

**Chinese history,
heritage and community
in Tasmania:
A bibliography**

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Hobart, Tasmania

2022

CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| History | 3 |
| Academic histories on Chinese in Tasmania..... | 3 |
| Other academic histories..... | 4 |
| Community, public and local histories | 6 |
| Biography | 10 |
| Heritage, archaeology and tourism | 14 |
| Oral history | 16 |
| Photographs | 19 |
| Community, art and identity | 20 |
| Archives and manuscripts | 22 |
| Tasmanian Archives / Libraries Tasmania | 22 |
| National Archives of Australia | 23 |

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, scholarship on the history and heritage of Chinese migrants and their descendants in Australia and New Zealand has flourished, with contributions from academic historians, curators, archaeologists, heritage professionals, and local, family and community researchers. Other than South Australia, Tasmania had the smallest Chinese population of the Australasian colonies over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Table 1), and this is reflected in the comparatively small amount of research undertaken to date on Chinese migration and settlement in Tasmania, particularly beyond the tin-mining communities of the North-East. Most studies in Chinese Australasian history and heritage focus on Victoria and New South Wales, as well as Queensland, the Northern Territory and New Zealand.

Table 1. Chinese population of Tasmania, 1881–1947

| | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 | 1921 | 1933 | 1947 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Persons | 844 | 1056 | 609 | 529 | 321 | 197 | 111 |
| Male | 842 | 993 | 536 | 450 | 283 | 160 | 81 |
| Female | 2 | 63 | 73 | 79 | 38 | 37 | 30 |

Source: *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No. 18, 1925*, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Melbourne, 1925, p. 955; Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1933 and 1947.

As this bibliography shows, however, there is a diverse body of research that provides a foundation on which future work on Chinese history and heritage in Tasmania can build – including Helen Vivian’s well-known 1984 study of Chinese heritage sites in the North-East and Adrienne Petty’s 2009 PhD thesis on case studies of early Chinese migrants. Future studies can also look to existing scholarship on Chinese communities in other parts of Australia and New Zealand, and their transnational connections, as a model.

Chinese in Tasmania were part of broader (particularly Cantonese) circulations around the Pacific over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their lives were shaped by the same shifting laws, policies and attitudes – from colonial anti-Chinese laws, to the White Australia Policy, to the Colombo Plan, to multiculturalism. Tasmania as a case study also has much to offer the broader field of overseas Chinese history and heritage, in Australia and New Zealand and beyond, due to its own distinct history as an island colony/state with a small and localized Chinese population, dating from the earliest days of British colonisation to the post-Tiananmen era.

Today Tasmania’s ethnic Chinese population is larger than it has ever been. More than 7,000 Tasmanian residents identify as having Chinese ancestry, and those born overseas have come from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Macau and beyond (Census 2016). In thinking about Tasmania’s Chinese history, it is also worth thinking about these contemporary Chinese Tasmanian communities and how

CHINESE HISTORY, HERITAGE AND COMMUNITY IN TASMANIA: A BIBLIOGRAPHY

museums, libraries and archives might ensure that they are documented in their collections. Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery's unique Guan Di Temple Collection is an example of the important role collecting institutions can play in preserving and documenting the history and heritage of minority communities for the future.

With all this in mind, this bibliography is intended as a research tool to assist with the study of Tasmania's Chinese communities across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It documents existing research relating to Chinese people in Tasmania, focusing on history, heritage and community, and provides a survey of publications and other research outputs. Generally, the bibliography only lists work whose principal subject matter is people of Chinese ancestry in Tasmania, while publications that contain only incidental mentions of Chinese people are not included. However, some relevant general studies of Tasmanian history and Chinese Australian history are also included where they touch on Tasmanian Chinese history in meaningful ways.

Material listed in the bibliography is available in the public domain, and most items can be found in the collections of Libraries Tasmania, University of Tasmania Library, National Library of Australia, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, and/or online. Links to material available online are provided where possible, and material only available online has been saved into the Internet Archive Wayback Machine (<https://archive.org/web/>).

While the focus is on published material, the bibliography includes a brief discussion of archives and manuscript material held in Tasmanian Archives and the National Archives of Australia. It does not, however, list material held in local museums, historical societies or private collections, nor does it include material culture and archaeological collections held in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, and regional and local museums, such as the St Helens History Room. There is also a wealth of additional primary source material, such as government reports, parliamentary papers, newspapers, genealogical sources and family collections, that goes beyond the scope of this bibliography.

The bibliography was compiled between January and March 2022 by Dr Kate Bagnall. It was commissioned by Kirstie Ross for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) as part of TMAG's Contemporary Migrant Experiences project, with funding from the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations. We would appreciate being notified of corrections and pleased to hear of additional or updated entries for inclusion in future editions.

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March 2022 (Edition 1.2)

HISTORY

Historical research on Tasmania's Chinese communities can be divided into three (somewhat overlapping) categories: academic histories that focus on Chinese in Tasmania; academic histories that mention Chinese in Tasmania; and community, local and public histories that explore Tasmania's Chinese history in various ways and to different extents.

Academic histories on Chinese in Tasmania

Adrienne Petty's 2009 PhD thesis is the most substantial academic study on the history of Tasmania's Chinese community, and it sits alongside a number of History Honours theses also completed at the University of Tasmania, most of which are now quite dated due to advances in scholarship and the increasing availability of relevant sources. A small number of scholarly articles and essays also exist – those by Mobo Gao and Cassandra Pybus emerged from the same ARC Linkage project as Petty's PhD. Of note is Richard Ely's 2001 essay on Andrew Inglis Clark's 1888 Memorandum on Chinese Immigration.

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Scattered references to Chinese people can also be found in the Companion to Tasmanian History entries on 'Abalone', 'Buddhism', 'Fishing', 'Ghost Stories', 'Healing', 'Vegetables Other than Potatoes'.
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Other academic histories

Discussion of Tasmania is only seldom found in general histories of Chinese in Australia, and Eric Rolls' epic two-volume study is one of the few where Tasmania receives more than a passing mention.

The histories listed below, however, refer to Chinese in Tasmania in some substantive way, even if it is only small. The list does not include publications where Tasmania is only mentioned in passing (e.g. where Tasmania is named in a list of colonies that had anti-Chinese legislation).

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BIOGRAPHY

Biographical profiles of individual Chinese Tasmanians and their families can be found in a range of publications, from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and the *Companion to Tasmanian History* to public history websites and personal blogs. Generally, these biographies focus on a small number of historical and public figures, including merchant James Chung Gon and family, merchant Chin Kaw, senator Thomas Bakhap, and journalist Helene Chung Martin and family.

Digitisation and indexing of archival material, particularly material available through the Tasmanian Names Index and Trove, means that it is now much easier to locate historical and genealogical information about individual Chinese Tasmanians. A number of works below, such as Monissa Whiteley's blog, suggest the scope of material that can now be located and compiled.

The publications listed below focus on individual Chinese Tasmanians and families. Scattered references to other individuals can be found in general publications on Tasmanian history.

The Tasmanian Family History Society's Comprehensive Subject Index (CSI) is a useful source to locate further references to individual Chinese. The CSI is a searchable database of references to named people, objects, places or events in publications held by the TFHS branch libraries. It can be accessed on the TFHS Inc. website at <https://www.tasfhs.org/csi.php>.

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HERITAGE, ARCHAEOLOGY AND TOURISM

Chinese heritage studies in Tasmania have focused on the former tin-mining areas of the north-east of the state. Most significant is Helen Vivian's 1985 study, 'Tasmania's Chinese Heritage', which provides information about 41 identified sites in the North-East including Chinese camps, joss houses, market gardens and cemeteries. Interpretation at some of these sites features stories of the Chinese people who lived and worked there. While no joss house buildings remain in situ, temple materials from these sites make up the Guan Di Temple Collection in the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston.

The Trail of the Tin Dragon project, an ambitious and now-defunct heritage tourism initiative, was established in the early 2000s and sought to boost tourism through the establishment of a Chinese heritage trail through Launceston, Scottsdale, Branxholm, Derby, Moorina, Weldborough, Blue Tier and St Helens. The relevant local councils, as well as Forestry Tasmania, were partners on a 2003 ARC Linkage project (LP0347077) by Mobo Gao and Cassandra Pybus from the University of Tasmania. The outcomes of this Linkage project, including Adrienne Petty's PhD thesis, are listed in 'Academic histories' above.

Around the same time (2004–2005), a Tasmanian working group (led by Mobo Gao) of the national Chinese-Australian Cultural Heritage (CACH) project was active; a substantial bibliography, entitled '*The Hidden Dragon*', was produced by this group and is held in the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery Library (see full reference below).

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ORAL HISTORY

A number of Chinese Tasmanians have been interviewed for oral history projects, including those undertaken by Diana Giese and Paul Macgregor in conjunction with the National Library of Australia. These are listed below along with oral histories held by Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and other relevant recorded interviews and transcripts.

The collection of further oral histories, particularly with older members of the contemporary Chinese Tasmanian community, is of critical importance and would enable the telling of a more complete story of Tasmania's Chinese past, including its twentieth-century history and the lives of Chinese Tasmanian women.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Tasmania's libraries, museums and historical societies hold a range of photographs relating to the local Chinese community and Chinese heritage. As an example, a small number of individual items are detailed below, but not all photographs are listed on public databases or in finding aids. In particular, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery's Kaw Collection contains a significant collection of studio portraits and family photographs that are, as yet, uncatalogued.

As demonstrated by the Kaw Collection and by the *Chinese-Australian Historical Images in Australia* listing below, personal and family photographic collections (held by both Chinese and non-Chinese Tasmanians) are likely to hold further material of relevance and significance. A dedicated project to locate, identify and document relevant Chinese Tasmanian photographs would be beneficial to telling a richer story of the state's history, particularly across the twentieth century.

'Group portrait of the Chung Gon family taken possibly at Lilydale, Tasmania, c 1905. Back row (LtoR): Joseph, Daisy, Rose, Violet, Lily. Middle row (LtoR): Mrs Mary Chung Gon holding baby Edward (Teddy), Esther, Mr James Chung Gon, Albert. Front row (LtoR): Samuel, Ann.' QVM:1995:P:0379. Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

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COMMUNITY, ART AND IDENTITY

Only a small amount of material created by or about Tasmania's contemporary Chinese communities are held in public collections or are available online, but these include commemorative publications by the Chinese Community Association of Tasmania (est. 1969) and the Wellspring Anglican Church Chinese Congregation (est. 1989). Contemporary creative works reflecting on Tasmanian Chinese history include a historical novel by John Biggs and visual art projects by Greg Leong and Chen Ping.

As with oral histories and photographs, community archiving projects or efforts to encourage individuals and community organisations to donate or deposit material in relevant collecting institutions would support future work in Chinese Tasmanian history and heritage.

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ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS

There is a wealth of primary source material that can be used to tell the history of Chinese people in Tasmania over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – including heritage sites, archaeological remains, material culture collections held in museums and private hands, family photographs and heirlooms, intangible cultural heritage practices, and documentary heritage such as historical publications, archives and manuscripts.

What follows is an overview of relevant archival material held by Tasmanian Archives (part of Libraries Tasmania) and the National Archives of Australia. Some of this is available online, as are other useful sources including:

- historical newspapers in Trove (<https://trove.nla.gov.au>)
- Tasmanian Parliamentary Papers 1856–1901 (<https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/tpl/PPWeb/>)
- genealogical records in Ancestry.com (e.g. Tasmanian Police Gazette) and FamilySearch (e.g. Tasmanian Government Gazette).

Tasmanian Archives / Libraries Tasmania

Tasmanian Archives and Libraries Tasmania hold and provide access to archival and manuscript material relating to Chinese Tasmanians in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Libraries Tasmania also holds copies of many of the publications listed in this bibliography.

Tasmanian government archives of relevance include records relating to: birth, death and marriage; convicts; naturalisation; land and property; shipping; Colonial Secretary's Office; courts and prisoners; bankruptcy; wills. Many records have been indexed, and digitised, and are available through the Tasmanian Names Index: https://libriestas.ent.sirsiidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/names/.

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'The Hidden Dragon' bibliography lists various items relating to the history of Chinese people in Launceston in the Dennis Hodgkinson collection. Materials held in Launceston.

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National Archives of Australia

The National Archives of Australia holds records relating to Chinese Tasmanians, most of which date from after Federation in 1901. Particularly significant are records relating to immigration, customs, naturalisation and alien registration. These records are held in Hobart and interstate, and access to these records varies.

For example, series A396 (Alien Registration Papers – Chinese, Tasmania) is fully described at item level and all 293 items are digitised, while P437, the main correspondence series of the Customs Department in Tasmania, is only partially described at item level, with an even smaller number of items digitised. P437 covers almost 95 shelf metres but only 4960 items are listed in RecordSearch and 23 are digitised. Further descriptive work on this series would open up significant material relating to Chinese migration and settlement in Tasmania and would be particularly beneficial to descendants seeking to know more about their family's pasts.

The National Archives has published two research guides – one on Chinese records and one on Tasmanian records – that are of use in locating relevant materials.

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