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12 July 2012

The Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I am a historian whose work focuses on the history of Chinese Australians. I am writing about an issue I have become aware of during my research into how Chinese Australians were affected by Australia's early 20th century immigration policies.

During the early decades of the 20th century, some Chinese Australians brought family members out from China on false identities. Most typically, wives or children of Chinese men resident in Australia entered the country illegally using the identity papers of Australian-born Chinese. Sometimes families purchased the papers outright; in other situations they substituted one family member for another. They did this to counteract official policies of the time which severely limited the ability of Chinese men, including those who were British subjects with established lives and businesses in the country, to bring their wives and children to live with them in Australia.

This issue is one of great sensitivity within the old-time Chinese community in Australia, and many families today are still very reluctant to speak about it for fear of official repercussions.

I am writing therefore to ask about the legal position of Chinese people who entered Australia using assumed identities *before 1950* and their descendents. Most particularly there is concern in families today that the Australian Government could undertake retrospective punitive action should their stories become publicly known.

You may be aware that similar practices occurred in both the United States and Canada, where Chinese entered illegally as 'paper sons'. The governments of both countries offered amnesty periods in the 1960s that allowed paper sons to legitimate their entry without fear of deportation or criminal charges.

This issue was the subject of discussion among historians at the recent Australian Historical Association conference held at the University of Adelaide, as a number of us have worked with families who have expressed these concerns.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kate Bagnall