

Certificates of Exemption (from the Dictation Test) were one way many people were able to enter Australia despite the White Australia policy. However, their usual link between eligibility to remain in Australia and employment meant that many of those who entered Australia under ‘Certificates of Exemption’ after 1901 were little better than bonded employees vulnerable to exploitation. This was in a sense a continuation of the pattern of the credit-ticket system. The freedom to sojourn was much less than that enjoyed by those with ‘domicile’ rights who could obtain Certificates Exempting the Dictation Test (CEDTs) and even less if the employment was not secure.¹ The employment history of Yuk Kwan is an illustrative example of both the greater restrictions faced by those on Certificates of Exemption and the changing administration of the Dictation Test in the years during and after World War Two.

Yuk Kwan came to Australia in 1926 to work for the Chinese language newspaper the *Chinese Republican News*, as a compositor. In 1934, his employers wrote to the Collector of Customs that it was ‘our intention to dispense with his services’, and a week later that they ‘will make arrangements for him to leave Australia by the *S.S. Nankin*’. A few days after this the Collector discovered that Yuk Kwan did not intend leaving quietly when the solicitors, ‘Pigott, Stinson, Macgregor and Palmer’, informed him that a writ had been served on the paper claiming £745/11/-, and requesting, as the court case was some months away, that an extension be granted. The *Chinese Republican News* responded by saying that, ‘as this man refuses to leave ... we now disclaim any further responsibility for his stay in Australia’. Yuk Kwan was given a four-month extension and in that time was able to find a job with the Chinese Masonic Society newspaper, the *Chinese World News*, where he replaced Yuen Yet Choy, who was returning to China. By April 1935, Yuk Kwan was again in ‘bonded’ employment.

This was not the end of Yuk Kwan’s difficulties and several years later, in 1942, the *Chinese World News* ceased publication and Yuk Kwan needed to find another job. By this time manpower shortages meant that, for the first time since his arrival in Australia 16 years previously, Yut Kwan could take any employment he wished, finding a position with the engineering department of Airlines of Australia. In 1947, with the war over and labour shortages ended, Yuk Kwan was told that as he was ‘not eligible to remain in Australia to continue in his present occupation, arrangements should be made for him to leave the Commonwealth by the first available vessel’. Yuk Kwan showed similar resourcefulness when

¹ No figures are available on trips by those on Certificates of Exemption. Their files are usually about getting extensions and rarely about taking a trip unless leaving permanently.

faced with deportation again and his case appeared prominently in the newspapers. This publicity did not alter the decision to deport but he was granted a six-month extension to stay in Australia in order to ‘find suitable employment’. This Yuk Kwan was able to do, becoming a waiter and later a supervisor and partner in the Taiping Cafe.

Yuk Kwan, now referred to in his file as Ken Wong, continued to battle with administrators over improving his status. He was finally granted permanent residence in 1959, after various friends certified that he was ‘a very good type’ and ‘has adopted the Australian way of life’. Ken Wong married an Australian-born Chinese, Edith Olive Edna Quay, and applied for and was granted citizenship in 1960. The final entries in his file report the couple planning a honeymoon to Hong Kong, Japan, France and England, which would have been Yuk Kwan’s first trip out of Australia since his arrival 34 years earlier.²

Yut Kwan illustrates the difficulties for those of the post-1901 ‘domicile’ generation who were only able to live in Australia under the conditions of the temporary Certificates of Exemptions. Yut Kwan may have had his personal reasons for not visiting China after his arrival in 1926, but even had he wished to do so, he would have found it extremely difficult to maintain the kind of sojourning undertaken by the ‘domicile’ generation. Apart from his dependence upon his employers, the temporary nature of his ‘Certificate of Exemption’ meant there was no guarantee he would be allowed back into Australia. A consequence of this was that links to the home villages were weakened or, as appears to have been the case with Yut Kwan, extinguished entirely.

² Australian Archives (NSW), SP11/12; Yuk Kwan, Tai Moon, & others, 1926-47 and SP1122/1; N56/6446, Yuk Kwan Wong.