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.

Local Studies Library Guide
Parramatta Heritage Visitor Centre
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.
E.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>祖 = Mak² or wheat</th>
<th>(surname)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>世 = Sai¹ or world</td>
<td>(given name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>英 = Ying² or brave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 sai¹ from the earlier example.

Further reading
Behind the name -
http://www.behindthename.com/names/usage/chinese
House of Chin -
http://houseofchinn.com/ChineseNames.html
Wikipedia, 2016, ‘Chinese name’ -
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_name
Wikipedia, 2016, ‘Generation name’-
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_name

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
Roots Village DB -
http://villagedb.friendsofroots.org/search.cgi and how to guide -
http://houseofchinn.com/HowToFindYourAncestralVillage.html

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
Chinese Family History Group of Souther California, 2014, ‘Ancestral village research’ -
http://www.chinesefamilyhistory.org/ancestral-village-research.html
Family Search, 2016, ‘China Genealogy’,
Wikipedia, 2016, ‘Place names in China’ -
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Place_names_in_China
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*


*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**

*Ancestors: Chinese in colonial Australia* by Ryan, Jan.
   General Subject: Chinese -- Western Australia -- History.
   Publication Date: 1995
   Format: Book
   Shelf Number: LS 325.25109941 RYAN

*Chinese-Australian journeys: records on travel, migration and settlement, 1860-1975* by Jones, Paul (Paul Anthony), 1955-
   General Subject: Chinese -- Australia -- Archives.
   Publication Date: 2005
   Shelf Number: LS 305.8951 JONE

*Chinese immigrants and Chinese Australians in NSW* by Stacker, Julie & Stewart, Peri
   General Subject: Chinese -- Australia -- History.
   Publication Date: 1996

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

**Shelf Number: LS 305.89 BROO**

*Red tape, gold scissors: the story of Sydney's Chinese Anzacs* by Fitzgerald, Shirley, 1949-
   General Subject: Chinese -- New South Wales -- Sydney -- History.
   Publication Date: 1997
   Format: Book
   Shelf Number: LS 305.895109441 FIT

*Remembering the forgotten: Chinese gravestones in Rookwood Cemetery 1917-1949* by Jones, Doris Yau-Chong.
   General Subject: Chinese -- New South Wales -- Rookwood -- Genealogy.
   Publication Date: 2003
   Format: Book
   Shelf Number: LS 929.5 JONE

*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* by Bagnall, Kate
   Series: *Locality*, volume 11, number 2
   General Subject: Chinese -- Australian -- Sources
   Publication Date: 2000
   Format: Online

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

**Other related books**

*Chinese Anzacs* by Clyne, Joanna, author.
Cooking & sharing : a booklet of Chinese recipes  
by Cheng, Shirley.  
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

The changing face of Australia : a century of immigration 1901-2000  
by Walsh, Kate.  
General Subject: Immigrants -- Australia -- History.  
Publication Date: 2001  
Format: Book  
Shelf Number: LS 325.94 WAL

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)
Simplified Chinese title: 唐人新聞紙
Traditional Chinese title: 唐人新聞紙

Chinese Australian Herald (Sydney, NSW) = Guang yi hua bao, (1894-1923)
Simplified Chinese title: 廣益華報
Traditional Chinese title: 廣益華報

Chinese Times (Melbourne - Vic.) (1902-1922)
Simplified Chinese title: 美利賓埠愛國報/愛國報/警東新報/民報
Traditional Chinese title: 美利賓埠愛國報/愛國報/警東新報/民報

The Chinese times [Newspaper]
General Subject: Newspapers on microfilm.  
Publication Date: 1894 1893 1892  
Format: Microfilm  
Shelf Number: LS REELS

Tung Wah News (1898-1902) / Tung Wah Times (1902-1936)
Simplified Chinese title: 東華新報 (1898-1902) / 东华报 (1902-1936)
Traditional Chinese title: 東華報 (1898-1902) / 東華報 (1902-1936)
Online index: http://resources.chineseaustralia.org/tungwah/
Note: not yet digitised.

For more information on early Chinese newspapers:
Trove list: Journals, articles and data sets on subject: "Chinese Australians" - New South Wales -- Newspapers. [Website]

Old Hong Kong newspapers - [Website]

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.) -
https://chineseaustralianhistory.org
Email: contact.cahs@gmail.com
Twitter: @cahs_contact

Chinese Heritage Association of Australia Inc. 澳洲華人歷史文物會

Migration Heritage Centre, 2011 - [Website]

Sydney Living Museum’s ‘Celestial City: Sydney Chinese story’, 2014 exhibition

Victoria
Chinese Australian Family History Organisation Victoria Inc. 澳洲維省華

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.


Video clips

Forums
Chinese genealogy (Australia) –
http://siyigenealogy.proboards.com/thread/1209

Chinese Family History & Stories (New Zealand) – click to go to the NZ forum notice board