

CHINESE VOICES 8

It has been said many times (by me anyway) that Chinese Australian history is perforce reliant on European observers – often of dubious quality and more often dubious perspectives (see [Observers 8](#)). Nevertheless, there are instances – increasing over time naturally – of Chinese Australians speaking in their own voice. Here are presented a selection of writings by Chinese Australian's in both Chinese and English. They range from the first (certainly the earliest extant) piece of Chinese writing in Australia as an indentured shepherd named Ang defends himself in 1850 from a murder charge, to a full novel written in Classical Chinese in 1910 on the eve of China's Republican revolution by the Melbourne based Wong Shee Ping. As well, there are reasoned attacks on discriminatory legislation, personal memoirs old and new, poetry, letters to those who have done well, and short stories expressing something of life in “white” Australia for someone of non-white heritage.

Together these ‘Chinese 8’ provide an insight into the many facets of Chinese Australian history as provided by Chinese Australian's themselves. Here they are presented in reverse chronological order – just for fun.

1. *The Boy from Shekki* - an autobiography
2. *What Happened to Riley* - a fictionalisation
3. *Stories from the Sandstone* - poetry
4. *I heard you have been successful overseas* - a request for help
5. *The Poison of Polygamy* - a social novel
6. *My Life and Work by Taam Sze Pui* - a bilingual autobiography
7. *The Chinese Question* - a question of politics
8. *Case for the defence* - murder or accident?

1. The Boy from Shekki

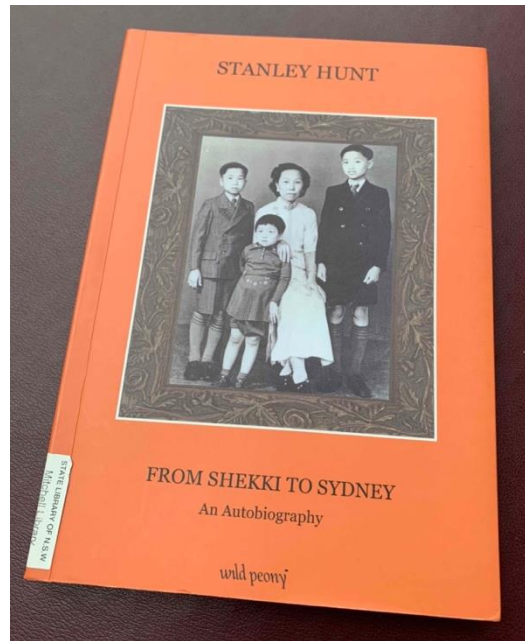
In many ways the Stanley Hunt story told in his *From Shekki to Sydney: An Autobiography* (2010) is a typical Australian one. Born in a south China village to a family with strong links to Australia and schooled in Shekki (see [No.85](#)). Stanley comes to Australia young and establishes his life here while keeping ties with his



home village. (See [No.30](#)) The most remarkable thing about this typical Australian story – as typical as one originating in a British or [Italian village](#) – is that it is not generally recognised as typical.

Stanley Hunt can be seen as a bridge between the sojourner and the permanent resident that is such a strong feature of Chinese Australia history. (See [No.35](#) and [No.21](#)) For generations fathers and grandfathers worked in Australia while maintaining families in China. This Chinese-Australian heritage included Stanley himself. Arriving young, Stanley largely grew up in Australia while working in the vegetable business most of his life, a typical “Chinese” occupation (see [No.77](#)). However, as a store owner and employer of often non-Chinese staff he was not obviously part of a stereotype of Chinese Australians many still hold. Later in life Stanley was also prominent in Chinese Australian organisations and in donating educational resources to his family village in southern China. (See [No.55](#))

Stanley Hunt's excellent *From Shekki to Sydney* is one of only a small collection of near contemporary sources for a generation that stretches from the mid-twentieth century war period until the beginning of the 21st century. This is a very



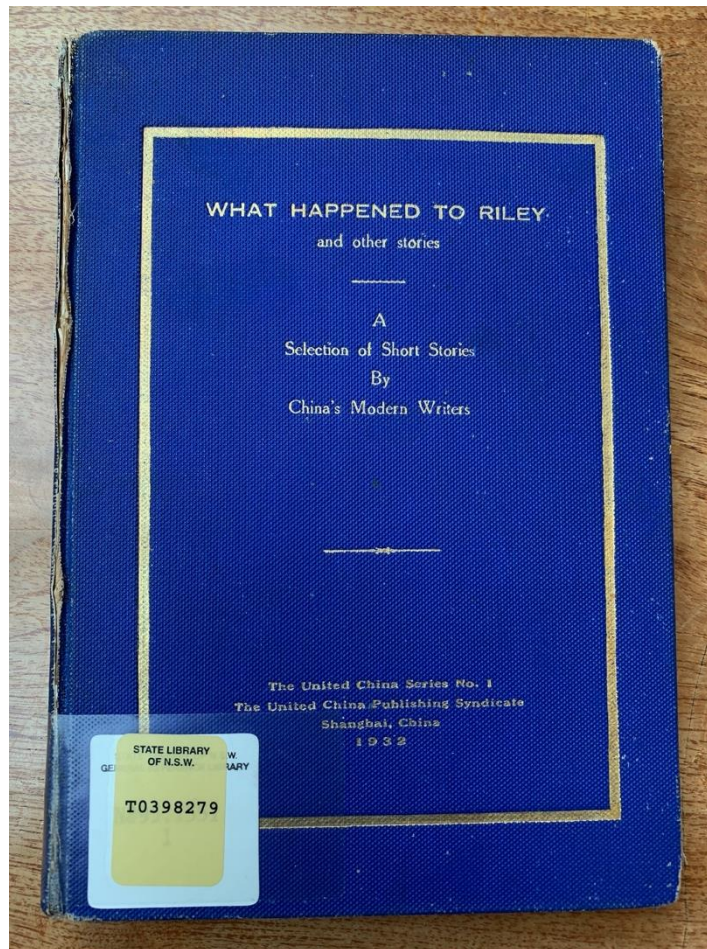
under researched period of Chinese Australian history. Others include Francis Lee, [*Out of bounds: journey of a migrant*](#), Andrew Kwok, [*One Bright Moon*](#), and the excellent oral history collection Mavis Gock Yen, [*South Flows the Pearl*](#). Together these are invaluable source materials that greatly enrich our understanding of Australian history; sources that hopefully will be added to before memories pass beyond our reach.

[For more on Stanley Hunt](#)

[For more comments on *From Shekki to Sydney*](#)

2. What Happened to Riley

Inside the blue covers of this intriguingly titled volume is the first piece of Chinese-Australian literature written in English. It follows *The Poison of Polygamy* (see [No.11](#)) by some twenty years and pre-dates the next example of this literature by some fifty years. Why is this short story almost unknown, despite this distinction and its remarkable tale of a confrontation between a



Chinese Australian and an European Australian in warlord China? The answer tell us something of the narrowness of perceptions about what is “Australian” as well as about the breadth of experiences that embodies the term “Chinese Australian”.

Thus the author Vivien Yung Chow was born and raised in Lismore, NSW, the son of a local businessman who had migrated from southern China and settled in that district. Vivien spent

some of his years in Sydney in association with other local writers, including contributions to a Sydney literary journal, *Readers and Writers Weekly*. However like many Chinese Australians he wished to contribute to China, which was undergoing so many changes at that time. Thus he and his brother headed for Hong Kong and Shanghai where their English skills and poor (or non-existent Chinese) would allow them to work, usually for English language newspapers.

This is a life story for Chinese Australians that is remarkable only in how ignorant of its typicality most Australians are. The ongoing links of many Chinese Australians with the home villages of south China as well as with the expanding and vibrant cities of Hong Kong and Shanghai with their strong Cantonese presence is a feature of Australian history recently well researched but still outside the pale of popular perceptions.^[1]

While the movement and China connections of these Australians is being better researched the inner lives of Chinese Australians, such as is often best expressed in literature, is still very much an unknown. It is for this reason that the recent translation of *The Poison of Polygamy* with its dramatic tale partly based on the family history of the author is such an important achievement. Twenty years later the writing of the short story *What happened to Riley* is another rare gem valuable in seeking to know not just what Chinese Australians did but what they thought and felt.

While this is a work of fiction there can be little reservation in believing that some of the intensity of feeling and the character's experiences are based upon the authors own. Spoilers are avoided here but something of the flavour of the thoughts of this Chinese Australian can be seen in this passage:

The world wants only one sort of Chinese. A humble, meek, ignorant fellow, soaked with opium and mad upon gambling. A clean-minded, clean-bodied, active-brained Chinese spells the doom of a white world dominion. And that, the white men have been clever enough to realise. ^[2]

Set in warlord era China the story of this confrontation between two Australians of different heritages may shock some:

For the full text of *What happened to Riley*

The only public copy is in the State Library of NSW. ^[3]

For bringing this valuable work to light Margaret Kelly, niece of Vivian Chow, is to be thanked.

^[1] See Michael Williams, *Returning Home with Glory: Chinese Villagers Around the Pacific, 1849 to 1949*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018 and Mavis Yen, *South Flows the Pearl*, Sydney University Press, 2022.

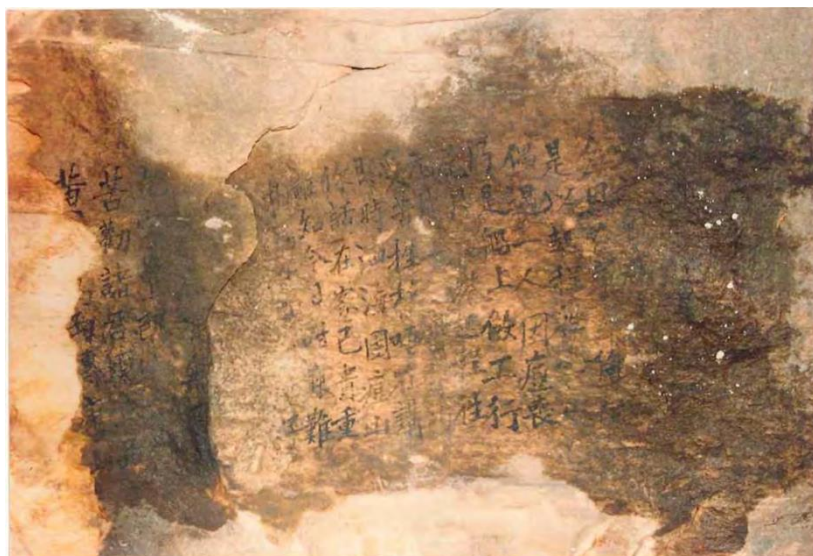
^[2] Vivien Yung Chow, ‘What happened to Riley’ in *What happened to Riley and other stories: a selection of short stories by China’s modern writers*, United China series no. 1, Shanghai, China: United China Publishing Syndicate, 1932, pp.169-170.

^[3] Where it was originally catalogued as: “Short stories, Chinese — Translations into English & Short stories, English — Translations from Chinese.” While the lack of Australian attribution may be excusable, the label ‘translations’ was more the result of stereotyping as all the stories were written in English. The other three stories of the collection are also worth reading.

3. Stories from the Sandstone

Sydney's North Head Quarantine Station operated from the 1830s until 1984. Over these years passengers and crew off ships thought to carry contagious diseases were forced to spend days, weeks and even months living there. Many of the passengers and crew were Chinese and they, along with others, often spent their time carving their thoughts and feelings into the sandstone. The result is a rare collection of poems and other writings that gives us a rare instance of Chinese voices in Chinese Australian history.

The carvings are mostly difficult to read now and vary from simply names and dates to emotional poems and the occasional denunciation of imperialism or Englishmen in general.



*As soon as thinking of my younger brother without help.
I set off for gold mountain right away.
Occasionally a man died of smallpox.
He is a sailor on the ship.
Setting off and sailing to in the last month of the year.
By tenth of January next year, arrived at Sydney Harbour.
It is hard to say how much misfortune I have suffered.*

I have been trapped and suffered from smallpox all these days.

Your advisable words are proved precious to me.

Nobody knows what trouble I am in.

I must not complain ••

Talking about it, I am surprised what I have done all these years.

I sincerely advise everyone should have his own decision.

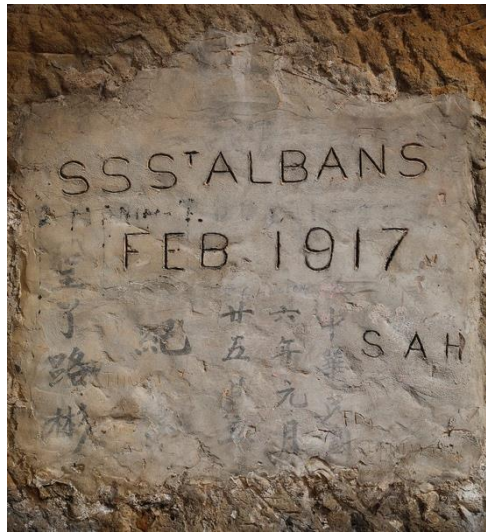
The news that ten thousands Liang of gold buried in Australia spreads to China.

•••••



Lee Defang – An Englishman – Down with this type of man

This description of the St Albans carving was supplied to the Chinese Australian Historical Society in November 2015 by archaeologist Dr Peter Hobbins when he conducted a tour of the Quarantine Station:



In some ways, a memento of the visit of the steamship *St Albans* in

© Ursula K Frederick, *Quarantine Project*, 2014.

history of Sydney's former Quarantine Station at North Head, near Manly. Created by layering concrete onto a sandstone cliff face, this inscription features messages in both English and Chinese. Latin characters were scored into the wet concrete to read simply "SS St Albans Feb 1917 SAH". For historians working in Australian and British sources, this is enough to track down Samuel Alfred ('Alf') Hollingsworth, third mate aboard the steamer when it was quarantined for smallpox over 16–19 February 1917.

But the concrete is also giving up another secret. As lime wash weathers away after nearly a century of sea air, a more detailed message is emerging. Painted with a skilled hand, this Chinese panel has led to some confusion – particularly the somewhat cryptic column on the left. Speaking the characters aloud, however, reveals their intention: they sound out a close equivalent of 'St Albans'. The entire message has been translated to state: "Erected in the sixth year of the Republic, first month, twenty-fifth day, to commemorate St Albans".

Who crafted this careful calligraphy, and whether they were permitted to do so, is unknown. Certainly, the *St Albans* had a

mixed British and Chinese crew, and spent decades sailing between Australian and Asian ports. The symmetrical layout which balances the English and Chinese messages may suggest that it was planned from the outset as a bilingual monument. Although the Chinese characters were later overpainted, one unintended benefit was that they have been better preserved as they reappear in the present.

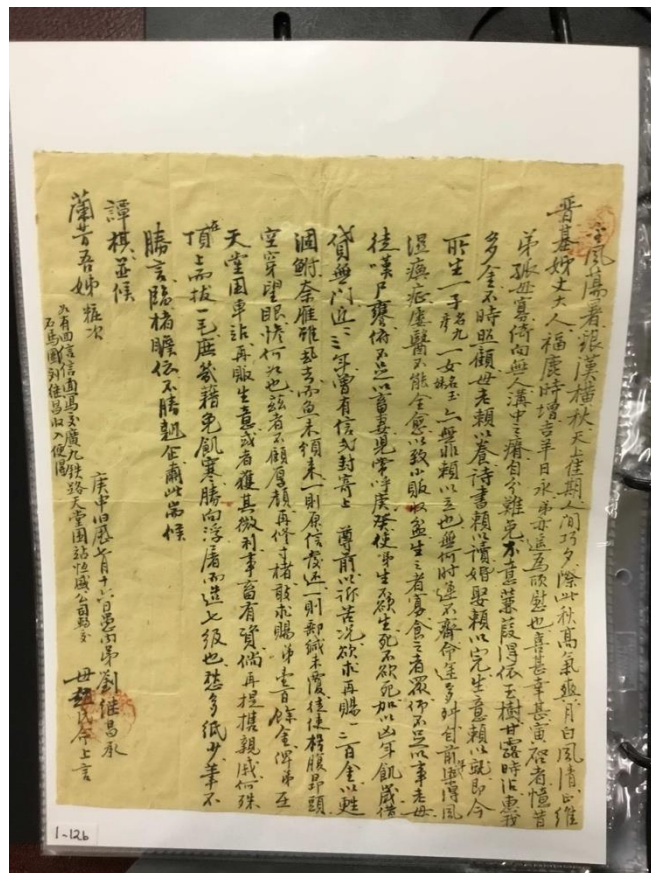
Similarly, Chinese residents, travellers and crew caught up in quarantine have moved in and out of visibility at North Head since the 1850s. Across the landscape, they also left over 100 inscriptions carved or painted onto cliffs, boulders, buildings and drain covers, while others are memorialised in the nearby cemetery. Since 2013 a team of archaeologists and historians from the University of Sydney has been recording these inscriptions and seeking to tell some of their stories of travel, disease, internment, sadness and strength.

[*Stories from the Sandstone*](#) examines around 1600 engravings in many different languages that were carved into the rocks and walls around the Quarantine Station during its 150-year history.

4. “I heard you have been successful overseas.”

Underpinning the sojourning enterprise was the sending of remittances and with each remittance went a letter (see [No.29](#)). Relatively few of these letters have survived and even fewer of those from the recipients back to those who were away earning money.¹ Translated here is an all too typical letter asking for money. It is one of many letters awaiting translation that are part of the wonderful Tet Fong collection. Originally from Tingha the letters are now in the UNE Archives, Armidale.

Lau Gai Cheong to Tsun Kei, no date. Brother-in-law.



¹ For a comprehensive and fascinating account of the remittance system see: Gregor Benton and Hong Liu, *Dear China: Emigrant Letters and Remittances, 1820–1980* (University of California Press, 2018).

I heard you have been successful overseas. I am very comforted by that and I remember you in the past, from time to time you sent us some money to maintain us. We used the money to look after our old mother and for going to school, for marriage and for doing business. Now I have one son and one daughter and they have to depend on me. Unfortunately recently I have arthritis and every time I go to the doctor, there's no cure. So now I am working as a pedlar. The amount I receive is little but a lot of people depend on me (too many mouths to feed). This is not enough for my own mother, or to look after my wife, and I don't want to live and don't want to die either. Plus these disaster years we couldn't get any loans. Within the last two or three years I've given you two letters telling you about my unfortunate situation and asking you to give me one or two hundred dollars. It's just to cover some of our expenses.

Unfortunately I sent the letter like a bird flew away or a fish that swam away. One letter was returned to me and one has no received no reply. I have been waiting for a long, long time and this is a very sad situation. Now I wish to ask you for a little over a hundred dollars and send it to Heavenly Station so I can do my small business again. I may be able to make a bit of money and what I'm asking you is only a small fraction from what you have – 'just one piece of hair, you won't miss it much'. So I could at least know where my next meals come from and you will be blessed in your next life.

(There is a year but difficult to work out.)

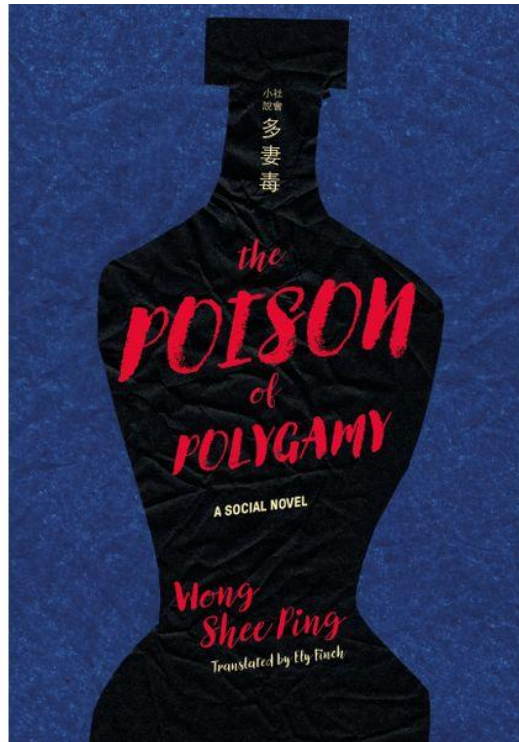
Doris Yau-Chong Jones translator, from Janis Wilton's Golden Threads, UNE Archives

The letter speaks for itself. The early 20th century was one of great hardship in China even before the Japanese invasion and numerous such letters were sent to those living and working

around the diaspora. Tet Fong himself worked as a herbalist in Tingha, NSW. He had four sons who ended up further south in Uralla. It is they who handed these letters to Janis Wilton when their sister, Tet Fong's daughter Victoria died - they were in the Tingha house a block over from [Wing Hing Long](#), now the Tingha Museum.

5. The Poison of Polygamy - 多妻毒

A Social Novel - 社會小說



The first novel of the Chinese Australian experience was written before the fall of the Qing Empire, albeit by a die-hard republican. The rediscovery of this long-forgotten Chinese-language novel around a century after it first appeared in print offers a rare window onto nineteenth century Australia from a local Chinese perspective. Not to mention valuable insights into the emotional lives of the gold seekers and the wider social concerns of Chinese-Australians at the time of writing. It is also to be valued for offering a Chinese perspective on the experience of migration more broadly, and on the challenges of migration for families and communities. [Wong Shee Ping](#), the author of this highly entertaining read, serialised *The Poison of Polygamy* in Melbourne's *Chinese Times* newspaper, in roughly weekly instalments, from June 1909 to December 1910.²

² This article is a modified version of the historical introduction to *The Poison of Polygamy*, 'Why is Polygamy Poisonous?' by Mei-fen Kuo and Michael Williams, pp.11-35.

The story is a morality tale that follows the highs and lows in the life of anti-hero Wong Sheung Hong, his virtuous wife, and the many characters he comes in contact with, during times spent in southern China, in south-eastern Australia



and on route between the two. The novel offers a dramatic and detailed account of Wong's humble beginnings, his not always moral efforts in life and his eventual rise in prosperity in Australia before returning to his long-suffering wife in his home village.

The author of *The Poison of Polygamy* was Wong Shee Ping, brother of the manager of the Pekin Cafe (see [No.11](#)) and son of a gold digger and Melbourne businessman from the See Yap region of southern China. Written therefore by a direct descendent of a gold digger, *The Poison of Polygamy* provides a fictional view of Victoria's goldrush history, along with some historical inaccuracies and anachronisms, as in many works of fiction. Nevertheless, the work offers a rare insight into the Chinese experience and community memory of that history. The novel is a document of its times and was created with a distinct political and social agenda to mobilise and shape Chinese Australian communities in ways favouring the revolutionary nationalist cause.

The novel tells the story of a typical divided-family of the mid-19th century. Histories of the males who moved often neglect the family's members, and especially the wives, who did not. *The Poison of Polygamy* is rare therefore in its focus on both the challenges male immigrants experienced in the Australia of that time, and on the implications of their departure for the families they left behind. Although much of the story highlights the importance of fraternity and clan ties for successful settlement in Australia, the novel also portrays a wife left behind in China who suffers from loneliness and sacrifices her life for the sake of the patriarchal family into which she married.³ The second half of the novel traces how arrivals from China transitioned from the tough life on the goldfields to becoming successful merchants, engaged in trade between Australia and China. Still, their lives were complicated by traditional demands that they produce heirs to carry on the patrilineal family name. This often served as justification for polygamy, or acquiring secondary wives, a troublesome practice that often led to disharmony in the family – and which lends the novel its title.

The author, the novel, the newspaper, and the many readers who enjoyed *The Poison of Polygamy* when it first appeared in print all merit a place in the social, political and literary history of contemporary Australia.⁴ This is a place long denied not simply because the novel was written in Chinese but also because it was written in Literary Chinese, a form of writing that has now all but disappeared.⁵ Even when such works have been translated,

³ For a discussion of the women left behind see Williams, M., 2021. Holding Up Half the Family, *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 17.1, pp.179-195. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17932548-12341438>

⁴ The many much shorter pieces of literature appearing in Australian's Chinese language press since the 1890s are well documented in Haizhi Luo, Towards a Modern Diasporic Literary Tradition: The Evolution of Australian Chinese Language Fiction from 1894 to 1912 (Master diss., University of New South Wales, 2017).

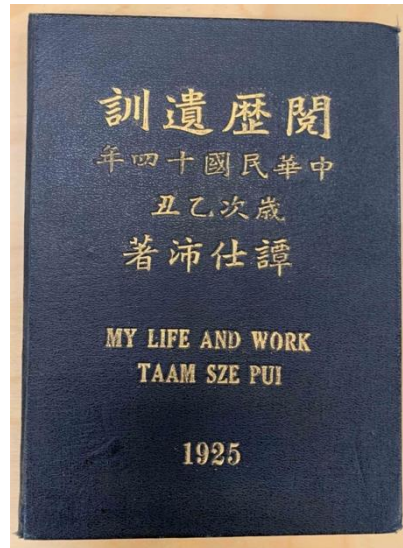
⁵ See Ely Finch's Translators Introduction in *The Poison of Polygamy* for a detailed explanation, pp.37-78.

the translations often give the impression of a chunkiness or stiffness that the original does not deserve. *The Poison of Polygamy* and its new generation of English readers is extremely fortunate in being able to gain this glimpse into the world of pre-Republican China and of the Chinese diaspora in Australia not only as an historical and literary curiosity but in a rigorous but readable translation that allows the imagination and the drama of the story to be fully appreciated and enjoyed. This is an Australian story and one that all Australians can now enjoy and treasure, both those with and without Chinese ancestry.

Wong Shee Ping, [*The Poison of Polygamy - A Social Novel*](#), translated by Ely Finch, and introduction by Mei-fen Kuo and Michael Williams (Sydney University Press, 2019).

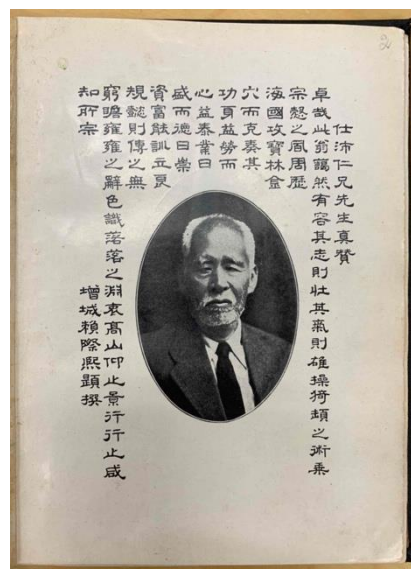
6. *My Life and Work* by Taam Sze Pui

In recent times a number of Chinese Australians have written their autobiographies, notably Stanley Hunt, Francis Lee, and most recently Andrew Kwong.^[1] But ahead of them all was the remarkable Taam Sze Pui who published his short but striking account of his life as early as 1925 and for good measure in a bi-lingual edition. (See No. 11)



Few copies of *My Life and Work* now exist, though a digitalised version leaves little excuse for not being familiar with this readable, valuable and all too rare example of the voice of Chinese Australians of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Like so many, Taam Sze arrived in search of gold and he quickly informs us just what a gamble this was: “There was a rumour then that gold had been discovered in a place called Cooktown and the source of which was inexhaustible and free for all. Without verifying the truth, my father planned to go with



his two sons.”^[2] In less than a month: “Oh, what a disappointment when we learned that the rumour was unfounded

and we were mislead!”^[3] Taam Sze continues with his account of the desperate straits of the failed goldminers as they sought to earn money through vegetable gardening, domestic service – “disrespectful and the wages poor” – and restaurant work.^[4]

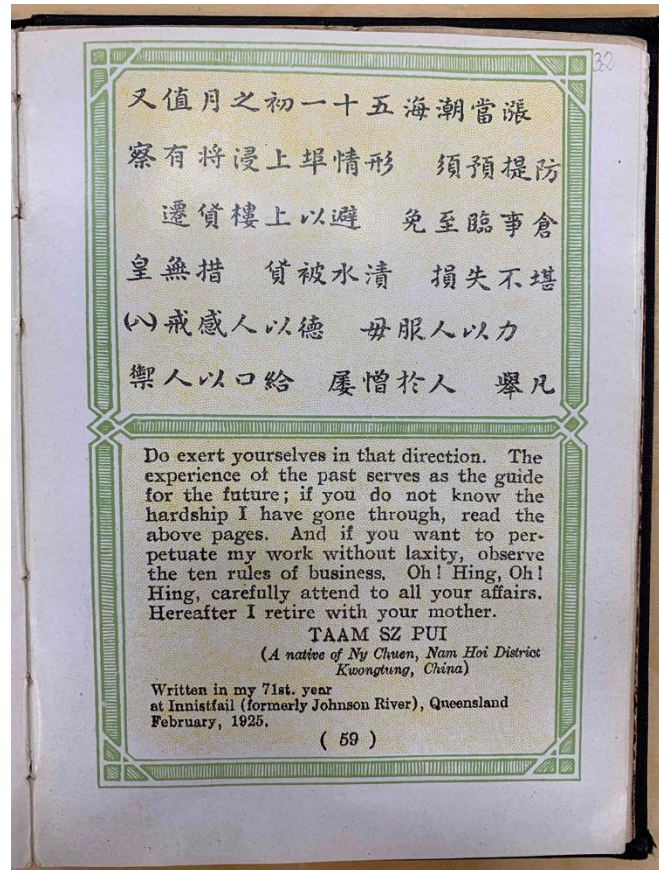
Taam Sze and his brother did as many others and worked at scrub cutting – “saved by frugal living” – to clear the land for European farming.^[5] Eventually he moved into hawking and business with partners before setting up as a sole owner.^[6] Throughout his time in north Queensland Taam Sze kept in touch with his relatives in China – his father had returned home – remitting money and contributing to funerals and helping arrange family matters, including the return to China and marriage of his brother (of whose intelligence he had a low opinion).^[7] By 1892 Taam Sze also had a partnership in a Hong Kong store, essential in helping transact business back to southern China.^[8] (See No. 19)

Taam Sze also touches on the essential sojourner dilemma and one that brought many to return to the home village and back to Australia again and again. The money was to be earned in Australia but as the classical saying quoted by Taam Sze went:

“To have amassed great wealth and not return home is comparable to walking in magnificent clothes at night.”^[9] (See No. 35)

Taam Sze’s solution was to remain in Australia and have a wife sent to him. This was the choice of a minority for a variety of reasons but with his parents already dead the main impediment to this path did not exist in his case.^[10] Thus a family was established in Innisfail and with children born the family business flourished. Money, however, continued to be sent to China, property purchased and the children sent on a visit at least once.^[11] In addition, Taam Sze helped others to arrive in

Australia and to find work, an essential element of the chain migration that was such a major element of the continuing link between Australia and southern China.^[12]



Taam Sze Pui's *My Life and Work* in its lovely bi-lingual edition provides in a remarkably concise manner all the elements of family, village links, poverty, remittances, business and hard work that are the core elements of Chinese Australian history in this period.

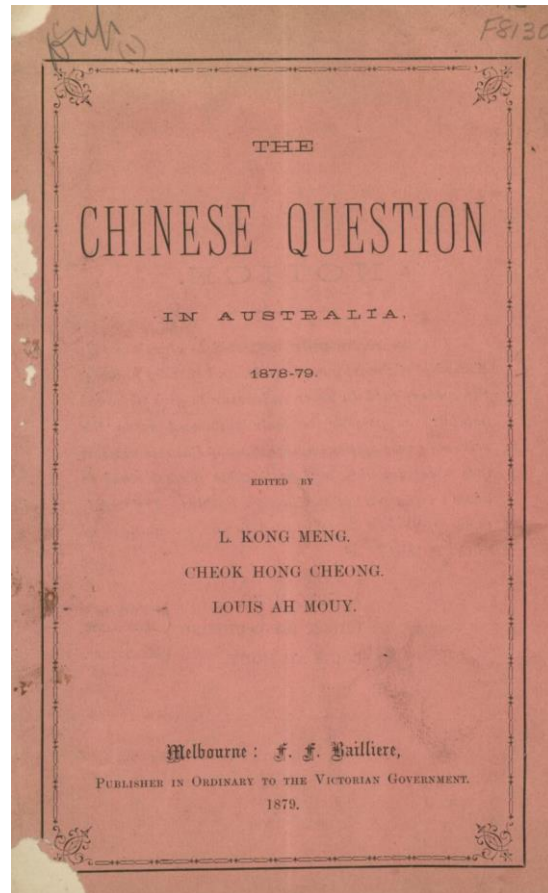
For a rare use of this source see:

Sophie Loy-Wilson, A Chinese shopkeeper on the Atherton Tablelands: Tracing connections between regional Queensland and regional China in Taam Szu Pui's *My life and work*. *Queensland Review*, 21(2), 2014, pp.160-176.

- [1] Stanley Hunt, *From Shekki to Sydney: an autobiography* (Broadway, N.S.W.: Wild Peony, 2009); Francis Lee, *Out of bounds: journey of a migrant* (Petersham North, N.S.W.: Universe Books, 2010) and Andrew Kwong, *One Bright Moon* (HarperCollins AU, 2020).
- [2] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, p.9.
- [3] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, p.10.
- [4] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, pp.22-26.
- [5] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, pp.27-29.
- [6] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, pp.31-34.
- [7] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, pp.32-34, p.37.
- [8] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, p.37.
- [9] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, p.38.
- [10] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, pp.39-40.
- [11] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, pp.41-43.
- [12] Taam Sze Pui, *My life and work*, n.p. 1925, pp.43-45.

7. The Chinese Question in Australia

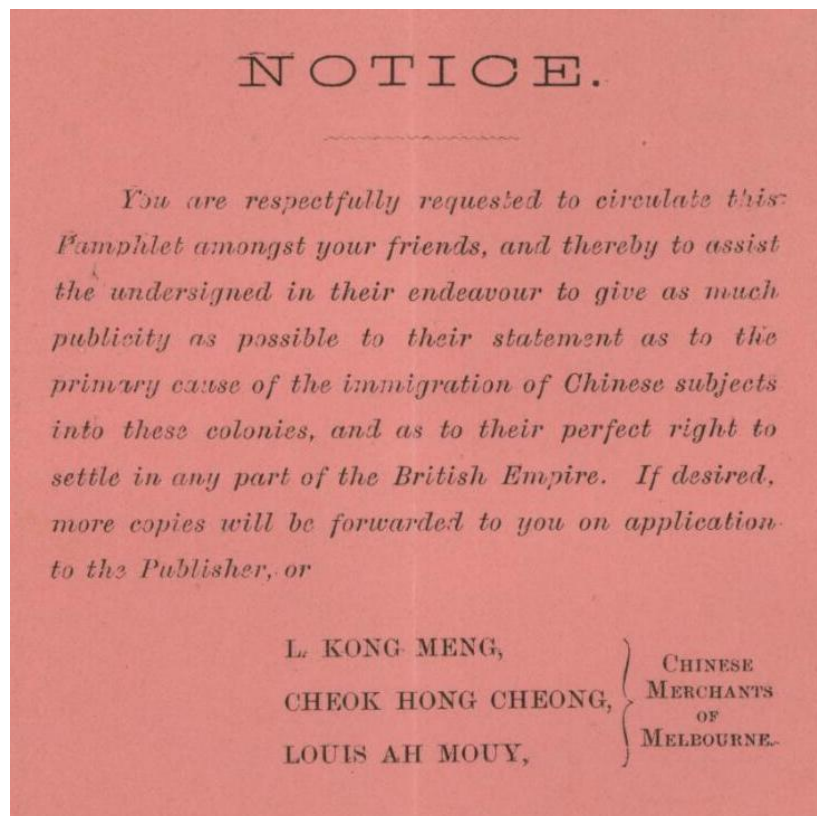
The presence of people from China in the Australian colonies was nearly always contested by those who arrived from, or were the descendants of those arrivals, from Britain. During the 1850s and 1860s this was particularly the case as people competed for the lottery that was gold diggings. Violence and legal restrictions were both resorted to and there are numerous petitions written by Chinese people attempting to assert their rights and sway the governments of the day.⁶ By the late 1860s and into the 1870s this degree of conflict lessened somewhat



only to begin to flare up again in 1878, this time in relation to access to certain kinds of work rather than to goldfields. The immediate response was a remarkable document written by three businessmen of Chinese heritage who had long been resident in the Colony of Victoria.

⁶ See Anna Kyi, [“The most determined, sustained diggers’ resistance campaign”: Chinese protests against the Victorian Government’s anti-Chinese legislation 1855-1862’](#), *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 8, 2009.

[*The Chinese Question in Australia 1878-79*](#), edited by L. Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy is an effort to infuse rationality into an emotional debate - “we appeal, as natives of China and as citizens of Victoria, to the reason, the justice, the right feeling, and the calm good sense of the British population of Australia”. On this basis it of course had little effect, and in fact the anti-Chinese movement would only increase from this point cumulating in the Immigration Restriction Act, 1901 (see [No.1](#)). Nevertheless, as the voice of those who had made Australia their home in defence of those of similar origin and aspirations it is a remarkable document comparable only to that by Walite Shah written many years later (see [Debating White Australia](#)).



The very presence of Chinese people in Australia at all is laid squarely on the colonial power that had first violated the rights of the Chinese government and demanded trade and freedom of movement ostensibly on a basis of equality. This is immediately followed up by an appeal to Christian-based principles of the

brotherhood of men. Principles it is pointed out that were violated in attacks on the Chinese gold diggers such as that at Buckland. Attacks that, if similar had occurred in China itself, would have seen demands for “prompt reparation and adequate compensation” and if such was not forthcoming would have resulted in “some men-of-war” “ordered up to the mouth of the Pei-Ho”.

Having pointed out past hypocrisy the current hypocrisy that inspired the document is arrived at. This is the proposition that Chinese seamen should be excluded from shipping in Australian waters. The hypocrisy lying in that a great deal of China’s trade at the time was carried in English ships with no likelihood that a ban on English seamen would be put in place.

“Surely, justice is justice, right is right, and fair play is fair play, all the world over.”

Many more arguments concerning misinterpretation of Chinese culture and government are put, as is a worker argument that betrays the class of the writers. The prejudice and hostility towards Chinese people in California is also discussed before the final argument that not to act with “reciprocity” can only bring great shame. A shame that the subsequent failure to act with reciprocity, despite the pleas in this pamphlet, present day Australians continue to deal with.

8. Case for the defence

In what is likely the first piece of Chinese Australian literature (broadly defined) a man accused of murder makes his defence. (See also No. 11 & No. 22) The accused, known as Ang, was from China, brought under contract through the port of Amoy (Xiamen). He was employed as a shepherd to replace the convicts no longer available for such work. Not only did Ang not

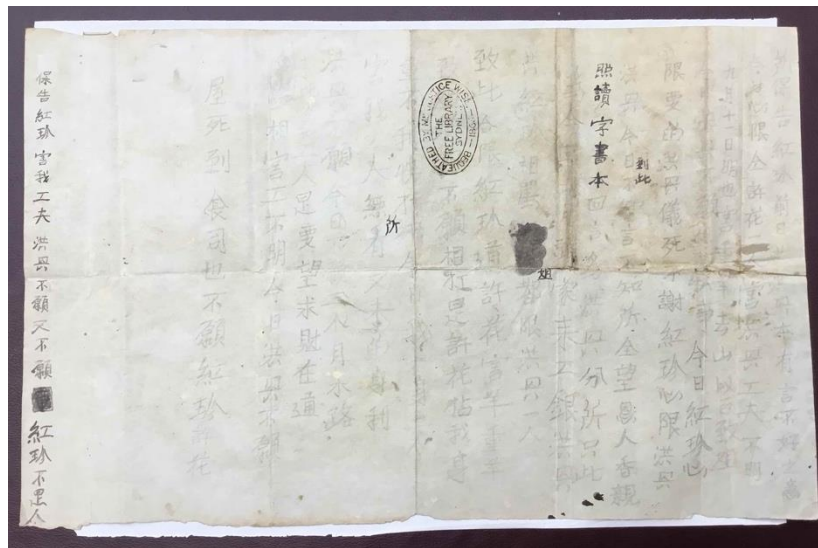


speak English but from this defence, produced in a mixture of words and drawings, it would seem his written Chinese or Fujianese was poor also. Nevertheless, his point was clear enough as the accompanying note in English understood it:

This is the defence of a Chinaman accused of manslaughter. The Chinese characters are supposed to tell the same story as the sketches which evidently assert the death of the slain man to be accidental.

Now in Sydney's Mitchell Library the drawing is not in the remaining trial documents in the NSW State Archives but rather was passed by map maker Frederick Proeschal to Justice Edward Wise, a progressive politician and Supreme Court judge who did not preside over Ang's trial (this was Justice Stephen).

Edward Wise deposited the document in the then NSW Public Library.



In addition to the dramatic images and the faint pencilled text we now can link this account to an 1850 incident and trial. A report commenting that the drawing “may be found useful in eliciting the truth.” Further we now know that this same Ang was also one of the two men on Cockatoo Island researched by Shirley Fitzgerald concerning Ang’s reluctance to leave before his mate Eu’s sentence expired and their eventual pardoning in 1853. [1]

The language and the occupation of those depicted as shepherds identify the participants in this dispute and death as some of the many thousands of “Amoy” (really Fujian) people who were recruited as indentured workers into the Colony of NSW in the period after convict transportation ceased. These men are often forgotten by a history obsessed with the gold rush and the arrival of greater numbers of people from further south in China – Canton or Guangdong – and speaking other languages. Nevertheless the Amoy men frequently stayed to establish families in Australia, many of whom are only gradually discovering this ancestry.

The Amoy shepherds first began arriving in the then Colony of NSW in 1848, and while many later shifted to the goldfields many also continued to work in various locations even after their contracts expired. Our defendant was by no means the only Amoy person to appear in court, with numerous instances of cases involving poor treatment or unpaid wages under the contracts they were brought to Australia on. It was a tough life and as one report observed around this time:

“It is the intolerable cruelty that is exercised upon the Chinese labourers in this colony that causes them so very frequently to revolt and commit many outrages that might otherwise have been avoided”.^[2]

When Fujianese (aka Hokkien) speakers did appear in court interpreters were frequently needed. In the case of Ang an interpreter from Sydney needed to be sent for before his trial in Brisbane could proceed. The drawing is not mentioned again in the depositions but Ang while charged with murder was convicted of manslaughter and received a sentence of five years. So perhaps his efforts to explain himself was “found useful in eliciting the truth”.

[1] *Moreton Bay Courier*, 26 October 1850, p.3. See also Margaret Slocomb, *Among Australia's pioneers: Chinese indentured pastoral workers on the Northern Frontier 1848 to c.1880* (Balboa press, 2014) and Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tap Gold Scissors* (State Library of NSW Press, 1996). [Thanks to Tony Anderson for pointing out the connection in the research of Margaret Solcomb.]

^[2] ‘Original Correspondence’, *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 12 August 1854 in Juanita Kwok, *The Chinese in Bathurst: Recovering Forgotten Histories*, Doctoral thesis, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, 2018, p.71.

For more on the Amoy Shepherds see:

[Responses and Reactions to the Importation of Indentured Chinese Labourers](#) by Maxine Darnell

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About *Chinese Australian History in 88 Objects*

This simple yet effective website showcases 88 objects from the history of the Chinese in Australia. It ranges over 200 years of migration history, illuminating political, social and economic aspects of the Chinese presence in the colonies and then Commonwealth. The objects come from both private and public institutions, each one including some discussion of its use and meaning in the past but also its curation and resonance today. Including bureaucratic forms and cafe menus, temple bells and even entire houses, this website provides readers with immediate access to a still overlooked part of the nation's formation.

The website is attractively designed and extremely easy to use — a reminder of the importance of thinking through universal accessibility to communicate with as wide an audience as possible. Its focus on the everyday stimulates users to think about the deeper histories and futures of other objects, both in Chinese–Australian history and in the history of other migrant groups. This beautiful portal promises only to grow richer as it finds more topics for investigation.

NSW Premiers Digital History Prize judge 2022

About the author

Michael Williams, Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture (IAC), Western Sydney University, is a scholar of Chinese-Australian history and a founding member of the Chinese-Australian Historical Society. He is the author of *Returning Home with Glory* (HKU Press, 2018) and *Australia's Dictation Test: The test it was a Crime to Fail* (Brill, 2021). His website: Chinese Australian History in 88 Objects was shortlisted for the 2022 Premiers Digital History Prize. Michael is currently working on a history of the Robe goldfield walkers entitled: *Every requisite for a campaign upon the gold-fields*.



Basic introduction to Chinese-Australian history

- Kate Bagnall, 'Rewriting the history of Chinese families in nineteenth-century Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, March 2011: pp.62–77. **[On women]**
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- Sheng Fei, "Environmental Experiences of Chinese People in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Australian Gold Rushes," *Global Environment*, 2011, 7/8: 111. **[On the environment]**
- John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007). **[On politics]**
- Natalie Fong, The Significance of the Northern Territory in the Formulation of 'White Australia' Policies, 1880–1901, *Australian Historical Studies*, 49:4, 2018, pp.527-545. **[On the North]**
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- Mei-fen Kuo, *Making Chinese Australia: Urban Elites, Newspapers and the Formation of Chinese Australian Identity, 1892–1912* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing 2013). **[On merchants]**
- Cathie May, *Topsawyers: The Chinese in Cairns 1870–1920*, (Townsville: James Cook University Press, 1984). **[On North Queensland]**
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- Michael Williams, *Returning Home with Glory: Chinese Villagers around the Pacific, 1849 to 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018). **[On villages]**
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