

200 Years of History in Australia

This year marks 200 hundred of China history in Australia. Although many Chinese had touched these shores before, 1818 is the year of the arrival of a Chinese man (Mak Sai Ying) who purchased land in Australia. There were two others in the 1820s who were domestic servants of Rev John Dunmore Lang in 1827. Only their names Queng and Tchiou, along with the names of others living here before the 1840s have survived.

Mak Sai Ying or Mak O’Pong, arrived at Port Jackson on the ship Laurel, an Indian built vessel. The Laurel reached Australia on 27 February 1818. Mak Sai Ying was born in Guangzhou (Canton) in 1798; he arrived in New South Wales as a free settler and purchased land at Parramatta. In 1829 Mak Sai Ying or John Shying, as he became known, was granted the license for The Golden Lion Hotel, a public house at Parramatta. John was working as a carpenter with John Blaxland, before establishing his business. John Shying married twice and fathered four sons. He returned to China in 1832, but was back in Sydney five years later. Some of his children became furniture makers, and his descendants became cabinet-makers and undertakers in Sydney. A grandson of Mak Sai Ying, also called John Shying may have been the first serving Chinese-Australian serviceman.



With the need for labour the colonial pastoralists in Victoria and New South Wales voted to enlist Asian workers. In the light of this request the British government allowed the first group of indentured Chinese to come to Australia. The group consisting of 100 adults and 20 boys arrived in October 1848 from Amoy (Fujian province).

Photos: See Yup Temple Melbourne c1866 (Photos: 1963 and 2016)
Chinese Miner Ararat

At first they were considered to be cheap labour to be used as servants, artisans and farm hands, so their arrival was not seen as a problem. With the discovery of gold the numbers grew significantly. Many more soon arrived, mainly from the See Yup districts of Guangdong province.



Some were indentured labourers, but a significant number were also free emigrants. In 1856 alone there were over 12,000 arrivals and from then on this situation changed. They began to be seen as a threat and became the brunt of every problem imaginable. This caused riots and racism to abound in many areas. A ten pound a head poll tax was implemented to curb the arrivals. This tax forced many to land in Robe South Australia to avoid the tax. From here they walked the perilous 480 Kilimetres to reach the gold fields. After the introduction of the white Australian policy the numbers of Chinese arrivals was further depleted.

When the Chinese had either finished their period of indenture or acquired enough money, many of these men returned to their families as soon as they were able. Some who were unable to return because of their limited funds,

had to rely on societies like the See Yup for help. Those who stayed took whatever work they could find as hawkers, farm hands, store keepers boot makers and with their skills in managing water many became market gardeners and ran profitable businesses.



In Tasmania the first arrivals of Chinese men were mainly as seaman. In July 1830 a group of nine carpenters arrived aboard the Nimrod to work in Launceston. By 1835 others had already established themselves in businesses.

Here the Chinese were mainly accepted in the community. There was not the amount of racism as there was on mainland Australia, even though at one stage the Chinese constituted the largest non-European ethnic community at the alluvial tin mines of the north east, and remained so to the late 1890s.



Many of those who came here were miners from other gold fields. They were brought to Tasmania by the Chinese business men such as Henry Tom Sing, Chung Gon, Chin Kit, and James Catt. Some like my family who had lived in Ballarat for nearly twenty years came for a more peaceful co-existence.



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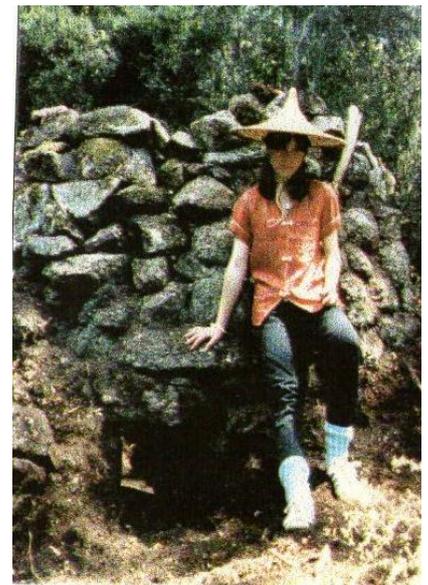
If you would like more information on Shying Family and related stories:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-10/first-chinese-settlers-descendants-reconnect-with-their-roots/98458>

They congregated in such places as Garibaldi, (South Mount Cameron), Ruby Flats, Red Hills, Thomas Plains (Weldborough) and Moorina. They practiced their religion and customs. They formed brotherhoods to look after their kinsman's welfare. The love of fan tan gave them an opportunity to gamble and socialise with the men from their particular region.

With the drop in tin prices many moved on to cities with a larger Chinese population like Sydney and Melbourne, or returned to their families they had left years ago in China. Those who remained formed the basis of the Tasmanian Chinese community in the 1900s. Now with a growing population from mainland China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan etc, it is difficult to see where the roots of this expanding Tasmanian tree began. Only the stories remain of the mining, market gardens, tobacco growing, abalone drying, shop owners and entrepreneurs.

The Chinese have overcome many adversities in Australia over the last 200 years. But from these humble beginnings the rich heritage of the Chinese Australians has grown and prospered. In former years, many of mixed Chinese race had their origins hidden from them. Now, many of these offspring are seeking to regain their lost heritage. Whether they are old or new arrivals to these shores, all of the Chinese people share a heritage that has a history of over 5,000 years.



Photos: Chinese at Weldborough, Weldborough Joss House and remains of a pig oven at Main Creek near Weldborough.