Telling Chinese-Australian Stories

Sophie Couchman

In 2008 I was employed by the Museum of Chinese Australian History to develop 'Remembering Chinatown', a self-guided audio walking tour of Melbourne's Little Bourke Street area. As a historian I was keen to use the opportunity to express current research in Chinese-Australian history in a heritage product. The aim was to create a product that would:

- entertain the general public,
- engage listeners with the built heritage of Chinatown,
- encourage listeners to 'see' the layers of history that lie behind the present-day urban landscape,
- introduce listeners to current ideas in Chinese-Australian history,
- tell stories about Chinese-Australians from their perspectives so that they are active participants in their own histories, and
- reveal the complexity and diversity of cross-cultural relations in the precinct.

Our knowledge of the history of Chinese in Australia has expanded enormously since the early work of labour historians in the 1970s. These understandings now need to be brought to the wider Australian public. This paper explores the practical challenges of conveying current perspectives in Chinese-Australian history through tailoring a commercial product aimed at the general public.

Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that the creation of heritage interpretation is a subjective process and interpreters are discouraged from trying to make it value-free (Ballantyne 1998: 2; Uzzell & Ballantyne 1998). There nevertheless remains a disquiet within heritage scholarship about the nature of what we choose to communicate in heritage interpretation and how this is decided (Staiff & Bushell 2004: 92–93). As Staiff and Bushell (2004: 98) have observed, the relationships between scholarship and the content of interpretation – so critical to how heritage is interpreted – is 'rarely the subject of discussion'. This paper responds to this call through a case study that explores the processes involved in deliberately integrating current historical scholarship into a commercial walking tour of the Little Bourke Street area, better known as Melbourne's Chinatown. It demonstrates how academic scholarship that complicates the history of Chinese in Australia can be expressed in formats suitable for a general audience. This adds depth to the heritage interpretation presented and offers another opportunity for academic scholarship to influence public discourse – in this case public perceptions of Chinese Australia.

The first three sections of this paper outline the framework within which 'Remembering Chinatown' was created. They address the nature of the project, the requirements of the Museum of Chinese Australian History (Chinese Museum) that commissioned it, and the issues which shape the development of an effective walking tour. The fourth section details how academic perspectives were woven into the walking tour and, finally, explores the challenges that arose in trying to achieve this.

The project

'Remembering Chinatown' is a self-guided audio walk through the Little Bourke Street area, between Swanston and Exhibition Streets in Melbourne's central business district in Australia. Visitors are guided via a recording played on an MP3 player with an illustrated booklet containing a map. As the tour progresses visitors learn about the area's history through the memories of Chinese-Australians who lived and worked in the area in the 1930s and 1940s. Oral history recordings with four Chinese-Australians – Mabel Wang, Raymond Lew Boar, Alan Lew and Ham Chan – form the core of the tour. Their stories are tied together with narration and directions. The accompanying booklet includes a map of the walk route, historic photographs related to the people and places viewed on the walk one-page biographies of the interviewees, and a short history of the area's Chinese heritage.

I pitched the idea for the project to the Chinese Museum in 2007 and they raised the funds to manage the project. I was employed as a contractor on the project, which cost a little under $14,000, funded through a grant from Heritage Victoria with some additional financial support from Lovell and Chen architects and heritage consultants, the Loong Kong Society, and in-kind support from community radio station 3MBS and the Bose Store.

Chinese Museum requirements

The Chinese Museum was interested in developing a commercially viable guided tour of the Chinatown area that would cater to individuals and small groups of adult visitors who spontaneously attended the Museum. The Museum already has a successful guided tour program of the Museum and Chinatown for school children but this formula did not work for adult tours. Moreover, these tours required advance bookings for a minimum of six people in order to be suitably organised and financially feasible.

Visitors and stakeholders of the Chinese Museum include people who are fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese and so to meet their needs the Museum has a policy to operate in both English and Chinese. Early plans to create Cantonese or Mandarin versions of the tour were, however, quickly abandoned. The first reason for this was cost. The creation of a bi-lingual or tri-lingual tour would involve the translation of the walk narration and either additional interviews with Chinese-speaking interviewees and/or the cost of employing actors to read translations of the original interviews in English. The second reason was that many of the potential subjects of the interviews (Chinese-Australians who had lived and worked in Australia since the 1930s and 40s) were more comfortable speaking English than Cantonese or Mandarin.

The project appealed to the Museum because they were keen to record memories of Chinese-Australian life in the pre-WWII era. The nature and character of Chinese immigration to Australia changed dramatically after the war. Rather than coming predominantly from southern China, Chinese immigration in the post-war period came from all over China

and also from southeast Asia and for a range of different reasons. These immigrants quickly formed communities and organisations that were separate and distinct from those of earlier Chinese immigrants. There is limited time left to capture memories of this earlier era. The Museum already had a strong oral history collection and the idea was that this project would contribute to this collection.

Finally, while never explicitly mentioned as part of the project brief, it was understood that the walking tour would be a product of which Chinese-Australians could be proud. The Chinese Museum is a community-run museum that relies on the support of Chinese communities in Australia and so Chinese-Australian communities were important stakeholders in the project.

Walking tour requirements

In order to create an effective walking tour certain practical issues also needed to be considered. A wide range of users had to be able to complete the walk comfortably. This limited the distance and duration that could be covered in the tour. Little Bourke Street is on a slight incline and there are very few places to stop and rest, adding to the difficulty of designing the walking tour. 'Remembering Chinatown' was kept to a length of one hour: it starts at the Chinese Museum (near Exhibition Street), travels down Little Bourke Street for about two blocks, almost to Swanston Street (see Figures 1 & 2), and contains deviations down some laneways before doubling back to the Chinese Museum. The section of Little Bourke Street between Spring and Exhibition streets and the Lonsdale and Little

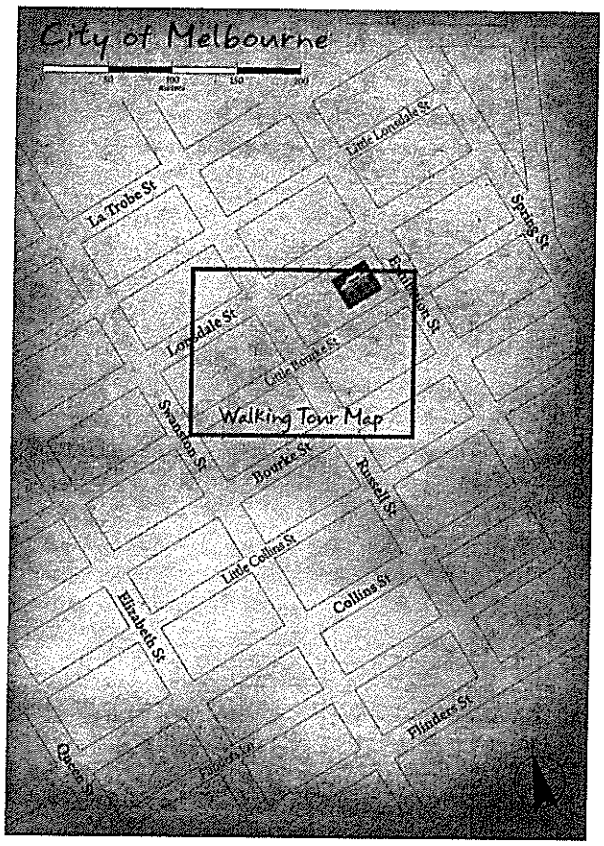
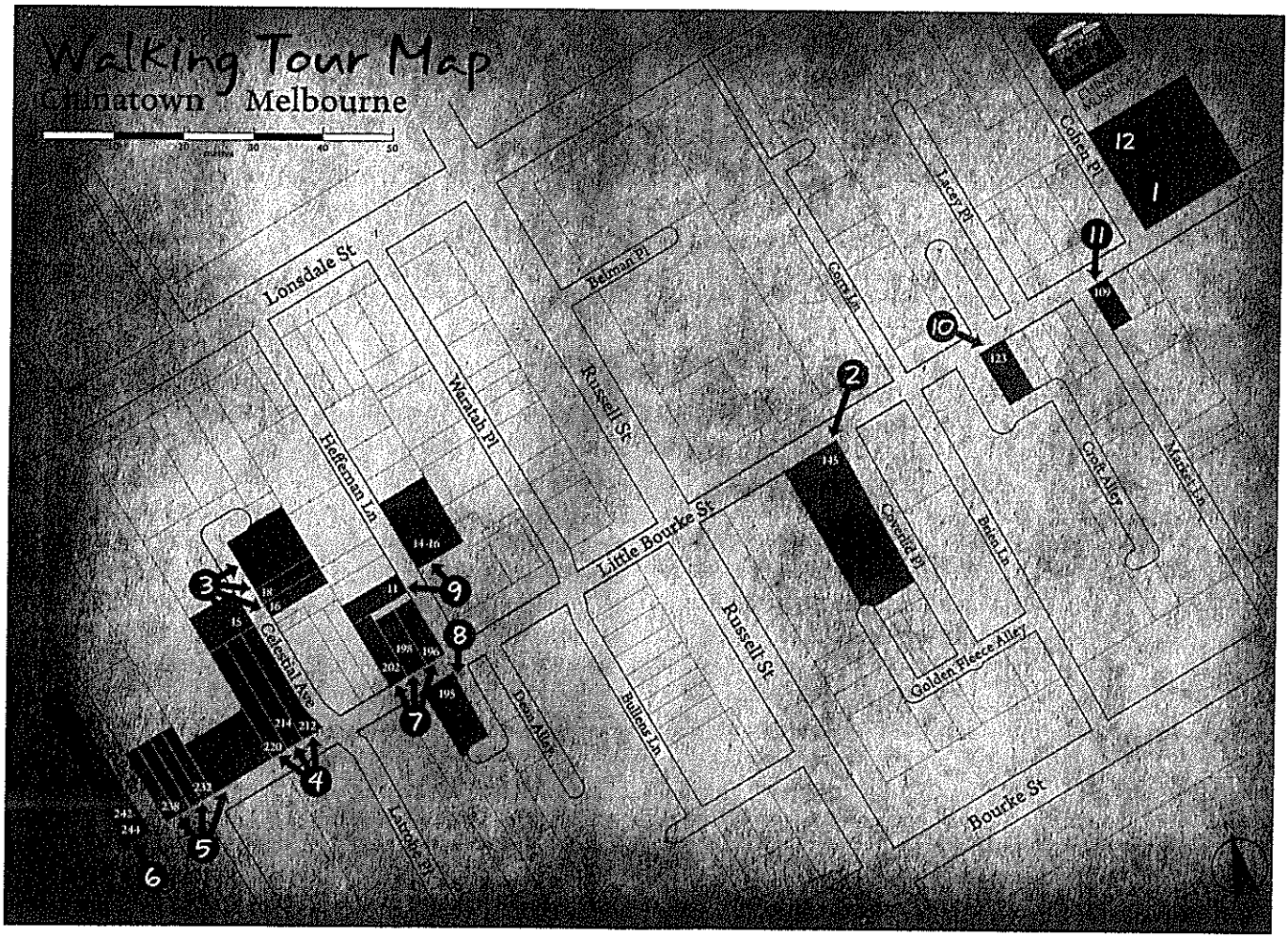


Figure 2 *'Remembering Chinatown': Little Bourke Street (Source: Museum of Chinese Australian History).*

Figure 1 *'Remembering Chinatown' Walking Tour Map (Source: Museum of Chinese Australian History).*



Lonsdale Street area would have provided additional perspectives on the history of the area but these were not included as they would have made the length of the tour too long, both in terms of time and distance. These areas also did not feature most strongly in interviewees' memories of the area.

A number of accepted heritage principles guide the creation of effective interpretation (Ham 1992: 8–21; Laing et al. 2008: 207–10; Tilden 1977: 3–10; Weiler & Ham 2000: 554). Interpretation should be intellectually interesting without coming across as an education package in which visitors are 'taught' in an academic sense. It should be enjoyable or engaging for visitors. In order to have people understand the information it needs to be relevant to them, relating to their everyday experiences. Material is also better understood if it is well organised and follows a story with a beginning, middle, and end. It should also be organised around a theme – an overriding message, rather than a topic or subject matter. The extent to which this was achieved is beyond the scope of this paper but the ways in which these issues were addressed in the tour are discussed in the following sections.

Integrating academic perspectives

The next step was to weave some of the current academic perspectives on Chinese-Australian history into the walking tour. Since 1993, there has been a multi-disciplinary conference (or panel within a larger history conference) dedicated to Chinese-Australian history almost every year (see 'Past conferences' 2011). Chinese-Australian history can no longer be viewed as a 'forgotten' history, but despite a wealth of research that dates back to the 1920s and which expanded rapidly after the 1970s, scholars of Chinese-Australian history still struggle to get the field fully recognised within Australia's national histories and the popular historical imagination (S. Fitzgerald 2001: 140; Fitzgerald 2007: 12). In this sense Australia's Chinese history remains 'hidden' until individuals 'discover' this body of literature more generally in the course of their own research.

General understanding of Chinese-Australian history is limited because it tends only to intersect Australia's national history at two points: the 1850s gold rushes and the evolution of the White Australia policy. These two issues mark the limit of most people's understanding of Chinese-Australian history. In my experience people are aware that large numbers of Chinese arrived during the gold rushes, and that due to poll taxes they began disembarking from Robe in South Australia and walked to the Victorian gold fields. There is knowledge of racial tensions on the diggings and violent riots during the gold rush period such as that in Buckland, Victoria in 1857 and in Lambing Flat (renamed Young), New South Wales in 1860-1861. They may know that after the gold rushes most returned home to China and that the White Australia policy blocked further Chinese immigration and separated families. Some remember the few that remained who eked out a living as market gardeners and hawkers.

While there is nothing substantially incorrect in the historical details of this narrative, it nevertheless offers an uncomplicated view of Chinese-Australian history. In this Chinese immigrants remain an amorphous and nameless group, victims of violence and the legislative whims of white Australians and an immigrant group with little control over their own histories. There is a limited understanding of the subtleties of cross-cultural interaction and how this changed over time and depending on context. The changing nature of racialised attitudes to Chinese in Australia, so carefully described by Andrew Markus (1979: chap. 1) and Ann Curthoys (1973: 5–7), is often overly generalised in public discourse. The extent of violence and conflict on the gold fields is perhaps exaggerated (McGowan 2004: 314). This is also a history which emphasises southern Australia and tends to end in the bush with the gold rushes or at federation with the Immigration Restriction Act (Couchman, Fitzgerald & Macgregor 2004: v; J. Fitzgerald 2001; Ganter 2003). Other kinds of histories are neglected in this process.

Scholarship since the 1990s has increasingly taken a more nuanced approach to Chinese-Australian history that tests the rigidity of the divide between white and Chinese-Australians, giving Chinese-Australians a role in the creation of what we call Australia and a place in its histories on their own terms, as individuals with agency and control over their lives. The classification of Chinese as sojourners who did not settle in Australia has been tested in part by their very persistence in Australia and in the historical record (Jones 2005; Shen 2001; Wong Hoy 2006). Scholars are increasingly taking perspectives that reach beyond the nation-state as a frame of reference in order to understand Chinese-Australian history from global, transnational, local and *qiaoxiang* (home village) perspectives (Lake & Reynolds 2008; Rasmussen 2009; Williams 2002). Others have argued that there was less segregation on the goldfields, towns and cities than previously assumed, even within 'Chinese' spaces (Couchman 1999; Lydon 1999; Mayne 2004; McGowan 2004; Reeves 2006; Rule 2004).

Significant and sustained processes of cultural exchange between white and Chinese Australia have also been explored, particularly within personal and sexual relationships and in business and public life (Bagnall 2006; Kuo 2008; Osmond & McDermott 2008; Rasmussen 2009; Woollacott 2007). In *Big White Lie*, John Fitzgerald (2007) took these arguments to a national level when he challenged scholars 'to establish how different communities came together to constitute Australia as a nation' demonstrating 'how their transnational, social, cultural and economic connections succeeded in linking Australia to the world' (213–14). He urges historians to:

> embed Chinese-Australian stories in Australian history to the point of demonstrating that Chinese-Australians were so unequivocally Australian that so-called anti-Chinese attitudes were not anti-Chinese at all but anti-Australian, even in White Australia. (ibid.: 5)

The challenge is how to work these more nuanced scholarly ideas into the public imagination. Heritage interpretation offers an opportunity to do this.

This walking tour project particularly appealed to me as an historian of Chinese-Australians as it provided the opportunity to tell an urban-based history of the Chinese in Australia set well into the twentieth century – a perspective not normally found in national Australian histories. The tour was constructed from interviews with Chinese-Australians who lived in the 1930s and 1940s, deep in the period covered by the White Australia policy. This made it possible to directly challenge the idea that Chinese-Australian history finishes with the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901. Jennifer Cushman's 1984 critique of Chinese-Australian continues to influence the field and I was eager to locate the 'Chinese experience within the Chinese community itself' (100–1) rather than frame their history according to Australian attitudes to it, I wanted to let Chinese-

Australians tell their own history and make them active subjects within their own histories rather than victims or passive pawns within the machinations of White Australia (ibid.: 112).

Chinese perspectives on the history of Melbourne's Chinatown area were particularly important because much of the existing information available (particularly on heritage building signage in the street and in existing guided heritage walking tours, produced by the Chinese Museum and others) has focused on the physical fabric of the buildings, the significance of their heritage design, and their white Australian architects (Blake 1980). While the Chinese-Australian occupants and owners of these buildings are mentioned, the nature of their lives – particularly Chinese-Australians who are not public figures – are treated in a superficial manner. In these narratives, Chinese-Australians are simply names and occupations and there is little to help visitors connect with these people. There is also no sense of what it was like to live and work in the area. I felt that by layering people's memories and experiences of Chinatown over the story of its built heritage visitors could not only obtain a richer historical experience but also a more interesting one that allowed them to relate to real people.

Since the 1980s, recorded oral histories have been one of the key strategies employed to give Chinese-Australians a voice so they can tell their own histories (Giese 1995; 1997; Loh 1989; Loh & Ramsay 1986; Wilton 1996, 2002). Oral histories allow Chinese-Australians to reconstruct the past as they see it and offer historians different angles to explore Chinese-Australian history (Wilton 2002: 151–2). They also help to make Chinese-Australians central and active participants in their own histories rather than hazy figures who are gazed at over a racial divide (Giese 1994: 3). While the idiosyncratic nature of the personal stories that emerge out of oral histories are necessarily biased and subject to the vagaries of memory they also allow us to see Chinese-Australians as real people with differing motivations and experiences. Oral histories provide an opportunity to explore the lived experience of Chinese-Australians rather than view their lives through the rhetoric of politicians and newspapers and the restrictions of legislation.

It was important to encourage visitors to think about how Melbourne's Chinatown area has changed and how being a 'Chinatown' might have meant different things over time as the nature of the area and the Chinese-Australian community associated with it changed. Evidence of the many layers of the area's history is still visible in the extant built environment of Little Bourke Street and is also evident in the lives of those associated with the area. Since the seventeenth century one of the stereotypes held by many Europeans about China is that it is archaic and unchanging (Hegel 2001; Mackerras 1989: 110–11). This stereotype spread internationally and so was present in modified forms when Chinese immigrated to places such as Australia (Fitzgerald 2007: 19, 23). Chinese culture and spaces (such as Chinatowns) were viewed, particularly in the nineteenth century, as replicas of an imagined unchanging life in China (Anderson 1991: 3; Clarke 1868). These stereotypes also resonate through into the present day. There is a tendency to see Chinese-Australians as culturally 'Chinese' until they 'assimilate' and seamlessly become 'Australian' with little sense that there might be a variety of ways of being simultaneously 'Chinese' *and* 'Australian' (Curthoys 2001) – that being 'Australian' might also involve having a 'Chinese' face, eating 'Chinese' food or wearing 'Chinese' dress (Fitzgerald 2007: 23, 210–35).

It was also important to expose visitors of Chinatown to a more nuanced view of the history of Chinese in the area; one that presented a range of cross-cultural relationships, that demonstrated the persistence of Chinese in Australia, that showed a variety of Chinese-Australian life paths and activities, that explored some of Australia's urban Chinese-Australian history and that revealed diversity within the Chinese-Australian community. I was keen to highlight how the area, although distinctly 'Chinese' in character, was also an integral part of mainstream Melbourne.

There was a risk that in expressing this academic scholarship directly in the narration that the interpretation would come across as too 'academic' and become unappealing. Instead these ideas and arguments were expressed indirect, through the anecdotes selected and the way in which these anecdotes were used. For example, when Alan Lew remembered arriving in Melbourne for the first time from Hong Kong he showed that although Chinese-occupied, Melbourne's Chinatown was different to other 'Chinese' places such as Hong Kong. He states:

> Little Bourke Street [was] very, very strange because – in Little Bourke Street, I know most Chinese live and do business there but the shops and the environment – actually very, very strange – very different environment ... at that time.

In discussion about the Young Chinese League there is a small section about the period when Ben Martin trained members to box. This was a Young Chinese League activity no longer widely remembered by local Chinese-Australians and so added interest for them, but it also offered evidence of Chinese-Australian involvement in a diverse range of activities. Alan's enjoyment learning and playing the violin also conveyed this message. Ham Chan offered an insight into some of the social divisions in the area – between Chinese-Australians born in Australia and those born in China. He talked about being part of the Young Chinese League: 'There wasn't much for us youngsters ... we were not even allowed to join the YCL because that was considered as mainly for Australian-born Chinese'. (He did anyway.)

Sometimes the walk narration was used explicitly to direct visitors' thoughts, such as when I wanted to ask people to consider how the status and financial fortunes of Chinese-Australian families might be different in China and Hong Kong than in Australia:

> Narration: People tend to think of Chinese market gardeners and hawkers as poor but Ham grew up with his mother in one of two multi-storey properties owned by his father in Hong Kong.
>
> Ham Chan: We were more or less considered a middle class Chinese family in Hong Kong ...

By contrasting the memories of different interviewees against each other it was possible to show different Chinese-Australian perspectives on particular topics and also demonstrate some of the social differentiation within Melbourne's Chinese communities. Mabel Wang, for example, referred to 'all these old men' who would 'go from one shop to the next shop and have a chat with everybody'. In the tour this is directly followed by a quote from Raymond Lew Boar describing his father's regular visits to Sun Shing Loong's store: 'And I remember my father used to roll tobacco and put it on the end of this spout and light it with a taper and just blow away on it for about tent

minutes and then go off again and go back to work ...'. While Mabel is talking about a group of men who are unknown and distant to her, for Raymond one of these men is his father.

The lives of the interviewees could also be juxtaposed against their memories in ways which created a layered walk narrative. Mabel Wang talked about how most of the men in Little Bourke Street did not have families with them in Australia. This was certainly the case, but the four interviewees in the walk were children and part of families (some geographically separated and some not) during this same period. This complicated Mabel's broad statements about social and family life at the time.

In order to show the relationships between Chinatown and the rest of Melbourne, stories were chosen that demonstrated the engagement of interviewees with the wider Melbourne area. Questions were used to draw out these stories during oral history interviews. These memories included shopping at nearby department stores, information about buildings in the area that were not occupied by Chinese-Australians, and stories about non-Chinese involvement in Chinatown, such a visits to Chinese cafes by other Australians. Without mounting any explicit arguments, the idea was that these small fragments of everyday life which function at the local level would sit in contrast to the heavy-handed discrimination against Chinese expressed in Australia's immigration restrictions. The aim was to encourage people to consider the complexity of Chinese-Australian life within local communities deep in the national framework of the White Australia Policy (see also Fitzgerald 2007: 221; Rasmussen 2009).

For historical accuracy and also to counter the visual bias towards nineteenth century illustration in published histories, it was important that the imagery used in the accompanying booklet related as closely as possible to Little Bourke Street of the 1930s and '40s. While late nineteenth-century imagery depicting Melbourne's Chinatown is relatively easy to source there was much less for the early decades of the twentieth century. Material was therefore drawn from private collections and images of relevant artefacts held by the Chinese Museum. Where possible, images from the collections of the interviewees were used. Where images from the period (of buildings for example) could not be located images from *later* in the twentieth century rather than earlier were used (see Figure 3). Sometimes images necessary for the tour simply did not exist. Alan Lew did not have any family photographs from his childhood. He grew up in Melbourne with his father and uncle but the spiritual centre of the family remained in China – where the photographs were. The photograph in the final booklet was cropped from a colour photocopy of a photograph held by his friend (see Figure 4). The original photograph had been loaned to this friend by another friend now deceased.

Challenges

Trying to balance the practical needs of a walking tour, the requirements of the Chinese Museum, and the desire to draw on more subtle academic approaches to Chinese-Australian history resulted in some challenges. A number of these challenges were associated with working with oral histories. Secondary material about the Chinatown area in the 1930s and

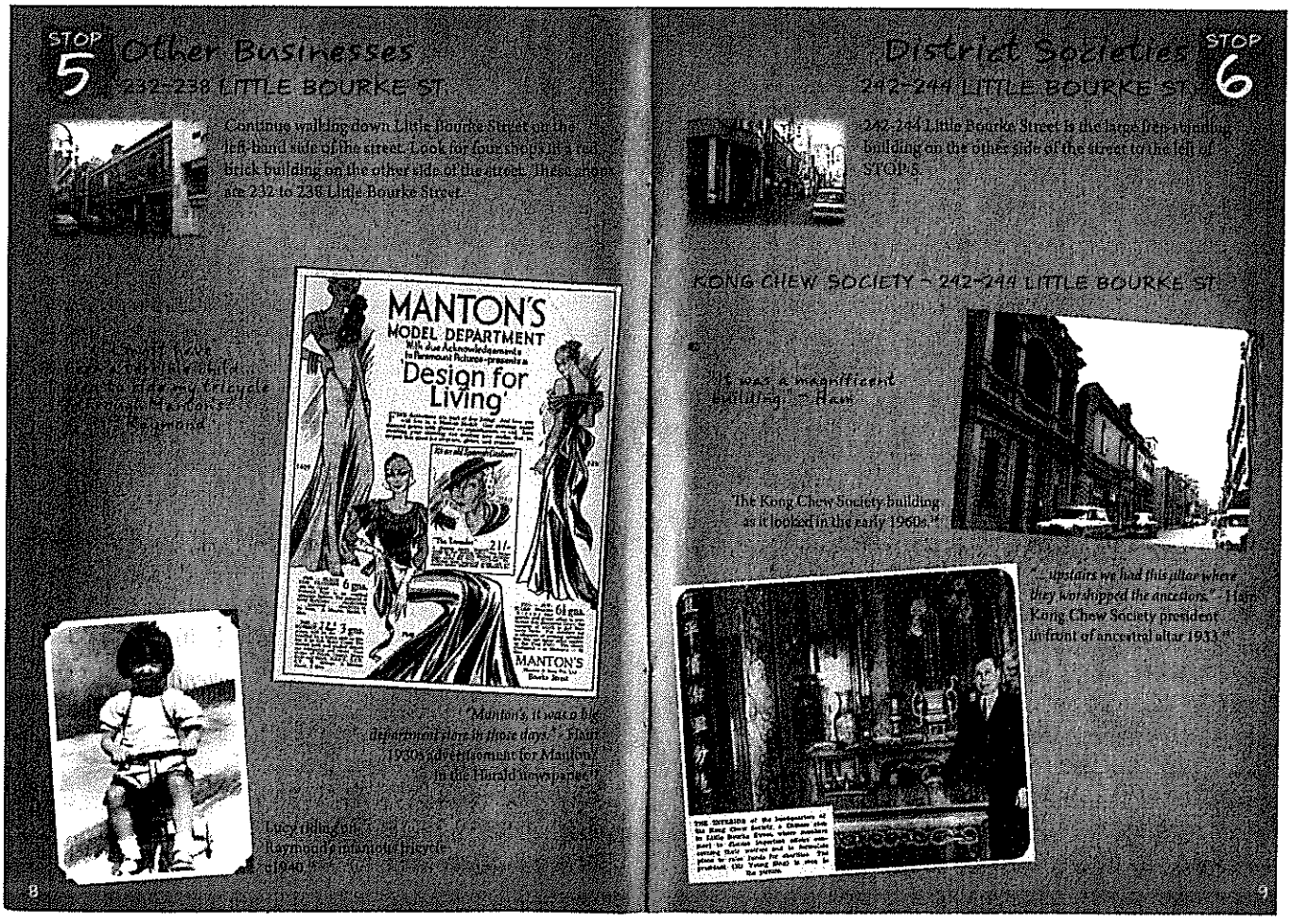


Figure 3 *'Remembering Chinatown' Stops 5 & 6: Little Bourke Street (Source: Museum of Chinese Australian History).*

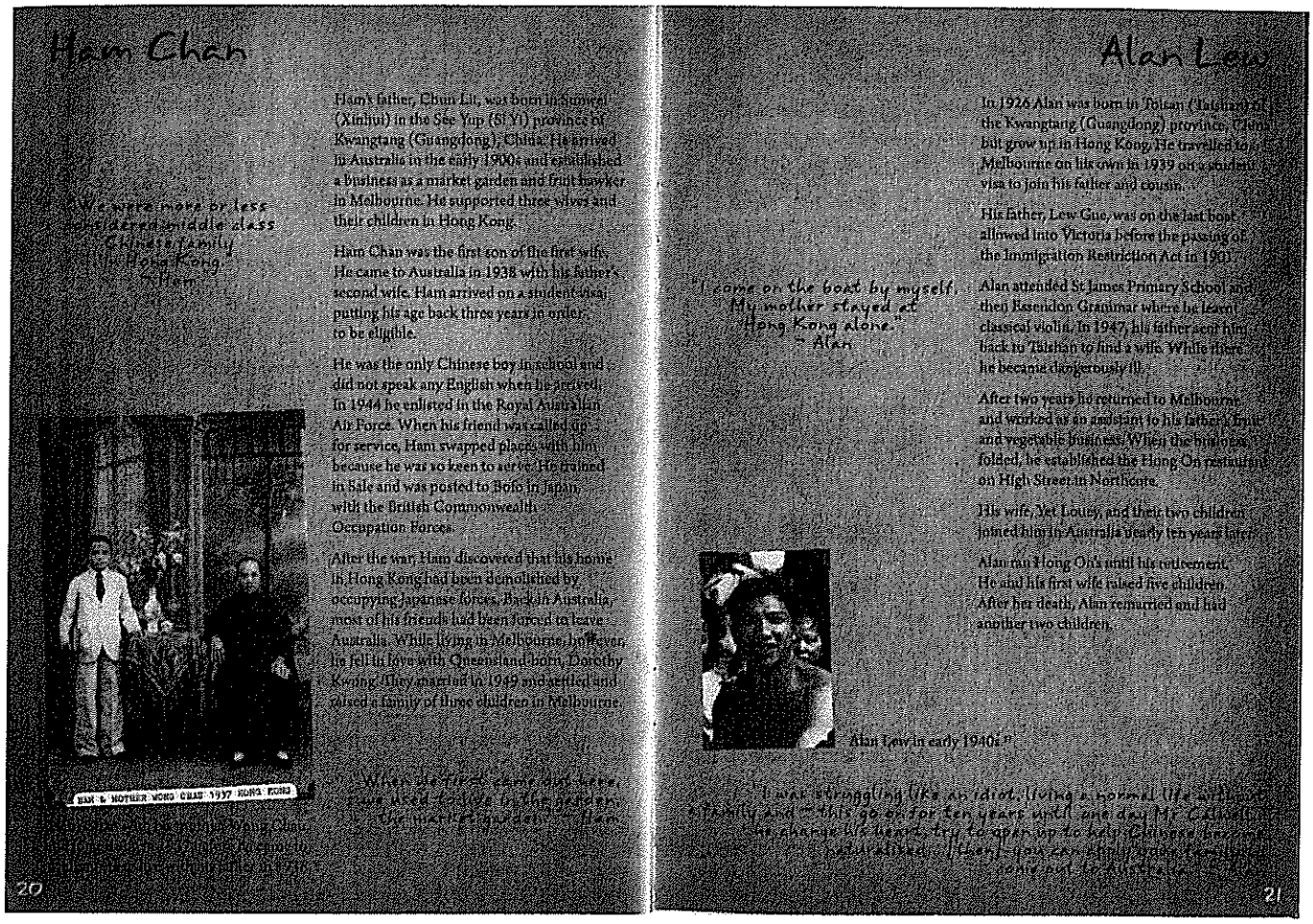


Figure 4 *'Remembering Chinatown': Ham Chan & Alan Lew (Source: Museum of Chinese Australian History).*

'40s is scarce and so the oral history recordings used in the walking tour served as research for the walking tour as well as part of the final product. In addition, these interviews were also intended to be valuable to other researchers as part of the Chinese Museum's oral history collection.

A mix of new and existing interviews was used in the final tour. The Chinese Museum has twelve oral history interviews with Chinese-Australians related to Melbourne and the Little Bourke Street area. Most were unsuitable as they did not discuss the Chinatown area in enough detail and one was very lengthy (over five hours long) and had not been transcribed. Four new interviews were recorded. One of these could not be used because although the interview was strong, the interviewee's memories of Chinatown were not substantial enough to be included in the walk. There was also difficulty locating people prepared to be interviewed for the project – an issue also encountered by others (see, for example, Koi 1993: 287–8). Some people were not interested and others too frail. Obtaining interviewees therefore relied on personal and Museum networks which led to people who had already participated in interviews with the Museum. One interviewee was prepared to give me permission to use an earlier oral history interview but not a second follow-up interview, which meant using a lower-quality recording. One person agreed to give a second interview. Therefore two existing interviews and three new interviews were used to construct the tour. Only two new interviews with people who had not previously been interviewed for the Museum were added to the Museum's archive.

The shortage of possible interviewees meant I was also not able to select interviewees for their suitability as informants for the walk. It was by good fortune rather than good design that the backgrounds of interviewees used were diverse enough to offer different perspectives on the Little Bourke Street area. There was some mix of genders, with one woman and three men. Two of the interviewees were born in Australia and two in China. Two lived in the Little Bourke Street area and two offered perspectives as visitors. There was a range of religious upbringings and they also came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Similarly, what was required from the oral histories for the walking tour were entertaining, evocative stories – that which is not necessarily the output of an oral history interview. Again interviewees were not selected on this basis, but it was fortunate that they all had good story-telling skills. Raymond Lew Boar was particularly good, not only at drawing a visual picture of the place but also using modern analogies to explain himself, a technique recommended for good interpretation (Ham 1992: 11):

> People used to buy three dim sims or six dim sims. It was quite a quick little [meal] – like McDonalds in a way, people come in and buy three dim sims and eat them on the way, down the street or something like that.

In addition to providing well-told stories, interviewee stories also had to have content suitable for the tour. Stories needed to be closely tied to Little Bourke Street's built environment, particularly that which survives today. Early feedback from testers made it clear that if material did not relate to the extant built environment it was difficult to maintain interest, regardless

of how entertaining the narrative was. In order to ensure users of the walking tour had as many tools as possible to imagine and connect with the area's past it was also necessary to get interviewees to draw on all these senses in their descriptions. Anecdotes were carefully selected for their descriptive power and interviewees were deliberately encouraged to describe in minute detail their memories of places using all their senses in interviews. Some interviewees tended to remember things in terms of different senses in any case. Mabel Wang in particular:

> I don't know whether you have ever experienced the smell of herbs but it's a lovely smell and – oh you know – a mixture of herbs, they're dried up plants actually. And it as a really nice smell. So you walk into this dark, dark shop... and the floor's rough, it's only asphalt floor and there's a wooden, an old wooden counter, and all the walls, three walls, would be lined with small drawers. Tiny, tiny drawers. And on each of the drawers there was written what the herb was.

In order to interpret the Chinatown area through the memories of the interviewees it was also important that the interviews were conducted in a way which allowed them to talk about the places that were special to them without biasing them towards the spaces that I thought were historically or visually important. A balance was needed. It was only after Raymond Lew Boar's recorded interview, where he spoke about the places that were important to him, that I asked him about why he hadn't mentioned one of the heritage-listed buildings in the street. He then told me that as children they avoided it because it was vacant and they thought it was haunted. In subsequent interviews I therefore waited until the end of interviews to ask more directly about other buildings or issues that interviewees might not have mentioned.

Sometimes vivid memories and strong anecdotes were associated with buildings that no longer existed, such as the Kong Chew Society building and the Chinn family home, which was also the headquarters of the Young Chinese League. The destruction of parts of the Little Bourke Street area and the gaps in the present landscape were important as they also demonstrated how Chinatown has changed over time. To counter the absence of these buildings in the present landscape and aid visitor imagination historical photographs of the buildings were included in the accompanying booklet (see Figure 3).

In order for interviewee memories to make sense and have interest, a brief outline of each interviewee's life story was included in the tour. The original aim was to get interviewees to tell their own histories in the walking tour. This proved to be impractical because interviewee accounts (even edited) were too long. Lengthy biographies could not be included because this information did not directly relate to the buildings and spaces that visitors were examining. Instead, short biographies with quotes were included in the walking tour booklet with only very short accounts in the walking tour narration (see Figure 4). This narration was then generally presented in sections of the tour when visitors were walking between stops rather than at a tour stop.

In order for interviews to also have research value, a wider range of memories about the lives and experiences of interviewees was needed than was necessary for the walking tour. Financial limitations meant subjects could only be interviewed once for an hour, and so the extent to which they could be interviewed about the rest of their lives was limited. Interviewees completed a brief biographical questionnaire to reduce recording time. Slightly longer interviews were also recorded on my own time in order to get fuller life stories.

Difficult or painful subject matter and its relationship to visitor interest posed another challenge in the tour's development. From the later half of the nineteenth century through to the present day the press and general public have been fascinated by stories of opium and gambling in the world's Chinatowns. Melbourne's Chinatown is no exception. This subject matter makes for exotic, exciting stories and so since the mid-nineteenth century these stories have been told and retold in public spaces such as newspapers, novels, historical accounts and exhibitions. Repeating stories about this kind of subject matter risks perpetuating racial stereotyping. Although opium and gambling were an important part of Melbourne's Chinatown community, they are not stories welcomed by some Chinese-Australians and the Museum was concerned about their inclusion. They are stories of addiction and poverty rather than self-sufficiency and resilience, and for some Chinese-Australians they are a source of shame and embarrassment. While two-up and a couple of beers at the pub is seen as quintessentially 'Australian', stories of Chinese gambling and opium smoking, driven by similar motivations, have been used as an excuse to exclude Chinese from being embraced as Australian. Nevertheless, just as it is important not to dwell on negative stereotypes it is also therefore important not to glorify or sanitise the past. It can also be argued that this pre-existing popular discourse provides a basis from which the public can be engaged and then encouraged to think about these issues in more sophisticated ways (Uzzell & Ballantyne 1998). The challenge is how to achieve this delicate balance.

It was important to address opium and gambling in the walking tour as they were a significant part of the area's history. Interviewees were asked about their memories of opium and gambling in interviews and they shared anecdotes and their views on these subjects. I chose to tackle these issues almost exclusively through the memories and voices of the interviewees with little if any accompanying narration. There was no commentary about opium smoking and only a small comment that '[g]ambling has always been a popular Australian pastime'. The intention was to personalise these histories and to reveal different views within the Chinese community about them. It was hoped this would reduce the sensationalism associated with these topics and in turn normalise them. Raymond Lew Boar remembered playing tricks on the local opium establishment as a child by knocking on their door and running away. Alan Lew described how the people he knew became different people once under the influence of opium and how unwelcome he felt. It was fortunate that Alan was also very frank about his gambling addiction as a young man. Although this occurred a little outside the framework of the time period it turned the Chinese-Australian history of gambling into a very personal one, and so I chose to include it.

The development of the White Australia Policy and its impact on the history of Chinese in Melbourne's Chinatown is another example of difficult subject matter. Some Chinese-Australians would prefer to leave this aspect of Australia's history in the past and focus on the more positive aspects of Chinese-Australian history. Others are keen to ensure this history is not forgotten and remain angry about its impact on the history of

Chinese in Australia. The history of the White Australia Policy and the role of racism in Chinese-Australian lives is also not always known or fully appreciated by the general public. It is, however, easy to oversimplify this history in such a way that Chinese become powerless victims whose lives were overly-determined by government bureaucrats, racial taunts, and anti-Chinese discrimination. In a one-hour tour there was not time to properly convey the complexity of these issues. I chose therefore to briefly outline the history of the white Australia Policy and its impact on Chinese immigration as part of the background information at the start of the tour. The lives of my interviewees then sit alongside and within this context as examples of the local lived experience of Chinese-Australians. These lives showed Chinese arriving in Australia despite immigration restrictions and living productive lives, but they also show how Alan's and Ham's families were separated and how they arrived temporarily as students and then lived with the uncertainty of visa extensions until granted Australian residency as adults.

Conclusions

The effectiveness of 'Remembering Chinatown' as a walking tour and method of communicating current ideas about Chinese-Australian history can only be touched on here, as this requires a different kind of analysis to that used. The use of oral history recordings (some with variable sound quality and one with a voice with a heavy accent) on walking tour in a busy city street has posed problems for users (Mountford & Reeves 2010). Constructing the tour around the lives of the Chinese-Australians and their memories of Chinatown did not leave a lot of space to construct the tour around themes according to effective interpretation principles. While an urban history of Chinatown in the 1930s and '40s that draws on the memories of 'ordinary' Chinese-Australians fills a gap in the historiography of Chinese-Australian history, this does not necessarily mean that this is subject matter which will readily engage the general public. Sales of the tour have so far been slow, despite positive anecdotal feedback.

This paper has explored how current historical ideas in Chinese-Australian history were incorporated into a heritage walking tour, the difficulties that this posed, and the compromises that were made. As observed by Staiff and Bushell (2004: 98), there is perhaps an inevitable gap between ideological frameworks and interpretation. Markwell, Stephenson and Rowe (2004: 465–9) have also described the shortfalls between interpretation content and historical ideology in the development of an urban walking tour. However, while it is vital that this disjuncture and these resulting tensions are acknowledged and discussed, it is also important to remember that there are many ways to disseminate ideas. Academic publications and heritage interpretation are two of a number of methods of communicating to the public. Both formats have inherent limitations but both can nevertheless play a role in encouraging people to think about the heritage and history of places where they live and visit.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Asian Studies program at La Trobe University for their support through an honorary fellowship and Amanda Rasmussen and the two anonymous referees for their comments.

References

Anderson, K.J. 1991, *Vancouver's Chinatown: racial discourse in Canada, 1875-1980,* McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal.

Bagnall, K. 2006, 'Golden shadows on a white land: an exploration of the lives of white women who partnered Chinese men and their children in southern Australia, 1855-1915', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney.

Ballantyne, R. 1998, 'Problems and prospects for heritage and environmental interpretation in the new millennium: an introduction', in D. Uzzell and R. Ballantyne (eds), *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation: problems and prospects*, Stationery Office, London, pp. 1 – 10.

Blake, A. 1980, 'Chinatown', in G. Davison (ed.), *Melbourne on foot: 15 walks through historic Melbourne*, Rigby, Melbourne, pp. 50 – 61.

Clarke, M. 1868, 'Night scenes in Melbourne, No. III: The Chinese quarter', *Argus*, 9 March, p.5.

Couchman, S. 1999, 'Tong yun gai (street of the Chinese): investigating patterns of work and social life in Melbourne's Chinatown 1900-1920', MA (Public History), Monash University, Melbourne.

Couchman, S., Fitzgerald, J. & Macgregor, P. (eds). 2004, *After the rush: regulation, participation, and Chinese communities in Australia 1860-1940*, Otherland Press, Melbourne.

Curthoys, A. 1973, 'Race and ethnicity: a study of the response of British colonists to aborigines, Chinese and non-British Europeans in New South Wales, 1856-1881', PhD thesis, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Curthoys, A. 2001, '"Chineseness" and Australian identity', in H. Chan, A. Curthoys & N. Chiang (eds), *The overseas Chinese in Australasia: history, settlement and interactions: proceedings from the symposium held in Taipei, 6-7 January 2001*, IGAS, National Taiwan University and CSCSD, Australian National University, Taipei, pp. 16 – 29.

Cushman, J. 1984, 'A "Colonial casualty": the Chinese community in Australian historiography', *Asian Studies Association of Australia Journal*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 100–113.

Fitzgerald, J. 2001, 'Another country', *Meanjin*, vol. 60, no. 4, pp. 59–71.

Fitzgerald, J. 2007, *Big white lie: Chinese-Australians in White Australia*, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fitzgerald, S. 2001, 'The Chinese in Sydney with particular focus on the 1930s', in H. Chan, A. Curthoys & N. Chiang (eds), *The overseas Chinese in Australasia: history, settlement and interactions: proceedings from the symposium held in Taipei, 6-7 January 2001*, IGAS, National Taiwan University and CSCSD, Australian National University, Taipei.

Ganter, R. 2003, 'Mixed relations: towards reconfiguring Australian history', in P. Edwards & Y. Shen (eds), *Lost in the whitewash: Aboriginal-Asian encounters in Australia 1901-2001*, Humanities Research Centre, ANU, Canberra.

Giese, D. 1994, *'All the flavour of the time returns': using oral history to explore the top end's Chinese heritage*, State Library of the Northern Territory, Darwin.

Giese, D. 1995, *Beyond Chinatown: changing perspectives on the Top End Chinese experience*, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Ham, S.H. 1992, *Environmental interpretation: a practical guide for people with big ideas and small budgets*, North American Press, Golden, Colorado.

Hegel, G.W.F. 2001 [1837], *The philosophy of history*, Batoche Books, Kitchener, Ontario.

Jones, P. 2005, 'The view from the edge: Chinese-Australians and China, 1890 to 1949', in C. Ferrall, P. Millar & K. Smith (eds), *East by south: China in the Australasian imagination*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, New Zealand, pp. 46 – 69.

Koi, N.K. 1993, 'Discovering my heritage: an oral history of my maternal family – the Ah Moons of Townsville', in P. Macgregor (ed.), *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific: proceedings of an international public conference held at the museum of Chinese Australian history, 8-10 October 1993*, Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne, pp. 287 – 295.

Kuo, M.-F. 2008, 'Making Chinese Australia', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Laing, J., Wheeler, F., Reeves, K., Frost, W. & Weiler, B. 2008, 'Interpreting the Bendigo Chinese heritage precinct', in K. Reeves & D. Nichols (eds), *Deeper leads: new approaches to Victorian goldfields history*, Ballarat Heritage Services, Ballarat, pp. 203 – 223.

Lake, M. & Reynolds, H. 2008, *Drawing the global colour line: white men's countries and the question of racial equality*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Loh, M. 1989, *Dinky-di: the contributions of Chinese immigrants and Australians of Chinese descent to Australia's defence forces and war efforts 1899-1988*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Loh, M. & Ramsay, C. 1986, *Survival and celebration: an insight into the lives of Chinese immigrant women, European women married to Chinese and their female children in Australia from 1856 to 1986*, Morag Loh and Christine Ramsay, Melbourne.

Lydon, J. 1999, *Many inventions: the Chinese in the rocks 1890-1930*, Monash Publications in History, Melbourne.

Mackerras, C. 1989, *Western images of China*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Markus, A. 1979, *Fear and hatred: purifying Australia and California 1850-1901*, Hale & Ironmonger, Sydney.

Markwell, K., Stephenson, D. & Rowe, D. 2004, 'Footsteps and memories: interpreting an Australian urban landscape through thematic walking tours', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 457 – 473.

Mayne, A. 2004, '"What you want John"? Chinese-European interactions on the Lower Turon goldfields', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 6, pp. 1 – 14.

Mcgowan, B. 2004, 'Reconsidering race: the Chinese experience on the goldfields of southern New South Wales', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 124, pp. 312 – 331.

Mountford, B. & Reeves, K. 2010, 'Chinatown by iPod', *History Australia*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 131 – 132.

Osmond, G. & Mcdermott, M-L. 2008, 'Mixing race: the Kong Sing brothers and Australian sport', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 338 – 355.

'Past Conferences', 2011, *Dragon Tails 2011*, viewed 19 May 2011, <http://www.dragontails.com.au/past-conferences>.

Rasmussen, A. 2009, 'Chinese in nation and community Bendigo 1970s-1920s', PhD, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Reeves, K. 2006, 'A hidden history: the Chinese on the Mount Alexander diggings, central Victoria, 1851-1901', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

Rule, P. 2004, 'The Chinese camps in colonial Victoria: their role as contact zones', in S. Couchman, J. Fitzgerald & P. Macgregor (eds), *After the rush: regulation, participation, and Chinese communities in Australia 1860-1940*, Otherland Press, Melbourne, pp. 119 – 131.

Shen, Y. 2001, *Dragon seed in the antipodes: Chinese Australian autobiographies*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Staiff, R. & Bushell, R. 2004, 'Travel knowledgeably: the question of content in heritage interpretation', in B. Weiler & R. Black (eds), *Interpreting the land down under*, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado, pp. 92 – 108.

Tilden, F. 1977, *Interpreting our heritage*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Uzzell, D. & Ballantyne, R. 1998, 'Heritage that hurts: interpretation in a postmodern world', in D. Uzzell & R. Ballantyne (eds), *Contemporary issues in heritage and environmental interpretation: problems and prospects*, Stationery Office, London, pp. 152 – 171.

Weiler, B. & Ham, S.H. 2000, 'Tour guides and interpretation', in D.B. Weaver (ed.), *The encyclopedia of ecotourism*, CABI Publishers, Oxon, pp. 549 – 563.

Williams, M. 2002, 'Destination qiaoxiang: Pearl River delta villages and pacific ports, 1849-1949', PhD thesis, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

Wilton, J. 1996, 'Chinese voices, Australian lives: oral history and the Chinese contribution to Glen Innes, Inverell, Tenterfield and surrounding districts during the first half of the twentieth century', PhD thesis, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales.

Wilton, J. 2002, 'Generations of journeys', in A. Hammerton & E. Richards (eds), *Speaking to immigrants: oral testimony and the history of Australian immigration*, History Program and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra.

Wong Hoy, K. 2006, 'Becoming British subjects 1879-1903: Chinese in north Queensland', MA thesis, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Woollacott, A. 2007, 'Rose Quong becomes Chinese: an Australian in London and New York', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 38, no. 129, pp. 16 – 31.