



# History Week 2022



## Zhongshan in Sydney's Chinatown

Dr Alexandra Wong, Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University



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**03 Zhongshan merchants in Chinatown**

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- Wing Sang

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# 01. Introduction

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**The China-Australia Heritage Corridor (Discovery Project  
DP170101200)**

**Sydney's Chinatown in the Asian Century (Linkage Project  
LP120200311)**

**Aims: To research the cultural heritage of Chinese migration to  
Australia in the 19th and 20th centuries. Our focus is on people  
migrated from Zhongshan to NSW**



*The researchers interviewing Mr Howard Wilson, who is  
the family historian of the Choy family*

# 01.

## Introduction: Our research

- **22 in-depth interviews with 28 people in Sydney**
- **2 fieldtrips to Zhongshan in 2017 and 2018 to record migrant build heritage in 30 villages**
- **A database of migrant heritage via Heurist open source platform**
- **A bi-lingual website to disseminate research findings**

<http://uat.heritagecorridor.org.au/places>



# 02. Emergence of Sydney's Chinatown





# 02. Chinese immigration and the White Australia Policy

- **Gold rush in the 1850s had attracted numerous Chinese immigrants from Guangdong provinces**
- **Influx of Chinese had caused opposition and riots from the European Australian**
- **Commonwealth Government passed Immigration Restriction Act in 1901 which became cornerstone of 'White Australia Policy'**
- **A dictation test was introduced to restrict immigration of non-European people**
- **The Chinese population in Australia dropped from the peak of 45000 to 6500 in 1947, half of them live in Sydney**



*1860 Lambing Flat riot in NSW*

# 02. Emergence of Sydney's Chinatown

- **First Chinese settlement in The Rocks near the wharves**
- **Boarding houses, furniture workshops, laundry, cafes were set up in The Rocks**
- **Poorer Chinese congregated in Haymarket in the southern end of the city, especially after the relocation of fruit and vegetable market to Belmore Market in 1869**
- **More Chinese families moved into the area, especially after slum clearance in Surry Hills in 1920s**
- **Small traders set up grocery stores or restaurants, fruit merchants and wholesale importers moved into warehouses in the**



*Chinese businesses in the Rocks*



*Belmore Market in 1901 (now Capitol Theatre)*

03.

# Zhongshan merchants in Chinatown





# 03. Chinese organisations before WWII

- **Community networks among Chinese before World War Two were largely organized through kinship ties and native-place associations or ‘tongxianhui’ 同鄉會**
- **Native-place associations were for people to network, borrow money, arrange remittance letters back home and even marriages, as well as the return of bones of deceased**
- **Long Du Society (Xiangyi Long Du Tong Sen Tong) in Chinatown was established in 1906, but dissolved by the 1930s. The new Chung Shan Society, based in Surry Hills was opened in 1981**

*Meeting of Long Du Society in Chinatown*



*Chung Shan Society of Australia in Surry Hills*

# 03. Chinese organisations before WWII

- **Kuomintang (KTM) building on 75 Ultimo Road was purchased by Chinese Nationalist Party supporters and opened in 1922**
- **Kuomintang came to power after they overthrew the Qing Dynasty in China**
- **Zhongshan merchants in Australia were particularly drawn to Sun Yatsen's KMT because Sun's home village was in Zhongshan.**
- **Zhongshan merchants also used the KMT's extensive party networks as springboards for their entrepreneurial endeavours in Hong Kong, South China and the Pacific**

*Kuomintang (KMT) Building*



*Kuomintang delegates of 5<sup>th</sup> Convention in Australia, 1933*



# 03. Kwong War Chong

- **The Kwong War Chong was a very important general store and trading company established by Philip Lee Chun with several business partners in 1910.**
- **Phillip Lee Chun was a leading member of the Long Du Society. Kwong War Chong store functioned as a central hub for the community of Long Du people**
- **He established founded remittance stores stores in both Hong Kong and Shekki and donated generously to charitable causes in Zhongshan**
- **Norman Lee took over the shop after Philip passed away. The business was closed in 1987**

*Newspaper advertisement of Kwong War Chong, 1910*



*Kwong War Chong Building on 84 Dixon Street*



# 03. Kwong War Chong



- **In 2017, the Lee family sold 82-84 Dixon Street for A\$20 million dollars**
- **Sydney's Chinese community came into action when it was reported that the new owner intended to demolish and redevelop the site**
- **The City of Sydney Council made an interim heritage order to assess the heritage significance of the property in March 2019**
- **In April 2020, the NSW Government's Department of Planning, Industry and Environment approved the listing of the building on the State Heritage Inventory**

## Public Notices



### INTERIM HERITAGE ORDER FOR 82-84 DIXON STREET, HAYMARKET

The City of Sydney has made an interim heritage order for the property known as the 'Kwong War Chong store' at 82-84 Dixon Street, Haymarket.

The temporary order, effective from 22 March 2019, will apply to the property for six months. This will enable the City to investigate the local heritage significance of the property.

If Council resolves to initiate the heritage listing process within these six months, the order has effect for a further six months. The listing process would include appropriate provisions for protecting and managing the heritage item.

For more information, contact Claudine Loffi, Senior Specialist Planner (Heritage) at [cloffi@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cloffi@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au) or 02 9265 9333.

*The newspaper notice about the interim heritage order (dated 1 April 2019)*

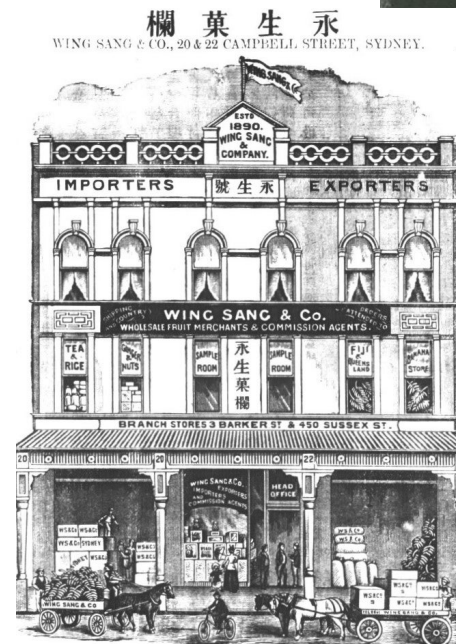
# 03. Wing Sang & Co

- **Wing Sang was founded in 1890, originally as a fruit shop by a group of Chinese who all came from Zhongshan, including George Bew, Choy Hing, Ma Ying Piu and Ma Wing Chan (aka Mark Joe)**
- **The company developed the highly profitable banana trade in Australia. In 1902 three firms, Wing Sang, Wing On, and Wing Tiy, amalgamated to form Sang On Tiy and Co. to grow and ship bananas from Fiji to Sydney at a rate of at least 2,000 bunches a week**
- **They also sponsored large numbers of Zhongshan people to enter Fiji and Australia. At the same time, they arranged the remittances of these Fijian and Australian Chinese back to Zhongshan.**

 @westsyduics



*The founders of Wing Sang & Co*



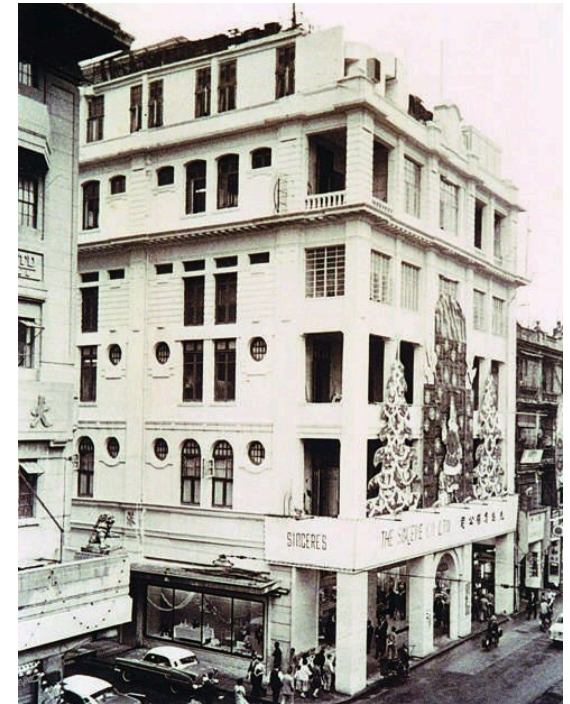
*The building of Wing Sang & Co*



# 03. Wing Sang & Co

- **The wealth generated by Wing Sang was not only based on the banana trade, but also on the remittance business**
- **During this period, Sydney Chinese sent huge amounts of gold to Hong Kong, which would be converted into cash for highly profitable exchange rates, providing these entrepreneurs with capital to invest in new businesses**

*The warehouse building of Wing Sang & Co in Haymarket, Sydney (c1910)*



*Sincere Department Store in Central, Hong Kong (c1960)*

# 03. Wing Sang & Co

- **The ‘big four’ departments stores established by the founders of Wing Sang: Sincere, Wing On, Sun Sun and the Sun Company.**
- **Wing Sang is an outstanding example of how some market gardeners from Zhongshan became local and regional fruit merchants in Sydney, and from there went on to establish large transnational enterprises**



*Da Sun Department Store in Guangzhou*



*Sincere Department Store in Shanghai*



# 03. Wing Sang & Co

*Wing Sang management in Sydney, 1930*



- **From 1918 it was managed by Sun Gee Mar (马辛巳), who came from Shachong village, Zhongshan**
- **After Sun Gee's death in 1937 the management of the company was passed on to his son Harry Leong Wah Mar (马亮华)**
- **When Harry retired in the late 1970s, his son Gordon Mar took over and he sold the company in 1984**



*Wing Sang head office on 58 Hay Street*

04.

# Zhongshan small businesses and market gardeners





# 04. Zhongshan small businesses

- **Chee Win Lee (1880-1951), came to Australia in the late 19th century from Zhongshan and established a grocery store in Haymarket on 82 Harbour Street named 'Yet Sing & Co'**
- **The business was operated by his son Wah Hook Lee (1911 -1972) and his wife Doris Gay (1915-2013). Doris's family owned a market garden in Guilford**
- **The shop sold both Australian and Chinese goods and the customers were mainly Chinese market gardeners**
- **William Lee (born in 1934) worked in the family shop when he was a schoolboy, along with his sister, Joyce.**

*Wah Hook Lee and Doris Gay with grandchildren at the family store*



*The family general store on Harbour Street*



# 04. Zhongshan small businesses

- **William went on to study at Sydney University and became a lecturer at TAFE while the store was being looked after by his sister Joyce**
- **William married Nancy Logan whom he met at Sydney University. They had four children, including Geoffrey Lee (Liberal Party Member for Parramatta since 2011)**
- **The family store has been closed but the building where their shop located still remains there today**



*William, Nancy and their youngest son Geoffrey*



*The building housed their family store on Harbour Street*

# 04. Zhongshan market gardeners

- **William's mother Doris was born in Sydney. She was the daughter of Louie Gay (1870-1946) who came to Australian from Zhongshan in 1890**
- **The Gay family firstly operated a market garden in Rosebay. In 1920, Louie Gay bought a 24 acre land in Guildford to operate the market garden.**
- **The family grew lettuce, potatoes and other vegetables. They shared a stall at the fruit and vegetable market in Sydney's Haymarket**



*The old house at the Guildford market garden*



*Doris, Bill and their siblings in Guildford market garden*



# 04. Zhongshan market gardeners

- **Doris' younger brother Bill Gay (born c.1920) ploughed the garden with a horse and watered the vegetable beds with watering cans suspended on either end of a carrying pole**
- **Bill Gay drove the family's truck to the markets loaded with produce from the gardens. Some of the buyers of their vegetables were men from Zhongshan who had fruit-and-vegetable shops in Sydney**
- **Bill Gay operated the market garden up until the 1950s. The land was bought by Parramatta Council which turned into a park**



*Bill Gay at the Guildford market garden, c.1940s.*



*The Gay family and their family's truck, at Guildford*

05.

# Zhongshan in Chinatown 1960-present



# 05. Zhongshan in Chinatown 1960s

- **The White Australia Policy made life difficult for Chinese in the first half of the twentieth century**
- **The Chinese population declined to its lowest level by mid-century as many returned to China**
- **Neutralisation Law 1956 and Migration Act 1966 allowed non-European people to migrate and become citizens in Australia, Dictation test was removed in 1958**
- **In 1950s-1960s, growing number of students came from Asia under the Colombo Plan, some stayed and became Australian citizens**
- **Chinese population in Sydney increased to over 9000 in 1966, but percentage of Chinese living in the City of Sydney LGA dropped to 16% due to suburbanisation**



# 06. Chinatown's rejuvenation in the 1970s

- **'White Australia Policy' abolished by Whitlam Government in 1973 after operating for 70 years**
- **Multi-cultural Policy begun under Fraser Government in 1978**
- **Dixon Street Chinese Committee was formed in 1975 in cooperation with City of Sydney to revitalise Chinatown**
- **In 1980, Dixon Street was turned into a pedestrian mall, Chinese style arch gates were built in two ends of Dixon Street**



*Dixon Street Chinese Committee formed in 1975*



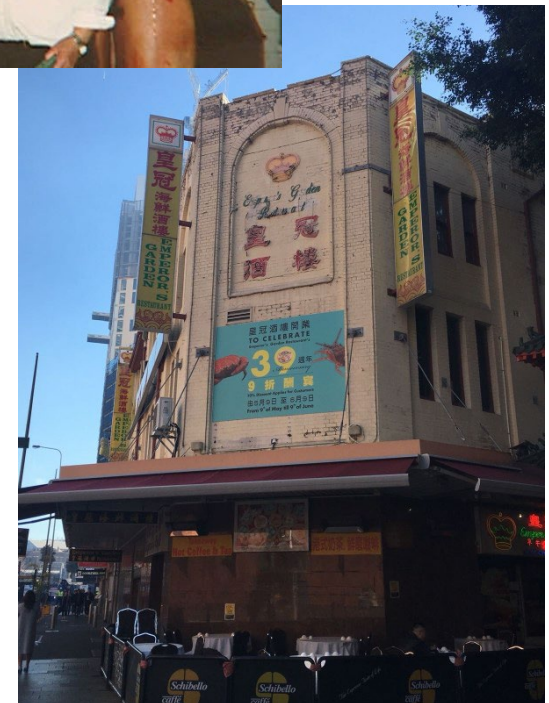
*The opening of Chinatown by Lord Mayor Nelson Meers in 1980*

# 06. Zhongshan in Chinatown

## 1970-present

*Stanley Yee learnt to be a chef of making Chinese-style barbecue meat*

- **Stanley Yee (余金晃), was born in the 1940s in Zhongshan. He came to Sydney to study high school in the 1960s**
- **From the 1970s he was active in the Chinatown restaurant industry. In 1979, he opened Emperor's Garden and established a number of other businesses**
- **Stanley maintained strong ties with Zhongshan and donated generously to charitable causes, such as schools, community center, nursing home etc. He also actively participated in the Chungshan Society of Australia**





# 06. Zhongshan in Chinatown - present

*Korean restaurant in Haymarket*



- **Zhongshan influence in Chinatown is likely to diminish over time**
- **In the past few decades, Sydney's Chinatown has become a much more hybrid, multi-Asian precinct, where there are growing number of Thai, Malaysian, Korean, Japanese and other Asian businesses.**
- **Since 2000, there has been a huge influx of Chinese from other parts of China**
- **Meanwhile, Stanley Yee plans to knock down his restaurant and build a high rise in its place, hoping to name the new building as 'Chung Shan Tower'**



*A 14-storey development planned on the site of Emperor's Garden Restaurant*



# 07. Conclusion



# 0.7 Conclusions



- **Since the mid 19th century, many Chinese migrants came from the villages of Zhongshan county to Australia. They formed a majority of Chinese who ended up in Sydney.**
- **They congregated in areas in the city, first in The Rocks and later in and around Dixon Street in the Haymarket district**
- **Restrictions imposed by the White Australia policy were an important reason why the merchant class dominate in the Sydney Chinese community. They become very wealthy through developing transnational enterprises**
- **However, by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Zhongshanese's presence begun to disappear, marked by the sale of the Kwong War Chong building in 2017.**
- **The City of Sydney has recently allocated a three-story heritage building in Haymarket, the former Haymarket Library, for a new 'Museum of Chinese in Australia' in an effort to 'preserve of Chinese history'**



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**Thank You**