

**Perception and Politics:
Chinese South Africans in 1980 and 2008**

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Abstract

In 2008, Chinese South Africans achieved inclusion in the efforts of the government's Black Economic Empowerment policy, following their inclusion was criticism accusing the Chinese of being adjacent to whiteness and therefore undeserving of their victory. This work examines past perceptions of Chinese South Africans to track the shape of the discourse and the later perceptions of Chinese South Africans by their critics in the late 2000s. In engaging with newspapers of 1980 and 1981, non-Chinese can be seen to place Chinese South Africans in an invidious space between apartheid era categorizations of "white" and "non-white." The conversation on Chinese South African classification intersects in 1980 with an increase in economic ties between the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of China. Association with Japanese through visual similitude in the eyes of non-Chinese, and several special privileges held by the Chinese during apartheid are seen to influence the perceptions held of Chinese South Africans, the boundaries to their perceived status, and the alterations in their status by the 21st century.

The Chinese South African community has been featured numerous times over the last half century in articles debating their place in South African society. In the years during and after apartheid, the Chinese South African community was subject to much discussion by non-Chinese as to the nature of their identity and that identity's place in a post-apartheid nation. This minor dissertation engages with the language of the discourse on Chinese South African status as it appeared in popular print media in the early 1980s and the late 2000s. Examined in detail was the relationship between perceptions towards Chinese South Africans in 1980 to those in 2008. Language used in 1980 and 2008 tracks the shifting Chinese status in relation to "white" and "non-white" categorizations and displays the role of past perceptions in defining later ones as Chinese space transformed over time. Chinese in South Africa occupied a space neither clearly white or non-white during apartheid and continued to occupy this space in the post-apartheid years. Their amorphous space and visual similarity to other peoples of East Asian descent allowed for Chinese South Africans to be depicted as having been oppressed and having benefitted from apartheid. Chinese South African space, regardless of questions on the nature of their legal classifications over the decades, has been utilized as a tool to depict them in different and opposite ways, all depending on the perspective of the wielder.

This minor dissertation displays important elements of the print discourse around Chinese South Africans and their existence between two racial categorizations at points during and after apartheid and details the way that perceived status had been utilized by those featured in print.

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Introduction

In 2008 a series of articles in the *Sunday Times* and *Independent Online* appeared featuring a debate following the decision of a South African court to include Chinese South Africans under the definition of ‘black people’ within the government’s Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) initiative.¹ Within these articles were comments by then Labour Minister Membathisi Mdladlana wherein the Chinese of South Africa were described as a scheming and “clever people.”² The National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC) believed that Chinese South Africans were taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by B-BBEE, expanding their businesses at the expense of others.³ To both Mdladlana and NAFCOC, the Chinese were benefiting from efforts made to right the wrongs of the past; these programs were not to further enrich those who had enjoyed success under apartheid. In the eyes of NAFCOC and Mdladlana, Chinese in South Africa were a wealthy, well-established people whose experience under apartheid was one of privilege, not of oppression. How did this perception come about? The research presented within this dissertation engages with newspaper articles in the English-language press that commented on Chinese South Africans in the early 1980s and in 2008 in order to address this question.

Previous works on Chinese South African history have engaged with the movements of peoples, conflicts in the legal world over status, identity construction, relations with the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and the Chinese South African experience in relation to other diaspora Chinese communities. Relatively little work, however, has focused on how Chinese South Africans were depicted in public reporting in the

¹ B-BBEE was the policy of the South African government to redress the inequalities of the apartheid era through increasing the employment levels and opportunities of those classified as previously disadvantaged peoples. The overarching goal is known as Black Economic Empowerment, but the specific implementation of the policies at the time was referred to as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment. In this work the terms BEE and B-BBEE will be used to refer to the same objective and policy implementation.

² “Confucius? Very” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), June 29, 2008: 22. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-17C66CEAC1C5D886%402454647-17C66D559D8CFD9F%4021-17C66D559D8CFD9F%40>.

³ Keith Ross, “Chinese Are Not Black: Chamber.” *Independent Online*, June 25, 2008. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/chinese-are-not-black-chamber-405752>; NAFCOC is an independent business chamber, established in 1964 with an objective to support black businesses and their development.

late apartheid period.⁴ This dissertation will engage with continuity and change in media reporting on Chinese South Africans in 1980 and 2008.

The population of Chinese origin in South Africa numbered an estimated 300,000 in 2008, with the vast majority having arrived towards the end of apartheid and in the years following the 1994 election.⁵ The population included a smaller community who had lived within South Africa for a longer period. This community of some 9,000 in 1980, and an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 by 2008, is the primary focus of this dissertation.⁶ This population traces its origin to groups arriving from southern China independently from the mid-19th century onward.⁷ These independent arrivals sought work, and once having arrived, provided a basis for future migration of relatives to South Africa.⁸

Two academics, Dr. Karen L. Harris and Dr. Yoon Jung Park have written extensively on the Chinese community, its establishment, as well as the construction of ties and identity in relation to other racial and ethnic groups. Though not the only academics to write about the Chinese South African community, their bodies of work are considerable. As their work reveals, the presence of Chinese in South Africa dates back to the 17th century.⁹ These early arrivals were subjected to opposition from white merchants who saw them as a competitor that needed to be restricted for white business to thrive.¹⁰ Harris argued that this same view of Chinese as unfair competitors to be controlled through administrative means would appear in later attitudes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹¹ An era in which Chinese and China were discussed as not

⁴ Harris and Park, among others, have noted the importance of how whites viewed their Chinese counterparts. The views expressed have been tied to legislation and argumentation around the rights of Chinese in South Africa and to the nature of their presence. Works that referenced events related to articles published around 2008 and the 1970s exist but have been done as one part of an examination engaging elsewhere in constructing an understanding of Chinese South African identity and history.

⁵ Yoon Jung Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*. (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2008), 1.; Yoon Jung Park. "Black, yellow, (honorary) white or just plain South African?: Chinese South Africans, identity and affirmative action." *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 77 (2011): 107-121.

⁶ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 1.

⁷ Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: the History of the Chinese in South Africa*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 32-33.; Park. *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*. 14-15

⁸ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 15-17.

⁹ Ibid, 11.; Tan Chee-Beng and Karen L Harris, "The Chinese in South Africa: Five Centuries, Five Trajectories." *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, (Routledge, New York, NY, 2013), 177.

¹⁰ Karen L Harris, "Anti-Sinicism: Roots in Pre-Industrial Colonial Southern Africa." *African and Asian studies* 9, no. 3 (2010), 223-224.

¹¹ Ibid, 228.

only a local economic threat, but as a civilizational opponent and threat to white supremacy.¹² Where whites and Chinese operated in similar fields, whites would seek to restrict the opportunities of their non-white counterparts. Larger waves of Chinese migration began at the start of the 20th century when Chinese laborers on fixed-term contracts were brought to South Africa by the British as a means of shoring up labor demand in the mining sector of the Transvaal, similarly to the impetus that brought many South Asians to Natal.¹³

The arrival of these Chinese laborers roused resentment in the white populace who saw the unfamiliar Chinese as competitors and a threat to white society.¹⁴ In response to the importation of almost 65,000 Chinese laborers, new legislation to limit the movement and abilities of Chinese peoples was brought into effect.¹⁵ This wave of legislation, in conjunction with other anti-Chinese legislation in what would become modern South Africa show a region unwelcoming and restrictive to the movements of the Chinese.¹⁶ For whites, all Chinese were a foreign entity whose activities were threatening. These threats came from a belief that the Chinese were not only unruly and incompatible with the desired white community, but highly competitive and capable of undermining white business and labor.¹⁷ For the white populace with an interest to maintain dominance in profitable sectors of the economy, the Chinese were a people to be restricted and scapegoated, regardless of their origins or goals.

Harris wrote about how “ethnic Chinese and their new migrant compatriots continue to live in an invidious space.”¹⁸ A space poorly defined and open to the ire of the whites and non-whites around them. From being economic competitors and undesirable non-whites who threatened society, to opportunistic immigrants seeking to enrich their established presence in

¹² Harris, “Anti-Sinicism: Roots in Pre-Industrial Colonial Southern Africa.”, 227-228.

¹³ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 12; Harris, “The Chinese in South Africa: Five Centuries, Five Trajectories.”, 1.; Karen Harris, “Indentured ‘Coolie’ labour in South Africa: The Indian and Chinese schemes in comparative perspective” *Journal of Diaspora Studies* vol 6 (2013), 96.

¹⁴ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 22; Harris, “The Chinese in South Africa: Five Centuries, Five Trajectories.”, 178; Tu. T. Huynh, “From Demand for Asiatic Labor to Importation of Indentured Chinese Labor: Race Identity in the Recruitment of Unskilled Labor for South Africa’s Gold Mining Industry, 1903–1910.” *Journal of Chinese overseas* 4, no. 1 (2008), 59-61.

¹⁵ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 13-14.; Karen L. Haris, “Private and confidential: The Chinese mine labourers and ‘unnatural crime’” *South African Historical Journal* vol 50 (November 2004)

¹⁶ Darryl Accone and Karen Harris, “A Century of Not Belonging — the Chinese in South Africa.” *At Home in the Chinese Diaspora: Memories, Identities and Belongings*, edited by Khun Eng Kuah and Andrew P. Davidson, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY, 2008), 188.; Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 14.

¹⁷ Harris, “Anti-Sinicism: Roots in Pre-Industrial Colonial Southern Africa.”, 220-221.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 187.

South Africa, Harris showed a constant othering of the Chinese as either unruly and base or an industrious and resourceful enemy. For Harris, the rhetoric used by opponents of the inclusion of Chinese within B-BBEE was disproved by the historic trend of oppressive treatment and legislation at the hands of white governance from as early as the 18th century.¹⁹ During apartheid and in the pre and post-apartheid eras, Chinese in South Africa have been subjected to efforts to restrict them, and discussed as something antithetical to the notion of South Africa.

For Harris and Park, the role of anti-Chinese legislation is central to the placement and activities of the Chinese South African community under it. In avoiding greater retaliation for resisting white anti-Chinese legislation, the Chinese South African community had been seen to make efforts to organize and maintain their status, however disadvantaged, from further reductions in rights.²⁰ Here, Chinese efforts to safeguard their position in South African society required maintaining a low-profile in order to avoid the focus of the apartheid state and possible dislocation from the rights they had then enjoyed. According to Harris, as legislation in South Africa moved towards the formal establishment of exclusive areas of settlement, the Chinese South African community devoted significant effort to the aim of retaining as much of their status as possible. This preservation of status initially saw them resist classification into other groups, in part through portraying themselves as similar to whites and as having less in common with other non-white peoples.

Harris also discussed the development of the Chinese South African physical space in the apartheid era. When the Group Areas Act was made law in 1950, areas were set aside for the racial groups to settle in exclusively, resulting in the mass expulsion of many non-whites from cities, towns, and regions many of them had resided in. The Chinese argued that their small size and difference from other non-whites meant that forcing them into a Coloured or Chinese area was unnecessary. The government itself found trouble with the miniscule size of the Chinese population, as it was so small that devoting resources towards constructing Chinese areas of settlement was impractical, but allowing the Chinese to live and work freely was a violation of apartheid's foundational tenets.²¹ Only one area for the Chinese, Kabega Park in what was then Port Elizabeth, modern Gqeberha, had any significant amount of success in development.²²

¹⁹ Karen L. Harris, "BEE-Ing Chinese in South Africa: a Legal Historic Perspective." *Fundamina: a journal of legal history* 23, no. 2 (2017), 16–17.

²⁰ Karen Harris, "'Whiteness', 'Blackness', 'Neitherness' - The South African Chinese 1885-1991: a Case Study of Identity Politics." *Historia (Three Rivers)* 47, no. 1 (2002), 122.

²¹ K L Harris. "Accepting the Group, but Not the Area': The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act." *South African Historical Journal* 40, no. 40 (1999): 191, 193.

²² Harris. "Accepting the Group, but Not the Area': The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.", 197; Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 37-38.

Chinese South Africans instead came to be subjected to a permit system, where on a case by case basis Chinese could live and work in rented property within white areas, provided they had permission from the whites living there.²³

To Harris, the careful effort to resist apartheid legislation often resulted in a tacit silence against government policy with organizations in the Chinese South African community going so far as to avoid cooperation with other non-white anti-government campaigns.²⁴ In maintaining a low profile, through presenting themselves as more palatable to the white populace, the community “pragmatically pander[ed] to . . . government policies”, seemingly making clear their desire to be portrayed as separate from the larger Indian, Black, and Coloured populations, while also leaving open the ability to press for greater civil rights in their own way.²⁵ Chinese South Africans in seeking to protect themselves from hostile legislation made the case that they were Asian, but not Asian in the same sense as Indians, whom they distanced themselves from by describing their “different historical backgrounds, cultures and patterns of life.”²⁶ Distancing themselves from other non-whites was not only done through rhetoric, but also through resistance to geographic proximity to other non-whites, as the Chinese protested Group Areas near other non-whites in early debate around the Group Areas Act.²⁷

The Chinese South African community continued its mixed approach to dealing with the South African government throughout apartheid, maintaining a low profile and occasionally vocalizing their desire to remain outside the ongoing civil rights discussions and to have their narrative dictated by no one other than themselves.²⁸ These actions show the Chinese community as willing to use whatever means possible to retain its position, even if it entailed occasionally vocalizing support for government efforts or avoiding direct involvement with anti-apartheid efforts by others.²⁹ Though as Harris notes, this did not mean the Chinese supported

²³ Harris. “‘Accepting the Group, but Not the Area’: The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.”, 196-197.

²⁴ Harris, “‘Whiteness’, ‘Blackness’, ‘Neitherness’ - The South African Chinese 1885-1991: a Case Study of Identity Politics.”, 116-117

²⁵ Ibid, 116-117.; Yoon Jung Park, “White, Honorary White, or Non-White: Apartheid Era Constructions of Chinese.” *Afro-Hispanic* review 27, no. 1 (2008), 133.; Yoon Jung Park, “State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.” *Journal of Chinese overseas* 4, no. 1 (2008), 78.

²⁶ Harris. “‘Accepting the Group, but Not the Area’: The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.”, 190.

²⁷ Harris, “‘Whiteness’, ‘Blackness’, ‘Neitherness’ - The South African Chinese 1885-1991: a Case Study of Identity Politics.”, 117.

²⁸ Harris. “‘Accepting the Group, but Not the Area’: The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.”, 189-190, 195.

²⁹ Harris. “‘Accepting the Group, but Not the Area’: The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.”, 195-196.

apartheid, but that they made an attempt to manipulate the legislation in their effort to preserve their identity and community from the aims of apartheid.³⁰

Park's works have engaged with the formation of a uniquely Chinese South African identity. She noted the methods utilized by the Chinese South African community to preserve their status and space, while leaving open their ability to work to improve it and advocate for change in spite of external and internal forces. One of the most visible external elements was legislation that defined the limits of Chinese freedoms in South Africa, requiring different things of different groups, segmenting the population and delineating differences in their relationship to the state and to one another.³¹ While not a method to enact direct legislative improvements, the effort by the Chinese to appear acceptable to whites served to preserve a sense of Chinese identity in the face of discrimination, altering certain elements to prevent a further loss of rights.³² For Park, the Chinese portrayed themselves in a more acceptable light to the white populace, not as a means of assimilating into white culture but as a means of improving their status and maintaining their own sense of identity.³³

Park argued that the Chinese South African community's sense of their heritage and the forces acting on them in their African home crafted a unique identity reflecting their unclear status in relation to other ethnicities and races.³⁴ This image played in part off of white racial stereotypes of the time towards Chinese, as well as off the belief of Chinese South Africans themselves in a connection to a kind of mythical China, what they saw as an ancient civilization with thousands of years of history and a superior culture.³⁵ The inconsistencies presented by the state's handling of the Chinese alienated them, not only from whites, but also to some degree from other non-whites more clearly defined in the structure of apartheid. Park argues that the Chinese South African community developed an imagined homeland whose traits were defined by the forces around them, and as memories of China grew increasingly distant.³⁶

This “mythologized China evoked historical consciousness, cultural continuity, social harmony, and a sense of rootedness and centeredness”, things Chinese were excluded from in

³⁰ Ibid, 193.

³¹ Park, “White, Honorary White, or Non-White: Apartheid Era Constructions of Chinese.”, 124-125

³² Ibid. 133

³³ Ibid, 126, 133.; Park. *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 124.

³⁴ Park, “State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.”, 71.; Park. *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 54-56.

³⁵ Park, “State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.”

³⁶ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 60.

the South Africa of the 19th and 20th centuries.³⁷ While a connection to a ‘real’ China existed through the lobbying efforts of the Qing dynasty and ROC on behalf of Chinese South Africans, geographic distance remained. In addition to distance, time and experience further differentiated the Chinese South African from those in Taiwan, and as younger generations without a significant reason to connect with Taiwan grew up, they became less interested in being lobbied for by a nation with different interests and no understanding of what it meant to be Chinese in South Africa.³⁸ The mythical China provided an image of an ancient and superior culture, one defiant in the face of white supremacy, something the Chinese portrayed as proof of why they should not be categorized in the same way as Black, Indians, or Coloureds.³⁹ The mythical China can be seen to have acted as a tool to preserve Chinese rights, and as a point of identity construction in a hostile environment without exclusive spaces.

Park conducted interviews with members of the Chinese South African community which provided the foundation for an examination of self-identification in the Chinese community. Park argues that as younger generations had fewer restrictions than previous generations, they felt less compelled to connect themselves to an entity they feel has little actual relation to their then current sense of self, questioning the influence of a distant China in politics beyond the distant mythologized China.⁴⁰ The role of China as a mythical point of origin changed as the place of Chinese in South Africa evolved and as the attitudes taken by the Chinese homeland towards overseas Chinese changed.⁴¹ Park’s works examine the self-identification of Chinese South Africans, describing in detail the factors that have come to define the history of self-identification, as well as its current imagined self.

This conception of the self, as with perhaps any other group, may differ from that held by an external observer. Chinese South Africans were often spoken of by non-Chinese to exist as one part of a greater hegemonic entity either through visual similitude or similarities in origins.⁴² Chinese South Africans and their counterparts from later migrations to South Africa were spoken of in 2008 as one entity. In 1980 they were considered by some to be difficult to

³⁷ Park, “State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.”, 80-83

³⁸ Ibid, 81-82.

³⁹ Ibid, 77-78, 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 82-83.

⁴¹ Ibid, 80-82.

⁴² Ross, “Chinese Are Not Black: Chamber.” *Independent Online*, June 25, 2008., *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 22; Park. “White, Honorary White, or Non-White: Apartheid Era Constructions of Chinese.”, 129.

distinguish from their Japanese counterparts.⁴³ In each case, the visual influenced the conversation around Chinese South Africans, rendering non-Chinese perceptions of Chinese South Africans to not only be of Chinese South Africans, but of other East Asians whom the Chinese South African was seen to relate to.

For Chinese South Africans, to live and work as non-whites without expansive areas under the Group Areas Act meant navigating a system of permits and permissions.⁴⁴ For Chinese South Africans, not only did that lack significant Chinese spaces, but they also lacked permanence in others.⁴⁵ Continuing to operate in white areas meant repeatedly renewing one's permit, ensuring a reliance on white property owners and bureaucrats. For Chinese South Africans, the process of requesting permission from whites, regardless of who they were, in order to live and work alongside them was an embarrassing ordeal, and one that did not guarantee success. Studies were published in the late 1970s on the attitudes of the white populace towards Chinese South Africans. Several of these surveys were conducted by L.N. Smedley for the Human Sciences Research Council and came only a few years before series of state visits between South Africa and Taiwan.⁴⁶ Regardless of the prospects these surveys may or may not have indicated, for the Chinese, little in daily life was rooted in a secure foundation. While the permit system was alleviated in the mid-1980s through a modification of the Group Areas Acts, it had remained in place for the majority of apartheid.⁴⁷

⁴³ A A, Black, "Will we open white doors for Taiwan?" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 26, 1980: 30. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*.

⁴⁴ Park, "State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.", 73.

⁴⁵ Harris, "Accepting the group, but not the area: The South African Chinese and the Group Areas Act", 197.

⁴⁶ Though I have not engaged directly with these works due to difficulties in acquiring them, for further information on the specifics of white attitudes towards Chinese South Africans in the late 1970s see: Linda N. Smedley and the Institute for Sociological Demographic and Criminological Research (Human Sciences Research Council). 1979. *Multipurpose Survey Amongst Whites : 1978 : Attitudes of the White Population Group Towards the Chinese Minority Group : A Follow-Up Study*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council; Smedley, L. N., and Dirk Cornelis Groenewald. *The Chinese Community in South Africa*. Pretoria: Institute for Sociological, Demographic and Criminological Research, 1976.

⁴⁷ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 38-39.; Harris. "Accepting the Group, but Not the Area': The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.", 197-198.

In examining Chinese migrants to South Africa who arrived in the years following 1980, it is noted that the Taiwanese Chinese community in South Africa had declined by 2010 to some “6,000 . . . down from a high of 30,000” in the early 1990s, with the mainland Chinese community ranging from “200,000 to over 350,000” by 2010.⁴⁸ Tu T Huynh, Park, and Anna Ying Chen divided migration to South Africa into two periods, pre-2000 and post-2000. Pre-2000 Chinese were said to be “middle managers and professionals” of whom the majority then entered “into import, retail and wholesale trading as well as manufacturing of consumer products”, with post-2000 Chinese being described as mostly “small traders and peasants” with less financial resources at their disposal.⁴⁹

The number of arrivals following the year 2000 dwarfed the Chinese South African community in size. Many of these later arrivals are shown to have had limited resources and had migrated due to hardships at home. Park made the case that the idea of a concerted Chinese effort to dominate the continent through migration obfuscated internal diversity of these migrants, and was not only unfounded, but countered by the very Chinese who had arrived in Africa in the years prior to the article’s publication date. While not discounting the influence of a rising China, Park did counter the notions of Chinese people as part of a grand scheme of domination, displaying many of the latest arrivals instead to be migrants that construct networks and expand the idea of not only the Global South but also form “new meanings and ways of being Chinese.”⁵⁰ Park’s look at the character of all Chinese in South Africa made the case that the experiences of Chinese South Africans and their later counterparts were, while of a similar origin, each unique and subject to the contexts of their own situations as well as those of South Africa at their respective times.

For Chinese South Africans in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, their position in society was strongly tied to perceptions of foreignness, as well as an inability or refusal on the part of the broader society to discern between peoples of similar origin. In the early 21st century, Chinese South Africans were seen as a foreign entity, much as had Chinese laborers in the early 20th century.

While Chinese South Africans and their fellow Chinese were strictly limited from their arrival and well into the 20th century, Japanese in South Africa were not. From 1960 onward,

⁴⁸ T Huynh, Tu, Jung Park, Yoon and Anna Ying Chen, “Faces of China: New Chinese Migrants in South Africa, 1980s to Present.” *African and Asian studies* 9, no. 3 (2010), 289, 294.; Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 166.

⁴⁹ Huynh et al, “Faces of China: New Chinese Migrants in South Africa, 1980s to Present.”, 289-290.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 289, 294.

Japanese were granted many of the rights reserved for whites, and gained what would be referred to as honorary white status, upsetting the Chinese and proponents of strict apartheid.⁵¹ For the Japanese, their reception of honorary white status can be seen to stem not only from important trade relations between Japan and South Africa, but from population dynamics as well.⁵² While the Chinese South African community was only around 9,000 people, the Japanese community was significantly smaller.⁵³ The trade benefits were considerable, and the risk posed by the Japanese population was deemed negligible, as most were foreign visitors aside from a few families.⁵⁴ However, as many South Africans could not tell the difference between either the Chinese or the Japanese, this imbalance in status would impact Chinese South Africans and how others thought of them.

As noted by Park, a Chinese community from Taiwan existed in South Africa and had reduced in size following the end of apartheid and the recognition of the PRC over Taiwan. The factors contributing to this group's existence in South Africa can be seen to have been the development of trade relations between Taiwan and South Africa in the 1980s. Taiwan and South Africa were two increasingly isolated states at this point in history. For each state there were various factors that made further engagement an appealing choice.

In 1980, South Africa was a nation concerned with domestic stability, as economic and social problems had been growing. South Africa had experienced economic difficulties stemming from “policies developed under apartheid, including the creation of . . . homelands, influx control, [a] migrant labour system and [a] draconian policing of migrants.”⁵⁵ Attempts were made to incentivize the relocation of factories to regions near the homelands, to take advantage of cheap labor while also alleviating unemployment.⁵⁶ To facilitate this, the government disincentivized manufacturing investment in metropolitan areas, hoping that the uptake in rural regions and near the homelands would be the solution to the economic problems of the time.

⁵¹ Meyu Yamamoto ascribed the origin of the term to the Japanese media, however, this term was used within South Africa by 1980 to describe the status enjoyed by Japanese in the country. See Yamamoto, Meyu. “Honorary or Honorable?: a Study of Japanese Residents in South Africa During Apartheid Era with Special Reference to Their Experiences and Understanding of Their Status in the White-Dominant Society”. M.Soc.Sc. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2007.

⁵² Masako Osada, “Japanese-South African Relations During the Apartheid Era.” In *Japan and South Africa in a Globalising World*, 1st ed. (Routledge 2003), 49.

⁵³ Harris, “‘Whiteness’, ‘Blackness’, ‘Neitherness’ - The South African Chinese 1885-1991: a Case Study of Identity Politics.”, 116.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ John Pickles, and Jeff Woods, “Taiwanese Investment in South Africa.” *African affairs (London)* 88, no. 353 (1989): 515.

⁵⁶ Song-Huann Lin, “The Relations Between the Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa 1948-1998,” 2001, 150; Pickles, “Taiwanese Investment in South Africa.” 516

While some “low-skill sectors such as textiles did relocate”, others instead remained in their metropolitan locations and eschewed further expansion in production.⁵⁷ These issues continued into the 1970s, with the attempts to bolster manufacturing having failed to prove adequate in alleviating the problems of unemployment and the lack of investment. By 1980 the South African government had long been looking for means to improve its economic situation.

Taiwan had invested considerably in Africa in its attempts to curry favor with the newly independent states of the continent.⁵⁸ However, upon the recognition of the PRC as the rightful holder of the Chinese seat in the UN, Taiwan had been left increasingly isolated.⁵⁹ Though much of Africa recognized the PRC over Taiwan, South Africa persisted in voicing its favor for Taiwan over the PRC, fearing that the PRC and the USSR would compete with one another in Africa, further spreading communism on the continent.⁶⁰ Taiwan, now abandoned officially by many major countries, sought allies where it could for trade and security purposes. South Africa was increasingly concerned with the decolonization of Africa and the increasing pressures from other African states. Its involvement in the Angolan Civil War and the departure of European powers from the continent left South Africa isolated on the continent. Likewise, its own “suppression of black opposition provoked calls for more stringent sanctions” that saw South Africa barred from accessing key materials from international markets.⁶¹ For both Taiwan and South Africa, their security on the geopolitical stage was uncertain.

As two isolated states, Taiwan and South Africa looked for allies where they could. For South Africa, Taiwan offered a source of investment that could aid in rectifying the poor economic situation of the nation, as well as serving as an export market, and a vocal anti-communist state. To Taiwan, South Africa was a friendly nation, an industrialized country on the African continent with whom it could look to for trade in the face of growing isolation and reductions in its international trade relations. The impetus for the strengthening of ties between

⁵⁷ Pickles, “Taiwanese Investment in South Africa.” 516.; Edward M. Kirby “The Economics of Isolation, Trade and Investment: Case Studies from Taiwan & Apartheid South Africa,” 2016, 88.

⁵⁸ Lin, “The Relations Between the Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa 1948-1998,” 47-48; Pickles, “Taiwanese Investment in South Africa.” 511; San-Shiun Tseng. “The Republic of China's Foreign Policy towards Africa: The Case of ROC-RSA Relations,” 2008. 76-79.

⁵⁹ Lin, “The Relations Between the Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa 1948-1998,” 71-73; Nitesh Dullabh. “South Africa and Taiwan: A Diplomatic Dilemma Worth Noting.” International UPDATE; *The South African Institute of International Affairs*. July 1994, 1.

⁶⁰ Lin, “The Relations Between the Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa 1948-1998,” 72.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

the two came about due to matters of necessity as both had seen the pool of nations willing to work with either had shrunk dramatically over the previous decade.⁶²

From 1980, newspaper articles from the *Sunday Times* (1906-) and *Rand Daily Mail* (1902-1985) display a moment in time where the domestic and the international conversation intersect on the topic of Chinese status.⁶³ The discourse present in 2008 is engaged with through articles from the *Sunday Times*, as well as the *Independent Online* (IOL).⁶⁴ These articles allow for an analysis of the historical coverage and language used at their respective times. These resources, spread across numerous issues and publication dates, detail the reporting of the time and the discourse on Chinese status as it was presented.

How might non-Chinese South Africans have viewed not only their own domestic communities of East Asians, but also the imagined connections between the resident Chinese and their non-resident country? The imagined mythical China has been examined by Park, and both she and Harris engaged with the connections between the Chinese in South Africa and China's various incarnations. Much has been written about the perceptions held by whites towards Chinese arrivals, the hostile reactions and legislative attempts to limit the Chinese in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. What has not been so clearly engaged with is the view of non-Chinese on what the bounds of Chinese South African identity were perceived to be in the last decade of Apartheid. It is on this question that this dissertation will examine the perception of Chinese status in South Africa, its bounds, and the impact of past perceptions on later perceptual developments.

When discussing race, the terms white and non-white are used extensively in this dissertation.⁶⁵ White as a term in this dissertation is to be understood as those classified as white under Apartheid, while non-white contains all other classifications, such as Coloured, Black, and Indian, regardless of self-identification. While the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act was repealed in 1985, and Apartheid itself was dismantled after 1989, the historical classifications of race remained important in efforts to rectify Apartheid's effects, like B-BBEE, utilizing race as a

⁶² Neither nation was left without connections or friendly states at this time, but their respective geopolitical and economic situations made pursuing increased ties between them more appealing.

⁶³ Articles from the *Sunday Times* and *Rand Daily Mail* were accessed through Newbank inc's database of South African Newspapers. Access provided through UCT

⁶⁴ Articles from the *Sunday Times* were accessed through Newsbank inc's database of South African Newspapers. Access provided through UCT. IOL articles accessed through the IOL website. IOL also serves in part as the online resource for several newspapers from Gauteng, Kwazulu Natal, and the Western Cape.

⁶⁵ Geoffrey C. Bowker, and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999. 208.

means of determining eligibility.⁶⁶ The classification of race continued after Apartheid though it no longer determined the rights that individual was permitted to.

The first chapter of this work examines the intersection of international and national events in 1980. As the Prime Minister of South Africa P. W. Botha traveled to Taiwan, events in South Africa affecting Chinese South Africans would be reported and in turn, tied to the conversation around the Prime Minister's trip. In analyzing articles from this period, the question of how Chinese South Africans were perceived and were discussed by non-Chinese South Africans will be highlighted. In examining this discourse, an understanding of the kind of conceptual space between white and non-white the Chinese South Africans were seen to occupy can be mapped.

The second chapter primarily engages with articles from 2008 following the classification of Chinese South Africans as "black people" in B-BBEE legislation.⁶⁷ From the discourse on Chinese status in 2008, the manner in which the perception of Chinese South Africans of 1980 influenced the perception in 2008 and how those opposed to, and in support of, the Chinese inclusion in B-BBEE legislation perceived, and in turn portrayed, Chinese South Africans of the post-apartheid era as a privileged people. An examination is also made of how Chinese South Africans' perceived historical status was wielded by those who portrayed the Chinese inclusion in B-BBEE in a positive or negative light.

From an examination of these two periods, the ways in which perceptions of Chinese South Africans in the early 1980s – and the rhetoric used during this earlier moment -- influenced later developments becomes clear.

Chapter One: The "Twilight Zone": Public Discussion about Chinese South Africans and the Intersection of National and International Events in the early 1980s

On the 23rd of March 1980, following a visit by Taiwanese Prime Minister Sun Yun-suan to South Africa, an article by reporter Eugene Hugo titled "After 90 years . . . the Chinese begin to emerge from the twilight world" was published by the *Sunday Times*. After detailing the visit and news of a "promise that the status of the Chinese community would be improved," the

⁶⁶ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette: BROAD-BASED BLACK ECONOMIC - EMPOWERMENT ACT, 2003. Vol 463, No. 25899*. 2004. South African Government Public Documents. (Cape Town, Government Printer)

https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a53-030.pdf.

⁶⁷ Chinese Association of South Africa & co v. The Minister of Labour & co, CASE NO: 59251/2007 (High Court of South Africa June 18, 2008).

article then turned to the situation faced by that community. This discussed Chinese South African status and the impact of apartheid on their daily life. Much of the article lauded the Chinese for the success in the nation, noting their living standards as being “far higher than the majority of the non-white population groups”, as well as their increasing level of reported acceptance by whites in a survey the paper had conducted.⁶⁸ The article noted the difficult situation Chinese South Africans found themselves in, and suggested the possibility of granting Chinese further rights to improve their standing. It referred to the Chinese as being “socially and culturally much closer to whites” than to other non-whites.⁶⁹ Even as the article praised the Chinese South African community, it also presented the limits of their successes due to the system of apartheid, describing their current status as being in a “twilight zone.”⁷⁰ This “twilight zone” referred to the idea that the Chinese South African community existed between the categories of white and non-white, referred to by journalist Jacky Heyns as the result of a “gentlemen’s agreement” between white and Chinese.⁷¹

It was probably no coincidence that attention returned to the status of Chinese South Africa merely days before P.W. Botha’s departure on a reciprocal visit to Taiwan later that same year. In the week prior to his departure an article in the *Sunday Times* reported on Sung Ho, a Chinese South African businessman, who had been denied a permit to purchase two flats in Kingsburgh.⁷² The town, located in modern KwaZulu-Natal, had a luxury beachfront apartment

⁶⁸ Eugene Hugo, “After 90 years . . . the Chinese begin to emerge from the twilight world” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), March 23, 1980: 43. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F88D98E8DAC727%402444322-16F88E2F50D4008C%4042-16F88E2F50D4008C%40> The survey was conducted on whites, both on speakers of English and Afrikaans. It found a “seven per cent increase over a three-year period” though it did not provide any specific statistics for context. Another survey, not specifically applied to one racial group, found that seven out of ten respondents believed the Chinese to be on the same level of development as the whites.

⁶⁹ Hugo, “After 90 years . . . the Chinese begin to emerge from the twilight world” *Sunday Times*, March 23, 1980: 43.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jacky Heyns, “Chinese use heads” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 19, 1980: 132. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8930D03C7E293%402444532-16F893396424C29E%40131-16F893396424C29E%40>.

⁷² G R Naidoo, “Mr Ho barred from Shangri la” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 5, 1980: 14. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. [https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892BCB1D71875%402444518-16F892E264458F54%4013-16F892E264458F54%40](https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892BCB1D71875%402444518-16F892E264458F54%4013-16F892E264458F54%40;);

complex known as Shangri La. For the Chinese to own property in white areas, permission had to be granted by those living in the community. In Sung Ho's case, the town council refused to allow him to purchase two flats in the Shangri La complex. This decision was opposed by some council members, and Joan du Plooy requested that the *Sunday Times* note her displeasure. du Plooy commented that she had "come in close contact with people of Chinese origin", who were "charming and cultured."⁷³ Reporter Paul Lange's article "I wanted the flats as an investment" had a comment by Sung Ho where he stated that the flats he had applied for were not meant for his own use, but as an investment.⁷⁴ These comments seemed to serve to allay concerns towards a Chinese man living in the complex, with him expressing his interest in the flats as how others "invest in gold or shares", and presumably leaving open the option of renting the properties.⁷⁵

This episode was but a foretaste of how Botha's visit to Taiwan was to direct attention to the status of Chinese South Africans. Press coverage of Botha's trip would see a question arise of whether the Chinese South Africans would benefit from an increase in economic ties between the two states. How was this reflected in the English-language press?

While initial coverage in October of 1980 described the then current state of economic relations between Taiwan and South Africa, the topic of South Africa's own internal affairs was hinted at sparingly in these reports. In examining articles of the period from the time near P. W. Botha's departure to Taiwan with a delegation of cabinet members and press, to his return and the conclusion of the month, a visible shift in the conversation and focus on how Chinese South Africans fit into that written discourse can be found within the papers of the *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail*. These two publications had liberal political leanings, which is important to consider when examining their coverage of events within and without South Africa. Both papers were Johannesburg-based publications which tied the national understanding to international affairs.

Coverage by the *Sunday Times* of P. W. Botha's trip was limited to his initial departure to Taiwan and his subsequent return. These two focal points in their coverage existed for the reason that *Sunday Times* published only weekly, rather than daily as its fellow Johannesburg

The main article only mentioned an attempted purchase of one flat. In the same issue of the paper, a small article by reporter Paul Lange quoted Ho as having sought to buy two flats. By the conclusion of this affair, Ho had purchased two flats.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Paul Lange, "I wanted the flats as an investment" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 5, 1980: 14. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892BCB1D71875%402444518-16F892E264458F54%4013-16F892E264458F54%40>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

paper the *Rand Daily Mail*. In covering the departure of Botha to Taiwan, the *Sunday Times* printed two stories. Anna Starcke provided an overview of South African and Taiwanese relations as they stood at that point from her perspective. Starcke began by stating that the Taiwanese opinion of South Africa was high, with note taken to how isolated the nation of Taiwan had increasingly become.⁷⁶ The title and introductory elements of the article made clear the positive reputation that existed in Taiwan, with Starcke commenting that “they like South Africa and South Africans on account of what is perceived as this country’s ‘great friendship’ for the Republic of China.”⁷⁷

From a basis of Taiwan and South Africa as friends, Anna Starcke continued to develop an understanding of the relationship by primarily focusing on the high-level development in Taiwan and the economic importance of the expansion of those ties with South Africa. She noted trade totals, highlighting South Africa’s status as “the ROC’s biggest uranium supplier”, and a future where the nation could become “its biggest maize supplier and . . . within the next three years . . . the biggest coal supplier too.”⁷⁸ Economic matters were the primary focus, with elements regarding the domestic situation in either country addressed tersely. South Africa’s internal situation, likely already well known to the readership, was simply addressed from the Taiwanese position as “your many problems.”⁷⁹ Likewise, the Taiwanese dictatorship was spoken of by Starcke as one step towards an eventual democracy that would doubtlessly arise at some point in the future.⁸⁰ Starcke portrayed Taiwan as a nation with whom South Africa had a reason to continue developing ties with and as a nation who deeply understood the situation that South Africa found itself in on the international stage.

In the same October 12th issue, Political Correspondent Ivor Wilkins wrote a short article titled “Premier leaves for visit to Taiwan.” Its focus was on the expectations for the upcoming visit. Wilkins commented on the entourage accompanying the Prime Minister, the pursuit of further trade links, the current status of trade, and the details of current agreements. Wilkins provided further information regarding the number and nature of existing agreements between the two states, noting that there were “10 official agreements between South Africa and

⁷⁶ Starcke, “Somebody loves us, somebody cares” *Sunday Times*. October 12: 20

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.; Taiwan, like South Africa, was a state undergoing discussion of future democratic reform. The timelines and scope of such reforms were not clearly defined.

Taiwan”, with half of them signed in 1980 alone.⁸¹ These agreements covered maize exportation, favored status as export destinations, with four of the agreements concerning “cooperation in science, technology, and technical training, with others that permitted “Taiwanese fishing fleets to operate within South Africa’s 320-l, zone” and with two others covering “bilateral air and marine transport” ties.⁸² Wilkins also noted that the Prime Minister’s entourage would not only include members of the cabinet but also several members of the press, himself included.⁸³

When Botha returned to South Africa on the 18th of October, Wilkins authored a full-page article featured in print the next day titled “We came, we saw, they conquered.”⁸⁴ This article covered the entirety of the trip. A short introductory note on the trip that the Prime Minister described as a “grand programme . . . full of excitement” was followed by a description of cultural events where the Prime Minister engaged with “the history, culture, traditions and achievements of the Chinese.”⁸⁵ Following this was a statement from one of the government men in the Prime Minister’s entourage who was quoted as having said that “maybe in 2,000 years or so, they will give us honorary Chinese status.”⁸⁶ From here, Wilkins described the events held in honor of P. W. Botha’s visit, from military functions to dinners and traditional dances. A short conclusion regarding the matters of trade, which were central to earlier articles, was offered, stating that “existing . . . co-operation was strengthened by improved and new agreements which will materially benefit both countries.”⁸⁷ What was present in this article when compared to the coverage of P. W. Botha’s pre-departure was the attention paid to the Chinese not only abroad, but domestically.

The comment attributed to a member of Botha’s entourage who jokingly mentioned being granted “honorary Chinese status” played off the term ‘honorary white’ which applied to the small Japanese community as well as Japanese visitors to the country. The comment can be seen to highlight hypocrisies in South African conduct towards Chinese within the country as

⁸¹ Ivor Wilkins, “Premier Leaves for Visit to Taiwan.” *Sunday Times*. October 12, 1980: 42. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892D282780D2F%402444525-16F8930A975D78AB%4041-16F8930A975D78AB%40>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ivor Wilkins, “We Came, We Saw, They Conquered.” *Sunday Times*. October 19, 1980: 13. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8930D03C7E293%402444532-16F89338F71D7360%4012-16F89338F71D7360%40>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

opposed to those abroad. From the conscious inclusion of this comment one can infer that a conversation on honorary white status existed in South Africa at the time of publication and was pertinent enough to be highlighted here in relation to the Prime Minister's trip abroad.

Wilkins noted absences in the language used during the trip. "We came, we saw, they conquered" featured frequent remarks alluding to an emptiness, or perhaps hypocrisy, within the rhetoric of democracy and freedom espoused during the state visit. An example of this includes mention of how at "a press conference in Taiwan at the end of the visit . . . Mr Botha spoke of the joint goal of a 'proper democracy and freedom' . . . no questions about South Africa's internal situation were asked."⁸⁸ While Wilkins did relay the events of the trip, his inclusion of "no questions about South Africa's internal situation were asked" following the comments on "proper democracy and freedom" appeared to make a statement against South African policy. Wilkins commented on the situation the South African delegation faced when traveling to a predominantly ethnic Chinese nation while simultaneously representing a state whose small Chinese population was "currently circumscribed by racial classifications and restrictions" and whose "honorary white' status in the day-to-day social affairs of South African society . . . only added to the discomfort of the Prime Minister's party."⁸⁹

In concluding a section on cultural exchange, an event where the Prime Minister danced in traditional native attire was presented alongside the comment that "he danced vigorously with the aborigines, a mixed-race group the equivalent of South Africa's Coloured people."⁹⁰ While perhaps not the most accurate comparison, this comment by Wilkins, in tandem with his others, details an effort to draw attention to the internal problems of South Africa. The interactions of the Prime Minister with Chinese and Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, while simultaneously representing a country whose own Chinese and non-white population were subjected to discrimination under apartheid, seems to have been the target of Wilkins's specific comments.

In the same 19 October issue as "We came, we saw, they conquered", a piece by Ivor Wilkins and David Jackson titled "After Taiwan . . . Chinese may become full citizens" directly discussed the concept of improving the status of Chinese South Africans. P. W. Botha was quoted as having said that his government was "already working on a better deal for the local Chinese."⁹¹ The article proceeded to describe the restrictions that were being endured by Chinese

⁸⁸ Wilkins, "We Came, We Saw, They Conquered." *Sunday Times*. October 19, 1980: 13.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ivor Wilkins, and David Jackson, "After Taiwan . . . Chinese may become full citizens." *Sunday Times*. October 19, 1980: 19. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document->

South Africans. Mentioned was the lack of representation in government and an existence in society separate from whites due to the “provisions of the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts”, as well the requirement for consent from white neighbors before living in any areas demarcated for white residence.⁹² The article further described the agreements signed between South Africa and Taiwan, as well as P. W. Botha’s hopes for future cooperation with Taiwan. However, it was Botha’s comment on possible changes in Chinese South African status that formed the basis for the title of the article. As evidenced by Wilkins’s other articles, the poor status of Chinese South Africans and the possibility of change in that status was of importance in his perspective.

When P. W. Botha returned to South Africa it was reported that before and after his trip to Taiwan, members of his cabinet had been concerned of the impact that the refusal of Sung Ho’s permit by the Kingsburgh council could have on international relations. Upon their return from Taiwan, Pik Botha, the minister of Foreign Affairs and Information, “telephoned the mayor of the town . . . to put to him the wider implications of the council’s decision.”⁹³ One can see in this the efforts initially being made to shift treatment of Chinese in South Africa, while this effort was not made for all Chinese South Africans, it is important to note that the basis for Pik Botha’s call was the “wider implications of the council’s decision”, alluding to the possible international relations hit should Taiwanese believe South Africa to be hostile to all Chinese people. Just as mentioned in “What they really want in Chinatown” the international ties and economic matters of trade and investment would come to define the actions taken to alter the perception of Chinese in South Africa, as well as to alter South Africa’s treatment of its Chinese.⁹⁴

The discussion of a new deal for the Chinese South Africans and the article regarding a phone call to the mayor of Kingsburgh all portrayed an effort to shift the perceptions of Chinese standing within South Africa. Notably, the main factors expressed were the importance of how the treatment of Chinese in South Africa would appear internationally, especially concerning the nation of Taiwan with whom South Africa sought to expand economic ties and encourage

view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8930D03C7E293%402444532-16F89338F71D7360%4012-16F89338F71D7360%40.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ G R Naidoo, “Common Sense” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), November 2, 1980: 19. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8934ACBE301E4%402444546-16F89383B80268A1%4018-16F89383B80268A1%40>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.; Sparg, “What they really want in Chinatown” *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

further investments. In support of this, Pik Botha was said to have informed the mayor of Kingsburgh of the wider implications of the refusal if not reversed.⁹⁵ Likewise, P. W. Botha's mention of a new deal for Chinese signified the importance of Chinese South Africans to Taiwanese - South African relations. There was an effort here to improve how Taiwan saw the treatment of Chinese South Africans, as Taiwanese money and eyes were what was emphasized in both Pik Botha's call and the timing of P. W. Botha's talk of a new deal, rather than the controversies within South Africa or opposition to apartheid.

This effort by the state and political parties was noted in a comment by Vause Raw, head of the NRP, in which he discussed the initial refusal of Sung Ho with Pik Botha. Raw stated he discussed the matter because he "was worried about the effect the issue could have on South Africa's international relations."⁹⁶ Here, the stated cause of concern for those with power was the impact that the events in Kingsburgh could have. It is important to note however, that while this is what Raw says was his concern and cause for discussing the matter with Pik Botha, it could be seen as a matter of framing the conversation a certain way. Raw may well have opposed it on moral or other grounds, but utilized the ongoing conversation on Chinese South Africans, international trade, and the Prime Minister's recent trip in his effort to impact change on the initial decision of the Kingsburgh Town Council.

The status of Chinese South Africans received even further ventilation following an episode that coincided with Botha's return from Taiwan. On the 19th of October 1980, two children were barred from entry into their local community pool in the Mayfair suburb of Johannesburg.⁹⁷ These two children, Avril and Kingung, 6 and 11 years old respectively, were barred because of their racial status. A staff reporter with the *Rand Daily Mail* reported on the effort of the children's father, Mawing Manning, to gain entry for his children. Manning's efforts were met with refusal by the superintendent Mr. Lambrecht who reportedly said "he was 'not interested in [Mawing Manning's] identity document classifying him as a Chinese person."⁹⁸ For Manning, the refusal did not mean his children would be unable to find somewhere to swim, as

⁹⁵ G R Naidoo, "Common Sense" *Sunday Times*, November 2, 1980: 19

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "Chinese children barred from pool" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 20, 1980: 1. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A135DEF57238F5FC5%40WHNPX-15B86EB2DA04B0B8%402444533-15B81CBF76F26030%401-15B81CBF76F26030%40>.

⁹⁸ "Chinese children barred from pool" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 20, 1980: 1.

Manning could take them to his brother's place.⁹⁹ He did however strongly oppose the principle of the refusal, commenting that "It is natural for children to want to play with other children"¹⁰⁰

Members of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) were also featured in the article. A councilor of the party, Alex Jaffe, noted that he "believed that Chinese people were allowed to use 'white amenities'", and that the exclusion of the two children was contradictory to regular procedure.¹⁰¹ The article contained comments by a member of the PFP, Sam Moss, who stated that his party's policy was that "public amenities paid for with public money should be available to all the public" and that he was "more horrified than usual in light of the Prime Minister having just returned from Taiwan."¹⁰² The comments by a member of the PFP would not be a once off in *Rand Daily Mail* coverage, as more comments would be featured in the paper over the following days.

This incident at the Mayfair pool was featured frequently in the *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail* and was inseparable from coverage of the recent trip by P. W. Botha that had concluded the prior day. The quotation by Sam Moss of the Progressive Federal Party highlighted the connections that were being drawn between the two events. In the weeks following this initial October 20th coverage of the Mayfair pool incident, more articles saw the Prime Minister's recent trip as less tied to his talk of ostracized nations working together but rather to the matter of South Africa's "many problems."¹⁰³

The *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail* both covered the events of the trip to Taiwan and the Mayfair controversy that coincided with coverage of the Prime Minister's return. Between these two however, the *Rand Daily Mail* engaged with discussion of upcoming municipal elections and how the events in Mayfair were being discussed by the community as well as by political parties. This election element influenced the shape of the conversation in print, as large portions of the overall coverage tied the Chinese South African situation to the matter of municipal elections and not towards the matters of the Chinese community's perspective. Articles such as "Concern over pool remarks", "Storm in a swimming pool", and "PFP protests over Chinese pool ban" all engaged with the PFP as central, rather than the situation faced by Chinese South Africans.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Starcke, "Somebody loves us, somebody cares" *Sunday Times*. October 12: 20.

¹⁰⁴ "Concern over pool remarks" *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 23, 1980: 2.; Sean O'Connor, "Storm in a swimming pool." *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg, South

Notable was the presence of political party comments in the *Rand Daily Mail* coverage of events. While the *Sunday Times* discussed the Mayfair and Kingsburgh controversies, the *Rand Daily Mail* repeatedly tied events to the comments of political parties.¹⁰⁵ Across several articles, comments by the PFP and the NRP were present and the events in Mayfair were discussed primarily as part of a wider effort by these parties to change the status quo and set themselves apart from the NP. One half page article spent few sentences on the specifics of the Mayfair controversy before focusing the rest of the article to a discussion of why the PFP objected to what occurred there. These objections were seemingly presented as a means of segueing into a larger discussion of the PFP and what they offered voters. These comparisons between the PFP and the NP took center-stage in *Rand Daily Mail* coverage, displacing Chinese South Africans as a focus of the conversation.

A political element to coverage was not limited to the *Rand Daily Mail*. In the *Sunday Times*, the President's Council appeared often as a topic where Chinese South African efforts and South African politics appeared together. By 1980, the NP sought reforms to the systems of governance in South Africa, namely with the creation of separate houses in parliament for whites and non-whites, the latter of whom had previously been excluded. This process had taken the shape of appointments to an advisory body, known as the President's Council, that would recommend reforms upon its eventual establishment in 1981.¹⁰⁶ However, admission to the council was to be limited to those "of the White, Coloured, Indian or Chinese population group."¹⁰⁷ In 1980, non-white and non-Black community leaders expressed concern over the

Africa), October 24, 1980: 13. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. [https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A135DEF57238F5FC5%40WHNPX-15B86EBCF28891B8%402444536-15B81CC012088808%401-15B81CC012088808%40](https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A135DEF57238F5FC5%40WHNPX-15B86EBCF28891B8%402444536-15B81CC012088808%401-15B81CC012088808%40;).; Sean O'Connor, "PFP protests over pool ban." *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 21, 1980: 5. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A135DEF57238F5FC5%40WHNPX-15B86EB4C7676A90%402444534-15B81CBF90D40B60%404-15B81CBF90D40B60%40>.

¹⁰⁵ O'Connor, "Storm in a swimming pool." *Rand Daily Mail*, October 24, 1980: 13; "Concern over pool remarks" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 23, 1980: 2. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*.; "Chinese children barred from pool" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 20, 1980: 1

¹⁰⁶ David Welsh. "CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICA." *African affairs* (London) 83, no. 331 (1984): 147.

¹⁰⁷ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette: No. 101 of 1980 Republic of South Africa Constitution Fifth Amendment Act, 1980*. Vol 182, No. 7152. 1980. Sabinet, Retrospective Government Gazettes, (Cape Town, Government Printer)

exclusion of Black involvement in the Council and discussions of possible reform.¹⁰⁸ From reporting, it appeared as though the Chinese South African response to this body was to refuse participation not only in protest of the exclusion of Black Africans, but also over their opinion on what participation in reform by the NP meant for the push for full rights as South Africans.¹⁰⁹ Concerns over how to respond to the issue of involvement with reform and the presentation of a unified front would lead to the creation of the Chinese Association of South Africa the following year.¹¹⁰

These concerns over the shape of reform and the future South Africa as envisioned by P.W Botha's reform push are important to place in an examination of race in South Africa. While political representation had been dominated by the white minority, it is important to understand that the Black African populace was not considered as a part of South Africa, but rather as eventually belonging to separate black homelands. The end goal for these homelands in the eyes of the South African government was partial independence from South Africa, and with Black representation outside of white South Africa.¹¹¹ These homelands also acted as manpower reserves, using Black labor for industry while denying them citizenship rights in South Africa.¹¹² In this dynamic between white and Black, participation in the South African political system by

¹⁰⁸ Norman West, "Convention needed — PC MAN" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), February 15, 1981: 117. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8CAFF2AC904F8%402444651-16F8CB2F101299C6%40116-16F8CB2F101299C6%40;> Ivor Wilkins. "Direct Cabinet line for President's men." *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 12, 1980: 44. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. [https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892D282780D2F%402444525-16F8930A9B5907BE%4043-16F8930A9B5907BE%40.](https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892D282780D2F%402444525-16F8930A9B5907BE%4043-16F8930A9B5907BE%40)

¹⁰⁹ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 50.; "Chinese MP?" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 5, 1980: 27. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892BCB1D71875%402444518-16F892E26FCB19C8%4026-16F892E26FCB19C8%40;> West, "Convention needed — PC MAN" *Sunday Times*, February 15, 1981: 117.; Sparg, "What they really want in Chinatown" *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

¹¹⁰ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 69.

¹¹¹ Ivor Wilkins, "Dr NO Rebels! Treurnicht defies PW plan." *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), September 21, 1980: 1. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F892015A4CFE1E%402444504-16F89234D59A56CC%400-16F89234D59A56CC%40;>

¹¹² Pickles, "Taiwanese Investment in South Africa." 515.

Coloured, Indian, and Chinese communities was limited. Botha's reforms aimed to establish a multiracial advisory body to work out how to include a political role for these groups.¹¹³

Coverage of the President's Council by the *Sunday Times* discussed the reservations held by minority communities and the opposition over the exclusion of Black Africans from reform by the ruling NP.¹¹⁴ On the other end of the political spectrum, more conservative NP members opposed the construction of a multiracial parliament, concerned that in time non-white power might grow to challenge "white self-determination."¹¹⁵ In addition to this, these members also saw the President's Council and suggestions for the involvement of non-whites in government as too much of a deviation from the apartheid aim of exclusive white rule.¹¹⁶ Minority communities expressed resistance towards the efforts of the NP, worrying about the aim of comprehensive reform. Within the Indian community, the Indian members of the council had "been spurned by the major political parties in their communities."¹¹⁷ This organizational resistance towards reform without the inclusion of the Black majority would be seen across racial lines.

The concerns of the non-white, non-Black communities continuously appeared in coverage and so too did Chinese resistance to engaging with the NP's reform efforts. The Pretoria Chinese Association had expelled Kenneth Winchiu for joining the NP's reform.¹¹⁸ Winchiu's appointment to the President's Council had been suggested to the NP not by Chinese South African organizations, but by Taiwan. For Chinese South African organizations pressing for their interests to be represented, the engagement by a foreign state into domestic issues facing the community was not wholly welcome.¹¹⁹ Likewise, members of the Chinese community did not desire to hold representation in a strictly separate political body and voter roll, voicing instead that they would rather be granted equal status and inclusion within a multiracial parliament.¹²⁰

Though these newspapers differed in their approach to discussion of domestic and international events involving Chinese individuals, their editorial domestic leanings were more inline. While the *Sunday Times* and *Rand Daily Mail* covered events at home and abroad, their

¹¹³ Wilkins, "Direct Cabinet line for President's men." *Sunday Times*, October 12, 1980: 44

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; West, "Convention needed — PC MAN" *Sunday Times*, February 15, 1981: 117.

¹¹⁵ Wilkins, "Dr NO Rebels! Treurnicht defies PW plan." *Sunday Times*, September 21, 1980: 1.; Welsh. "CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICA.", 148-49.

¹¹⁶ Welsh. "CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICA.", 148-49.

¹¹⁷ Wilkins, "Direct Cabinet line for President's men." *Sunday Times*, October 12, 1980: 44.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 65-67.

¹²⁰ "Chinese MP?" *Sunday Times*, October 5, 1980: 27. See also Park, "State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948-1994.", 80.; Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 51.

editorial voice leaned against the National Party. From the coverage by Ivor Wilkins of the *Sunday Times* into the activity of the Prime Minister dancing with the indigenous peoples of Taiwan, the joke by an entourage member about “honorary Chinese” status, and the approach when noting absences in comments made by the Prime Minister, Wilkins can be seen to have critiqued the Apartheid government. The *Rand Daily Mail* likewise frequently opposed government policy. Each paper focused on different elements of the stories, but both had similar leanings regarding Apartheid.

The October 26th issue of the *Sunday Times* featured an article by Marion Sparg titled “What they really want in Chinatown.” Marion Sparg’s piece not only described the situation of Chinese South Africans, but also dedicated a portion to the perspectives of Chinese South Africans themselves. Sparg described population totals and the controversy over the President’s Council. Sparg also reported that the council was decried by the Pretoria Chinese Association and described by one anonymous Chinese South African as a means to “bring us (Chinese South Africans) one step lower” once possible reform solidified Chinese status as non-white.¹²¹ For some Chinese South Africans, the appointment of a Chinese South African to a non-elected position was subject to suspicion that the council would provide a means to reify the separation of Chinese from whites in society. The trip by the Prime Minister, the denouncement of the President’s Council by the Pretoria Chinese Association, and the exclusion of two Chinese children from their local pool were combined in Sparg’s article as part of a look at the then-current situation faced by Chinese South Africans.

Sparg’s article featured an image of a Chinese shop in Johannesburg with a subtitle, “Johannesburg’s tiny ‘Chinatown’. A strong political stance is suddenly apparent.”¹²² This “suddenly apparent” stance contradicted earlier evidence of an active role played by Chinese South Africans in resisting the expansion of apartheid. The language used here can be seen to point to the perception of Chinese South Africans by others, namely the white author and readership, as out of the public focus. The aftermath of Botha’s trip and its coinciding with the Mayfair pool story provides a moment in which the Chinese of South Africa are connected by events intersecting internationally and nationally. Coverage converged around their status in the nation, providing a heightened focus in the print discourse around which their issues became more visible to non-Chinese, either through the importance of the events or the intersection that could have provided an avenue to broach the topic.

¹²¹ Sparg, “What they really want in Chinatown” *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

¹²² Ibid.

Sparg relayed that “Chinese leaders said . . . the children were turned away because they ‘did not look Chinese, but looked like Bantu’.”¹²³ The article continued on to state that Chinese children of “mixed marriages are treated with contempt and are accused of ‘lowering the prestige’ of the Chinese.”¹²⁴

In a nation where whites and non-whites were separated, perception was a crucial tool when concerning exceptions and permissions. Of the Chinese, Sparg stated that “no group is treated so inconsistently [sic] under South Africa’s race legislation”, it is here on the matter of group and race that another set of inconsistencies appears. The article concluded with a quote from PFP member Colin Eglin, which it incorrectly attributed to an anonymous Chinese individual, commenting that in light of the Prime Minister’s visit to Taiwan and supposed talk of a new deal, that “the Japanese got their honorary white status because of pig-iron exports. Now it seems the Chinese are to get the same thing because of uranium exports.”¹²⁵ Here the importance of trade, which was highly spoken of during the Prime Minister’s visit, and the importance that economic matters played for the Japanese, bridged the international and national coverage. While these two populations were not the same by any means, how many within South Africa could discern between the two? From comments regarding the Bantu appearance of the children in Mayfair and talk of Chinese South Africans possibly receiving a “new deal” from the government, the role of perception as a tool to shape a discourse is shown to stretch a conversation across the international and the national, and then again from the Chinese to other races and ethnicities.

In the same 26 October issue of the *Sunday Times*, a section for letters to the editor features one titled “Will we open white doors for Taiwan?”. It asked of the state where the Chinese stood in South Africa in the weeks following the Prime Minister’s trip, with the author commenting that as far as they knew, “Japanese were . . . regarded as white, but Chinese were classified as non-white”, followed up by then asking whether this was “still the case?”¹²⁶ To further their point, the author asked that if concessions or honorary white status were granted, whether “the Chinese from the Peking People’s Republic of China. . . still remain[ed] non-white?”¹²⁷ The letter concluded with a remark criticizing the government’s approach to these issues commenting that “we should know about this before our . . . friends arrive, so that we

¹²³ Sparg, “What they really want in Chinatown” *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.; “It took Sun's visit to help the Chinese” *The Argus*. (Cape Town, South Africa), October 18, 1980: 6. Sabinet - All SA Media (News Clippings). <https://discover-sabinet-co-za.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/document/7589191>

¹²⁶ Black, “Will we open white doors for Taiwan?” *Sunday Times*, October 26, 1980: 30.

¹²⁷ Black, “Will we open white doors for Taiwan?” *Sunday Times*, October 26, 1980: 30.

know which gates and doors they are allowed to go through. Perhaps the experts on the President's Council can sort that one out!"¹²⁸ If the South African government, in pursuit of economic ties, granted honorary white status to the Japanese, then would that same process grant it to the Chinese? If it did, where would the line be drawn if at all?

On the 23rd of October, the *Rand Daily Mail* published "SA Chinese appeal from twilight zone", an article by an unnamed resident correspondent.¹²⁹ This piece, like the later "What they really want in Chinatown", focused on the Chinese perspective toward their standing in South African society at the time.¹³⁰ The article began with the statement that Gordon Loyson, "a leader of the Eastern Cape's Chinese community, ha[d] urged the Government to grant the Chinese people white status to substantiate the Prime Minister's proposed 'better deal'."¹³¹ The article continued on to describe to the readership the "twilight zone" the Chinese occupied between white and non-white, noting that in Port Elizabeth the "Chinese are treated as 'white'", while in business matters the "Chinese . . . are effectively 'black'."¹³² These differences in classification and treatment in South African society were brought up repeatedly in the article, as matters of housing, education, healthcare, and business were used to display the confusing situation Chinese South Africans found themselves in.¹³³

The article "SA Chinese appeal from twilight zone" made an effort to convey how the Chinese community saw its own position. The presence of comments by Gordon Loyson showed a place in the discussion where the Chinese perspective was heard. Earlier coverage by the *Sunday Times* and *Rand Daily Mail* discussed matters of Taiwanese trade and future rights for Chinese while alluding to difficulties faced by the Chinese community. Articles like this and "What they really want in Chinatown", presented voices from the Chinese community with a focus on that community, rather than through the words of non-Chinese figures. At a time when the conversation featured a discussion of trade and investments, the presence of Chinese South African voices displayed a different view towards what was important in the discussion.

During the period the President's Council was discussed in the press and the Mayfair pool incident was reported, the conversation around Chinese status featured in letters from the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ "SA Chinese appeal from twilight zone" *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 23, 1980: 4. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A135DEF57238F5FC5%40WHNPX-15B86EBCF28891B8%402444536-15B81CC01432AF50%403-15B81CC01432AF50%40>.

¹³⁰ Sparg, "What they really want in Chinatown" *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

¹³¹ "SA Chinese appeal from twilight zone" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 23, 1980: 4.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

readership. These letters printed in the *Sunday Times* correlated to the ongoing discourse and its events, first the President's Council and Taiwanese trade, then the question of honorary white status and the Chinese existence within a vaguely enforced classification. The presence of these letters shows at least some interest from the readership in the classification inconsistencies surrounding Chinese South Africans. The previously mentioned, "Will we open white doors for Taiwan?" satirically asked whether the Government would take action on the Chinese in South Africa, and whether or not those actions would be consistent.¹³⁴ Essentially, the author questioned whether the Government would differentiate between Chinese from Taiwan, Chinese South Africans, and Chinese from the People's Republic of China.¹³⁵

A letter "Chinese MP?", printed on the 5th of October, engaged with the question of whether the President's Council was something Chinese South Africans wished to be a part of. The letter was attributed to a member of the Chinese community whose only provided identifier was that of having lived for "55 years in South Africa."¹³⁶ The author rejected the notion that Chinese should participate in the President's Council, insisting that instead of being a part of a staunchly separated house, that the Chinese should have been integrated into parliament directly, stating that "if Mr P. W. Botha is sincere in making changes . . . he should find a way for us to elect a representative."¹³⁷ Here, as with "What they really want in Chinatown", the opinion of the Chinese community towards engagement with P. W. Botha's administration on the President's Council was that of opposition. This resistance towards being further removed from their placement between white and non-white showed the Chinese community's perspective on their status, seeing it to exist in a tenuous state.

The *Rand Daily Mail* featured a letter deriding comments that had been made by P. W. Botha's wife in reference to the recent trip. The letter was attributed to Francesco the Clown and was presented under the title "Oriental comedy scripts." Citing the then recent headlines regarding the Mayfair story, Francesco said that "these headlines are enough to make my comedy scripts look ridiculously silly by comparison."¹³⁸ The letter proceeded to quote P. W. Botha's wife Elize's comments about how "courteous, obliging and polite" the Chinese were during their trip

¹³⁴ Black, "Will we open white doors for Taiwan?" *Sunday Times*, October 26, 1980: 30.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ "Chinese MP?" *Sunday Times*, October 5, 1980: 27.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Francesco the Clown, "Oriental comedy scripts" *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg, South Africa), October 31, 1980: 14. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A135DEF57238F5FC5%40WHNPX-15B86EDCD8EB41D8%402444544-15B81CC5380D49F8%4013-15B81CC5380D49F8%40>.

to Taiwan.¹³⁹ Francesco concludes asking what her thoughts might be towards the departments within South African that ensured that Chinese South Africans remained disenfranchised and subjected to a confusing state of existence within the structure of the Group Areas Act.¹⁴⁰ Francesco's comments show a degree of public interest in not only reading the recent coverage of the Prime Minister's trip, but also to engage with what they might have seen as hypocrisies evident in rhetoric and treatment towards South Africa's own Chinese community.

As we have seen, print discourse evolved in tandem with events that occurred nationally, internationally, and with the increasing temporal distance from the intersection of these events coverage continued to change. The initial central role in the discourse first transitioned from economic relations on the geopolitical stage to that of South Africa's domestic race relations. The center of the conversation shifted within the month, but the space outlined in the various articles and letters printed after P. W. Botha's return were defined in part by the conversation established prior to the events in Mayfair. In the following months, the Mayfair controversy was not mentioned again by the *Sunday Times* except for an end-of-year retrospective in the December 28th issue. Nor was there further commentary on the Kingsburgh refusal of Ho's attempt to purchase flats developed further beyond a report on the 14 of December wherein it was reported by G R Naidoo that "Mr Sung Ho . . . has at last bought his two apartments."¹⁴¹ For the *Sunday Times*, coverage of the Taiwan trip and most subsequent discussion of internal Chinese standing in society was contained to the months of October and November, with most of its content on the matter limited to October alone, with only a small number of articles placed in November and December.

The trend of declining coverage in the *Sunday Times* continued through into January of the following year. In January of 1981 there was almost no mention of domestic matters that focused solely on Chinese South Africans and only a few mentions of Taiwan as an important trading partner in articles by reporter Elizabeth Rouse.¹⁴² This quick drop in coverage saw only

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ G R Naidoo, "Its ho! ho! ho! as Mr Ho buys his flats" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), December 14, 1980: 63. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8944B1DDC53D8%402444588-16F8948C57515A75%4062-16F8948C57515A75%40>.

¹⁴² Elizabeth Rouse, "SA highly rated in investment and exports" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), January 11, 1981: 46. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8C97CD83BA9A4%402444616-16F8C9B4816CB738%4045-16F8C9B4816CB738%40;>

rare mentions on the topics that were prevalent only months earlier. After October 1980, Chinese South Africans appeared only in reference to the discussion of the President's Council and the conversation around separate voter rolls, as well as the occasional mention in other articles. These other articles placed Chinese South Africans as the focus but did not explicitly tie their coverage into part of a wider discussion along a thread of immediately related events, as had been done during discussions of "honorary white" status in October of 1980.¹⁴³

In an article from the 15th of February 1981, by Norman West, titled "Convention Needed - PC Man", Chinese South Africans were mentioned in tandem with Indians and Coloureds. As the conversation around the construction of a President's Council entailed the inclusion of non-white minority groups into government, non-white groups are mentioned but rarely as singular groups. A Mrs. Elizabeth Rose was quoted as having believed that "the President's Council [was] 'one small step for whites . . . and one giant step for the coloured, Asian and Chinese communit[ies] of South Africa.'" and here, much like in other articles about the President's Council, Chinese were discussed as a part of a greater non-white community, not on their own.¹⁴⁴ Of note in this quote, however, were the differences in the opinion expressed by Elizabeth Rose and the Chinese Communities towards the President's Council, one positive and the other negative.

By the beginning of 1981 coverage of Chinese South Africans reverted to the pattern seen prior to October 1980. One article specifically focusing on an issue regarding Chinese South Africans did appear in April of 1981. The article by Bevis Fairbrother, titled "Closed: The shop on the corner can't keep its permit", described the closure of a Chinese-owned shop in Port Elizabeth following the refusal of their application for a shopkeeper's permit.¹⁴⁵ The shop, having been built before the neighborhood of Fairview Estate was zoned for whites, was said to be popular in the community before its closure. B van der Vyver, the Deputy Director-General

Elizabeth Rouse, Exports, Imports are down" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), March 8, 1981: 80. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8CC91F9FAB9E3%402444672-16F8CCC7B06E8977%4079-16F8CCC7B06E8977%40>.

¹⁴³ Similarly to coverage on Chinese South Africans following the visit of Taiwanese Prime Minister Sun Yun-suan in March of 1980, coverage fell off without other high profile events to explicitly tie it to. It would not be until P. W. Botha's trip to Taiwan that same year that coverage would again arise and intersect national and international events.

¹⁴⁴ West, "Convention needed — PC MAN" *Sunday Times*, February 15, 1981: 117

¹⁴⁵ Bevis Fairbrother, "The shop on the corner can't keep its permit" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), April 12, 1981: 23. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8>.

of the Department of Community Development, was reached for comment but refused to do so. While this article engaged with a specific instance of Chinese South African grievances towards their status in South African society, and the struggle around maintaining a store established before a rezoning to exclude non-whites, this article did not visibly place itself in close relation to the discourse shaped in October of the previous year. Henceforth, the most common mentions of things Chinese related were occasional references to the developing trade relations between South Africa and Taiwan, news about the PRC, and advertisements for acupuncture and home decor.¹⁴⁶

Another article whose approach to the topic of Chinese South Africans did not directly tie to the conversation threads found in October of 1980 was published on the 15th of February 1981. Titled, “Garage bed for Indian evicted from his ‘Chinese’ sister’s home”, authored by Boeti Eshak, the article described the situation of Ballen Verdappen, an Indian man who was evicted from a home located in Claremont, a white area. Verdappen’s half-sister was allowed to live there due to her classification as Chinese, but Verdappen was classified as fully Indian and therefore was made to relocate under duress.¹⁴⁷ Author Boeti Eshak commented on the circumstances that led to Verdappen being expelled from Claremont and the issues around his family’s classification. Eshak noted that “Mr Verdappen’s parents [were] both Indian. But when his father died, his mother remarried,” this new marriage was to a Chinese man, and the subsequent children were classified as Chinese, not Indian.¹⁴⁸ In this situation, his mother, father, and half-siblings were allowed to live in Claremont, but not Mr. Verdappen.

The amount of coverage in the months following October 1980 correlated to the decreasing coverage about Taiwan and South Africa. The presence and topics of the letters to the editor in October 1980 showed a conversation around Chinese South African status in South Africa at a point where South Africa, Taiwan, and Chinese South Africans intersected. The coverage of the Prime Minister’s trip and the controversies in Kingsburgh and Mayfair formed a place in which the domestic and the international intersected. This domestic and international

¹⁴⁶ For examples of advertisements for acupuncture, home decor, etc, see: “Chinese Acupuncturist” *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg, South Africa), December 23, 1981: 14. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*; “Auction: Antique Furniture” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), November 1, 1981: 85. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*;

¹⁴⁷ Boeti Eshak, “Garage bed for Indian evicted from his ‘Chinese’ sister’s home” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), February 15, 1981: 13. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-16F8CAFF2AC904F8%402444651-16F8CB2EB24D7358%4012-16F8CB2EB24D7358%40>.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

intersection provided a point in which the conversation of honorary-white status could be held. International trade had seen the granting of honorary-white status to the Japanese in South Africa, and now the conditions existed for that conversation to occur. These conditions can be seen to provide ground for the evolution of the print discourse from matters of trade to those of domestic concerns, namely those pertaining to Chinese South Africans occupation of an invidious space.

The letters to the editor found in October 1980 evidenced an involvement in this discussion beyond the editorial staff of the *Sunday Times*. The bounds to the discussion expand outward include the paper's readership. Coverage of P. W. Botha's trip was limited primarily to comments by the state and by the members of the press brought with the Prime Minister's entourage to Taiwan. Upon their return and the publication of their coverage, the conversation was limited to the comments of reporters. Comments like those of Ivor Wilkins targeted perceived shortcomings in the inconsistencies in conduct between the rhetoric expressed during the Taiwan trip and the Government at home in South Africa. Upon the Prime Minister's return and the events in Mayfair, now coinciding with ongoing discussion of the President's Council, these events engaged in their own ways with the domestic conversation on Chinese status.

The Mayfair pool story and the difficulty of Sung Ho to purchase flats in Kingsburgh engaged directly with the domestic troubles faced by Chinese in South Africa. The refusal of two children from accessing their community pool and the unclear government stance towards Chinese usage of white amenities displayed the inconsistencies that defined the "twilight zone" from which the Chinese operated.¹⁴⁹ The rejection of Sung Ho's attempt to purchase flats in the Shangri La apartments in Kingsburgh presented the uneasy requirement of white approval that Chinese faced when attempting to purchase property. These events occurring within the same month as the Prime Minister's trip as well as within the wider context of increasing economic ties to Taiwan and the controversies surrounding the President's Council, all contribute to bringing the concerns of the Chinese community to the forefront of print coverage.

The combination of these events occurring in quick succession tied their coverage together. The international and the national connected visibly to form a discourse in print on the uncertain status of Chinese, the rhetoric of the South African government, and the Government's vague promises of a "new deal" for the Chinese. The events in Mayfair and Kingsburgh found themselves referenced in the discussion of honorary status, and honorary white status appeared in the conversation following the Prime Minister's trip to Taiwan.¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁴⁹ "SA Chinese appeal from twilight zone" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 23, 1980: 4.

¹⁵⁰ Sparg, "What they really want in Chinatown" *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

Prime Minister's trip, supposed upcoming deal, negative reaction towards the President's Council by Chinese South Africans organizations, and repeated troubles owing to an undefined place in society, situated the Chinese at the heart of a conversation that encompassed the national and the international.

Chapter Two: Chinese South Africans and the Debate on their relationship to Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment

In the decade following the events of 1980, the system of apartheid would come to an end in South Africa and with it the systems of designated group areas and the correspondence of rights to racial classification¹⁵¹. And from 1994 onward, so too would the majority rule of the NP cease following the ascension of the African National Congress (ANC) to state power in the Government of National Unity (GNU).¹⁵² Yet the dynamics of power and place of the apartheid era lived on in a variety of ways. For Chinese South Africans, the “twilight zone” of the 1980s would muddy their experience in the post-apartheid period.

Despite a documented history of Chinese oppression in South Africa, the South African government prior to 2008 had repeatedly expressed the view that the Chinese held an elevated status over other non-whites. Statements by elements of the government held that not only were Chinese South Africans “never discriminated against consistently”, but that their “degree of suffering” was what set them outside the categorization of “previously disadvantaged.”¹⁵³ Such a position had material consequences. In the B-BBEE Act of 2003, “black people” was defined as a “‘generic term’ meaning Africans, Coloureds and Indians.” Would and should B-BBEE apply to Chinese South Africans?

Views of the kind expressed by some within the government reflected a hangover from the past. Having received concessions allowing for greater mobility during apartheid, the Chinese were seen by many others in South Africa as to have occupied a higher position in South African society than other non-whites. These concessions and the abilities afforded by them, influenced perceptions of the Chinese South African community in two ways. They placed Chinese South Africans in a “twilight zone”, a space between white and non-white, and they also created the perception of Chinese adjacency to honorary white status as being synonymous with holding honorary white status.¹⁵⁴ The conversation on Chinese standing in the early 1980s often engaged with the inconsistencies faced by the Chinese and the unequal statuses enjoyed by the Chinese

¹⁵¹ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette: Population Registration Act Repeal Act. Vol 312, No. 13342*. 1991. Sabinet, Retrospective Government Gazettes. (Cape Town, Government Printer)

¹⁵² “South African Parliament Votes to Repeal the Legal Framework of Apartheid: 17 June 1991.” South African History Online, March 16, 2011. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/south-african-parliament-votes-repeal-legal-framework-apartheid#:~:text=The%20vote%20on%2017%20June,afforded%20to%20them%20under%20Apartheid.;> Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette: Population Registration Act Repeal Act. Vol 312, No. 13342*. 1991. Sabinet, Retrospective Government Gazettes. (Cape Town, Government Printer)

¹⁵³ Harris, “BEE-Ing Chinese in South Africa: a Legal Historic Perspective.”, 4-5.

¹⁵⁴ “SA Chinese appeal from twilight zone” *Rand Daily Mail*, October 23, 1980: 4.

and Japanese in South Africa. In a discussion of what the Chinese lacked in comparison to the Japanese, the matter of what Chinese held over other non-whites was invariably brought into the discourse.¹⁵⁵

While some allowances permitted residential and business possibilities that other non-whites lacked, they did not permit the Chinese to operate as freely as the Japanese or whites.¹⁵⁶ Chinese South Africans operated in spaces reserved for whites and interacted with those considered white, while they themselves were not. A perceived adjacency to whiteness and being honorary white are two different things. For the ruling whites, Chinese were categorically non-white and prevented from fully evading their classification despite several special privileges. For other non-whites, the Chinese, through those same concessions that afforded them the ability to live and work alongside whites, were seen as having benefited over other non-whites in the nation and were therefore benefiting from a special status when compared to other non-whites.

In being seen to live and work within the group areas of other races, namely that of the whites, the Chinese came to be seen as having benefited from honorary white status. Whether the Chinese held honorary white status is not what is key here, rather, it is the perception of Chinese held by non-Chinese. In discussing the role of perception, it is also important to note that comments were made in the past of difficulties in discerning Chinese from Japanese by the non-Chinese South African population. In doing so, one may better understand the influence of apartheid-era perceptions on those in the following decades.

In an environment where many people were unable to consistently discern between Chinese and Japanese, their perceived visual similarity and possession of concessions can be seen to have tied the two in the eyes of many South Africans.¹⁵⁷ Those controlling access to white-only amenities were often unable to discern between Japanese and Chinese. Chinese could claim to be Japanese in instances where possible, making the enforcement of laws regarding white and non-white amenities difficult.¹⁵⁸ With large differences in privileges between the two, the inability to clearly and consistently control and delineate boundaries prevented the formation of two clear perceptions of Chinese and Japanese. Without consistent differentiation in the eyes of non-Chinese South Africans, the Chinese and Japanese shared an overlapping perception. For the Chinese, this obfuscated their status to non-Chinese and maintained the invidious space they

¹⁵⁵ Bevis, "The shop on the corner can't keep its permit" *Sunday Times*, April 12, 1981: 23.

¹⁵⁶ Harris. "'Accepting the Group, but Not the Area': The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.", 196-197.

¹⁵⁷ Park, "White, Honorary White, or Non-White: Apartheid Era Constructions of Chinese.", 128.

¹⁵⁸ Park "State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.", 75-76.

occupied. The perception of Chinese South Africans as having benefited from honorary white status defined the way they were seen not only in the 1980s, but well into the following decades. It is in the following decades that the Chinese community of South Africa would be reshaped in both demographics and perception.

The conversation surrounding Chinese South Africans in 1980 and 1981 engaged with their uncertain status in South Africa. The events of Prime Minister P. W. Botha's trip, the refusal of two Chinese children from accessing their local pool, and a man attempting to purchase flats, were presented to show how Chinese in South Africa were repeatedly and visibly stuck between two classifications. These articles, and the engagement from the readership of the papers that present them, display a frustration with the troubles faced by the Chinese, as well as an interest in the possibility for the Chinese to move from a supposed "gentlemen's agreement" and into honorary white status due to political circumstances similar to those that benefitted the Japanese.¹⁵⁹ Chinese were known to be non-white, but were also increasingly accepted by their white counterparts as the communities operated in close proximity and as the former continued to present itself favorably to whites.

Following the end of apartheid in the 1990s, the Chinese community of South Africa experienced increased inflow and outflow. The Chinese communities within South Africa would soon see the arrival of a new influx of immigrants from China. These new immigrants would quickly outnumber their counterparts in the Chinese South African and Taiwanese communities, with the number of all Chinese in South Africa reaching an estimated 300,000 by 2008.¹⁶⁰ Park noted that many who those to South Africa in the pre-2000 period had left China during its gradual reopening to the outside world, and had moved to South Africa for work in a "more developed African country."¹⁶¹ Park described pre-2000s immigrants who arrived as having financial resources and connections to engage in manufacturing and middle-management opportunities outside of China. These arrivals settled in cities like Johannesburg, using their connections to industry in China and elsewhere to aid in establishing themselves.¹⁶² Post-2000 immigrants predominantly originated from China's Fujian province, and arrived in South Africa

¹⁵⁹ Heyns, "Chinese use heads" *Sunday Times*, October 19, 1980: 132.

The relationship between Chinese and Japanese was constantly brought up in discussions of changes for the Chinese populace. While this conversation appeared frequently in 1980, little solid information was made by the Government as to when or what changes would be made. The Group Areas Act would be modified by the mid-1980s to reduce the impact of the permit system on Chinese South Africans, but Chinese South Africans would not be granted equal rights until the end of apartheid over a decade after the events of 1980.

¹⁶⁰ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 1, 160.

¹⁶¹ Huynh et al, "Faces of China: New Chinese Migrants in South Africa, 1980s to Present.", 293.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 293-294.

during a period of “high unemployment, service delivery protests, disappointment with the democratically elected government, and periodic outbursts of xenophobic violence” while they themselves were worse off than those who had arrived in the 1990s.¹⁶³ These later arrivals had difficulty settling in the cities of South Africa and instead situated themselves in the smaller towns and wider rural regions.¹⁶⁴ Not only that, but with the South African economy experiencing difficulties, the ability for many post-2000 Chinese to establish themselves economically and repay loans that might have been taken to facilitate their relocation was made difficult.¹⁶⁵

They arrived at a moment of economic and legal flux. Following the end of apartheid and the ascension of the ANC to power in the Government of National Unity, efforts were made to abolish the structures of apartheid and the economic inequalities that had been codified and continually reinforced over the last half a century. One of these efforts was B-BBEE, the implementation of the policy objective known as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)¹⁶⁶ Another was that of the Employment Equity Act of 1998, an act that sought to “redress the effects of discrimination” for those considered by the government to have been disadvantaged during apartheid by favoring them in employment opportunities.¹⁶⁷ These policies were conceived of in an effort to increase non-white participation in business and to increase levels of employment, all as a part of seeing the disenfranchised gain ground and in theory, greater parity with the whites who had dominated many sectors of life.¹⁶⁸ It was this effort to improve the standing of those who had been systematically excluded from economic success that the matter of categorizations and perception would see the Chinese again placed between categories and to be perceived inaccurately and unfairly.

Following the end of Apartheid, the Chinese were not alone in their experience of liminality. The Coloured community of South Africa, which encompassed a wide range of

¹⁶³ Huynh et al, “Faces of China: New Chinese Migrants in South Africa, 1980s to Present.”, 295-296.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 296.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 295-296.

¹⁶⁶ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette: BROAD-BASED BLACK ECONOMIC - EMPOWERMENT ACT, 2003. Vol 463, No. 25899.* 2004. South African Government Public Documents.

Noted here in reference to B-BBEE as the basis for pursuing the aim of BEE

¹⁶⁷ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette: South Africa Employment Equity Act No.55 of 1998. Vol 400, No. 19370.* 1998. South African Government Public Documents. (Cape Town, Government Printer); Park. *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 132-133.

¹⁶⁸ Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette: BROAD-BASED BLACK ECONOMIC - EMPOWERMENT ACT, 2003. Vol 463, No. 25899.* 2004. South African Government Public Documents. (Cape Town, Government Printer),

peoples under one label, also struggled with how it was perceived and how the histories of those under its label were tied into a national history. During Apartheid, the Coloured community was often imagined as falling between categories -- not white, not Black, not Indian -- and was referred to by some academics at the time as a “residual category”.¹⁶⁹ Even after Apartheid, the importance of race remains and has done little to place those labeled Coloured beyond a space defined in part by being between white and Black.¹⁷⁰

In December of 2007, the Chinese Association of South Africa, Victor Chong, and Albert Peter Fung, filed with the Pretoria High Court against the Ministers of Labour, Trade and Industry, and Justice and Constitutional Development. Victor Chong and Albert Peter Fung filed over their exclusions from initiatives dependent on being considered a previously disadvantaged person. These individuals, as well as several others, filled affidavits recounting the discrimination they had experienced in the past, all in an effort to see their inclusion in policies aimed to rectify past inequalities in employment and business.¹⁷¹ Chinese South Africans had been excluded from the BEE and B-BBEE despite being considered non-white during apartheid. Such an exclusion was not an accident due to omission of memory over specifics of categorizations, but rather a calculated move decided by how each community was understood to have experienced the apparatus of apartheid. This filing sought to bring an end to a relative inaction by the South African government over the previous decade to inquiries by members of the Chinese South African community, serving to finally force a response.

This 2007 filing followed a long struggle between members of the Chinese South African community and the South African government. In the early 2000s, the Chinese Association of South Africa sought an answer from the South African government as to the classification of Chinese which was unclear following the end of Apartheid. No answer to the Chinese Association of South Africa was given. In 2004, in response to question on the Employment Equity Act, the Minister of Labour stated that groups seeking an answer had the right to “seek clarity via the Courts”.¹⁷² In addition to this, other governmental bodies voiced their position that Chinese were not to be included under the term “black people” in B-BBEE.¹⁷³ In seeking to change this exclusion of Chinese South Africans, attorneys sent letters demanding an answer

¹⁶⁹ Pierre L. Berghe VAN DEN. “Miscegenation in South Africa.” *Cahiers d'études africaines* 1, no. 4 (1960): 74.

¹⁷⁰ Bronwynne Anderson. “Coloured' Boys in 'Trouble': An Ethnographic Investigation into the Constructions of Coloured Working-Class Masculinities in High School in Wentworth, Durban.” Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009, 28-32.

¹⁷¹ Harris, “BEE-Ing Chinese in South Africa: a Legal Historic Perspective.”, 8-11.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*.

from several heads of Ministries, the response that followed was that the Chinese were not “black people” within the definitions in B-BBEE. This left the Chinese Association of South Africa no other option than to take the matter to the court, filing in 2007 after years of uncertainty around the status of the Chinese community.¹⁷⁴

On the 27th of January 2008, a featured article in the *Sunday Times* by Chinese South African author and journalist Darryl Accone titled “Recognition of apartheid travails behind Chinese race rights trial” discussed the ongoing controversy over the exclusion of the Chinese community from B-BBEE. Accone, had worked in journalism for several decades as well as a research associate in the Chinese in Africa/Africans in China project at the University of Johannesburg.¹⁷⁵ His article made an impassioned argument about the state of affairs faced by the Chinese South African community, deriding the exclusion of Chinese South Africans as denying not only their history, but their belonging in a modern South Africa. The history of the Chinese South African community was described with an emphasis on the history of their oppression and status as second-class citizens during apartheid and made clear that while Chinese South Africans may not have been treated in the same way as other non-white groups they were nonetheless oppressed by a white minority and the system of apartheid.¹⁷⁶ Accone made an effort to note how this history was forgotten or perhaps out of the public focus in the then current perception of Chinese South Africans. His article provided not only a glancing retrospective towards the Chinese South African, but also an examination of Chinese status in the context of the South Africa of 2008. He made his case that Chinese South Africans were a part of the nation, and in being so, must be considered in all their facets.

Accone’s interpretation of the history of Chinese in South Africa was ultimately reflected in the Pretoria High Court decision of June 2008. The case concluded with an outline of the changes to be implemented:

South African Chinese people:

- (a) fall within the ambit of the definition of “black people’ in section 1 of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998;

¹⁷⁴ Harris, “BEE-Ing Chinese in South Africa: a Legal Historic Perspective.”, 7-8.

¹⁷⁵ Darryl Accone, “Recognition of apartheid travails behind Chinese race-rights case” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), January 27, 2008: 24. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-17C5CF5A9EE4C5E5%402454493-17C5CFBA66543C3B%4023-17C5CFBA66543C3B%40>.

¹⁷⁶ Accone quoted Dr. Park and Patrick Chong of the Chinese Association of South Africa. Darryl Accone had worked alongside Dr. Park during her time at the University of Johannesburg.

- (b) fall within the ambit of the definition of “black people” in section 1 of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003¹⁷⁷

In including Chinese South Africans under the term “black people”, Chinese South Africans would be among those considered “previously disadvantaged” and therefore eligible for participation in the efforts of the B-BBEE acts, this usage of “black people” is important to understand.

The judgement stirred considerable public comment. Mohau Pheko, an activist who would later serve as the South African Ambassador to Canada and Japan, authored the article “Black judgement subjects Chinese to animosity” in the opinions section of the *Sunday Times*. For her, the conversation around who was eligible for B-BBEE in terms of race opened troubling questions and provided unclear answers. For Pheko, the language of Chinese South Africans being included “within the ambit of the definition of ‘black people’” in B-BBEE arose questions as to the meaning of black identity, political or otherwise.¹⁷⁸ Pheko outlined how she saw the mixing of “equality and ethnicity in a fragmented and contradictory manner” as a process that subjected Chinese South Africans to animosity. For Mohau Pheko, the language of B-BBEE wherein “black” encompassed many South Africans obfuscated the importance of B-BBEE’s aim, and weakened its effort to empower those “Africans [who] as a majority ha[d] been disenfranchised.”¹⁷⁹ She did not decry the inclusion of Chinese South Africans following the ruling of the High Court, she rather wondered if the language and conversation around “black” as a term was inadequate in a nation as multiracial as South Africa.

Mohau Pheko outlined her trouble with the usage of “black” and the inclusion of Chinese as being based on the unclear nature of the term. Pheko quoted Lansana Keita, a West African academic, and described how in her eyes, “the ‘black race’ can be considered as sets. To belong to Africa is to be part of this set. ‘Africanity’ is African identity, and ‘blackness’ is black racial identity. Thus the skin colour can range from very dark in Sudan, to brown and yellow as among the San people of the Kalahari desert.”¹⁸⁰ Pheko stated that the trouble with the term “black” originated with Western anthropologists attempts to “label all of Africa's indigenous

¹⁷⁷ Chinese Association of South Africa & co v. The Minister of Labour & co, CASE NO: 59251/2007 (High Court of South Africa June 18, 2008).

¹⁷⁸ Mohau Pheko, “Black judgment subjects Chinese to animosity” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), June 29, 2008: 23. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-17C66CEAC1C5D886%402454647-17C66D5D4B9D18D3%4022-17C66D5D4B9D18D3%40>

¹⁷⁹ Pheko, “Black judgment subjects Chinese to animosity” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 23.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

people as belonging to the “black race.”¹⁸¹ For her, “if the ‘black race’ is a product of . . . geography, then African identity is equivalent to black identity.”¹⁸²

How might one understand the various inequalities faced by the non-white population, and how might these weigh in contrast to those of the majority whom are African? To Mohau Pheko, the nation “must create a sense of belonging that does not manufacture and ascribe a false classification for an expedient equality”, as to what shape such a thing might have taken was left undescribed.¹⁸³ In her piece on the decision of the High Court, the central element of the conversation was not the location of Chinese South Africans in the nation, rather, it seemed to be the meaning and power within the terminology of Black identity and the shape of African identity. Mohau Pheko’s article engaged with the question of Black identity, but in doing so displayed the uncertainty in the conversation on Chinese status in post-apartheid South Africa, and the questions of how to categorize those who had been previously resigned to a contradictory place in society.

On the 29th of June 2008, a page featuring several letters from the readership of the *Sunday Times* was published. Among these letters were several by Chinese South Africans. These submissions expressed satisfaction over the final decision by the court to include Chinese South Africans as “black people”, grouping them with Black, Indian, and Coloured in B-BBEE efforts.¹⁸⁴ This inclusion marked the categorization of Chinese South Africans as having been “previously disadvantaged” under apartheid.¹⁸⁵ The conversation around Chinese inclusion under the term black in B-BBEE displayed an interplay between being included in the B-BBEE’s usage of the term black alongside other non-whites, and having been regarded as white by some South Africans.¹⁸⁶ For Chinese South Africans, the victory had correctly addressed an exclusion based on an incorrect summation of historical Chinese status.

One reaction to the 2008 ruling that drew a considerable response in print was that by the Minister of Labour, Membathisi Mdladlana. In comments dated to the 24th of June, he took

¹⁸¹ Pheko, “Black judgment subjects Chinese to animosity” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 23.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), June 29, 2008: 20. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-17C66CEAC1C5D886%402454647-17C66D47474D88D0%4019-17C66D47474D88D0%40>.

¹⁸⁵ L.P Kruger. “The Impact of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) on South African Businesses: Focusing on Ten Dimensions of Business Performance.” *South African Business Review* 15, no. 3 (January 2011): 207–33.

¹⁸⁶ “Chinese want court to rule they are black” *Sunday Times*, June 15, 2008: 2.; “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.

issue with Chinese in South Africa. Commenting that Chinese did not speak English in the workplace, were feigning ignorance, and that the Chinese “are now coloureds . . . coloureds don’t speak Chinese.”¹⁸⁷ The Minister stated that “the Chinese pretend to be dumb when they are not. We know they are not. Chinese are very clever people”, expressing distrust while also casting all Chinese within South Africa into one stereotype. This comment would be quoted in several responses featured in the *Sunday Times*’ “Readers’ Views” section following the 2008 court decision. Dion Shing and P Woon were the two readers whose responses to the Minister were featured, though they were not the only Chinese South Africans whose voices were recorded on the page.¹⁸⁸

Dion Shing, expressed disgust at Mdladlana’s comments for treating Chinese South Africans as though undeserving recent recipients of B-BBEE.¹⁸⁹ His article contained anecdotes from their own life during apartheid as well as a further unease at the Minister’s grouping of all Chinese into one category. Not only this, but Shing lamented being considered part of a group that some members of the ruling ANC believed perhaps did not belong. For Shing, the efforts of B-BBEE were meant to “correct the wrongs of the past by uplifting the capability of those who were not given an equal opportunity under apartheid.”¹⁹⁰ Mdladlana comments were, for Shing, a failure to acknowledge the injustices faced by Chinese South Africans and a failure to separate the Chinese South African community under apartheid from the “post-1994 immigrants.”¹⁹¹

Woon, similarly to Shing, cited the conflation of the long-standing Chinese South African community with the more recent arrivals in the years following 1994, as a point of contention with Mdladlana’s outlook on the Chinese. Woon stated that “there is a difference between the Chinese who were born in the country and the Chinese who have arrived in the country after 1994”, echoing to an extent the 1980s conflation of Chinese and Japanese decades prior. Woon’s letter, more so than Shing’s, focused on the portrayal of Chinese as one hegemonic entity. While Shing’s letter engaged with both personal anecdotes as well as with the Minister’s comments on the Chinese as a whole, Woon’s shorter article discussed only the Minister’s combining of the disparate Chinese communities into one. For Woon, the conflation of all Chinese people regardless of their relationship to South Africa into one whole represented a dismissive and harmfully “stupid” view of Chinese as one hegemonic being with no degree of

¹⁸⁷ “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.; “Confucius? Very” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 22.

¹⁸⁸ Sandra Pow, “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.

¹⁸⁹ Dion Shing, “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

significant internal diversity.¹⁹² This conflation displays a perception of Chinese South Africans not as a community in their own right, but as an inseparable part of a pan-Chinese community, one whose bounds encompassed all Chinese regardless of other factors.

The perception held by Membathisi Mdladlana of the Chinese as a lying, “clever” people applied to all Chinese in its lack of specificity and displayed his stance on the nature of the Chinese and of their relation to others in South Africa, upsetting some Chinese South Africans.¹⁹³ The combining of all Chinese into one entity reads similarly to the conversation on the issue of discernment between Chinese and Japanese that appeared during apartheid. Though these two examples of conflating Chinese South Africans into one perceived entity and the trouble in dealing with the Chinese and the Japanese had their own contexts, each engaged with a conversation on Chinese categorization and status.

In an article titled “Say it loud I’m black and confused” by Andrew Donaldson, the inclusion of Chinese as “black people” was presented as a reflection of the ridiculousness of the situation. Donaldson wrote that by the court’s decision and rationale, he too was eligible for categorization as Black. Citing that he “failed to qualify for business and job promotions because [he] was deemed white” and had “suffered widespread discrimination during the apartheid years” as proof of his new classification.¹⁹⁴ Donaldson followed up by denouncing those who would say he was biologically white, accusing them of users of “calipers and pieces of string”, tools representative of scientific racism. His comments showed a view of the Chinese victory as farcical.¹⁹⁵ While Donaldson’s article was not focused on the Chinese case, the manner it was deployed indicated a perception that the Chinese classification was absurd.

A similar take was repeated elsewhere, including in Ben Trovato’s “Set the controls for Planet Xenu, Ms Star Trek.” In this article, the Chinese inclusion under the definition of “black people” in B-BBEE was used only at the end of a long satirical article as a punchline. Trovato finished the article writing, “[i]f you are not accepting white applicants, I can do a very good impression of being Chinese”, as though the Chinese inclusion in B-BBEE was in itself

¹⁹² P Woon, “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.

¹⁹³ “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.

¹⁹⁴ Andrew Donaldson. “Say it loud, I’m black and confused” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), June 29, 2008: 2. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-17C66CEAC1C5D886%402454647-17C66D50585F4E81%401-17C66D50585F4E81%40>.

¹⁹⁵ Donaldson. “Say it loud, I’m black and confused” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 2.

humorous, as a Chinese individual being black was the same as a white man calling himself Chinese.¹⁹⁶

Both articles have a specific understanding of the term “black people”, one focused on race rather than as a partially political term of identity. While the B-BBEE Act of 2003 defined “black people” as a term for Africans, Coloured, and Indians, the term “black people” was written in the articles by Donaldson and Trovato as though synonymous with Black African. This confusing interplay between the definition held by some in the public and the definitions found in B-BBEE left the term subject to no single interpretation in the public discourse. From these different approaches to the word “black”, the discussion surrounding the inclusion of Chinese under the definition of “black people”, as defined by the B-BBEE Act of 2003, became obfuscated and subject to controversy.

As displayed by these two articles and the comments by Membathisi Mdladlana, the Chinese victory in the High Court was not seen by all South Africans as a positive or sensible thing. For Mdladlana, it was a victory of a hegemonic, wealthy, and privileged Chinese group that had gained access to resources they were undeserving of. Yet for others, like Andrew Donaldson and Ben Trovato, it was an absurdity to see the Chinese be considered “black people” and given access to the efforts of B-BBEE. These more negative perceptions of Chinese South Africans from political and published figures show a divisive struggle around the perception of Chinese status and standing in South Africa was in 2008.

Among those reported to have denounced the decision of the High Court was a business support organization known as the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC), an independent business chamber, established in 1964 to support black business and their development. President of NAFCOC, Buhle Mthethwa, decried the Chinese inclusion in B-BBEE as a step that would lessen the effectiveness of the program. NAFCOC used language framing Chinese South Africans as self-serving and as a community who would “given half a chance, would want to strengthen their foothold in the South African economy.”¹⁹⁷ The organization claimed that it opposed the inclusion of Chinese on the grounds that the B-

¹⁹⁶ Ben Trovato. “Set the controls for Planet Xenu, Ms Star Trek” *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg, South Africa), June 29, 2008: 44. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A16ED7D43CFB7D6F4%40WHNPX-17C66CEAC1C5D886%402454647-17C66D1677877B1F%4043-17C66D1677877B1F%40>.

¹⁹⁷ “Chinese Are Not Fully Black - Nafcoc.” Independent Online. IOL | News that Connects South Africans, December 3, 2016. <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/economy/chinese-are-not-fully-black-nafcoc-711715>.

BBEE program did not have the resources to cover more people than it already did.¹⁹⁸ In the eyes of NAFCOG, the Chinese South African community already had an outsized representation in business ownership and therefore could not be considered as seriously requiring the assistance of B-BBEE.

NAFCOG spokesperson Kganare Lefoka opposed the inclusion of Chinese under the definition of “black people”, as “[b]lack . . . d[id] not denote a race or a nation but a people who, through past discrimination, were excluded from the benefits given to the white population of the country.”¹⁹⁹ Lefoka believed the Chinese were immensely successful under apartheid and were therefore not a people discriminated against and fully excluded from the wealth available to whites. In the framing presented by NAFCOG, the Chinese were attempting to gain access to the opportunities provided by B-BBEE out of a desire to enrich themselves, not out of grievance with their past treatment and initial exclusion.

The stance of NAFCOG, while not representative of the entire breadth of South African society, is indicative of the conflicting views on the nature of Chinese South African status, hardships under apartheid, and belonging in the post-apartheid era that existed at the time. Common in both the framing utilized by NAFCOG and Membathisi Mdladlana is the framing of Chinese as well-off enough so as to occupy a position of privilege in status and economic affairs. This framing of privilege rendered Chinese South Africans as a people that had been discriminated against, but not to an extent significant enough to restrict their successes in business and social life.

In their comments, Mdladlana and NAFCOG distanced Chinese South Africans from other disadvantaged groups and seemed to conflate them with all other Chinese within the country. This connection exhibited a portrayal of Chinese in South Africa, along with Chinese South Africans, regardless of time in South Africa as one whole. This framing rendered Chinese South Africans not as a community on their own, but as an inseparable part of a pan-Chinese community, one whose bounds encompassed all Chinese regardless of other factors. Chinese South Africans as well as others featured in the *Sunday Times* pointed this out and refuted the portrayal.²⁰⁰ While the decision of the High Court noted its application to South African Chinese, the differences between the Chinese population in South Africa was paid little heed by those opposed to it. Chinese South Africans who had been “victimized by apartheid-inspired racism”

¹⁹⁸ “Chinese Are Not Fully Black - Nafcog.” Independent Online. IOL, December 3, 2016.

¹⁹⁹ Ross. “Chinese Are Not Black: Chamber.” Independent Online. IOL, June 25, 2008.

²⁰⁰ “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.; Accone, “Recognition of apartheid travails behind Chinese race-rights case” *Sunday Times*, January 27, 2008: 24.

are, through a perception held and spread by opponents, subsumed into the wave of post-1994 immigrants, being cast as a part of a group seen to be larger, wealthy, and business owning.²⁰¹

The view of the Chinese South African community as one undeserving of B-BBEE and as one essentially white, placed them into a position of two conflicting natures.²⁰² One as a people who had been discriminated against under apartheid as non-white, yet also privileged enough to be “generally regarded” as the same as the whites who had dominated the system of apartheid.²⁰³ The Chinese were perceived by some who opposed the decision of the High Court as to exist in two places, of privileges and disadvantages. The Chinese South African was seen to belong to neither strong enough to remain solidified in that place, oscillating between them depending on the perspective of external entities using the Chinese South African past as a means of shaping and enforcing perceptions of Chinese. The usage of past Chinese South African perceptions to react to ongoing developments might be seen to operate similarly to the historical development of the 1980s. In the 1980s, historical perceptions of Chinese and East Asians interacted with the influence of international economic investment. This investment from foreign countries had seen the Japanese attain honorary-white status, and in the 1980s so too did it seem that the course of events would repeat for Chinese South Africans.

Though the granting of honorary white status for the Chinese in the 1980s did not come to pass, there remained the issue of visual discernment with the Japanese who did have it. Discernment in the sense that most South Africans could not tell the difference between either Chinese or Japanese individuals.²⁰⁴ The purported inability to discern between these two East Asian communities also implied an inability to discern between one who benefits from honorary-white status and one who did not. From factors such as this, the perceptions of Chinese South African status were subject to not only the invidious space they occupied during apartheid, but also the overlap in visual perception between the Chinese and Japanese, both of whom held strictly different legal rights. These difficulties in a clear categorization for Chinese South Africans continually placed the perception others held of them into an undefined space. In this amorphous space the Chinese South African community could be perceived by others to be a community of privilege. While these factors of perception could be seen to form a confusing relationship between Chineseness and whiteness, it does not wholly explain or examine why the perception of Chinese excluded them from inclusion in B-BBEE and why their non-white status

²⁰¹ Dion Shing, “Readers’ Views” *Sunday Times*, June 29, 2008: 20.

²⁰² Sparg, “What they really want in Chinatown” *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

²⁰³ “Chinese want court to rule they are black” *Sunday Times*, June 15, 2008: 2.

²⁰⁴ Park “State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.”, 76.

alongside Indian, Coloured, and Black did not extend into the B-BBEE of the post-apartheid era. It is in this exclusion that the role of past perceptions of Chinese South African status and space in defining the perception held by non-Chinese in the mid-2000s might be understood more thoroughly.

Conclusion

For Chinese South Africans under apartheid, the factors that placed them into an existence between white and non-white were the concessions that granted them opportunities that were not enjoyed by other non-whites. In the years following the 1994 election, Chinese South African status would again be influenced by the opportunities afforded to them during apartheid. These apartheid-era concessions would instead serve as a tool to place the concept of Chineseness in adjacency to whiteness. In both instances, during and after apartheid, the concessions Chinese South Africans held served to define the perception of Chinese South Africans as neither white nor non-white, but rather a group occupying a space between spaces. During and after apartheid the perceptions of Chinese belonging would be deployed as a tool to frame their status in specific ways by opponents and allies of Chinese South African efforts to be included in B-BBEE.

In the Chinese experience of continual placement between categorizations, one can see the circumstances that formed the basis for the Chinese apartheid-era “twilight zone” reimagined across time and transformed societal structures. The concessions from the apartheid government saw Chinese South Africans placed at a point of uncertainty between white and non-white, in a perceived place of privilege. This place was perceived by some as part of a “gentlemen’s agreement” between white and Chinese, and to others as a place of reprieve from the oppression faced by Black, Indian, and Coloured South Africans.²⁰⁵

As we have seen, ignorance about the experience of Chinese South Africans played a key role too. Chinese space and status have been shown to not only be influenced by the privileges they held during apartheid, but also by the inability by others to properly discern between Japanese and Chinese, as well as to differentiate between different types of Chinese South Africans (those who had lived in South Africa for generations, newcomers, etc). Paradoxically, what further muddied perceptions of Chinese South Africans in the post-apartheid period was a warming of perceptions among white South Africans toward this population in the 1980s. An increase in white acceptance towards living and working alongside Chinese South Africans can be seen when looking at the changes in Chinese status between 1980 and 2008, but so too can it be supported when looking at legislative adjustments made to Chinese space in the 1980s.²⁰⁶ In May of 1985, following similar measures in 1982 and 1984, alterations to “the Group Areas Act enabled the Chinese to acquire, hold, or occupy property . . . without permits” in areas

²⁰⁵ Heyns, “Chinese use heads” *Sunday Times*, October 19, 1980: 132.

designated for whites.²⁰⁷ Chinese South Africans were pulled further into their invidious space by these amendments, as they no longer were as restricted or allocated one group area in Port Elizabeth.²⁰⁸ Though restrictions may have been amended for Chinese South Africans, improvements to their status within the nation still relied on the politically enfranchised white populace. However, with the elimination of permits, Chinese South Africans now no longer faced an impediment to daily life that other non-whites experienced. Chinese South Africans did not hold honorary-white status and did not enjoy all the same rights as whites, remaining legally distinct and disenfranchised.²⁰⁹ The increasing white acceptance towards interacting with the Chinese, presented in comments from the time, and the amendments to the Group Areas Act, display a curious situation for the Chinese. The Chinese were increasingly accepted by whites and enjoyed improvements in the systems designed to keep them distant, however, Chinese South Africans operated under no illusion that they were white or considered an equal.

This dissertation has sought to engage with what the perception of Chinese South Africans appeared to be in 1980 and 2008 through an examination of print media, and while most of the voices presented were that of non-Chinese, Chinese South Africans themselves were present as well. After discussing the space Chinese South Africans were perceived to reside in and how their status was constantly utilized by white and non-white groups when engaging with the Chinese community, what did Chinese themselves say? As evident by the letters from readers present in the *Sunday Times* following the High Court's B-BBEE decision, Chinese South Africans were active in speaking against perceptions of them seen to be incorrect or of discounting their history. In 1980, Chinese South Africans are mentioned in articles by non-Chinese to have been in opposition towards efforts by the NP to introduce separate legislatures for non-white groups, excluding Black Africans entirely. The expulsion of Kenneth Winchiu, the Chinese member of the President's Council, by the Pretoria Chinese Association, shows a response against the efforts of the NP by organized elements of the community.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 38-39.; Harris. "‘Accepting the Group, but Not the Area’: The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.", 197-198.

²⁰⁸ Harris. "‘Accepting the Group, but Not the Area’: The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.", 197-198.

²⁰⁹ Chinese South Africans were seen to be a more acceptable community to interact with and live alongside, however it would not be until 1985 that many restrictions on Chinese South African movement and residence in white areas would be lifted. Even then, this did not legally position Chinese South Africans as equal with whites. The 1985 amendment to the Group Areas Act "made *de jure* what was already *de facto*", as many Chinese South Africans already resided and worked in white areas prior to the 1985 Amendment. (Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 38.)

²¹⁰ Sparg. "What they really want in Chinatown" *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59., West, "Convention needed — PC MAN" *Sunday Times*, February 15, 1981: 117.

This organizational response displayed an opposition to further removal from the rights that whites held, not as an effort to gain honorary-white status, but as a means of pursuing equal status. Chinese South African organizations like the Pretoria Chinese Association made clear their opposition to involvement in the President's Council and expressed their negative opinion on the state of South Africa.²¹¹ The efforts made by the Pretoria Chinese Association mirrored the wider effort to maintain Chinese South African status and pursue improvements to it, while avoiding opportunities for further distance from whites.²¹² In the post-apartheid era, organizations like the Chinese Association of South Africa would push for the recognition of Chinese travails under apartheid. These efforts on the organizational front did not operate alone, as comments by Chinese South Africans as individuals aligned similarly.

At a convergence of international and national discussions in 1980, the Chinese South African community appeared in articles decrying their status in the nation. In the article "What they really want in Chinatown" Chinese South African desires for political change were noted, with the Pretoria Chinese Association and unspecified figures referred to as "Chinese leaders."²¹³ Anonymous individuals were featured expressing views similar to those of the organizations, of dissatisfaction with the status quo, and the view that their position in society was unjust and defined by uncertainty.²¹⁴ Here, and in other articles printed by the *Sunday Times* and *Rand Daily Mail*, the Chinese South African community expressed a near uniform perspective, that the space they resided in was problematic and in need of change, preferably on their terms. These statements and actions by organizations and individuals of the time were seen by Yoon Jung Park as part of an effort to preserve the rights that Chinese South Africans already held. This effort to maintain and gain further rights akin to those whites held was not motivated as a means of becoming white, but as a desire for full rights.²¹⁵

In articles from 1980 and 2008, the Chinese South African community was shown to be generally uniform in complaints and perspectives on their position with regards to treatment and hopes for the future of South Africa. Much of this similarity may stem from the small size of the community, the shared experience of non-white status, and the applicability of the non-Chinese perception of all Chinese. The Chinese South African community can be seen to present a

²¹¹ Sparg, "What they really want in Chinatown" *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59., West, "Convention needed — PC MAN" *Sunday Times*, February 15, 1981: 117.

²¹² Park, "State, Myth, and Agency in the Construction of Chinese South African Identities, 1948–1994.", 77-78. Harris. "'Accepting the Group, but Not the Area': The South African Chinese and the Group Area Act.", 193.

²¹³ Sparg, "What they really want in Chinatown" *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Park. *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, 50-52.

mostly united front, mostly in regards to the expulsion of Kenneth Winchiu for cooperating with the NP's President's Council. The community works to convey their history as well as their dissatisfaction with how they are perceived in turn by non-Chinese, both during and after apartheid.

Chinese South Africans worked extensively as individuals and within organized structures and to voice their perspective on events pertaining to them. In the matter of the 2008 High Court decision, the Chinese community came under attack by opponents who sought to deride their gains, using the standing perception of Chinese South Africans to obfuscate and portray the Chinese in a negative light. Chinese individuals wrote into the papers to affirm their own perception of what they as a community and the Chinese South African experience were. Likewise, the Chinese Association of South Africa confronted opponents, such as NAFCOG, and repeatedly expressed their view of historical Chinese status. This activity by the Chinese South African community shows an effort to define the Chinese South African place in society on their terms, rather than those of the non-Chinese.

In recalling how Chinese status during apartheid was subject to concessions, creating a perception of the Chinese as above other non-whites and adjacent to whites, how do we see the past perception define the conflict between Chinese and non-Chinese going forward? As already outlined, Chinese existence between white and non-white enabled the perception of Chinese South Africans to be both one of disadvantages and advantages. It is here that the discussion on degrees of suffering came into effect. As the Chinese legal status of non-white could not be denied, it then became the perceived degree of suffering that Chinese exclusion would be justified by opponents of the 2008 High Court decision. Chinese South Africans and their non-Chinese counterparts engage in a discourse on the nature of Chinese history along categorizations outlined under apartheid.

As indicated by articles from 1980, some white South Africans found the treatment of their Chinese counterparts distasteful and spoke of the Chinese as a small, inoffensive community that deserved better. The matter of deserving better was echoed by the Chinese themselves, and the idea of the Chinese as a small community aligned with government policy regarding its dealings with the Chinese. While the Chinese did not attain honorary-white status, this was justified, in part, by the government as due to the fact that unlike the miniscule Japanese community, the Chinese South African posed a “threat.”²¹⁶ Dr. Hendrick Verwoerd, the 6th South African Prime Minister, believed that if the Chinese received honorary-white status, then so too would the “Indians and coloureds would want the same”, thus rendering the Chinese a

²¹⁶ Sparg. “What they really want in Chinatown” *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

threat to the stability of apartheid.²¹⁷ From being described both as a “threat” and a “charming and cultured” people, where does this perception of the Chinese South African community continue to develop in later years and amongst other non-whites?

It is on the idea of the Chinese as a threat that a parallel might be posited from this past news coverage and the perception of Chinese status in the post-apartheid years. The Chinese, being non-white and relatively small community, were not seen to be as much of a threat as their counterparts in the Indian, Coloured and Black African communities. They were however a threat in that they were seen to be numerous enough that their inclusion in white categorization might lead to larger calls for the same to be granted to others.²¹⁸ The South African government seemed to engage in attempting to allow Chinese greater rights than their fellows, while simultaneously ensuring that the Chinese remained distant from whiteness. This relationship changed as apartheid ended and the succeeding government sought to establish a multiracial parliament and to work against past inequalities. The Chinese, having been forced into a twilight space, now remained in one, with their adjacency to whiteness perceived as being close enough as to deny inclusion in B-BBEE. By 2008, a view of the Chinese as a threat to the aims of the South African state remained but had by this point been reframed due to the non-existence of apartheid.

As seen in the comments of NAFCOC and Membathisi Mdladlana, their perception of the Chinese was that of a threat to a government objective and the success of South Africa. While this government objective was no longer the system of apartheid, the perception of the Chinese as a threat to the success of B-BBEE’s aims now existed. Opponents of Chinese inclusion in B-BBEE portrayed Chinese South Africans as part of a larger pan-Chinese South African identity that included all individuals of Chinese descent, regardless of relation to one another or South African history. In this perception, the Chinese South Africans were spoken of as a threat to the success of B-BBEE due to either their advantages over others during apartheid or because of their supposed prevalence in business. For those against the High Court decision the Chinese South African is spoken of as a threat to the aims of B-BBEE. The relationship

²¹⁷ Sparg. “What they really want in Chinatown” *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.; The Chinese South African community was evidently small enough to lack, with some exceptions, the apportionment of any sizable Chinese group areas. Outside of Port Elizabeth, little was reserved for Chinese settlement, and this in part led to the concession that allowed Chinese South Africans the ability to live and work in other Group Areas, including white ones.

²¹⁸ For the South African government, the granting of honorary-white status to the Japanese was more acceptable, as there were very few Japanese within South Africa. This community, though small, was significantly smaller than the Chinese South African community.; Sparg. “What they really want in Chinatown” *Sunday Times*. October 26, 1980: 28, 59.

between Chinese South Africans and other South Africans in the apartheid years influenced the bounds of the Chinese space across categorizations, and their identification as a threat to government objectives can be seen to stem in part from troubles of visual discernment and possible demands from other non-Chinese. In the post-apartheid years, Chinese South Africans were again connected to another group with whom they were visually identified with, and from this association were perceived to hold all of that group's advantages. This pan-Chinese identity saw Chinese South Africans spoken of as not only having suffered to a lesser degree than other non-whites, but as having already succeeded and attained substantial economic power in the post-apartheid years.²¹⁹

The perceptions held of Chinese South Africans and the discourse around them in 1980 displays a community trapped between white and non-white, while simultaneously being pulled further into this uncertain space. Growing white acceptance of the Chinese South African community, issues discerning between Chinese and Japanese, the merging of all Chinese into a singular perception during the post-apartheid years, all trapped the small Chinese South African community in a constant state of uncertainty. To call this relationship between Chinese South Africans and those around them uncertain, is to describe the fluid way in which Chinese South Africans repeatedly are combined perceptually with other groups, regardless of whether these groups share much more in common beyond the inability for non-Chinese to discern between them. Having been granted concessions during the 1980s, Chinese South Africans would become subjected to debates on their status and the degree of their suffering. The Chinese South African existence between categorizations ensured that depending on the framing, Chinese could be depicted as an 'other'. This othering of the Chinese to disqualify aspects of their history appears in the discourse around B-BBEE.

Chinese South Africans repeatedly found themselves in situations requiring them to vocalize their own perspectives of their history and relationship to South Africa in order to counteract prevalent perceptions about them. The Chinese community in 1980 and 2008 is shown to display a degree of uniformity in their experiences that are printed in news media. While this does not definitively mean the Chinese expression of their self-perception was uniform, it does show a uniformity within news media. The status of Chinese South Africans during apartheid came to define not only their place in the post-apartheid era, but to serve as a perceptual tool. Chinese South African status under apartheid was deployed by Chinese South

²¹⁹ This is not to deny that any Chinese South Africans owned businesses or were successful, but rather that the conversation around Chinese South Africans in 2008 tended to combine them with all other Chinese present in South Africa.

Africans and their detractors in an effort to manage public perceptions of Chinese, and to shift said perceptions towards the categories of non-white and white respectively.

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