

## Chinese Migration to Australia

The earliest recorded link between China and the new colony of New South Wales was made when several ships of the First Fleet, after dropping off their convict load, sailed for Canton to pick up goods for the English market. It is probable that the ships also hired crew and took on passengers who may have disembarked later at Sydney. The first recorded Chinese born settler was a carpenter, Ahuto, who came to Australia as a free man in 1803. Another early settler Mak Sai Ying (also known as John Pong Shying) had arrived by 1818 and was a carpenter, a farm hand, a builder and in 1829, the publican of the Lion Inn, Parramatta. A linen press he made for the pastoralist Elizabeth Macarthur in 1824 still exists. He married Sarah Jane Thompson on 3 February 1823 in St John's Church of England, Parramatta.

After convict transportation to Australia started to stop in the 1840s large numbers of Chinese men were sent to Australia as forced labourers. Between 1848 and 1853, over 3,000 Chinese workers on contracts arrived in Sydney for employment in the NSW countryside. Chinese labourers were paid very poorly and made to work very hard. Resistance to this cheap labour occurred as soon as it arrived and was heavily mixed with racism. Some stayed for the term of their contracts and then left for home, but others spent the rest of their lives in NSW.

With the discovery of gold in Australia, the volume of Chinese immigration increased significantly. In 1856 12,396 Chinese migrants made the journey to Australia. In 1861, 38,258 people, or 3.3 per cent of the Australian population, had been born in China. The majority of Chinese immigrants to Australia during the gold rush were indentured or contract labourers. Many made the voyage under the credit-ticket system managed by brokers and emigration agents. Only a small minority of Chinese people were able to pay for their own voyage and migrate to Australia free of debt. Their wives and families remained in China.

The Chinese miners referred to the Australian gold fields as 'Xin Jin Shan', or the New Gold Mountain. The Californian gold rush was in decline by the 1850s and had become known as 'Jiu Jin Shan', the Old Gold Mountain. The Chinese miners were particularly industrious with techniques that differed from the other miners. They lived in camps usually with others from the same part of China. They saved their money to send home to their families. These work practices, their physical appearance and the fear of the unknown led to racial persecution with violent clashes including those on the Buckland River in Victoria, and at Lambing Flat (now Young) in New South Wales. This racism led to the passing of Acts in the various colonies designed to reduce the number of Chinese people entering the colonies and eventually, in 1901, to the [Immigration Restriction Act](#) passed by the new federal government. This became known as the [White Australia Policy](#).

Chinese immigrants who followed the gold rushes usually returned home when they could afford the journey but some saw other opportunities to earn a living. By the 1890s Chinese people were represented in a wide variety of occupations including cooks, market gardeners, cabinet makers, scrub cutters, storekeepers, laundrymen, tobacco farmers, drapers, hawkers and interpreters.

By the time of Australian Federation, there were approximately 29,000 people of Chinese origin in Australia. Continued discrimination, both legal and social, reduced the occupational choices of Chinese people and also further immigration from China.