

# Rediscovered Past: China in northern Australia

The Second “no fuss” Conference

February 16 -17, 2008.

Organised by Chinese Heritage in Northern Australia Inc (CHINA Inc)  
at the Cairns Library, Abbott Street, Cairns. QLD. 4870.



## Conference Program

SATURDAY, 16 February 2008		
9.00 am – 9.25 am	Registration	
9.25 am – 9.30 am	Welcome	
9.30 am – 11.00 am	Session one <b>Chair: Kevin Wong Hoy</b>	<b>Darryl Low Choy</b> <i>Sojourners to Settlers: Experiences of Chinese pioneers of the Far North Queensland settlement frontier</i>  <b>Gaye Nayton</b> <i>The built environment as an expression of power relationships in the northwest Australian pearling industry</i>  <b>Sandi Robb</b> <i>Beyond the coast: Chinese settler patterns of the western gulf region: North Queensland</i>
11.00 am – 11.30 am	Self-catered morning tea	At nearby cafes
11.30 am – 1.00 pm	Session two <b>Chair: Jan Wegner</b>	<b>Kevin Wong Hoy</b> <i>Commemorative stelae from Cooktown to the south: an ancient Chinese cultural symbol adapted to Australian conditions</i>  <b>Gordon Grimwade</b> <i>They came from Guangdong</i>  <b>Patrick Kneipp</b> <i>Hau Wong temples of Hong Kong and Zhongshan</i>

1.00 pm – 2.30 pm	Self-catered lunch	Night market cafes
2.30 pm – 4.00 pm	Session three <b>Chair: Darryl Low Chow</b>	<b>Kevin Rains</b> <i>Sharing the fringe: Chinese and Aboriginal relations in North Queensland</i>  <b>Alastair Kennedy</b> <i>The Assassin of Gallipoli &amp; other Chinese Australian heroes of World War 1</i>  <b>Kevin Wong Hoy</b> <i>Unpardonable indifference: northern Chinese Australians-in-need between 1901 and 1973</i>
4.00 pm – 4.30 pm	Self-catered afternoon tea	
4.30 pm – 5.00 pm	Session four <b>Chair: Sandi Robb</b>	<b>Leonie Ryder</b> <i>The beginnings of ginger growing in Australia</i>  <b>Kevin Rains</b> <i>Digging but not for gold: the Chinese market gardeners of Cooktown</i>  <b>Gordon Grimwade</b> <i>Roast Pork</i>
5.00 pm CHINA Inc AGM for members		
7.30 pm - Conference dinner at Reef Casino, Pacific Flavours Brasserie, 35 Wharf St		
<b>SUNDAY, 17 February 2008</b>		
9.00 am – 9.30 am	Registration	
9.30 am – 11.00 am	Session five: Local communities session <b>Chair: Kevin Rains</b>	<b>John &amp; Bev Shay</b> <i>A productive community</i>  <b>Croydon Visitor Information Centre</b> <i>Yin and Yang: Opposing forces that can both produce one another and overcome one another</i>  <b>Cairns And District Chinese Association Inc (CADCAI)</b> <b>Group presentation by Mary Low, Julie Ramsbotham and Darryl Thomas</b> <i>Inspiration from the Past: the Lit Sung Goong temple collection</i>
11.00 am – 11.30 am	Self-catered morning tea	At nearby cafes

11.30 am – 1.00 pm	Session six, practical workshop and closure	<b>Jan Wegner</b>  Workshop: Protecting Chinese Australian heritage places
1.30 pm Yumcha at the Golden Boat Restaurant, 34-40 Lake Street, Cairns		

*Forward conference registration before 8 February 2008 by cheque or M/O made payable to **Chinese Heritage in Northern Australia Inc.** Registration can also be paid for on the day at the conference venue. Receipts issued at conference.*

Full conference	AUD\$30.00
16 Feb only - AUD\$20.00	17 Feb only - AUD\$10.00
Conference dinner and lunches are pay-as-you-go	

Post your registration fee to Kevin Rains at 5 Railway Street EAST IPSWICH QLD 4305

## **PRESENTER ABSTRACTS**

**Cairns and District Chinese Association Inc (CADCAI)**

**Group presentation by Mary Low, Julie Ramsbotham and Darryl Thomas**

### ***Inspiration from the Past: the Lit Sung Goong temple collection***

At the inaugural CHINA conference in 2006 CADCAI gave a brief presentation about the history of the Lit Sung Goong temple collection and CADCAI's invigorated role as custodian this significant NQ treasure.

This paper will report on the activities of the CADCAI heritage group in safeguarding the collection since the 2005 conference – their challenges and achievements during the past and two years, and current and future projects. It will reflect on how the collection has impacted on the community and conclude with a slide show (power point) of significant objects from the collection.

## **Croydon Visitor Information Centre**

***Yin and Yang: Opposing forces that can both produce one another and overcome one another.***

When gold was discovered in Croydon, in 1885 – the population explosion began. The new arrivals had many differences e.g. Race, culture & religions – but shared one common goal or should I say gold – to strike it rich!

In our presentation, we would like to build an overall picture of the contribution the Chinese had to our community, by honouring the ingenuity of these industrious people and praising their efforts in helping to establish Croydon – in 1900 – to the fourth largest town in Queensland.

Chinese migrants not only had to deal with the harsh new landscape, but in addition – faced vilification & discrimination on an extreme level and in many different realms. Our paper will describe some of the many success stories and to give credit to the Chinese business community who helped pioneer the development of Croydon.

**Gordon Grimwade**

**Gordon Grimwade & Associates**

***They came from Guangdong***

Guangdong province, Southern China was home for most Chinese migrants to Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This illustrated paper looks at some of the elements of modern Guangdong and the connections between sites like temples and other buildings and pioneer Chinese in Australia. Many smaller temples, not surprisingly, reflect elements of style found within their counterpart Australian structures. Sometimes, however, the likeness is almost uncanny. Overseas Chinese were able to fund the construction of

schools and libraries and the world heritage listed towers of Dailou. Such philanthropy clearly dispels notions that Chinese migrants were uneducated peasants trying to strike it rich quickly.

The paper is based on a two-week study tour funded by the Australia China Council, and the Guangdong Provincial Government as part of a larger National Trust of Queensland research project to explore the links between north Australian sites and Guangdong province.

### ***Roast pork***

There is a substantial body of literature on Chinese pig ovens in Australasia. Relict ovens have been reported from Pine Creek, Northern Territory, to NE Tasmania and the Palmer Goldfield, Qld within Australia. Across the Tasman there are reports of ovens in both North and South Island. The author was fortunate to witness a contemporary pig roasting near Auckland. This illustrated paper explains the process of whole pig roasting as an aid to understanding how earlier 'pig roasting ovens' may have been used.

**Alastair Kennedy**

**Australian National University**

### ***The Assassin of Gallipoli & other Chinese Australian heroes of World War 1***

The 1911 census indicated there were less than 1500 full Chinese born in Australia and about 3000 with some Chinese ancestry. Given at least half would have been female and a third of the males would have been children and the elderly, the number of Chinese Australians available to serve in the AIF would have been quite low. Yet, despite the uneven imposition of a recruitment bar on non-whites and the fact that China did not enter the war until 1917 (thus in theory barring Chinese from becoming combatants) at least 26 World War I veterans feature on the Australian War Museum's Chinese-

Australian Honour List and the War Memorial on the corner of Dixon and Liverpool Streets in Sydney.

At least three of these were Chinese Australians from northern Australia, probably the most famous being Billy Sing, 'The Assassin of Gallipoli', a former Queensland kangaroo shooter from Clermont who enlisted in the 5<sup>th</sup> Light Horse in Proserpine in October 1914. He saw action in Gallipoli and the Western Front earning a DCM and a Croix de Guerre.

From the AWM and National Archive's records, I have compiled a short presentation setting out some of the acts of bravery attributed to these gallant men and what happened to those who survived the War.

### **Patrick Kneipp**

#### ***Hau Wong temples of Hong Kong and Zhongshan***

This paper presents some preliminary findings, from a recent trip to China, on the nature and distribution of Hau Wong temples. It explores the notion that in China these temples have a limited geographical distribution to the Pearl River delta, and that this phenomenon can, in part, be connected to the story of an historical figure, Yeung Leung Jit, who played a significant role in the imperial court during the final days of the Song Dynasty. It also looks at the relationship between the Atherton Hau Wong temple and those extant in China, finding that there are many similarities. Furthermore, the Atherton example can be seen as equal in terms of age and the quality of internal furniture.

**Associate Professor Darryl Low Choy**  
**Griffith University**

***Sojourners to Settlers: Experiences of Chinese pioneers of the Far North Queensland settlement frontier***

The majority of Chinese sojourners who arrived on Australian shores during the 1800s were seeking fortunes for themselves and their families from the many gold strikes that characterised that era. Whilst the majority of these sojourners returned to their homeland at the end of the gold rushes, many through forced repatriation, others went to great lengths to settle themselves and their families permanently in Australia. This raises the question as to their motives, especially in the face of the blatant discrimination that they encountered. Of interest also are the strategies/methods that they employed to secure their place in the emergent Australian nation which was dominated by a largely European society.

The paper will utilise the experiences of the author's paternal and maternal families utilising both written and oral historical evidence. Drawing on family and official primary and secondary sources, the paper will seek to answer the questions posed. It will also examine the pioneering efforts of four Chinese Australian families and their contributions to the settlement and development of Far North Queensland frontier.

The paper and presentation will be supported by photographic sources.

**Gaye Nayton**

***The built environment as an expression of power relationships in the northwest Australian pearling industry***

This paper demonstrates that class and ethnicity played a central role in developing power relationships within the Northwest pearling industry in Australia. Urban locational theory and Paynter's (1982) "Strategies of Domination and Resistance" have been used to analyse power and resistance as they developed and were expressed in historical documents and the built environment of Cossack and Broome.

The towns represent two phases in the pearling industry: skin diving and hard-hat diving. The change in technology between the phases reworked the social and built environment of the pearling industry creating two substantially different sets of pearling masters and workers. Common threads could be found in the types of domination strategies employed by both sets of pearling elites, though the actual methods used were different. Resistance strategies were found to vary by ethnic group with the success of the Chinese resistance strategies being the most visible in the historical documentation.

**Dr Kevin Rains**

***Digging but not for gold: the Chinese market gardeners of Cooktown***

The initial impetus for the mass migration of Chinese people to the North Queensland port of Cooktown in the 1870s was the discovery of the rich Palmer River goldfield. An important ancillary Chinese industry that quickly became established was market gardening. Chinese market gardeners became the principal source of fresh fruit and vegetables and they soon moved into produce exportation as well, developing a key industry within the town's economy. Indeed, Chinese largely controlled agricultural production, with only a few Europeans ever successfully becoming involved. The market gardens supported produce dealers, packers, hotels, bakeries and households. This paper looks at the historical and archaeological evidence for these market gardens, the key personalities and commercial networks involved, and the relationships forged with the wider Chinese and non-Chinese communities.

***Sharing the fringe: Chinese and Aboriginal relations in North Queensland***



This paper examines the social relations between the early Chinese and Aboriginal communities of North Queensland. Being part of the mining-led influx of settlers into the region in the 1870s, Chinese people were seen by local Aboriginal groups as invaders and were met with open hostility. The initial confrontation soon gave way to complex relations of mutual dependency. Aboriginal people, dispossessed from their land and traditional means of subsistence, became fringe dwellers around European settlements. Here they came into contact with Chinese market gardeners and storekeepers who, experiencing much of the same alienation exerted by White society, became key sources of shelter, provisions and employment. In turn, Chinese businesses gained access to a valuable labour force and Chinese men sought companionship with Aboriginal women. Government and anecdotal evidence suggests that many Chinese-Aboriginal 'marriages' and families were established.

In the 1890s Government authorities viewed such close ties with alarm. The Indigenous inhabitants of Queensland, having suffered the devastating effects of the colonisation process, were believed to be a dying race requiring isolation and protection. This was particularly the case in North Queensland where relatively large numbers of Aboriginal people still existed and were an integral aspect of the local social and economic fabric. Within this misinformed and paternalistic environment, the Chinese were regarded as protagonists in the exploitation and corruption of Aboriginal society. Legislative reforms were introduced to remove Aborigines from outside influences. A major legacy of these reforms was the break-up of Chinese-Aboriginal families, the strict policing of cohabitation with and employment of Aborigines through a permit system, and the accelerated removal of the Aboriginal population to missions and reserves.

**Sandi Robb**

**James Cook University**

***Beyond the coast: Chinese settler patterns of the western gulf region:  
North Queensland***

(Abstract not available)

**Dr Leonie Ryder**

**University of Adelaide**

***The beginning of ginger growing in Australia***

Early British settlers to Australia brought with them a taste for ginger and a demand for ginger products, and I am exploring how they developed this taste. Scholarly works, local historical records, food books and magazines, and literature of Buderim Ginger Ltd maintain that some pieces of ginger root found their way to Buderim, in Southeast Queensland, by chance, sometime shortly before or during World War I. Buderim became the centre of ginger growing in the 1950s. However, my research to date has revealed that this story is only a very small and not wholly accurate part of a much broader story which began much earlier. From at least the 5th century, Chinese sailors carried ginger growing in pots on their ships, and it is possible that Chinese fishing Australia's northern shores for bêche-de-mer left ginger growing there before white settlement. It is certain that Chinese immigrants and workers who came to Australia in the 1800s brought with them living rhizomes which they planted in their gardens in North Queensland and the Northern Territory. This paper examines the Chinese involvement in establishing ginger growing in Australia.

**John & Bev Shay**

**Cook Shire Historical Society**

***A productive community***

This paper is an in-depth look at the Chinese community in the Cooktown-Palmer region from 1893 to 1910. The presentation will cover who lived in the various communities in this region, and how these communities were supportive of one another through occupations and productivity. This is a

work in progress, showing just what information the digitizing of the Cook Shire Council archives is uncovering.

**Kevin Wong Hoy**

***Commemorative stelae from Cooktown to the south: an ancient Chinese cultural symbol adapted to Australian conditions***

Many ancient civilisations honoured heroes or memorialised historical events through the installation of vertical slabs of stone called stelae. From the first century C.E., this convention was also taken place in ancient China. Early Chinese stelae were characterised as upright, stone columns, usually between one and three metres in height and exhibiting calligraphic inscriptions of considerable aesthetic or literary quality – calligraphy being a highly valued art form in traditional China.

With the spread of Chinese migration in Australia from the nineteenth century onwards, grand or humble versions of Chinese stelae materialised at a number of Australian sites. Although not greatly acknowledged by Australian scholars, the erection of these elegant memorial stelae in Australia is illustrative of the aesthetic and honorific postures of Chinese Australians. Some may claim the stele phenomenon in Australia was simply the transference of a traditional Chinese form to a new land, whilst others might interpret this phenomenon as the Chinese in Australia emulating the colonial British Imperial passion for memorialising the dead. Can it be demonstrated that the specific features of Australia's Chinese memorial stelae contest these two assumptions?

Stelae may be found at sites ranging from north Queensland to northern Tasmania and were erected during a time span bridging the late nineteenth century to the present day. This paper identifies and investigates the stelae of Australia as well as comparing them with the stelae of China.