CHINESE CONTRIBUTION TO EARLY DARWIN
By Charles See-Kee
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This paper is the outcome of a very successful set of lectures on the history of the Northern Territory held at the State Reference Library of the Northern Territory during July and August 1982.

Speakers covered different aspects of Territory history and illustrated the wide and varied nature of our history.

The transcripts of the lectures are being published individually in this series. No major editorial work has been undertaken, so that the lectures are presented as they were delivered by the speakers.

*The Caledon Bay Killings*
— Ted Egan (21 July 1982) — not to be published at the request of Mr Egan

*The History of the Catholic Church in the Northern Territory*
— Bishop O'Loughlin (28 July 1982)

*Point Charles Lighthouse; and The Military Occupation of Cox Peninsula*
— Mike Foley (4 August 1982)

*The Queensland Road*
— Peter Forrest (11 August 1982)

*Chinese Contribution to Early Darwin*
— Charles See-Kee (18 August 1982)

*John Stokes and the Men of the Beagle:— Discoverers of Port Darwin*
— Alan Powell (25 August 1982)
OCCASIONAL PAPERS


2. The History of the Catholic Church in the Northern Territory, by Bishop John Patrick O'Loughlin. (1986)


4. Point Charles Lighthouse; and The Military Occupation of Cox Peninsula, by Mike Foley. (1987)
THE CHINESE CONTRIBUTION TO EARLY DARWIN

CHINESE VISIT AUSTRALIA BEFORE EUROPEANS

My lecture is entitled 'The Chinese Contribution to Early Darwin'. Perhaps the broader term 'Top End of the Northern Territory' would be more appropriate: for, in the early years of the 1870s there were more Chinese working in the mines and on the railways outside of Darwin than there were in the town itself.

A Chinese professor, Wi Chu-Hsien, in his paper on the Chinese discovery of Australia, claims that the Chinese people went back and forth to Australia from time to time from 592 BC to 1432 AD, and that a Chinese stone statue dating back to 1432 found at Port Darwin in 1870 is proof of the Chinese early presence in Australia.

Old Chinese historians also refer to visits to Australia by Chinese, centuries before the white man set foot on the shores of this island continent. If these claims are correct, then Port Darwin, or Palmerston, could have been easily visited by the Chinese long before its discovery by Europeans.

There are authentic records showing that China's greatest adventurer, Admiral Cheng Ho, travelled extensively in South East Asia in the 1400s and visited many countries and islands bordering Australia. However, recorded Australian history of early Darwin, and the first recorded migration of Chinese to the 'front door' of Australia, only goes back a little more than a hundred years ago in the 1800s.

PORT DARWIN AND CHINESE WORKERS

Port Darwin was established in 1869 and it was the fifth attempt to set up a permanent settlement on the coast of North Australia. The other four bases were abandoned as failures, and I have no doubt that Port Darwin would have met the same fate of her predecessors were it not for the Chinese who were brought here as a labour force to work in the extreme climes and conditions prevailing at that time which Europeans found hard to endure. Perhaps I'm biased. I'll leave it to you to form your own opinion after you've heard my lecture.

The first group of two-hundred Chinese were brought to Port Darwin from Singapore in 1874 to work in the mines. In 1875, to meet the demand for labour for essential public works, the Government agreed to the immigration of more Chinese. It's not definite how many Chinese came here under this scheme.

One writer, Douglas Lockwood, mentions thousands, but I'm inclined to think that hundreds would be nearer to the mark. Unfortunately, no official census of the Chinese population in the Territory was taken in the 1870s and even the census figures of 1881 showing the Chinese population as 2,490, does not agree with other early records. I think it would be safe to say that the Chinese outnumbered the Europeans by at least four to one.
EUROPEANS, CHINESE AND ABORIGINALS

I should mention that I use the name 'European' because at that time the people here were divided up into three categories: Europeans, Chinese and Blacks. William J Sowden in his book *The Northern Territory As It Is*, an official narrative written for the SA Minister for the NT, the Hon J Langdon Parsons, MP, published in 1882, mentions the Chinese right throughout his book. He refers to the Chinese as 'Orientals', 'Celestials' and 'Chinamen'.

I make mention of this name-calling not with any resentment, but more as a reflection of the thinking of the time of the superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon over the 'foreigner', particularly the Chinaman. I should hasten to say that W J Sowden spoke well of the humble 'Chinaman'.

Later, the discovery of gold in the Pine Creek area brought more Chinese to Port Darwin from South China. Australia soon became known as the 'New Golden Mountain' to distinguish it from California which the Chinese called the 'Old Golden Mountain' where gold was previously found.

By 1886 the Chinese community had risen to around 4,000 while the European population was less than 1,000. The colonial government became alarmed at the rapid increase of the Chinese population in Australia and legislations restricting the Chinese were quickly passed.

LABOUR FORCE FOR RAILWAY 1887

South Australia excluded the Northern Territory from the restricted regulations because the Chinese labour force was still needed for the development of the Territory. Construction of the railway from Port Darwin, then known as Palmerston, to Pine Creek was started in 1887 and Chinese indentured labour was brought out from Hong Kong to build the line.

They were paid from five shillings (equivalent to fifty cents) to eight shillings (eighty cents) a day for skilled tradesmen and they worked from ten to twelve hours a day.

By 1888 the Chinese population has risen to well over 6,000, while the European population remained static around the thousand mark. At the completion of the railway in 1889 there was no further need for Chinese labour. The South Australian Government then enforced the immigration restrictions.

Further restrictions were introduced in 1901 with the 'Federation of States Restriction Act'. Many Chinese were repatriated and by 1905 the Chinese population had been reduced to about 2,000, which was still more than the European population. It was not until the end of South Australia's administration in December 1910 and the transfer of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth in 1911, that the Chinese population fell below the European population.

By that time Port Darwin's total population was at an all time low. The dramatic drop in the Chinese labour force proved disastrous for the Territory and many strug-
Mining and other leases were abandoned and forfeited because Chinese labour was no longer available.

Not all the Chinese worked in the mines or railway. Some had started general stores, tailor shops and other businesses to cater for the needs of the community.

**CAVENAGH STREET CHINATOWN**

Those Chinese who stayed behind and who were not repatriated started various private enterprises in the town from the money they had saved. Cavenagh Street became known as Chinatown with the stores being patronised by all citizens of the town, including the 'Silvertails', as public servants were called in those days.

Chinese market gardeners supplied the town with a plentiful supply of locally grown fruits and vegetables. Some of the gardens were located in the area adjacent to Gardens Hill Road below Dashwood Crescent; also in Houston Street and Tuckwell Court right up to the Gardens Road Cemetery. All the big mango trees and shade trees still growing in these areas were planted by the Chinese market gardeners.

Other market gardens were located at Doctor's Gully and in McMinn Street on the site at the bottom of the Darwin Primary School; also on land in Stuart Park previously known as the 'Police Paddock' and in the areas now occupied by the Parap Shopping Centre and the Fannie Bay Shopping Centre. Wherever you see clusters of large mango trees, you can safely say they mark the site of early Chinese market gardens.

The Chinese established piggeries in the area near Gardens No. 2 Sports Oval and on the site of the present Paul's icecream factory. Another piggery was established at one end of the Fannie Bay Shopping Centre.

They were also engaged in the fishing industry and fished for trepang as well as fish which was salted and dried for export to Hong Kong.

The Chinese grew rice successfully without tractors and mechanised equipment in a place later known as Esmeralda Station which was then called the Chinese Rice Gardens. Rice was also grown in the old Police Paddock in Stuart Park.

There were no motor vehicles, electricity or water reticulation. Buffalo carts were used before the horse carts as the chief mode of transport in the early days. Rain water tanks and sunken wells provided the only water supply for the whole town.

**SKILLED TRADESMEN**

Skilled Chinese tradesmen such as carpenters, stone masons, cabinet makers, boiler makers and fitters helped to construct the buildings in the town when they were not employed by the mines or the railways. They built many buildings including a stone building on the Esplanade in 1884 to replace the first primitive weatherboard court house. The Chinese tradesmen also rebuilt the old Catholic Church that was destroyed by the big cyclone in 1897.
Chinese carpenters and labourers were employed in building Government House. The stone building now being used by Brown’s Mart, the old Town Hall next to the Reserve Bank which was later destroyed by Cyclone Tracy, and some of the government houses at Myilly Point were built by Chinese tradesmen. They also built the old railway cottages along the Stuart Highway at Parap that were later demolished to make way for more modern planning.

One of the first two-storey buildings in Cavenagh Street was a Chinese store. This store was later burnt down by looters during the Second World War. It was located on the site opposite the building now occupied by the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

One of the first Chinese merchants in Port Darwin was a man named Kwong Soo Tak who had five wives at the same time. He started business in the early 1880s in his own premises now known as the Stone House which is still standing next to the Windsor Arcade in Cavenagh Street and currently occupied by Sue Wah Chin Ltd, drapers and tailors.

I would now like to refer to three papers written by prominent Darwin Chinese citizens in 1965 and reprinted in 1979 in different editions of the Chung Wah Society (official organisation of the Chinese community in Darwin) ‘Darwin Newsletter’.

CHINESE ENTERPRISE

The first paper by Ernest Fong relates to ‘CHINESE ENTERPRISE IN PRE-WAR DARWIN’. In this paper Ernest Fong said Chinatown played an important role in private enterprise in pre-war Darwin.

Ernest Fong said Up to the time of the evacuation of the town in February 1942 (Second World War), most of the stores in and around Cavenagh Street were owned by members of the Chinese community. It was for this reason, coupled with the fact that more than ninety percent of the Chinese community lived in this busy and crowded sector of Darwin, that it became known as Chinatown.

Darwin’s Chinatown in those days comprised of the area commencing from the present Church of England’s Parish Hall on the Esplanade down both sides of Cavenagh Street from the Esplanade to Edmund Street. It also took in part of Bennett Street and Knuckey Street from Cavenagh Street to Austin Lane. Edmund Street and Austin Lane are new streets built under the new town plan after the Second World War.

Ernest Fong commented that The compulsory evacuation of the civilian population in 1942 caused an upheaval in the previously isolated Chinese community. This brought many changes but the post-war Chinese, like their forebears, are still law-abiding and industrious and great believers in endeavour and enterprise.

FESTIVALS AND CUSTOMS

The second paper on Chinese ‘FESTIVALS AND CUSTOMS’ was written by the late Harry Chan who was the first Chinese Mayor of Darwin and the first elected President of the Northern Territory Legislative Council.

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Harry Chan wrote about Chinese burials and said Before the war many Chinese exhumed the bones of the dead and stored them in urns, or boxes, in a little chapel next to the Chinese Temple to await shipment to Hong Kong for subsequent transhipment to the ancestral village for the final place of rest. This custom is no longer practised in the Territory.

The little chapel and the present Chinese Temple in Woods Street are not the original buildings. The old buildings were demolished twice by cyclones and had to be completely rebuilt.

Harry Chan in his comment on 'RESPECT FOR FAMILY' said With the departure of our folks and with our younger generation adopting more and more of the Australian way of life, old customs are being forgotten. However, there is one custom that lingers on and which I hope will never leave us and that is the high regard we have for the family and the respect for our elders. We also treat our in-laws as part of the family and do not hold them in ridicule at any time.

That is the basis of Chinese family life and it is why we have no homes for the aged because we look after our old folks in our own homes.

Referring to the Chinese dialects spoken, Harry Chan wrote There were three main Chinese dialects spoken in Darwin before 1942, namely, Sze-Yup, Hakka and Heung-Sun. (These are Cantonese pronunciation.)

He said Darwin has lost its isolation since the end of World War Two and more Chinese, mainly brides, have come here from Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia adding to the number of different dialects spoken in Darwin. Nevertheless, Cantonese, the main dialect of the southern province of China, is the most common Chinese dialect in the Territory, although the national dialect of Mandarin is understood by a minority of the Chinese community.

Harry Chan wrote his paper in 1956; since then there has been a big influx of Timor Chinese evacuees from East Timor fleeing from the turmoil caused by the civil conflict in 1975 and the subsequent take-over by the Indonesians. These people speak Hakka and so now more Chinese speak Hakka than any other dialect in Darwin.

PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

The third paper, written by myself, on 'EARLY CHINESE MIGRATION TO THE NT' makes mention of the prejudice and discrimination encountered by the early Chinese and I quote: These prejudices and hostilities persisted until the early 1940s mainly through ignorance and resentment of the foreign 'Chinaman'.

There were talks of the 'YELLOW PERIL'. One learned gentleman from a sheltered home two thousand miles away in Adelaide, who was none other than the Minister for Education, Dr John Cockburn, denounced the Chinese as 'Birds of plunder who dug their gold and flew away to their homes and ended their days amidst the fumes of opium'.

Chinese were restricted to the Asiatic Ward at the Darwin Hospital and they were not wanted in sporting clubs. Ironically, Eddie Quong an Australian-born Chinese was appointed as Chairman of the Darwin Hospital Board in the post-war years.
I was one of the first Chinese to be accepted in the Public Service as a clerical officer in the NT Administration. In those days we did have Chinese working for the Government, but they were employed as 'house boys', cooks, or gardeners.

However, although I was accepted, there were still prejudices lingering among some of the high-brows in the public service. This soon became apparent when I was curtly informed by the Government Secretary (the top executive officer in the NT Administration at the time) that your application for admission to the wardroom mess has not been recommended by the committee of the civil wing of the Mess' (the Government Hostel for single public servants).

Later on, when the war started and everybody was transferred to Alice Springs, I became the Secretary of the Public Service Mess in Alice Springs. Before the transfer of the Government offices to Alice Springs, the Secretary of the Public Service Mess (Government Hostel) in Darwin had gone to Canberra. He later came to Alice Springs and he had to apply to me for admission to the Alice Springs Government Hostels. I thought this was a great opportunity to get my own back and not accept his application — but I didn't.

OBSTACLES FOR FIRST ETHNIC GROUP

The Chinese being the first non-English-speaking ethnic group in the Northern Territory had to face many obstacles. They were first brought to Australia because European labour was expensive and Europeans could not stand up to the hard rigorous life like Chinese.

Chinese were used by the Adelaide mining companies because the reefs were poor. The companies did not expect to get much out of the mines but the Chinese made the reefs pay. The Government wanted to build a railway in the desolate North and so more Chinese were allowed to come to the Territory to build the railway.

When Chinese labour was no longer needed immigration restrictions were enforced. Despite the treatment as third-class citizens those Chinese who were allowed to remain in the Territory carried on through the bad years. Where others failed the Chinese succeeded. Attempts were made to persuade European workers to develop the NT and an effort was made to recruit Indian labour.

At one stage the Japanese Government was invited to populate the North but the invitation was declined. We know of course that the Japanese changed their minds in 1942 and 'dropped in' uninvited.

The Second World War has changed the attitude of white Australia. People regardless of their ethnic origin are treated on their merits and their deeds. Well, more or less. But old prejudices die hard! (I like the word 'ETHNIC' that came into use after the war to replace the label of 'FOREIGNER'.)

So it was not with any great surprise we find in 1953 the Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition, the Honourable Arthur Calwell, accusing the local Darwin Chinese of 'trafficking in teenage brides from Hong Kong'.

Members of the Northern Territory Legislative Council spoke up against the allegations which they said were untrue. It can only be assumed that the Honourable Mr Calwell was sadly misinformed.
CONTRIBUTING TO NT AND AUSTRALIA

I'm now happy to say that nearly a hundred years later the Chinese have been accepted in the Territory without malice. Chinese have been elected as Aldermen to Darwin City Council and members of the Chinese community are prominent in civic, charitable, sporting and service organisations.

Furthermore, they are contributing to the Territory and Australia as doctors, engineers, solicitors, accountants and even as public servants — a far cry from the belittled Chinese man of the Territory's early pioneering days.

I might also mention that the late Harry Chan distinguished himself by being the first Chinese to be elected as Mayor of an Australian city and the first Chinese to be elected as President of an Australian State or Territory Legislative Council (Parliament). Incidentally, he was the first elected President of the Northern Territory Legislative Council. Previously, the Administrator of the Northern Territory automatically became the President of the NT Legislative Council.

Members of the Darwin Chinese community have been honoured by the Queen, receiving the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and Member of the British Empire (MBE) and other high Australian honours. Members of the Darwin Chinese community have also been appointed as Justices of the Peace.

The best way to describe the Chinese contribution to the Northern Territory is to quote a paragraph from Douglas Lockwood's book 'THE FRONT DOOR'. In this book he says From them and from others to come later there grew a second and third generation of Chinese and a fourth and fifth and they became the most permanent of all the citizens in the north giving their lives and ashes to it until now they are part of the soil, no different from any other part of the community except for their surnames and their bilingual ability and greater devotion to family and commerce.

RELICS OF THE PAST

Speaking of the ashes of the dead becoming part of the soil, I would like to read now part of an article on 'RELICS OF THE PAST' written by the Reverend S K Lo for the Chung Wah Society's 'DARWIN NEWSLETTER' of September, 1979.

Reverend Lo says in his article Two things came to mind when speaking of relics of the past of great significance to early Chinese pioneers in the Northern Territory.

They are 'Sam Sui' (the name of a Chinese rice wine) and 'Na Tou' (a phrase linking the body with the soil in the hereafter). Sam Sui was more than a wine imbibing drink to the Chinese workers who arrived in the Territory, many of whom were Cantonese. They had very little luggage but invariably among their rough wooden boxes there would be some jars of the precious Sam Sui which H M Customs allowed to be brought into the country.

When the Chinese arrived in Port Darwin they had to start work in the wilderness under the blazing sun, tormented by insects. Sam Sui then became their main armament against the trying conditions. Perhaps you could say the wine was more precious than the elusive gold. The Chinese wine did not interest the Europeans; so Sam Sui was always available from the Chinese storekeepers in the town. The rice wine came by ship from Hong Kong and Singapore.
ASHES BECOME PART OF SOIL

On the subject of 'Nai Tou', Reverend Lo wrote *This phrase means that after death the body is devoured by the earth and it effectively becomes part of that soil. But the Chinese did not want to be 'Nai Tou' here or become part of the foreign soil if they died in a foreign land. This is why the bones of the dead were exhumed for transhipment back to China so that they could be 'Nai Tou' in their ancestral soil.*

Perhaps I should mention that the custom of shipping the bones of the dead back to China was not practised by all the Chinese and this old custom ceased completely after 1942. It is interesting to note that there is still a traditional Chinese tomb or grave in the old Chinese cemetery in the Stuart Park area with the following inscription on the tombstone *This tomb for all our old friends was respectfully restored by the Chinese in Darwin in 1896 in the period of the Ch'ing Dynasty. Many of the old Chinese families still visit this historical tomb during the 'Ching Ming' Festival (a festival for the dead which falls around Easter time).*

One of the abilities of the Chinese who migrate to other countries is their quick acceptance of the language and customs of the country of their adoption. Language barriers are soon overcome and after a while many converse in the tongue of their new country. This is probably why the early Chinese and their offspring were able to surmount all the obstacles and contribute so much to the development of Darwin.

PECULIAR SURNAMES

No doubt many of you like Douglas Lockwood have been puzzled by the peculiar Chinese surnames. The simple reason for the unusual surnames is because when the migrants first arrive in the country, the Immigration officers take the last name as the migrant's surname. In China the first name is the surname. That's why we get all these funny surnames —— what could be called 'occidentalised surnames'. This is the main reason for the multi-variation of Chinese surnames overseas where brothers of the one family could have different surnames.

The easiest way to explain the mix-up is to take my surname of 'See-Kee', which was derived from my father's name of Tsang See-Kee. 'Tsang' being his surname and 'See-Kee' his Chinese given names. The Australian Immigration people used my father's last name (given name) as his surname. It became our family's surname in Australia. When I came out to Australia I was determined to retain my proper surname TSANG, but soon gave up because my father's surname of See-Kee was too well known and, being my father's fourth son, I was forced to use the name of See-Kee as my surname.

Another example of surname mix-ups common to Darwin is when people use their Chinese given names with their Chinese surname. The given name is written last and so sometimes this erroneously becomes the surname. Consequently, we have brothers of the one family with different surnames, such as George Lim, Charlie On, Harry Loong and Ernest Fong. They are all brothers, but they are known by different surnames because their last Chinese given names have been taken as their surnames.
To further complicate matters the new-arrivals, including Indo-Chinese refugees, have been told that Anglo-Australians take the last name as the surname. So some of these new-arrivals put their surname last, but the Immigration officers, knowing that the oriental surname if the first name, immediately take the first name as the surname —— and once again we have another mix-up.

PRAISE FROM OFFICIAL NARRATIVE IN 1882

Finally, I like to refer you again to William J Sowden’s official narrative on the Northern Territory entitled ‘THE NORTHERN TERRITORY AS IT IS’ written in 1882 for the then SA Minister for the NT, the Hon J Langdon Parsons, concerning the ‘NT, its settlement and industries’.

In commenting on the misconception about the Chinese in the 1880’s, William Sowden spoke strongly against a report in a leading Queensland paper that The Chinese have not formed agricultural settlements, either on their own account or under the direction of Europeans. They have done nothing, directly or indirectly, to add to the prosperity of the settlements. They have scraped together whatever alluvial gold was accessible to them, and we believe that they have strangled nearly all European attempts at colonisation, miners and traders alike. Nearly all the white men who went to the Northern Territory have either been ruined, driven out, or reduced to poverty.

Sowden’s strong comments were This is a gross libel, though it credits the Chinese for what they are held not to do here, that is, pioneer work in the discovery of new gold-fields. They have formed all, save four of the agricultural settlements. On all the European plantations which employ any labour the Chinese largely preponderate over other people as labourers. So, far from ‘strangling all European attempts at colonisation’, they have assisted them by starting gardens all over the mines. And to charge them with ‘ruining, driving out, or reducing to poverty’ the white man is to throw guilt upon the innocent.

Sowden added Ruinous rates of living, the discomforts of pioneer work in so inhospitable a region, and the lack of ground for hope of anything better as a result of the construction of a railway —— these drove the Europeans out of the Territory. The Chinese did not. But for them, many thousands of ounces of gold which are yearly exported, would not be produced.

Their bitterest opponents on the mines admit that they work alluvial ground the whites have long since abandoned, and, though their peculation must be stopped, and themselves kept from sharing, without some acknowledgement, the benefits of European discoveries, they certainly must be looked to as the men by whom the poorer auriferous country must be developed.

CHINESE WERE THE ANSWER

Summing up, in order for Port Darwin to develop and not meet the fate of the four other attempts at setting up a permanent settlement, there had to be something to attract settlers to this northernmost outpost of the Northern Territory of South Australia.

Already the Territory was burdened with debt and getting worse each year. Mining, pastoral and agriculture could be the solution, but these all required cheap labour working under the most trying conditions. When gold fields were discovered, the Chinese were the answer.
Then a railway was needed to serve all the mining country and help the navigable rivers to take down the pastoral and agricultural products to the seaboard. Again the Chinese provided the main work force, and later the legitimate business of the country.

The descendants of these Chinese pioneers remained in the Territory and as the author Douglas Lockwood wrote they became the most permanent of all the citizens in the North. This is all the more remarkable when you realise what the early ‘Chinaman’ had to put up with not only from the harsh inhospitable surroundings but also from the prejudices and discrimination prevailing at the time.

WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY

Even the Chinese who were born and bred in Australia were not allowed to have the full rights of Australian citizens and entitlement to Australian passports. The best they could hope for was a ‘Certificate of Exemption from Dictation Tests’.

Under the Immigration Restriction Act of the White Australian policy passed in 1901, all non-Europeans (that is, non-whites) had to pass a dictation test to enter or remain in Australia.

The dictation test, which could be given in any European language, was used as a device for exclusion from Australia. This policy remained essentially unchanged until after World War II. The dictation test was finally quietly abolished in 1958.

Moreover, Chinese were not allowed to join the North Australian Workers Union and they were not acceptable as Jurors.

Some insurance companies, like AMP, placed a loading on the life assurance premiums of Chinese.

Police constables could ask Chinese parents to remove the napkins of their babies so that a check could be made of the sex of the babies despite the fact that birth certificates had been issued by Government doctors in the hospital.

The Chinese living in the Territory had to endure these and many other restrictions and discrimination right up until the 1950s and in some instances the 1960s. It was annoying at the time but the Chinese somehow always managed to ‘turn the other cheek’.

In conclusion I should say I have made particular mention of this early racial discrimination so that you can appreciate more the CHINESE CONTRIBUTION TO EARLY DARWIN.

QUESTION TIME

And now it's Question Time. Although I was not born here and I came to Australia from Shanghai, China, I have lived in Darwin for 42 years and so I think I should be able to answer your questions.
RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

QUESTION: You said earlier that Chinese weren't allowed to participate in sports in Darwin. What sort of recreational activities did they do?

CSK: They weren't welcome to join clubs and compete in sporting fixtures, so they formed the Darwin Chinese Recreation Club (DCRC) and organised their own sporting activities. However, not long after I arrived here, some Chinese were participating in town sports.

CHINESE TEMPLE OR JOSS HOUSE

QUESTION: You mentioned a Chinese Temple. I've only visited the Joss House. Is that still in use or is that what you referred to as the Chinese Temple?

CSK: Well, the Chinese prefer to call it the Chinese Temple. 'Joss House' I think comes from the Portuguese word 'Deos'. The Joss House you visited would have been the Chinese Temple.

QUESTION: I thought it was 'Joss' meaning idol worship.

CSK: I am pretty sure 'Deos': means 'God'. Because of paper-back novels, Joss House conjures up images of Orientals, idols and pagan rites. That is the reason why we use the proper name of Chinese Temple. Just as in the Christian Churches, the statues represent God and Saints, so in the Chinese Temple the so-called idols are only images of the Gods.

QUESTION: So that temple is still being used?

CSK: Yes, its still being used. There's no minister or priest there. People go there to meditate and pray. Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian followers use the Temple and these include locals, people from Timor, Vietnam and South-East Asia. The Temple was completely rebuilt after it was demolished by Cyclone Tracy in 1974.

OLD CHINESE CEMETERY

QUESTION: Is the old Chinese cemetery in Stuart Park still used?

CSK: No. There used to be two Chinese cemeteries in the Stuart Park area. There's only one left because the other was converted into residential blocks and houses have been built over the old graves. Fortunately, the Government has declared the remaining old Chinese cemetery a Reserve Area. Some Chinese families visit the old Chinese cemetery during the Ching Ming Festival (sometimes called the Chinese Easter because it is around Easter time) to clean the ancient tombs there and to pray for the dead.
WAR DAMAGE TO TEMPLE

QUESTION: Was there any damage to the Chinese Temple when the Japanese bombed Darwin?

C S K: No. There was no damage caused by the air-raids, but there was some looting and vandalism after the civilians were evacuated from the town and the Military took over control of Darwin. There was extensive damage to the Post Office, government buildings and the wharf and there was general panic in the town, but that's another story.

CHUNG WAH SOCIETY

QUESTION: Can you tell us a bit about the Chung Wah Society?

C S K: Yes. Before World War Two there were several Chinese societies or associations in Darwin and there were three Chinese Temples. When the war started, the evacuation of civilians commenced. Women and children were the first to leave on ships for southern ports. Incidentally, the Chinese families on the ships were the only groups who had to declare how much money they had. After the war when the civilians were allowed to return to Darwin, some Chinese, including myself, thought this was a good time to start afresh and to forget past grievances and differences and to try and unite the community. A general meeting of the Chinese Community was convened and, as a result, it was unanimously agreed to disband all the old organisations and to form a parent body to look after all members of the Chinese community, irrespective of clan or dialect.

And that's how the Chung Wah Society came into being immediately after the war. It was also agreed to retain the Darwin Chinese Recreation Club (DCRC) to attend to the sporting and social activities of the community.

ANGLICISED SURNAMES

QUESTION: You mentioned there's been a trend to change Chinese names to Anglicised names. Was that because of discrimination and if it was, has the change made any difference?

C S K: No. It wasn't due to discrimination. It was mainly because the Chinese, like myself, thought it would be easier to adopt the Anglicised names rather than to complicate matters with a lot of explanations that seemed clear to us, but, apparently, were hard to understand by Anglo-Australians.

The Chinese regard their surnames very highly, but it really didn't matter if the spelling in English was different because our names in Chinese didn't change.
Further complications have been brought about by the new-arrivals. Those from Timor use Portuguese spelling while those from Vietnam use the French spelling and pronunciation.

END OF QUESTIONS AND LECTURE

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Charles See-Kee