

Early Chinese Newspapers in Australia: Trove Presents a New Perspective on Australian History

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Most Australian historians will tell you that there was a “before Trove” and an “after Trove”. Being able to search and access digitised copies of hundreds of Australian newspapers, from major city dailies to small country papers, has changed the way we work and the sorts of histories we are able to write.

Nowhere is this more apparent than among those of us researching the history of one of Australia’s oldest migrant communities — the Chinese. Over the past 20 years historians have sought to uncover Chinese voices within the historical record, to allow us to consider the lives of Chinese Australians on their own terms and to better understand their place within the Australian community.

Newspapers are one source that provides an astounding array of information about the individual and collective lives of Chinese people in Australia. The mainstream English-language newspapers, particularly local rural papers, that are available through Trove have facilitated new lines of historical inquiry and provided fresh insights into many aspects of the day-to-day lives of the early Chinese residents of Australia.

An example is my work on Chinese-Australian families, where with Trove’s help I have been able to identify and track the lives of some of the earliest Chinese women in New South Wales. Arriving in the gold rush decades of the 1860s and 1870s, these women appear in few historical records. But because the women were a source of curiosity to European colonists, local newspapers featured articles about them, noting their arrival, marriage, settlement, the births of their children, and their deaths. While it’s still a work in progress, Trove’s digitised newspapers have allowed me to pursue a research topic I had once abandoned as being too hard.

Australia’s Chinese communities were also active in publishing their own Chinese-language newspapers. From the 1890s to the 1940s, Chinese in Sydney and Melbourne produced weekly papers that found a wide audience around Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. There were also a couple of short-lived Chinese-language newspapers produced in the 1850s and 1860s.

Historian Mei-fen Kuo has argued that these Chinese-language newspapers “have an important role to play in understanding Chinese-Australian history—mundanely through the historical archives they supply, and more profoundly through the windows they offer on community formation and everyday historical awareness” (Kuo 2013, p. 5).

The editorials, news articles (both local and international), shipping timetables and advertisements they published reflected the interests and concerns of Chinese living in Australia. They provide insights into the ways Chinese in Australia saw themselves and the broader society around them. The language used within the papers is also a reflection of the Cantonese origins of the community and is interesting in and of itself.

The Chinese-language newspapers carried advertisements for a range of Chinese and European businesses, such as those on the front page of the *Chinese Times* on 3 October 1914. Note the prominent ads for shipping lines. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page15349329> But while they are incredibly valuable as a historical source, these newspapers haven’t been widely used in researching Chinese-Australian history. The main stumbling block for most Australian researchers has been the fact that they’re written in Chinese. Even those of us with some Chinese have balked at the thought of trawling through microfilm copies for more than the occasional article — it’s a hard and often thankless task

It's exciting to think of the "after Trove" possibilities that access to these newspapers holds, both for historians in Australia and those overseas, particularly in China. Researchers on overseas Chinese history in the People's Republic of China tend to look towards Canada and the United States — two major destinations for Chinese migrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries — yet perhaps easier access to these Australian sources will prompt them to turn their gaze to the south.

Read on for a short introduction to each of the newly-digitised newspapers:

Chinese Advertiser (1856) / English and Chinese Advertiser (1856-1858)

The *Chinese Advertiser* was the earliest bilingual Chinese-English newspaper in Australia, first appearing in May 1856. It was published by Robert Bell, an Englishman, in Ballarat every Saturday, had a circulation of 400 copies and was distributed for free. The name of the newspaper changed later in 1856 to the *English and Chinese Advertiser*, after which time more of the paper's content was in English. The Chinese name of the newspaper varied in the earliest editions, but the Chinese title 英唐招帖 (*Yingtangzhaotie*) appeared consistently under the English masthead from late 1857. The latest remaining copy of the newspaper is dated 7 August 1858.



Front page of the last known copy of the *English and Chinese Advertiser*, 7 August 1858. The page features advertisements for five Ballarat businesses. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page15910530>

Only ten issues of the newspaper are known to still exist, all of which have been digitised and made available in Trove. The newspaper published government notifications, advertisements and Biblical passages, rather than news articles or editorials.

Chinese Australian Herald (1894-1923)

The *Chinese Australian Herald* 廣益華報 (*Guangyi huabao*) was the first major Chinese-language newspaper in Australia. Published in Sydney, it first appeared on 1 September 1894. The *Chinese Australian Herald* was founded and run by G.A. Down, J.A. Philp and Sun Johnson (孫俊臣 Sun Junchen), a bilingual Chinese intellectual who was the newspaper's editor (another Chinese editor had been involved in establishing the paper, but he died in 1896). The *Chinese Australian Herald* was published every Saturday, had a circulation of up to 1,000 and was distributed throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. The final issue of the *Chinese Australian Herald* was published on 25 August 1923.

報 華 益 廣
THE CHINESE AUSTRALIAN HERALD. February 10, 1899

張附報華益廣 單貨定家店人華

THE CHINESE STOREKEEPERS' ORDER LIST.

CHINESE STOREKEEPERS MAY SAVE THEMSELVES A LARGE AMOUNT OF TROUBLE BY USING THIS LIST IN MAKING UP THEIR ORDERS FOR GOODS.
也券煩之信寫省減可則行洋至因字英華單此將後然單此在寫者貨取行洋家各到信寫家店有凡

Name of Article.	目名貨各	Where to be purchased.	貨買店某從要處此於明書
COFFEE (Fry's)	茶吉哥種艾	ANY WHOLESALE GROCER.	買有店貨雜行發家各
ARNOTT'S BISCUITS	乾餅派牙律曼	W. ARNOTT, Newcastle	吉乾餅派曼律卡島
HACKSHALL'S BISCUITS	乾餅路樹加	THE HACKSHALL BISCUIT CO., Parramatta Road, Forest Lodge.	仔譯巴在店乾餅路樹加 始律士屬科名地路打
PURE WINES & SPIRITS	酒美好士	HOOKINGS, Opposite G.P.O., Pitt Street, Sydney.	必製者在店酒洋士做學 而對館信書大列的上
ANDERSON'S SEEDS	荷種司公臣打麥	ANDERSON & Co., Pitt-st., Sydney	司公臣打麥列的士必單製書
BESTOVALL BOOTS and SHOES	鞋番柯上卓	KELLERMANN & Co., 168 Clarence Street, Sydney.	聯其單製書在司公文聯基 號八十六百壹第與士倫
ROSE'S Celebrated Eye Lotion.	藥眼名楊店藥士聖	H. A. ROSE, 531 George-st., Sydney	街治左製書在店藥士聖
BAKING POWDER (Dr. Waugh's)	打包京北好和打露	JAMES CHAMBER, Proprietor, 24 Kent Street, Sydney.	單製書在主要論城士占 號四十九百四列的上聖
FLOUR	粉麵	BRUNTON & COMPANY, Builders, Clarence Street, Sydney.	製書在司公房須領舖非 礦用商士倫製其單
BOOTS, SHOES, and MERCERY	物器彩內鞋番	JOHN HUNTER & SON, LTD., 117 Pitt-st., Sydney, 5 Branches abroad and A.S.N.	單單在新島打那 七第一百零列的士必專 家十各省本在枝開及號
Beale Patent Sewing Machines, Special Prices to Wholesale. Please refer to send any Circulars.	器機衣縫款新司公華卓 宜相外行銀帶行發有凡	SEALE & Co. Ltd., 484, Geo. St., Sydney	治左單製書在司公路車 牌門號四十八百四街大
TEA Cup Blend & C. A. N. Blend	記為杯茶用裝茶士烟亞	PITT, BROWN & Co. 89 Clarence-St.	街士倫舖其單正製書 司公期車必九十八
Razors Knives, & Tools Sharpened	器利等各及刀剃磨代	H. F. SHAW, 279 Pitt St., Sydney	百二列的士必製書在梳 牌門號九十七
Paper Bags, Newspaper, Twine, & KEEN'S D.S.F. MUSTARD	客發袋紙子繩紙開紙有 末芥法亞士亞的士堅	AUSTRALIAN PAPER CO., 104 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.	單製書在司公紙山全新 號四十九百一街禮士加
KEEN'S OXFORD BLUE	繩繩路車活士德士堅	ANY WHOLESALE GROCER	買有店貨雜處各
VAN HOUTEN'S COCOA	茶吉哥號字士頓口雲	ANY WHOLE ALE GROCER	買有店貨雜處各
SILVERSTREAM SCHNAPPS	酒粒士號字康的士華司	TUCKER & Co., George-st., Sydney	買有店貨雜行發 街司公架德人治左單製書
COFFEE ESSENCE (Symington's)	汁士先衣啡架號字頓明司	ANY WHOLESALE GROCER	買有店貨雜行發
SOLICITORS	師狀英	WALLACE & SON, Federal Chambers, Corner Pitt and King Street, Sydney.	類製書當領狀活曼士瑞倫 頭角街列的士必及列特士
B.B. M. NURE	袋肥號字卓卓	SYDNEY MEAT PRESERVING Co., Rockwood	單製書 單活聯在廠工司公限有肉製
VARNISHES SUN BRAND.	油士利花號字陽太	Wm. Docker's, 280 George-st., Sydney	治左製書在架牌林威 牌門號十八百二街大

This List is issued Monthly. Rates (to Advertisers in "Chinese Australian Herald," £1 per Line per Annum.)
Non-Advertisers are Charged Line.

A helpful bilingual "Chinese storekeeper's order list" from the *Chinese Australian Herald*, 10 February 1899. The newspaper included advertisements for brands we still know today, including Arnott's biscuits, Keen's mustard and Van Houten's cocoa.
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article168654947>

The full run of nearly 1500 issues of the *Chinese Australian Herald* are digitised and available through Trove. The newspaper published editorials, Australian and overseas news, and advertisements, many of which were for European-run businesses in Sydney. Drawings and photographs were used to illustrate both news stories and advertisements.

***Chinese Times* (1902-1922)**

The *Chinese Times* was Melbourne's first major Chinese newspaper, published for the first time on 5 February 1902. For the first three years Thomas Chang Luke (鄭祿 Zheng Lu) was the proprietor and editor until he ran into financial difficulties. The *Chinese Times* changed its Chinese name several times over the years, reflecting shifts in its ownership and political sympathies: 愛國報 *Aiguobao* (1902-1905), 警東新報 *Jingdongxinbao* (1905-1914), 平報 *Pingbao* (1917), and 民報 *Minbao* (1919-1922). It was published weekly, at first on Wednesdays and then from February 1905 on Saturdays. From 1919 the newspaper was the official organ of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in Australia. It was published in Sydney from 1922 until it ceased publication in 1949.

Nearly 800 issues of the *Chinese Times* have been digitised and made available through Trove. These date from 1902 to 1922 with some gaps as there were breaks in the newspaper's publication. Only scattered issues after 1922 are known to exist, held in both public and private collections.

***Tung Wah News* (1898-1902) / *Tung Wah Times* (1902-1936)**

The *Tung Wah News* began in Sydney in 1898 as a joint-stock company funded by local Chinese merchants. One of the largest shareholders was Thomas Yee Hing (劉汝興 Liu Ruxing) and many of the smaller shareholders were market gardeners. The newspaper was published twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and the first issue appeared on 29 June 1898. The *Tung Wah News* became the *Tung Wah Times* in August 1902, after which it was published once a week.

The *Tung Wah* newspapers have not yet been digitised and made available through Trove. There is, however, an English-language index to the newspapers which was prepared as part of the Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation project. This index allows you to search for terms in English and provides the issue, page and column numbers for individual articles. Copies of the *Tung Wah* newspapers are available on microfilm in the State Library of New South Wales and the National Library of Australia.

Further reading

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