



Guide to Chinese-Australian Family Research

This guide describes resources of particular interest to those researching their Chinese-Australian ancestry. It should be used to supplement standard family research at libraries, historical societies and genealogical societies.

The following three steps are a good way to start your general family research:

1. Gather as much information as possible from family members and family stories.
2. Obtain Australian birth, death and marriages certificates which provide information about the family's original Chinese Australian ancestor. An Australian marriage certificate should provide information about an ancestor's birthplace and parents. Sometimes a Chinese groom will have signed his name in Chinese characters, which is valuable information and occasionally the birthplace named is more specific than the normal 'Canton' or 'China'. Birth registrations may also provide tiny but useful pieces of information
3. Visit the genealogical section of your state or territory library and your local genealogical society

Chinese Names

Typically Chinese have three characters to their name, sometimes two, which translate to a three syllable name. Traditionally the first character is the 'family name' but overseas Chinese also swap their names around to suit western conventions.

Chinese names can change over a person's lifetime. It was common for babies to be given a 'baby name' which was used instead for their name for the first few years of their life. Some people also changed their names when they retired. Women do not traditionally take their husband's name.

Often many Chinese names in English have the term 'Ah' or 'A' at the start such as 'Ah Lee'. The 'Ah' does not have a meaning. It is simply a way of indicating that the next word is the person's given name and was used as a way of addressing friends. These type of names were often mistakenly entered into documentation as people's names and over time were joined as one word and eventually become the family surname. There are also a number of examples of families who became known by their business name rather than their actual name.

The only way to accurately know your ancestor's Chinese name is to have the Chinese characters for it. As Chinese is a tonal language it is not possible to translate the Chinese name accurately into English unless a system such as pinyin is used. It is not possible to work backwards from English without guesswork. This is further complicated by the fact that names may sound different depending on the Chinese dialect used to pronounce them.

As is standard with genealogical research it is important to search as many variations of a person's name as you can think of. This can include different spellings which might provide the same sound.

For further information about the Chinese naming practices and how they work in both Australia and China see some of the items below:

- *Bai Jia Xing = 100 most common Chinese surnames* edited by Cynthia Wang (Melbourne, Vic: Word Connection, 1997)
- Chung, Yoon-Ngan, *The origin of Chinese surnames* (Nedlands, W.A., Yoon-Ngan Chung through Rio Bay Publishing, 2000)
- Jones, Russell, *Chinese names: the traditions surrounding the use of Chinese surnames and personal names* (Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, c1997)
- Kehrer Jon, 'The Bai Jia Xing or Book of Hundred Surnames', in *The Ancestral Searcher*, Vol 24, No 2, June 2001, pp.60-73
- Kehrer, Jon, 'Who Was "John Chinaman"', in *The Ancestral Searcher*, Vol 24, No 4, December 2001, pp201-205
- Kehrer, Jon, 'Honourable Ancestors: My Search for the Chinese Connection', in *The Ancestral Searcher*, Vol 27, No 4 December 2004, pp.328-333 is a discussion of how the author gradually found his ancestor's name, its Chinese characters and eventually the location of his ancestral village and relatives.
- Presland, G., 'Some difficulties in researching Chinese ancestry' in *From gold to federation: papers from the Fourth Victoria Family State Conference*, ed. Noelle Oke (Melbourne, Vic, Penfolk Publishing, 2001)

Chinese family trees: Jiapu and zupu

Traditionally Chinese have kept family genealogical records, *jiapu*, and clan or lineage records, *zupu*. These records normally are patrilineal. The Family History Library of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City has a large collection of these Chinese genealogical records. A visit to your local Family History library to consult their catalogues may help to ascertain whether there is anything in these records which may be of use. The actual microfilms would then need to be ordered from the head library in Salt Lake City. As the records are in Chinese any initial inquiry and consultation of the records would need to be undertaken with the assistance of a person familiar with the Chinese language.

Arriving and Leaving

Chinese immigrants and their descendants not only travelled to Australia but they also made repeated visits back to China and Hong Kong for business and family reasons. Many also tried to return home before they died and if this was not possible some families organised for their bodies to be exhumed and the bones returned to China. Shipping lists documented the arrivals and departures of individuals to colonies in Australia.

Shipping lists for Victoria (<http://www.access.prov.vic.gov.au>) are held at Victorian Public Records Office has digitised indexes for inward unassisted shipping from 1852-1923 and outward passengers currently up to 1852-1901. Not all shipping passenger lists have survived and some lists for ships with Chinese passengers merely state there were a certain number of Chinese passengers in steerage. If a possible name and ship is found on the online index it is important to check the microfiche of the inward passenger lists from foreign ports. The microfiche show the actual passenger lists and may provide more detail, such as whether someone travelled in steerage or as a cabin or saloon passenger, their gender, their birthplace and their occupation. Two places where the microfiche are available are the Victorian Public Records Office and at the Genealogical Society of Victoria.

Shipping lists for New South Wales (<http://mariners.records.nsw.gov.au>). Mariners and ships in Australian waters 1845 to 1922 is an ongoing project to scan and index the passenger lists for ships visiting Sydney. The lists provide the names of people who were passengers for Sydney and the ships' crew. Chinese people who landed in Sydney may have later travelled to Victoria. A large number of the crewmen on the ships especially those

coming from Hong Kong and Singapore were Chinese. Their names are also listed on this site. This is not the case for the Victorian shipping lists.

Restrictions on Chinese immigration meant that Chinese who had been living in Australia and were exempt from these restrictions needed **travel documents** in order to freely return to Australia after travelling overseas. They might travel on a range of different kinds of documents – birth certificates, naturalisation certificates or exemption certificates (see Dr Kate Bagnall's discussion of this documentation - <http://chineseaustralia.org/?p=838>). Much of this documentation is held by the National Archives of Australia and can be accessed through RecordSearch (<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/recordsearch/index.aspx>). Some material can also be found in State government archive collections.

Naturalisation and Citizenship

Prior to Australia's federation in 1901 naturalisation was legislated independently by each Colony and those naturalised became British subjects. From the 1880s restrictions were placed on Chinese wanting to naturalise. These took different forms in different colonies. In 1903 Chinese were prevented legislatively from being naturalised across Australia. Before restrictions were enforced Chinese did become naturalised. Applications for naturalisation, rejected applications and cancelled and confiscated naturalisation certificates can be found in State government archives and the National Archives of Australia.

Research Guides and Support

The **Chinese Australia website** (previously Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation, CHAF) contains a '**Resources**' page (<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/resources.htm>) which acts as a portal to the wide range of Chinese Australian historical resources published on the web. Links to the digital material listed in this guide can also be found on this page.

The 'Chinese Australian History Resources' database

(<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/history.htm>) on the same website lists over 2,500 published and unpublished materials related to the history of Chinese in Australia including newspaper articles, theses, monographs, books and journal articles and oral histories in both English and Chinese language.

A number of **published guides** have been produced to guide researchers to Chinese-Australian materials. Trove, a search facility run by the National Library of Australia, can be used to locate the following printed material in Australian libraries.

- Boey, Danny, *Basic guide to Chinese genealogy* (Singapore, Chinese Roots, 2002)
- Chao, Sheau-ueh J, *In search of your Asian roots: genealogical research on Chinese surnames* (Baltimore, Md., Clearfield, 2000)
- Chinn, A.R. *You are royalty: a guide to your Chinese ancestor* (Toronto, A.R. Chinn, 2002)
- Jones, Paul, *Chinese-Australians journeys: records on travel, migration and settlement, 1860-1975* (Canberra, National Archives of Australia, 2005)
- Stacker, Julie & Stewart, Peter, *Chinese Immigrants and Chinese-Australians in NSW* (Canberra, National Archives of Australia, 1998). Also available in modified web format (<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/naa.htm>)
- Young, Faye & van Barneveld, Nicole, *Sources for Chinese local history and heritage in New South Wales* (Kareela, N.S.W., F. Young: Alexandria, N.S.W., N. van Barneveld, 1997)
- Paul Jones & Terri McCormack, 'Chinese Australians: A guide to holdings in the Mitchell Library' (<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/mitchell.htm>)

An increasing number of people are creating **blogs and websites** that document their research successes and findings. The following might be of interest:

- **The tiger's mouth: thoughts on the history and heritage of Chinese Australia** (<http://chineseaustralia.org>). This is a monthly blog maintained by Kate Bagnall. It contains interesting and useful material about Chinese Australians with special reference to the documents held by the National Archives of Australia and undertaking Chinese-Australian family history.
- **Chinese Rural Victoria** (<http://chineseruralvictoria.wordpress.com/>). This is a blog maintained by Carol Holsworth. It has interesting material on Chinese herbalists but also refers to other aspects of Chinese Australian life in rural Victoria.
- **Taishan Genealogy: A Sze Yup County in Guangdong Province China** (<http://www.apex.net.au/~jgk/taishan/menu.html>). Many of the Chinese who came to Victoria came from Taishan district in Guangdong (Canton until 1922) Province. This excellent website is especially designed for people interested in Taishan ancestry but is useful for anyone familiarising themselves with their Chinese background.
- **Journal of Chinese Australia (JCA)** (<http://www.purl.org/jca>). JCA is a free, online journal dedicated to providing access to research and resources on the history and culture of Chinese people in Australia. It is a place for family and community researchers, historians and students to share their ideas and questions.

Aside from local historical societies and museums, which specialise in the places where your ancestor may have lived and worked, there are a range of organisations which specialise in Chinese-Australian history. These include:

- **Chinese Australian Family Historians of Victoria Inc (CAFHOV)** (<http://purl.com/cafhov>) are a group of people researching in the area of Chinese Australian family history. Their website contains information on how to contact them. It also contains links to other institutions and organisations in Australia which may be able to assist with Australian Chinese family research.
- **Chinese-Australian Historical Association Inc** is based in Brisbane, Queensland. Queries about Chinese Queensland family research should be directed to the President, Ray Poon at rnp@smartchat.net.au.
- **Chinese Australian Historical Society Inc** (<http://cahs.wordpress.com>) is based in Sydney, New South Wales. Enquiries by email.
- **Chinese Heritage Association of Australia Inc** (<http://www.chineseheritage.org.au>) is based in Sydney, New South Wales and is a community organisation set up to promote the study and discussion of the history of the Chinese community in Australia.
- **Chinese Heritage in Northern Australia (CHINA Inc)** (<http://chinainc.yolasite.com>) is based in Cairns, Queensland and is committed to promoting research and study into the Chinese Australian experience in northern Australia. Requests by email through their website.
- **Chinese Heritage Interest Network** (<http://www.chinese-heritage.tripod.com>) is a not-for-profit research group with an interest in the Chinese heritage of regional Victoria.
- **Chung Wah Association** (<http://www.chungwah.org.au/>) was established in Perth, Western Australia in 1909 to meet the social, cultural and political needs of Chinese in Western Australia and has become the representative body for the Chinese community in Western Australia.
- **Golden Dragon Museum** (<http://www.goldendragonmuseum.org/library.html>) displays the living history of the Chinese people of Bendigo, from the 1850's gold rush to the present day. Ming Yeung Library and Joan Jack OAM Research Centre can be accessed by appointment (<http://www.goldendragonmuseum.org/library.html>). An index of Chinese Family names which are associated with objects and photographs in their collection can be found on their website.

- **Migration Museum** (<http://www.history.sa.gov.au/migration/migration.htm>) has exhibitions and material related to the history of Chinese in South Australia in its collection.
- **Museum of Chinese Australian History** (<http://www.chinesemuseum.com.au>) is a national museum that explores and preserves the history and heritage of Chinese in Australia. Information about the Museum's collection is available by email. The Museum has a Research Library catalogue can be accessed at <http://www.librarything.com/catalog/MCAH>.
- **Northern Territory Chinese Museum** (<http://www.chungwahnt.asn.au/>) is part of the Chung Wah Society and based in Darwin. It aims to encourage greater awareness and understanding of the history of the Chinese in the Territory.

Digitised historical resources

Australia

Chinese Australian Historic images in Australia (CHIA)

(<http://www.chia.chinesemuseum.com.au>) website is a catalogue of historical images of Chinese, Chinese immigrants and their descendants held in Australia. It draws on the photographic holdings of the Museum of Chinese Australian History but also includes photographs from other online archives, publications and private family collections.

Chinese Australian History Collections Online

(http://www.kuomintang.org.au/en/en_index.aspx) contains an inventory of material from the Chinese Consulate-General which had an office in Melbourne from 1908 to 1929 and then in Sydney from 1929 to 1951 and also material from the Kuo Min Tang (KMT) societies in Melbourne and Sydney. Members of these societies are mentioned in their records. Chinese people living in Australia at times used the Chinese Consulate-General to help them negotiate with the Australian Government over immigration and trade matters.

Christianity and the Chinese 1800s-1900s

(<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/welch/index.htm>) developed by Ian Welch contains information about Chinese missions, Christian births, marriages, burials and a bibliography of material related to the study of the Chinese in the West Pacific-Oceania region together with other references to Chinese history and culture and the nineteenth century evangelical missionary movement.

Kok, Hu Jin, ***Chinese cemeteries in Australia***, (Bendigo, Vic., Golden Dragon Museum, c2002). Many volumes listing the inscriptions on Chinese grave stones and their location in the Chinese sections of cemeteries in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Victoria

Melbourne Chinatown Streets Database, 1900-1920, 1930 & 1940

(<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/chinatown.htm>) is a database of information drawn from the Melbourne Sands & McDougall Street directories for Little Bourke Street, between Swanston and Spring Street and the lanes coming off the street.

Published on the Chinese Australia website, **Fading links to China**

(<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/brumley/brumley.htm>) includes the following databases of information:

- Chinese-Australian Inquests for Victoria, 1840 -1880
- Listing of Chinese Burial Records - Ballarat Old Cemetery
- Listing of Chinese Burial Records – Ballarat New Cemetery

- Chinese Admissions Ballarat Hospital 1858 – 1880

Published on the **Chinese Heritage Interest Network** website is:

- Register of Chinese Patients – Ballarat Asylum, 1893 -1907
- Register of Chinese Patients – Ballarat Asylum, 1877 – 1884
- Register of Chinese Patients – Collingwood, 1864 - 1871
- Register of Chinese Patients – Beechworth Asylum, 1867 – 1884
- Register of Chinese Patients – Yarra Bend Asylum, 1848 – 1912
- Register of Chinese Patients – Ararat Asylum, 1867 - 1884
- Register of Chinese Patients – Kew, 1871 - 884
- Register of Chinese Patients – Sunbury Asylum, 1879 -1912
- Index of some Chinese Exhumation Requests (Victoria)
- Index of Male Prisoners with Chinese Surnames (Victoria)
- Index of Female Prisoners with Chinese Surnames (Victoria)
- Chinese Deaths in the Melbourne Hospital copied from the *Argus* 1868 -1880

Chinese memorials & memories: the White Hills Cemetery, (Bendigo, Vic., Golden Dragon Museum)

New South Wales

Golden Threads (<http://www.archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/collections>) website contains a database of people with Chinese ancestry, their objects and the places lived and worked in rural NSW along with an online exhibition and stories.

Jones, Doris Yau-Chong, **Remembering the forgotten: Chinese gravestones in Rookwood Cemetery 1917-1949**, (Pymble, NSW, 2003).

Chinese-language Newspapers

The Chinese Times (1902-1922) was published in Melbourne and was a Chinese-language newspaper with some English-language advertisements. A microfilm copy of this newspaper is available in the Newspaper Reading Room at the State Library of Victoria.

Tung Wah newspaper (1898-1936) was published in Chinese but there is an English-language index (<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/tungwah.htm>). The name of the newspaper changed its name from the *Tung Wah News* to *Tung Wah Times* in 1902.

Some other Chinese newspapers were the *Chinese Australian Herald* (1894-c1920s), the *Chinese World's News* or *Gong Bao* (or *The Bulletin*). More information about these and other Chinese newspapers is available on the CHAF site at <http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/resources.htm>.

Some other things to try...

Newspapers in Australian Libraries (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>) is a growing digital archive of newspapers (currently only English) in Australia.

Government Gazettes, Police Gazettes and Street Directories contain hundreds of thousands of names and have been digitised by Archives Digital Books Australia. The search facility for the digitised versions is very user friendly. Hard copies of the gazettes and microfiche copies of directories are available in State Libraries.

The Genealogical Society of Victoria (GSV) library has developed an electronic index of approximately 4 million names mostly relating to Victoria known as **LINX**

(<http://www.gsv.org.au>). It contains a large number of Chinese names. The GSV offers a Free Trial Name Search.

Oral history collections of the Northern Territory Archive Service, National Library of Australia, Museum of Chinese Australian History, Golden Dragon Museum and State Library of Victoria.

This guide was compiled by Pauline Rule and Sophie Couchman for the Chinese Museum, June 2011. Any corrections or additions should be emailed to curator@chinesemuseum.com.au.