



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Chinese Australians

SPEECH

Monday, 25 June 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Brodtmann, Gai, MP

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Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (20:34): I too would like to lend my support to the member for Bennelong's private members' motion and recognise the strong and significant history of Chinese migration to Australia over the past 150 years. During this time Chinese-Australians all over the country have made a significant contribution to our nation. They are the masters of vibrant, loud and colourful festivities, and not just in Bennelong. During Canberra's National Multicultural Festival in February 2012 our Chinese community celebrated Chinese New Year—the Year of the Dragon. They came together for an extravaganza of dance, singing and performances. It was colourful, lots of fun and a wonderful reminder of the joy our Chinese community brings to Canberra.

I have my own connections to the Chinese-Australian community. My father's mother's family came out from China to Australia during the 1850s as part of the gold rush in Ballarat. Members of my family on my father's father's side also came from Germany in the 1850s, when there was a huge influx of Germans making the voyage to Australia's shores. My mother's family came out from Ireland and Scotland in the late 1800s. Despite all that, Chinese cuisine loomed large in my childhood, particularly in the sixties. Most Saturdays my father would tuck into a plate of congee, and would sit there with his red hair, blue eyes and very pale skin. My mother had mastered the art from my father's mother, and my poor old mum used to go into Chinatown every now and then to pick up fresh ginger—in the sixties it was a bit of a challenge to get that in Melbourne, so she would always go there to get her Asian foodstuff. So despite the fact that there was German, Irish and Scottish influence, the cuisine at home was very much influenced by China.

Australians, particularly working-class Australians, are a mix of every nationality. Australia is a diverse community, a multicultural community and, for the most part, an accepting community. We should be proud that so many people from all over the world view Australia as a wonderful place to live, to raise a family and to contribute to society. More and more people are willing to come to our country, adopt our values, call themselves Australian and become productive members of our society. In fact, the census data released last week shows that Canberra is becoming more culturally diverse than ever before. Between 2006 and 2011, the percentage of people in the ACT who

said they had an Australian background dropped from 30.7 per cent to 26.6 per cent. And the third most reported country of birth, after Australia and England, was China, with 1.8 per cent of people living in the ACT born in China, compared to 1.1 per cent in 2006. Mandarin remained the second most popular language spoken at home, following English, increasing from 1.1 per cent to 1.9 per cent between 2006 and 2011. The number of people living in the ACT who were born overseas is also on the rise—a trend I am sure is evident in many other parts of Australia. The local Chinese community here in Canberra play a significant role in welcoming new migrants and supporting Chinese students who choose to study at our universities. They are led by Sam Wong, who this year was nominated a People of Australia Ambassador for his contribution to the community.

We are also fortunate to have many schools committed to teaching languages, including Mandarin, and encouraging young Chinese students in our community to retain their native language. For example, there is the Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre in Mawson, which was refurbished last year, providing long day care with a focus on bilingual education in English and Mandarin. The centre is helping young children develop a proficiency in and appreciation for the Chinese language and culture from an early age, which is wonderful to see. Many of the staff at the centre are native Mandarin speakers and have been teaching at the school for over a decade. The centre itself has been running for more than 25 years, thanks to the fine work of the Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia.

As you can see, Chinese-Australians are continuing to contribute to our local communities in many different ways. Whether they emigrated here in the gold rush or are visiting now as international students keen to work here when they finish their degree, Chinese-Australians have played a key role in Australia's history and have enriched our cultural diversity and our nation immensely. I wish the member for Bennelong well at the Bennelong Cup table tennis match. I am sure it will be another great example of sport bringing different cultures together.

Debate adjourned.