Chinese Heritage Databases On-Line in Australia

©2008 Sophie Couchman

In 2005 I published an introduction for researchers to the Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation (CHAF) website in the on-line *Journal of Chinese Australia*.[1] This paper reprints that earlier information, updating where necessary, and then introduces two other websites with searchable databases that should be of interest to people researching Chinese heritage in Australia. I then conclude with some other useful websites relevant to research or teaching on Chinese Australia.

1. The Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation Website

The Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation (CHAF) project was a joint undertaking between La Trobe University, the Melbourne Chinese Museum and Shanghai's East China Normal University. It was funded over several years. One of the aims of the project was to promote Chinese–Australian studies in Australia and to contribute to the growing field of Chinese diaspora studies. The project created a large website with many exciting resources (http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au), with materials developed by the CHAF project during its duration and others contributed by independent researchers. The site was primarily designed for researchers but also contains a substantial section for secondary educators. There is also much to appeal to genealogists.[2]

The aim of this brief guide is to provide an overview for newer researchers in the field and to remind those familiar with the site of the wide range of resources available. I would now like to draw attention to some of the site's basic elements.

Resources

The 'Resources' section (http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/resources.htm) contains links to a broad range of databases or digital resources of both primary and secondary sources. There are two ways of searching the databases. A simple 'browse' shows all entries in the database in no particularly order. The 'search' function allows you to search for particular records in the database. If you elect to search the databases, you can choose either a 'simple search' which searches all fields in the database at the same time or a complex one. Complex searches allow you to search for information in particular fields. For example using a 'complex search' you can find all the entries in the *Tung Wah* newspaper in April 1899 or all the businesses that operated from a particular address in Little Bourke Street between 1905 and 1910.

Also on the 'Resources' page is a link to another page which holds a number of research guides that are available to download. These guides provide information specific to Chinese–Australian research and research materials by a number of researchers in New South Wales and New Zealand.

Databases found in the 'Resources' section appear briefly below. The primary author is noted in brackets.

1. **Tung Wah newspaper index** (Liu Luxin for CHAF)
This is an English language index to the Chinese language newspaper, the *Tung Wah News* (1898-1902) which subsequently became the *Tung Wah Times* (1902-

---

[1] Sophie Couchman, "Overview of the Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation website for researchers", *Journal of Chinese Australia*, Vol 1 (2005). The article can be found on-line at: http://www.purl.com/jca/issue01/08Couchman.html. *CSDS* thanks *JCA* for allowing this material to be reproduced.
[2] The current email address is cha@latrobe.edu.au.

1936). The index provides a brief title and description of each article, the date the article was published, the original source of the article and its page number and column. Users should note that Chinese names are transliterated into pinyin and so may not correspond with those commonly known. For example the NSW merchant and notable Chinese figure Quong Tart appears as Mei Guangda in the index. Searching for 'Darwin' yields 47 references in the newspaper while a 'Northern Territory' search provides 28. These items are wide ranging in nature: from a copy of a letter written by the Hua An Society (*hua an hui guan*) in Port Darwin to the Chinese associations in Sydney in August 1920 to a report on the visit of a Chinese boxing coach to Darwin on 18 August 1934.

There are also links to a background article about Chinese Australian newspapers by Liu Weiping (translated by Sang Yichuan and John Fitzgerald) and an article by Michael Williams that describes the wealth of information that can be drawn from the index.

2. **Chinese Australian History Resources Database**
This is a bibliography of primary and secondary source material in archives across Australia related to Chinese–Australian history. It includes: publications; government records; guides to Chinese–Australian records; databases; image and oral history collections; Chinese–Australian newspapers; personal, organisational and business records; theses; and video material. It is worth doing some very broad searches of this database and browsing the results to discover the surprising range of information contained in it. For 'Darwin' the 40 results of such a search include books, articles, theses, newspaper articles, indexes, oral history references and primary source material such as Mervyn John Holmes 1912 sanitation report for Darwin. Over the past year Dr Julie Marshall has added over 1000 additional references to secondary source material to this database.

3. **Chinese Australians: A guide to holdings in the Mitchell Library** (Paul Jones and Terri McCormack for CHAF)
The Mitchell Library in Sydney has an extensive collection of materials related to Chinese–Australian history in New South Wales and Australia generally. This guide describes the items relating to Chinese in Australia as listed in the various catalogues at the Mitchell Library. To locate the original you need to be able to access the catalogues at the Mitchell Library in the State Library in Sydney. The guide was published as a small booklet but is also available in PDF format. Items in the guide can also be found in the Resources database described above.

4. **Chinese Australians: A guide to holdings in the NSW Office of the National Archives of Australia** (Terri McCormack for CHAF)
This database builds on a guide compiled by Julie Stacker and Peri Stewart called *Chinese Immigrants and Chinese-Australians in New South Wales* (1996) [https://shop.naa.gov.au/browse_cat.php?cat=42]. Where possible, it provides a more detailed description of large record series and examples of records within these series. This is particularly useful for those living outside Sydney without easy access to the archives. The examples provided with record series can be useful for picking up references as well as helping to describe the record series.

5. **Digitised Historic Documents Database** (CHAF)
This database provides either searchable text or scanned copies (sometimes both) of around fifty historic documents relating to Chinese–Australian history. Documents summaries are available, plus contextual information about them. The easiest way to get an overview of the types of documents held in the database is to simply browse the database.

6. **Chinese NSW Naturalisation Database 1857-1887** (Terri McCormack)
This database, which draws on naturalisation records and the Colonial Secretary's correspondence held by the State Records Office of New South Wales, records people with Chinese names who were naturalised between 1857 and 1887. Information about occupation, age, residency of applicants and the reasons provided for their naturalisation can also be found in this database.

7. **Melbourne Chinatown Streets Database 1900-1920** (Sophie Couchman)
This is a database of Sands and MacDougall Directory entries for Chinatown, in Little Bourke Street (and the small lanes coming off it) between Swanston and Spring Streets, 1900-1920. This database is useful for tracking particular businesses over different addresses and for exploring the nature of businesses and residents at particular addresses in the area. Information about Chinese occupation in the area in 1940 has recently been added to the database.

8. **Indentured Chinese Labourers and Employers identified, NSW, 1828-1856** (Maxine Darnell)
The Chinese presence in Australia before the gold rushes is often neglected. This list of indentured Chinese labourers and employers has been laboriously compiled from newspaper, official and archival sources by Maxine Darnell as part of her doctoral studies.

9. **Fading Links to China** (Linda Brumley, Lu Bingqu, Zhao Xueru)
This is an expanded web version of a book of the same name published by the History Department of Melbourne University. It contains the following on-line databases:

- Inquests for Victoria 1850-1880 database;

- Listing of Chinese Burial Records - Ballarat New Cemetery;

- Listing of Chinese Burial Records - Ballarat Old Cemetery; and

- Chinese Admissions Ballarat Hospital 1858-1880.

10. **Christianity and the Chinese in the 19th and early 20th centuries** (Ian Welch)
This mini-website within the CHAF site contains digital resources developed by Dr Ian Welch during his many years of private research into the Chinese and Christianity in Australia. It includes:

Missions to the Chinese, 1855 - c1900 (on-line list)

Chinese Christian Baptisms in Victoria, 1855-1915 (series of databases)

Reference Materials (on-line list)

Last year a database of Chinese Australian Ex-Servicemen was also added (http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/welch/exservicemen.htm).

Education (in conjunction with Asia Education Foundation)
The 'Education' section of the site (http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/education) contains a range of lesson plans and is primarily aimed at secondary educators. However, researchers new to Chinese–Australian history may be interested in the 'About the

Chinese in Australia' part of this section, which provides a brief overview of Chinese–Australian history and short list of further reading on the area.

Stories
The 'Stories' section of the website (http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/stories.htm) contains short, easy-to-read pieces by family historians, academic researchers and others, that tell about the lives of individual Chinese–Australian around the time of Federation. This section may also be of interest to people wanting to learn about the diverse experiences of Chinese–Australians during this period as part of an effort to understand their own histories.

2. Golden Threads. The Chinese in Regional New South Wales, 1850–1950
This website (http://archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/index.htm) is maintained by Australian Museum and Galleries On-line, and was developed from the findings of the late-1990s Golden Threads Project. This project sought to source, identify and help preserve the objects and stories of Chinese people scattered throughout regional NSW museum collections. The content author of the site is Professor Janis Wilton, based on her own research and that of team members Joe Eisenberg, Doris Yau-Chong Jones and Barrie Steer.

The project, which published a book of the same name by Janis Wilton, also produced a travelling exhibition of objects from these collections that toured seventeen museums in mostly eastern Australia (including major museums in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne and Adelaide) from 2001 to 2005. Photographs of it form the first of the four main portals of the site, which are described below.

1. *Exhibition* (http://archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/exhibition/)
This portal is divided into six sections that reflect Chinese life and experience in Australia. They are:
- Work, with entries on gold and tin mining, pastoral work, market gardening, herbalists, cooks, dressmaking, storekeeping and carpentry
- Staying and leaving, with entries on intermarriage, new arrivals, visits to China, families, staying alone, in the armed forces, and citizenship
- Leisure, with entries on gambling, opium smoking, picnics, music, sport, and social visits
- Beliefs, with entries on 'joss houses', festivals and Christianity
- Dress and
- Food.

2. *Stories* (http://archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/stories/)
This portal opens a treasure trove of materials organised under six general headings. They are:
- Objects, in which Janis Wilton takes readers on a tour of the holdings of several smaller regional museums in NSW (Albury, Parkes, Wellington, Glen Innes and Tingha), while also providing a thoughtful commentary on the local treatment of both Chinese people and the objects that documented their existence in these places
- Family histories, which contains six oral histories, autobiographies or stories about the Kwan clan, of Glen Innes, and their shop the Kwong Sing Store that was established in 1886
- Fiction, which contains a short story by Kristal Yee, "Coming Home", written as a tribute to the life and times of her grandmother
- Oral history, which contains nineteen pages of edited segments from an oral history interview with Thomas Hoy Lee, who was born and raised in Stuart Town in the first half of the twentieth century

- Research processes, in which Doris Yau-Chong Jones explains how to read Chinese headstones and
- Sites, in which Janis Wilton writes about the Wing Hing Long store in the former mining community of Tingha, which is now the local museum.

3. *Peoples and Collections* (http://archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/collections/)
This portal opens the database and search engine, which can be accessed either by a browse or search function. The database is divided by regions of NSW, although the whole state is also accessible. Each region is sub-divided into various segments: all categories, people, collections, objects, localities and historical sites. Looking up Braidwood in Southeastern NSW, for example, gives fifteen items ranging from materials held in the Braidwood Museum to references containing brief information and sources to follow-up.

4. *Resources* (http://archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/resources/)
This portal provides access to a wide range of other sites and materials that are listed under the following headings:
- Artefacts and objects
- Conferences and workshops
- Digs, sites and trails
- Education
- Family history
- Further study
- Histories of the Chinese in Australia
- Museums and exhibitions, including several in the USA
- Organisations and networks
- Research aids, centres and collections.

3. Chinese–Australian Historical Images in Australia [CHIA]

This website (http://www.chia.chinesemuseum.com.au/home.html) is a database of historical images that brings together photographs held in the Chinese Museum in Melbourne, in private collections and also photographs that are available online that relate to Chinese in Australia. It results from a collaborative project between the Chinese Museum and La Trobe University that principally involved Professor John Fitzgerald, Dr Jane Lydon, Paul Macgregor and me. The photographs can be browsed by subject type, title, collection or repository as well as via a free search. The database contains over 1750 photographs with accompanying contextual information about people, families, places and activities.

As an example of what can be found here, let us consider the entry on Mei Guangda, or Quong Tart (1850-1903), one of the most famous Chinese figures in later-nineteenth-century New South Wales and Australia. The entry includes his name in pinyin and Chinese characters, followed by a short biography and the source materials used to create it. Then the real value of the database is revealed, in the associated information hyperlinked to each entry, where such information exists. In Quong Tart's case, this associated information contains links to:
- Associates
- Children
- Controlled corporate bodies (that is, his business)
- Family
- Wife
- Related concepts (with hyperlinks to Christianity; death and burials; gambling; importing and exporting industry; mining and mines; opium and tobacco smoking; restaurant, café and cook shop industry; and sports)

- Related events (with hyperlinks to the 1897 Diamond Jubilee Charity Carnival; Quong Tart's funeral in 1903; and the funeral of Way Kee in 1892)
- Related people (with hyperlinks to W. G. R. Lee; and Way Lee and Yet Soo War (1853-1909)
- Related places (with hyperlinks to Braidwood and Sydney)
- List of archival collections holding material
- Bibliography of published sources, including books, journals, newspapers, reports and on-line resources.

Finally, all this information is followed by twenty-two historical images of either Quong Tart or of events in his life.

For those interested in Quong Tart, it should be noted that the City of Sydney staged an exhibition about him in 2003, on the centenary of his death, called "No Ordinary Man: Sydney's Quong Tart". It survives on-line as a website containing several photographs of his tea rooms and other business ventures. It is at: http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/history/quongtart/NoOrdinaryMan.html.

OTHER USEFUL SITES
1. **Tracking the Dragon**
In 1999 the Australian Heritage Commission produced a toolkit to help local communities to trace and assess their migrant heritage. The late Henry Chan then helped secure extra funding to extend this to specifically Chinese heritage. A book to assist people to identify significant Chinese-Australian heritage sites can be found, in six PDF documents, at the following website:
(http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/publications/commission/books/tracking-the-dragon.html).

2. National Database on Chinese–Australian Cultural Heritage
The Chinese–Australian Cultural Heritage (CACH) project (http://www.cach.org.au) emerged out of an earlier initiative of the Museum of Chinese Australian History. CACH aims to locate and assess heritage sites, places and objects throughout Australia that are associated with, or significant to, Chinese Australians and to create a National Database of Chinese–Australian Cultural Heritage. The NSW branch of this project has added its verified and validated data to the database.

3. Harvest of Endurance
This is a digitalised version of an eighteen panel scroll painted in 1988, for the Australian Bicentenary, by Mo Xiangyi with the assistance of Wang Jungwen. The original, in the *gong bi* style, is held in the National Museum of Australia. The digital version contains thirty-eight different segments, each of which opens a part of the scroll depicting occupations, events or people of the particular era, from 1788 until 1988. Its artistic and interactive qualities, plus a highly informative audio introduction, make this website particularly useful for classrooms. It can be found at: http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/collection_interactives/harvest/harvest.htm.

4. Victorian Chinese Indexes on the Chinese Heritage Interest Network (CHIN)
These indexes can be accessed via the general website of the Network by following the link entitled "Victorian Chinese Indexes" at http://chinese-heritage.tripod.com. The information contained in the indexes mainly covers the colonial and early federal eras, from 1848 to 1912. The indexes comprise: records from seven local hospitals ("asylums"); of exhumations of corpses for repatriation; of male and female prisoners with Chinese surnames; and of press reports of Chinese deaths in Melbourne Hospital from 1868 to 1880.