

Ear to Asia podcast

- Title:** Migrants from China grappling with acceptance in Australia
- Description:** While the majority of the 650,000+ China-born people living in Australia are here permanently, most choose to forgo Australian citizenship. So how do members of Australia's mainland Chinese community view themselves, and how are they viewed by others -- particularly now that the relationship between Canberra and Beijing is at an ebb. Asia Institute researchers Dr Sow Keat Tok and Dr Qiuping Pan examine the lived experiences of this group with presenter Ali Moore. An Asia Institute podcast.
- Listen:** <https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=787385>
- Voiceover:** The Ear to Asia podcast is made available on the Jakarta Post platform under agreement between the Jakarta Post and the University of Melbourne.
- Ali Moore:** Hello, I'm Ali Moore. This is Ear to Asia.
- Sow Keat Tok:** When you don't trust the Chinese Communist Party, you don't trust the Chinese government, that by extension you don't trust the Chinese people, in general. It's a huge problem and it really runs into the heart of how mainland Chinese in Australia can be accepted.
- Qiuping Pan:** I think marginalizing and othering Chinese immigrants as well as other immigrants is a regrettable waste of resources for Australia. By integrating them into its social, economic, and political lives, it can benefit Australia as well, and everyone can benefit from that.
- Ali Moore:** In this episode, migrants from China are grappling with acceptance in Australian society.
- Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialist at the University of Melbourne.
- At a time of heightened political and trade friction between Australia and China, spare a thought for the many people who were born in China but now are living, working and studying in Australia. Migration from China famously goes back to colonial times in Australia, but the numbers of mainland Chinese choosing to call Australia home are now greater than ever.
- According to the latest official count in mid 2018, there were over 650,000 China born people living in Australia, double the number of only a decade earlier. And while the vast majority of mainland Chinese are here as permanent migrants, many choose to forego citizenship and retain their PRC passports with China not recognising dual citizenship.
- So how do people in Australia's mainland Chinese community view themselves and how are they viewed by others in these difficult bilateral times? What challenges do they face fitting into the wider Australian

community and what choices are they making to navigate cultural and linguistic differences that can sometimes lead to bitter misunderstanding?

Joining me in our virtual studio to examine the lived experiences of this group, a human migration researcher, Dr. Qiuping Pan and Asia political scientist, Dr. Sow Keat Tok, both of Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Welcome to Ear to Asia Qiuping and welcome back Sow Keat.

Qiuping Pan: Thank you Ali, it's a pleasure to be here.

Sow Keat Tok: Hi, glad to be back.

Ali Moore: Let's start by looking at where people from mainland China fit in Australia today, both socially, economically, but also when it comes to the broader ethnic Chinese community. Sow Keat, can you draw us a picture of mainland Chinese in Australia?

Sow Keat Tok: Well, I think we can look at various phases of migration. So as you mentioned in your introduction, the first phase was during the colonial times when the migrants came in to be gold miners. But subsequently we also have different waves of Chinese migrants coming in. Although it's a White Australia Policy during that time, there were some trickles of Chinese migrants then, in particular from Hong Kong and Macau and Taiwan.

But subsequently after the 1990s and 2000s, you see a huge wave of Chinese migrants coming in first after Tiananmen when Australia grant amnesty to large groups of Chinese students and residents here in Australia followed by after 2000s waves of Chinese migrants coming through. So if we were to put everything into perspective, that will be how I would classify all the different generations of Chinese migrants here in Australia.

Ali Moore: And Qiuping, where do we see these mainland Chinese migrants today in particular, where are they most represented and where are they perhaps unrepresented?

Qiuping Pan: I think most prominently, they are quite highly visible in the workforce. So among the China born population in Australia, there is a much higher percentage of professionals, which is close to 30% in comparison with that of Australian born population, which is 21%, and for the total overseas born population, that's 25%. That's according to the 2016 census data.

And apart from that in terms of education, Chinese are also quite visible in terms of their educational attainment. So just under half of the China born population in Australia aged 15 years and over held a bachelor degrees level and above. This has more than doubled the figure of the Australian born population, which is around 20% and also much higher than that of the total overseas born population, which is 32%.

Ali Moore: So Qiuping if we talk about the professional qualifications of some 30% of the mainland Chinese population, where do the other 70% sit? Where do they fit in society?

Qiuping Pan: Generally, although they have a very high percentage of workforce participation rate, they are kind of under represented in terms of leadership roles overall speaking.

Ali Moore: And when you say leadership roles, do you mean political leadership, do you mean business leadership, society leadership? Is it across the board?

Qiuping Pan: I think overall, yeah, there is an under-representation of Chinese immigrants in terms of political leadership and also key leadership roles in the business sector, as well as other major important civil society associations, et cetera. And this is not a common issue faced by Chinese immigrants, but also for Asian background immigrants overall.

Ali Moore: We'll have a look at some of the barriers to representation more closely in just a minute. But Sow Keat, how has the pandemic changed the environment for the mainland Chinese community in Australia? What sort of impact has it had?

Sow Keat Tok: Well, I think to be fair, let's talk about Asian migrants in general. I think the COVID situation has not helped in the way that they're received in the society by and large and mainland Chinese more so. I think we're seeing an increasing sense of discrimination. If you look at the number of cases that were filed over the last year, there's increasing number of racial discrimination being reported.

And just to share a little bit of my own experience, even though I'm not from mainland China myself, being an ethnic Chinese, I've experienced a number of discrimination because of COVID as well whether it was because I wore a mask or that I look like a Chinese. I think that is definitely wedging into the divisions of Australian society as a whole.

Ali Moore: Sow Keat, where is this discrimination coming from? What's the genesis of it, do you think? Is it a blame? Is it you're from mainland China, you brought COVID here? Is it that?

Sow Keat Tok: I mean, for the lack of better word discrimination or rather the non whites suffer from a little bit of a disadvantage within the Australian society.

Ali Moore: You're talking racism, aren't you Sow Keat?

Sow Keat Tok: Yes, I'm talking about racism, but it's more in the more subtle form where after the White Australian Policy was overturned there are still a lot of structural issues that migrants elsewhere, it's not just from Asia, but from Africa, from Latin America, non-whites mainly that still find themselves in a more disadvantaged position.

But that notwithstanding, I think the COVID situation just exacerbated the whole blame game that Chinese are uncouth, they bring diseases. Other than coming in and take the jobs away, they brought diseases with them and affect everyone around them. And it's not just something that happened at discursive level, even day to day routines. You see kids. In fact, my experience with that discrimination come from little kids who really just shout at me and say, "COVID, COVID, Coronavirus," that sort of attitude.

And the parents, rather than stopping the kids, they actually push the narrative within the family. And that is something that kind of built up as we go up the social ladder. Sometimes discrimination may not be so obvious as in the way that I have experienced, but at each level of the society, Australian society, I think there is some form of blame given to the Chinese population for the COVID situation.

Ali Moore: Qiuping, do you agree with Sow Keat? And Sow Keat is I think choosing his words carefully with the use of the word racism. But do you think that COVID has aggravated existing racism in Australia?

Qiuping Pan: I do think so. And this also aligns with my personal experience as well. So if I may add some more statistics into our discussion now, so in a recent study of more than 3000 people, researchers from the Australian national universities suggest that nearly 85% of Asian Australians reported experiences of racism during the pandemic.

And also another survey conducted by the Asian Australian Alliance and Osmond Chiu alone has collected 377 incidents of racism targeting at Asian Australians between April and June 2020. And these victims include not only Chinese from mainland China, but also those who are perceived as Chinese looking, including people from Korea, Malaysia, as well as other migrant source countries, even those who were born and raised in Australia.

And in terms of scapegoating Chinese immigrants or Chinese for spreading the COVID virus, actually the reason why I used that term scapegoating is because the fact is that only a tiny percentage of cases of COVID-19 in Australia have been directly from mainland China and the overwhelming proportion have come from Europe and the Americas.

Ali Moore: But Qiuping isn't this attitude that Sow Keat's talked about not to do with the number of cases of COVID that have originated from China, but the fact that COVID itself originated from China?

Qiuping Pan: Yeah, that's true. But it does not necessarily mean that Chinese in Australia should be blamed for the spread of the virus in Australia. It's merely by associating them with the country that they might have come from. And then they're used to the allegation that they've been spreading the virus. I think it's very unreasonable and illogical.

Ali Moore: And Sow Keat, can you draw us a picture of the historical relationship between mainland Chinese in Australia and the existing Australian community? Can you take us through some of the history?

Sow Keat Tok: Sure. I mean, this thing about being Chinese is a very complex idea. It can mean a lot of things. What is important today is that Chinese identity is quite different from being Chinese politically or being a Chinese ethnically. There are quite different shapes of way that we understand this idea of Chineseness. This has a lot to do with how Chinese have migrated overseas.

So historically the way about being Chinese is you are linked to an ethnic group called Chinese. Like my grandfather is a Chinese, but he was born in Singapore. I am a Chinese born in Singapore. Whereas there are others who

found themselves in a situation where they actually saw themselves more like Taiwanese Chinese or Chinese Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, Macau Chinese, different ways of understanding it.

We look at how the Chinese political system has evolved over time, the contention of what it means to be a political Chinese comes during the civil war between 1945 and 1949. And in fact, it's still ongoing as we speak. But during that time when Taiwan, the Kuomintang Taiwan and the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party were fighting the civil war, there was this very conscientious effort to bring in overseas Chinese to support their political cause.

KMT was trying to promote sort of propaganda about the ownership of mainland China as much as what the CCP was doing. Overseas Chinese become a kind of battle ground for different narratives of what being Chinese is. And given the way that all these are conflated, it's very difficult to unpack what being Chinese is all about, which is a big problem.

It's not just for other people to understand Chinese, but for Chinese to understand themselves as well, especially overseas Chinese. They're very often torn between different loyalties and different way of associating themselves to the so-called their roots. And that created a huge mess in the way that the communities was received in their host countries, not just in Australia, but elsewhere in Europe, even in Southeast Asia, in the Americas.

Ali Moore: If we just deal with mainland Chinese and the Chinese Communist Party, if you look at relations between the Australian government and the Chinese government, if you look at the escalating trade war where we've got coal, timber, barley, sugar, wine, lobster exports all blocked, and you look at the recently introduced Foreign Interference Legislation, we have a real confluence of issues. And at the same time, as you were saying, there is a tendency to refer to Communist Party, China and Chinese as one and the same, which is a narrative actually promoted by the Communist Party. So how do we separate the two?

Sow Keat Tok: We can't separate the two. The narrative has been so prevalent that we cannot separate. But what I'm trying to emphasise here, that it's important to understand that there are different gradation of Chinese identity. So-

Ali Moore: But if we're talking about mainland Chinese being discriminated against in Australia and being seen as whether fairly or unfairly as linked back to China's government, how do we separate that and how big an issue is that in efforts to not have the sorts of discrimination that so many experience?

Sow Keat Tok: At the end of the day, we need to look at how the society, the host society or the host country is receiving this community and attempt to understand the Chinese community. Then again, the Chinese community has a role to play to tell their stories to the whole society that they reside in. Many a times you see mainland Chinese people, and in fact, Chinese in general, they tend to keep a low profile in whichever society that they found themselves in.

I can't speak for everyone, all right? But our family upbringing is keep your head low, try not to get yourself too obvious. The whole idea about

surviving, about thriving is really to be the same as the others, because the one that lift their head gets chopped off. That's the kind of family upbringing that I was brought up with and I presume a lot of Chinese families do the same.

So Chinese communities and families tend to kind of like steer clear of being too vocal and share what they exactly think about things, that is inherent within the communities. So they need to bring themselves out and share what they think or how they feel, what are the differentiations that they have amongst themselves to the host community. I think the conversation needs to get going.

Ali Moore:

Qiuping, can I just ask you and go back to that issue of mainland Chinese community being conflated with Chinese Communist Party and China's government? Because if the pandemic and if the issues that we currently face and the bilateral relationship are aggravating the discrimination that was already being felt, how do we separate? How does Australia, for example, protect itself from what it considers to be undesirable foreign influence through things like the foreign influence legislation, but at the same time not fan the flames of distrust of the mainland Chinese community in Australia?

Qiuping Pan:

I think to start with, as Sow Keat has mentioned, we can have a broader and more open-minded discussion about the lived experiences and thoughts and perspectives from the community. And because currently our narratives about the Chinese community is quite simplified to the extent that it's preoccupied with alleged political interference, as well as at times by being preoccupied with issues like rising house price, other social problems.

So I think there is definitely a need for us to broaden our discussions about the Chinese community and get to know what their lived experiences are like. And another point is that while this sounds like a new phenomenon that we are witnessing, like the current surge of anti-Chinese, anti-Asian racism as well as like the heightening fear towards political interference channelled by immigrants, this is not something novel.

And in Australia's history, we've seen many times actually when immigrants have been scapegoated for some systematic social problems, as well as alleged or imagined national security concerns. So for example, during the World War II a lot of Japanese living in Australia have been sent into prison because of they were conceited as being spies of the Japanese government and also at the turn of the century after the 911 incident that Muslims in Australia have been increasingly associated with fear of terrorism, right?

And this is not very different from the old narratives that we have been experiencing. Because again, at this time, what we are seeing is that Chinese immigrants have been associated with concerns over national security and safety. And this is inflammatory because it speaks to the deepest concern in every Australian's heart. It's about our concern that whether Australia can be a safe and equal place for us to live in.

Qiuping Pan:

But also often what's neglected and overlooked in the narratives is that this is also a concern and a dream and a pursuit shared by all immigrants who

come to Australia and choose Australia to be their new home. They do not come merely to take a slice of the cake away and to take opportunities for better lives away. They come also to create better lives for themselves and for their loved ones.

Ali Moore: Is that fear of taking away, is that what you mean when you talk about Australians having anxiety over what you call the Asianization of Australia?

Qiuping Pan: I think that there is more to that. So by the Asianization of Australia, I mean that this is a trend that has been unfolding in two main aspects. First is in terms of Australia's demographics, Asian immigrants are taking up a larger and increasingly a larger proportion. And secondly, in terms of the Australia's economy, there is a growing closer economic and tighter economic ties between Australia and the Asian region.

And Asianization unfolding in both aspects have been kind of psychologically challenging – like to be fully accepted. Because first of all, Asian has not yet being embraced as part of Australian is. And secondly, Australia has long considered itself to be, in most cases, superior Western country at the peripheral of the Asian region. So it's kind of very psychologically challenging to accept the fact that Asia is rapidly developing and development of Australia needs to rely on, to a great extent, the opportunities arising from this fast developing region, which Australia has long considered as like less developed.

Ali Moore: Sow Keat, can I just get your thoughts on what Qiuping has said? And going back to the issue at hand, which is the acceptance or otherwise of mainland Chinese in Australia, how much of the background and the issues that we face do you think go to trust?

Sow Keat Tok: If you really look at how the trust issue is not so much about whether or not to trust mainland Chinese, but whether or not to trust mainland Chinese government or even the Chinese Communist Party. Earlier on I pointed out that they're conflated. So when you don't trust the Chinese Communist Party, you don't trust the Chinese government, that by extension you don't trust the Chinese people in general.

It's a huge problem. But as far as I see, it's a clash of value. It's a clash of the way that we understand the world around us, it's the way that we associate ourselves with different communities. And it really runs into the heart of how mainland Chinese can be accepted and seen as someone who is trustworthy. Just to give you an example, last month BBC made this report about trustworthiness of Chinese people.

Even Australian Chinese [who] were born here working at the Ministry of Defence, they were subject to the kind of special discrimination by being singled out for delayed security checks and things like that. That is actually happening. And that is actually guilt by association rather than guilt by action. And guilt by association is really at the bottom of it is what exactly you mentioned, it's about the trust issue. And the fact that the conflation of people, party and the state are all coming in together, it makes it so difficult to unpack and so difficult to ensure that trust can be given.

Ali Moore: So Sow Keat, how do you unpack that, and particularly right now, as I was saying earlier, when we have a government that is on the one hand trying to prevent foreign interference and talks about foreign interference, it has new foreign interference legislation and on the other hand, it doesn't want to fan the flames of discrimination against mainland Chinese? How does the government unpack that or how do we unpack that so it doesn't have the impact it's having?

Sow Keat Tok: Politics being politics, we cannot be telling Canberra what or how they position themselves in an election situation. They have their audience to preach to, they need to talk to their electorates. But it goes back to what Qiuping and I were mentioning about understanding.

At least at a society wide level, there is a need to educate communities about the roles that were played by mainland Chinese communities, the kind of identity crises that they face when it comes to acknowledging whether they are part of China or not or whether they are associates of the Communist Party or not and the way that different gradations of identity can be created or based on their experience and where they come from in the very first place.

Ali Moore: You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. And just a reminder to listeners about Asia Institute's online publication on Asia and its societies, politics and cultures, it's called The Melbourne Asia Review. It's free to read and it's open access at melbourneasiareview.edu.au.

You'll find articles by some of our regular Ear to Asia guests and by many others, plus you can catch recent episodes of Ear to Asia at the Melbourne Asia Review website, which again, you can find at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. I'm Ali Moore with guests, Dr. Qiuping Pan and Dr. Sow Keat Tok. And we're discussing the lived experience of mainland Chinese in Australia. I wonder Sow Keat, what role do you see in mainstream media in all of this and particularly in how mainland Chinese are viewed by the broader Australian community, what do you see is the role of the media?

Sow Keat Tok: Well, I think you're seeing a mix of media here, we need to acknowledge that. But in traditional print media, I think there is a general leaning to the centre right over here in Australia, which really puts them at odds with the Chinese Communist Party in general. But over time because of the competition brought about by social media, Australian media is increasingly being pushed to sensationalise some news related to China as what we see in the last year or so.

The joke goes around in Asia Institute, just an inside joke, that when these paper needs to sell or increase their readership, they will published something on China, negative about China or negative about the Chinese communities. While it is more of an anecdote, you can actually read from what has been published in the press media over the past year related to China and related to Chinese community.

Ali Moore: But Sow Keat, do you think that's fair? Because in a number of newspapers, there must have been very extensive investigations that go to the heart of

allegations of foreign influence, which have ultimately been borne out with even charges being laid, the first charges under the foreign interference legislation. So is it fair to brand media as is going the negative?

Sow Keat Tok:

No, I wouldn't say I'll brand media as being negative. But what I'm trying to highlight there is the need to sell stories is important in understanding how the media has positioned themselves in this news mix. I think there have been attempts as you rightly pointed out to do investigative journalism, which is excellent. And I think those are excellent efforts, but still it doesn't change the great trend of things whereby the biggest news story going around is that how Australia is dealing with China.

Just a few days ago we talked about so-called the funding fraud that comes with researchers, mainly from mainland China, getting hired by Chinese university. Whereas something they will not mention was that this is common not just in academics that were previously from mainland China, but also amongst Australian academics elsewhere.

China's universities has so much money to spend now that they're trying to improve their standing, their international standing. And that is what they have been doing, throwing money into research, getting a lot of renowned researchers to get to China to present their work, whether or not they were subsequently being hired by the Chinese government is another story altogether.

But by and large, you're looking at the same thing as how Australia's university has been collaborating with American university or the UK university. And this really goes back to the point that we talked earlier about trust. When you don't trust the Chinese government, you don't trust the Chinese, everything you see is untrustworthy. That's it. You see what you want to see at the end of the day.

Ali Moore:

And of course we talk about mainstream media in Australia, but there's also of course, a very strong Chinese language media in Australia, including social media. I wonder Qiuping, what role do you see the Chinese media is playing in Australia in terms of where mainland Chinese fit in our society?

Qiuping Pan:

A lot of discussions in Australian mainstream media have been focusing on to what extent WeChat has been a place of censorship and have been manipulating what Chinese people think and have been a dominant source of information among the Chinese community. And well, WeChat, it's an app that we use on a daily basis. It has become one of the most important sources of information that we received.

But using that WeChat app, it's like an economic choice that you make about like using Facebook or Messenger. It has a lot to do with the kind of social app that your friends and family back in China use and what your close ones used. And so this is a choice that's made in the context of the social networks that Chinese immigrants are embedded in.

Ali Moore:

But going back to the question of role of media, does it reinforce bubbles, does it reinforce differences? It's notable that Gladys Liu, a federal politician based here in Victoria, Hong Kong born, she actually... she says that "if...";

this is a quote from 2016, "If you ask how many Chinese people read mainstream news, the percentage is so, so low. But the first thing they do in the morning is turn on the phone and go to WeChat."

Qiuping Pan: But at the same time, I don't think this means that they are isolated because it's a very simplistic view that saying that WeChat official accounts only plays a role that channels information from China to the Chinese community. And what has been neglected in our current discussion is that, which are official accounts always like... well, have translated a lot of news stories from Australian mainstream media and becomes a channel that actually direct information from the mainstream media to the Chinese community.

Ali Moore: So it's not a bubble. You don't think that's a fair comment.

Qiuping Pan: I don't think so. Because I have also subscribed through a quite sizeable group of WeChat official accounts. And from my observation is that often they have digested the news, which a lot of Chinese immigrants have language barriers to read on their own and they translated those news and then sometimes repackage it or collect several items of news together and then feed that to their Chinese users.

And so I don't think that the use of WeChat means that they have been isolated or they are deliberately isolating themselves from the mainstream society. And quite often they also use WeChat as a means to get to know the broader society using a language that they are more familiar with and more comfortable with using.

Ali Moore: So Qiuping, what do you think are the key barriers that need to be removed or changed for mainland Chinese to play a greater role in Australian society? We've talked a bit about lived experiences, about being more specific about who we're talking about, not lumping the state and the individual in together, but what do you see as the main change that needs to happen?

Qiuping Pan: I think we need more platforms and more occasions in which we can put people from different ethnic backgrounds together, and to learn about each other's cultural backgrounds and perspectives. This is not only helpful for relieving the current rising racism that we are witnessing nowadays. It also helps to consolidate social cohesion [in] Australia and in the long-term, it will benefit Australia tremendously, as scholars have put, Australia's engagement.

Say, for example, Australia's engagement with Asia will in a large part be a function of our own domestic ability to deal with cultural diversity. And I think marginalising and othering Asian immigrants as well as other immigrants is a regrettable waste of resources for Australia because Australia can easily tap into this pool of resources. And by integrating them into its social, economic and political lives, it can benefit Australia as well and everyone can benefit from that.

And the stories about the communities, of the migrant communities should be broadened to cover not only their lived experiences and actions as political beings in Australia, but also their lives and their feelings, experiences as social, economic and cultural members of the Australian

society. Because today, what we are seeing is that the media has actually over-politicised immigrants. And in our daily lives, the importance of politics is not as important as what media has portrayed it to be.

Ali Moore: Qiuping, we've made the point much earlier that relatively few mainland Chinese take Australian citizenship and certainly China is not unique in prohibiting dual passport holding. But does the fact that many Chinese choose to keep their Chinese citizenship make a difference?

Qiuping Pan: I think this definitely will have some political consequence in terms of the political voice that they have in Australia. Earlier there are a lot of discussions about Chinese immigrants, political participation has focused on, for example, how they lobby MPs and try to get their voice heard. And this has to do with the lack of voting power on the one hand. And on the other hand, it also has something to do with the situations that they have been in and the decisions they made.

As you've rightfully pointed out, like for Chinese immigrants, it means that if they want to be an Australian citizen and to have a political voice in the country that they are now living in and want to build a life in, they have to relinquish the citizenship they hold from China. And this means a lot of concrete social and economic impacts in their daily lives.

Say, for example, many of them have established their lives, their family back in China. This means that they have property to hold and they have their family members back in China, this means that they have to frequently travel back and forth. And some of them have businesses back in China. So the easiest way for them to retain this kind of connections with their home country is to retain their Chinese citizenship.

But not choosing Australian citizenship does not necessarily mean that they don't love Australia, that they don't identify with Australia. It's just an either-or choice that they have to make. And in their situation ultra often having Chinese passport saves them quite a lot of efforts in dealing with what's probably considered as unnecessary troubles.

But I think we have to reflect upon the conceptualization of citizenship because ultra often what we've been seen media in public discussion is that we tend to equate citizenship with loyalty to a nation. Like if you hold Australian citizenship, that means like you are, or at least you should be loyal to Australia. But it's not necessarily the case in our data lives.

I've interviewed many immigrants as well as Australian citizens who hold dual citizenship or multiple citizenships and the answer that I often get is that choosing which citizenship to hold or passport to hold is a decision that has more to do with other considerations like maybe you want to travel around the world, or you want to save the trouble of applying for residence again and again, or have a student loan.

Ali Moore: Sure. But if we're going to look at the representation of mainland Chinese in Australian leadership positions, whether that's political or in the judiciary or in defence, then not holding citizenship is an immediate negative. So if you want full participation, you can't do that without citizenship.

Qiuping Pan: Yeah, it's true.

Sow Keat Tok: Sorry, just to jump in a little bit there. I think a lot of time as what Qiuping has described, the decision whether or not to adopt citizenship is a private one, not so much of whether or not associated to the Chinese Communist Party. But that being said, in a world, in a globalised world at the moment, are we giving too much emphasis on citizenship?

Having a citizenship doesn't guarantee any loyalty of any sort although I do acknowledge that having a citizenship might give you a certain sense that you belong to a particular group of people. But that's about it. When we are now crisscrossing the world, using social media to talk to people who 20 years ago we would not have imagined talking to, that is what we are doing now. This is how the world is moving, we are converging. And to really link up citizenship with loyalty, I think is something of a bygone era.

Ali Moore: I think though we do have to point out that the question of citizenship globally is one completely beyond the remit of this particular podcast.

Sow Keat Tok: Fair enough.

Ali Moore: And no doubt one that we should do an entire podcast on, or maybe even a whole series on because it certainly goes beyond the issue of mainland Chinese in Australia. Sow Keat, can I ask you, you've talked a little bit about some of the things that need to happen, you've talked about a need to be more outward looking, where do you see, I guess, the primary need for change if there's going to be a greater acceptance of mainland Chinese in Australia?

Sow Keat Tok: I say you need to not just educate people on customs and rituals and belief system or values, but also to give them those what I call social language. Social language, not just to the Chinese community, but also to Australian community so that they can communicate with each other socially. It means that you need to know about values, beliefs and everything, but on top of that, you need to know how to coexist with each other and live with each other, about being part of this bigger community, rather than just something like you are Chinese and I'm Australian, or you are Malaysian or et cetera, et cetera. It's the social language that we need to get people to learn.

Ali Moore: Sow Keat, given the challenges, does it surprise you that the number of mainland Chinese immigrants has grown so rapidly? Certainly Qiuping gave us a number of statistics about the number of people who feel that they have been discriminated against, and yet we're not seeing that reflected in a decline in the number of mainland Chinese wishing to make Australia their home.

Sow Keat Tok: Well, whether or not that will change, it remains to be seen. I mean, COVID is really changing the game at the moment, as well as the deteriorating relationship between Australia and China. But that being said, I think Chinese have a history of overseas migration. My family came from Southern part of China to Singapore back during the turn of the 20th century. We have a history of it.

If you look far back into history, the Chinese have been overseas for thousands of years, it's not just confined to mainland China. And whether or not it is to seek better life, whether or not it's for economic reasons, for political reason or whatever reasons, everyone has a different reason to go out. For me, I decided to come to Australia from Singapore, not because I love Australia wholeheartedly, it's not so much about that, but whether or not I have a job here.

I have a story that I can tell. And I think all this story needs to be told. It's not just my story, but each and every migrant's story should be heard. That is the point. As much as Australia is pushing some away, there are things that are pulling migrants into Australia and including mainland Chinese migrants. So I don't think you can really draw a direct correlation over that.

Ali Moore: Qiuping, are you optimistic about the future for mainland Chinese communities in Australia? Are you an optimist?

Qiuping Pan: I think I'm an optimist. And I think it's a learning process for both sides, for both Chinese and for the broader Australian community. And I think as long as we take up the right attitude and keep open minded, I think we can arrive at a better place. The important thing is that we should note that over conversations and understanding of each other being dominated or significantly shaped by the current media narratives which focus on less important differences between different groups of people.

But I think that more importantly we should focus on the common ground that we have. So that is like for everyone in Australia, I think we all wish Australia to be a safe and equal place for all of us to live in and for our future generations as well. And if we stand firmly upon this common ground and we learn the social language that Sow Keat mentions and master the civic skills that we can have to deeper mutual understanding, I think we can build up a better society for us and our future generations through living.

Ali Moore: Sow Keat, are you an optimist?

Sow Keat Tok: I think so. I think Australia has proven itself over time to be open to different cultures. The Chinese is not the only group that has migrated to Australia. The Italians, the Greeks, the Japanese, Asians in general, they have all found new life here in Australia and the society has embraced them. Some of them found themselves in a good position socially or economically, even some went into politics. And I think Australia can definitely be better over time by showing its big heart all throughout these decades. I'm actually quite optimistic about that.

Ali Moore: That's a nice place to end our conversation. Sow Keat and Qiuping, thank you so much for talking to Ear to Asia.

Sow Keat Tok: Thank you Ali.

Qiuping Pan: Thank you Ali.

Ali Moore: Our guests have been Dr. Sow Keat Tok and Dr. Qiuping Pan from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia

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Ali Moore:

And if you like the show, please rate and review it on Apple Podcasts. Every positive review helps new listeners find the show. And please help us by spreading the word on social media. This episode was recorded on the 25th of January 2021 with all participants safely ensconced in their own homes. Producers were Kelvin Param and Eric van Bommel of profactual.com. Ear to Asia is licenced under Creative Commons, copyright 2021, The University of Melbourne. I'm Ali Moore, thanks for your company.