Attachment E

Chinatown Thematic History

Chinatown Thematic History

Final Report

February 2023

GML HERITAGE

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The following report register documents the development of this report, in accordance with GML's Quality Management System.

Job No.	Issue No.	Notes/Description	Issue Date
22-0177	1	Final Report	February 2023

Quality management

The report has been reviewed and approved for issue in accordance with the GML quality management policy and procedures.

It aligns with best-practice heritage conservation and management, *The Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013* and heritage and environmental legislation and guidelines relevant to the subject place.

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Cover image

Haymarket at night, 2000. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

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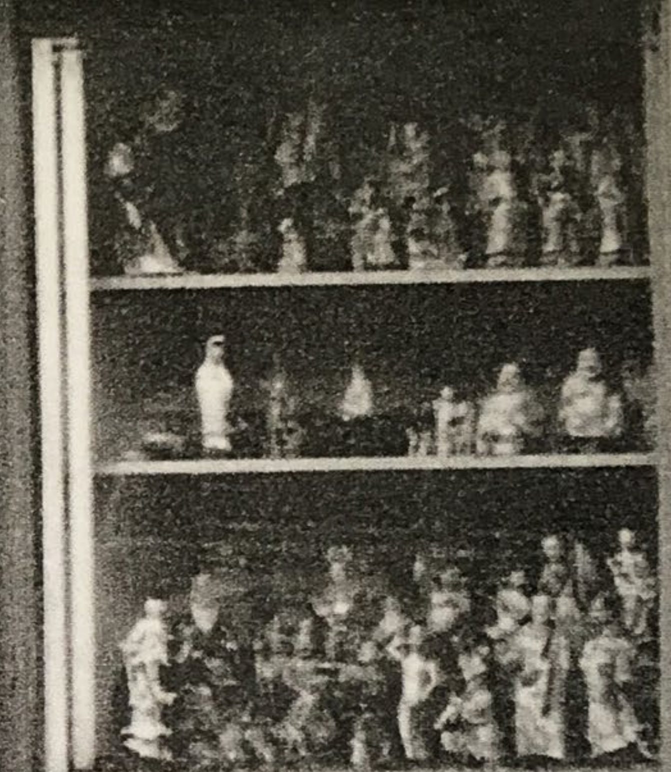

King Fong's family grocery store Say Tin Fong, 52 Dixon Street, 1954. (Source: China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

1 Introduction

Background

The Council of the City of Sydney (Council) has engaged GML Heritage to prepare a thematic history of the area in Central Sydney known as Chinatown. This thematic history will inform Council's work to assist the community and businesses in reinvigorating Chinatown. This document helps link Chinatown's history with its important places to guide Council's actions in the area including historical interpretation, urban character controls, heritage conservation and public domain design.

The study area

Although 'Chinatown' is commonly used to refer to Dixon Street, Haymarket, and its immediate surroundings, the study area extends beyond these bounds. Today's Chinatown has an irregular shape, bounded by Liverpool Street, Harbour Street, Valentine Street and Pitt Street. Figure 1.1 is based on the Haymarket/Chinatown Special Character Area outlined in the 2016 review of the Sydney Development Control Plan.

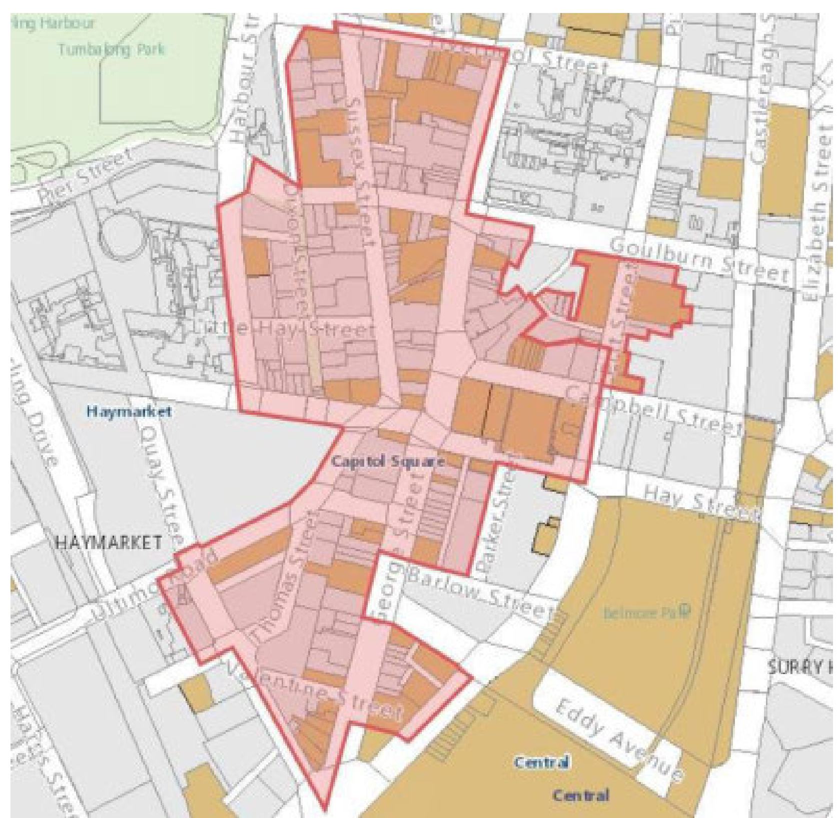

Figure 1.1 Indicative study area based on the Haymarket/Chinatown Special Character Area. (Source: City of Sydney Council)

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The area outlined in Figure 1.1 includes approximately 200 properties, excluding roads. There are currently 48 discrete local heritage listings relating to 59 properties, including 6 that are also listed on the State Heritage Register. Many of these items do not necessarily reflect Chinese heritage, history or individuals within the evolution of Chinatown and Haymarket.

This report aims to help Council understand the history of the relevant geographic areas that make up Chinatown. We note that Chinatown's borders are porous and have moved over time within the city of Sydney. The report has also considered Chinatown's intangible heritage (i.e. oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices).[1]

Key objectives

This thematic history is a resource to inform the Council's work with the Chinatown community.

To contextualise this, a concise summary is provided in Section 2 of Chinese patterns of settlement, as they have been expressed within the broader historic built environment in the City of Sydney. This report is not a comprehensive history of Chinese immigration and influence.

The key objectives of this study are to provide a robust platform for future heritage management and planning in this area by:

- providing a thematic history of Chinatown
- identifying the historic themes and heritage significance of the Chinatown precinct as well as its significant characteristics and places.

What is a thematic history?

A thematic history provides broad historical context for understanding the patterns and forces that shaped an area over time. Typically, a thematic history is prepared when a comprehensive heritage study of an area is undertaken. The history is then used to provide a framework for investigating and identifying heritage items.

In 2001, the Heritage Council of NSW established a list of 36 historical themes to help to guide the development of thematic histories. However, as noted by Heritage NSW, 'Not all themes are relevant throughout the state … [and] local themes will not necessarily fit neatly into the state thematic framework.' This history identifies locally distinctive themes to provide a high-level overview of the development of Chinatown.

A theme can unite a variety of actions, events, functions, people and dates. Using themes helps to prevent overemphasis on a particular type of item, period or event of history.

The thematic history is **not** intended to be a detailed account of all aspects of the history of Chinatown, nor to replace the extensive local, scholarly or published histories that provide detailed historical accounts focused on specific subjects and utilise extensive primary historical sources.

This thematic history aims to help readers understand and appreciate why an area like Chinatown has developed into its current form. The history identifies and explains a selection of locally distinctive themes that help us understand the area and its historic physical fabric.

Methodology

The methodology for this thematic history has been guided by the City of Sydney RFQ as well as a review of some primary documentary resources, and the guidelines prepared by the former Heritage Office: 'Historical Research for Heritage'[2] and 'NSW Historical Themes',[3] published in 2000 and 2001 respectively.

Report limitations

The focus of this report is on the broad historical factors, forces and patterns that shaped Chinatown(s) in Sydney. We acknowledge the study area is on Gadigal land of the Eora Nation. However, the report does not include a history of Aboriginal archaeology, cultural values or sites of significance.

We know that at any given time and place, certain values and ideas are privileged over others in how history and urban environments are created and represented. We also need to consider and challenge the notion that identity is singular or monolithic, and instead consider it to be multifaceted, shifting and made up of heterogeneous representations of race, gender and class. A key finding of this recent scholarship is, for instance, that the urban characteristic expressions and experience of Chinese people in the City of Sydney extends well beyond the boundaries and material fabric of the current locality defined as Chinatown.

Notwithstanding the various methodological and theoretical limitations, thematically, this history endeavours to identify the key shaping forces and some of the characteristic expressions of Chinese people's lives and culture as evidenced by a range of extant places, spaces, recorded events and activities in the City of Sydney through time. Such examples include tangible forms

and features favouring particular materials and colours, such as gateways, signage, shops, restaurants, commercial businesses, and places of worship, and—just as importantly—food, festivals, dress, dance, religious practices and traditions. We understand that as research in this area evolves through further documentary research and community based engagement, more places of potential heritage value and significance may be identified.

We note that the authors of this thematic history are not Chinese-speaking, and have not accessed or used documents or sources in Mandarin, Cantonese or other Chinese languages as part of the preparation of this report.

Authorship

This report was prepared by Minna Muhlen-Schulte (Associate/Manager, Interpretation and Design) and Léonie Masson (Associate, Historian), with assistance from Adiba Rahman (Heritage Consultant), Linda Phung (Graduate Heritage Consultant) and Angus Bowen (Design Consultant). Julian Siu (Principal) and Sharon Veale (Chief Executive Officer/Partner) reviewed the report and provided strategic advice.

Thematic summary

GML has drafted the following themes:

Theme 1: *Evolving Chinatown*

Chinatown as a destination, a place name and a unified urban area of Sydney evolved much later in the twentieth century. Concentrations of Chinese residences and businesses tell the story of evolving patterns of migration and a diversifying economy.

Theme 2: *Living and working in Chinatown*

The theme of living and working in Chinatown spans a vast range of historical experience. Formerly high-density neighbourhoods have vanished but new homes and businesses have taken their place. Discrimination against Chinese communities directly impacted on the function of business and their homes. However, the strength and diversity of Chinese people and businesses ensured a thriving network with international reach.

Theme 3: *Belief, culture and community*

Chinatown evolved over time from a place offering shelter and sanctuary to a hub of social, cultural, religious and political activity for Sydney's Chinese community and an international gateway for business.

Theme 4: Change and renewal in Chinatown

Like many Chinatowns globally, Sydney's Chinatown has been shaped by a range of factors. Development pressures, population decentralisation and shifting demographics have changed the fabric and boundaries of its communities. Consequently, the role of Chinatown has also evolved as it straddles its history and the new demands of our increasingly globalised world.

Community consultation summary

City of Sydney and GML Heritage facilitated two in-person consultation sessions (20 December 2022 and 17 January 2023) with community members to ensure the thematic history encapsulates the best representation of Chinatown.

Each session consisted of a small group of representatives from important local Chinese Australian history and cultural organisations. Members of the group discussed the thematic history study with City of Sydney staff and historians from GML Heritage. Feedback was provided directly at the session and via email.

Key content and suggestions included:

- Examine the multifaceted role of Chinatown over time as a community hub, tourist attraction and transnational gateway.
- Discuss sources of change in Chinatown from demographic change to development.
- What is the significance of Chinatown? Consider the perspective of family connections, business, national significance.
- Include the importance of the complex political landscape that occupied Chinatown; diverse beliefs; clan houses; cultural practices.
- What is the intangible heritage of Chinatown? i.e. visceral experience of music, food, performance, personal memories.
- Heritage planning: How can the thematic History help support the documentation and protection of Chinese heritage in Sydney?
- Managing community history: How can the growing repository of Chinatown's history be supported? i.e. digital mapping platforms (i.e. Social Pinpoint), nascent organisations like Museum of Chinese in Australia, China–Australia Heritage Corridor database.

Recommendations

The following recommendations consider how the Thematic History can provide the basis for future stages of work.

1. **Further historical research**

The thematic history has highlighted the important historical patterns and forces that shaped Chinatown in its distinct historical and geographical formation. Some key areas for further research are as follows:

- intangible heritage (i.e. historic routes of parades, gatherings, protests)
- associations of key Chinese businesses, organisations and prominent figures with specific places
- Chinese influence on design and built form of fabric from the nineteenth century onwards
- contemporary heritage values (i.e. public art, shopping malls).
- Build on the City of Sydney's oral history collection conducted in the 1990s i.e. identify up to five potential oral history candidates who could talk about the evolution of Chinatown in the last 50 years.

2. **Heritage Study**

Following further research, and commissioning of a comprehensive heritage study. In reviewing prior heritage studies and specific heritage items for the Chinatown area, it is noted that inventory descriptions do not necessarily relate to Chinese heritage, history or individuals with the evolution of Chinatown and Haymarket. A Heritage Study would capture potential heritage items not yet identified that relate to the history of Chinatown or the Chinese community in Sydney; and update existing inventory sheets to accurately reflect the history of listings and their significance.

3. **Public domain: interpretation and design**

The Thematic History can provide a foundation for future public domain and interpretation works to celebrate the history of Chinatown and capture the voices of community over time. As noted above, additional oral histories will also be developed following the consultation and could inform devices such as soundscapes, phone app or digital platform overlays with linked onsite signage.

Endnotes

[1] UNESCO, 2004, *What is Intangible Heritage?*, viewed 5 December 2022 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>.

[2] NSW Heritage Office, 2001, Heritage Information Series: Historical Research for Heritage.

[3] Heritage Council of NSW, 2001, *NSW Historical Themes.*

Historical overview

Dragon dancers, Chinese New Year, Dixon Street Haymarket, 2003. (Source: City of Sydney archived)

2 Historical overview

The following illustrated timeline shows how Chinese immigration to Sydney and NSW, and the subsequent development of today's Chinatown, sits within the context of key international, national and local events.

Year	Event/policy and impact
1788	Three First Fleet ships sailed to Canton, China, under contract to East India Company. Beginnings of trade route linking Australia, China, Europe and the Americas.
1818	First Chinese arrival. Earliest known Chinese immigrant to Sydney was Mak Sai Ying (John Shying) from Guangzhou, Canton. Arrived on the *Laurel*.
1839–1842	First Opium War and Treaty of Nanking. British established treaty ports in China for free trade. 98th Regiment of Foot attacking Zhenjiang, 1842. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)
1848	Arrival of first Chinese indentured labourers on the *Nimrod*. The first wave of migration of 'sojourner' Chinese from southeast Chinese district of Canton. Page from an English copy of the agreement between Thomas Beckford Simpson and Chinese labourers, 11 October 1851. (Source: State Library of NSW)

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Year	Event/policy and impact	
Post-1852	Gold rush. The gold rush in NSW and Victoria brought more than 600,000 immigrants to Australia between 1851 and 1860, including many Chinese people.	Chinese on the goldfields, 1850s. (Source: Sydney Living Museums)
1855	*Chinese Immigration Act* (Vic).	Victorian legislation limited number of Chinese passengers per vessel to one for every 10 tons.
1856–1863	Second Opium War and Peking Convention. Opening of ports of Newchang, Chefoo, Formosa, Swatow and Hainan.	Signing of the Treaty of Tianjin. (Source: www.historytoday.com)

Year	Event/policy and impact	
1881	*Influx of Chinese Restriction Act 1881* (NSW). Legislation passed in New South Wales Parliament introducing £10 poll tax on Chinese people arriving by sea or by land and a limit of one Chinese person to every 100 tons of shipping.	*Influx of Chinese Restriction Act 1881*. (Source: NSW State Archives Collection))
1888	*Chinese Restriction and Regulation Act 1888* (NSW). Legislation passed to prevent Chinese people becoming naturalised citizens.	
1889	Australian population reached three million. Between 1856 and 1889, 61,245 Chinese people entered New South Wales and 31,850 left again.	

Year	Event/policy and impact
1901	Federation of the Commonwealth of Australia. *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth) ('White Australia policy'). This legislation contained a clause requiring an immigrant to write out a passage in a European language dictated by an immigration officer to be allowed to enter the country. After 1905, the officer could choose any language at all so a Chinese immigrant could be asked to write a passage in Italian or French etc. It also applied the term 'prohibited immigrant' to anyone who failed the test. Chinese immigration was severely curtailed. 1901 Census recorded 29,907 Chinese-born people in Australia (third-highest in list of countries of birth).
1905–1914	Approximately 390,000 new (predominantly British) immigrants arrived.
1912	Establishment of the Republic of China. End of imperial rule in China. Chinese Republic Forever, pre-1930. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)
1914–1918	Immigration virtually ceased during World War I.
1929–1930s	Great Depression reverberates globally between 1929 and 1939. Unemployment rates increased to nearly 32% and community attitudes hardened towards immigrants, including Chinese.
1937–1945	Second Sino-Japanese War. The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War led to the first increase in Chinese arrivals in Australia since 1901 as Chinese seamen and Pacific Island evacuees sought refuge. There was widespread sympathy for Chinese people and their profile in Sydney increased.
1939	Australian population reached seven million. 99.3% of the population were born here or emigrated from countries in the Commonwealth.
1939–1945	World War II. Halt to immigration except for a small number of people in need of refuge.
1949	Proclamation of the People's Republic of China. Chinese Communist Party takes control of China.
1951	Colombo Plan. Australian Government offered scholarships and other assistance to students from member countries. Students

Year	Event/policy and impact
	with a Chinese background from the Indo-Pacific region were also eligible.
1957	Amendment to *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth). Non-European residents with at least 15 years' permanent residency were permitted to obtain citizenship.
1958	*Migration Act 1958* (Cth). The dictation test was abolished, and entry processes were reformed.
1969	Australian population reached 10 million. New South Wales's population was 3,223,740, of which 72,791 were born in Asia. Of that number there were 9,829 born in China and 2,842 in Hong Kong. These latter figures do not take into account Chinese people born in Australia.
1963–1966	Review of non-European immigration policy. Entry conditions relaxed for non-Europeans.
1972–1974	Remnants of the White Australia policy were dismantled by the Whitlam Government. *Australian Citizenship Act 1973* (Cth). Migrants with three years' permanent residence were permitted to obtain citizenship, regardless of race. Chinese migrants were no longer excluded from citizenship.
1976–1981	Indo-China wars—Australian Government accepted Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian refugees. In total 56 boats carrying 2,100 Indochinese refugees landed on Australian shores. Sydney's Asian population became increasingly diverse. First boatload of Indochinese refugees arriving in Darwin Harbour, 1975. (Source: Museum of Australia)
1985 onwards	New overseas student policy. Policy allowed overseas students to enrol at Australian institutions if they meet the entry requirements and pay the full cost of their course. Enrolments by full-fee paying overseas students rose quickly from around 2,000 students in 1986, to 40,000 in 1990, and to almost 70,000 in 1994.

Year	Event/policy and impact
4 June 1989	Tiananmen Square massacre. This led to an Australian policy change to enable 42,000 Chinese students to stay in Australia. Student protests, Tiananmen Square, 4 June 1989. (Source: ABC News)
1994–1997	Handover of Hong Kong to China. Influx of 100,000 new immigrants from Hong Kong. Of that number, 40,000 returned to China within 10 years of arrival. Ceremony of Hong Kong handover, 1 July 1997. (Source: https://time.com/4829838/hong-kong-20-years-handover-timeline-photos/)

Year	Event/policy and impact
1997	Asian Financial Crisis. Increasing numbers of Korean economic migrants sought work in Sydney.
2001–2011	Thai population in Australia doubled. Sydney's Thai Town is home to the highest residential concentration of Thai people in Australia. Thai Town sign, 2015. (Source: Wikipedia Commons, http://sydneythaiclub.com/)
2009	By 2009, there were 630,663 international student enrolments in Australia.
2014	New Colombo Plan. Australian Government introduced a scholarship program encouraging Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the Indo-Pacific region including China.
2019–ongoing	COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-Asian discrimination surged in Australia.

Year	Event/policy and impact
	Australian borders closed in 2020. Most international students returned to their home countries. Many businesses in Chinatown closed because there were no tourists or international students, and many people were working from home. Closure of Super Bowl Chinese restaurant, Dixon Street, 2020. (Source: Gourmet Traveller, https://www.gourmettraveller.com.au/news/food-news/chinatown-sydney-restaurants-coronavirus-18656)
2020–2021	China introduced national security laws in Hong Kong. In total 12,000 Hong Kong citizens, many of them students, were offered safe haven visas if they were in Australia in July 2020. More than 4,300 Hong Kong citizens became Australian permanent migrants in the 2021 financial year.

Year	Event/policy and impact
	 Pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in 2019–20. (Source: SBS News, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/china-and-britain-made-a-promise-to-hong-kong-25-years-ago-today-people-feel-betrayed/bpp17m1c4)

Theme 1: Evolving Chinatown

Chinatown, 1985. (Source: State Library of NSW GPO 4-39059)

3 Theme 1: Evolving Chinatown

The evolving boundaries of Chinatown mark separate phases: 'The area around Belmore Markets and adjacent parts of Surry Hills is often referred to as Sydney's second Chinatown, the first being The Rocks, while the third, in the vicinity of Dixon Street had clearly emerged by the 1930s.'[1]

Members of Sydney's Chinese community were also impacted by changing immigration policies. By the 1970s, the idea of creating 'Chinatown' as a destination took hold, shifting the area's character once more.

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Arrival

Colonial Australia's ties with China began in 1788. Three ships in the First Fleet, *Lady Penrhyn*, *Charlotte* and *Scarborough*, sailed from Sydney in May 1788 under contract to the East India Company and proceeded via Canton, China, to collect a cargo of tea, bound for England.[2]

In the period before 1848, 18 Chinese settlers immigrated to Australia. The first among this group of immigrants was Cantonese-born Mak Sai Ying, who arrived in Sydney in 1818. He took up land at Parramatta, anglicised his name to John Shying and by 1823 was married to Sarah Thompson at St John's, Parramatta. By 1829 Shying was granted the licence of the Lion Inn in Parramatta.[3] Newspapers refer to him variously as 'the Chinaman' at Parramatta[4] and 'John Shying (Chinaman), Church-Street, Parramatta'.[5]

The numbers of Chinese labourers arriving in NSW in the 1820s and 1830s steadily increased, but remained low overall. Some came free or were brought into Sydney by merchants who then employed them on their estates and farms. The Macarthurs at Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta, employed three Chinese workers in the early 1820s, a carpenter, cook and servant respectively.[6] One newspaper reported the arrival of a Chinese carpenter in December 1827 on the brig *Nimrod*.[7] According to Maxine Darnell in *Indentured Chinese Labourers and Employers Identified New South Wales 1826–1856*, four Chinese migrants arrived in 1827 on the *Ephemina* and are listed in the 1828 Census. Chinese carpenters and furniture makers operated in Sydney by the late 1820s.

In 1837 GF Davidson put forward a proposal to bring out 500 Chinese men (but no women), to work on farms in the Hunter River area. Forty graziers endorsed the proposal.[8] Yet the

scheme was abandoned two years later, because Davidson could not secure a vessel to Sydney from Singapore.[9]

Numbers of Chinese migrants were bolstered after convict transportation ended in 1840. Because convicts no longer supplied free labour, the importation of Chinese workers was seen as a way to circumvent the resulting labour shortage. Yet the indenture system that the Chinese labourers were brought out under was seen by some as a new form of bondage. This increased number of arrivals, principally from 13 counties around Kwantung (present Guangdong) and Fukien (present Fujian), was facilitated by the opening up of five new Chinese treaty ports. The ports were opened following China's loss to Great Britain in the First Opium War (1839–1842) and, to a lesser degree, its loss to Great Britain and France in the Second Opium War (1856–1860).

In 1848 the barque *Nimrod* sailed into Sydney Harbour from southern China with 121 Chinese contract (or indentured) labourers aboard. Half remained in Sydney and the rest were sent to the farms in Queensland's north. These labourers were engaged for £2.5 a month, with rations, on five-yearly indentures. Between 1848 and 1851, 981 Chinese people had arrived in Sydney, and 1,000 more landed before April 1852. The journey was often perilous and conditions were appalling, which caused high rates of death and disease aboard the ships.[10]

It was intended that the first Chinese labourers would work in rural areas, but some stayed on in Sydney and formed a small close-knit community.

The discovery of gold in NSW in 1851, and later in Victoria, rapidly transformed the nature of Chinese migration to Australia. The news of gold in the NSW Central West saw European workers leave farms and city businesses in droves to try their luck on the goldfields. Many Chinese workers in NSW soon joined them, and by early 1852 the word had spread overseas, including to China. Chinese businessmen in Hong Kong were soon arranging passage to Australia. Most of these Chinese miner migrants came from Canton (now Guangzhou) in southern China. Although most of the first arrivals went on to the goldfields of Victoria, by 1861 there were 13,000 Chinese people in NSW.

Where did Chinatown start?

Initially Chinese businesses clustered in The Rocks, close to the city's wharves at Circular Quay. The gold rush of the 1850s provided Chinese migrants with the opportunity to prospect and open businesses alongside the regional goldfields and to establish temporary lodgings and supply stores at the key arrival points in Sydney.

As the gold rush ended, many Chinese people returned from regional areas into Sydney. Their occupations shifted from miners and indentured labourers to market gardeners, hawkers, café workers, merchants, market stallholders, fishers, shopkeepers and furniture makers. Some Chinese people worked in cabinet-making workshops that were concentrated around The Rocks.

Although only 189 Chinese people were recorded in Sydney in the 1861 Census, the Chinese population had almost doubled to 336 by 1871, and increased each decade, to 900 by 1878 and up to 1,321 by 1881. This population increase precipitated a new *Influx of Chinese Restriction Act* in 1888. It was the second such Act; the first had been passed in 1861 but repealed in 1867. The *Influx of Chinese Restriction Act 1881* and the *Chinese Restriction and Regulation Act 1888* made entering and exiting Australia more difficult. As part of these Acts, a tax was imposed and those who paid were issued a certificate. Chinese migration to Australia declined but did not cease. The Chinese population became concentrated in the inner city.

Sydney's first Chinatown developed in the second half of the nineteenth century around Lower George Street, The Rocks, and the streets near Circular Quay. This was where most of the community worked in shops and restaurants or ran boarding houses catering to Chinese migrants. It was also where a range of businesses and lodgings were clustered, and the location of at least five Chinese furniture-making factories.[11]

Shirley Fitzgerald's research into the Sydney Directory and Sands Directories (1855–1873) traced the first entries of Chinese businesses registered with unnamed 'Chinamen' at addresses in Cambridge Street that ran behind Lower George Street. Fitzgerald notes that the spellings of the businesses' names are inconsistent but that the 'impact of Chinese activities on the area was unmistakable.'[12] The permanence of such businesses by 1870 suggests that increasing numbers of Chinese people were making Sydney home.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Sydney's wealthiest Chinese merchants resided in The Rocks, while the pattern of Chinese residential occupation in the inner city developed alongside the growth of market gardens. Chinese market gardeners brought their produce to the markets and often stayed overnight. Chinese boarding houses, shops and cook houses sprung up on Goulburn, Pitt and Campbell streets to meet the demand of these itinerant workers. Alongside the market gardeners, cheap rent and factory buildings attracted furniture making businesses to the southern part of the CBD. This in turn enticed groceries, cook-shops, butcheries, gambling houses and more lodging houses (some of which were converted from factory sites and stables).[13]

Figure 3.1 Chinese newcomers arriving on shore after passing customs. (Source: *Sydney Mail*, 25 February 1903, p 482)

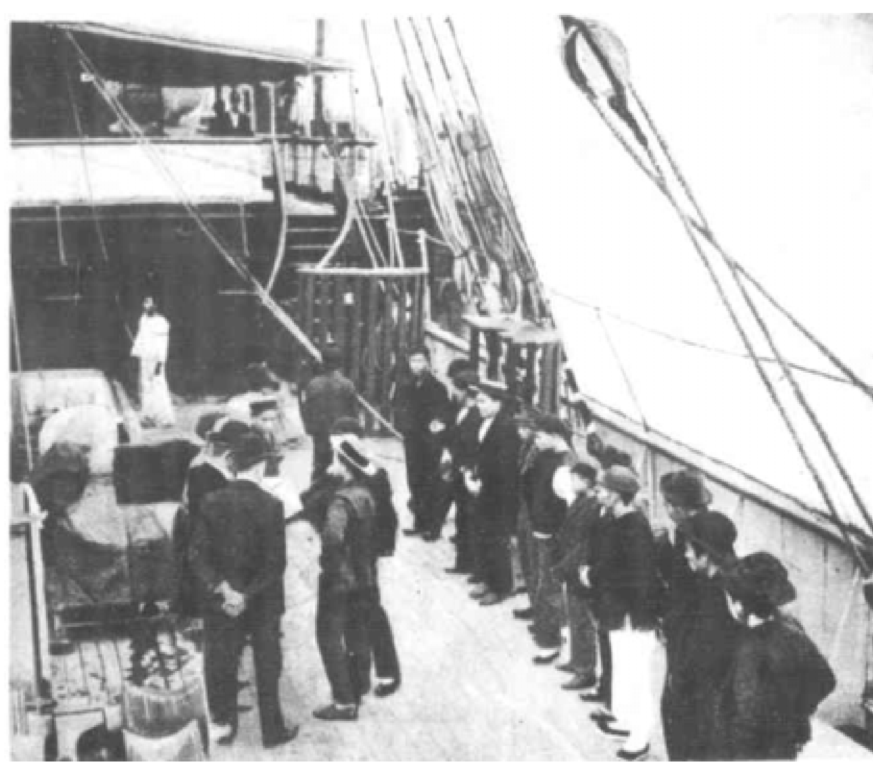

Figure 3.2 Customs officers administering the *Immigration Restriction Act* on board an arriving vessel from China. (Source: *Sydney Mail*, 25 February 1903, p 482)

Impact of immigration policies on the population of Chinatown

While early Chinese immigrants were considered 'sojourners', staying temporarily before returning to their home villages, the more settled Chinese Australians travelled regularly between Australia, China and other destinations for a raft of family, business and personal reasons. The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth) (otherwise known as the 'White Australia' policy), however, forced Chinese Australians (along with other 'non-white' Australians) to provide extensive documentation and an application to return to Australia after travelling overseas. The restrictive immigration and citizenship policies were not wound back until the 1970s.

The Chinese population in Australia declined after 1896, falling from 37,533 in 1880 to 23,000 at the outset of the Chinese Revolution in 1911. The 'White Australia' policy was partly responsible for the declining population. After 1901, partly due to the introduction of a restrictive immigration policy, there was a tight-knit, culturally homogenous Chinese community in Sydney. Most spoke Cantonese, one of the dominant languages in southern China. This small community began to shape the composition and location of Sydney's early Chinatown areas including The Rocks and Surry Hills.

During the 1920s, Sydney's Chinese community remained small but strong, buoyed by the ambitions of the Kuomintang, which set up branches across the world to support nationalist cultural initiatives. However, ongoing immigration restrictions in Australia and upheaval in China generated 'a plethora of sad stories of people smuggling gone wrong, and harassment by authorities. Lonely old men were unable to marry, unable to return to an increasingly chaotic China and unable to assimilate into the Sydney scene.'[14] The 1930s Depression took its toll on market gardeners and market stall holders (further explored in the next chapter, Life and work in Chinatown) but some of the bigger Chinese firms were able to consolidate wealth and continue trade between Australia and China.

Consciousness of the plight of dislocated Chinese people in Sydney was piqued following the commencement of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and the outbreak of the Second World War in the Pacific in 1941. Shelter was offered to Chinese seamen abandoning ships bound for Japan, and unions boycotted loading goods for export to Japan. The Chinese Seamen's Union (CSU) was established in Dixon Street in 1942 at a meeting in the Trades and Labour Council building. Many Australian-born people of Chinese heritage joined the Australian armed forces during World War II. After the war, the geopolitical landscape shifted once more with the proclamation of the People's Republic

of China in 1949 and the rise of the Cold War. Previously the Federal Government had worked to repatriate refugees, seamen and wartime arrivals back to China.

There was a change of national policy in 1947 permitting visiting merchants' wives and dependants to remain for seven years; local traders' families, five years; and the families of temporary assistants on a case-by-case basis. The *War-time Refugee Removals Act 1949* (Cth) aimed to deport the remaining wartime arrivals was highly contentious and was scrapped when Robert Menzies came to power as prime minister. His government recognised the difficulties of deportation to China after 1949 and ultimately allowed some 800 wartime refugees to remain in Australia.[15]

'Newcomer' Chinese from the 1950s shifted the structure of Australia's Chinese communities. Haymarket had transformed into the traditional heartland of the Chinese community in Sydney, but its demographic changed after World War II because of a gradually increasing number of Australian-born Chinese and the ageing of the earlier generations of immigrants.

The children of Chinese diaspora parents from countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong began to arrive in Australia to study under the Colombo Plan. Many were attracted to the existing community of Chinese people in the heart of Sydney. There was also a large cohort of private overseas students. International students became a significant part of the university population and the city itself.[16]

From the 1970s Chinese immigrants were arriving from mainland China, as well as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indo-Chinese (or Southeast Asian) countries such as Cambodia. Unlike most of their predecessors, who had arrived in Australia as indentured labourers in the nineteenth century, these new immigrants tended to come as skilled workers, and many were educated, white-collar professionals.

Figure 3.3 Dixon Street, 1984. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Creating 'Chinatown'

As early as 1961 the Council discussed forming Dixon Street into Sydney's Chinatown. The Town Clerk's Minute Paper of 17 March described the Chinese occupation of Dixon Street, identifying several restaurants on both sides of the street between Goulburn and Hay streets and 'a very considerable amount of industrial and commercial usage … and the ownership of the premises is quite numerous'.[17] The question of closing Dixon Street was a difficult issue because it would not be practicable to close the street during normal daytime business hours as this would adversely impact all the business operating in the street.[18]

By 1971, the last vestiges of the White Australia policy were being removed. The City of Sydney Council established the Dixon Street Chinese Committee, with sponsorship from the Chinese Consul (Taiwan). This committee pushed the regeneration of Dixon Street as a centrepiece of the broader Chinatown area. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described Sydney's Chinatown as 'mainly a working area as most Chinese have been absorbed into the suburbs' and 'only the very old and the very new arrivals from China still come to Dixon Street'.[19] It remained a thriving area with good-quality, affordable Chinese restaurants around Hay and Dixon streets, and a range of shops selling groceries, foodstuffs and household objects, but fewer younger Chinese people were taking up traditional market gardens, fruit and vegetable wholesaling and restaurants.

Figure 3.4 Dixon Street Chinese Committee, c.1980. (Source: The China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

The relocation of the wholesale markets to Flemington from the late 1960s provided an opportunity to redevelop the market complex bounded by Hay, Quay and Thomas streets, west of George Street. In 1971, as part of its strategic planning, the Council considered the future redevelopment of Darling Harbour, including Chinatown and a new Chinese Garden. In 1973, the City of Sydney approved 'the development of a Chinatown in the city markets area'[20] by a consortium of Sydney businessmen, Chinatown Development Co., but wanted the centre to

encompass the new Paddy's Markets development. The consortium's 1975 plan (Figure 3.5) depicts a walled 'Oriental' village, theatre and floating restaurant on a miniature lake.

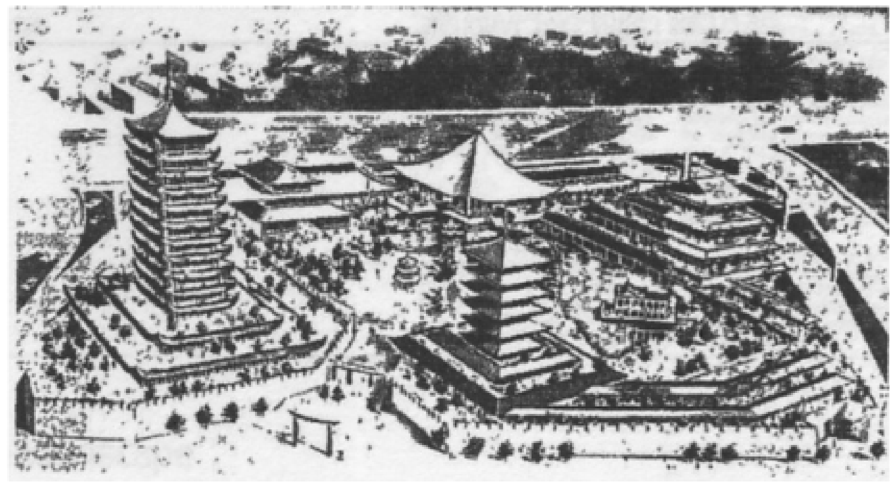

Figure 3.5 An architect's vision of Chinatown's redevelopment, 1975, by John Brindley and Dominic. (Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July 1975, 'Chinatown. One Man's Vision', as reproduced in Michael Bogle, *History of the Chinatown Gateways: Dixon Street, Sydney*)

The trial road closure proved successful, despite some unhappy shop keepers, and the Council proceeded to a permanent closure of this section of Dixon Street in 1979 to coincide with the Moon Festival and to allow for landscaping by the City of Sydney. The Dixon Street Chinese Committee passed a resolution in March 1979 to 'continue the Dixon Street closure and beautification scheme in conjunction with the Council on a permanent basis', and had a budget of $30,000 to beautify the two ceremonial archways.[21] Architect Henry Tsang was commissioned to design the ceremonial arches. In 1980, the Lord Mayor opened Dixon Street, complete with the Chinese damen, or arches, at either end.

The design of the gates is based on the traditional Chinese post-and-lintel system with a hipped roof plan. Characters inscribed on the north face of the lintel of the arches read: 'Virtue is to be found in the celebration of cultural differences'. On the eastern post is inscribed, 'The antiquity of China is celebrated worldwide' while on the western post, 'The maintenance of freedom and trust preserve the virtues of the past.' Although the gates are a distinctive icon of Dixon Street, Sydney, they share common features with similar gates that are used in the branding of Chinatowns in major cities all over the world.[22]

In the past two decades, Chinatown has faced a new series of challenges to its identity and cohesion as an urban space, as explored further in the last chapter, Change and renewal in Chinatown.

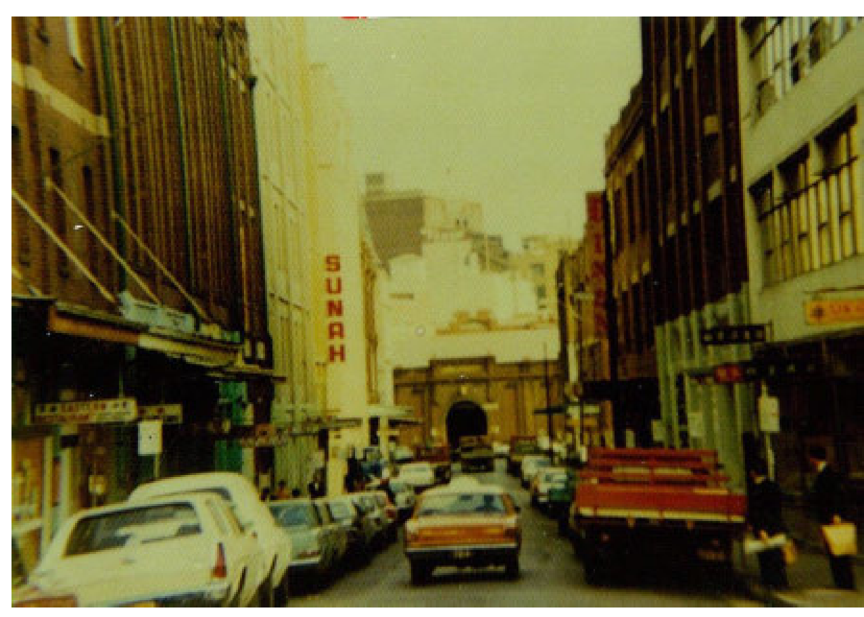

Figure 3.6 Dixon Street before pedestrianisation, 1970s. (Source: The China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

Figure 3.7 Chinese-style lanterns on Dixon Street buildings, 1979. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 3.8 Dixon Street, Haymarket, 1979. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 3.9 Dixon Street, Haymarket, 1979. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 3.10 Official opening of the Dixon Street pedestrian mall, 1980. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 3.11 Looking across the Chinese Garden of Friendship, at its pavilions, ponds and plantings. (Source: Property NSW Archives)

Endnotes

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[18] Minute Paper, Town Clerk's No. 5430/60, 17 March 1961, City of Sydney Archives.

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Theme 2: Living and working in Chinatown

Two of Nancy and William Lee's two grandchildren inside their grocery shop on Harbour Road, Haymarket. (Source: China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

4 Theme 2: Living and working in Chinatown

The theme of living and working in Chinatown spans a vast range of historical experience. Formerly high-density neighbourhoods have vanished but new homes and businesses have taken their place. Discrimination against Chinese communities directly impacted on the function of business and their homes. However, the strength and diversity of Chinese people and businesses ensured a thriving network with international reach.

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Figure 4.1 Chinese hawker, Sydney, c.1900s. (Source: National Library of Australia, Star Photo Co.)

Market gardeners

The gradual shift of Sydney's Chinese population southwards from The Rocks from the 1870s is reflected to a limited degree in

official council and government records. As early as 1863 a Jimmey Chow was listed in Council Assessment Books as the occupant of a property in Goulburn Street. Four years later John Ching was listed at 62 Goulburn Street. Several Chinese names are listed as ratepaying tenants in Goulburn Street including Ah Lind, Chang Stang, Ah Chule, Loo Kan, Pai Saiam, John Chung and John Ching Wall.

The 1885 Sands Sydney Directory listed 54 market gardens, half of which were in Alexandria. The remainder were located in Botany and scattered throughout Canterbury, Marrickville, Rose Bay and Willoughby.[1]

By 1888 Sydney was reliant on these market gardens as its main supply of fruit and vegetables. After a day hawking vegetables around the city or at market stalls, market gardeners would alternate between lodgings at the market gardens and other lodgings nearby. The first lodging houses in Haymarket were on Goulburn Street and the surrounding laneways near the Belmore Markets.

By the late 1880s, Chinese market gardens on the fringe of the city were supplying much of the fresh fruit and vegetables needed by Sydney's growing population.

While over half of the market gardens were in Alexandria, a few were also scattered on the fringe of the city at places like Rushcutters Bay, Rose Bay, Waterloo and Matraville, and others spread further south and west in the twentieth century.

The Chinese market gardeners travelled to George Street and the Belmore Markets to sell their produce. Chinese hawkers also travelled widely across Sydney.

In The Rocks and Haymarket, European and Chinese men and women interacted daily. For Chinese hawkers, harassment, threats, verbal abuse and physical assaults by white people were a regular occurrence. Chinese hawkers also faced theft or destruction of their wares and produce. For instance, in December 1892 Ah Bun, a Chinese vegetable hawker of Robertson Lane, was attacked and wounded by youths near Regent Street.[2] Likewise Sun Je, a hawker, was injured in an unprovoked attack in Goulburn Street by 17-year-old Charles Ratcliffe in August 1888.[3]

Anti-Chinese vigilance movements sprung up around Sydney, including at Darlington. Some residents attempted to forbid Chinese people from becoming storekeepers, hawkers or residents in the area.[4]

Institutional harassment also took place. Chinese hawkers and merchants were subject to regular inspections from the Council, such as in April 1888 when Inspector of Nuisances Richard Seymour visited dwellings in Castlereagh Street, Blackburn

Street, Campbell Lane and Wexford Street to inspect the living conditions of the Chinese hawkers.[5] Dilapidated buildings occupied by Chinese vegetable dealers and hawkers in Haymarket and the city were frequently condemned, and the residents blamed despite bearing no fault; all these buildings were owned by Europeans.[6]

Contrary to the vitriolic rhetoric in some corners of the press, including *The Bulletin*, there are few accounts of female residents feeling threatened or fearing interactions with the vegetable hawkers. Margaret Egerton's three-part account in *Cosmos* magazine in 1896, narrated by Mrs Frank Leigh, the wife of a doctor, centres on her friendship with 60-year-old Ah Yoo Sin:

> From that hour a strong friendship sprang up between us, and it was my custom each week to present him with some of my choicest flowers, cakes and preserves, while he, on his side, quite embarrassed me with the royal munificence of his gifts.[7]

Friendships formed readily over the threshold as 'cabbages and turnips changed hands at the back door or over the fence, men who were otherwise "alien" became part of everyday family life.'[8]

Figure 4.2 *A woman, possibly Aboriginal or Chinese, selling fruit from a small barrow* (as titled in the State Library of NSW catalogue), c.1885–90. (Source: State Library of NSW, Arthur Syer collection 1885–90)

Figure 4.3 Ah Toy's cabinet making factory, 192 George Street, The Rocks. (Source: Photographs of Francis O'Brien and O'Brien family)

Discrimination

As the Chinese population grew from the 1850s onwards, Europeans viewed them with suspicion borne from ignorance, jealousy and fear. Hysteria against the Chinese, culminating in the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth), was whipped up by opportunistic labour leaders, business owners and politicians.

Chinese people were denied citizenship, and were subject to verbal abuse, vandalism and acts of violence, all while under intensive scrutiny from the government and media. Chinese people living in Haymarket and Surry Hills generally bore the brunt of antagonism but so too did Ah Toy's furniture store on Lower George Street, The Rocks. In December 1878, a group of about 2,000 men attempted an arson attack on Ah Toy's workshop. Although this attack shocked Sydney residents, it was emblematic of other public expressions of racism in the period. John Moy Mow, a fellow resident and merchant in The Rocks, wrote an impassioned letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* calling for 'fair play and protection from ruffianism.'[9]

In 1879, the Political Reform Union held an open-air meeting at Haymarket to support the anti-Chinese immigration movement. On 8 March 1879 the Anti-Chinese Immigration League hosted a meeting reportedly attended by 2,000 people.[10] Earlier the same year a reported 10,000 people attended a similar rally in Hyde

Park. The numbers were predominantly tradesmen and labourers protesting on their Saturday half-holiday.[11]

The Political Reform League was a particularly vocal group. In 1880 they organised another anti-Chinese meeting at Haymarket, attended by about 1,200 people.[12]

Chinese hawkers and stallholders at Belmore Markets were targeted on numerous occasions by anti-Chinese agitators and European market holders. In June 1881 Chinese traders left their stalls in the market for fear of attack from anti-Chinese demonstrators. One newspaper report stated they were 'expelled … by a crowd of demonstrative Colonials'.[13] Simultaneously several dealers and market gardeners associated with Belmore Markets lodged a petition with Council requesting the immediate removal of all Chinese dealers and producers.[14]

The second meeting of the newly formed Anti-Chinese League of NSW was held at Gregson's Store, Haymarket, in August 1886. One of the speakers, Mr Lilly, complained of competition in the trades affecting European businesses.[15] The following year the league held a meeting at the corner of Pitt and Hay streets to protest against the 'influx' of Chinese into the colony. This was not a well-attended event, but organisers judged it a success.[16]

The largest anti-Chinese rally/meeting in Sydney took place in June 1888 when between 30,000 and 40,000 people gathered in The Domain. Some of the crowd marched from Circular Quay. Police advised local Chinese shopkeepers to close their stores in the streets along which the parade passed.[17]

Animosity aimed at Chinese fruit and vegetable vendors at the Belmore Markets continued in the 1890s. In 1895 a group of 30 commissioned agents and fruiterers of the Belmore Markets met at the New Haymarket Hotel to oppose Council granting stalls in the market to Chinese people.[18] The group submitted a petition accusing the five Chinese stallholders of dishonesty and undercutting the Australian dealers and fruit growers. The group met with the mayor, who expressed sympathy but stated Council could not discriminate against the Chinese stall holders unless they had contravened market by-laws that 'prohibited all retailing in the markets, and also re-packing'.[19]

T Lee & Co, grain, produce and commission agents of 34 Campbell Street, wrote to Council defending the Chinese growers and sellers from the false accusations by the 'English Fruit Merchants at Belmore Markets'.[20]

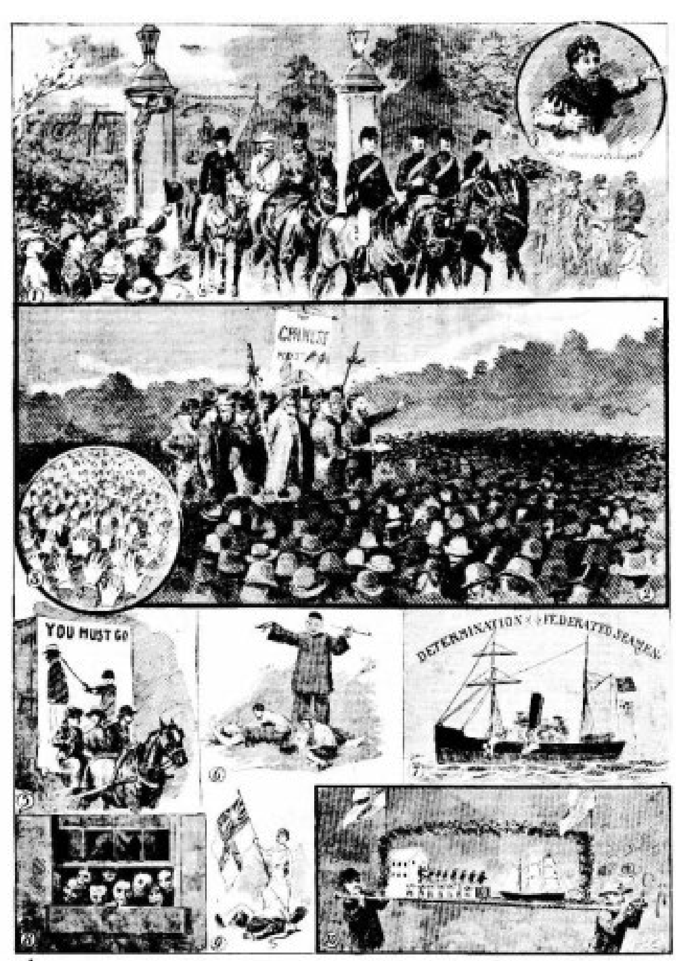


Figure 4.4 Anti-Chinese agitation. (Source: *Illustrated Sydney News*, 28 June 1888, p 23)

Crime and prejudice

By the 1880s opium smoking and betting on games like *pak-ah-pu* and *fan-tan* had spread to the mainstream Sydney population. Sydney's newspapers and *The Bulletin* argued that Chinese migrants suppressed workers' wages, spread disease (smallpox and typhoid) and promoted gambling (*pak-ah-pu* and *fan-tan*) and customs robbery, while also encouraging opium use and immorality.[21]

As a result the NSW Chinese community became the subject of parliamentary inquiries. These included the *Report of a Select Committee of the NSW Parliament into Common Lodge Houses* published in 1876 and the Inquiry into Chinese Gambling in 1891.

By the early twentieth century, there was a vocal and persuasive anti-opium lobby comprising prominent members of the Chinese community. The Anti-Opium Crusade Committee was based at 158 George Street North. The committee members included Victorian Chinese missionary Cheok Hong Cheong, merchant Quong Tart, and L Yee Hing, a businessmen of On Chong & Co, who was the committee chairman. This committee, plus other groups such as the Chinese Merchants' Defence Association and Chinese Empire Reform Association, actively sought signatures to petitions and lobbied government to 'prohibit the importation and sale of opium and its various preparations, except for medicinal

purposes'.[22] Business members of these groups also promised to forgo profits reaped from importing opium into Australia.

Figure 4.5 Interior of a Chinese gambling house. (Source: *Illustrated Sydney News*, 30 September 1871, p 13)

In May 1905 a deputation representing the anti-opium crusade met with the Public Morals Association to seek support. The deputation comprised Yee Hing, Sam Wong, Rev J Young Wai, H Fine, Lee Chun, J Choy King and John Hoe, Chinese merchants.[23]

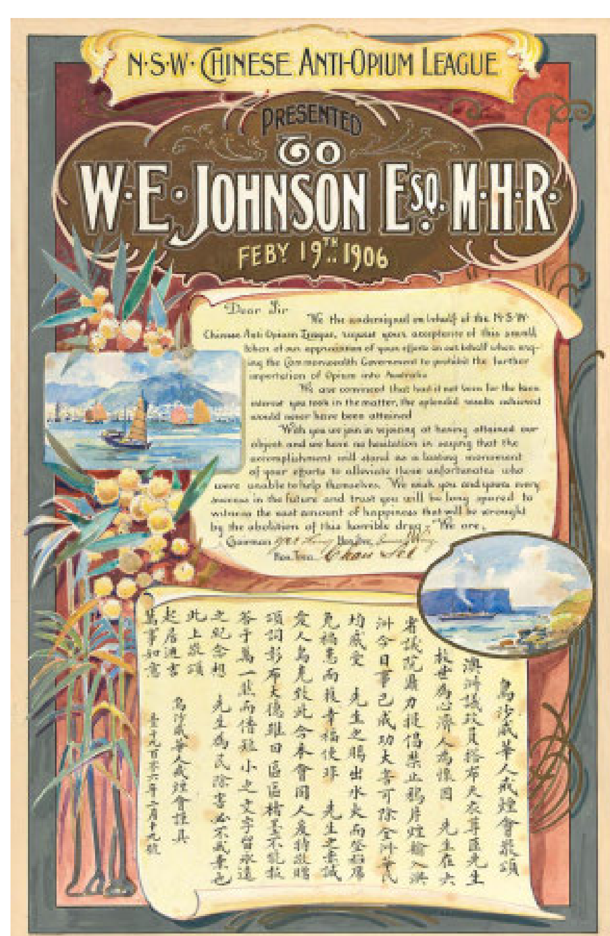


Figure 4.6 Illuminated manuscript presented to WE Johnson by the NSW Chinese Anti-Opium League, 19 February 1906. (Source: State Library of NSW)

By September 1905 the Chinese Anti-Opium League claimed to have collected 61,000 signatures on a petition calling for a stop to importation of the drug.

At the meeting of the NSW Chinese Anti-Opium League in the beginning of January 1906, chairman Yee Hing reported that the Commonwealth Government had issued a proclamation prohibiting the importation of opium except for medicinal purposes, while Victoria and South Australia had enacted laws illegalising the smoking, sale or manufacture of opium.[24]

Vanished neighbourhoods

By the mid-1880s, Wexford Street, which ran from Elizabeth Street to Goulburn Street (in the rough vicinity of today's Wentworth Avenue), was almost exclusively a Chinese neighbourhood. Some of the community continued to live in The Rocks but by 1900, most who lived in the city centre had settled in and around Haymarket.

According to a City of Sydney Council survey, 86% of Sydney's Chinese population, numbering 1,440 people, lived in and around Haymarket, although some of these were transient people, moving between the city and their gardens on the city's southern fringes around Alexandria and Botany.[25] Other Chinese residents may not have been recorded at all. Only household heads and primary tenants were listed and poorer residents who lived in homes in alleyways or in 'off street' addresses were often left out of official records.[26]

Figure 4.7 Children in Stephen Street, Surry Hills, where many Chinese families lived. Pictured in 1906. Stephen Street was demolished by 1910. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 4.8 Former Wexford Street prior to demolition in 1906. It was home to several Chinese families. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Demolition and rebuilding in the Haymarket area from the 1880s on led to high turnover of residences. Some buildings occupied by Chinese people had been neglected by owners for years and were ripe for demolition even before they had been occupied. Nonetheless Chinese residents were subject to intense scrutiny by the Council. On numerous occasions the City Inspector of Nuisances investigated dwellings, stores and lodging houses of the Chinese residents of the city following anonymous tips. The Inspector of Nuisances report for 1889 noted 233 Chinese dwellings and 132 common lodging houses within the city, an increase from the previous year. In April 1896 Loong Yun was served a notice for premises at 20 Dixon Street, which he occupied and operated as a Chinese brothel, that were 'found to be in a filthy condition'.[27]

As Janice Wood notes, 'the frequency of prosecution for filthy premises among Chinese at certain addresses often reflected the poor state of their dwellings rather than excessive dirtiness on their part.'[28] Durand's Alley, later renamed Robertson Lane, was reported to house 100 men in a building run by Kow You Man. More successful Chinese merchants were able to afford better living conditions, such as Tah Sing, who set up a grocery and importing business in Sam Hordern's building. Toy Lee, a vegetable dealer, created a lodging house in the stables behind the Hordern Building (now the site of World Square) to support market gardeners and their horses.

Figure 4.9 50 Wexford Street, 'Chinese Bedroom'. (Source: NSW State Archives Collection)

As noted earlier, Sydney's Chinese population was consolidated near the markets on Campbell and Goulburn streets by the early 1900s. Chinese households were also present in the area around Wexford Street in Surry Hills, and Chinese children could be seen playing with European children in the laneways (Figure 4.7). In 1905, Sydney Municipal Council gained authority to resume properties as part of a so-called 'slum' clearance program. In 1906, council resumed Wexford Street in Surry Hills, and the surrounding area for street widening and to create a new approach for Central Station. Wentworth Avenue was built on the alignment of Wexford Street. The Council demolished all the houses on Wexford Street and some in surrounding streets, and evicted an estimated 724 people. This gave impetus to the relocation of much of the city's Chinese community west to the area around the new City Markets (erected between 1909 and 1915, now Paddy's Markets) and Dixon Street.

The boarding houses of Chinatown provided temporary lodging to market gardeners bringing their produce to the markets, to older men, to new arrivals and those departing, but Chinatown was also home to families and family businesses.

Temporary lodgings sometimes became more permanent than expected. Old men who had become stranded without wives or families, money or ties back to China, lived out 'their days in Chinatown, renting cubical living spaces from merchants with upstairs rooms'.[29] Irene Kwong Moss described seeing such men in the 1950s:

> It was like that old man dressed in an old-fashioned black jacket over blue trousers: blue, black and grey were the

> colours of Chinatown. I remember these old men with affection and sadness, wondering where they came from as they had no one but each other for company, passing the time smoking and gossiping after their work ...[30]

Isolation was still very much part of daily life for some Chinese men in Sydney well into the mid-twentieth century. The pressure of earning an income combined with cultural expectations of a proper marriage meant many men remained single.

Albert Leong in an interview with Shirley Fitzgerald recalled:

> The life I led, I couldn't get involved with a Chinese lady ... I was too bloody poor to have anything with Chinese girls ... We were all struggling in the market ... We were just battling along ... So most of us ended up with Australian girls.[31]

Though less visible, there were also 'left over' Chinese women who were widowed after marrying men several decades older. Many were isolated without family networks or knowledge of English.[32]

Figure 4.10 230 George Street, 'Chinese Sleeping Apartment, Views taken during Cleansing Operations, Quarantine Area, Sydney', 1900. (Source: State Library of NSW, PXE 92, Vol. III / under the supervision of Mr George McCredie, F.I.A., NSW)

Figure 4.11 Mrs Chan Harr, Marjorie Wong Yee, Annie Kwok, Norma Wong Yee, Ida Kwok, and Patty Wong Yee on their arrival in Sydney from Hong Kong on the SS *Changte*, 8 March 1938. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Women of influence

Few Chinese women migrated to Australia during the nineteenth century and the imbalanced sex ratio influenced the movement and migration of men. Yet Chinese women became crucial to the social, economic and cultural life of Chinatown.

The women (and girls) who did manage to migrate to Australia entered as wives, daughters or servants of well-established merchants on temporary visas and were usually granted extensions.[33] Some women entered Australia as sponsored students; however, more research is required to understand their experiences in nineteenth-century Australia.[34]

Inevitably intermarriage between Chinese and non-Chinese men and women took place, despite racial prejudice in both cultures. In the 1850s, approximately 2,000 marriages between 'white' women and Chinese men were recorded in NSW. Fewer than 30 years later that number had fallen to around 180 marriages due to increasing fear that intermarriage would be a 'threat to the white race.'[35] There were well-known exceptions including Quong Tart, who married Australian woman Margaret Scarlett.

Australian females of Chinese descent (either with one or two Chinese parents) were considered British subjects and could leave and re-enter the country, leading to another possible avenue for entry. Some migrants used false identities and purchasing of birth and naturalisation certificates or Exemption from the Dictation Test or a deceased Australian-born (or non-return migrant).[36]

Figure 4.12 'Chinese lady at home in Castlereagh Street'. (Source, *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 15 February 1879, p 253)

Chinese women living in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were expected to be stay-at-home mothers and care for their children and household, but some women ran businesses with their husbands or, if they had been widowed, by themselves. Some women even established businesses by themselves and were the primary earner for the household.[37]

Figure 4.13 Margaret Scarlett and husband Quong Tart and their five children, c.1899. (Source: Margaret Tart, *The Life of Quong Tart*)

During the Second World War, Chinese women in Australia actively organised to support victims of conflict in China. The NSW Chinese Women's Relief Fund (1937–1941) raised funds to send shipments of medical supplies, food, clothing, and even sewing machines to China to assist the war effort against Japan. In 1954, the Chinese Women's Association was established by Phyllis Wang, wife of the Chinese Consul in Sydney. The

association initially met at the Kuo Ming Tang Society building but moved to the Chequers Restaurant (owned by entrepreneurs and brothers Keith and Denis Wong) at the corner of Pitt and Goulburn streets as membership expanded (the Restaurant later became the Mandarin Club). Phyllis became a pillar of community leadership, organising a range of activities and events, including fashion parades, to raise money for Chinese and Australian charities.

Other fundraisers like the Dragon Festival Ball became an institution in Sydney and particularly special for Chinese women. Initially a major fundraiser for the Young Chinese Relief Movement, a youth organisation backed by the Nationalist Party in China, it featured the Miss Dragon Ball Princess pageant and then from 1941 had a debutante ritual for young women to be presented to society. The living memories of this event are still vivid for many members of Sydney's Chinese and non-Chinese community today.

Free From Horrors of War

Little Merle Minjoy makes a close study of the doll being presented to her by Miss Jean Lumbewe, at the Eastern Fair in the Sydney Town Hall yesterday. The fair was held by the N.S.W. Chinese Women's Relief Fund in aid of the Red Cross appeal for medical supplies to be sent to China.

Figure 4.14 'Little Merle Minjoy makes a close study of the doll being presented to her by Miss Jean Lumbewe at the Eastern Fair in the Sydney Town Hall yesterday. The fair was held by the N.S.W. Chinese Women's Relief Fund in aid of the Red Cross appeal for medical supplies to be sent to China.' (Source: 'Free From Horrors of War', *The Labor Daily*, November 1927, p 20)

A cheque for £166 to purchase medical supplies for the relief of sufferers in China being handed to Mr. H. L. Pitt, superintendent of the New South Wales division of the Australian Red Cross Society, by executives of the New South Wales Chinese Women's Relief Fund. The women executives from the left are: Miss M. Kaw, Mrs. J. A. Chuey, president, and Mrs. T. Lumbewe.

Figure 4.15 Chinese Women's Relief Fund, 5 March 1938. (Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*)

Figure 4.16 Sydney Chinese Dragon Ball, 1945. (Source: National Library of Australia)

Figure 4.17 Sydney Chinese Dragon Ball. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Figure 4.18 Linda Wong Luey, pictured with the golden dragon in the Tai Yuen Palace restaurant, which she ran, in the Covent Garden Hotel building, c1981. (Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 July 1981)

Following the introduction of the Colombo Plan in 1950, and the relaxation of immigration legislation in 1956, the migration of Chinese women increased, and almost equalised the sex ratio by the 1960s. By this time, Chinese women worked in a range of industries. Many worked in shops or restaurants, either for their families or other people.

Linda Wong Luey, described as 'the glamorous chatelaine of Sydney's Chinatown',[38] was one notable example of a Chinese woman working in a family business. She ran the Tai Yuen restaurant (Figure 5.13) in the Covent Garden Hotel on Hay Street, which was owned by her wealthy restaurateur father, Stanley Wong MBE, who also served on the Dixon Street Chinese Committee. Linda was the first of her family to arrive in Australia when she had migrated in 1961, as a 16-year-old student. Two decades later she and her husband Michael Wong owned multiple properties and built developments all around Sydney.

Some Chinese women also went to university or arrived with tertiary qualifications and found work in Australia.[39] Today, women entrepreneurs are indelibly associated with the institutions, political and cultural output of Sydney.

Burgeoning businesses

A decade after the implementation of the 'White Australia' policy, the 1911 Census provided a picture of the Chinese workforce, which was increasingly concentrated in urban areas. Chinese people were occupied in professional, domestic, commercial, transport, agricultural, pastoral and mining industries. Over 40% of the Chinese workforce was employed in market gardening and agriculture, 4% in the pastoral industry and 7% in mining. A further 17% were employed in commercial activities (such as storekeepers and greengrocers), 9% provided domestic services and about 13% were employed in industry, predominantly furniture making.[40]

As early as 1901 there were 60 Chinese people in Sydney working as fruit merchants, and a further 55 as produce merchants/storekeepers, mostly around Haymarket.[41] To cater to the Chinese market dealers, pork butchers, gardeners, hawkers and other produce merchants, a cohort of lower-class merchants established businesses such as grocery stores, general stores, cookshops and lodging houses in Goulburn, Pitt and Campbell streets.

In the Chinatown this translated on the ground to a range of businesses such as butchers, cook shops, fruit and vegetable wholesalers, restaurants, grocery stores supplying Chinese and

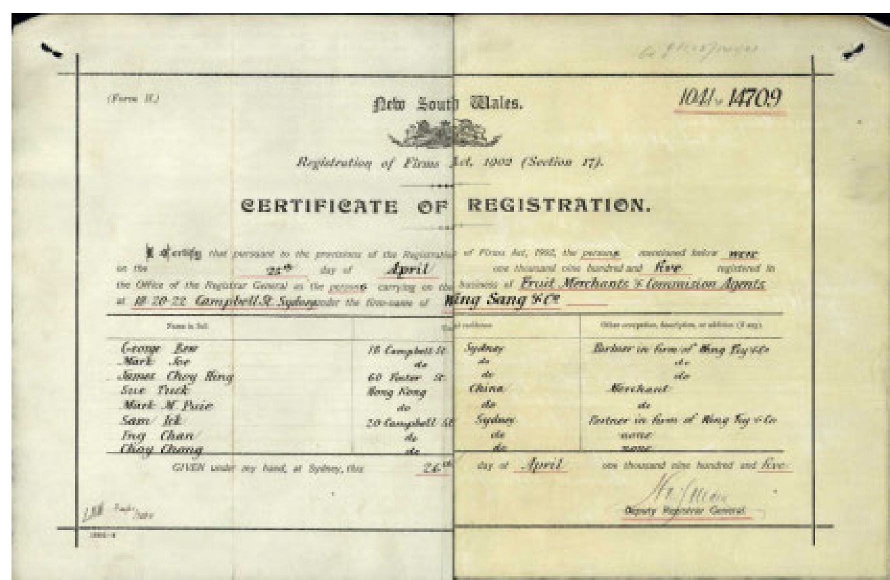
local goods and produce, laundries, providore shops, import/export businesses, doctors, herbalists, and lodging houses. These businesses provided employment for immediate family members, their relations, and Chinese male and female employees—both Australian-born and overseas-born.

The workforce was divided along 'class' lines, with over half of the Chinese population engaged in labouring and manual occupations such as market gardening, hawking, furniture making and cooking while there was a smaller lower class and 'elite' merchant group managing the export/import businesses, and fruit trading, groceries and greengroceries.

In the late nineteenth century a new bilingual elite emerged that included merchants, publishers and ministers of religion such as Quong Tart, Sun Johnson, William Robert George Lee and Rev John Young Wai. They were respected for their honesty and business acumen and facilitated network connections with 'the legal, commercial and social system of the colonies'.[42] They also helped many Chinese fruit traders such as Wing Sang and Co, Sun Kum Tiy & Co, Sang and Co, and Wing On & Co to expand their commercial enterprises and wealth, which resulted in Chinese dominance of the Australian banana market and trade in Fiji. Major banana traders based in Sydney included Ma Yingpiu, George Kwok Bew, Gock Lock and Mark Joe.

By 1910 Chinese people began to buy into the Dixon Street area, west of George Street, instead of renting. This move was in response to the closure of the Belmore Markets and opening of new markets in this part of Haymarket. The produce merchants established new premises in Hay and Quay streets and Ultimo Road while numerous restaurants and grocery stores and other Chinese businesses and organisations moved to this area. For instance, in 1909 the Council approved plans by Evan Evans for a pair of three-storey stores at 82–84 Dixon Street, prepared for Lee Chun. These stores were occupied in 1910 by the firm of Kwong War Chong, tea merchants, and other Chinese organisations.

These entrepreneurs and other 'elite' merchants established diverse Chinese Australian transnational enterprises, including notably the 'Four Great Department Stores', namely Wing On, Sincere, Sun Sun and The Sun, today based in Hong Kong, Guangdong and Shanghai. Some prominent Chinese merchants were also involved in investment opportunities in industry and banking.



(Form II.)

New South Wales.

1041 ~ 14709

Registration of Firms Act, 1902 (Section 17).

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION.

I certify that pursuant to the provisions of the Registration of Firms Act, 1902, the persons mentioned below were on the 25th day of April one thousand nine hundred and five registered in the Office of the Registrar General as the persons carrying on the business of Fruit Merchants & Commission Agents at 18-20-22 Campbell St Sydney under the firm-name of Wing Sang & Co

Name in full	Residence		Other occupation (if any)
George Bew	18 Campbell St	Sydney	Partner in firm of Wing Tay & Co
Mark Joe	do	do	do
James Choy Hing	60 Foster St	do	do
Sue Tuck	Hong Kong	China	Merchant
Mark M. Puie	do	do	do
Sam Ick	20 Campbell St	Sydney	Partner in firm of Wing Tay & Co
Eng Chan	do	do	none
Choy Chong	do	do	none

GIVEN under my hand, at Sydney, this 26th day of April one thousand nine hundred and five.

Deputy Registrar General.

Figure 4.19 Certificate of registration for Wing Sang & Co, April 1905. (Source: Chinese in the NSW fruit & vegetable industry, Coloured Colonials <https://colouredcolonials.yolasite.com/chinese-in-the-nsw-vegetable-and-fruit-industry.php>)

The Ignis et Agua survey plan dated to 1907 (with later annotations) indicates the emerging presence of Chinese businesspeople and trades in Dixon Street. These included Wing Sang, a fruiterer, at the corner of Hay Street, Chinese stores (86 and 88), McCormack's Buildings (56–62), Chinese stores (50 and 54), *Tung Wah* Chinese newspaper (52) and Goon Lee Shing & Company (37).

Figure 4.20 At far right is the Wing Sang & Co Ltd store, 20 Campbell Street. (Source: State Library of NSW; photographed by Arthur Ernest Foster)

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Figure 4.21 The 1890s building at 18–22 Campbell Street, Haymarket. Wing Sang occupied this building from 1895. (Source: The China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

Figure 4.22 Wing On & Co Ltd, corner of Ultimo Road and Quay Street, Haymarket, undated. (Source: Anthony Ah Kee, Chinese in the Sydney Produce Markets Facebook page, private collection)

In 1979, when the Council was considering pedestrianising Dixon Street, there were many Chinese tenants as follows:

37	K Fong Chung Joy, See Sue Chow Trading as Goan Lee Shing & Co
39–41	Lion Manufacturing Co
49	T Choy trading as War Hing & Co
51	H Lee Young
53	1st & 2nd floors, Lee Young
50	Hung Wah & Co, Lai Kee & Co
52	1st floor, Chinese Chamber of Commerce
54	Lai, War, Hing (trading as Lee Sun Low Café)
56A	Say Ting Fong
56–58	Say Ting Fong
62	Hong, Sing & Co. Estate Tin Fong
64	Mr Yee Chong
66	Chinese Youth Club
82	Allen See, Lee Wing, Chung Leong
84	Ground floor, Norman Lee, Pang Hing trading as Kwong War Chong and Jack Choy. 1st floor, Pang Hing
100	Hay Street, Henry Ming Lai Pty Ltd.[43]

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Key extant buildings in Haymarket remain visible legacies of the emergence of the 'elite' merchant class in the 1890s. For instance, the Kuo Ming Tang Society building at 75 Ultimo Road, the Wing On & Co building at 37 Ultimo Road, the Dong Guan Yee Tong and Luen Fook Tong buildings at 50–54 Dixon Street, and the Wing Sang & Co building at 18–22 Campbell Street.

Both the 'elite' and lower class merchants were also able to subvert the 'White Australia' policy; under the Exemption from the Dictation Test from 1902 to 1959, 27,654 Chinese passed through Sydney on their journeys.[44] Many family members and chefs were brought to Australia at this time.

A diverse community

The community who lived and worked in Chinatown and Haymarket during the twentieth century became increasingly diverse.

The Chinatown community included interracial families, retired and single older Chinese men, young immigrant students and workers from China, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and from the Pacific including New Guinea, Fiji and Solomon Island. There were also female servants and domestic workers, who lived in rooms, apartments and lodging houses and worked in shops,

restaurants, warehouses and other businesses in Dixon Street and the surrounding area.

In 1901 people born in China were the fourth largest group while in 2001 this group had dropped to fifth place behind Vietnam (fourth). By 2016, migrants from China, India and other Asian countries comprised one of the largest groups of overseas-born residents behind migrants from the United Kingdom.

The trend of rising Asian migration is reflected in the residential population in the Haymarket and Chinatown area today. The top 10 populations by ancestry are (in descending order) Chinese, Thai, English, Australian, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese, Irish and Italian. Further analysis of the 2021 Census indicates 76.8% of people living in Chinatown and the CBD South Village Area were born overseas and, for the first time, Thai-born people outnumbered the Chinese population. Interestingly, the numbers of those born in Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Vietnam have increased since 2016.[45]

By 2014 approximately one in ten residents in the Sydney CBD was born in Thailand, and Sydney had the second largest Thai population of any city outside Thailand, after Los Angeles. Sydney's Thai population was increasingly concentrated in Haymarket at the corners of George and Campbell streets, and Pitt and Goulburn streets, an area previously home to Sydney's second Chinatown. In 2021 Thai people in the City of Sydney ranked eighth by size of population (6,293), while those of Chinese ancestry ranked third (35,616), behind English and Australian-born people.[46]

Haymarket is characterised by diverse multilingual communities who work, live and have businesses in the area. According to the findings of community engagement in 2022, the top languages spoken at home in the area were Mandarin, English, Thai, Indonesian, Cantonese and Korean.[47] Most of the residents in this area work in accommodation and food services, followed by professional, scientific and technical services. Almost half of the people living in Chinatown and the CBD South Village Area are highly educated and work as professionals.

Return to the flowery land

The spiritual or cultural yearning for return to China was based on the concept of 'upon the roots of the tree rest falling leaves',[48] a metaphor for love of the homeland and a sense of deep belonging. This extended to death, namely the need to have one's bones returned to China for reburial for ancestor worship.

Early reports describe corpses stored in sand at Campbell's Wharf in 1864, and human remains stored in tin-lined wooden boxes made by the Chinese cabinet makers. Records at the Waterloo

temple show exhumations from Rookwood Cemetery were happening from the 1870s to return bones to specific villages.

The last return may have been of Goon Yee Tong in 1936, as the Second World War interrupted the tradition. The anti-religious campaigns in 1949 after the Chinese Communist Revolution officially banned ancestor worship.

During the gold rush years of the 1850s and 1860s, the immigrant Chinese who arrived in Sydney from 13 counties of southern China largely all spoke Cantonese. By 1891, it was reported that 16 Chinese were counties represented in Sydney, and Cheng Shen, Tuang Kuan and Chung Shan had the highest numbers. Immigrants from the 13 counties carried with them a diverse set of beliefs including Confucianism with some practices carried across from Buddhism and Taoism. However, a shared idea was 'the return to the Flowery Land where their ancestors were buried.'[49] The ideal was shaped by familial obligations to be reunited with parents and grandparents and also an ambition to 'return home with honour and wealth.'[50]

Many Chinese immigrants undertook multiple return visits to their families in China. Some would also send their children living in Australia back for a few years to learn Cantonese and to imbibe the culture. As Shirley Fitzgerald described, the push and pull between two different 'worlds' was complicated:

> All manner of forces might take a man back to China – loneliness, absence of women, cultural emptiness. And all manner of things might bring him back – opportunities to work and prosper, or an unexpected attraction to new friendships and social ways. Roots, it would be discovered, could take hold in more than one place.[51]

By the 1870s and 1880s, as anti-Chinese sentiment was building in Sydney about the number of arrivals, an 1881 investigation into the ship *Glamis Castle* sought to uncover the terms under which Chinese labourers were being imported, to establish if they were free and not bound/indentured. In the process the enquiry revealed the patterns of cyclical emigration and family support networks through glimpses into specific passengers:

> Lau A-Fai, passenger number 275 ... returned to China 'the year before last' with HK$300 which he had handed over to his wife. With three children to provide for and no work in China, he was heading back to Sydney.
>
> Lau Kwai ... had spent 1880 in his village, where had bought fields with money made in Sydney in a year's labouring in 1879.
>
> Wong Sek-kin had never been away from home before, but he claimed that his father, who was a market gardener had sent passage money from Sydney. 'When I go to Sydney, my father returns to Heung-shan.'[52]

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Figure 4.23 Onyik & Lee, 225 George Street, 1908–1910. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-01001375)

The mentality of return also had a significant impact on Sydney's economic life. Business was conducted around allegiances to clan houses or societies based on the county of origin. Chinese Australians would patronise particular businesses and entrust them with the money to be sent home. This was particularly important for market gardeners, who relied on Chinese greengrocers or storekeepers to organise their banking and, often, to provide credit or financial loans to support them. Families back in Hong Kong and China could access the funds via the store's homeland branch or headquarters. Onyik & Lee on George Street was one such example. Some businesses, such as Kwong War Chong at 82–84 Dixon Street, acted as a remittance agency and also arranged ship passage for those visiting or returning to China.

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Theme 3: Belief, culture and community

Sydney Chinese Dragon Ball, 1945. (Source: National Library of Australia)

5 Theme 3: Belief, culture and community

Chinatown evolved over time from a place offering shelter and sanctuary to a hub of social, cultural, religious and political activity for Sydney's Chinese community and an international gateway for business.

Old traditions and new beliefs

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Parts of Haymarket and Surry Hills were designated as places to worship, organise, protest and maintain culture in the Chinese community, though many of these structures are no longer intact. Structuring these gatherings were the allegiance to 'village and district ties, obligations of debt, and dialect affiliations.'[1] As the momentous political upheaval of the twentieth century took shape in China, it shaped new allegiances in Sydney's Chinese community and the places they sought to congregate.

Religion has long been a central part of the life of the Chinese community. Although a proportion of the Chinese population were converted to Christianity, Mo Yimei states:

> The majority of the Chinese before the Second World War, however, tended to go to josshouses or Chinese temples. There, to gods such as Guan Di (the symbol of loyalty), Guan Yin (Goddess of Mercy), or Cai Shen (God of Wealth), they prayed for fortune, health and safety for themselves and their families.[2]

Figure 5.1 Rev. John Young Wai and the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Foster Street. (Source: Courtesy of Howard Wilson as reproduced in The China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

In the first decade of the century, there were three joss houses in Sydney: the Zse Yup Temple in Glebe was built in 1898 with funding from immigrants from the Sze Yup district in the Guandong/Kwongtung province; a second joss house was built in 1900 at 86 Goulburn Street; and a third, You Ming Temple and Joss House was established in Alexandria by immigrants from the Gaoyao/Gouyiu and Gaoming/Gouming region in 1909.[3] The Sze Yup was the largest of the joss houses, able to accommodate at least 150 worshippers. In 1935 the Consul-General for China, Dr Chen, stated that the 'joss house was falling in favor among Sydney Chinese as a place of worship'[4], which he partly attributed to the effect of the Great Depression.

Places of Christian worship in Chinatown included the now-demolished Chinese Church of England in Wexford Street (Figure 5.2), which melded the influence of European Christianity with the hallmarks of traditional Chinese architectural design. This church reflected the success of the Church of England Mission in converting 1,871 Chinese people by 1891.

The Presbyterian Church of New South Wales attempted conversions but lacked enough Chinese and European preachers. John Young Wai, ordained in 1898 in Sydney, succeeded in erecting two Chinese Presbyterian churches in Foster Street (Figure 5.1) and in Waterloo. In this same period, increasing numbers of Australian-born Chinese people were converting to Christianity, including Ying Pu Ma, George Bew Kwok and James Hing Choy, co-founders of Wing Sang & Co. These gentlemen along with merchant Joseph Joe Young Ma were all baptised by Rev Wai in 1894. Another prominent merchant to convert was James Lock Gock, who became a parishioner of the Chinese Presbyterian Church.

A large proportion of the Chinese population in Australia converted to Christianity in order to become part of the wider community and through the adoption of the religion of their Caucasian spouses.[5] The Anglican, Presbyterian and Wesleyan Methodist churches all established missions in the major Chinese centres.[6] Between 1850 and 1920, there were Chinese people attending church services in Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches throughout Australia.[7] For instance, in 1886 the Marrickville Congregational Church held a special tea for 150 Chinese men, followed by a service and addresses in Chinese and English, supported by Quong Tart and Rev Soo Ten.[8] It was attended by 300 to 400 people. The Rev Tear Tack officiated at services of the Wesleyan Chinese Mission, including an open-air service in the evening on Goulburn Street in July 1895 with a 'moderate congregation, a good proportion of which were Chinese'.[9]

In 1889 the Dean of Sydney reported that 50 Chinese converts had been received into the 'Christian Church' and there were Anglican missions established by Soo Hoo Ten at Sydney, Botany and other suburbs.[10]

Following the easing of immigration restrictions, an increasing number of Christian church attendees came from immigrant families, including those of a second-generation Asian background.

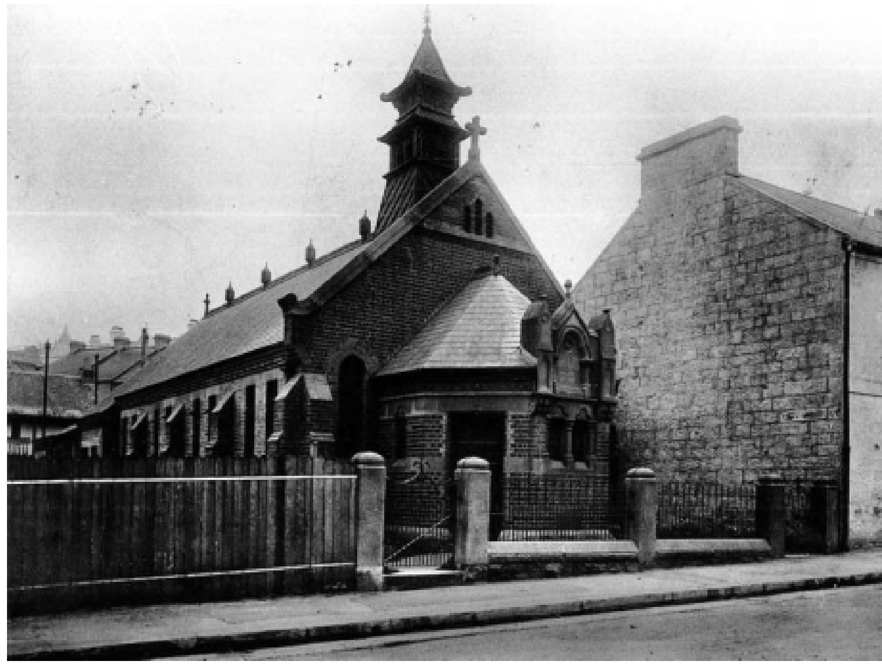

Figure 5.2 Chinese Church of England on Wexford Street, Surry Hills, in 1908. It was built in 1890 of rendered brick stone in a Victorian Free Gothic style and demolished in 1911. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 5.3 Chinese Mission Society. (Source: Yong, CF 1966, ‘The Chinese in New South Wales and Victoria 1901–1921...’, p 349)

Figure 5.4 Chinese Masonic Hall, 18 Mary Street, Surry Hills, was constructed in 1911. (Source: The China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

Clan Houses, Clubs and Associations

According to Mei-fen Kuo:

> Sydney was not merely a hub of Chinese activity but also a centre of community mobilization and identity formation from the late 19th century.[11]

Integral to Chinatown's fabric was the social and clan societies, known as Tongs, based on Chinese counties or districts of origin. Many clan societies established their headquarters in Chinatown over 100 years ago. Examples of historical Chinese societies that are still based in Chinatown are the Goong Yee Tong for Dong Guan people, founded in the 1850s, at 50 Dixon Street; and Yiu Ming Hung Fook Tong for Gouyiu people, founded in 1880, at 417 Sussex Street. During the 1880s Australian-born Chinese responded in kind, establishing the Sino-Australian Association and the Australian Chinese Association to further their interests.

The clan societies supported members through by providing remittance services, financial assistance, translation services, and by finding or providing accommodation. Clan houses were vital links to the villages back in China and became meeting and social places for members.[12]

Figure 5.5 Meeting of the Chung Shan Society, Campbell Street, 1910. (Source: Private collection of Norman Lee)

Business was conducted around allegiances to clan societies. The Lin Yik Tong (Chinese Commercial Association) was formed in 1892 to advocate for Sydney's merchant-class Chinese and included representatives from eight Chinese firms in the city. The Tong did not admit smaller traders and working-class Chinese. County-based clan shops were also developed to serve their fellow clansmen, hence the range of similar grocery stores and other businesses in the Haymarket area. Some of these shops were based in buildings owned by the clan societies.[13]

In more recent years, membership rates have declined as these societies struggle to attract younger members. This is possibly due to generational differences in social activities and governance issues such as improper financial management and internal politics. Many clan societies have also moved out of Chinatown, and new ones have been established elsewhere in Sydney as many Chinese Australians choose to live in the suburbs rather than in the city. As a result, Chinese people are attending social events across Sydney rather than congregating in one central location, lessening opportunities for socialisation and networking.[14]

The increased Chinese immigrant population in Australia has resulted in the establishment of many community organisations that have assumed the traditional role of the Tongs for new arrivals and provide a range of mainstream services such as employment, health care and housing for the broader Chinese-speaking community. These include the Australian Chinese Community Association and Chinese Australian Services Society, neither of which are headquartered in the Sydney CBD.

Other locations in Haymarket and Chinatown, beside clan society premises, became the political headquarters for organising and agitating. By the early twentieth century several Chinese newspapers were printed to keep readers up to date with political events in China. The *Tung Wah News* (also named *Tung Wah*

Times) was founded in 1898 by Chinese merchant elites as the official organ of the New South Wales Chinese Merchants' Society and the Chinese Empire Reform Association. The newspaper's premises was at 52 Dixon Street. The NSW Chinese Chamber of Commerce had its premises in the same chambers.

The Sydney branch of the Chinese Reform Association was founded in 1898 by prominent Sydney merchant Yee Hing of the firm of On Chong & Co. A new monarchist organisation, the Chinese Empire Reform Association, was founded in 1900 by a group of Chinese merchants with the object of protecting the Emperor, and for the preservation of country, race, commerce and history. Founders included Thomas Yee Hing, Ping Nam, Gilbert Quoy, C Leanfore, Henry Fine Cheong, Goon Ick, WRG Lee, George Bew and newspaper editors Ng Ngok-low and T Chong Luke. By 1911 the association had over 2000 members.

The Sydney community was riven with competing allegiances and organisations. The trading company On Chong & Co on George Street in The Rocks advocated for the monarchist cause in China. Over in Surry Hills, the Chinese Masonic Society was pro-republican.

Figure 5.6 Chinese Youth League anniversary meeting, 1945. (Source: Arthur Gar Lock Chang as reproduced by Australian National Maritime Museum)

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Figure 5.7 Chinese Seaman's Union at the Trades Hall for Chinese New Year, 1940s. Photographer: Sam Hood. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Figure 5.8 Chinese banquet, 58 Dixon Street, December 1945. Photographer: Sam Hood. (Source: State Library of NSW)

10 Dixon Street. The building was donated by the Wran Government to the Chinese Youth League for use as their clubhouse. (Source: The China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

Community fundraising for building projects was increasingly influenced in the twentieth century by political parties in China. The pro-republican paper *Chinese Australian Times* advocated for directing money towards civic institutions rather than funding temples. Pro-republican clan groups like the Chung Shan Society funded schools and hospitals in Sydney and China. A tenet of Dr Sun Yat-sen's republican movement was maintaining cultural and economic links to Chinese people who were based overseas to help fuel support. This led to the establishment of Chinese language schools in places like Elizabeth Street.

Originating in the Young China League, the Chinese Nationalist Party of Australia, the Kuo Min Tang, was founded in Australia with branches in Sydney and Melbourne, and later, formed in other cities, and regional towns.[15] Its headquarters were in the Chinese Nationalist Party of Australia building at 75 Ultimo Road from 1921. It supported the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of republican government in China.

In 1942, during World War II, 300 Chinese seamen established the Australian branch of the Chinese Seamen's Union (CSU) in the rooms of the Chinese Youth League premises at 66 Dixon Street, Haymarket. Finding themselves stranded in Sydney as Chinese ports came under Japanese control, the seamen unionised to fight for better working conditions, find accommodation and negotiate contracts with Australian

authorities in need of labour on the Australian waterfront. The CSU was disbanded after the Second World War when the seamen returned to Asia.

Figure 5.9 Chinese Seamen's Union, 1944. (Source: State Library of NSW; photographer: Sam Hood)

In the postwar period, political activism by members of the Chinese community increasingly turned to mainstream parties and local government representation such as the NSW Labor Party, NSW Liberal Party and City of Sydney Council. Architect Henry Shiu-Lung Tsang served on the City of Sydney Council from 1991 to 1999. He was the first person of Asian origin to sit on Council. He was also a member of the Labor Party and served from 1999 to 2009. Restaurateur Robert Ho served as a councillor from 1999 to 2003.

The Taste of Chinatown

Food and eateries have been integral to the cultural identity of the Chinese community in Australia since the nineteenth century. During the 1850s there was a huge influx of Chinese immigrants seeking their fortune on the goldfields. Cookhouses flourished on the goldfields, serving food to the Chinese community and European workers alike. As Chinese people drifted back to the city in increasing numbers to live and work, enterprising businesspeople set up cookhouses/cookshops catering to the community in the first Chinatown in The Rocks, and later, with the establishment of the Belmore Markets, in the new Chinatown at Haymarket.

TWS wrote in the *Evening News* in February 1904:

> Enter a Chinese eating-house in Campbell street, and you will find plenty of fish and poultry on the daily bill of fare, at a sixpenny and ninepenny tariff. Another thing he is very fond of is a sort of dough-cake, cooked by steam, in large, flat camp-

> ovens. However the Chinese may save, they do not do it at the expense of their stomachs.[16]

Chinese food gained popularity in the twentieth century. Sydney's population grew from 480,000 in 1900 to two million in 1960. During the same period Chinese restaurants emerged as distinct commercial enterprises.

According to Julie Stacker, in 1900 there were 227 restaurants in Sydney; six Chinese businesses were listed as restaurants and these were located on Campbell, Goulburn, Elizabeth and King streets, Haymaket. The cookhouses were conveniently located adjoining the Belmore Markets and served all classes of Chinese people, from merchants' sons to labourers, as well as poor Europeans.[17] The Sing Wah Ku restaurant at 317 Castlereagh Street in 1900 was known as the Li Hung Hi cookshop a decade earlier. Towards the end of World War I consortiums of Chinese businessmen established modern cafes and restaurants catering to Chinese and European customers. These included the Shanghai Café at 65–67 Campbell Street, opened by the Chinese Consul-General, TK Tsang, in 1917. It featured 'many novelties in the menu, such as sharks' fin, bamboo shoots, birds' nests, stone fungus, etc'.[18] Two new Chinese cafes opened in 1919, the Pekin Café, at 206–210 Pitt Street, and the Tientsin Café, at 70 Campbell Street (later at 46/48 Campbell Street).

> [The Tientsin] café is elaborately decorated in typically Chinese style, the tables and chairs in the tearooms and lounge made of sandalwood, lacquered and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The walls are decorated after the artistic Eastern style with panels of tapestry and paintings interspersed with floral decorations in yellow and black metals heightening the Oriental effect of the Chinese woodwork, and the arches leading to the alcoves and retiring rooms are spanned by delightfully-worked garlands of black and yellow metal flowers.[19]

Historian Barbara Nichol has analysed the history of Chinese restaurants in Melbourne. Her findings correlate to the Sydney scene. She has investigated restaurant/cafe menus from the 1910s to 1930s, along with supporting evidence, showing that while restaurants offered very specialised and virtually authentic dishes, menus also became Australianised.

> By the late 1910s for example the distinctive Cantonese emphasis on fish, poultry and pork had been joined by beef and local wild fish such as snapper and Murray cod. These were important shifts in the development of a uniquely local Chinese cuisine.[20]

Evelyn Yin-lo lived in Campbell Street in Surry Hills in the 1920s and 1930s. Her parents ran food shops in different locations, and her father, G. Lai Park, was the first to make spring rolls in Sydney, in the 1930s. Those with mushrooms were sold for 6

pence and those without for 8 pence. They also sold prawn and fish balls.[21]

Figure 5.10 Advertisement for the Tientsin Cafe, 1949. (Source: National Archives of Australia, A433, 1949/2/8208)

Chinese cuisine continued to grow in popularity during World War II with the arrival of Allied servicemen and Chinese refugees and seamen who frequented the cafes. New Chinese restaurants that joined the food scene in Sydney in this period included the Tai Ping Café, Haymarket; Asiatic Cafe, Liverpool Street; Golden Dragon, Phillip Street; and Shanghai Chop Suey House, Campbell Street.[22]

By 1939 the Council recognised nine Chinese cafes in the city area, and 18 by 1945. Four years later the Council licensed 28 in the CBD 'and a considerable number outside it'.[23]

The Nanking café's position as the pre-eminent Chinese restaurant in Sydney was challenged during the 1940s and 1950s when it was overtaken by the New Dixon restaurant, the Mandarin in George Street, and the Sun Ah in the 1960s and 1970s.

Prominent Chinese businessman King Fong of the Say Tin Fong & Co store remembered several cafes in the Haymarket area including the Nanking, Tientsin and Shanghai; the latter had an 'English' dining area downstairs and a Chinese one upstairs. There was also the Bamboo Restaurant in King Street, which served a basic chop suey and sweet and sour dishes mainly catering to a Western clientele.[24]

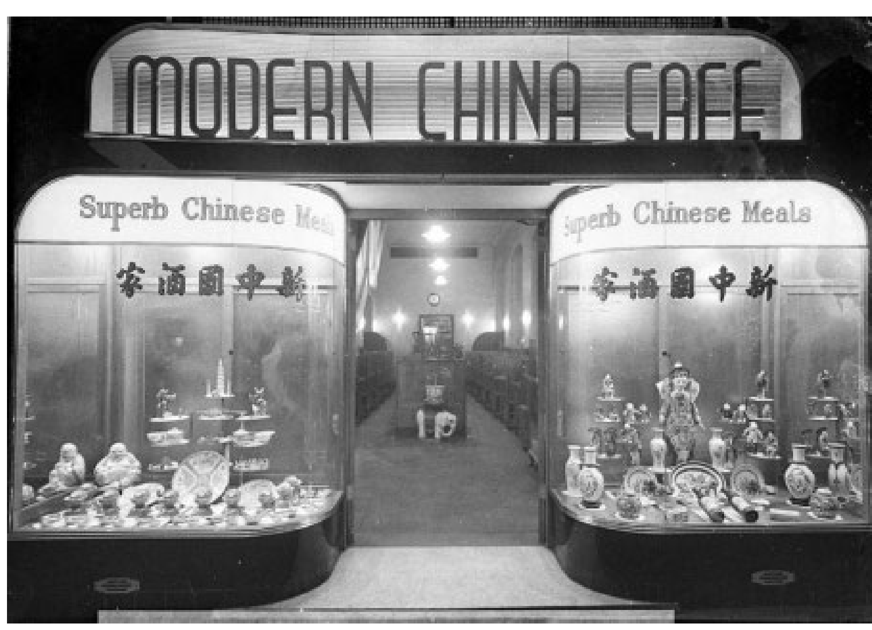

Figure 5.11 Modern China Cafe, 651 George Street, Haymarket, 6 September 1949. (Source: State Library of NSW; photographer: Sam Hood)

By 1960 the restaurant scene had expanded and there were over 1,000 restaurants across Sydney serving Chinese cuisines. Yet some of the former popular places from earlier decades had long since closed.

Figure 5.12 Looking south down Dixon Street, October 1950. (Source: State Library of NSW, ACP Magazines Ltd Photographic Archive; photographer: Ivan Wilfred Ive)

Figure 5.13 Tai Yuen Palace Restaurant, Sussex Street, 1979. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

In 1979 when Council began planning to close Dixon Street to vehicular traffic, they reported as follows:

> On the eastern side of Dixon Street, between Goulburn Street and Little Hay Street, there are three Chinese restaurants and there is one on the eastern side of Dixon Street between Little Hay Street and Hay Street. These restaurants are apparently well kept and are reported to be well patronised in the evenings.
>
> There is also one Chinese restaurant on the western side of Dixon Street between Little Hay Street and Factory Street, but it is reported that this is not open at night time.
>
> It is obvious, therefore, that the main night restaurant activities lie on the eastern side of Dixon Street.[25]

Figure 5.14 Tai Yuen Café/Restaurant in Covent Garden Hotel building, 1979. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

The iconic 'old Marigold Restaurant' opened in 1982 at 299 Sussex Street and was the first Hong Kong-style Chinese restaurant in Sydney. It was owned by the Chung family. They also opened the Regal Restaurant at the corner of Sussex and Liverpool streets in 1986. The Marigold was then opened across two floors of the CityMark Building, 683 George Street, in 1991.

Figure 5.15 Stanley Lee learnt to be a chef by making Chinese-style barbecue meat. (Source: The China–Australia Heritage Corridor <https://www.heritagecorridor.org.au/people/stanley-yee>)

In 1979 Stanley Yee opened Emperor's Garden Chinese Restaurant at 96–100 Hay Street, a barbecue food and noodle restaurant, as well as a tofu factory, a bakery and a butchery. A speciality of the bakery are the Emperor's Puffs, balls of soft pastry filled with steaming hot sweet custard, and churned out to satisfied customers to this day.

Figure 5.16 Emperor's Puffs at 96–100 Dixon Street, 2018. (Source: Roam the Gnome <https://www.roamthegnome.com/emperors-garden-sydney/>)

Eric and Linda Wong emigrated to Sydney from Hong Kong in 1989, promptly opening the Golden Century Restaurant at 405 Sussex Street. The following year they relocated into larger premises at 393 Sussex Street, expanding from 120 to 500 seats. The restaurant was notable for the fish and lobster tanks visible at the entrance and for one particularly special dish, the pipis in XO sauce, as well as its 200 Cantonese-style dishes.

In the 1980s and 1990s Cantonese-style restaurants flourished in Chinatown, attracting locals and tourists alike. Other regional cuisines from China followed from the early 1990s, including those from Hunan, Sichuan, Beijing and Shanghai. Prominent establishments in this period include the aforementioned the Golden Century, the Marigold in the CityMark Building. The Regal in Sussex Street hosted major events in Chinatown. Also located along the Chinatown strip was the East Ocean Restaurant (entrances in Dixon and Sussex Streets), and Kam Fook Shark's Fin and Seafood in the Peak complex. This latter restaurant was established by Eddie Ng in about 1997 and seated 800 patrons, being the largest in Chinatown. Ng was born in Canton in southern China but lived much of his life in Hong Kong and Sydney.

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Figure 5.17 Golden Century fish tanks. (Source: TimeOut <https://www.timeout.com/sydney/restaurants/golden-century>)

Figure 5.18 Marigold Yum Cha trolley. (Source: Broadsheet <https://www.broadsheet.com.au/sydney/food-and-drink/article/after-39-years-sydney-yum-cha-institution-marigold-closing>)

Figure 5.19 Yum Cha service, Marigold Restaurant, undated. (Source: 9 News <https://www.9news.com.au/national/sydney-chinese-restaurant-marigold-restaurant-closing-on-december-5-due-to-effects-of-the-covid19-pandemic/91dc472e-6442-4fd9-be81-7b6947df20b2>)

Figure 5.20 Marigold Yum Cha trolley. (Source: Broadsheet <https://www.broadsheet.com.au/sydney/food-and-drink/article/after-39-years-sydney-yum-cha-institution-marigold-closing>)

In this period the Hong Kong Cantonese meal of yum cha became popular. Restaurant patrons flocked to Chinatown restaurants to enjoy tea and snack-sized dishes from 11am to 3pm, with the area crowded with Chinese and non-Chinese people on the weekend.

Since the 2010s new waves of Asian migrants have permeated Chinatown, including Japanese, Thai, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Malaysian and Filipino people, and regional mainland Chinese (from Szechuan, Xinjiang, Yunnan, etc.).

Figure 5.21 After 32 tears, Sydney's beloved late-night Chinatown Restaurant, Golden Century goes into administration, 2021. (Source: Broadsheet <https://www.broadsheet.com.au/sydney/food-and-drink/article/after-39-years-sydney-yum-cha-institution-marigold-closing>)

The COVID-19 pandemic has wrought havoc on the food scene in Chinatown. Since 2020 several iconic Cantonese restaurants and food establishments have closed their doors including the Golden Century, Marigold, Regal and BBQ King. The Dixon House Food Court was also closed, with the building set to be demolished and redeveloped.

Sights, sounds and smells

For many the memories of Chinatown are associated with the sights, sounds and smells reverberating around the streets during annual celebrations and events and in daily life as people go about their business.

The gloriously coloured and decorated dragon and lion dances, the elaborate costumes and music of Chinese opera performers, the bang and smoke of crackers heralding the Lunar New Year and the smells of incense burning on altars all convey a cultural connection to time and place.

> The Chinese New Year, like the English, is heralded by ear-splitting noises. The Chinese, however, go one better in their prodigal dissemination of the agile and nerve-disturbing cracker. They do not parade the streets blowing discordantly upon tin whistle, but wake the echoes in their own quarters with the resonant gong.[26]

The Chinese New Year (Lunar Year) Festival, organised by the City of Sydney, is a very popular event on the Sydney calendar, attracting large crowds of locals and international tourists, including Chinese-born people.

Figure 5.22 Twilight Parade, Chinatown, January 2015. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 5.23 Lion Dance, Carnivale, Chinatown, 1988. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

Figure 5.24 Leung Wai Kee Buddhist Craft and Joss Stick Trading Co, where Chinese calligraphy is sold during Lunar New Year festivities. (Source: Brook Mitchell, *Sydney Morning Herald*)

Figure 5.25 Preparing for Chinese New Year at the Shanghai Café, Campbell Street, 5 February 1940. (Source: State Library of NSW; photographer: R Wolfe)

Chinese opera has a long history in Australia, commencing on the goldfields in the 1850s. It was performed in Sydney in mainstream theatres or church and community halls. Cantonese opera, a version of Chinese opera, involves music, singing, martial arts, acrobatics and acting. The City Hall on Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, served as a rehearsal hall for a Chinese opera troupe called Le Yao Tian Ban that formed in Sydney. The building was demolished during the Wexford Street resumption.

Figure 5.26 Chinese opera performers, Australian Hall, Elizabeth Street, 1949. (Source: State Library of NSW; photographer: Arthur Bullard)

The Chinese Youth League Cantonese Opera Troupe was formed by Madam Dao Ping Wu in the 1980s and is based at the youth league's premises at 10 Dixon Street. A Cantonese opera course is also taught at the Australian Chinese Community Association of NSW on Mary Street, Surry Hills. In the late 1980s, 434–436 Sussex Street was the meeting place of an amateur Chinese opera group.

Figure 5.27 Chinese opera performers in Hay Street, for Lunar New Year parade, February 2005. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-01154325)

Shopping in Dixon Street was a feast for the eyes, nose and mouth. The following description captures the sights, sounds and smells of shopping in Chinatown in the early 1980s:

> All the shops are fascinating, with paper lanterns, a smell of dried fish and incense. They have names like Joong Heng and Company, Say Ting Fong and Company, and Far Eastern Foods. Everywhere there are great sacks of rice, bean sprouts and dried mushrooms. Bamboo baskets full of unrecognisable Chinese items block the doorways.
>
> ... These shops sell everything—ginger, garlic, hundreds of differing noodles, woks, Chinese movie comics, bamboo steamers, teapots, paper money, joss sticks and fresh vegetables.
>
> There is food from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Korea.
>
> ... The fridge at Lucky Food Stores, in Pitt Street, offering whole fish, fresh, frozen shells of periwinkle, soya bean drink. Chrysanthemum tea, fish balls, frozen durian and Chinese TV dinners, sweet and sour meat of combination chop suey while watching the ping pong.
>
> There are tins of duck with preserved vegetable, arrow head, packets of things labelled only as Chinese food, dried cuttlefish, fish may, ben thread, shrimp flavoured chips. Shelves of Chinese herbal medicines, large jars of dried seahorses.[27]

Figure 5.28 A shop in Chinatown selling Chinese medicine. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 5.29 Elder Paik spins a hula hoop at the southern end of Dixon Street. (Source: Brook Mitchell, *Sydney Morning Herald,* 7 February 2016)

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Theme 4: Change and renewal in Chinatown

Former Kwong War Chong, 82–84 Dixon Street. (Source: China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

6 Theme 4: Change and renewal in Chinatown

Like many Chinatowns globally, Sydney's Chinatown has been shaped by a range of factors. Development pressures, population decentralisation and shifting demographics have changed the fabric and boundaries of its communities. Consequently, the role of Chinatown has also evolved as it straddles its history and the new demands of our increasingly globalised world.

Tourist hub

Chinatown's role as a destination precinct continued to expand in the lead-up to the bicentennial of the First Fleet in 1988 when the NSW Government began to organise commemorations and look for sites in the city to celebrate the anniversary. A major component of the redevelopment of the industrial lands at Darling Harbour was the creation of the Chinese Garden of Friendship, a proposal first imagined by the local Chinese community and leaders like Henry Tsang. The garden was seen as a broad expression of the long history of, and connections with, the Chinese community in Sydney.

Some in the community questioned the motives of creating what they saw as a fake and romanticised Chinese precinct with oriental and exotic furnishings. However, the area continued to attract businesses and residents. The survival of many of the clan associations and community organisations in the area from the early years of the twentieth century also added to the community's sense of place and belonging.

The face of Chinatown evolved once more with the transfer of Hong Kong's sovereignty from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China in 1997. Rising numbers of Chinese immigrants created Cantonese-style restaurants, Chinese grocery stores and gift shops. Many brought with them capital and managerial expertise, contributing to large-scale urban development projects such as the Sussex Centre, and the refurbishment of Market City and Capitol Square. Chinatown's transformation from a working-class industrial fringe in the early twentieth century reached its zenith as one of Sydney's top 10 tourist destinations.[1]

Figure 6.1 Thai Town signage at Campbell Street, Haymarket, about 2020. (Source: asianinspirations.com.au)

From Chinatown to Asia Town

> When I came to Sydney in 1970, there was a fairly close-knit community – when I walked through Chinatown I knew everybody. There's no way I would be able to do that now. (Simon Chan, President of Sydney's Haymarket Chamber of Commerce 2017)

In the last few decades, the social fabric of Chinatown has changed dramatically. As the older generation passes, traditional clan societies and their associated businesses have declined and struggled to attract younger members. The recent Chinese diaspora migrating to Sydney is not associated with the southern provinces of China that formed the origins of these groups in Chinatown. Waves of immigration to Australia after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests saw the rise of Mandarin-speaking Chinese people in Chinatown. Mandarin has overtaken Cantonese as the dominant Chinese language in the Haymarket precinct.[2]

The generational change was keenly felt in Chinatown as new arrivals increasingly moved away from the city centre to settle in the suburbs. Some Australian-born Chinese people speak English as their first language (and sometimes their only language).

Since the 1960s there has been a pull away from Chinatown as a place to live, as Chinese immigrants settled increasingly in suburbs forming peripheral centres to the city such as Hurstville, Campsie, Auburn and Chatswood. Wei Lei described this phenomenon as familiar in urban populations where 'multiethnic communities [grow] in suburban areas, where one ethnic group has a significant concentration, but does not constitute the majority.'[3]

The homogeneity of a single 'Chinatown' has also shifted with diverse waves of migration from across Asia and the replication

of politics among these ethnic groups. Sydney's Chinese New Year celebrations are now called Lunar New Year to reflect the broader significance of this tradition to an increasingly diverse community. New street signs demarcate 'Thai Town' on Campbell Street and 'Korea Town' on Pitt Street.

Korea Town and Thai Town have become more than just distinctive cuisine quarters, rather changing the face of the local residential population and demographics, while being driven by the socioeconomic factors of their respective homelands. The repeal of the *Australian Immigration Act* in 1973 saw increasing numbers of new Asian migrants and refugees settle in Australia. Prior to the Act's repeal, the first Korean immigrants arrived in Sydney under the Skilled Migration Program in 1969; mostly arriving as students, they sponsored family members extending the chain migration each year. Just as in other diaspora groups, the Korean community has complex dynamics between old and new waves of migration. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis saw Korean arrivals shift from tourists and students to unemployed, bankrupt or citizens of Korea seeking economic migrants seeking opportunities for work. Temporary migration has also meant many Koreans will return home, migrating only for education either for themselves or their children. Nonetheless there is a significant clustering of Korean business in the CBD area bordered by Bathurst, Castlereagh, Liverpool and George streets. This is attributed to the attraction of existing Korean businesses, residents and customers, and the reliance on the density of foot traffic in the CBD.[4] Although there is a Korea Town on Pitt Street, Campsie and Strathfield have also now become significant Korea Town suburbs.

Following the 1973 repeal of the *Australian Immigration Act* and the introduction of policy supporting refugees from the Indochina Wars, Sydney's Thai community grew, becoming most visible in the array of Thai restaurants from the 1980s. Chalio Tongsinoon remembers the shift from Chinese to Thai businesses in Haymarket:

> there were not many job opportunities in Thailand in the 1970s. My brother came to Sydney in 1971 and encouraged me to follow … In 1973, Sydney did not have any Thai businesses. I had to buy food from Chinese grocery stores around Paddy's Market. Not many people knew Thailand. People thought I came from Taiwan. In the late 1970s, I was so excited to find the first Thai product, the Thai brand Pickled Sour Mustard, sold in a Chinese store. It sold out in one day because all Thais here bought a dozen each to stock …[5]

Forty years later, the City of Sydney installed three signs on corners of George and Campbell, Pitt and Campbell, and Pitt and Goulburn streets marking Thai Town 2013. This is the second municipality in the world that has recognised the Thai community as having its own enclave, after Los Angeles in 1999. Many of

Thai Town's residents are in low-paid service jobs as students working in Thai businesses. Haymarket itself represents the highest residential concentration of Thais in Australia.[6] Today Thai has eclipsed Mandarin as the most spoken language in Haymarket.[7]

Transnational Gateway

Recent scholarship has redefined our historical understanding of Chinatown as a gateway or corridor with global influence:

> It is no longer a self-contained ethnic enclave, but a 'nodal meeting place' for different kinds of transnational human, economic and cultural flows between Australia and Asia.[8]

Property development in particular traces the significant capital investment by Chinese companies. In 1996, Grocon built the Peak Apartments (part of the Market City complex). Owned by one of the wealthiest men in Asia, magnate Robert Kuok, the tower was seen as a 'totem of the "overseas" Chinese in Australia'.[9] Developments in subsequent years have surpassed the Peak, including high-rise apartments such as The Quay (2015), built for $300 million by Ausbao Pty Ltd, which is the Australian subsidiary of the Beijing Capital Development Holdings Group. Many of the apartments in these buildings were sold to local and overseas Chinese buyers and occupied by international students including those from mainland China.

The associated banking, real estate and financial services and networks between China and Australia have set up real estate agencies and professional firms in Chinatown to service a wide range of customers.

Figure 6.2 Peak Apartments, 2 Quay Street, Haymarket, 2003. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, Brian McInerney Industrial Photographs Collection)

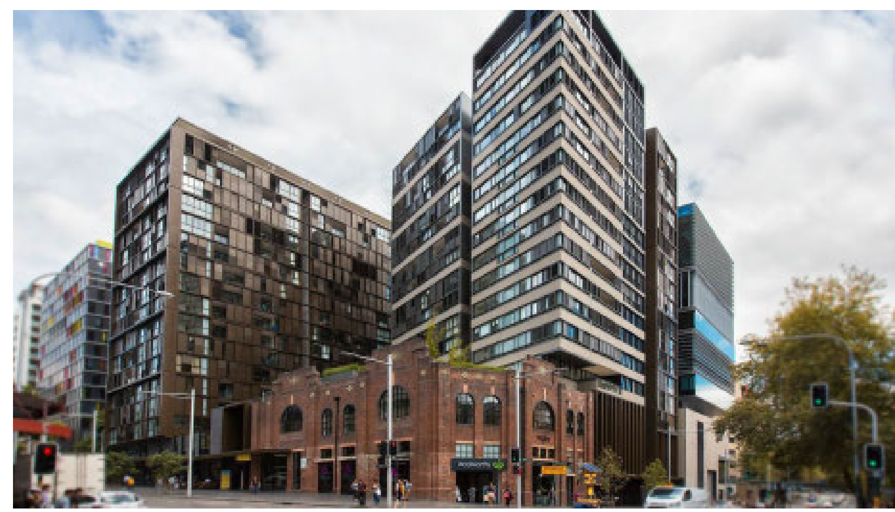


Figure 6.3 Residential and retail complex, The Quay Haymarket, 61–79 Quay Street. (Source: *Daily Telegraph*)

However, the legacy of economic flows between Sydney and China can be traced even earlier in Chinatown. The Wing On & Company Ltd was founded as an import and export fruit merchant in Haymarket in 1890, the company went to establish major department stores in Hong Kong and Shanghai. The capital collected in Australia funded expansion in Hong Kong, which increased from $4 million in 1930 to $8 million in 1942 (in today's currency).[10]

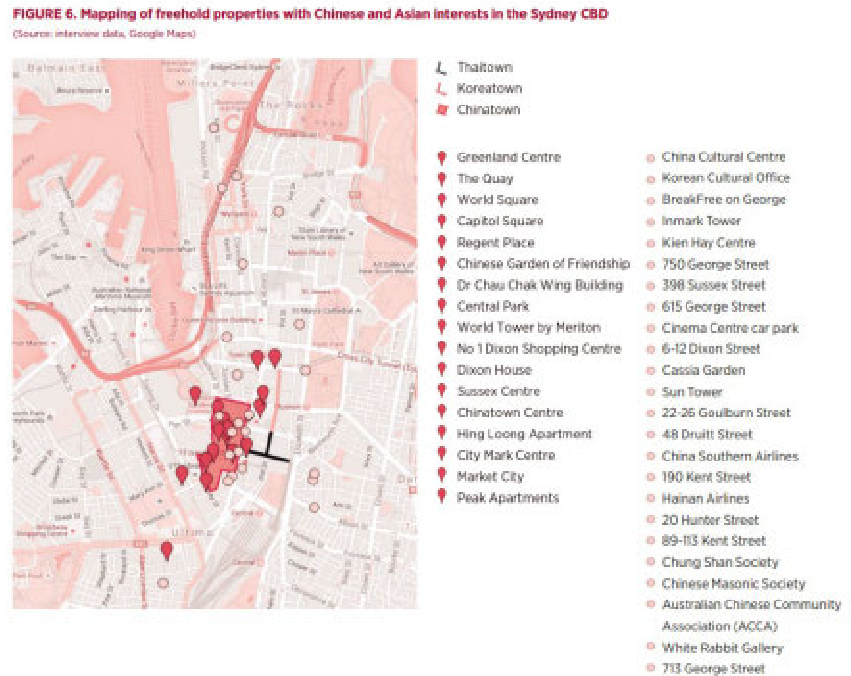


Figure 6.4 Freehold properties with Chinese and Asian interests in Sydney CBD. (Source: Western Sydney University 2016, Sydney's Chinatown in the Asian Century: From ethnic enclave to global hub, p 30)

On a modest scale, personal capital generated in China and Australia has been invested back into communities on both sides. Recent research by The China-Australia Corridor Project (The Institute for Culture and Society) has recorded the heritage connections between Australia and Zhongshan Prefecture, Guangdong, since the 1800s. Houses, schools, and ancestral halls were built in villages in this prefecture with money sent back from Australia. In turn, these places are linked to sites in places like Chinatown that Zhongshan people created, including houses, shops, and market gardens. As Denis Byrne notes, this has implications for how the significance of heritage is understood:

> There are now many more sites listed on heritage inventories at the federal, state and local levels of government for their association with migration … framing stresses the contribution immigrants have made to the migrant-receiving nation and minimises … the ongoing presence so many of them have in the sending nation and their active role in producing its built environment.[11]

Change in Chinatown

Chinatown's built fabric has been continually disrupted and altered by local and global events.

In 1985, a fire caused by a leak from the Australian Gas Light Company sent flames 100 feet into the sky and destroyed landmarks such as Jade Green restaurant and Prajna Temple (Figure 6.5).[12]

Figure 6.5 Prajna Temple fire, Dixon Street, Haymarket, 1985. (Source: City of Sydney Archives)

More recently the construction of the CBD and South East Light Rail from 2015 to 2019 negatively impacted many businesses in Haymarket and disrupted the traditional route of the Twilight Parade during Lunar New Year along George Street. The construction also saw the removal of Lindy Lee's artwork *Cloud Gate* on the footpath on Thomas Street (later reinstalled as part of a new commission, *The Garden of Cloud and Stone*).

The emergence of Darling Square has also overshadowed Haymarket. A combination of Sinophobia related to the pandemic and the associated lockdowns further devastated visitation to Haymarket in 2020 and 2021. Sydney institutions such as Marigold on George Street and Golden Century in Sussex Street were forced to close. Councillor Craig Chung expressed dismay at the decline of Chinatown since the pandemic.

> Any tourist store there is buggered. About 1.2 million tourists a year went to Chinatown pre-pandemic. Now you can shoot a gun up the middle – it is so sad.[13]

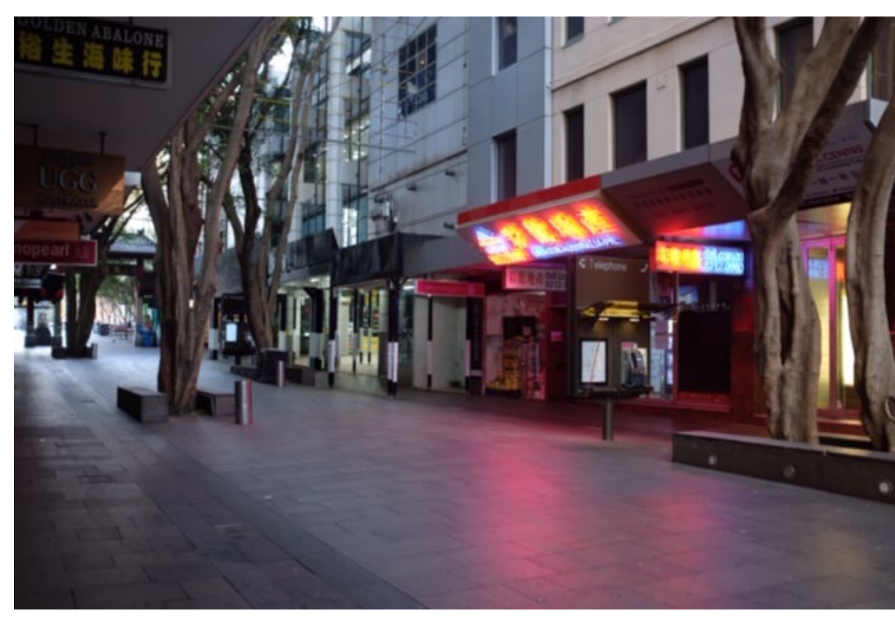


Figure 6.6 Dixon Street during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-01137877)

Yet Chinatown still attracted significant Chinese investment as well as wealthy and highly educated Chinese residents. Prior to the pandemic, a large percentage of Chinatown's residents were transient international students or people on short-term visas. While this transience of residents has challenged the traditional community of Chinatown, a new generation of international students has also emerged whose patronage and casual labour sustained businesses on Sussex, Goulburn, Thomas and Little Hay streets. The social importance of Chinatown is still paramount to younger international students and migrants searching for familiarity and connection. Some of these sentiments were captured in a survey undertaken by Western Sydney University with one participant describing:

> I'm Chinese, so it's a bit like my home away from home. I'm not there to experience the culture, I'm there, to a certain extent, to just be myself.[14]

Globalisation and the increased mobility of people has 'disrupted the conventional understanding of Chinatowns as locally fixed urban spaces.'[15] The historical forces that created a specific cultural enclave have been superseded by Asia–Sydney connections that see expression of 'culture, symbols and aesthetics; and the materialities of Asian built forms in Sydney's urban centres.'[16]

Endnotes

[1] Wong, A and Ang, I 2017, 'From Chinatown to China's town?', in Wah Chan, Y and Yee Koh, S (eds), *New Chinese Migrations: Mobility, Home, and Inspirations*, Routledge, 2017 (no page number).

[2] Wong, A and Ang, I 2017, 'From Chinatown to China's town?', in Wah Chan, Y and Yee Koh, S (eds), *New Chinese Migrations: Mobility, Home, and Inspirations*, Routledge, 2017 (no page number).

[3] Western Sydney University 2016, *Sydney's Chinatown in the Asian Century: From ethnic enclave to global hub*, p 15.

[4] Collins, J and Shin, J 2012, *Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the Sydney Restaurant Industry*, Sydney, UTS Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Research Centre, p 33.

[5] Beasley, T, Hirsch, P and Rungmanee, S *Thailand in Australia*, University of Sydney, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, p 34.

[6] Beasley, T, Hirsch, P and Rungmanee, S *Thailand in Australia*, University of Sydney, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, p 22.

[7] Xing, D, 'Thai edges out Mandarin as the most spoken language in Haymarket', *SBS Thai*, 20 August 2019.

[8] Western Sydney University 2016, *Sydney's Chinatown in the Asian Century: From ethnic enclave to global hub*, p 8.

[9] Kirby, J and Baltazar M, 'The new dynasty', *Australian Financial Review,* 28 May 1999, viewed 31 January 2023 <https://www.afr.com/companies/the-new-dynasty-19990528-kb6f8>.

[10] Yong, CF 1966, 'The Chinese in New South Wales and Victoria 1901–1921: With special reference to Sydney and Melbourne', PhD thesis, ANU, p 104.

[11] Byrne, D 2022, *The Heritage Corridor: A Transnational Approach to the Heritage of Chinese Migration*, Routledge, p 106.

[12] Slavin, S, 'Gas leak touches off two fires', UPI, viewed 31 January 2023 <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1985/11/14/Gas-leak-touches-off-two-fires/2936500792400/>.

[13] O'Sullivan, M, '"You could shoot a gun down it": Sydney's Chinatown struggles to recover', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 2021.

[14] Western Sydney University 2016, *Sydney's Chinatown in the Asian Century: From ethnic enclave to global hub*, p 43.

[15] Western Sydney University 2016, *Sydney's Chinatown in the Asian Century: From ethnic enclave to global hub*, p 18.

[16] Western Sydney University 2016, *Sydney's Chinatown in the Asian Century: From ethnic enclave to global hub*, p 19.

Key places and characteristics

Former Kwong War Chong, 82–84 Dixon Street. (Source: China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

7 Key places and characteristics

The City of Sydney has identified Haymarket and Chinatown as a Special Character Area and *Sustainable Sydney 2030* identifies Haymarket as one of 10 village centres recognised as a focus for the city's village communities.

The Special Character Area statement for Haymarket notes it:

- retains a market atmosphere, characterised by a diversity of uses, vibrant street life and a diverse social and ethnic mix
- retains fine-grained subdivision patterns, narrow frontages, informal public spaces and generally low building heights
- features a consistent low street wall, and absence of tower form creating a microclimate at street level which is sunlit and protected from winds.

Building on the Special Character Area statement, the following section provides a summary of some additional key architectural, landscape and design features of Chinatown that can be linked back to the historic themes identified in this report.

A further comprehensive heritage study is required to understand the heritage and historical significance of items included.

Figure 7.1 Chinese fruit barrows at Hay Street, Haymarket, 1933. (Source: State Library of NSW)

The evolution of Chinatown

> Green glazed Chinese ridge capping appeared in place of old-fashioned Australian galvanised iron, and cool white walls replace old wooden paling fences.[1]

Associated theme: *Evolving Chinatown*

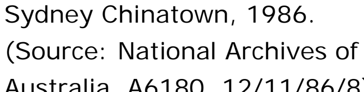
The conscious urban renewal of Haymarket in the 1970s–1980s sought to create urban landmarks like the arches as part of a Chinese enclave or destination. As Flemming Christiansen notes:

> Arches, signposts in Chinese … names in Chinese characters and all sorts of Chine-style kitsch … Westernized restaurant names, often written in brush-stroke letters … the Oriental ambience is a main emblem of the Chinese catering trade … the exotic is standardised in order to satisfy the customer's hopes of predictability.[2]

The use of conspicuous Chinese or 'oriental' materials and colour is consistent with other urban Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York and London.

Example locations:

- Dixon Street Gates
- Chinese Garden of Friendship
- Dixon Street

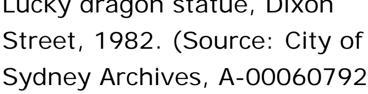


Sydney Chinatown, 1986. (Source: National Archives of Australia, A6180, 12/11/86/8)

Orientalised decoration of Chinatown, 1980s. (Source: China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

Victoria Building, Chinatown, 2017. Photographer: Joshua Foo. (Source: https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/chinatown-sydney--731975745663277742/)

Chinese-inspired lanterns in Dixon Street, Chinatown, 1984. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00061090)



Lucky dragon statue, Dixon Street, 1982. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00060792)

Lunar New Year celebration, 2014. (Source: The China–Australia Heritage Corridor)

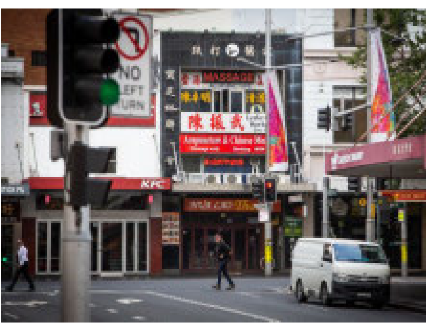
Dual English/Mandarin signage on CBC Bank, Haymarket. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Lanterns as street lighting, Dixon Street, 12 April 1982. (Source: State Library of NSW, Bob Fenney)

Dixon Street. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Chinese Garden of Friendship. (Source: Sydney.com)

The former Kwong War Chong at 54–58 Dixon Street was a clan shop for Zhongshan people in Sydney. (Source: The China–Australian Heritage Corridor)



Chinatown shops, George Street, December 2015. (Source: State Library of NSW, D-Mo Zajac)

Streetscape and Chinatown Garden Restaurant, Dixon Street, 1986. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00059349)

Hay Street end of Dixon Street with illuminations, 2000. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00056877)

Gateway to Chinatown, Dixon Street, 1984. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00061053)

Seating pagoda, 1991. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00011719)

Changing face of Chinatown, 12 April 1981. (Source: State Library of NSW, Bob Fenney)

Details in Dixon Street, 12 April 1981. (Source: State Library of NSW, Bob Fenney)

Lanterns and signage under awnings, Dixon Street, 12 April 1981. (Source: State Library of NSW, Bob Fenney)

Dual signage, ES&A Bank, Haymarket, undated. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Intangible heritage: gatherings, performances and leisure activities

Key characteristics of Chinatown's history are associated with events, celebrations, protests and movements of people which are not necessarily anchored in a building but occurred in a significant public domain space. Some of these locations are no longer intact.

Associated Theme: Evolving Chinatown; Living and Working in Chinatown; Belief, Culture and Community

- Arrivals
- Protests / race riots
- Underbelly: opium dens, gambling dens (Haymarket)
- Routes of Moon festival, Dragon Parades, Lunar New Year

Example locations:

Migration

- Millers Point Wharves (west Barangaroo—Towns Wharf demolished)

Underbelly

- 84 Dixon Street (raid on opium den)
- Campbell Street (east of Castlereagh) site of raid on opium den

Parades

- George Street (Town Hall to Dixon Street)

Anti-Chinese movement

- Circular Quay
- Hyde Park
- Domain
- Lower George Street
- Trade Unions Building, Sussex Street

Pageant of Nations, Town Hall. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Chinese Kuo Min Tang political luncheon, undated. (Source: State Library of NSW; Sam Hood)

Town's Wharf. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Chinese joss house, Chinese New Year, 8 February 1940. (Source: State Library of NSW; N Herfort)

Twentieth-century mall culture

Different waves of Chinese migration have shaped the character of retail and restaurant venues in Chinatown. There are distinct identities to malls, food courts and restaurants in this precinct that have been influenced by the commercial architecture and identity of similar venues in places like Hong Kong.

> In the back corner of the top level is the legendary Ching Yip coffee lounge, a Hong Kong-style café restaurant. Enter through under the pink neon sign and you find yourself in a pink and grey, laminex and vinyl oasis, soon examining a menu printed on pink paper, listing hundreds of items, from Hot Lemon Coke and Hot Tea & Coffee Mix to rice, pasta and borscht. In the corner, a cake fridge glows, its contents mostly lemons.
>
> Building grades are probably not the same as movie-grades, but even so, I will spring to Dixon House's defence. My love of it comes from it being an 80s time-warp, with mirrored ceilings and columns, pink walls and carpet, artificial plants and a collection of small, independent businesses. Like Eating World its basement food court has a worn atmosphere, although it does have the additional novelty of the mirrored ceiling.[3]

Associated Theme: *Evolving Chinatown; Living and Working in Chinatown; Change and Renewal in Chinatown; Belief, Culture and Community*

> In the back corner of the top level is the legendary Ching Yip coffee lounge, a Hong Kong-style café restaurant. Enter through under the pink neon sign and you find yourself in a pink and grey, laminex and vinyl oasis, soon examining a menu printed on pink paper, listing hundreds of items, from Hot Lemon Coke and Hot Tea & Coffee Mix to rice, pasta and borscht. In the corner, a cake fridge glows, its contents mostly lemons.
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- 1980s
- Food courts
- Nostalgia—waves of migration
- Different cultural and regional cuisines

Key Locations:

- Dixon Street Mall
- Paddy's Markets, Hay Street
- Market City, Hay Street
- Prince Centre, Quay Street
- Sussex Centre
- CityMark, 683–689 George Street
- Eating World, Harbour Plaza Building
- Number One Dixon Shopping Centre, 1 Dixon Street
- World Square
- Darling Square

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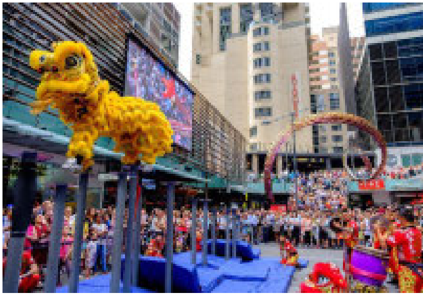
Dixon House's exterior. (Source: Vanessa Berry, Mirror Sydney)

Eating World, Harbour Plaza. (Source: alamy.com)

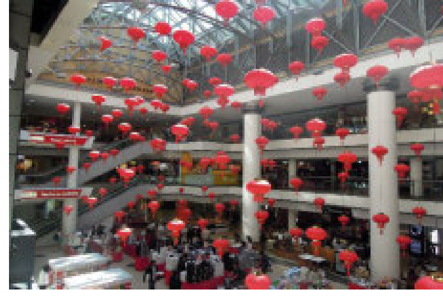
Prince Centre. (Source: Rork Projects)

Former Ching Yip Coffee Lounge. (Source: Noodily)

CityMark, 221 Thomas Street. (Source: realcommercial.com.au)



Lunar New Year at World Square. (Source: Time Out)



Market City. (Source: Alamy.com)

Darling Square at night. (Source: City of Sydney Council, Darling Square Library; photographer: Jessica Lindsay)

Chinatown shop, September 2004. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00064426)

Souvenir shop, Chinatown, September 2004. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00064422)

Dixon House's mirrored interior. (Source: Vanessa Berry, Mirror Sydney)

Sussex Centre. (Source: Realcommercial.com.au)

Lost heritage

Much of the built legacy of the old Chinatowns (the 'first' and 'second' Chinatowns) in The Rocks, Surry Hills and Haymarket is no longer extant. Mapping and documentary records may help reconstruct important landmarks such as places of worship, housing and commerce.

Associated Theme: Evolving Chinatown; Change and Renewal in Chinatown

- Second Chinese quarter in Sydney
- Alleyways and laneways
- Fruit and vegetable markets
- Joss houses
- Terrace houses and rookeries

Key Locations:

- Belmore Markets (Capitol Theatre, Campbell and Hay streets)
- Hay Street Markets (Paddy's Markets)
- Wexford Street (Wentworth Avenue)
- Stephen Street (demolished)
- Durand's Alley (Campbell and Pitt streets—now World Square)
- 86 Goulburn Street (former joss house)

Wexford Street, Chinese Church of England, 1908. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00039165)

Interior of old Belmore Markets, c.1890s. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-0002.4393)

Elizabeth and Wexford streets, 1906. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, A-00040076)

Cleansing operations in Mary Street, 1900. (Source: State Library of NSW)

Contemporary material expressions of culture

Public art commissions by contemporary Asian artists are featured in the laneways, forecourts and plazas of Chinatown. Some have generated controversy from breaking with tradition or coming under threat from development. For almost 30 years, Gallery 4A, on Hay Street, has helped foster wider engagement between Australia and Asia and supported Asian-Australian artists.

Associated Theme: Evolving Chinatown; Change and Renewal in Chinatown

- Art installations
- Landscape elements

Example locations:

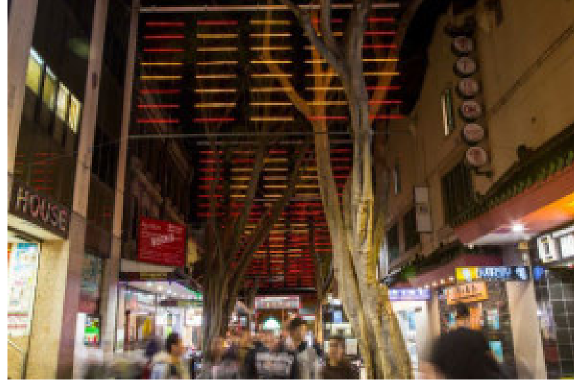
- Jason Wing, In Between Two Worlds
- Lindy Lee, Garden of Cloud and Stone, Thomas Street
- Lin Li, Golden Water Mouth, Hay Street
- Gallery 4A
- Chris Yee, Tumbalong, Darling Square
- Peter McGregor, *Heaven* and the Dixon Street Light Screens

Lindy Lee, *Garden of Cloud and Stone.* (Source: City of Sydney)

Jason Wing, *Heavenly Bodies.* (Source: City of Sydney)

Lindy Lee's destroyed artwork near Market City. (Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 November 2018)

Peter McGregor, *Heaven* and the Dixon Street Light Screens. (Source: City of Sydney)

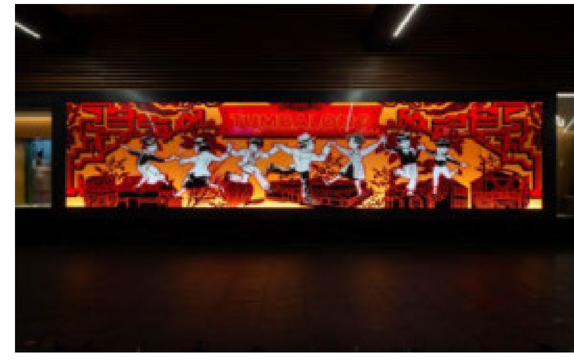


Peter McGregor, Dixon Street light screens. (Source: City of Sydney)

Lin Li, *Golden Water Mouth.* (Source: City of Sydney)

Thomas Street Plaza, curated by Aaron Seeto. (Source: City of Sydney)

Lindy Lee, *Garden of Cloud and Stone*, Thomas Street Plaza. (Source: City of Sydney)



Chris Yee, *Tumbalong*, Darling Square. (Source: Art Pharmacy)

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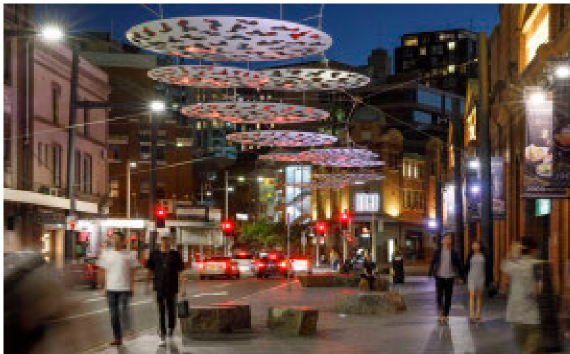

Lindy Lee, *Garden of Cloud and Stone*, Thomas Street Plaza. (Source: City of Sydney)

Endnotes

[1] Fitzgerald, Shirley 2008, *Red Tape Gold Scissors*, p 193.

[2] Burke, E 2010, Tradition as a Tool: Designing Culture and Negotiating Power in Chinatown, Sydney, UTS, 2003, p 165.

[3] Berry, V, 'Chinatown Malls', Mirror Sydney blog, 10 February 2010, viewed 26 September 2022 <https://mirrorsydney.wordpress.com/2019/02/10/chinatown-malls/>.