RESEARCHING CHINESE FAMILY HISTORY IN AUSTRALIA

Great Wall of China (Mutianyu section of the Great Wall), Huairou, Beijing, China
Photo Source: Flick. Photo taken by Robin Zebrowski, 27 June 2009.

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CITY OF PARRAMATTA
1. “Start with the known”
Like all family history research, a good starting point is by writing down what you know already. Then gather as much information as you possibly can through family members and family stories. This can be done through conducting an oral history interview.

2. Chinese personal names
Traditionally Chinese names comprise of three characters: 1 surname character at the front followed by 2 given name characters.

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<tr>
<th>汉</th>
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<td>世界</td>
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<td>姓</td>
<td>Surname</td>
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In Australian records, Chinese people’s names were written down in many different ways. Note that Chinese surnames are in the reverse order of western name conventions.

‘Ah’ or ‘A’ does not have a meaning. It was simply used as a way of addressing someone. It’s the equivalent of saying ‘Hey’ Peter, etc.

Chinese is a tonal language. There is no standard way for translating Chinese characters into English until the Wade-Giles (19th century) and later Hanyu Pinyin (1950) systems were developed.

Tip 1: Keep a list of each different spelling of your ancestor’s name you find, to use in keyword or name searches. Be on the lookout for anything written in Chinese characters and take a photocopy.

Tip 2: Keep track of any other Chinese families you find living in the same area as your ancestor, or who have the same family name. These could become possible clues that connect to your own family.

If you want to trace your ancestor before they arrived in Australia, you will need to know their proper Chinese name (preferably in characters) and their home district (just ‘Canton’ isn’t enough).

Chinese naming practices
A Chinese genealogy book known as a 家族 (jiapu) or 族譜 (zupu) traditionally recorded the male names of a family in Chinese. The surnames of wives were also listed followed by the character 氏 shì which means surname.

Some Chinese families use a ‘Generation Poem’ 字輩詞 to record the lineage of a generation. Usually prescribed to males in the family, siblings and cousins of the same generation would share a ‘Generation Name’字輩 zìbèi or 班次 bāncì. This was usually the middle character of the name, e.g. 世 sai² from the earlier example.

Further reading
Behind the name - http://www.behindthename.com/names/usage/chinese

3. Place names of Chinese ancestral homes
Most early Chinese migrants to Australia were listed as having arrived from Canton, which could refer to a province of Guangdong or the capitial city of Guangzhou.

A good starting point is to locate familiarise yourself with the village or region of China you are researching using Google maps (English) or Baidu maps (Chinese). My China Roots - http://www.mychinaroots.com/ can also help by providing some context to your ancestral village. Fees apply should you use their research services.

There are several databases that allow you to research your Chinese ancestral village including:
In Search of Root’s Village Database - http://rootsdb.org

Some words when describing the hierarchy of locations in China.
縣 xiàn - County
城 chéng 市 shì - City
鎮 zhèn – Town or Village
區 qū - Borough
鄉 xiāng - Village
村 cūn - Hamlet
裡 lǐ - Lane
巷 xiàng - Alley
園 yuán - Garden

Further readings
4. Consult Australian records and resources on:
   - Gravestones
   - Birth, death and marriage records
   - Immigration, travel and alien registration records
   - Naturalisation and Citizenship records
   - Chinese newspapers
   - Chinese student records

Additional Chinese-Australian Family History Research Guides

*Archives In Brief 33 - Chinese migration and settlement in New South Wales*

*Chinese Australians: A Guide to Holdings in the Mitchell Library*

*Chinese Immigrants and Chinese--Australians in New South Wales*

*Guide to Chinese-Australian Family Research*

*Chinese settlement in NSW: a thematic history: A report for the NSW Heritage Office*

**The Chinese in Australia: A context and introduction to material on the Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation website**

**Finding Chinese family connections in the National Archives**

**LIST OF RESOURCES**

**Books about Chinese family history**


**Chinese immigrants and Chinese Australians in NSW**

*From Canton with courage: Parramatta and beyond: Chinese arrivals 1800-1900* by Brook, Jack. General Subject: Chinese Australians. Publication Date: 2010 Format: Book

**Sources for Chinese local history and heritage in New South Wales**
by Young, Faye. General Subject: Chinese -- New South Wales -- Social conditions -- History -- Sources. Publication Date: 1997 Format: Book Shelf Number: LS 305.89510994 SOU

**Sourcing our Chinese past**

**Tracking the dragon: a guide for finding and assessing Chinese Australian heritage places** by Pearson, Michael, 1951- General Subject: Chinese -- Australia. Publication Date: 2002 Format: Book and Electronic version Shelf Number: R 363.69 PEAR

**Other related books**

*Chinese Anzacs*
by Clyne, Joanna, author.
General Subject: Cooking, Chinese.
Publication Date: 2013
Format: Book
Shelf Number: LS 641.59 COOK

Looking forward, looking back: a collection of migrant stories, 2009 by Dundas Area Neighbourhood Centre (N.S.W.).
General Subject: Migrants -- Chinese community -- Australia.
Publication Date: 2009
Format: Book
Shelf Number: LS 305.895 LOOK

Castlemaine petitions: petitioners for a Castlemaine municipality and petitioners against the Chinese Residence Licence by Gervasoni, Clare.
General Subject: Chinese -- Victoria -- History.
Publication Date: 1998
Format: Book
Shelf Number: LS 994.5031 CAST

India, China, Australia: trade and society 1788–1850 by Broadbent, James.
General Subject: International trade -- Australia -- History.
Publication Date: 2003
Format: Book
Shelf Number: LS 994.02 BROA

Databases


From various institutions and private holdings in China, North America, and Southeast Asia.


Visit your local State Library, State Records and Archives, Local Library and Historical Society to see what resources they may hold in their collection.

Newspapers
The Chinese Advertiser (Ballarat, Vic.) (1856)

Later known as The English and Chinese Advertiser (1856–1858)

Chinese Australian Herald (Sydney, NSW) = Guang yi hua bao, (1894–1923)

Chinese Times (Melbourne, Vic.) (1902–1922)

Tung Wah News (1898–1902) / Tung Wah Times (1902–1936)

The Chinese times [Newspaper]

For more information on early Chinese newspapers:
'Those early Chinese newspapers: Trove presents a new perspective on Australian history' by Kate Bagnall, 19 February 2015.

Old Hong Kong newspapers - [Website]. Available online https://mmis.hkpl.gov.hk/old-hk-collection

Online Resources and Organisations

New South Wales
Australian Chinese Community Association of New South Wales

Chinese Australian Historical Society Inc. 澳洲華人歷史協會 (Haymarket, N.S.W.) - [Website]. Available online https://chineseaustralianhistory.org
Email: contact.cahs@gmail.com
Twitter: @cahs_contact


Migration Heritage Centre, 2011 - [Website]. Available online http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/ (archived website that is no longer updated. Useful for past Chinese research projects such as Tracking the Dragon : a history of the Chinese in the Riverina or Water from the Wells : Chinese market gardens in NSW 1850-2010)


Victoria
Chinese Australian Family History Organisation Victoria Inc. 澳洲維省華商家譜華協會 [Website]. Available online http://www.cafhov.com/
Email: info@cafhov.com


Australia Capital Territory

Historian Dr. Kate Bagnall’s ‘The tiger’s mouth’ blog – [Website]. Available online http://chineseaustralia.org/


Invisible Australians : Living under the White Australia Policy by Dr. Kate Bagnall and Dr. Tim Sherratt– [Website]. Available online http://invisibleaustralians.org/
Email: admin@invisibleaustralians.org
Twitter: @InvisibleAus

Overseas


Forums
Chinese genealogy (Australia) – [Website]. Available online http://siyigenalogy.proboards.com/thread/1209

Chinese Family History & Stories (New Zealand) – [Website]. Available online click to go to the NZ forum notice board

Video clips

References

Kate Bagnall, 2016, ‘Finding your Chinese roots : tips for tracing your Australian family’s Chinese origins’ [workshop notes], presented at ‘Chinese family history and migration to Australia’ workshop held at the Society of Australian Genealogists on Saturday 30 April 2016.