese people will benefit from the attention given to their customs and traditions. It is perhaps feasible that these images in a sense reinforce the sense of distance between East and West (Parker 1998).

These representations of Chinese people and culture already discussed, reproduce what Stuart Hall (1988: 256) has described as a doubling of fear and desire. Hall, like Fanon, asserts that the politics of representation ‘is a question not only of “black-skin, white-skin” but of “black-skin, white-masks” - the internalization of the self-as-other . . . fear and desire double for one another and play across the structures of otherness, complicating its politics’ (see also chapter 6). My informants were well aware of the ways in which the media represented Chinese interests and were generally dissatisfied with current perceptions of Chinese people in Britain. It was highlighted by Steve, amongst others, that in order for media representation to move on, ‘there needs to be more Chinese people in the media’ (Interview, 24 March 1997). Many also stressed the lack of Chinese people on British television in comparison to the coverage given to other
ethnic minority groups. Karch appreciated the ethnically diverse presence on British television, but recognised the virtual absence of Chinese faces:

Ka: The images that they have grown up with of oriental people, you know, they are quite terrible really. They’re so stereotypical, do you know what I mean! Whereas you know, if you take the black community and the Asian community, there’s been a natural progression, maybe through the media whatever, but Chinese people . . .
K: Do you think the media has an important role in all of this?
Ka: Oh definitely! I mean if you looked back about twenty years ago, the amount of black people on TV, or Asians and now . . . nearly all the Channel Four and BBC2 is like . . . but are there any Chinese faces?
No! (Interview, 5 November 1996).

The coming into representation of minority peoples in Britain has enabled an increasingly unquestioned acceptance of their lives within the fabric of British society. Yet the conspicuousness of certain minority groups vis-a-vis others in media representations in part reflects a willingness to persevere on behalf of their communities. In the following extract Puncho, acknowledges how Chinese people remain at the margin:

P: Well, it doesn’t really give Chinese people voice, whereas on TV for example, Asians have their own magazine programmes, community programmes, same with blacks as well, but with Chinese it’s pretty much non-existent.
K: Are you saying that we are neglected?
P: Yeah, well neglected in a sense yeah, but the Chinese community in a sense does make up for it by establishing their own...circles (Interview 28 June 1996).

A lack of agency in the sphere of representation from within the Chinese community was perceived by Puncho to have confined the Chinese to their present standing in Britain. Britain has not seen any political mobilisation of British-Chinese interests on the scale of the ‘yellow power’ movements witnessed during the 1960s on West coast university campuses in the USA (Wei 1993).

The legacy of previous generations of Chinese renowned for their tendency to maintain cultural traditions and to foster minimal contact with the host society remains
(Watson 1977, Parker 1996). The Chinese takeaway presents itself as a prominent marker of the Chinese presence in Britain. Associated with the takeaway are a series of perceptions which view this space in predominantly negative terms. David Parker (1996, 1998) has detailed how the British public perceive Chinese takeaway food in pejorative and condescending tones. The accompanying image of demure, meek and timid young Chinese working behind the Chinese takeaway counter lingers in the imagination as a potent symbol of the takeaway, the ramifications of which affect identity formation for young Chinese in Britain.\(^2\)

It is safe to assume that when Chinese people are featured on British television, familiar themes of Chinese Triad gangs, Chinese new year and Chinese food are repackaged and re-presented to suit the occasion. Advancement beyond what various cultural critics have witnessed for the black British experience\(^3\) and what Stuart Hall (1988: 254) has famously characterised as 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject', is not immediately apparent for Chinese people. Amongst my informants, some were well aware of how media representations of the Chinese affect contemporary attitudes towards Chinese people. Andy, who promoted arts events for a British-Chinese institution, commented:

> you will only get various established things that don't need any more establishing, such as Chinese new year and stuff like that. When I meet non-Chinese people it's a problem because the general public view is controlled by what they see. They can't talk about anything else apart from food, catering, Chinese new year and in a sense it's their minds which have been ghettoised (Interview, 6 April 1997).

It was generally agreed by the majority of my second generation informants that British media representations of Chinese people were often narrow and insensitive to the

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\(^2\) David Parker (1995) and Miri Song (1997) have both written extensively on this image of defenceless young Chinese people working for their parents. Moreover, this image persists in other contexts. One of the scenes from Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing* (1989) features the young Korean daughter cowering behind the counter of her parents' grocery store when one of the lead characters, the 'intimidating', profanity-mouthing Radio Raheem, comes in to purchase some batteries for his ghetto blaster which plays NWA's 'Fight the Power' throughout the film.

\(^3\) I am referring to the British-Asian experience too.
growing specificities of young Chinese people raised in British circumstances. For instance, Steve had this to say:

They almost get away with saying that and we all know it's true as well but then again, there's like a whole group of us who are not going to stand for that (Interview, 24 March 1997).

While Steve acknowledged that current representations of Chinese people were true to an extent, he felt that they did not fully reflect contemporary aspects of growing up in Britain. The limited scope available for young Chinese to articulate their sense of self continues to stifle a British-Chinese sensibility and creativity. Fundamentally, King considered Britain to be unreceptive to the interests of young Chinese:

Does that society allow you to be that kind of thing? Or do they still see you in the eyes of you sad little chinky? (Interview, 7 October 1997).

King's remarks set in motion the themes that will be explored below. The underlying sentiment behind what King had to say concerns the extent to which young British-Chinese people are able to formulate identities unfettered by the constraints of these representations. This part of the chapter has highlighted the pivotal role of representation in shaping contemporary perceptions of Chinese people in Britain. While current regimes of representation continue to impose their images of Chinese culture and people, it has been shown that British-Chinese youth do not passively receive these externally-controlled practices of representation. The next section examines the ways in which young Chinese people overcome these barriers to subject formation.

Towards British-Chinese futures?

The rest of this chapter is primarily concerned with the kinds of social relationships that second generation Chinese people establish. I will consider previously established
conventions of looking at identity, such as assimilation/integration, and the ‘between two cultures’ thesis, and will examine some of the hybridised forms of identity formulations inhabited by my informants. As discussed in earlier chapters, previous research has tended to focus attention on the catering trade as the cornerstone of British-Chinese identity formation. In particular, the scattered nature of Chinese settlement in Britain - a consequence of Chinese concentration in the catering trade - is regarded as maintaining ‘regressive cultural formations’ (Parker 1998). Central to the analysis of British-Chinese identities which follows is how my informants have negotiated their relationships with what Paul Gilroy has termed ‘ethnic absolutism’, which separates cultural and racial absolutes from the historical circumstances that give them meaning and turns them into unchanging essential characteristics (1987: 43-69). While ethnic absolutism undoubtedly continues to inform Chinese attitudes towards identity formation in Britain, future work needs to be sensitive to the strategically held aspect of these identities. It is my contention that the essentialized character of British-Chinese identities has been over-emphasized in the past (Baker 1994, for example), and that the implications of such research have less relevance for emerging generations of Chinese youth (Hall 1990, for comparison).

The position of the Chinese in Britain can be understood through Brah’s (1996) concept of ‘differential racialisation’, how specific histories of various racisms place different racialized groups in particular relationships to each other. The specificities of Chinese settlement in Britain (see chapter 1), together with the economic and material advantages derived from the catering trade, place the Chinese in a novel position (see chapter 3). A perception of Chinese people as within society but not of it is a common image. Past analyses of Chinese people in Britain appear to affirm their insular characteristics. This has had repercussions for the formation of second and third generation British-Chinese identities (see Broady 1955, Ng 1968, Watson 1977, Shang 1984, Parker 1995 for examples). David Parker’s study of the range of identities formed by young Chinese in Britain, although comprehensive, does not explicitly consider the
urban context of London and the possibility for alternative kinds of identifications to occur in that setting. In his research, undertaken during the early 1990s, the designations of identity that he outlines undermine the potential for the emergence of hybrid and syncretic British-Chinese identities. With this in mind I will consider the parameters of British-Chinese identities established by his work to develop a further understanding of the situation in London.

The role of racism and how it affects the lives of Chinese people in Britain is regarded as an integral component in the understanding of second generation British-Chinese identity formation (Parker 1995). Amongst my informants, however, the vast majority outwardly chose to overlook the significance of racism in their lives. During the course of my fieldwork, my informants when questioned about the extent of racism that they had encountered would most commonly deny the impact of racism though many acknowledged the occasional derogatory remark at school. Faced with such a response, it would be presumptuous to assume that all of the informants were unequivocally subjected to racism in its various guises. However, the popularity and sustained existence of spaces where young British-Chinese people regularly meet each other in London suggests an essentialist agenda in the formation of individual and collective identities. The existence of Chinese discos, as outlined in chapter 4, raises issues of why such events are held and why young Chinese people continue to support them. In the current chapter I am chiefly concerned with how young Chinese people can deny the significance of racism yet at the same time strive to maintain pre-existing Chinese social spaces.

The following discussion consists of three sections. The first examines the conditions which young Chinese people face growing up, especially at school. In the second section I address the contexts in which Chinese youth are ascribed identities, and how they must make particular choices in their own formulations of identity. Following from this, the rest of the chapter focuses on the range of identities formed by my informants, and considers the forms of essentialism and hybridity that this involves. Overall, what I aim to do is to illuminate the meanings, ambiguities and contradictions of
‘race’ and ‘culture’ in the public lives of young Chinese in Britain, by examining my informants’ attitudes towards their own identities.

Growing up and school

Even though all of the informants were aware of their racialized minority status in Britain, the prevalence of racism in their lives seemed to be generally muted. However, over half of my informants, when questioned about the level of racism in their lives, reported that the greatest incidence of racism occurred during their years at school. It is a weakness of the present study that I was unable to probe more fully their experiences of school. It occurred to me that some were, unsurprisingly, not willing to reveal in detail what they had encountered. As one researcher has noted ‘it became clear that an important defence against racism by many young Chinese was to downplay its significance, not to talk about it and put it to the back of the mind’ (Parker 1995: 105).

Much has been written about the connection between education and disadvantage for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds (Cashmore and Troyna 1983, for example). However, while the problems of black and Asian youth in the British education system are recognised and to an extent provided for, the difficulties that Chinese youth face also require attention. Amongst other things, a central feature structuring the lives of young British-Chinese people at school is their susceptibility to racist name-calling. The aim of this section is to examine the ways in which my informants handled the racist name-calling that they encountered. In particular, I want to highlight how my informants were able to negate the effects of racist name-calling. Through this discussion a preliminary understanding of the inherently negotiated character of young British-Chinese identities will emerge.

Amongst my informants, Khoung was exceptional in that he spoke frankly about how racism had affected him. In addition to hearing the occasional ‘ah saw!’ utterance and
being called a ‘chinky’, he told me that, ‘I’ve lived through having a stone thrown through our window, rabbit poop though our door, stuff thrown into our garden and our hanging line being cut’ (Interview, 28 April 1997). Khoung attributed his predicament to being resettled to a small town in Kent after arriving in Britain as a refugee during the early 1980s where there were few other Chinese families living locally. It became apparent that what Khoung had experienced in this particular town had repercussions for his personal formulation of identity:

When I'm feeling a bit insecure in an environment, I think it's down to racism. I get all paranoid. It might not be that, it might just be something else, but I confuse it with racism. It affects me in the fact that I think that everything, I think that people are just being racist and maybe they're not, you know? And I jump to the conclusion that they are being racist. It could mean that they just don't like you, you know what I mean? The paranoia which has been created, that has been the effect it has had (Interview, 28 April 1997).

Khoung's upbringing in an area with few Chinese people intensified a sense of isolation which has persisted to this day. Especially worrying is his conflation of racism with paranoia which is indicative of the isolation that many young Chinese people in Britain endure. Indeed, Khoung was of the opinion that 'Chinese people in this country are very, very lonely' (Interview, 28 April 1997). Khoung's comments correlate current research that highlights the difficulties which many young Chinese people growing up in Britain confront (Parker 1994, Song 1997b for example). These works examine the relationships between British-Chinese people's upbringing in Britain and their, in many cases, enforced labour 'helping out' in family-owned Chinese takeaways.

The vast majority of my informants told me that they had experienced racist name-calling most often when they were young, especially at school. Given that there are few schools in Britain that have a noticeable Chinese presence, Chinese pupils are

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4 According to Vaughan Robinson (1993: 142), the British Home Office intentionally dispersed refugees from Vietnam so that there was not more than between four and ten families in any one locality. This
relatively ill-equipped to defend themselves from racialized teasing. Catherine recounts how:

"It really upset me, you don't realise them things when you're young, about races and stuff, you just think that you're the same as everyone else and all of a sudden you get called a 'chink' in the playground, and then you just get really pissed off" (Interview, 13 April 1997).

Catherine’s sense of helplessness is indicative of how vulnerable Chinese pupils at school are to racist name-calling. Young Chinese have to contend with and formulate ways of dealing with racist name-calling from an early age. On the whole, my informants had become accustomed to and tolerated the racist name-calling that they were exposed to. Typically, many of my informants dismissed the impact of racist name-calling. Karch claimed that:

"At school . . . it [racist name-calling] wasn't bad. But I mean, you know, I think it's just like any other cuss that you say. If you're fat, you're skinny, if you're different, then they're gonna use that" (Interview, 5 November 1996).

Karch, like most of the others in my sample, went to a school where there were few people of Chinese origin. Unlike Asian and black youth in Britain who are potentially able collectively to empower themselves, Chinese children at school must confront racism on their own. Like Karch, Steve downplayed the impact of racist name-calling. When I asked him whether or not he had encountered racist name-calling at school, he replied:

"No, not really, not through secondary school. Maybe when I first got back to England when I was a very young kid then I didn't really speak English, but as I picked up on the queen's lingo . . ." (Interview, 24 March 1997).

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The implication here is that, as Steve got older, incidents of racist name-calling occurred less. Although it is tempting, and convenient, to assume that my informants progressively experienced fewer incidents of racist name-calling as they matured, it is likely that the adversity they encountered during their formative years affected identity formation.

Even though there existed the possibility for my informants to form strategic alliances with other Chinese pupils at school, some were reluctant to do so. Puncho recalled how there were seven other Chinese people during his time at school, yet he rarely spoke to any of them. According to him,

they were just sad though, do you know what I mean? They were really like 'Hong Kongie' you know? There was this guy A, but he was always getting picked on (Interview, 26 June 1996).

Puncho refused to commit himself to strategic alliances with other Chinese pupils at school who he considered to be 'Hong Kongie'. The term ‘Hong Kongie’ was used by Puncho to refer to Chinese people who he regarded as having a strong sense of being ‘Chinese’, which differed to his conception of self. Puncho’s concern to position himself as different from the other Chinese kids that were being teased was also related to his wish to be accepted by his English peers at school. That Puncho operated a distancing strategy towards his Chinese peers at school is significant. It highlights how even from an early age Chinese youth is concerned with defining a sense of self in relation to other Chinese peers (see chapter 4).

Central to understanding why many of the males in my study negated racist name-calling by playing down its effects was an underlying desire to belong to peer groups. Back has asserted that ‘it is not simply that young people “learn to belong”; they are also involved in an active process that explores the meaning of belonging’ (1996: 74). My informants were not simply the passive recipients of racist name-calling. Some of them were able to challenge the teasing that they were subjected to as a result of which some were able to gain acceptance amongst their peers. It is my view that past analyses of
young Chinese people in Britain tend to overlook the negotiated character of these identities.

Back has argued that the two domains of ‘play’ and racist name-calling are inextricably linked. Cultural practices amongst young men act as the platform on which racist name-calling is utilized. It was relatively common for my male informants to claim racist name-calling as a feature of the ‘duelling plays’ between boys that occurred at school, and which most often took the form of ‘cussing’. As King put it, ‘it’s like . . . yeah a kids’ thing, you just cuss each other you know’ (Interview, 7th October 1996). Being able to accept and contest racialised ‘cusses’ redefined notions of belonging for my male informants and conferred a degree of prestige and status in that some were able to gain access to alternative adolescent peer groups. King reasoned that:

It’s like you’re chatting and someone will say ‘easy chinky’ and you go ‘alright white boy.’ I haven’t had no problem with it. I’d like to think I haven’t had a problem with it. Only people that I don’t know, people that come up to me in the street and call me a ‘chinky’, that’s different! (Interview, 7 October 1996).

Although my male informants acted in complicity with racist name-calling, there were limits placed on its use. While King accepted name-calling amongst his peer group at school, being subject to racist name-calling outside his social network was deemed to be inappropriate. However, the limited resources available for young Chinese to withstand prolonged racist name-calling did lead some to retreat into forming exclusive peer groups beyond the realm of school with other Chinese marked by closure to outsiders. It has been noted that incidents of racist name-calling lead to a flight from multi-ethnic peer space which resulted in moments of heightened ‘race’ consciousness (Back 1996).

Although ‘cussing’ was experienced by both men and women in my sample, the racialised discourses of ‘play’ that were invoked most often featured the men as the victims of racist name-calling. There is a gender dimension to consider here in that there is
evidence to suggest that some of my female informants indicated that they had experienced fewer incidents of racist name-calling. For example, Sau Wah told me that:

I have hardly, you know, come across that much prejudice . . . Even when I was a kid. I only remember being called a chink once (Interview, 11 January 1998).

It could be argued that young Chinese women experience racist name-calling differently to their male counterparts, thus affecting the social relationships that they are able to participate in. Wulff has argued that adolescent girls are more likely to mix culturally than boys (Wulff 1995). Additionally, Back observed that the young women in his study were less likely to use racist insults as often as their male peers (1996: 90). It would appear that outside the sphere of the Chinese takeaway (see chapter 3), young Chinese women are less likely to be exposed to racialized teasing. When I asked Ivy if she had ever experienced discrimination because of her ethnic origin, she replied ‘not really . . . when I was little maybe, like once at school and the occasional one from little boys or something’ (Interview, 30 October 1996). Some of the wider implications of the gendered nature of British-Chinese identities will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Through the medium of racist name-calling it is significant that, at such a young age, Chinese youth are made to feel different from other pupils at school. While I have focused on those individuals who were able to negate the effects of racist name-calling and, to a certain extent, gain approval from their peers at school, tolerating racialized teasing also imposed various constraints on my informants which will be considered in the following section. Feelings of exclusion surfaced regularly during the interviews I conducted, as a consequence of which young Chinese have formulated markedly different ways of coping. Although my informants acted in compliance with some of the racist name-calling, I want to suggest that the ways in which my informants learnt how to deflect and negotiate racism at school has affected their adult lives through their choices in terms of identity formation.
Ascribed identities?

We’s stuck in the middle . . . really, really stuck (Jason. Interview, 27 March 1997).

In this section I outline some of the social and cultural forces which serve to impede the articulation of a stable and coherent sense of British-Chinese identity. A central theme in what follows is the response of my informants to the classifications of identity ascribed to them by both British and Chinese people. It is my contention that young Chinese are confronted with particular choices if they are to transcend the ascribed identities assigned to them.

The formulations of identity that young Chinese opt for are in part affected by the legacy of the stereotypical representations of Chinese people in Britain discussed earlier. Also, the dilemmas that young Chinese face are exacerbated by other Chinese who emphasize the essential nature of identifications with being “Chinese”, particularly through proficiency in the Chinese language (see chapter 4). As Puncho noted:

if you don’t come from Hong Kong and you were born here and your Chinese isn’t perfect then they will seem to think ‘Oh but you come from . . . you’re Chinese and you don’t bother taking as much interest in the culture as you should.’ But then that’s their thing because they come from a different background culture themselves (Interview, 26 June 1996).

The attitudes of Chinese people who pride themselves as being, to varying degrees, more authentically Chinese, has a significant impact on the formation of British-Chinese identities. Due to the spatial dispersal of the Chinese population in Britain, many young Chinese people grow up in isolated circumstances. This may encourage Chinese youth to maintain a sense of pride in their cultural identity to overcome some of the difficulties experienced in their formative years. For those young Chinese, raised in Britain and possessing more ‘open’ formulations of identity, the identities that are ascribed to them by other Chinese people cause some anxiety. For example, Yin said that:
In some ways it kind of hurts because you think, “I'm stuck in two cultures” (Yin. Interview, 3 January 1997).

Yin’s comment encapsulates the everyday tensions which many young Chinese confront, having to manoeuvre between the competing notions of Chineseness and Britishness (see chapter 4). Although, in some ways Yin considered herself to be fortunate in the sense that ‘I think I have got the best of both worlds’ (Interview, 3 January 1997), she was also acutely aware of how she was perceived by Hong Kong Chinese people:

it’s when others say from Hong Kong start seeing you in a different light, thinking that you’re a foreigner, that you feel out of place (Interview, 3 January 1997).

For Chinese youth located at the juncture between Britishness and Chineseness it would appear that, at times, the two categories are reproduced in mutually exclusive ways.

Paul Gilroy has outlined how ‘the new racism’ (Barker 1981) is primarily concerned with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and how ‘it specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose “origin, sentiment or citizenship” assigns them elsewhere’ (1987: 45). In other words, in order to understand ‘the new racism’ one must appreciate that cultural factors assume precedence over biological attributes. In Britain, a tradition of representation that portrays Chinese people in largely stereotypical terms has left impressionable Chinese youth raised in Britain with little to feel proud of (Parker 1998). Given these conditions, it is hardly any surprise that a minority of Chinese youth have little interest in their sense of cultural identity (Parker 1995). However, in the current study there is evidence to suggest that some individuals, in the face of confronting cultural exclusivity from Chinese people, were rediscovering and appreciating their cultural heritage:
Over the last couple of years it [Chineseness] has, it's beginning to come in, rear its head, making itself stronger and stronger and it's got to the point now where I try to get a good balance between the two you know, East and West (Steve. Interview 24 March 1997).

Rather than maintaining a distance from Chineseness (see chapter 4), individuals such as Steve were concerned with embracing a politics of cultural nationalism to negate in some ways the identities that were ascribed to them by other Chinese people. By aiming to ‘get a good balance’ of his dual heritages, an active negotiation of his identity was taking place where compromise could be arrived at. The extent to which young British-Chinese people are able to assert identities that fully reflect their circumstances in Britain, however, remains uncertain.

The optimism embodied in the new cultural practices and cultural spaces of an emerging generation of British-Asian and black-British youth born and raised in this country, who are actively involved in reshaping national boundaries, may leave in their wake young Chinese who continue to be excluded from these spaces (Back 1996, Parker 1998). While many of my informants were committed to inter-ethnic friendships, a degree of uncertainty was expressed by some towards their role in these peer groups. In what follows, I am chiefly concerned with the degree to which British-Chinese youth are able to formulate identities on their own terms that reflect their upbringing in Britain.

Of the various social constraints imposed on the behaviour of my informants, some voiced concern about the level of participation they were permitted within the culturally-mixed peer groups they were involved in. The status of young Chinese people within these inter-racial friendships seemed to be in question. For instance, Jason felt that the onus was on him to behave appropriately according to whether he was with his Chinese or white English friends:

When I was with my English friends I just act the way they did. It’s a bit sad, it’s a bit pretentious. I act the way that they should expect me to. You shouldn’t be like that, yeah, but I do because like if I started acting [. . . ] With my Chinese friends I can relax, I can be myself. I can’t be myself when I’m with my white friends, I’ve got to put on a front (Interview, 27 March 1997).
The ability of my informants to foster inter-ethnic friendships is often predicated on their willingness to accept and conform to existing frames of reference for Chinese people. There are similarities here between accepting racist name-calling at school and the social relationships Chinese youth form beyond school. Jason's conception of 'belonging' necessitated an acceptance on his behalf of the position he occupied amongst his white English peers. His admission that 'I act the way that they should expect me to' implies that these practices define how young Chinese may belong to inter-racial groups of young individuals. My informants handled their own participation in inter-ethnic friendships in different ways. In Jason's case, being a core figure of 'the Hatfield bunch' (see chapter 4) resulted in him having the option to socialize with his Chinese friends whom he felt more at ease with, since, as he put it, 'with my Chinese friends I can relax, I can be myself.' Jason felt that his English friends did not fully understand his Chinese heritage and the associated obligations which had an adverse impact on the social relationships which he had previously enjoyed with his English friends:

A lot of my English mates, a lot of the stuff they don't understand. They don't understand the culture because it's different to their culture. They find it strange or they think it's funny. But it's not that we've had different upbringings. They don't understand why, for instance, we're so close to our parents and why we have to work for them and why we can't go out (Interview, 27 March 1997).

In some cases, the lack of understanding of Chinese cultural practises and obligations from inter-ethnic peers may impede the full participation of young Chinese people in mixed friendship groups. The pressures of having to help out parents in the catering trade may exacerbate these problems (see chapter 3).

The relatively large Chinese presence in London provides young Chinese people with alternatives to forming inter-ethnic alliances. I have already written about how various sites frequented by Chinese people enable 'partial communities' to flourish around Chinatown, domestic settings, gambling and Chinese discos. While some, such as
Jason, strategically opted to keep company with other Chinese people, others, like Steve who was perhaps one of the most vocal in denying the significance of ‘race’ in inter-ethnic friendships, had to negotiate the ascriptions given to Chinese people in Britain:

It’s like, a lot of my friends, before me they don’t know any Chinese guys and they always have a total misconception of what Chinese people are about. That’s why when I say I get to meet say some geezer down in a hip-hop jam down at the Crossbar, they’re freaked out by me you know, because they’ve never met a Chinese guy who’s into graf [graffiti], who’s into breakdancing and who’s into hip-hop, it kinda enrichens them (Interview, 24 March 1997).

Steve’s active participation in an urban youth sub-culture necessitated contact with other ‘races’, which was not always unproblematic. The potential for racist materials to be mobilised strategically against Chinese youth as a means of gaining an advantage or hurting Chinese peers is ever present (Parker 1995). In order to counter the legitimacy of racist remarks, many were concerned with negating contemporary stereotypes of Chinese people. Steve, to a certain extent, acknowledged the constraints placed on him during the initial stage of forging inter-ethnic friendships:

There’s always a barrier you have to come across, you know? In a way sometimes you have to prove yourself [. . . ] I try and find out what they’re about and hope they try and find out what I’m about and then, you know, you relax, find common ground and build on from that (Interview, 24 March 1997).

Of those in my sample, Steve was certainly one of the most committed to contact with individuals from other ethnic and racial backgrounds. During the course of my fieldwork, I was introduced to his multi-racial peer group and on most of the occasions that I met Steve he was accompanied by ‘D’, a black friend of his.

In order to maintain the inter-ethnic friendships that my informants pursued a measure of both fortitude and determination was required. One of the ways in which a few of my informants negotiated access to socially prestigious non-Chinese youth peer groups was partially to reject notions of “Chineseness”. This occurred frequently, albeit
in often understated ways and included tactics such as insulting and renouncing other Chinese people as friends (see also chapter 4). For instance, Steve told me that ‘a few years ago you know, I would’ve just totally probably dissed Chinese’ (Interview, 24 March 1997). In addition, Sue would often speak in deprecatory terms about how “sad” other young Chinese were. The distancing strategies that were mobilised by some of the informants against other young Chinese people were a way in which ascribed identities could be rejected, but at a certain social and political cost.

Despite Steve’s efforts, it became apparent that he had experienced some prejudicial feeling by others towards his involvement in what can loosely be described as “hip-hop” culture:

I hate it. Sometimes it's like when you're, you surprise a lot of westerners, yeah? When I come across some westerners who are into what I'm into [...] They'll be like really blown away as soon as I open my mouth you know. They can't quite figure out where I'm coming from and then they try to compare me from what I know onto how true I am to, to how I'm involved into what they're involved in. They feel superiority over what I'm doing. At the end of the day we're all the same you know. That's why I say I can't give myself an identity whether or not I'm British or Chinese (Interview, 24 March 1997).

The type of prejudice that Steve has encountered is akin to the discrimination that Chow’s ‘inauthentic native’ receives (1993: 27-54). Chow problematizes the politics of identifying ‘authentic’ natives and suggests that ‘we cannot approach this politics without being critical of a particular relation to images that is in question’ (1993: 29). Steve’s participation in the sub-culture is interrogated because it would appear that he has violated cultural boundaries. One issue in this scenario is whether Steve as a person of Chinese descent should be so actively involved in what is primarily considered to be a ‘black’ youth culture. However, Steve’s concern is not merely about how his ‘race’ has

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6 The term “hip-hop” has wide-ranging meaning. A central element of hip-hop culture is rap music which, as Back notes, is a ‘simultaneously local, multinational and transcultural’ phenomenon (1996: 210). Although rap music is acknowledged as emanating from within urban black America during the early 1980s, the style has been incorporated and mutated into a lifestyle that may be summarily classified as
affected his involvement in the sub-culture. Instead, similar to the workings of ‘the new racism’, cultural stereotypes to a large extent form the basis of what Steve has experienced in Britain. The main implication is that an assumption is being made about Steve, that as a Chinese person he should be faithful to what is assumed to be his ‘Chinese’ cultural heritage. Indeed, it could be argued that, currently, hip-hop is not simply the domain of black youth culture. The influence of hip-hop has permeated urban centres on a global scale and the diversity of its practitioners reflect this (see Wood 1998 for an account of the dynamics of ‘black musics’ in Japan). Hip-hop becomes a domain within which cultural identities are negotiated. For example, amongst Asian-American young men hip-hop is a core mode of cultural expression for the younger generation (Espiritu 1997). This has resulted in the emergence of Asian-American hip-hop acts such as, Q-Bert and Mountain Brothers.

Individual manifestations of syncretic British-Chinese identities are perhaps kept in check by a lack of collective response to the actions of Chinese youth like Steve. It would appear from this that there exists minimal space for British-Chinese people to articulate identities that are irreducible to cultural essences or dominant stereotypes. Similar to Steve, Jason voiced concern about how he would be perceived by others when joining his non-Chinese friends for a drink:

They [friends’ parents] get surprised because they think ‘Oh yeah your type of people aren’t really into that stuff.’ For instance like going down to the pub. I mean every time I go to the pub it seems like I’m the only Chinese person in there and it’s just unusual (Interview, 24 March 1997).

For Jason, even a seemingly routine activity such as going to the pub was potentially problematic. Even though young British-Chinese people are playing an active role in racially mixed groupings, many are continually questioning their positionings. While the likes of Jason and Steve were able to acquire personal status by gaining access to multi-
racial groups, their involvement with non-Chinese people was to an extent dependent on
how willing they were to commit themselves to these friendships. The processes which
determine whether or not Chinese youth can 'belong' to these groups are multi-faceted,
but racism and its ascribed identities assume a chief role. Racism defines different cultures
as separate entities and locates individuals accordingly. As Gilroy points out:

the absolutist view of black and white cultures . . . is far from secure. It is constantly under challenge from
the activities of blacks who pass through the cultural and ideological net which is supposed to screen
Englishness from them, and from the complex organic process which renders black Britons partially soluble
in the national culture which their presence helps transform (1987: 61).

The cultural conservatism and economic success of the Chinese in Britain, together with
the relative indifference of the indigenous population towards Chinese people, have
combined to produce a kind of mutually reinforcing relationship whereby it is beneficial
for both groups to maintain the status quo. Presuming the existence of a racial hierarchy in
Britain, Chinese people occupy decidedly ambiguous ground. As I have described,
practices of representation have affected how the Chinese in Britain are generally
perceived. These conditions have lent intensity to the question of where the Chinese are
positioned in relation to other ethnic groups in Britain, which for long has been
conceptualised in terms of a black/white binary. The reputation of the Chinese as a silent
and invisibly minority in Britain is undoubtedly apt. Whether or not discord amongst
second generation Chinese people raised in Britain, tired of the long hours associated with
working in the catering trade, will provide a platform for change in the futures of British-
Chinese people remains to be seen.

In the current study, while many of my informants were committed to forming
identities that were somehow a synthesis of both cultures, a great deal of persistence is
required in order to sustain them. The experiences of Steve and Jason provide testimony
to the vulnerability of their respective positions and illustrate the inherently negotiated
status of their personal formulations of identity. What I hope to have demonstrated in
this section is how young Chinese are confronted with particular obstacles growing up in Britain, and how it is often difficult for them to transgress the ascribed identities that they are framed within. Ultimately, it is these kinds of attitudes and ascriptions that continue to stifle and hinder British-Chinese creativity and cultural aesthetics. The rest of this chapter develops a further understanding of the conditions under which these diverse and complex identities are formed by focusing on the different forms of essentialised and hybridised identities which are on display amongst my informants.

**Essentialist formations of identity**

In the previous section I documented how Jason had discovered some solace through socializing with Chinese friends. Much conventional thinking on ‘race’ would suggest that this was a ‘normal’ outcome which rests on an implicit assumption that individuals share an essential cultural identity that maintains this bond (Gardner and Shukur 1994, for comparison). While not simply refuting this, it is my aim in this section to highlight some of the contradictions associated with the essentialist forms of identity constructed by my informants. I want to suggest that many young Chinese adopt positions of what Spivak (1984-5) has termed ‘strategic essentialism’. It is my intention to outline how my informants strategically held essentialist identities to minimalise the perceived threat from racism.

A chief consideration in what follows is the influence of London in the construction of these identities. As I have argued in previous chapters, London’s Chinese population is the largest of any city in Britain and its Chinatown acts as a focal point for the many other Chinese living in the south east of England. The role of London as a metropolitan centre enables Chinese youth to sustain and nurture strategic alliances with other young Chinese people. Also, London’s Chinatown provides the cultural resources that enable Chinese people to maintain cultural connections with the Far East. However,
one must caution against the possibility of reverting to a kind of ‘ethnic absolutism’ (Gilroy 1987), as a result of the practice of strategic essentialism. In this section I wish to demonstrate that while moments of a slippage into more absolute forms of identity may have occurred, the recourse to strategic essentialism represents only a component of the complex identities that my informants formed (Fuss 1989).

“Chineseness” and identity

Presented with opportunities to meet other young Chinese from similar backgrounds, it is little surprise that few disregard the prospect of escaping being ‘different’ in white peer groups. The isolated circumstances which many Chinese youth are familiar with in their early years are often forgotten when young Chinese in Britain come into contact with other Chinese peers. Sai, for example, felt especially comfortable in the company of other Chinese people and would often speak in glowing terms about his experiences in Hong Kong:

I feel it's natural for a wong pee fu [yellow skin person] to hang around with a wong pee fu, very natural. I don't know what it is, it's just mother nature I suppose . . . I'm not like a typical BBC [British Born Chinese] who is born here and simply speaks English, refuses to speak their own mother language. I feel I'm more than that (Interview, 1 May 1997).

It is not easy to summarise Sai’s position. His formulation of identity certainly entailed a specific identification with being “Chinese” and he stresses the difference between himself and other BBCs, who he regarded as being oblivious to their cultural heritage. At the same time, however, he was aware that his personal identification with being “Chinese” was a limited one due to his upbringing in England. When questioned about what he thought being “Chinese” entailed, he replied, ‘I think ultimately being Chinese is about . . . when I refer to being Chinese, I identify myself in relation to the culture’ (Interview, 1 May
Sai was familiar with the negative connotations associated with being a ‘BBC’, such as not speaking the mother language and not complying with “Chinese” cultural values. It was apparent that Sai was keen to distance himself from the perceptions of BBCs, held by other more “authentic” Chinese people. As he put it, ‘I feel I’m more than that’ (Interview, 1 May 1997).

Paradoxically, while Sai outwardly set himself apart from other BBCs in Britain, his network of friends was from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. For example, during the course of our interview, it transpired that his best friend was Japanese and that they had plans to go into business together. In addition, on the many occasions I met him at a south London snooker club, he was always with a Caucasian colleague from his workplace in the City. Sai’s personal conception of identity is far from straightforward.

He was firm in his belief that:

S: I think everyone needs an identification. You can’t have a middle ground. You can’t be a ‘middle man’ all your life.
K: Why not?
S: I associate being a ‘middle man’ with mediocrity, as being a Mr Normal. I mean you can’t be in the middle all the time, some things have to be either black or white (Interview, 1 May 1997).

The disparaging way in which Sai speaks of the ‘middle man’ implies that in his view one should remain ‘true’ to one’s cultural heritage. Yet, despite the absolute nature of Sai’s identification, he did not socialize exclusively with Chinese people. It could be said that Sai’s strong sense of being “Chinese” was held strategically and mobilised according to who he was with, on a local and transnational level in London and Hong Kong.

Trung, like Sai, considered it important to be aware of the historical significance of one’s cultural background. His standpoint, however, differed from Sai’s in that he believed that Chinese people in Britain needed to ‘integrate’ more. Trung told me that:
I say that the Chinese, Vietnamese community, if they integrate better, established some sort of relationship with their neighbours yeah, then things that basically wouldn't happen, they would be less likely to happen, but they don't do they? They've always stuck to themselves (Interview, 21 April 1997).

Currently, social scientists rarely use the term 'integration' since it is regarded as an outmoded concept. Regardless of that, a few of my informants considered 'integration' to be relevant in the formation of identities. During the interviews, even though I did not directly ask my informants questions on 'integration', the term was mentioned recurrently. It was not entirely clear, however, what they meant when they utilised the term. The implication in Trung's discussion of integration is that if Chinese people were to engage themselves more fully in British society, an ensuing inter-racial harmony would follow. Most of the people I spoke to were divided on the topic of whether the Chinese population in Britain were 'integrated' or not. For instance, Yin was of the opinion that:

I think that they [Chinese people in Britain] are pretty well integrated, but at the end of the day some of them keep themselves to themselves. But then again some of them cross the barriers so I think on the whole pretty much integrated (Interview, 3 January 1997).

Yet, Karch especially felt that the material and economic benefits derived from the Chinese catering trade had hindered British-Chinese socio-cultural advancement in Britain:

The Chinese are doing well for themselves, but if you're talking about integration into mainstream society, it's not really happening (Interview, 5 November 1996).

While Trung professed a multi-racial outlook he was amongst my informants also one of the most vocal in stating that young Chinese people should adhere to cultural traditions. The scope for these two, in many ways, opposing tendencies to co-exist forms

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7 Social scientists would classify this as 'assimilation', not integration. In race relations vocabulary, integration is considered to occur when the host society accepts groups of people from different ethnic minority backgrounds. It is probable that my informants used both terms synonymously. For a definition of these terms from a perspective of human geography, see Johnston et al 1987.
the crux of questions about the future for British-Chinese identities. Trung’s strong sense of cultural identity would appear to contradict his sentiment that the Chinese in Britain need to ‘integrate’ more. He especially felt that the emerging generation of Chinese and Vietnamese youth in London had little appreciation of their cultural heritage, which he makes clear in the following extract:

T: I think the young Chinese, Vietnamese people growing up in London now basically have lost all sense of direction, all roots, history, discipline.
K: Isn’t that good in the sense, you was saying how it was good to mingle?
T: Yeah it’s good to mingle, but that doesn’t mean that you should lose your identity. I mean look at little Chinese kids now growing up in London, hanging around in snooker clubs, smoking pot and all that stuff [. . . ] it’s sad because I don’t think they have much of a future. I would say that if I was doing that when I was younger my parents would just . . . you know what I mean? (Interview, 21 April 1997).

From Trung’s point of view, he considered it to be a loss that his younger counterparts were losing their sense of cultural identity. Even though Trung evidently advocated ‘integration’, he distinguished this from losing one’s sense of identity. The position adopted by Trung suggests that his personal conception of identity was centred upon the strength of his affiliation to his cultural heritage yet was also influenced by his upbringing in Britain.

In the discussion of ‘the Chinese community’ in chapter 4, it was established that Britain’s Chinese population is a diverse one, comprising a variety of ethnic Chinese, as well as Vietnamese groups. On the basis that it is more plausible to think of plural ‘partial Chinese communities’ rather than a singular notion of ‘the Chinese community’, one of the problems that may be identified with an over-reliance on an essentialist approach to examining the formation of identities amongst young Chinese people is that they are not all the same. Although young Chinese people may share an essential cultural identity,
where and when it is mobilised, strategically or otherwise, is very much a matter of individual and group perception.

*Not all Chinese are the ‘same’*

During his time at university, although Jason regularly attended Chinese society events he affirmed that he shared little in common with native Hong Kong Chinese students and that it was the British-Chinese students with whom he would get together:

To some extent all BBCs are the same, we're all friends, we all stick together... with the Hong Kongies we don't really get on with them, not intentionally, because their level of thinking, their socialising, is different. There seems to be a barrier. We've had a few sports events organised, they all stick together and we all stick together (Interview, 27 March 1997).

Jason’s intention to fraternize with Chinese people cannot be conceptualized in terms of a crude form of essentialism that posits shared innate characteristics. Rather, it was Jason’s aim to be around people with personal narratives of growing up in similar circumstances.

Many of the times that I met Jason and the Hatfield bunch we would also meet other British-Chinese people. On the few occasions that Hong Kong Chinese students were in attendance at the social spaces that we frequented, their presence would be acknowledged within the group. Yet it was considered to be unusual to be on amicable terms with them. This became apparent at a house party I was at with the Hatfield bunch which was hosted by the president of their university Chinese society, an overseas Hong Kong Chinese student. It was at this particular party that I was introduced to Jason and his other British-Chinese friends. Despite the large Chinese presence at the party, during the course of the evening the British-Chinese gradually huddled together into the living room area of the lodging, and the Hong Kong Chinese students remained in the kitchen.
While the British-Chinese contingent conversed to each other in English, the Hong Kong students spoke Cantonese to one another. From time to time, one of the British-Chinese students would go to the kitchen to get a drink but would not linger long enough to hold a conversation with the other Hong Kong Chinese guests. The two groups continued to maintain their sense of distance from each other throughout the evening. This occurrence suggests that there were different essentialist agendas occurring for the two groups. Thus the politics of essentialism is vitally complex and multi-faceted. Instead of a primordial essentialism that posits shared ties with all Chinese people, the actions of Jason and the Hatfield bunch support the view that internal differentiation persists between certain groups of individuals. What this situation highlights is the strategic form of essentialism adopted by the Hatfield bunch. Their unwillingness to maintain a connection with the Hong Kong Chinese students was a reflection of their upbringing in Britain. But at the same time, their status as part of a wider racialized minority in Britain, was a central element in the formation of the Hatfield bunch in the first place.

However, to assume that Jason preferred to socialise exclusively with other British-Chinese people is misleading. Jason was a popular figure amongst both his Chinese and English friends. He was also sensitive to the differences between the two groups and it was a personal aim of his to bring his diverse set of friends closer together. He told me that, ‘Ideally I’d like to integrate all my friends together’ (Interview, 27 March 1997). Fundamentally, however, he felt that this was not possible due to the irreconcilable qualities of both sets of friends. As he put it, ‘my English friends like to joke around and are sarcastic, my Chinese friends might take it the wrong way’ (Interview, 27 March 1997). Nevertheless, Jason expressed a wish to be around Chinese people more often in the future and his motives for doing so are clarified in the following extract:

K: Do you tend to hang out more with Chinese people?
J: Nowadays I do. Since I started university I’ve been introduced to a lot of Chinese people. In the first year I was hanging out with English people going to the pub doing drugs, whatever. And then like second
year I just got sick of it. I was thinking where is all this leading to - close but not close enough. Everything is like a laugh, nothing is serious. With Chinese people there is a lot more depth.

K: Do you regret that you’re not as close as you once was to your English mates?
J: I have felt that way. I mean they have said ‘oh you’re skanking [ignoring] us, you don’t come out anymore, you just hang out with your Chinese friends’, and it does make me feel guilty. I do miss some of parts of it, you know the less serious side of life. (Interview, 27 March 1997).

The oscillation of Jason’s socializing preferences from his group of English to Chinese friends was, in part, an outcome of his gradual realisation that he shared more in common with his British-Chinese peers.

Without advocating that British-Chinese youth exclusively mix culturally with each other, it may be advantageous for them to do so given the limited socio-cultural resources available to them. All of my informants were part of social networks of Chinese people, although their participation in these groups fluctuated. Even though many decided to socialize primarily with Chinese people, the nature of these associations was not as transparent as it would seem. Puncho was a case in point:

I would have to say the majority of my friends are Chinese, more so the people, I mean I know a lot of non-Chinese people but a lot of them are more acquaintances more than friends, but some of my best friends aren’t Chinese either . . . I don’t know, I don’t know how to say it, but on the whole just generalising I feel more at home with Chinese people (Interview, 26 June 1996).

bell hooks (1992), in her introductory chapter to Black Looks, attempts to explain how manifestations of black separatism in public space are not indicators of anti-white racism, rather they should be viewed as efforts by black people to construct places of ‘political sanctuary’:

Every aware black person who has been the ‘only’ in an all white setting knows that in such a position we are often called upon to lend an ear to racist narratives, to laugh at corny race jokes, to undergo various forms of racist harassment (hooks 1992: 16).
Young British-Chinese people are acutely aware of being the ‘only’ in many situations. For many Chinese youth raised in Britain, the solitary conditions that they encounter from a very early age have an impact on the formation of identities. Maintaining an essentialist identity could be viewed as a way of deflecting experiences of racism. Amongst my informants, many did not start socializing with Chinese peers until their early to mid-teens, since at school there were few other Chinese youth with whom to form alliances. While it would appear that essentialism is a binding force that connects Chinese youth, to assume that Chinese people are automatically disposed to socialize together is misleading. This is exemplified by Karch:

K: Who do you relate to more, Chinese or non-Chinese people?
Ka: I’d say both, being bought up in England.
K: Who do you hang out with more?
Ka: I’d say Chinese.
K: Do you feel more comfortable with Chinese people?
Ka: Not really. That’s just the way, probably subconsciously, that’s the way it is, but it just came about really (Interview, 5 November 1996).

It would be fair to say that while all of the informants maintained contact with other young Chinese counterparts, some more than others were also committed to contact with their British friends. Also, some of my informants were reluctant to socialize exclusively with Chinese people. Those individuals who were likely to possess more hybrid formulations of identity were, at times, characterized as being different by other Chinese people in ways that were negative.

In the same way as with the questions of language considered in chapter 4, Chinese people characterised as being too ‘white’ in cultural terms are labelled in a variety of ways, such as ‘banana’ (white on the inside, yellow on the outside) or ‘jook sing’ (meaning ‘bamboo’, which is yellow on the inside). Trung would occasionally mockingly refer to me as a banana and a ‘sell-out’. I would usually accept these designations to the
point that I would label myself a ‘banana’ in his presence. When questioned about why he thought I was a ‘sell-out’, he told me that:

I only say that when you refer to yourself as a banana, because people use that to mean when you’re [a] sell out, so . . . although I would say I’m largely influenced by British society I wouldn’t say that I’m a sell out. I know where I’m coming from, I know where my roots are (Interview, 21 April 1997).

Trung inextricably linked being a ‘banana’ with his conception of being a ‘sell-out’, which in his terms referred to someone who had lost sense of who they were culturally. To classify young Chinese people in these totalizing ways reveals little of their complex position. It could be said that none of the informants with more hybrid formulations of identity would identify themselves as wanting to be ‘white’ or as shadowing the practises of their white friends. Instead, their relationships with a wider Chinese collectivity are constantly being probed and explored in the same way that their relationships with white peers are tested and defined. The classification of young Chinese people in these absolute ways by other Chinese people undermines and inhibits the formation of progressive British-Chinese identities, although it has not prevented them.

_Hybridised identities: resisting essentialism(s)?_  

The lack of a readily accessible and discernible popular British-based Chinese youth culture has affected the development of a British-Chinese cultural politics. Social scientists, while praising the optimism of the literature on new ethnicities have been somewhat cautious in their commentary on the position that Chinese youth occupies. At best, it is assumed that young Chinese and Vietnamese people in Britain occupy peripheral roles in the formation of new ethnicities (Parker 1995, Back 1996) and, at worst, it would seem that the experiences of British-Chinese youth do not merit attention.
In the following section, I examine the scope and character of new British-Chinese identities. I want to propose that the formation of these identities does not necessarily embrace a notion of collective consciousness, the basis of which tacitly underpins much research on emerging black-British and British-Asian identities. Instead, I suggest that the new identities being formed by young Chinese people are manifest on an individual level, which is both limiting and liberating. The supposition that young blacks and Asians in Britain have galvanised support for their respective struggles by organising themselves collectively is a potent one. For Chinese people in Britain, the economic self-sufficiency derived from the catering trade enabled earlier generations to pursue lifestyles largely concealed from mainstream society and the repercussions of this are still felt. Yet my informants realised in various and contrasting ways that they were acting as agents in the reconfiguring of British-Chinese identities. At the most basic level, this was often expressed in terms of generational difference. Amongst those I spoke to, a distinct second generation British-Chinese consciousness was evident and the differences between the generations was primarily perceived in terms of cultural practices that deviated from the norms established by their parents.

One of the informants, Yin, felt strongly that her understanding of being ‘Chinese’ contrasted to that of her parents:

Y: If you can manage to juggle the two then you’ll be fine. Once you start thinking well I’m actually Chinese but I’m in Britain, when you start fighting that, then you’ll end up like your parents. Trying you know to bring over the values and everything.
K: Do you think that’s bad?
Y: It’s not bad, but sometimes there can be a conflict within yourself to try and juggle it and everything (Interview, 3 January 1997).

Individuals such as Yin, like a minority of others in the study, had accepted the inescapability of their dual heritage. There was a general consensus amongst them that a dilution of Chinese cultural values had led to transition amongst second generation British-Chinese youth. Whether in relation to being Chinese in Britain or being a fragment
of diaspora, the sense of difference from earlier generations of Chinese settlers is keenly felt by young British-Chinese. As noted above, some of the individuals in my sample opted for strategically essentialist formulations of identity, while others were committed to the insertion of Chinese people into a redefined Britishness. Puncho was perhaps more self-assured than others in his sentiment that:

You can’t really hang on to the past . . . you might be more aware of other cultures but then as long as you still know where you’re coming from you’ve got no problems about yourself . . . it’s for the better I think. It’s not about losing your own identity, that you’re becoming less Chinese. Circumstances for myself, where I am at the moment, I’m in England, I’m Chinese you know what I mean? I think that’s the way it is. Whereas a person living in Hong Kong might think totally different, but don’t think I’m going to keep my Chinese culture. I mean they’ll probably look at me and think ‘Boy, that’s quite shameful what he is saying’, but then, they are not where I am (Interview, 26 June 1996).

Puncho’s self-reflexiveness indicates the extent to which young Chinese people are framed within ascribed identities by more ‘authentic’ Chinese people. Yet the willingness of some of my informants, such as Puncho, to reject the attitudes of these individuals points to new ways of being ‘Chinese’ in Britain. Being part of a different generation in itself was regarded by many as constituting change. As Karch put it:

Our parents, they came from a different culture. They landed on this planet called England . . . but we are the first generation to have come from the British experience, so I think it’s a start (Interview, 5 November 1996).

For Karch, being second generation British-Chinese born and raised in this country was important in defining his personal conception of identity. Contrary to the pessimistic scenarios painted by some in their writings on the Chinese in Britain, the individuals discussed below were eager to relate in a generally upbeat way to their upbringing in British circumstances (Parker 1994). A few of the informants viewed the second generation experience in Britain as being instrumental to the welfare of future generations of Chinese people in Britain - a yardstick for successive generations of British-Chinese
people to measure themselves against. Ivy was especially optimistic about what lay ahead for young Chinese people:

Chinese people our age are the first real ones to be born here and been bought up here, and in the years to come there will definitely be more Chinese people in the media being seen as figureheads to look up to for other Chinese people. I think us now will be sort of like people who other Chinese people born here will be looking up to, to see our achievements (Interview, 30 October 1996).

It is worth, therefore, examining the new forms of identity that these second generation British-Chinese men and women are constructing.

New British-Chinese futures

Previous analyses of Chinese people in Britain have focused on their relative aloofness from society at large and it is this perception which arguably persists in the popular imagination (Baker 1994, for example). Although Chinese social arenas no doubt contrive to sustain wider Chinese collectivities, a minority escape the ‘cultural and ideological net’ (Gilroy 1987: 61). Young Chinese people in London are increasingly fashioning identities on their own terms that avoid a simple resort to cultural essentialism. However, the stimulus for change is not straightforward. Avtar Brah’s (1996) concept of ‘diaspora space’ adequately captures the conflicting cultural processes that operate within collectives of Chinese people in Britain. She argues that,

what is at stake is the infinite experientiality, the myriad processes of cultural fissure and fusion that underwrite contemporary forms of transcultural identities. These emergent identities may only be surreptitiously avowed. Indeed, they may even be disclaimed or suppressed in the face of constructed imperatives of ‘purity’. But they are inscribed in the late twentieth-century forms of syncretism at the core of culture and subjectivity (1996: 208).
In what follows, I want to demonstrate that the individual strategies of identity formation that some of my informants have developed are profoundly affecting the kinds of social relationships that young Chinese people are forging. Chinese youth are increasingly forming inter-ethnic alliances where 'race' is seemingly insignificant and, in the process, are reworking the meanings of 'race' and widening the scope for inclusion in Britain. Amongst some of my informants there was an underlying sentiment that stressed the inappropriate nature of friendships founded on absolutist principles. As Sue put it:

"Because you're living in a country where you see more white people than your own kind, you just have to make the best of your own situation. But plus I see friends as friends and I don't say 'I would like to have a Chinese friend, I would like to have an Indian friend... I have to make friends with just Chinese people.' I just meet people through my life, if we become friends we become friends and if not we're not. It's not like I sift out the ones 'cos I like their kind or whatever" (Interview, 21 October 1996).

The pervasiveness of popular youth cultures in Britain and their consumption by my informants were also instrumental in facilitating change. Although my sample is by no means representative of the British-Chinese population as a whole, for the individuals in the current study it was noticeable that those who actively participated in popular British-based youth cultures were more committed to socializing in racially mixed peer groups than those who did not.

The lack of a readily identifiable and accessible British-based Chinese youth culture that informs other popular youth cultures in Britain has affected the development of a British-Chinese consciousness (Parker 1995, 1998). While a British-Chinese youth culture rooted in British circumstances has yet to take hold, I would like to examine how western forms of mainstream youth cultures have influenced formulations of identity for Chinese youth. I argue that young Chinese involvement in these youth cultures has facilitated a reconceptualisation of British-Chinese identities. In the London situation previously-established conventions of being 'Chinese' are being abandoned, paving the way for the formation of new identities, or new combinations of social selves. London's
role as the hub of Chinese settlement in Britain together with its status as an internationally-renowned centre where disparate youth cultures are defined and redefined enables young Chinese people to nurture and sustain hybrid formulations of identity.

My informants chiefly identified with American and British aspects of youth cultures. In particular, the type of music which my informants listened to assumed an important role in shaping their sense of identity. Typically, the varieties of music that my informants listened to encompassed British and American dance music and included styles such as house, garage, techno, drum and bass, r&b, soul, swing and rap. A corollary of my informants' tastes in dance music were the nightclubs that they patronized. The rise to prominence of clubbing has given rise to its current status as one of the most popular forms of 'experiential consumption' in Britain.9

The majority of my informants would go clubbing occasionally and, for the most part, the types of clubs they went to affected their formulations of identity (also see chapter 4). For example, when Ivy was questioned about why her group of friends was predominantly comprised of white people, she told me that:

I don't hang out exclusively with white people out of choice... it's just from the situation. It's just because if there were more Chinese people here who were into the same thing I'd probably like them as mates as well (Interview, 30 October 1996).

It can be inferred that Ivy spent most of her time with her English friends because she felt that there were not many other Chinese people that she knew who shared her preference for going to clubs that specialized in playing techno and house music. Amongst other things, Malbon (1998) has described how going clubbing induces a commonality of experience with other fellow clubbers. Clubbing enabled my informants to meet individuals from a diversity of backgrounds, criss-crossing cultural, class and racial

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9 Malbon defines the term thus, 'crudely, it is used to distinguish activities where expenditure involves the purchase of 'physical' goods from those activities where no such 'physical' exchange is involved' (1998: 282).
divides. In this way it is possible that going clubbing in culturally-mixed peer groups propagates cultural hybridity amongst young British-Chinese people. Similar to the experiences of young Chinese people at school discussed above, denying the significance of ‘race’ assumed a chief role in sustaining these friendships. Further probing with Ivy revealed that she considered her peer group to be indifferent to her phenotypical difference, ‘most people just like me for who I am, being Chinese does not come into it’ (Interview, 30 October 1996, also see chapter 6). The communal experience of clubbing and its associated lifestyle were considered to be central in supporting these inter-ethnic friendships.

Like Ivy, Sue’s clubbing also influenced her formulation of identity:

I was living my life as an art student and going clubbing, going pubbing, waking up and stuff like that. It was just me. None of my friends had a problem, they didn’t see me as Chinese either because the way I spoke and the things we were into were as un-Chinese as possible (Interview, 21 October 1996).

For Steve, his interest in a youth culture emanating from urban America and his location in London were deemed to be crucial in defining his personal conception of identity:

I think a lot of it stems back from my childhood you know, ‘cos I’ve grown up in Kent, really getting into hip-hop and listening to loads of rap music and then doing graffiti and painting, riding BMXs and being casual and all that, do you know what I mean? And where that kind of lifestyle exists is in London. Plus, after studying at art college, living here and you know I feel at home here and in that sense, not because it’s being London, it’s more like a sub-culture, or a culture which I can identify with, which is thriving in London, the scene is in London (Interview, 24 March 1997).

Living in London conferred upon Steve a degree of individual freedom that, he implied, could not be acquired elsewhere in Britain. While London was viewed by Steve to be a desirable place to live, his decision to come to live in the capital was not motivated by its role as a centre of Chinese activity. Indeed, of all my informants, Steve was outwardly the
most detached from Chinese social structures and perhaps enjoyed the least exposure to Chinese people.

The cultural practises of British-Chinese people possessing new identities have impacted on the social relations operating internally within wider Chinese collectivities. I spoke briefly above about the accusations, such as ‘banana’, levelled at young Chinese people who were considered to have co-opted to white norms. In the same way, the individuals discussed in this section were more likely to denounce other Chinese people who they thought of as being more ‘Chinese’. In the following extract, Khoung outlines how his sense of personal gratification differed from his colleagues at the Kent restaurant where he once worked:

My intentions, my goals, what I want, what my preference is, my ideal of being happy is different to theirs. Theirs is meeting friends at the casino and having a drink and gambling and see . . . I'm not saying that's a horrid thing, if they're enjoying themselves, at the end of the day they're happy you know. And my happiness is being around friends and going out and taking loads of drugs (Interview, 28 April 1997).

Contrasts in the formation of British-Chinese identities point to a discernible heterogeneity that is becoming increasingly evident within the Chinese population in London. In this regard, the sense of solidarity shown by Chinese youth towards each other would appear to be more restrained than that reported by Alexander in her study of black youth. She reported that all of her male informants, ‘considered it important to show “respect” to other black people within the public arena’ (1996: 51). For my informants, acknowledgement of other Chinese people was not as forthcoming. A point which Karch makes clear in the following excerpt:

Kim: Do you acknowledge Chinese people that you’ve never seen before?
Karch: Depends. If you were in a club, you wouldn’t step to them and go ‘Oh hi! You’re Chinese, join the community.’ Do you know what I mean? Because . . . I mean the fact that living in London, there are so many different types of people, you know? (Interview, 5 November 1996).
The individuals who appeared to be committed to a hybridised British-Chinese sensibility occupied highly ambiguous ground in their relationships with their Chinese counterparts. All of the informants mentioned in this section were part of pre-existing Chinese social networks, yet most were ambivalent towards their involvement in these groups. Although they were well acquainted with many other young Chinese people, this did not necessarily mean that they were in regular contact. Even though I did not directly ask why this occurred, I gathered that in many cases there existed a conflict of interest. As Karch put it, ‘it’s hard to hang out with other Chinese when there are not many around’ (Interview, 5 November 1996). Karch’s view was typical. What he told me, however, appeared to be contradictory in that he was well-known and on familiar terms with individuals from several distinct groups of Chinese friends due to his reputation as a disc jockey, which occasionally resulted in him securing work at Chinese discos. It is not easy to summarize Karch’s position, since while he shared little in common with his young Chinese counterparts, his everyday life revolved around working with other Chinese people. Although Karch experienced prolonged contact with Chinese people, he also paradoxically felt that there were few Chinese people he could relate to. This was a concern expressed by some possessing hybrid identities. It was often difficult for them to meet similar young British-Chinese people with shared perspectives. It is in this way that these emerging British-Chinese identities are far more fragmented and less stable and comprehensible than the identities of those who were discussed in the previous section.

Another defining feature of the new British-Chinese identities is the reluctance of many to attend sites that support Chinese social structures in London. For those inhabiting these formulations of identity, many would renounce their association with these spaces. This can be related to the discussion of ‘partial communities’ in chapter 4. Chinese discos in particular were singled out for unfavourable attention. Some of the informants would not go to these events due to the stigma attached to them. Karch felt that, increasingly, Chinese discos were not for him, since ‘nowadays you can’t go to them no more anyway because you just feel out of place. All the yoots [youths] are taking
over’ (Interview, 5 November 1996). Overall, existing spaces that offer young Chinese opportunities to meet each other, such as Chinese discos, were considered to be unsuitable places to meet similar people since they were associated with negative connotations of what being “Chinese” signified and were viewed as being the exclusive domain of regulars that did not like to interact in socially mixed peer groups.

The previously mentioned partial rejection of certain forms of “Chineseness” was also a constitutive element in the formulation of these identities around youth culture. In the past, the significance of popular Hong Kong culture in the construction of Chinese identities in Britain has been noted (Parker 1995: 139-172). These cultural forms, however, assumed minor importance in the lives of those outlined in this section. The marginal status of mainstream forms of Hong Kong popular culture render their consumption to be minimal by young British-Chinese involved in inter-ethnic friendships. Rather, identification with American and British forms of popular youth cultures played a pivotal role in the construction of these identities.

The individual manifestations of syncretic identities outlined in this section testify to the diversity of identifications within Britain’s Chinese population. A chief consideration in the formation of these hybrid identities amongst my informants was denying the significance of ‘race’ in forming inter-ethnic bonds. Furthermore, by prioritising these mixed friendships, racial boundaries became irrelevant and the development of mixed identities centered upon a synthesis of Britishness and Chineseness became possible.

Conclusion

The subject of British-Chinese futures is a thorny issue. I have demonstrated how young Chinese people in Britain are confronted from an early age with particular choices in their formulations of identity. At school, Chinese youth, in most cases, have to contend with being the ‘only’ in most settings and experiencing racist name-calling was common.
Having to deal with difference from such an early age inevitably placed limits on the kinds of social interactions in which my informants participated. Yet among the individuals in the current study, many were actively involved in racially mixed groups of friends. The degree to which all my informants were committed to inter-ethnic friendships varied, but the point is, as Back has asserted, 'ethnicity is always about negotiations' (1996:158). For many young Chinese people growing up in Britain, their upbringing in isolated circumstances necessitates protracted negotiations with individuals from different racial collectivities. Overcoming the barriers set by representations of Chinese people in Britain presents a further hurdle to negotiate. In the current chapter, I have attempted to highlight the inherently negotiated character of second generation British-Chinese identities.

While some of the formulations of identity adopted by my informants can be considered essentialist it is my opinion that they are strategically constructed. To dismiss summarily these positions as essentialist reduces the complexity of the subjective life experiences of young British-Chinese. Indeed, further research needs to be conducted on the micro-level dynamics of groups predominantly comprising Chinese youth in urban contexts. In addition, a reconceptualisation of being British-Chinese has occurred with young Chinese people going to Hong Kong in search of work (Parker 1998). This heightened awareness of being British-Chinese in Hong Kong has largely arisen through individuals defining themselves in relation to other Chinese people from elsewhere in the diaspora. This process further complicates the politics of essentialism.

The contribution of young Chinese people to the formation of new ethnicities has been denied in the past. In the current study there is evidence to suggest that, on an individual level, negotiations are taking place between young Chinese people and their inter-ethnic peer groups. Whether or not young Chinese people fully engage themselves in these friendships is dependent on the level of racist discourses prevalent within racially-mixed groups of friends. Amongst the informants discussed in the section on hybridised forms of identity, 'race' was seemingly irrelevant and what could be considered mixed ethnicities were being formed. The involvement of my informants in various youth
cultures were important in sustaining these identities. The syncretic cultures that are developing are instrumental in transforming the fortunes of Chinese youth. Many acknowledged that it was down to the second generation British-Chinese to enact change. For example, Steve felt as follows:

S: Now that the whole kind of our parents' generations, it's kind of left us, it's us who are kind of almost in power to do something about it. It's up to us to kind of take the direction and take heed of what's going on

K: How will you contribute towards this . . . struggle?

S: I'm in that struggle, I try with my work, with my artwork, with the people I meet, tell them about myself you know and just let them know more about Chinese people in a way and how they live because it matters a lot (Interview, 24 Mar 1997).

British Chinese youth are fashioning identities that are not easily classified. Young Chinese people are formulating identities that are simultaneously 'British' and 'Chinese' and, in the process, are widening the scope of racial inclusion in Britain. Young Chinese people face particular struggles growing up in Britain and they do not get the same level of attention as black-British and British-Asian youth. The situation is changing, however, and it is for the second generation British-Chinese to ensure that they remain an enigma no more.
Gender

I recognized for the first time that I would never be able to feel sexual with a Chinese male because of the strong incest inhibitions that I had formed in my family . . . I could only feel familial about Chinese men: they drew me as strong companions and brothers or repelled me as tyrants or weaklings, but a bar was raised between my body and theirs beyond which I could not imagine (Goek-Lin Lim 1996: 111).

Demure, diminutive, and deferential, the Lotus Blossom Baby is modest, tittering behind her delicate ivory hand, eyes downcast, always walking ten steps behind her man, and, best of all, devot[ing] body and soul to serving him (Espiritu 1997: 94).

Why is there such a qualitatively different life in racial terms for Asians who are mixed with blacks versus Asians mixed with whites? Do we find Asians (and Latin Americans) rushing to wed blacks to uplift their gene pool, as seems to be the case with their marrying whites? Blackness, in the end, functions as a constant, underlying mark of racialization as does no other racial designation. Its persistence suggests that the fluidity of racial identities points upward in continuing spirals of potential whiteness (Gordon 1997: 57).

Introduction

In the film dramatization of Amy Tan’s popular novel The Joy Luck Club (directed by Wayne Wang, 1993) two of the four daughters - Waverly and Rose - are in relationships with Caucasian men. The fact that only one of the daughters is involved in an endogamous relationship may be interpreted as a triumph of multiculturalism over the tide of an emerging jubilant Chinese nationalism (Ong 1999). Ironically, while the film essentially narrates the hardship of the lives of four Chinese women and their middle-class American-
Chinese daughters, the Chinese male characters are implicated in ways that indirectly raise issues surrounding Chinese masculinity. The crucial point is that our understandings of the male characters are inevitably coded. With few exceptions, the Chinese men in the film are portrayed in wholly negative terms. It would seem that the adversity the women face is a consequence of the demeanour of the men. We are shown how auntie Lindo's boy husband is impotent; how auntie Ying-Ying marries a serial adulterer; how auntie An-Mei's mother becomes involved with a man with three concubines; and, of the daughters, how Lena is initially devoted to a miser.

Although this chapter is concerned less with inter-racial relationships than with attitudes expressed towards gender relations, the film is significant in crystallizing a series of issues that arise out of the current discussion. Recent thinking on 'race' in Britain points to the centrality of gender in accounting for differences in the lived experiences of ethnic minorities (Brah 1996, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993, for example). Much of this literature has focused on the suffering of women within traditional systems of patriarchy. Within the context of the Chinese catering trade in Britain there is ample evidence to show that, in family-run enterprises, women are burdened with many responsibilities (Song 1995, Baxter and Raw 1988). That Chinese women have suffered at the hands of Chinese men is not a matter of dispute. It is my concern, however, that British-Chinese masculinities have received little attention. In Britain there is simply no literature on the topic. What little we do know about Chinese masculinities seems to be controlled by media representations. It is therefore no surprise that Chinese men are known through various images that construct them as being purveyors of the martial arts and through characters which portray them as sexually depraved (Espiritu 1997). Writing on the objectification of black women, Collins (1990: 69) has noted how, through the use of 'controlling images', elite groups are able 'to objectify the subordinate group.' By further examining representations of Chinese men and women, I will establish how their sexuality is constructed and look at how the dating patterns of my informants were influenced by these images.
Hardly surprising, then, that the intersection between ‘race’ and ‘gender’ in the research was perhaps the most contested and controversial issue studied. Distinct patterns of behaviour were discerned amongst my informants with regard to preferences in choice of dating partners. One of the themes brought to my attention from an early stage of the research was the prevalence of inter-racial unions occurring between Chinese women and Caucasian men. From my sample of thirteen young Chinese men and eight women, my findings show that the Chinese women that I spoke to were more open to the possibility of dating partners outside of their own race. On the other hand, my male informants generally voiced conflicting opinions, although, exceptionally, one of them was in a long term relationship with an English partner. Recent writing on ‘race’ in Britain has highlighted the salience of gender as an influence in the formation of ethnic minority youth identities (Brah 1996, Alexander 1996, for example). In the current chapter, it is my intention to explore the different ways in which my informants experience gendered processes of growing up in Britain. I want to suggest that the different ways in which young Chinese men and women are represented affects the formation of gendered subjectivities. I will make reference to the understandings gained from the previous two chapters on how different groups of Chinese people with various interests are sustained and how British-Chinese identities are formed to provide a preliminary insight into the construction of British-Chinese femininities and masculinities.

A recurrent theme in the chapter is the reference to Asian American literature to galvanise my account. In doing this, a few caveats are necessary. Popular understandings of the term ‘Asian’ differ in the British and American contexts. In the United States the label ‘Asian’ generally refers to individuals from the Far East of Asia, which perhaps reflect the largely Chinese and Japanese origins of early Asian settlers. As such, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Philippino or Vietnamese peoples in the United States may be classified under the heading ‘Asian’. This understanding of ‘Asian’ contrasts with that of

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1 In not using the hyphen to conjoin Asian and American, I am committing a political act for which I am unsure of the protocol. The majority of the Asian American texts I have consulted do not hyphenate the
Britain where, due to different historical circumstances, the term ‘Asian’ does not routinely include Chinese people. Instead, ‘Asian’ is widely used in reference to South Asians, more specifically, persons of Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani origin.

As well as differences in nomenclature, the term ‘Asian American’ also signifies a cultural politics that differs from the experiences of the Chinese in Britain. Kibria (1998) illuminates the extent to which the Asian American population is bound by common interests. While internal differences persist amongst the diverse ‘racial’ collectivities that together constitute the group ‘Asian American’, the level of political organisation and mobilisation that exists within this grouping far exceeds the position occupied by the Chinese in Britain’s racial hierarchy. Accordingly, a gender politics has arisen in Asian American literature that is virtually non-existent for the British-Chinese. In tackling issues of gender relations amongst the Chinese in Britain I use the Asian American literature as a comparison.

Ling (1997: 312) argues that a basis for the beginnings of a gender politics in Asian American writing is through the emergence of ‘simultaneous articulations of gendered subjectivities.’ He asserts that a source of tension between Asian American men and women cultural workers stems from the ‘dichotomy between a male defense of patriarchy and a feminist defense of women’ (1997: 313). As will be demonstrated below, similar conflicts of interest were expressed by my informants. It appeared to be the case that the women mentioned in this chapter were concerned with assuming control of their own sexuality, while some of the men were interested in maintaining control over Chinese women.

Reflecting this divide, the current chapter is divided into three sections. The next section examines the influence of parents in determining partner selection for my informants. In the second section, I discuss the role of representation in portraying the sexuality of Chinese women and examine how the women I interviewed formulate their sense of femininity. The final part of the chapter looks at British-Chinese masculinity, term. I am aware that this is at variance with my use of ‘British-Chinese’ throughout the research.
and focuses on my male informants’ attitudes towards women.

**Parental expectations**

A core element determining the dating preferences of my informants was the wishes of their parents. Indeed, it would be true to say that all of the individuals I spoke to shared some sense of obligation to be with a Chinese partner. The issue of maintaining what Kibria (1997) terms ‘lineage purity’ - a pure line of descent - was an underlying concern for many. Amongst the second generation informants the pressures emanating from parents to sustain ‘lineage purity’ by marrying endogamously seemed to affect the vast majority of my informants. What emerges from this is that a sense of being ‘Chinese’ is understood, at least in part, in terms of essentialised notions of ‘race’ passed down by the older generation. However, for the informants, there were diverging viewpoints on how much of an influence parents actually had on the selection of suitable dating partners. Moreover, while the wishes of parents were often instrumental in determining my informants’ choices of suitable dating partners, the influence of parents formed only a part of a wider framework governing their dating preferences.

The thinking behind some of my informants’ choices to be with Chinese partners certainly reflected parental concerns. When I asked Wai if he would consider having a relationship with someone not Chinese, he replied:

W: If you’d have asked me that question a year ago, then yes. Now I don’t know, it’s just something I’ve decided recently.
K: Why have you decided that?
W: It’s mainly for reasons to do with the future. It depends on how far it goes. If it goes to the extent of git fun [marriage] and things like then... your sae lau [children] are going to end up in a worse state than you are or what I am (Interview, 19 January 1997).

A principal reason why Wai had switched his preference to having a Chinese partner was
based on future expectations. It is noteworthy that Wai offered a clear-cut distinction between marrying and dating a non-Chinese partner. As he says, 'It depends on how far it goes.' The implication here is that he would have dated a non-Chinese individual but preferred to marry a Chinese woman. For Wai, the supposition that by marrying someone Chinese he would ensure a level of 'racial' continuity appeared to be an important consideration for him. Committing himself to an exogamous relationship was unlikely since he presumed that the children of such a union would be affected adversely. In particular, the premise of Wai's last sentence - 'your [children] are going to end up in a worse state than you are or what I am' - is revealing. He assumed that since we shared a common cultural and racial background we would have similar viewpoints. It was inferred that children of mixed race parentage would, in cultural terms, turn out less culturally aware than we British born Chinese already were.

It is significant that almost all of the young men expressed a wish to marry a Chinese woman. Given the central role of sons in traditional Chinese kinship systems it is perhaps not surprising that the young men rather than women were more likely to want to be with a Chinese partner. This was often also a reflection of parental concern for 'lineage purity' (Watson 1975). Some of these anxieties were raised by Khoung, who was involved in a relationship with an English partner. As the eldest sibling in the family he felt that there were certain responsibilities for him to shoulder. Being with his English girlfriend was viewed by him to be going against traditional Chinese family conventions:

Khoung: There are times with E and it's brilliant you know and then there are times when I'm by myself and I think I wouldn't mind having a Chinese girl, taking her back to my parents.
Kim: Have you ever taken an English girl back to meet your parents?
Khoung: I have done.
Kim: What did they think?
Khoung: They never mentioned it. They must have just spoken to my sister. I think my mum is alright about it. My dad is a bit funny, because I'm the eldest son and he would like me to have a Chinese girl and

2 David Parker and Miri Song (1996) have written about the methodological implications of the cultural identities of researchers on the researched.
they would assume her to be Chinese purely (Interview, 28 April 1997).

Exceptionally, Khoung was the only one of my male informants involved in a long-term relationship with a non-Chinese partner. He felt he was disavowing the Chinese tradition of respecting elders and showing deference to those in authority. Since he was the eldest son he was acutely aware of parental pressure - at least from his father - to be with a Chinese girl, and to set an example for his younger brothers. However, unlike most of the other male informants, he was uncertain of whether or not he would marry a Chinese woman:

Thing is I really really want to have this sense of duty and say ‘Yes mum, I want to do it, because I feel it’s right, and I want to do it for you as well, because I think that’s right.’ There are times that I think that, but I think that it’s difficult for me to, um, carry that out. And I don’t think that I will marry a Chinese girl. I don’t think that I will marry an English girl you know, do you know what I mean? Who knows, you know? It might be that this Chinese girl is completely like me, whatever, just right, anybody who is right. At the moment it’s, yeah I do have a preference for an English girl, but I don’t think it has to be marriage, do you know what I mean? (Interview, 28 April 1997).

Khoung’s parents’ expectation that he would marry someone Chinese presented him with a dilemma. In choosing to be with his current girlfriend he felt he was going against his parents’ wishes. Khoung attributed his predicament to the rigidity of Chinese cultural values. As he put it, ‘I think this duty thing, although I’m denying all this ‘Chinese’ stuff, I’m not denying it, but I’ve kinda got a problem with it’ (Interview, 28 April 1997). In Khoung’s case, the bind of ‘lineage purity’ resulted in a personal conflict between choosing a partner of his own choice and complying with the wishes of his parents. In the final section on Chinese masculinities I will discuss further how concerns about lineage purity intersect with my informants’ experiences of growing up in British society to produce complex outcomes.

While Khoung, as the eldest son, felt a sense of obligation to marry a Chinese partner, Trung, as the youngest member of his family, felt less pressure to be committed
to an endogamous relationship. The research suggests the existence of a differential in parental expectations of siblings:

K: Would your parents like you to marry a Vietnamese girl?
T: I don't think they would mind. I think they'd prefer it, but I think they wouldn't mind. I think it's just because I'm one of three children. If I was the only child, then I think they [his parents] will definitely want me to marry a Vietnamese girl, as you can imagine (Interview, 21 April 1997).

In Trung's case, although he felt that his parents wanted him to marry endogamously, he sensed that, because of his position in the family, they did not really mind. As one of his brothers had already married a Vietnamese woman he felt less burdened to do the same. As Trung says, 'if I was the only child, then I think they’ll definitely want me to marry a Vietnamese girl.' As a result, the pressure on him to carry forward the family line of descent was not as great. It was perhaps because of his positioning within the family that he felt more relaxed about who he could date. When asked if he had a preference for a Vietnamese girl, he replied, 'It's like with my friends. I don't pick or choose . . . If I fancy them, I would say it's like choosing a friend, if you're compatible then why not' (Interview, 21 April 1997).

In reality, however, Trung's situation was not as straightforward as it appeared. Of all the informants he was one of the most vocal in articulating pride in his cultural heritage (see chapter 5) and he held strong views about how Oriental women should behave (see below). In some ways, that there was less parental pressure on him to be with a 'racially similar' partner complicated his standpoint on who he should date. While he was open to the possibility of being in an interracial relationship, I was unsure of his commitment to maintaining such a union. In my view this was a matter of gender and 'racial' dynamics which will be examined below. For Trung at least, it appeared that he felt more comfortable in the company of Chinese women.

Concerns of 'lineage purity' were also manifest amongst the young women that I spoke to. For instance, the connection between racial and family continuity was
continually emphasized to Catherine by her parents. However, for her, being born in England and imbued with an English sensibility, placed her at odds with her parents. As Catherine describes below, she was instilled from a young age with a belief that she should marry a Chinese man:

Since I was little, it was like 'You've got to marry a Chinese bloke,' like, 'why don't you meet yourself a nice Chinese bloke?' You grow up with all these intentions, all this stuff going through your head. This is what you should do, you know? You sort of follow it, but as you get older you sort of realise, you know? You just do what you want (Interview, 13 April 1997).

Catherine’s intention to pursue what she wanted cannot simply be interpreted as her wanting to reject her parents’ concern for ‘lineage purity’.

C: They [her parents] just see me as being Chinese. They're always going 'You're Chinese you know. You've got to marry a Chinese man.'
K: Do they ever call you a ‘gwei sing’ [westernised]?
C: Oh yeah, of course they do, but I think they’ve sort of got used to it now, do you know what I mean? I'm, what, 23 nearly and they understand that I've been bought up here and I sort of like English sort of stuff, the English way of life you know, and that I don't really do really Chinese things. They don't pressure me anymore but I think they'd be happy seeing me more sort of Chinese and seeing me go back to Hong Kong. Which is probably why my mum said 'Oh I'll pay for your ticket to go back to Hong Kong.' When I went back this summer, my mum and dad go ‘Did you meet yourself a nice Chinese bloke?’ Like hoping that I'd get married to some Chinese bloke in Hong Kong (Interview, 13 April 1997).

From what she told me there appeared to be a tension between Catherine’s dating preferences and what her parents wanted. Although Catherine’s parents had gradually accepted that in the future she was perhaps less likely to be romantically involved with Chinese men, it is intimated that they had not given up hope of seeing her marrying someone Chinese:

I think they'll feel better off if they could speak maybe to a son in law in Chinese and have grandkids who can speak Chinese, you know, keep it in the family and be able to communicate a bit more. You know if I
married into an English family, I would just feel in some way cut off from them. And they’d be cut off from me, you know? (Interview, 13 April 1997).

Catherine was aware of the implications of marrying into an English family which were perhaps exacerbated by her parents’ anxieties about who she should marry. It was her concern that if she were to marry exogamously it would affect her relationship with her parents and parents in law. Despite her perceived apprehension about being with a non-Chinese partner, it is significant that she was involved in a long-term relationship with a Caucasian man.

What has emerged from this discussion is that parental expectations are often instrumental in determining my informants’ choices of marriage partners. While the majority felt that it was acceptable to date non-Chinese people, marrying the same person was a different consideration. Even where my informants, such as Khoung and Catherine, had acted against the wishes of their parents they were seemingly aware of the future implications of their actions. For Catherine this was manifest through concerns expressed about her being, in some way, isolated from her family. While, for Khoung, the issue was one of maintaining ‘lineage purity’. Although it was generally acknowledged that the views of the older generation had helped shape the dating preferences of young Chinese people, not all parents thought the same way. Will seemed to anticipate few problems. As he said, ‘My parents have been very open about it. They’ve never sort of ... they’re quite Chinese and westernised in that sort of way. They don’t really mind, I have bought an English girl home before and they’ve never said anything about it. They’ve even said ‘Oh, English grandchildren would look nice’ (Interview, 18 April 1997). For others the influence of parents appeared to be waning:

Society has changed, society has viewed relationships totally differently now. Even parents have as well, even if you take Chinese parents. I think over the past ten years, I think they have learned to accept it that if you’re going to bring a Chinese kid up in England then there’s no way you’re really going to stop them marrying an English person or going out with an English person, it’s impossible. As your child grows up it’s entirely up to them who they want to see, how they view their culture and their life. What their parents
say to them . . . you can't force them [second generation young Chinese people] into anything you know (Interview, 24 March 1997).

What emerges from Steve's comments is that he feels that Chinese parents are having less of an influence on how young Chinese people are choosing to live their lives. Nevertheless, even though the perspectives of parents were regarded as having less relevance for my informants, it is significant that many of the young men I spoke to were looking for endogamous relationships. On the other hand, the women that I spoke to seemed less constrained in their standpoints on who to date. The rest of the chapter examines in more detail the attitudes of my informants in their dating preferences. First of all I consider the attitudes of British-Chinese women towards men.

British-Chinese femininity: thinking through representation

I think some people do though, some people just go for Chinese or Japanese girls, do you know what I mean? They've just got this funny thing about them. Maybe it's because they're petite . . . it's just a bit mysterious you know? I mean, I've always been a bit dubious about going out with an English bloke, I just thought it'd be better if I stuck with my own kind. My parents have always wanted me to go out with Chinese people and I sort of just went along with them and I get along with Chinese people, but it's like I haven't met any nice Chinese blokes that's all (Catherine. Interview, 13 April 1997, my emphasis).

Catherine's statement summarizes the main issues of this section, which deals with how some of the young women that I interviewed think through their decisions on who to date. Two areas of discussion may be drawn from what Catherine had to say: first, practices of representation and the ways in which they inform the dating habits of young British-Chinese women; and, second, how young women, like Catherine, view Chinese men. An important distinction between the young women and men in the sample was that the women were more inclined to date non-Chinese individuals. Of the eight women that I interviewed, I was told by seven of them that they had previously been involved in
relationships with English partners. However, the title of this section ‘British-Chinese femininity’ - in the singular as opposed to the plural - is a deliberate act. This section talks about British-Chinese femininity from a particular perspective.

As a British-Chinese man doing research on issues dealing with Chinese women there are methodological and epistemological implications that the reader should be aware of. Due to the sensitive nature of the issue at hand I was unable to secure full accounts from all the women in the sample. I was given the impression that the young women that I spoke to were withholding material from me. Understandably, some of my women informants were unwilling to disclose highly personal information which unavoidably restricted the scope of the current chapter. Only two of the informants, Catherine and Yin, were willing to speak candidly about their dating experiences. Further, what I had to say about these informants was conditioned by what I knew about them on a personal level.3 One of the drawbacks of having one-off interviews with the young women was that their accounts were inevitably constrained in certain ways. While I was able to overcome some of the limitations of the methodology for this chapter by observing the men in their everyday lives, securing access to the lives of the young women was not as easy. However, insofar as this section is only a partial account of British-Chinese femininity it is also instructive in that few studies have dealt with the issue.

Espiritu (1997) has reviewed stereotypes of Asian-American women in Western representation. She notes how representations of Asian women are characterised by a dichotomy between the stereotypes of the ‘cunning Dragon Lady’ and ‘servile Lotus Blossom Baby’:

though connoting two extremes, these stereotypes are interrelated: Both eroticise Asian women as exotic “others” - sensuous, promiscuous, but untrustworthy . . . it endows Asian women with an excess of

3 There are ethical issues here that warrant further discussion. While I was able to secure the highly personal accounts of Catherine and Yin through a largely unspoken contract of ‘friendship’, my actions could also be regarded as an act of betrayal, which may or may not be justifiable in the name of highlighting British-Chinese struggles. For further discussion on ethical issues in doing ethnographic research see Keith (1992).
"womenhood" sexualising them but also impugning their sexuality. In this process, both sexism and racism have been blended together to produce the sexualisation of white racism (1997: 93).

It has been argued that the representations that depict Asian women as sexually available cast them as the possessions of white men. Espiritu cites the prevalence of inter-racial pairings involving Caucasian men and Asian women in mainstream American media to support her claim. In addition, she mentions the preference for white male and Asian female broadcasting teams on news broadcasting programmes, stating that ‘virtually every major metropolitan market across the United States has at least one Asian American female newscaster’ (1997: 95). A corresponding lack of Asian American men on these programmes is also noted. In the section on British-Chinese masculinities I will explore Western representations of Chinese men.

While representations of Chinese women are deemed to be negative and controlling, some of the women in the study were able to manipulate the images of Chinese people in Britain for their own purposes. One of the young women I spoke to, Ivy, informed me of how occasionally she would wear traditional Chinese costume:

When I go out sometimes . . . I used to wear cheong sam [traditional Chinese dress] to go out and to weddings. It's like if white girls wear cheong sam it wouldn't look as good. It's flattering and stuff but it wouldn't look as good as on a Chinese person because it's totally oriental and dead sexy (Interview, 30 October 1996).

Ivy’s adoption of Chinese dress is significant in a number of ways. By occasionally wearing cheong sam Ivy was able to re-appropriate contemporary trends in Britain that reflect a general admiration of Oriental cultures and traditions (see chapter 5). Claire Dwyer (1998) has demonstrated how young British Muslim women define their own identities according to their dress styles. For example, she notes that ‘dress styles can be used “strategically” within certain places in order to escape parental approbation or to safely negotiate particular spaces such as the “public space” of the streets’ (1998: 57). In negotiating their dress codes between different spaces young Asian women were able to
subvert the meanings attached to particular styles of dress. By 'playing' on her difference
as a Chinese women wearing traditional Chinese attire Ivy was, in a similar way, opting to
dress strategically. As she says, 'it [wearing a cheong sam] wouldn't look as good as on a
Chinese person because it's totally Oriental and dead sexy' (my emphasis). It can be
inferred that Ivy was not only manipulating the image of Chinese women as exotic
'other', but also, by wearing Chinese costume, she was reinforcing a potent sense of
difference which appeared to be empowering and alluring. Her actions contradict any
straightforward idea that Chinese women are oppressed by the stereotypes described
above and raise issues concerning how young British-Chinese women are able to construct
hybrid identities (see chapter 5).

It was evident, however, that stereotypes of Chinese women did affect some of
the young women in unfavourable ways. Catherine told me that:

I used to think why do I get all this stick being Chinese, why can't I just be English? You sort of want to
be more normal, fit in with everyone at school. I think if I was English I would have 'pulled' [got to
romantically meet] a lot more people, because I think being Chinese stops you. I always get really paranoid
when English blokes ask me out, because I think they've got this kinky Asian girl thing, do you know
what I mean? And I think it's quite weird because one of my friends he's got this thing with Chinese girls.
It just seems like a thing, do you know what I mean? I just used to be really funny about it you know?
(Interview, 13 April 1997).

Catherine's comments lend testimony to her awareness of the differences that exist in the
representations of Chinese women. Her personal assessment that 'I think if I was English
I would have “pulled” a lot more people, because I think being Chinese stops you' is
meaningful. The stereotype of Chinese women that operated to limit Catherine’s romantic
involvement with English boys when she was at school is the antithesis of that described
by Ivy. Avtar Brah (1996: 79) has noted a mode of representation that portrays South
Asian women as 'ugly', 'smelly', and 'oily haired'. In a similar way, Catherine was able
to construct a sense of self based on the view that Chinese women were not very
attractive, meanings that were perhaps consolidated by her peers at school. Further, by
juxtaposing opposed representations of Chinese women, Catherine was able to construct an impression where she was averse to contact from English men, ‘I always get really paranoid when English blokes ask me out, because I think they’ve got this kinky Asian girl thing.’ However, that Catherine was not currently in a relationship with a Chinese man is significant. When questioned about her romantic involvement with Chinese men it became clear that she was not attracted to Chinese men, she told me:

C: If it was like a normal Chinese bloke it [Chinese women in exogamous relationships] probably wouldn’t bother them, because there would be so many more other Chinese girls on offer, on the same level as them, do you know what I mean?
K: A lot of people have said that . . .
C: I think it’s going back to the Chinese thing, where you’re Chinese and you should stick with your Chinese thing and that Chinese community thing you know (Interview, 13 April 1997).

From Catherine’s point of view, a ‘normal Chinese bloke’ would not be concerned about Chinese women dating Caucasian men. It was implied that, on the grounds of preference, Chinese men would have little in common with Chinese women who date white males. The distinction that Catherine offers is a revealing one. Perhaps most importantly it suggests the existence of alternative Chinese femininities. By problematising her relationship to ‘the Chinese community’ - ‘I think it’s going back to the Chinese thing’ - and distinguishing herself from other Chinese women - ‘there would be so many more other Chinese girls on offer, on the same level as them’ - she was positioning herself in relation to the wider collectivity (see chapter 4). This in part reflected her upbringing in British circumstances and her refusal to participate in Chinese social arenas. The availability of ‘other’ Chinese women who identify strongly with being ‘Chinese’ were thought of as being an appropriate match for those Chinese men whom she regarded as being indifferent to Chinese women in exogamous relationships. However, her judgement that Chinese men were not bothered about Chinese women involved in interracial relationships was misguided (see below). Ultimately, the various pressures that Catherine felt to date a Chinese partner constituted, for her, a form of ethnic absolutism since, as
she put it, ‘I just think you go out with someone because you get on with them, regardless of race or whatever’ (Interview, 13 April 1997).

Similarly, for Yin, a distinction was drawn between her and other Chinese women whom she perceived to be more ‘Chinese’ in cultural terms:

Chinese girls, you know, if they’re completely one hundred percent Chinese, i.e. they were bought up in Hong Kong, whatever, either that or they’re really in touch with their Chinese side then they’ll probably go for [...] they’ll probably go for a Chinese guy who they can get mishy mushy with. But that gets a bit boring after a while (Interview, 3 January 1997).

Yin differentiated herself from other young Chinese women in Britain who she regarded as being more ‘Chinese’. Her comments encapsulate a way of visualising British-Chinese women who primarily identify with Hong Kong popular culture. The situation here replicates the scenarios in the two previous chapters where my informants operated various distancing strategies to define themselves against other Chinese people. Yin’s conception of these women was undoubtedly informed by a cliched notion of Hong Kong popular music. In the past this music, or ‘Canto-pop’ as it is often known, has tended to be downbeat and melancholic, incorporating an ethos of romantic love. The association of other British-Chinese women with Hong Kong popular culture and its connotations of romantic love were deemed by Yin to be excessively soppy or mawkish. The way in which she equates Chinese men with these women is interesting. She regarded these British-Chinese women as liking a certain type of man - one they can get ‘mishy-mushy’ with. While it is difficult to discern exactly what she meant, a ‘Chinese’ version of romance is essentialised and ridiculed. From this it can be deduced that, for Yin, Chinese men are undesirable and that she would rather not be involved in such a relationship. As she asserts, ‘that gets a bit boring after a while.’

Yin justified not wanting to be in a relationship with a Chinese man in the following way:
It'd be nice because there's a Chinese saying, 'same sound, same skin, same culture.' It's easy. You can relate to each other more but in the same sort of essence. Sometimes that's not what you want. You want something different (Interview, 3 January 1997).

While acknowledging that 'it'd be nice' to be involved in an endogamous relationship Yin was also asserting that she wanted 'something different'. At the time of writing Yin had been with her Caucasian partner for eight years. To an extent, her opting to be with a Caucasian male mirrored her upbringing in Britain, and her not frequenting Chinese social spaces. Coming into contact less often with Chinese men may provide an explanation for Yin's dating preferences.

The gendered circumstances in which young Chinese people grow up may account for differences in the lived experiences of young Chinese men and women. In the following extract Sue outlines how her upbringing contrasted with that of her elder brother:

maybe Chinese girls integrate themselves more successfully into British society than guys do . . . There's a good example here. Take my brother for instance, the older one. Because I integrated quite happily with white people I haven't got a problem with that. But my brother sees me, well he cusses [insults] me for that. From as far back as when I was sixteen I noticed his hostility towards white people because I felt that he had a problem with me having white friends. I never had a problem 'cos I can have whatever friends I want. But he could see it as disrespect because he told me once that 'You tell your white friends everything and you're not loyal to your family roots or family culture.' [. . .] I could see what he meant as well since he had very few white friends at the time (Interview, 21 October 1996).

Sue's perceived difference from her brother centred on their different ways of being Chinese in Britain. It was intimated that the tension that existed between the siblings was due to Sue's brother adopting an outlook of cultural nationalism towards living in Britain. Ultimately, it would be true to say that, for the individuals in the current study, an overall broad gender difference could be discerned. Catherine's pronouncement (see quote above) that 'I haven't met any nice Chinese blokes that's all' was, in part, a recognition that she had not met any young Chinese men that shared her perspective on being raised in
Britain. The view that the lived-experiences of young British-Chinese men and women differed was supported by what Will, a British-Chinese man, had to say:

One of my best friends is going out with this white guy and she's enjoying herself. She can't get that from a Chinese person. She has had Chinese relationships but she hasn't found . . . a Chinese man that can satisfy her, not in that kind of way, but in . . . because she is so British yeah, she wants to go to the pub. She wants to basically do her own thing (Interview, 18 April 1997).

According to Will, his young Chinese woman friend had not met any Chinese men that shared compatible interests. For the women discussed in this section, they appeared to be more willing to be involved in exogamous relationships. Their participation in mixed unions would suggest that they were open to reformulating and negotiating new identities that embraced their dual heritages of growing up in British circumstances imbued with Chinese sensibilities. To this end it is conceivable that they were more committed to more hybrid formulations of identity. However, the limitations of not being able to include the experiences of young British-Chinese women romantically linked with British-Chinese men in this section render this a restricted version of events. It is likely that the Chinese women that I spoke to who were in endogamous relationships would have been less critical of Chinese men.

In the exploratory account of British-Chinese femininity discussed in this section I have outlined how young Chinese women understand their relationships with men. I looked at the role of representation in shaping contemporary perceptions of Chinese women and how some of the women informants, like Ivy and Catherine, understood their sense of self through these images. In taking advantage of the range of dating options available to them, some of the young Chinese women in the study were exploring the possibilities of a British-Chinese consciousness which rejected the politics of cultural nationalism. In the next section I will look at how British-Chinese femininity intersects with British-Chinese masculinities in complex and contradictory ways.
British-Chinese masculinities: attitudes towards women

In this final section I examine the nature of British-Chinese masculinities and chiefly look at my male informants' attitudes towards women. The ways in which diverse masculinities are constructed has recently stimulated interest from researchers. Of the various texts on the theme of racialized masculinities few have focused on heterosexual Chinese men (Ling 1997 is an exception).

Similar to the images of Chinese women discussed in the previous section, contemporary perceptions of Chinese men are undoubtedly influenced by media representations which embrace unwieldy dichotomies. On the one hand, Chinese men are viewed through a lens which characterizes them as kung-fu experts, exemplified by Chinese film stars such as Bruce Lee, Jet Lee and Jackie Chan. A corollary of the supposed martial arts proficiency of Chinese men is their involvement with Chinese gangsters, otherwise known as triads. On the other hand, Chinese men are portrayed as being either under or oversexed, or as weak and effeminate (Espiritu 1997). The juxtaposition of the evil Dr Fu-Manchu of the past alongside the emasculation of Chinese men in contemporary representations reproduces a further binary (Ling 1997). These representations arguably impede the articulation of British-Chinese masculinities.

An example of how Chinese masculinity is manifest on an everyday level in Britain and how it is relationally situated with other masculinities is provided by Back's (1996) ethnographic study of urban youth in a south London multicultural neighbourhood. Oriental youth were considered to be the antithesis of the 'hard', assertive black youth living in the area. Accordingly, young white masculinities were being reconfigured by the appropriation of black styles, while Vietnamese youth were on the whole excluded from inter-racial peer groups. What emerges from this discourse of white working-class masculinities is that a particular image of blackness is esteemed and, in the context of an urban environment, black young men are regarded as being contingent...
insiders. In contrast, the Vietnamese young men were chastised and thought of as being ‘soft’ and vulnerable.

In the context of the current study, what was uppermost in the minds of some of my male informants was how current modes of representation subjugate Chinese male sexuality. Kibria (1997), in her study of intermarriage between second generation Chinese and Korean Americans, has noted how popular cultural stereotypes affected the dating experiences of her informants. In the interviews I conducted this was expressed in a number of ways. For Sai, seeing images of oriental women being seduced by white males incensed him:

You’ve seen Platoon. You’ve seen exploitation of oriental girls. I mean when you see it you think ‘this guy’s using her man!’ Nice girl like that, you know? (Interview, 1 May 1997).

From an early stage of the research, the issue of Chinese women dating white men was bought to my attention by some of my male informants. The ways in which various media representations have disempowered Chinese masculinity was viewed by Karch as being instrumental in reproducing stereotypical attitudes towards Chinese men:

Kim: Shouldn’t Chinese girls have the choice to go with who they want?
Karch: That’s true actually. They should have the choice to go out with who they want, but why are they choosing to choose [to go out with English men]? You’ve got to look at how they’re bought up. Society. What the thinking in their heads is, do you know what I mean? When you’re saying the stereotype of Chinese people is backwards . . . that must have been drilled into their heads [ . . . ] (Interview, 5 November 1996).

What appeared to be positive choices for those young British-Chinese women who were involved in exogamous relationships were chiefly viewed in negative ways by some of the male informants. From what Karch was trying to say it can be inferred that he regarded some Chinese women as rejecting Chinese men. This, in his view, was underpinned by how Chinese people have been represented.
Amongst the young men that I interviewed there were some important themes or threads of commonality in how they experienced and understood interracial relationships and where they were positioned in terms of the selection of partners. A distinct set of responses focused on negative views of Chinese women involved in exogamous relationships. Consider the following extracts:

I'd say there is definitely something inside which . . . I would say there is a bit of jealousy or envy . . . it's like, you know what I mean, it's that male thing, you want to protect your women from predators (Trung. Interview, 21 April 1997, my emphasis).

If I saw a Chinese girl going out with the English bloke that I thought was very attractive then I'd say why are you out with him but not me? That sort of thing. I don't see it as a problem for them [Chinese women and/or English men] (Wai. Interview, 19 January 1997).

I know it's selfish but, it [Chinese women going out with English men] pisses me off. It's just I don't know, it's very difficult to describe that's all (Sai. Interview, 1 May 1997).

The hostility of Trung, Wai and Sai towards inter-racial unions involving Chinese women and men of other races raises interesting issues concerning Chinese masculinity. An underlying theme of what both Wai and Sai had to say is that of control and the wider issue of power. While it was not overtly mentioned, Chinese women dating white men were seen to be betraying the wider collectivity - as Trung mentions above, 'you want to protect your women from predators.' Evidently it was the concern for maintaining 'lineage purity' which sustained their viewpoints. Their inability to influence who Chinese women were dating, and the fact that some of the women discussed in the previous section were seemingly taking charge of their own sexuality, intensified this loss of control. Alexander (1996), in her study of black-British masculinity, noted how her male subjects would treat black and white women differently. According to her, 'Black women were generally considered to be “our” women' (1996: 173). Similarly, amongst these men, it is likely that they regarded Chinese women as belonging to them.
To a certain degree, Sai articulated a feeling of disempowerment at not being able to control who Chinese women were dating:

"We usually associate nice girls going out with white guys because white guys are supposedly the superior race as such. I do believe in that, you know [. . . ] If my impressions were wrong then fine, your moral standards comes in and your identity comes in, but initially your nationalistic pride, it hurts (Interview, 1 May 1997)."

It is significant that while virtually all my male informants would have considered dating Caucasian partners, few were, or had been, involved in exogamous relationships. The differential that exists between the dating patterns of my informants raises important questions concerning the perceived desirability of Chinese men and women which is not unlike the situation in the United States. Espiritu (1997: 97) asserts that 'due to the persistent desexualisation of the Asian male, many Asian females do not perceive their ethnic counterparts as desirable marriage partners.' In explaining why such a differential also remains in the dating habits of British-Chinese men and women, it may be relevant to consider how desire for the other is transformed by encounters with difference. Representations of white men as desirable are constructed against representations of Chinese men as undesirable. As a result, 'white men are depicted as virile and as protectors of women, [whereas] Asian men have been characterised both as asexual and as threats to white women' (Espiritu 1997: 90).

The extent to which the young women in the study were aware of the concerns highlighted by some of the men was uncertain. It is also the case that these representations of Chinese men had not prevented the formations of relationships. With the exceptions of Yin and Catherine all the women I interviewed were in relationships with Chinese partners. While Chinese women dating Caucasian men stirred tension amongst some of the men that I spoke to, frustrations about Chinese men were not aired by the women in the study. Certainly, the level of resentment had not yet reached the stage communicated by Espiritu (1997) in her study of Asian American men and women.
Commenting on the divergence between the ways in which Asian American men and women are represented, she recounts the incident of a dinner discussion hosted by an Asian American students association reported in an edition of *Asian Week*, a weekly Asian American newspaper:

the Asian American women in the room proceeded, one after another, to describe how Asian American men were too passive, too weak, too boring, too traditional, too abusive, too domineering, too ugly, too greasy, too short, too . . . Asian (1997: 97).

That a process of emasculation was occurring amongst the male informants is subject to dispute. Of all the men, only Sai (quoted above) partially acknowledged experiencing a sense of disempowerment. The experiences of Asian men in the United States, however, do point to the ways in which young British-Chinese masculinities are informed. As will be demonstrated in the next section of the chapter, perhaps as a consequence of representations of Chinese masculinity, the young men in the study displayed highly contrasting attitudes towards partner selection for the different realms of dating and marrying.

**The case for Chinese partners**

In the discussion above I argued that representations of Chinese men were central in shaping the construction of British-Chinese masculinities. While the majority of the women in the study were seemingly oblivious to the anxieties of the men, the concerns expressed by some of the men were very real. In view of the perspectives outlined in the previous section it is not surprising that most of the young men stated a preference to be in an endogamous relationship, although it should be mentioned that each of the male informants were, in their individual ways, ambiguous about the whole issue of partner selection. Varying reasons were given as to why some of the men wanted to be involved
with Chinese partners. Steve told me that:

S: There's definitely more of a, like, chemistry thing if you find a Chinese girl.
K: What do you mean?
S: If I find a Chinese chick who's kind of like grown up with my social background, did their time in the take-away/restaurant and kind of rebelled a bit, growing up in that environment, went ahead did their own thing and then went on to go to college, whatever.
K: Is that chemistry?
S: Well you know, that's like part of it, do you know what I mean? It's like I will never find an English girl who will know how that feels at all (Interview, 24 March 1997).

Steve's wish to be with a British-Chinese girl can be related to his background growing up in the take-away. While his comments appeared to contradict his commitment to maintaining mixed friendship groups (see chapter 5), it should be noted that what he had to say was perhaps only indicative of how he felt at the time of the interview, and should not be regarded as an absolute statement of his intent. For Steve, being with a Chinese woman was not connected to any culturally essentialist agenda, rather he seemed to value meeting someone with a shared lived experience. What can be presumed from his dialogue is that were he to date a British-Chinese woman the potential for a mutual level of understanding to occur would have been greater. These concerns were also expressed by Andy:

A: At this stage, if I had a preference it would be for a Chinese or Oriental partner.
K: Are there any reasons behind that?
A: Well yes really... the main reason... I mean obviously we're separating just being attractive or interested in someone to being specifically white or Chinese. Well, all the usual factors apply, such as like I had to personally be attracted to them, but at the end of the day, less explaining to do really [... ] A lot of the women that I've known who are non-Chinese, I have suspected even though it has not been a direct issue, they don't know how to take me (Interview, 6 April 1997, my emphasis).

On a fundamental level, it was Andy's intention to be with 'a Chinese or Oriental partner' because as he put it, there was 'less explaining to do.' In large part, due to his
previous experiences with non-Chinese women, he thought that he was better suited to
dating Oriental women since, like Steve, he felt that they were better able to understand
him because they would have grown up in similar ways.

It is significant, however, that the vast majority of the men said that they would
date non-Chinese women given the opportunity. For instance, when I asked Sai if he
would consider dating someone who was not Chinese, he replied, ‘Wouldn’t mind, it’s
just down to character really, whether or not she’s a nice girl’ (Interview, 1 May 1997).
That most of the men were open to dating non-Chinese people would suggest that they
were not as rigid in their approaches to partner selection as it at first appeared.

Indeed, it would be misleading to assume that the males in my sample did not date
Caucasian women. Many of the male informants espoused a notion of romantic love
where ‘race’ was apparently not at stake in the selection of suitable dating partners.
Puncho told me that:

I know it sounds stupid but as long as you’re in love with someone . . . I think that if you get on really
well with someone and there’s understanding and trust then I think that’s all you need really. You’ve got
to think to yourself rather than what everyone else thinks. Whether other people approve of it or not, in the
end it’s down to you, you’re the one living your own life (Interview, 28 June 1996).

Puncho’s version of romantic love was linked to his conception that partner selection was
about individual choice rather than ethnic group affiliation. It was intimated that ‘race’
was not a concern for him. However, for Puncho, this distinction was not clear-cut.
Despite asserting his right to individual choice, Puncho also stated a preference to marry a
Chinese partner. As he said, ‘I don’t know, it’s hard to say, a lot of it’s to do with the
influences around me. It would be nice to marry someone of my own kind’ (Interview, 28
June 1996). Puncho’s remarks support the arguments outlined in the discussion of
parental expectations where my informants differentiated between dating and marrying
non-Chinese partners.

Even amongst the informants who expressed a conscious decision to limit their
choice of suitable marriage partners along racial lines, there existed a certain degree of uncertainty as to whom they would marry. When I asked Karch if he would marry someone not Chinese, he told me ‘well, it’d all depend on the relationship. I mean if it was there . . . the matter of making it work, that would be another matter (Interview, 5 November 1996). The men displayed shifting and highly ambiguous attitudes towards relationships. Although the majority of male informants were generally ambivalent about partner selection, some of them did, nonetheless, appear to choose partners on the basis of them being Chinese. In the following extract from the same interview, Karch acknowledges how when he was younger he was attracted to English girls:

Karch: When you’re younger at secondary school, you’re looking at the Sharon’s and Tracy’s [stereotypes of English women]. But as you get older, you feel closer to Chinese girls.
Kim: You think so?
Karch: It’s true, do you know what I mean?
Kim: So you wouldn’t go out with an English girl now then?
Karch: No, I think that there’ll be too many differences and too many outside influences . . . I mean the interracial peer pressure, from both communities would not be on (Interview, 5 November 1996).

As he got older, Karch felt that he was drawn to Chinese women. As he said ‘you feel closer to Chinese girls.’ While it was impossible to ascertain why Karch expressed this sentiment, it is feasible that experiences of exclusion from British society may have had an influence in determining the preferences for Chinese women as suitable marriage partners amongst my male informants (see chapter 5). His concluding remarks are of significance. It is implied that Karch would not date an English woman because, were it to happen, it would not be acceptable amongst his and his partner’s peer group and the wider society. Furthermore, even though many of the men expressed a wish to marry a Chinese woman, this opened up the question of what ‘Chinese’ might mean. Thinking through the possibilities for them, Yin suggested that:

Maybe Chinese men would do better in Hong Kong. There’s loads more Chinese girls to choose from and
because there's a lack of, you know, competition [. . .] (Interview, 3 January 1997).

Whether or not the men in the sample were attracted to Hong Kong Chinese women is another issue. For Steve and Andy, at least, they were concerned to meet British-Chinese women who had grown up in similar circumstances. Indeed, when an intention to marry a Chinese woman was stated, it is likely that most of the male informants would have preferred to be with partners with shared backgrounds and histories rather than on any simple essentialist agenda.

Complicating the relationship between partner selection and identity formation for the men in the study were the differences that existed in how they understood and interpreted the actions and behaviours of Chinese women. One of the notable sources of difference was the extent of their participation in Chinese social arenas, which tended to be the domain of young men. Overall, it could be said that those who had a history of participation in social spaces where young Chinese people congregate were more likely to attach a racial agenda to partner selection. Notwithstanding such differences, there was also a generally stronger sense of racial commonality with being Chinese that existed amongst the men rather than the women.

Replicating the situation in the section on British-Chinese femininity, a multiplicity of British-Chinese masculinities may be discerned, a full discussion of which goes beyond the scope of this preliminary investigation. It is probable, however, that individual subject formation had a bearing on the kinds of masculinities adopted by my male informants. In chapter 5 I outlined the ways in which my informants formulated their identities. It is significant that individuals such as Steve and Karch, who I regarded as being committed to more open, hybrid and mixed formulations of identity, expressed a preference for being in endogamous relationships. What this suggests is that there is no simple, linear way of conceptualising British-Chinese masculinities. As Trung pointed out:
There are people that I know that can't mix with Chinese people, they feel that they are so different. They're the people [Chinese men], they're so... they choose to go out with white girls because they feel that white girls will probably understand them more. They find it easier and feel more relaxed to be around white girls than Chinese girls because we all know what Chinese girls are like (Interview, 21 April 1997) (my emphasis).

Trung’s claim to know Chinese men who he perceived as being so different that they would not date Chinese women supports the existence of plural British-Chinese masculinities. In addition, the remark that ‘we all know what Chinese girls are like’ is likely to refer to caricatures of Chinese women which circulate amongst British-Chinese men. When I asked what Chinese girls were supposed to be like, he responded:

You know, you get different sorts but the majority of them [Chinese girls] I’d say are quite different. [...] It’s all about location as well isn’t it? Don’t you find that Chinese girls in London behave in a different way to Chinese girls from outside London? In the sense that girls from outside London are less aggressive, they’re more feminine, whereas girls from London... (Interview, 21 April 1997).

Although there was a recognition that ‘the majority of them [Chinese girls]... are quite different,’ Trung differentiated between Chinese women resident outside of London and those living within London. His affirmation that ‘[Chinese] girls from outside London are less aggressive’, perhaps indicate the extent to which he was able to exercise his influence and control over these women. Trung’s comments substantiate the argument outlined above regarding the loss of control and power that some of the men felt they had over some Chinese women. However, it was not the concern of all the men to maintain this view of Chinese women. Will was of the opinion that:

Some Chinese men are just big-manly sort of thing, do you understand what I’m saying? I don’t reckon they can handle it. Their girlfriends, if they’re English, a girl going on nights out with the girls on a Friday night going drinking, chatting up blokes or blokes chatting them up. I just think a Chinese bloke can’t hack that. [...] some of them [Chinese blokes] just go crazy [...] I mean like you look at a person and it’s like judging a book by its cover, she’s Chinese, but deep inside, she’s human, she can go out with whoever she wants (Interview, 18 April 1997).
Will's acceptance of a particular version of British-Chinese femininity may be contrasted to what Trung had to say. Will's critique of a British-Chinese masculinity that attempts to control and maintain power over Chinese women is a partial recognition that British-Chinese men need to overcome some of the limitations of cultural nationalism in order to create more harmonious gender relations between Chinese women and men.

Corresponding to the situation with British-Chinese women, the men in the study considered the issue of representation important in externally constructing their sense of masculinity. An issue for some of the men – for example, Sai, Trung and Wai – was their perceived loss of control over Chinese women. Indeed, the attitudes expressed towards women by the young men in the study can be seen as complex and shifting. While the majority stated that they would date non-Chinese partners, most also expressed a view that they would like to marry Chinese partners. The contradictions and ambiguities which characterise the gender relations that exist between young British-Chinese men and women will be summed up in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to document the gendered nature of British-Chinese identities. Like all discussions of 'race' and gender this remains as a highly contested area of study, and, in this instance, one where there is little previous research to act as a guide. A core theme of the chapter was the issue of interracial dating. By examining the dating patterns of my informants, I was able to obtain an idea of the processes that underlined their choices of partner selection. While the findings presented here remain exploratory, they indicate that significant differences in the lives of young British-Chinese women and men exist. I argued that dichotomous representations of Chinese women and men were crucial in determining the sexualities of my informants. The diverging and disparate ways
in which Chinese women and men have been portrayed mirror, in a sense, the contrasting
dating experiences of my male and female informants. Further, many of the informants
considered the wishes of parents to be important in choosing partners. However, a
distinction between dating and marrying non-Chinese partners was upheld, especially
amongst the men.

While the women that I spoke to were generally open to having exogamous
relationships, some of the men were against the idea. Issues of power and control were
central to how my male informants understood their relationships with Chinese women.
Yet, in attempting to sustain control over ‘their’ women, the men were also reinforcing
patriarchal dominance and co-opting women into nationalist struggles. By dating
Caucasian men, Chinese women were, in many ways, freeing themselves from the rein of
Chinese men, but, were also regarded as betraying the wider collectivity. To some extent,
the loss of control experienced by the men was exacerbated by popular representations of
Chinese men that depict them as emasculated subjects.

I highlighted how, in the American context, differences in the ways
in which Asian men and women are portrayed have contributed towards a widening gulf in gender
relations between Asians. A central element in the hostility that has arisen is the different
argues that ‘stripped of the privileges of masculinity, some Asian American men have
attempted to reassert male authority by subordinating feminism to nationalist concerns.’
It remains to be seen how, by adopting an ethos of cultural nationalism in the future,
British-Chinese men fare in the sphere of gender relations. Due, in part, to the invisibility
of the Chinese in Britain and the lack of critical forums to address British-Chinese issues
the tension that characterises Asian American gender relations were not yet openly
manifest amongst the young British-Chinese women and men that I interviewed. It is,
however, likely that in the future as British-Chinese youth become more culturally aware
of their mixed heritages, the issue of gender will assume precedence. In allaying some of
the tensions that exist between British-Chinese men and women, it is imperative to take
heed of Ling’s comments:

... articulation of the subjectivities of Asian American women and men cannot be understood as an ideological given or as an explicitly triumphal or recuperative endeavour. Rather, such subjectivities have to emerge from complex and contested processes of differentiation and renegotiation of discourses. External and internal constraints and changing combinations of interests or identities may frequently defer such subjectivities from being clearly and fully realized... [it] requires that the negotiating parties move toward and at least mutually acknowledge their respective power positions (1997: 325).
Conclusion

To claim border crossing, the mixing of high and low, cultural hybridity, as the deepest expression of a desired cultural practise within multicultural democracy means that we must dare to envision ways such freedom of movement can be experienced by everyone (hooks 1994: 5).

This study has attempted to challenge dominant conceptions of second generation British-Chinese identities. Throughout the research I have been concerned to examine how young Chinese people both rework and shape their identities around competing notions of Britishness and Chineseness. In exploring the multiple positionings of British-Chinese youth, this research has aimed to both interrogate and complement existing studies of the Chinese in London. By focusing on a relatively small sample, I was better able to illustrate the diversity and richness of second generation Chinese youth experience and cultural expression. From the findings of the current study it would appear that the individuals in the study are acting as agents in changing the nature of British-Chinese futures. Far from occurring in a straightforward and linear fashion, however, I have highlighted how processes of identity formation, and the ways in which my informants understand their lived experiences, involves a succession of protracted and unceasing negotiations in a variety of spheres, be they at school, in the catering trade, or in Chinese social arenas. In making these claims, and offering a further way of conceptualising the Chinese in Britain, a number of questions arise.

What is the role of the take-away in British-Chinese identity formation? Consolidating the findings of previous studies, the Chinese takeaway is seen as a crucial site in the formation of young Chinese people’s identities (chapter 3). Chinese youth
growing up helping out parents in the catering trade are necessarily thrust into sets of complex negotiations involving their roles within families and the relationships they form with customers. While previous studies have emphasised the economic participation of the Chinese in the catering trade and the ensuing social and cultural ramifications of employment in an ethnically-marked labour market, the current research has attempted to move beyond this sphere. This study supplements existing research by highlighting the sociability of Chinese youth in arenas outside of the take-away. That the overwhelming majority of the informants have chosen careers outside the catering trade is significant. Most of my informants preferred employment in the wider British labour market over the long hours and toil that their parents endured in the take-away. In this respect, a fundamental change in the employment structure between the first and second generation was evident.

Endeavouring to research other sites of relevance in the everyday lives of Chinese youth has, however, presented methodological and epistemological issues which remain unresolved. My positioning as a British-Chinese man played a significant part in the kinds of access I was able to negotiate. In securing access to the personal and private lives and worlds of a select group of predominantly young men, there is less coverage of the lived experiences of young Chinese women. The tendency to privilege the experiences of young men in the sample render this account to be partial and should be read as such. Nowhere is this more apparent than in chapter 6, which focused on the implications of gender for British-Chinese lives and identities. There were also ethical implications involved in undertaking fieldwork with individuals selected from pre-existing social networks. Justifying the politics of selection in the study, it was my concern to produce an account of the Chinese in Britain that reflected the ‘real’ life experiences of my informants. While the danger persists of this study being read as an ‘insider’s’ viewpoint, it bears repetition that invoking this claim is an act of ascribed essentialism. Although some of the informants did confide in me and were sympathetic to the aims of the research, this research was undertaken at great personal cost. The intrinsically personal
nature of the study was both an impediment and a motivation to complete the research. During prolonged spells of the project, the absorption of my personal and research lives, at times, threatened to derail the study. An inability to disentangle these contrasting domains, and my continued and persistent inquiries into the lives of my informants, created, at times, a sense of alienation in relation to the participants in the research which may have been detrimental.

However, by adopting this approach I was better able to understand how young Chinese people in Britain relate to each other to form and support distinct groups which collectively undermine a notion of a singular monolithic ‘Chinese community’ (chapter 4). Indeed, one of the aims of the project was to illuminate the internal differences that characterise the social relations that exist amongst Chinese people in Britain. The portrayal of ‘the Chinese community’ as a homogenous entity bound together across undifferentiated relations of class, gender, and ethnic origin, and exemplified by Chinatown, acts as a potent symbol of the Chinese presence in Britain. In deconstructing the term ‘the Chinese community’, I was able to demonstrate that it is perhaps more appropriate to regard the Chinese as belonging to multiple, interweaving and overlapping ‘partial Chinese communities’, each of which is responding collectively to the challenge of being Chinese in Britain.

This challenge is also a matter of the various ways in which the Chinese have been portrayed in Britain. One of the objectives of the study was to question how these representations have affected the lives of Chinese people. By looking at the differential representation of Chinese men and women in chapter 6, I argued that British-Chinese youth identities are gendered. As a result of which, amongst the young Chinese women and men in my sample, differences in dating patterns and behaviours surfaced. While the involvement of young Chinese women in exogamous relationships unsettled some of the young men in the study, the women that I spoke to regarded their choices of Caucasian partners in a positive light. Parents’ viewpoints were important in the selection of suitable partners, although a clear demarcation between dating and marrying non-Chinese
individuals existed, especially amongst the men. On the whole, stereotypes of Chinese gender roles were considered to be vital in constructing gendered identities.

Identities are also made and negotiated in relation to other social groups. Some of the individuals in the study were acknowledging popular perceptions of Chinese people and were actively involved in creating and re-fashioning new British-Chinese identities. Individuals such as Steve, through his artwork and participation in youth cultures, were actively inventing and constructing distinct ways of being British-Chinese and were concerned that dominant images of Chinese people should not be regarded as the sole definition of Chinese identity. One of the most pertinent issues addressed is how the young Chinese people documented in this study are positioned in relation to other groups of ethnic minority youth. The overall picture painted of Chinese youth as participants in British youth cultures is one of exclusion and marginalisation (chapter 1). I suggested that the lack of a collective response amongst Chinese collectivities in Britain was crucial in sustaining these perceptions of Chinese youth. However, it was shown in chapter 5 that, amongst my informants these new, mixed, hybrid formations of identities or ethnicities were mobilised by some of the people I spoke to at an individual level, and at that level, they trangress conventional ways of looking at young British-Chinese people.

In considering these questions of identity, it is my contention that external ascriptions of identity and the ways in which Chinese people are represented are influential in imposing definitions of what it is to be ‘Chinese’ (chapter 5). In attempting to show that being Chinese in Britain is a highly contested and inherently negotiated process, I have sought to illuminate the complexities and contradictions that structure the everyday lives of young Chinese people.

An overreliance and overemphasis on overarching, essentialist ways of being ‘Chinese’ maintain a respectable level of credibility in popular conceptions of second generation young Chinese people. While not denying the significance and relevance of cultural essentialism in the construction of young Chinese peoples’ identities, the current study has sought to demonstrate that essentialist identities were both adopted and
rejected by my informants. This happened in complex ways and, in describing the
different cultural politics of my informants, I have consciously tried to avoid neatly
compartmentalizing their experiences and assigning them fixed identities. Rather, my aim
was to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, the different ways in which essentialism was
both embraced and eschewed.

At various times, tactics of essentialism were utilised as an expression of
individuality - as evidenced by the actions of Trung and Sai in chapter 5 - or as a way of
reinforcing group solidarity - exemplified by the Hatfield bunch. In some instances, these
culturally essentialist identities were regarded as the 'real' Chinese ones, while on other
occasions they were strategically mobilised by individuals according to the situation they
were in, at any given time. Negotiating identity roles in the company of Chinese people
who claimed a more 'authentic' Chineseness was also central in determining notions of
self amongst the informants. Being labelled with derogatory terms such as 'banana' by
other Chinese people resulted in some of the informants enacting essentialist identities to
resist these ascriptions. The relevance of diaspora in understanding the formation of
British-Chinese subjectivity in Britain is also important in this process. How do young
Chinese people understand their identities in relation to Britain and ancestral homelands?
Assuming fluid identities that were what Alexander (1996: 194) terms 'transiently
essentialist' was central to how some of my informants negotiated the, in some ways,
opposed terrains of Britishness and Chineseness. Other informants simply rejected
essentialist conceptions of identity and were committed to constructing highly individual
hybrid formulations of identity.

The present research is subject to some constraints. The small-scale nature of the
study inevitably means that certain issues have been left out. For example, I am aware
that more could have been said about the relationships between my second generation
informants and their families. Insofar as the study is a limited account of British-Chinese
youth, it is also useful in that it highlights future research agendas for the Chinese in
 Britain. Young Chinese people's lives merit further attention if we are to understand more
fully the ways in which diverse ethnic minority identities intersect and are operationalised. Future discussions of ‘race’ in Britain that exclude the experiences of the Chinese run the risk of further marginalising a collectivity who largely remain silent and of whom relatively little is known.

In choosing to study a field that remains under-researched further scope exists for future researchers to challenge or build from the findings of this study. Indeed, one of the drawbacks of the study is the breadth and diversity of experience outlined in the research. It is my contention that further separate studies on each of the empirical chapters would be possible. Nowhere was this more evident than in chapter 6, where British-Chinese femininities and masculinities could prove to be intriguing areas of study in the future. In problematising the issue of representation, it should also be mentioned that the study makes no grand claims to be representative of all Chinese people in Britain. It is very much about understanding what the experiences of young Chinese people in London can tell us about ‘race’ and identity in Britain. Therefore, the study aims to be informative in that the ways in which my informants understand and think through the sets of cultural choices available to them and the structural constraints they overcome in the formation of subjectivities, generally reflect the cultural dilemmas that young Chinese people confront. Hall (1990: 225) writes:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything else which is historical, they undergo constant transformation . . . identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.

What this study has attempted to detail is the construction of identity amongst a relatively small sample of young British-Chinese people over a specific period of time. For this reason I have cautioned against making grand claims about the lives of individual informants. In documenting how the findings of the research pertain to the current lives of the informants I acknowledge that identity is always in a state of flux.
Andy is still working at the British Chinese Arts Association and continues to promote the interests of British-Chinese artists and performers. Currently, he is working on a personal project, writing a play which he hopes will make it big! He is on his way. During September 1999 he held a public reading of extracts from the script. Karch left his job in the catering trade during August 1999, and now runs a stall at the weekends on Portobello market. At the time of writing he was also hoping to get a full-time position at the music store HMV. At the beginning of the year he entered a relationship with a British-Chinese girl. The last occasion I saw Steve he was in a relationship with an English girl. From what he told me, he was thinking of moving out of the flat he shares with his sister to move in with two Caucasian friends. Khoung remains with his English girlfriend and they plan to marry soon. Currently they are looking for a house together. Meanwhile, despite repeated attempts to find employment elsewhere, he is still at a graphics company in central London. At the time of writing, Yin was intending to buy a property with her Caucasian boyfriend in a south London suburb. Their relationship has lasted eight years. From what I knew, she was still in the same job. Ivy is in her fourth year of study in her quest to become a doctor. She lives with her current English boyfriend in west London. Jason is still part of the Hatfield bunch. From what I gathered the group were still together and meet each other as often as possible. However, ever since he started going out with a British-Chinese girl introduced to him by Sue’s elder brother, it appeared that his commitment to the group had waned. In addition, he had found full-time employment as a computer programmer.

Amongst the informants who had left London during the period of research, Trung is now running a successful catering enterprise in Cambridge, where he works six days a week. His involvement in the catering trade meant that he was often out of London and it can be presumed that he participates less in Chinese social arenas. In addition, he told me that he was involved in a relationship with a Chinese girl that he had met through
the restaurant. **Sai** left his old job working for one of the 'big six' accountancy firms during the summer of last year to oversee the running of this catering enterprise with **Trung**. As well as having plans for expansion next year, Sai also had intentions to set up a business specialising in financial services in Japan with one of his friends. From what Trung told me, Sai and his Hong Kong Chinese girlfriend were still together. **Catherine** has moved to France to be with her boyfriend and they have set up their own clothes label. She comes to London periodically to see her family. After going to Hong Kong during a gap year in her Art and Philosophy degree, **Sue** plans to stay out there for the foreseeable future. After briefly returning to see her family and the eclipse during August 1999, she returned to undertake various arts projects in Hong Kong. She maintains contact with **Kin** who has now lived in Hong Kong for over four years. During that time he has only returned to London once for his elder brother's wedding during October 1996, which was when I interviewed him. I managed to keep in touch with him through occasional visits to Hong Kong. He has had two graphic design jobs during that period, as well as a time when he was freelancing.

In illuminating the ways in which the lives of my informants have moved on and how their formulations of identity have changed, what emerges is that British-Chinese youth identities are constantly reinvented. This challenges conventional ways of looking at essentialised cultural or racial entities. Although essentialised notions of 'Chinese' identity retain their significance for both Chinese people and British society, they are continually resisted by the attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of second generation British-Chinese people. In highlighting the interconnections between 'work', 'the Chinese community', 'identity' and 'gender', the study emphasises the ambiguities and complexities of the relationships between lived experience, identity formation and place in a diasporic context.
Bibliography

* Denotes items consulted but not referred to in the text.


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