

澳洲華人  
歷史協會

CHINESE AUSTRALIAN  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY inc

# NEWSLETTER

- September 2019 -

The latest news and updates from CAHS



Dr John Yu AC and Daphne Lowe Kelley at the launch of MOCA, 12 September 2019. Photo by William Yang.

*In Conversation: Chinese Australian Memories and Stories*, 31 August 2019.

## IN THIS ISSUE

- From the President
- From the Editor
- Upcoming Events
- *Stranded Nation*
- Family History
- Get your copy of *The Poison of Polygamy!*
- *Stranger Country*
- Membership update

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Since my last report, the intervening months have been action packed, the two main projects being efforts to establish a museum of Chinese Australian history in Sydney and organising and being present at performances in Auckland, Sydney and Melbourne, by a Hong Kong Cantonese Opera troupe. The former is a project that has been on my wish list for some time and the latter is an interest that has grown in more recent years.

Ever since I was a child growing up in New Zealand, I knew our family and others like us were a minority, different from the predominantly 'white' majority. We spoke a different language with our parents, ate different food, had different customs and knew that there were other family members in a far-off country called China. Yet, once outside of home we took part in school and some mainstream community activities.

When my parents took their five New Zealand-born offspring back to the ancestral home and country, China became a reality and it soon became clear why many Chinese left their homes to seek a living abroad. This interest in the settlement of Chinese in overseas lands has continued, focussing, for me, on New Zealand and Australia.

When I heard that a Museum of Chinese Australian History had been established in Melbourne (Museum of Chinese Australian History) in 1985, I recall travelling to Melbourne to specifically see it. Since then, Victoria has gained two additional Chinese museums, in Bendigo (Golden Dragon Museum) and Ararat (Gum San Chinese Heritage Centre). Establishing a museum in Sydney was always just a pipe dream, until recently when I first learnt that the City of Sydney's Haymarket Library would be moving to new premises.

A new organisation, the Museum of Chinese in Australia (MOCA), was formed with Dr John Yu AC (1996 Australian of the Year) as president and Australia's first Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, Dr Stephen FitzGerald AO as vice-president. The other committee members are from the Chinese Australian Historical Society and the Chinese Heritage Association of Australia - Ann Toy (Secretary), Susan Leong (Treasurer), Cheryl Cumines, Peter Hack, Brad Powe and yours truly.

MOCA's recent focus was working on an Expression of Interest (closing date 27 August) for the City of Sydney's building at 744 George Street, on the corner of George and Hay Streets, in the heart of Chinatown. If selected, MOCA aims to turn this building into a dynamic community hub not only for the local precinct but also for out of town visitors. So it is fingers crossed until a decision is announced. Meanwhile, in an effort to raise funds, MOCA held a very successful promotional launch at the Chinese Garden of Friendship announcing that the first 100 individuals, companies or organisations that donate \$1,000 or more will be known as MOCA's Founding Donors.



Haymarket Library building. Hay Street view.  
Source: EOI documents.



The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney, Cnr. George and Hay Streets c. 1900.  
Source: MAAS Archives, 129196



At the launch of MOCA, 12 September 2019

Chinese opera is an art form that millions of Chinese have enjoyed for centuries. It was one of the forms of entertainment that the early Chinese on the Australian goldfields enjoyed and an art form that my appreciation has increased in line with my increasing knowledge of it. Thanks to Australasian Arts and Stageworks, audiences in Auckland, Sydney and Melbourne were privileged to see a full length production of *Monkey King and Skeleton Devil*, one of the tales from the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, performed by Azure Seas Cantonese Traditional Theatre, a troupe comprised mainly of teachers, graduates and students from the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts.



Susan Leong, Daphne Lowe Kelley and Man-Yee Leanfore with Pigsy.

It is always pleasing to see Chinese Australian stories being told and more so when they have the benefit of being shown to a wider audience as was Benjamin Law's *Waltzing the Dragon*, a two-part program shown on ABC TV. This personal story of Benjamin learning more about his parent's ancestry is not unlike that of many Australian born Chinese.

Do check our CAHS events program – just held was our 31 August History Week panel with Juanita Kwok, Aliza Chin and Margaret Yung Kelly *In Conversation: Chinese Australian Memories and Stories*. On 28 September Kira Brown will present her family story *Potstickers and Panning*; and this will be followed by our 25-26 October Fong Lee's Lane Festival excursion to Wellington NSW – look forward to seeing you at these.

**Daphne Lowe Kelley**

## FROM THE EDITOR

Two important anniversaries in the history of the Chinese in Australia were recently celebrated. The Chinese Women's Association of Australia Inc. celebrated its 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at a lunch attended by about 60 people in a private function room at Zilver Restaurant in Haymarket on Saturday 13 July 2019. Draped across one of the walls in the room was displayed the embroidered banner of the Chinese Women's Association of Australia, presented to the Association by the Kaw family. The banner includes the embroidered names of the founding officers of the Association:

*President*

**MRS. L.M. WANG**

*Vice Presidents*

**MRS. W. MA HOWE**

**MRS. G. YOUNG LEE**

**MISS. MARJORIE TING**

*Treasurer*

**MISS RUBY KAW**

*Asst Treasurer*

**MRS. JAMES BIEN**

*Secretaries*

**MRS G. CARPAY-YOUNG**

**MRS. L.S. TSUI**

*Organising Secretary*

**MRS. SIDNEY.F. YOUNG**

The Association was the vision of Mrs Phyllis Wang, the wife of Martin Wang who at the time was Deputy Consul General for China in Sydney. Phyllis Wang would later move to Melbourne with her husband when he became Consul General. Mrs Wang invited a number of women to her home in Vaucluse on 14 March 1954 to discuss the idea of a Chinese Women's Association. The 37 women present were very enthusiastic, so a Committee was formed to draw up a constitution.

Another meeting, also at Mrs Wang's home, was held three weeks later on 4 April 1954. It was resolved that the Chinese Women's Association of Australia be formed, the Constitution was adopted and the 61 women present were designated as Founding Members. Mrs Wang's home was soon no longer suitable for meetings, with the membership growing to nearly 400. The Kuomintang Building at 75 Ultimo Road and Chequers Restaurant on the corner of Pitt and Goulburn Streets became new meeting venues.

A younger group of members was also formed to take part in the Waratah Festivals and the renowned Dragon Balls held at the Trocadero. The Waratah Festival was established in 1956 and held from late October to early November to coincide with the blooming of Sydney's floral emblem, the waratah. The festival included a parade, art competition, exhibitions, performances and a Lord Mayoral reception at the Town Hall. The Waratah Festival was eventually replaced by the Sydney Festival, now held each year in January. The Dragon Festival Balls were the Chinese debutante balls held for about 40 years. They

were started as fundraisers for China's resistance to Japanese imperialism in the 1930s and in the 1940s raised money for the "warphans", Chinese orphans of the Second World War.

After 48 years, on 8 June 2002, the Association adopted a new constitution and incorporated, becoming the Chinese Women's Association of Australia Inc. The original objectives of the Association remain to:

- promote close relationships between Chinese women in Australia
- work for the welfare of Chinese people
- foster greater friendship between the Chinese and Australian peoples
- foster greater knowledge of Chinese and Australian cultures and living conditions.

The current President is Ms Leanne Tam. The past Presidents are Mrs Phyllis Wang, Mrs Eva Ma Howe, Mrs Lily Ma, Mrs Helen Wong, Mrs Valerie Richards, Mrs Valerie Quay and Mrs Diana Nguyen. The Life members of the Association are Mrs Vera Fong, who was Secretary when Lily Ma was President; Mrs Valerie Richards, a past President; and Miss Kaylin Simpson Lee.

I would like to thank Leanne Tam, Kaylin Simpson Lee and Mei-Lin Yum for the information they provided. See also Shirley Fitzgerald (2008), *Red Tape Gold Scissors; The Story of Sydney's Chinese*, Sydney: Halstead Press, pp. 217-9.



King Fong's Table including CAHS President D. Lowe Kelley and Committee members S. Leong, P. Hack, M. Leanfore and A. Toy.



Banner of the Chinese Women's Association of Australia (detail), showing the names of the Founding Officers.



President Leanne Tam cutting the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cake.



Members of the CWAA Committee with the Association's banner.



Eugenia, Lesley and Daphne.

The second anniversary that many of us celebrated recently was the auspicious 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Daphne Lowe Kelley, President of the Chinese Australian Historical Society. Over 70 of us joined Daphne for lunch on Saturday 3 August 2019 in the first-floor restaurant of the Oxford Hotel on the corner of Lyon and Victoria Roads in Drummoyne. In lieu of gifts, Daphne with characteristic generosity asked her guests to make a donation to the newly established Museum of Chinese in Australia, an initiative that she has played a prominent role in developing for Sydney.

A former TAFE teacher and travel and tourism industry manager, Daphne lived in the city from 1964 to 2005 at Glebe, Centennial Park, Paddington and Broughton House. She worked at Sydney TAFE, Tourism NSW and later had an office in Millers Point and the CBD.

For over 40 years, Daphne has been an active committee member and leader in many organisations. These include the Women's Australian Travel League (1980's-1990's), the Australian Chinese Community Association in Mary Street, Surry Hills (1986-2012), Residents Network of Sydney (RESNET) Vice-President, International Institute for Peace through Tourism (President 2001-2011), Chinese Heritage Association of Australia (President 2003-2012), Luen Fook Tong (President 2009-2013), Cultural Days in the

Chinese Garden of Friendship, City of Sydney's Chinese New Year Festival Advisory Group (2009-2015), Australasian Art and Stageworks (Vice-President since 2011), NSW Police Multicultural Advisory Council (2013-2018), and the Chinese Australian Historical Society (current President).



Daphne was the recipient of the 2011 NSW Premier's Jack Wong Su Award for Voluntary Service Beyond the Chinese Community. The citation read:

Daphne Lowe Kelley is recognised for her community service spanning more than 30 years in the wider Australian community. Daphne is recognised for the breadth of experience and commitment she brings to the many and varied roles she has undertaken, including serving on local Chinese, Australian and professional organisations and Councils.

Her passion for education and human rights, social justice and good governance are key motivators in the community work she undertakes.

Daphne is the founding member and current Chairperson of the Chinese Heritage Association of Australia and has provided a forum for Australians of Chinese ancestry to present their research into family histories.

The photographs of Daphne's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday lunch were taken by Dr Leonard Lee.

**Peter J. Hack**



William Yang speaking at Daphne's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.





Daphne with her son, Monty, and his wife, Nelle, and Daphne's two nieces, Katie and Brenda.

## UPCOMING EVENTS



Chinese Australian Historical Society

Invites you to

### Potstickers & Panning

Opium Wars, conflict and fortuity – from Canton to Tingha via Ballarat – the separate journeys of three Chinese men, their interconnecting lives and interracial relationships.

This presentation is accompanied by numerous relevant documents and photographs of people and artefacts. It traces the migratory paths of three native Chinese men from Guangdong in Southern China to the Australian colonies. It explores the reasons for their leaving and the adverse circumstances they encountered. The colonies offered opportunities for wealth-acquisition and security, but prevailing white racism presented formidable barriers. Undaunted, the promise of prosperity outweighed the obstacles. Chen Quin Jack and Samuel Yaupaung arrived in the early days of the gold rushes of the 1850s, followed later by Lee Kee Chong in the early 1880s. In constructing their new lives, the first two married young women of European extraction, from the lower socio-economic class of settlers. Lee Kee Chong, arriving later, and partnered with, what was then termed, a half-caste wife from within one particular fledgling family (Yaupaung) in the segregated Chinese community. The families they all started, today make-up a typical admixture of ABC's (Australian Born Chinese) and European. Geographically the trajectories of these families intersected and focussed in the mining town of Tingha and surrounding districts in Northern NSW.



Opium tin, late 1800s

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Kira Brown is a 5<sup>th</sup> generation mixed-ABC (Australian Born Chinese), originally from Coonabarabran, she now lives in Orange NSW. Inspired by an inherited collection of Chinese related artefacts and ephemera, she is immersed in her family history and contributed a presentation at the 2017 Dragontails conference. Kira also posts to her blog – [chenquinjackhistory.com](http://chenquinjackhistory.com)

DATE: Saturday 28 September 2019

TIME: 2:30 pm

VENUE: Mitchell Theatre, Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street Sydney

PRESENTER: Kira Brown

COST: \$10 members, \$15 non-members (includes refreshments)

RSVP: Daphne Lowe Kelley 0417 655 233 or [lowekelley@bigpond.com](mailto:lowekelley@bigpond.com)

## FONG LEE'S LANE FESTIVAL EXCURSION



Fong Lee's shop in Nanima Crescent Wellington  
 Photo courtesy of Oxley Museum

### ***Friday 25 October 2019 and Saturday 26 October 2019***

One of the Society's aims is to organise excursions to various Chinese Australian heritage celebrations in rural New South Wales.

This year an excursion is planned to Wellington, New South Wales, to coincide with the Fong Lee's Lane Festival on Friday evening 25 October 2019. Fong Lee's Lane Festival is an event in the Dubbo Region Entertainment Arts and Music (DREAM) Festival.

Last year's inaugural Fong Lee's Lane Festival was reported on by Juanita Kwok in the Society's December 2018 Newsletter.

The business "Fong Lee & Co" traded under that name in Wellington from 1888 to 1936, when trading ceased following the death of its then owner, William Suey Ling. A predecessor store was opened in 1879 by Hong Wong, trading as Kum Yoon Fong. Following his death, the store was managed by Kum Sing Lee. Melbourne-born William Suey Ling was sent by his parents as a teenager to learn the store business and later they purchased Fong Lee's store in 1896 which William operated until his death in 1936.

Fong Lee's Lane was named after the Fong Lee & Co store, which was in Nanima Crescent with its warehouse in Fong Lee's Lane. The building which housed the Fong Lee & Co store still stands on the main shopping street of Wellington. Barry McGowan wrote in his heritage report on the Orange district, that Wellington was "one of the most important Chinese communities in rural New South Wales, if not rural Australia, in the 19th and 20th centuries to the present day." (McGowan and Mott, 2017).



William Suey Ling

The excursion will be a self-booking exercise – **you must book your own transport and accommodation**, but in the knowledge that there will a core group of members attending the Festival.

The proposed itinerary travelling by train is as follows:

### *Friday 25 October 2019*

07:19 train from Central to Wellington (***self-booking needed***)

The return economy train fare is \$104; there are some ‘sale fares’ currently mentioned on the website and certain members may be eligible for pensioner tickets (it is not an Opal service).

13:04 arrive Wellington Station.

Transfer of luggage to accommodation – the suggested accommodation is Hermitage Hill (***self-booking needed***), but there are other accommodation options in Wellington.  
<https://hermitagehill.com.au/> - Telephone 6845 4469.

The current proposal is to transfer luggage under the supervision of one of the organisers, whilst rest of party walks to Cactus Café.

13:45 Light lunch at Cactus Cafe – for this we need to know expected numbers.  
After lunch, short walk to Oxley Museum.

15:00 meet at Oxley Museum, tour Museum.  
After Museum tour, walk to Fong Lee’s Lane.

17:00 meet at Fong Lee’s Lane, walk Fong Lee’s Lane.  
Dinner from food stalls in Fong Lee’s Lane.

20:00 transfer to accommodation.

### *Saturday 26 October 2019*

10:00 transfer to Wellington Cemetery to view Chinese and other graves.

Transfer back to Hermitage Hill.

For those not participating in cemetery tour, free time.

12:00 to 14:00 Excursion lunch with Sing Lee and Coon families (descendants of two market gardening families) at Hermitage Hill – for this we need to know expected numbers.

Transfer to Wellington railway station.

14:48 train back to Central (***self-booking needed***)

20:48 train arrives at Central.

The transfers will be by a combination of local taxi, Hermitage Hill shuttle, and possible assistance from those with their own transport. It may be that a small mini-bus can be obtained. Costs will be shared among group participants.

Expressions of interest are sought so that Cactus Café can be given notice of likely numbers for lunch on Friday and Hermitage Hill can be given notice of likely numbers for lunch on Saturday.

Please email Malcolm Oakes at [oakes@tenthfloor.org](mailto:oakes@tenthfloor.org) to lodge an expression of interest.

**Please note that you must organise your own transport to and from Wellington, and your own accommodation in Wellington, so book accommodation now if you are interested. Meals and transfers will be on a user-pays basis.**

**Meals will be on a user-pays basis.**

**There will be an administration fee of \$25 person. Please deposit into the Society's account ANZ BSB: 012-071 Account No: 111 211 003 and fill in the description box Fong Lee and depositor box with your surname, OR send your cheque to The Secretary, Chinese Australian Historical Society Inc. PO Box K556, Haymarket NSW 1240.**

## CHINESE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

***Maidens in Marble & Myth***, the Goddesses of Ancient Greece were a significant part of the everyday lives of women and girls. Their mythology was central to society and cultural expression. Their stories and images tell of fertility rites, harvest festivals, home and hearth, birth and death, love, war, music and poetry. Please come along to hear Marilyn Sue Dooley who will bring "show and tell" which adds to the interest.

**Date:** Saturday 12 October 2019

**Time:** 1:30 – 2.30 pm

**Venue:** Sydney Mechanics Schools of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney

**Cost:** \$8 members; \$10 non-members.

**RSVP:** Phone Rose Wong 0418 838 737 or Marie Chan 0410 582 338.

## ***Stranded Nation: White Australia in an Asian Region***

The room at Parliament House for the book launch of Professor David Walker's latest tome (526 Pages), hosted by Shaoquett Moselmane MLC, chair of the Sydney Institute for Public and International Affairs, was filled to capacity with standing room only. Such interest from the wide range of attendees including members of the diplomatic corps, academics and community leaders attested to the importance of *Stranded Nation: White Australia in an Asian Region*.

Guest speaker, Professor Stephen Garton, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost Sydney University, a former student of Professor Walker's, outlined the contents and noted that a large number of the case studies and people mentioned in the book have never previously been published. The book has three parts: *Pacific Imaginaries*, *Volatile Minds* and *Asian Voices* with fascinating chapter titles such as *Biggles Explains the Orient*, *Ganging up in Bandung*, *The Empty Bookshelf* and *The Dancer and the Farmer*.

In the Foreword, written by Dr Stephen FitzGerald, Australia's first Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, he writes, 'David Walker's *Stranded Nation* is not only a much-debated issue freshly explored and discovered, it's told with authority, insight and wit, and the satisfying readability of a good novel, and that makes it great history. It is a recommended read for anyone, politicians and students alike, seeking to know the history of Australia's agonising over Asia, how it began, how it evolved and the passionate and colourful characters involved.'

Professor Walker mentioned that in 2004, he was declared legally blind and that research on this book had barely begun. His plan had been to examine Australian responses to Asia, from the 1930s to the 1970s, following on from his earlier book, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939*. After turning to a number of other projects, on his retirement in 2016, his wife reminded him of this unfinished project and she was of great assistance to him in getting *Stranded Nation* published.

### **Daphne Lowe Kelley**



## GETTING STARTED WITH FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

The Society recently received a request from a member of the public about how to get started with Chinese Australian family history research. Committee Member Malcolm Oakes was asked to respond and an edited version of his response follows.

Allow me to introduce myself. I am a committee member of the Chinese Australian Historical Society. We are a volunteer Society with modest financial resources. Your letter has been passed to me.

I first became interested in the Society because I wanted to research my wife's Chinese ancestry, about which she knew very little other than, "My mother was born in Cooktown, my father was born in Paddington, my grandmother was born in Tingha, and then you're on your own" and that her great grandfather was the person who originally migrated from China.

The Society's activities go beyond family history and I increasingly became interested in Chinese-Australian history generally.

The Society has a website, which can be accessed here:

<https://chineseaustralianhistory.org/>

It has a Family History section on the website, which may be accessed here:

<https://chineseaustralianhistory.org/family-history/>

It has a Chinese Names section on the website, which may be accessed here:

<https://chineseaustralianhistory.org/chinese-names/>

There is much other interesting information on the website. I suggest you read the Family History and Chinese names sections as a starting point.

Names, names, names. These are the bane of your life if you are researching your Chinese family history. First, as you are no doubt aware, in the Oriental tradition surnames appear first, followed by given names. So given names are often entered in Australian government records as surnames.

Secondly, the names were written down as heard by some clerk, so the spelling can be all over the place in different government records. Even if you have access to a searchable electronic data base containing names, the multiple spelling possibilities mean you only get back the spelling you put in.

Thirdly, that's quite apart from the reasonably common Chinese practice of changing one's name, or acquiring a "courtesy name" (a concept grander than a nick-name), although the surname was usually retained, but may not have been used publicly.

The next thing I would suggest, based on my own experience, is that you get an exercise book and write down everything you find out, or get told by a family member. Regard this rather like a jigsaw puzzle with a huge amount of blue sky. When you start you have no idea of where the pieces fit in. But as your information grows and you go back over old entries, bits of the puzzle start to fit together and lines of enquiry start to suggest themselves.

## *National Archives*

These can be accessed here:

<http://www.naa.gov.au/>

The movements of Chinese back and forward from Australia were closely monitored by the immigration bureaucracy. Painful for your forbears, but good for you, as the records often throw up photographs and details of comings and goings to and from Australia, the dates and the ships they travelled on, and details of spouses and children. They also often contain correspondence with family detail in it and references from various worthies, which gives you an idea of people who supported your forebears in various ways.

## *Trove*

Trove is the digitisation project of Australian newspapers, which can be accessed here for an advanced search:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/search?adv=y>

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries country newspapers in particular used to include a lot of detail about district families, such as hatches, matches and despatches and school prize and sports days, so information can often be gleaned from that source.

There is an English Index to the NSW *Tung Wah Times* (a publication in Chinese) which may at least point you to possible articles by or about your great grandfather. If he wrote articles and used a *nom-de-plume*, an Index search under his known names will not be of assistance.

The *Tung Wah Times* Index can be accessed here:

<http://resources.chineseaustralia.org/tungwah/>

## *Finding your direct ancestors in China*

This is difficult.

The steps you have to go through are first, try and find out within the family the name in Chinese characters of the original migrant. That way you get his *actual Chinese name*. Look around old family records and see if there is anything with Chinese written on it. A name is likely to be three Chinese characters grouped together. The importance of having the Chinese characters of his name lies in the fact that the Romanised version of his name (ie how it was written in English) may bear no relationship to his Chinese name, and obviously an English given name adopted for day-to-day purposes is not likely to be a Chinese name.

Secondly, try and find out within the family the ancestral village of the original migrant. If you can find out that, and his actual Chinese name, there are organisations in China which will search for relatives for a fee. But you have to give them a useful starting point. Chinese villages often had family records of particular families either in the form of ancestral tablets on altars in joss houses or records maintained on paper.

Thirdly, there is an organisation in China called *My China Roots* which undertakes ancestral research in China. It was referred to in the ABC Benjamin Law documentaries *Waltzing the*

*Dragon*. However, the Society has no reported experience of this organisation and cannot yet vouch for reliability or capability. The business operates on the basis of a flag fall fee and a success fee. The cost is several hundred US dollars, which is why getting a dossier of information together before retaining such an organisation would be the better way to go.

Fourthly, even if you have this information, records in China may not have survived the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, when there was systematic destruction of family records by the Red Guards.

If you think there is an easy path through to obtaining the information you want, there isn't. It's a slow process and involves the gradual building up of a dossier of information. Every now and then you will get a breakthrough, but more often than not you will chase rabbits down burrows for no results.

But that said, it's still a lot of fun.

By way of example, Kira Brown has also gone down the path you are about to embark on. She has a blog of her experiences here:

<https://chenquinjackhistory.com/>

Happy researching

**Malcolm Oakes**

## ***The Poison of Polygamy: A Social Novel***

By Wong Shee Ping, Translated by Ely Finch

Serialised in 1909-1910, *The Poison of Polygamy* is a rare gem of Australian literature. The first novel of the Chinese-Australian experience, it follows the fortunes of a young man who leaves his wife behind in southern China to seek his fortunes in the Victorian goldfields.

—Nicholas Jose, author of *Avenue of Eternal Peace*  
 and *The Red Thread*

The creators gratefully acknowledge the role of the Chinese Australian Historical Society and its consultant historian Michael Williams in initiating this project.

Ely Finch and Michael Williams recently gave a very interesting and well received presentation on *The Poison of Polygamy* at the 11th International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS) which was held in Leiden, the Netherlands, 16-19 July 2019. While essentially a work of Australian literature, the outstanding translation of this work of late-Qing Literary Chinese and its unique position within the history of the Chinese Diaspora makes *The Poison of Polygamy* of great interest to international scholars also.

Two launches of *The Poison of Polygamy* have been announced for October:

- In Sydney at Gleebooks on Friday 11 October, 6.00 to 7:30 pm.
- In Melbourne at Readings, Carlton on Tuesday 22 October, 6.00 to 7:30 pm.

*The Poison of Polygamy* is now available and copies can be purchased from CAHS for \$35 or \$32 for members. Copies will be on sale at the next CAHS event on 28 September, *Potstickers and Panning*, presented by Kira Brown. We can also mail a copy to you. The charge is \$42.95 which includes postage and handling. Please complete the order form and you can pay by cheque or direct deposit.



Michael Williams and Ely Finch in Leiden, the Netherlands.

Serialised 1909-1910,  
*The Poison of Polygamy*  
is a rare gem of Australian literature.

The first novel of the Chinese Australian experience, it is a roller-coaster tale of blackmail, murder, betrayal and even thylacine attack, partly based on real people, places and events. Revealing the human face of migration between imperial China and colonial Australia, it recounts the story of a man from southern China who tries his luck on the Victorian goldfields, the wife he leaves behind, and their eventual fraught reunion.

In this bilingual edition, Australia's and possibly the West's earliest Chinese-language novel is presented in English translation for the first time. Illuminating introductions explore the work's historical, cultural and linguistic context, and establish its unique significance in Australia's literary and social history.

"The discovery of *The Poison of Polygamy* and its publication in this highly informative bilingual edition is a double happiness. It gives readers a highly entertaining new novel, replete with drama, emotion and intrigue. At the same time it documents Chinese Australian life in a key period of history."

Nicholas Jose, author of *Avenue of Eternal Peace* and *The Red Thread*

"A shiny little nugget has been disinterred from the tailings of our literary past ... *The Poison of Polygamy* is an exciting addition to our literary history that deserves to be widely discussed and analysed in both China and Australia."

David Walker, Emeritus Professor, Deakin University and author of *Anxious Nation* and *Stranded Nation*



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ANZ BSB: 012-071  
Account No: 111 211 003

Please email your completed order form to [contact.cahs@gmail.com](mailto:contact.cahs@gmail.com) or post to the Chinese Australian Historical Society, PO Box K556, Haymarket NSW 1240.

## ***Stranger Country***

### **Book Giveaway**

A fairly new member of the Society is Monica Tan - the former deputy culture editor of *Guardian Australia* and co-host of the Token podcast. And Monica has written her first book.

*Stranger Country* is the riveting account of the six months Monica drove and camped her way through some of Australia's most beautiful and remote landscapes. She shared meals, beers and conversations with miners, greynomads, artists, farmers, community workers and small business owners from across the nation: some Aboriginal, some white, some Asian, and even a few who managed to be all three. The result is an enthralling and entertaining celebration of the spirit of adventure, a thoughtful quest for understanding and a unique portrait of Australia and all it means to those who live here.

*Stranger Country* has had some great reviews:

“A tender and thought-provoking exploration of cultural and national identity, and a bewitching love letter to Australia, recounting the pain of what's been, the complications of the present, and offering hope for what is to come. Tan's curiosity and deep reverence for the land and its first inhabitants makes her the perfect travel buddy on this journey into the heart of Australia.”

—Michelle Law, author of *Single Asian Female*

“*Stranger Country* is a marvelously engaging, beautifully described record of a quest into the meaning of belonging, that documents both the gritty reality of a 30,000-kilometre solo road trip around Australia by one young woman, and her profoundly intelligent journey of mind.”

—Isabelle Carmody, author of *The Obernewtyn Chronicles*

We are hoping to get Monica to give a presentation to the Society early next year but in the meantime, we have permission to publish a short extract for you to read. And thanks to the publishers, Allen & Unwin, we have a copy of *Stranger Country* to give away.

If you would like to win the free copy of *Stranger Country*, please send an email to [contact.cahs@gmail.com](mailto:contact.cahs@gmail.com) and tell us in no more than 200 words what you think of the extract from Monica's book and why you would like to read the whole book. Include your name and address at the end of the email. Only members of CAHS can enter and entries close at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 30 October 2019.

The following extract is from *Stranger Country* Part 5 Top End:

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27 AUGUST

Day 83

I was fascinated to see my Chinese stepmother on Aboriginal-controlled land. She and my father had flown to Darwin, the Northern Territory's capital, from Sydney for a long weekend over the final days of August. I had taken a circuitous route from Broome that included a detour to Derby and through breathtakingly beautiful parts of the Kimberley, then east back into the Territory. We met at a hotel deep in the savanna woodlands of Kakadu National Park, with its corkscrew pandanus and thousands of termite mounds.

My stepmother, Mary, was fifteen years younger than my 62-year-old dad, a classic Chinese beauty with very smooth, straight hair one imagined she had brushed carefully every evening since she was a child. A decade had passed since she moved from Beijing to Sydney. Aside from a trip to Uluru, she had barely interacted with Indigenous Australia. She'd come into this trip neither callused with racism nor teary-eyed from colonialist angst, unlike so many Australians who interact with Indigenous Australia.

Kakadu is roughly the size of Israel, and the traditional owners are the Bininj people in the north of the park and Mungguy people in the south. At a gunbim (rock art) site we joined a tour led by an interpretive park ranger. The gunbim was painted in red, white and yellow ochre, mainly in the X-ray art style that sees figures depicted

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with anatomically accurate skeletal features. According to the Bininj and Munggyu peoples, many of the older paintings—up to twenty thousand years old—were created by mystical, long-limbed Mimi spirits. It was from these spirits their ancestors learnt to paint. What they depicted were more than stories: they were Law. Among depictions of turtle, fish and wallaby species is a thylacine, while the 1880s arrival of hat-wearing, pale-skinned buffalo hunters is depicted with them standing stiffly, hands in pockets.

Despite the thirty-degree weather, Mary was dressed in long pants and a cream Burberry-style trenchcoat to protect her pale skin from the sun and mosquitos. She listened to the ranger with interest as he spoke about the twelve languages formerly spoken in the park, and the traditional owners' complex kinship system dividing all people, plants, animals, songs, dances, ceremonies and the land into two moieties: duwa and yirridja. I picked up a tourist guide from the park that had said the calendar was divided into six distinct seasons: gudjewg/monsoon, banggerreng/knock 'em down storm, yegge/cooler but still humid, wurrgeng/cold weather, gurrung/hot dry, and gunumeleng/pre-monsoon storm.

Mary was less fascinated by a sample of basket-weaving displayed in the park museum. 'I can do that,' she said, with a little shrug of her trenchcoat-draped shoulders, after I'd pointed it out. 'When I was a little girl I used to have to weave many hats and shoe soles out of wheat.'

Like so many Mainland Chinese people she was middle class now, sure, but in Mao-era China everyone had been dirt poor. Mary's father was the first in his village to own a bicycle in the 1960s; wherever he rode kids chased after him, delighted by the sight of this novel contraption, and shouted, 'Foreign donkey! Foreign donkey!'

She told me about a property developer she and my dad knew, Mr Zhang. A real Mr Moneybags. During China's Great Famine of 1959–61, he remembered eating nothing but sweet potato. During the winter, when there was nothing to harvest, his family would add

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TOP END

water to dehydrated potato. Potato, potato, potato. Now, he hated them—couldn't even bear being in the same room as one.

As I was primarily raised in air-conditioned shopping centres, the idea of living off the land had some novelty to it. I was prone to adopt a romantic view of the ingenuity Bininj and Mungguy people displayed, and their mastery of bush tucker and bush medicine: a view propped up by a complete lack of firsthand experience with the tiring and tedious work of traditional life.

But just two generations back, my own relatives had been in China—foraging, fishing, building, farming, weaving, carving out an existence from the landscape—as they had for thousands of years. In Kakadu, Mary was just a woman from one ancient culture coming to another. Because of that, she was able to cast a more discerning eye than me.

At Cahills Crossing we saw saltwater crocodiles. They were known to congregate there, so infrastructure had been built to allow visitors to view them safely. The crocs drifted lazily about in the water reminding me of overweight tourists in a hotel swimming pool, occasionally propelling themselves with their tail by swishing it back and forth.

Crocodiles exercise a sit-and-wait approach to hunting. Through routine lassitude they conserve energy and go months without food. Their agility and speed are only on display when they have the opportunity to strike, which makes them all the more unnerving. It's easy to anthropomorphise the crocodile as a slick Sicilian mobster who spends most of his time sitting nonchalantly at a diner table, puffing on a cigar, but who at any moment can have those who dared cross him beaten to a bloody pulp and chucked into a shallow grave.

The stories I'd heard about croc deaths were gruesome. One doctor in Darwin had told me about a father out fishing in Kakadu with his wife, son and daughter-in-law on a relaxing Saturday afternoon. He was alone on a boat, washing or emptying a bucket, when a 4.7-metre saltie jumped up, nabbed him by the arm and dragged him into the water.

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Crocs' victims aren't executed with a snap of the jaws but are instead drowned or crushed to death. The body is then jerked or spun in a death roll so that croc-bite-sized pieces twist off and can be swallowed whole. As the crocodile only has a stomach the size of a basketball, unfinished chunks of meat might be stored in mangroves and are sometimes used as bait to attract fresh meat like turtles and mud crabs. It's discomfoting to think of a human rendered into something as lowly as fishing bait.

We went for a sunrise boat tour of the river, its water splotted with round, green lilies and filled with birds. I spotted comb-crested jacanas, whose exceptionally long toes allow them to tread evenly across lily pads, and elegant pygmy geese dressed in dark iridescent green. Rainbow bee-eaters provided fluttering splashes of colour. But my favourite birds here were the softly honking magpie geese. As their name suggests, they look like geese that have borrowed the smart piebald plumage of magpies. That morning they floated on the water and tipped like jugs being poured until their feathered tushies and orange legs were the only parts sticking out.

Later Mary and I were in the park museum, where we learnt that Kakadu was one of few UNESCO World Heritage sites listed for both its natural and cultural wonders. In a not-so-distant life Mary had worked as a local guide in China. As she was well versed in traditional Chinese culture I asked her if the Chinese imbue the landscape with spiritual meaning, in a similar way to what the Bininj and Mungguy do. She told me there are many sacred mountains in China—some connected to Buddhism, others to Taoism and still more to ancient animistic Chinese religions—that for thousands of years have drawn pilgrims and powerful emperors for worship. We spoke of the parallels between Bininj and Mungguy ontology and that gentle, ironic, nature-loving Chinese philosophy of Taoism, with its emphasis on balance, intuition and adherence to natural cycles.

Whereas what do most non-Aboriginal Australians see when we stand before a mountain? Maybe a photo-op, an athletic hike or,

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TOP END

for the more industrious, a new mining site to blast the hell out of. The colony was born from a British culture that understood sacred churches better than sacred earth. For us non-Aboriginal Australians to feel that a rock escarpment or waterhole can be imbued with the spirits of ancestors and ancient creators requires a certain imaginative leap not all of us are able or willing to make.

I told Mary that for all the diversity of the Aboriginal nations I had travelled through, from Wiradjuri to Warlpiri, what remained universal and constant was this deep love of their land. They loved the land as though it was family and seemed to know every rock, tree and cloud.

She said before the great bulldozers of urbanisation tore entire villages down, Chinese people also had a deep kinship with the land. 'When Chinese people moved overseas, such as the miners who went to America or Australia during the gold rush, they'd always bring a jar of soil from their home village.'

How wonderful was that? And back then you had to be extra judicious about what you packed. You were about to embark on a dangerous journey overland and over sea for months on end to a strange new place. You had no idea when or if you would ever return to your village, and there wasn't an overnight FedEx service for your relatives back home to post you anything you missed. Yet a coolie would find room to pack a glass jar containing the earth that had sustained him—for they were almost always male—since he was a child: the same earth that had sustained his father, his father's father, his father's father's father, and maybe a hundred fathers prior.

\*

On the morning that I watched my dad and Mary's rental car drive away, destined for Darwin airport, I headed to the Chung Wah museum downtown. It was adjacent to a small Chinese temple that in various incarnations had stood on the site since 1887. Inside the temple were pillars and beams painted red and decorated with gold-embroidered

## MEMBERSHIP

**Membership News:** Welcome to:

- new life members Matthew Blampey, Debra Hogan and Anthony Charles Wing
- new members Andrew Barty-King, Kira Brown, Janice Eastment, Janet Liu Terry, Therese Jackson, Kevin Shaw and Peter Trist
- renewing members Rose Boutin, Marie Chan, Belinda Coombs, Ann Fieldhouse, Natalie Fong, Sybil Jack, Juanita Kwok, Man-Yee Leanfore, Julie Lim, Vivienne Lock Lee, Megan Neilson, Malcolm Oakes, Brad Powe, Karen Schamberger, Leanne Tam, Christine Yeats and Alexandra Wai Wah Wong
- re-joining members Ooi Hock and Gordon Mar.

We look forward to seeing you at our events and to your active participation.

**Membership Renewals:** The membership year is the same as our financial year, 1 July to 30 June. Membership renewals for 2019-2020 fell due on 1 July 2019.

The membership form can be used for membership renewals and also for enrolling new members. <https://cahsociety.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/cahs-membership-form-2019.pdf>

It can also be downloaded from the CAHS website <http://chineseaustralianhistory.org>

### **Twentieth Anniversary of Incorporation of the Society Call for documents**

The Society was incorporated with its registration on 4 September 2002.

The Committee is keen to prepare a short history of the Society's first 20 years and to that end seeks any old documents relevant to the Society's activities, particularly those from the early years, with a view to creating an archive.

The types of documents we have in mind include:

- Newsletters
- Minutes of Annual General Meetings
- Minutes of Committee meetings
- Treasurer's Reports to AGMs or Committee Meetings
- Copies of correspondence to and by the Society
- President's Reports to AGMs
- Photographs of activities undertaken by the Society
- Details of presentations or addresses made to the Society.

If you require assistance with scanning, let us know and we will borrow what you have and return it. Or if you no longer want the documents, we will happily take them off your hands!

**Contact Malcolm Oakes**  
**SMS or ring 0419 249 697**  
[oakes@tenthfloor.org](mailto:oakes@tenthfloor.org)

**DISCLAIMER:** The views expressed in articles published in the *Newsletter* are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Chinese Australian Historical Society.