

Chapter 6:

MARKETING AND EXPANSION

The drapery section was a big long counter with everything on it, even shoes, all the men's mercery (trousers and cardigans), haberdashery, dress materials. At the bottom [end] of the counter there was a showroom with corsets and dresses. And we had lots of hats then. You don't have so many hats now. There were big shelves behind the counter for the stockings and things like that.

The cash box was in the middle of the shop. And the counter on the other side was for all groceries and vegies and fruit. We also had a bit of furniture - you went through a door to the furniture. And an ironmongery.

I also remember that Hong Yuen used to have an old kitchen off the shop, that was where the men had their meals. There was also a big storeroom next to the shop with a passageway in between the storeroom and the shop. In front of the kitchen was the furniture. So it went - the furniture, then a big shed with all the bulk potatoes, a passageway, and then the shop. In the shop was the office, crockery department and then through an archway to the grocery and drapery departments.¹

This was how Beatrice Winmill described the Hong Yuen store in Inverell at the time when she first joined the staff in about 1915. There are similar descriptions of other Chinese stores in the area during the first decades of the twentieth century. Bessie Chiu, for example, recalled her father's store, Sue Fong and Sons, in Emmaville:

It had two counters. One was a grocery and the other side was a draper. You know those country stores had a bit of everything. Not fruit and that.

In the olden days you have a lot of people's loyalty, people would speak to you. We used to have a couple of chairs and they'd come and have a talk. Now there's nothing like that. In those days we used to weigh everything. There was no such thing as packet everything. We used to weigh everything - sugar, dates, sultanas - everything was bulk.²

Ken Gett offered his childhood memories of his family store, Yow Sing and Company, also in Emmaville, during the early and mid 1930s. He recalled:

...as a child I remember going into the store. It had two big doors and when you entered the doors, the first thing that you saw was all the products hanging off the ceiling. You know those country stores. We had bicycles and tubs hanging off the ceiling. ... We sold a tremendous range of things. We sold guns, we had things like horseshoes and horseshoe nails. We had a drapery, a haberdashery section, grocery

¹ Interview with Beatrice Winmill, Inverell, 16 February 1984.

² Interview with Bessie Chiu, Gold Coast, 24 September 1991.

section. We had a produce section - chaff, bran, all those things - kitchen ware. It was a really packed store.³



Yow Sing and Company, Emmaville, mid 1930s.⁴

An early photograph of the interior of the Kwong Sing store in Glen Innes provides a sense of the variety and clutter of goods, and the presence of sufficient staff to handle the packing and stacking of merchandise, and the serving of customers.



Inside Kwong Sing and Company, Glen Innes, c.1916.⁵

Derrick Yee, whose parents opened the Kwong Sing store in Bundarra in the late 1920s, emphasised the labour intensive nature of the work involved in serving customers:

Now what would happen, a customer would come in and would go up to the counter, now this is for example for anything, but take for example groceries and ... the

³ Interview with Ken Gett, Brisbane, 22 September 1991.

⁴ *Kwan Reunion Newsletter*, 3, March 1986, p.3.

⁵ Kwong Sing Photographs.

*housewife or whoever it was, would have her weekly list of groceries and she would read that down to the person who was going to serve her and he would write the order out in an order book and he would go away and pack it and the customer would come back later on and pick it up. Now that's the way it was done, in all ways, if you were going in and wanted to buy shirts and things like that, you'd go up and the attendant would come over and look after you. I don't suppose that's changed much, even in the big stores, that still happens. But for groceries and things like that, you didn't touch the goods, you gave your order to the server behind the counter and he'd pack your order in big cardboard boxes and they'd take it out to your horse and cart, or old car, whatever it was, and put it in there, you see.*⁶

These descriptions are evocative of general stores, big and small, throughout rural New South Wales during the first half of the twentieth century - long counters, a variety of goods, a sense of clutter, bulk supplies, personal service, cash boxes.⁷ For the Chinese stores in and around Glen Innes, Inverell and Tenterfield (and arguably for Chinese stores elsewhere in rural Australia), these characteristics were a recognition that customers were to be found among the local community and, in order to attract those customers, the services and appearance of the stores had to be familiar. Behind this public face, however, there were characteristics and practices which were unlikely to be found in non-Chinese country stores. They included practices which focused on ensuring that the stores remained viable and, when possible, expanded. The stores, after all, increasingly provided the main livelihood for the Chinese in the district.

This chapter focuses on the evolution and nature of the business practices evident in the stores, and the factors shaping those practices. It begins with an examination of ownership, marketing strategies, the development of an array of services and the expansion of the stores. Attention then turns to the role the immigration legislation played in influencing business strategies. The chapter concludes with an account of the composition of the staff employed in the stores and their working conditions.

- **Family Ownership and Management**

The larger stores established around the turn of the century began as small businesses with many partners, only a few of whom were family members.⁸ As the businesses expanded, ownership contracted and became focused on one person who then distributed shares to family members who also became employees of the business. At Kwong Sing in

⁶ Interview with Derrick Yee, Inverell, 5 June 1990.

⁷ For various descriptions of country stores during this period see, for example, Frances Pollon and Phillip Geeves, *A Romance with Retailing*, Retail Traders' Association of NSW, Sydney, 1983, pp.21-23; Frances Pollon, *Shopkeepers and Shoppers: A social history of retailing in New South Wales from 1788*, Retail Traders Association of NSW, Sydney, 1989, especially pp.232-298 passim; and Brenda Marshall and Len Moore, *Grandma's General Store*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1978, pp.8-19;

⁸ See Chapter 4, pp.90-93 previously.

Glen Innes, for example, Percy Young became the key figure. By 1912 he had purchased a major shareholding in the business. He had also sponsored a number of his nephews to begin their Australian lives as assistants in the store and, as the business grew, they acquired shares in it. In 1926, when Percy Young decided to return with his family to China, the management of the store passed to his eldest nephew, Walter Gett, with shares distributed, among others, to Percy Young's sons, and to other nephews. In 1939 Percy Young returned to Australia and to Glen Innes. He again purchased a major shareholding in the business; he also acquired shares for his wife, and his sons. By this time, a number of the other family members involved with the store had moved out to establish their own stores. This pattern continued until, by the time of Percy Young's death in 1942, the store in Glen Innes was under the ownership and management of members of his immediate family.⁹ As Percy Young's granddaughter, Valmai Au, recalled:

*By the 1940s essentially different departments [at Kwong Sing, Glen Innes] were managed by different members of the family. Uncle David and Uncle Norman were in the grocery section, and Uncle Cecil was in the hardware, and our father [Stanley Young] was always the manager.*¹⁰

Harry Fay's central role in acquiring Hong Yuen as a family business was very similar. In 1916 he was described as a managing partner. Over the next two decades he sponsored family members to come to Australia, some of whom not only gained employment in the store but also acquired shares. He also bought out shareholders who were not family members.¹¹ By 1938 there were seven registered shareholders - Harry Fay, his wife Ruby, his two brothers George Ping Kee and Ernest Lun, his nephews Lawrence Ping Kee and Joe Mah, and Chungshan compatriot, Edward Severn Fong.¹² The ownership of the business had certainly become concentrated in family hands. By 1947, the ownership was even more concentrated. The shareholders, by then, were wholly members of Harry Fay's immediate family. They were Harry Fay himself (84,000 shares), the estate of his late wife, Ruby Fay (10,000), and his two sons-in-law, Thomas Loy (3,000) and Charles Cum (1,000).¹³

⁹ The account of Percy Young's role in Kwong Sing is drawn from Autobiography of Mr Kwan Hong Kee, 1938, unpublished manuscript, Kwong Sing Papers; *Glen Innes Examiner*, 2 June 1942; *Kwan Family Reunion Newsletter*, 3, March 1986; Kwong Sing and Company: One Hundred Years of Service, *Glen Innes Examiner*, 1986; and Interviews with Oscar Fatt, Edna Pang, David Pang and Daisy Yee, Sydney, 19 July 1990; Interviews with Stanley Young, Glen Innes and Brisbane, 15 February 1990 and 24 September 1991.

¹⁰ Interview with Valmai Au and Olma Gan, Sydney, 19 July 1990.

¹¹ Information about Harry Fay's central role in Hong Yuen comes from *Inverell Times*, 17 and 18 July 1973; Elizabeth Wiedemann, *World of its Own: Inverell's Early Years 1827-1920*, Devill Publicity, Inverell, 1981, p. 187; and Interviews with Eileen Cum, Warialda, 14 February 1984; Harry Fay, Inverell, 6 October 1983, 23 November 1987 and 17 August 1987; and Marina Mar, Sydney, 18 January 1984, 22 March 1984, 24 July 1987, 2 June 1989 and 20 July 1992. For an overview of the history of the Hong Yuen store and Harry Fay's involvement see Janis Wilton, *Hong Yuen: A country store and its people*, NSW Department of Education Multicultural Education Coordinating Committee and Armidale CAE, Armidale, 1988.

¹² Customs and Excise Office memorandum, 30 November 1938. Australian Archives (NSW): N56/5481.

¹³ Copy of Form D, Harry Fay to Acting Commonwealth Migration Officer, 30 December 1947. Mar Papers.

The emphasis on ownership by immediate family members also characterised stores established after 1910. Many of these were set up by men who had initially worked at one of the established stores like Kwong Sing, Hong Yuen, Wing Hing Long or Sam Kee. Once they had accumulated or borrowed sufficient capital, they sought to buy their own family business. Edward Fong, for example, had been one of the earlier partners in Hong Yuen, Inverell. Eventually he sold his share to Harry Fay. He then invested in another established Chinese store, Sam Kee, in Tingha. This store became a family business run at first by Edward Fong and then (and still in the 1990s) by his sons, Eric and Henry.¹⁴ Similarly Harry Hon had been one of the initiating partners for W.Warley and Company which was established in 1903 in Glen Innes. This store went out of business in the early 1920s. For a short while Harry Hon had a small store in Glen Innes. He then moved north to Tenterfield where he opened Sun Sun and Company in the mid 1920s. The store operated as a family business run, at first by himself, then by his sons and daughters. It continued to operate as a family business owned and managed by family members until its closure in 1973.¹⁵ Similarly, Yow Sing and Company in Emmaville was purchased by Walter Gett in the early 1930s. Walter Gett had been the first nephew Percy Young had sponsored to work at Kwong Sing in Glen Innes, and he had also been the manager of the store during Percy Young's absence in the 1920s. However, as the Kwong Sing store in Glen Innes became concentrated in the hands of Percy Young's sons and grandsons, Walter Gett moved out to seek a business which could be for his immediate family. The Yow Sing store was managed and run by Walter Gett, his sons and daughters until they sold out in the early 1950s.¹⁶ Percy Young's other nephews followed similar patterns: moving out to establish their own stores owned and managed by their own immediate families. As Daisy Yee observed when explaining why so many left the main store in Glen Innes:

*There were too many married couples really, and they had to look out for their own families.*¹⁷

This emphasis on family ownership of stores reflected the central role of the family in Chinese life.¹⁸ It also reflected patterns evident in Chinese firms in China and elsewhere overseas. Sociologist Wong Siu-Lun has analysed the characteristics of a number of these firms, and has identified the emergence of what he terms the 'father-entrepreneur'. These were men like Percy Young and Harry Fay who set about acquiring majority ownership of the business for themselves and their immediate family members.¹⁹ This increased the incentive

¹⁴ Customs and Excise Office memorandum, 30 November 1938. Australian Archives (NSW): N56/5481; *Inverell Times*, 12 December 1978; Helen Brown, *Tin at Tingha*, The Author, Armidale, 1982, p.108; and Interviews with Eric Fong, Inverell, 22 November 1983 and 28 February 1990.

¹⁵ *Tenterfield Star* 29 January 1987; and Interviews with Dulcie Hon, Sydney, 23 May 1990 and 5 May 1992.

¹⁶ Interviews with Ken Gett, Brisbane, 23 February 1990 and 22 September 1991.

¹⁷ Interview with Oscar Fatt et. al.

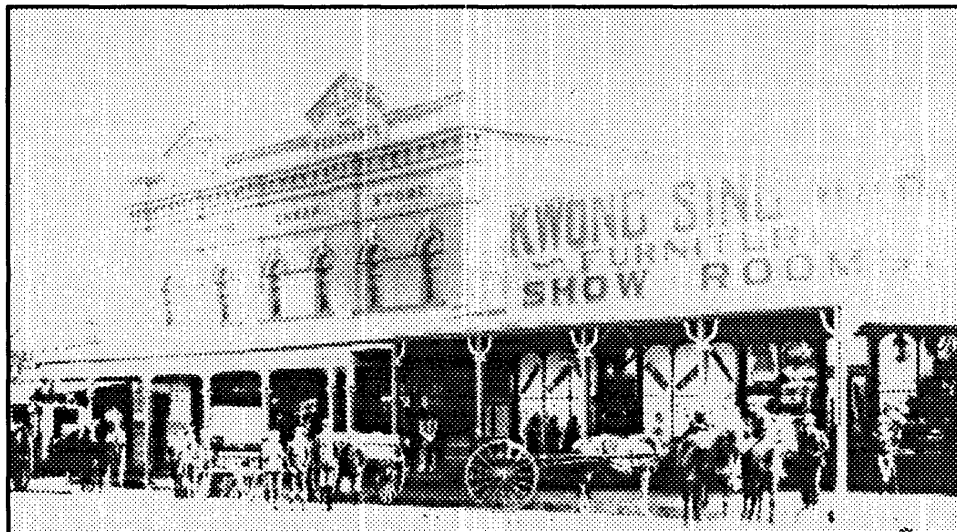
¹⁸ On the importance of family in Chinese life see Chapter 8, pp.172-173, 181-184 and 199-200 following.

¹⁹ Wong Siu-Lun, 'The Chinese family firm: a model', *British Journal of Sociology*, 26/1, 1986, especially pp.62-64.

to ensure that the stores became successful enterprises since the profits would go into the family coffers. For the objective to be achieved, however, the storekeepers and their staff had to develop marketing strategies which took into account the need to win customers in what was, at the very least, an alien, if not an hostile, environment.

- **Marketing Strategies**

The opening of new stores and the completion of new extensions were often accompanied by grand ceremonies and local fanfare directed to winning and cementing the support of local clientele. When the 1903 extension to Kwong Sing was opened, under the heading 'A fine store', the local newspaper described the new premises as 'a beautiful massive building fitted up in the latest style'.²⁰ A photograph from about 1906 gives a sense of the style and facade, including the wooden furniture section which would be a later



Kwong Sing War, Glen Innes, c.1906.²¹

subject of reconstruction and extension. The Glen Innes band was engaged to play for three consecutive Saturday evenings once the store was open.²² The opening itself was conducted by the mayor of the town who commended the then manager, Wong Chee, with sentiments which clearly echoed a need to establish the credibility and acceptability of a Chinese businessman in an Australian country town:

*Mr Chee, as a naturalized British subject, had proved himself to be a man of integrity, of charity, and was known as such throughout the district.*²³

In line with this image of a community oriented person, the report observed that, to mark the opening, Wong Chee presented a cheque for purchasing a hose reel for the local fire

²⁰ *Glen Innes Guardian*, 20 October 1903.

²¹ Kwong Sing Photographs.

²² *Glen Innes Examiner*, 25 September 1903.

²³ *Glen Innes Guardian*, 20 October 1903.

brigade.²⁴ The lead up to the opening also saw regular reports on progress accompanied by reminders of Kwong Sing's reputation and slogan, as 'The noted cheap store', and by the promotion of a 15% reduction sale of old stock.²⁵

Similar affirmations of the characteristics which were deemed most attractive to local consumers accompanied other openings and extensions. Hence, when F. Mon How General Store opened in Byron Street, Inverell, in 1899, its advertisements bore the slogan 'Lowest prices'.²⁶ In 1903 W. Warley and Company advertised the opening of their store with its range of goods 'At reasonable prices',²⁷ and when Hong Yuen opened new sections to its building in 1925, the slogan of 'Small profits, quick returns' was well publicised.²⁸

Cheap and competitive prices were also a hallmark of advertising, and special 'cut price' sales became a characteristic of the businesses. As Albert Yum who worked at Hong Yuen during the 1930s recalled:

...our sales were something out of this world. Unbelievable. I remember he [Harry Fay] had towels for one shilling, that was one of his specialties. He got in contact with a good towel manufacturer - he would probably buy seconds or discontinued lines and they would come in their thousands. He was a huge buyer. And full page ads in the paper, pamphlets and opening day - the extra opening specials. ... And the crowds that used to gather outside. I remember, everybody ready at 9 o'clock. 'Right,' he'd say, 'open the doors'. And in they'd stream.²⁹

Giving credit was also characteristic.³⁰ It proved a particularly effective means of ensuring that members of the local community saw the stores as vital to their economic survival. Indeed, some local residents claim this as one of the features which most endeared the stores to them, especially during the hard times which regularly affected rural customers. As one Inverell resident recalled of Hong Yuen:

I remember the 1918-22 drought when we were all having a very trying time. But Mr Fay stuck to us. He never once turned us down for food for the family and feed for the animals.³¹

24 *ibid.*

25 For example, *Glen Innes Guardian*, 4 August 1903, 16 October 1903, and *Glen Innes Examiner*, 28 July 1903, 21 August 1938, 6 October 1903. This particular opening was presumably spurred by the almost simultaneous opening (and fanfare) by competing Chinese store, W. Warley and Company, and by the then concerted anti-Chinese storekeepers campaign mounted by a group of NSW retail country traders. See Chapter 5, pp. 98-101 previously.

26 *Inverell Times*, 20 December 1899.

27 *Glen Innes Examiner*, 17 July 1903.

28 Wiedemann, *World of its Own*, p.187.

29 Interview with Albert Yum, Sydney, 5 June 1989.

30 Compare Pollon, *Shopkeepers and Shoppers*, p.52 where she emphasises that in general stores, credit was only for 'known and approved customers'. Cash sales were the norm. See also Beverley Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley: A history of shopping in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp.62-63 for background to the preference for cash scales as well as the move towards small scale credit schemes.

31 Mrs Rankin quoted in Hong Yuen's 60th anniversary commemorative souvenir, *Inverell Times*, 30 March 1960.

Beatrice Winmill asserted:

During the Depression Harry Fay got a lot of customers then because he was good to the farmers. He lent lots of money They'd come with no money and he'd given them things.³²

Daisy Yee who, with her husband Arthur, owned and ran the Kwong Sing store in Bundarra from the late 1920s to the mid 1970s, recalled:

You know, it was nothing for us to give a three year credit. They depended on their wool cheque every year to come and pay us for twelve months and then they had other commitments. And if they couldn't do it all, they'd come in and ask my husband to give them another twelve months.³³

Similar evaluations have been offered of the willingness of other Chinese stores in the area to offer credit.³⁴ It was a willingness provoked, at least partly, by the fact that a good number of customers were farmers and graziers who had to wait for their wool cheques to come in once or twice a year and whose incomes, ultimately, were dependent on the whims of the weather. It was also a practice that accommodated the need for Chinese merchants to offer particularly attractive services in order to win over local non-Chinese customers. At times it meant hardships for the storekeepers themselves. As Bessie Chiu observed about her father, George Sue Fong's, habit of giving credit to his customers:

He was good to them. They'd say 'We won't get our tin washed till next week' or something, you know. 'Can you give our groceries for next week?' They still owed you money. 'We got the kids to mind, you know.' They owed him thousands, nobody knows!³⁵

Daisy Yee echoed this negative side of the practice:

Arthur [my husband] was so soft. People would come in and say they had a family of four or five kids and they had nothing to eat and they'd say, give us another month's credit. And you'd give them that month's credit and they'd do a midnight flutter, they'd be gone, ...and you had no redress.³⁶

Local newspaper reports and correspondence in personal papers also indicate that outstanding debts were a problem. In 1904, for example, Sue Fong and Sons of Emmaville successfully took action in the small debts court against two local residents (one Chinese and one non-Chinese) who had not paid for goods.³⁷ Similarly, in 1912, both W. Warley and Company and Kwong Sing successfully sued different local residents for non-payment for

32 Beatrice Winmill quoted in *ibid.*

33 Interview with Oscar Fatt et. al.

34 See, for example, Australian Chinese Community of Australia, *Australian Chinese: A pictorial history*, ACCA, Sydney, 1987, the excerpt on Tenterfield 1914; Kwong Sing and Company: One Hundred Years of Service, *Glen Innes Examiner*, 1986, p.8. Also Interviews with Valmai Au and Olma Gan; Frank Fatt et.al.; Eric Fong, Inverell, 22 November 1983 and 28 February 1990; Ken Gett, Brisbane, 23 February 1990 and 22 September 1991; Eileen Jang, Brisbane, 21 September 1991; May Lun, Gold Coast, 23 February 1990, and Lawrence Ping Kee, Moree, 26 March 1990.

35 Interview with Bessie Chiu.

36 Interview with Oscar Fatt et. al.

37 *Glen Innes Guardian*, 18 October 1904.

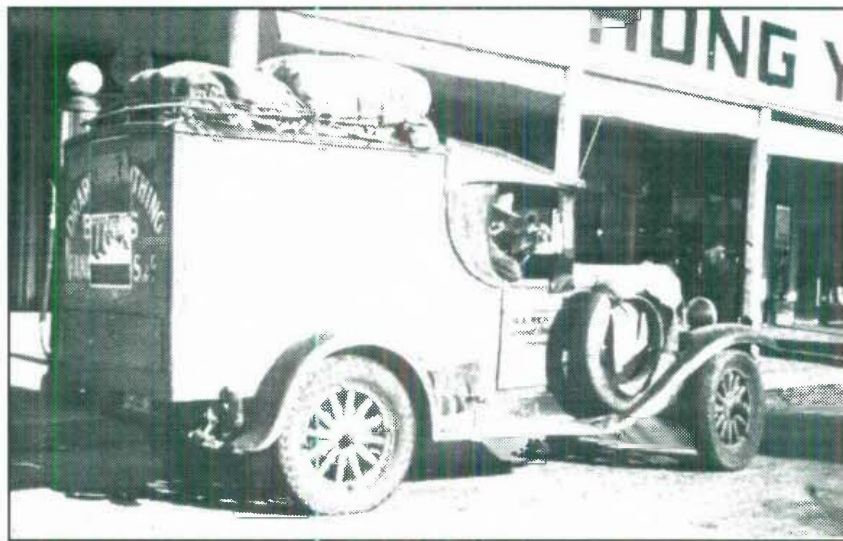
goods sold and delivered.³⁸ In 1951 Wong Yuk Kuen from Ah Chee Brothers of Boggabilla, wrote to Harry Fay asking for some financial assistance, because 'I have given too much credit to my customers'.³⁹

Giving credit may well have won some customers. It also, in the long term, risked the viability of some stores and spurred changes. As Elaine Jang explained:

*There was a lot of credit and that was ... its [Hop Sing's] downfall. Creditors sometimes let you down. So, in the end, things had to be put into cash and carry.*⁴⁰

Change and adaptability characterised the development of the stores throughout as storekeepers became aware of local conditions and adapted business practices to suit.

In this vein the stores also, early on, provided a home delivery service and supplied hawkers who would take their goods to the more remote areas. At the time, hawkers were an important part of Australian rural life. They were some of the few visitors families on outlying farms would receive.⁴¹ The Chinese stores tapped into this need, and were able to advertise and market their goods and services in the process. They eventually had delivery trucks with sign writing advertising the stores themselves. A photograph from the early 1930s depicts a Hong Yuen hawker's truck, fully loaded and ready to trek across the rough roads of the surrounding rural district, spare tyre strapped firmly to the front of the car, packages under tarpaulin on top, and advertising on all sides.



Hong Yuen hawker's van, c.1932.⁴²

³⁸ *Glen Innes Guardian*, 5 December 1912.

³⁹ Wong Yuk Kuen, Ah Chee Brothers, Boggabilla to Louie Mew Fay, Hong Yuen, Inverell. Mar Letters, 479.

⁴⁰ Interview with Elaine Jang.

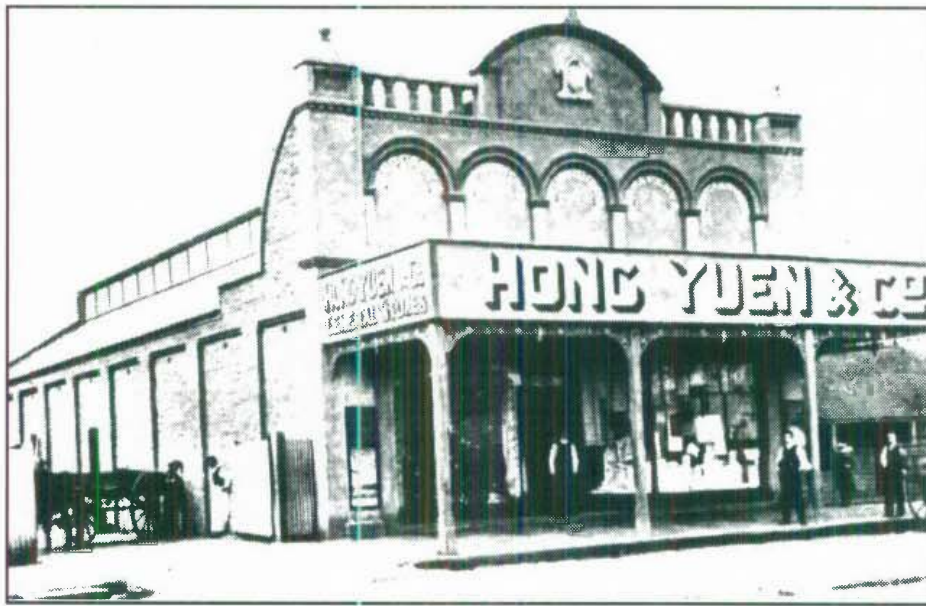
⁴¹ For an evocative account of the role of hawkers in rural life about this time see Patrick White's description of the arrival of the Syrian hawker in his *The Aunt's Story*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963, pp.30-31. See also Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, pp.22-23; Marshall and Moore, *Grandma's General Store*, p.70; and Janis Wilton, *Hawking to Haberdashery*, Department of Education Multicultural Education Coordinating Committee and Armidale CAE, Armidale, 1988, pp.8-14 for further accounts of hawkers in rural areas.

⁴² Fay Photographs.

The marketing strategies obviously worked. The custom attracted by the Chinese stores was sufficient to ensure that they remained viable and, for some, was sufficient to enable expansion of the main stores and the establishment of branch stores. The success was also sufficient to entice relatives and employees to set up their own businesses.

- **Expansion of the Main Stores**

The expansion of the main stores is well illustrated by the growth in the size of the premises. Hong Yuen, for example, originally occupied a small wooden building on one block of land. A photograph dating from about 1900 shows the building reconstructed as a reasonably stylish brick edifice, albeit still occupying one block. Subsequent extensions and additions over the next four decades saw the building grow to occupy the four block frontage seen in a photograph taken in the late 1930s.⁴³



Hong Yuen, Inverell, c.1900.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Hong Yuen 1899-1989*, Supplement to *The Inverell Times*, 18 October 1989, p.1 notes that the first section of the store was built in 1899, and that subsequent additions were made in 1909, 1925, 1935, 1960 and 1976. The article also points out that the store expanded between 1916 and 1960 from a 40 foot frontage to a 198 foot frontage. See also *Inverell Times*, 12 October 1904 announcement that Hong Yuen had moved into a new brick store; and *Inverell Times*, 31 July 1925 detailing extensions at Hong Yuen. For details about extensions and refurbishments after 1950 see Chapter 10, pp.234-237 following.

⁴⁴ Fay Photographs.



Hong Yuen (on left), Inverell, 1938.⁴⁵

Kwong Sing in Glen Innes followed a similar pattern. From a single wooden store in 1886, a series of additions from 1893 onwards saw the building expand and modernise. Wooden sections slowly became brick, and interiors were updated. Single long counters on either side of the store, gave way to more open display areas and increasingly clearly defined departments within the store.⁴⁶ Photographs again provide a sense of the expansion and refurbishment.



Kwong Sing War, Glen Innes, 1897.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Sue Fong Photographs.

⁴⁶ Kwong Sing and Company: One Hundred Years of Service.

⁴⁷ *Town and Country Journal*, 24 July 1987, p.27.



Kwong Sing and Company, Glen Innes, c.1931.⁴⁸



Inside the grocery section, Kwong Sing and Company, Glen Innes, c.1945.⁴⁹

Hop Sing and Company in Tenterfield was one of the later stores and was smaller than Hong Yuen, Inverell or Kwong Sing, Glen Innes. Yet, expansion and refurbishment during the 1930s and 1940s were also signs of its success and viability as a family business. The store was established by John Hong in the late 1920s. His daughter, Elaine Jang, reflected on the store's evolution:

I think it started from one shop first and then sort of extended. You notice in Tenterfield they [brother, Henry Hong] have two or three or four shops together. So

48 Kwong Sing Photographs. Compare to the c1906 photograph of Kwong Sing on p.109 previously.

49 Kwong Sing Photographs. *From left to right:* Ivan Henderson, Jim Sheah, Roy Floyd, ? Perrott, Bob Biddle, Norman Young. Compare to the earlier inside photograph of Kwong Sing on p. 105 previously.

father started one shop and gradually added groceries, hardware and that sort of thing.⁵⁰

The development of Sun Sun and Company in Tenterfield also witnessed expansion and refurbishment. As Dulcie and Merle Hon, who worked in the family store, recalled:

[It started with] three little shops. Then we got four and then we got another. We knocked the walls down, knocked arches through, and made them into one shop. Then we extended the back.⁵¹



Sun Sun and Company, Tenterfield, mid 1920s with its three shop fronts.⁵²



Sun Sun and Company, Tenterfield, mid 1940s, occupying four shop fronts.⁵³

⁵⁰ Interview with Elaine Jang.

⁵¹ Interviews with Dulcie and Merle Hon, Sydney, 23 May 1990, 5 May 1992, and 14 and 30 September 1992.

⁵² Hon Photographs.

⁵³ *ibid.*

- **Branch Stores and New Businesses**

Accompanying the expansion of the main stores, there was also the establishment of an increasing number of branch stores and of new businesses whose managers and/or owners began by working in and for the main stores. By 1940, for example, branches of Hong Yuen were established in Moree, Texas and Warialda. The Moree branch was managed by Harry Fay's older brother, George Ping Kee, and his sons who eventually became the owners of the store. The Warialda branch was established specifically for Harry Fay's son-in-law and daughter, Charles and Eileen Cum. The Texas branch remained with Harry Fay as the proprietor but had a number of managers who were either family members or Chinese who had served an apprenticeship at Hong Yuen in Inverell. As well as branch stores, Harry Fay established a number of other small stores in the region including Fay's Cash and Carry, S. Fong Lee, and Yee's Fruit Shop and Cafe, all in Inverell, and another Fay's Cash and Carry in Texas. Like the Hong Yuen branch in Texas, these stores were placed under the management of, and partly staffed by, family members or other Chinese who had served an apprenticeship with Hong Yuen in Inverell.⁵⁴ This pattern of establishing branch stores and other small businesses throughout the north west region is illustrated in the map on the following page.

As well as the stores established by Harry Fay, there were also a number of Hong Yuen employees who, after serving their apprenticeships in the main Inverell store, went out on their own and established their own stores and businesses in Inverell and elsewhere. These were owned independently by the men and their families who established them. Joe Mah, for example, eventually opened the Bamboo Cafe in Inverell.⁵⁵ Walter Hoy managed Hong Yuen's radio section before moving out to set up his own radio repair business.⁵⁶ Ted Lumbewe established his own radio, white goods and sports stores in Inverell.⁵⁷ Trevor Jack moved to Coonabarabran where he opened Jack's Catering Service, a business which in 1990 was still run by his daughter.⁵⁸ Sam Woo also moved to Coonabarabran where he owned a general store.⁵⁹ Bill Manwar moved north and took over the grocery section of Sun Sun and Company in Tenterfield, and established his own family business.⁶⁰

54 Wilton, *Hong Yuen*, pp.14-24; Supplement to *The Inverell Times*, 18 October 1989; *Inverell Times*, 15 October 1976; Interview with Joe Mah, Inverell, 27 February 1990; Interview with Percy So Quan, Inverell, 27 March 1990; and Interviews with Eileen Cum, Harry Fay, Marina Mar, Lawrence Ping Kee, and Albert Yum. Also Department of Immigration, Form D, Hong Yuen, Inverell and Yee's Pty Ltd, Inverell, 21 February 1955. Mar Papers.; Department of Immigration Memorandum No. 52/24/494, 15/3/1954. Australian Archives (NSW): sp1122/1; N56/5481.

55 Interview with Joe Mah.

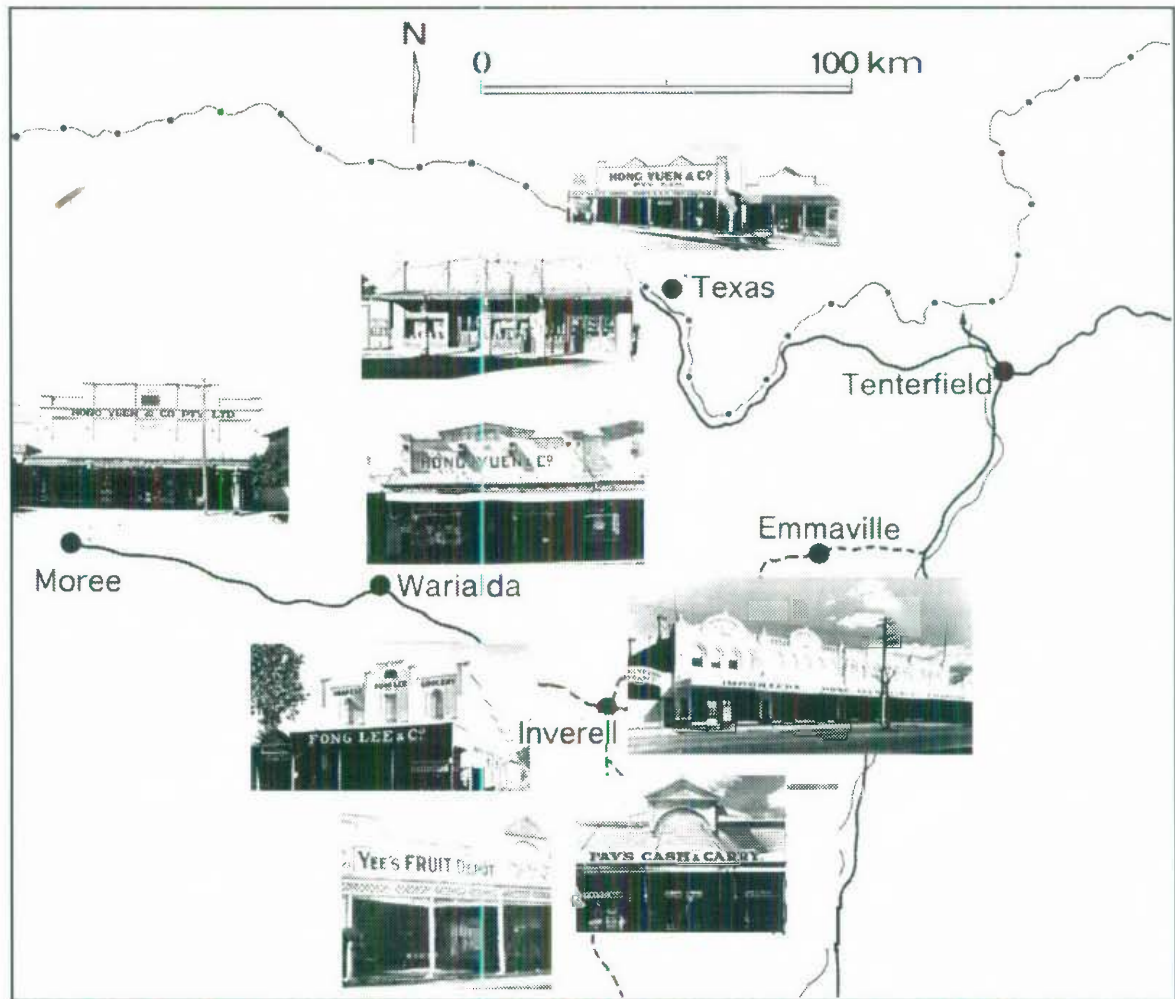
56 Interview with Kevin Garr, Brisbane, 25 September 1991.

57 Interview with Ted Lumbewe, Inverell, 7 June 1990.

58 Interview with Trevor Jack, Coonabarabran, 25 June 1990.

59 Interview with Sam Woo, Wyoming NSW, 24 July 1990.

60 Interview with Dulcie and Merle Hon, Sydney, 23 May 1990.



Map 4: Hong Yuen, Inverell, and branch stores in north-western New South Wales, 1941.⁶¹

Kwong Sing, Glen Innes, similarly became the birthplace of a number of other Chinese stores which were established in northern and north eastern New South Wales. The pattern, however, was slightly different to Hong Yuen in Inverell. The branch and other stores established initially under the aegis of Harry Fay all retained some contact with the main Hong Yuen store through sharing goods and supplies and, in some instances, by remaining under Harry Fay's proprietorship. By contrast, the new stores which emerged under the management and ownership of Chinese trained at Kwong Sing were more independent enterprises. This was caused partly by the inability of the main store to provide a sufficient livelihood for the increasingly large number of family members based there, and partly by the tradition and expectation that, once an apprenticeship was served, the opportunity should be taken to establish a new enterprise which, in its turn, could support and sponsor more family members from China as well as the growing Australian-born generation. In this vein, for example, Percy Young's nephew Frank Fatt and his family established F. Kwong Sing in Casino, another nephew set up Harry Yee and Company at Ballina, and another nephew,

61 Sue Fong Photographs

Walter Gett, initiated Yow Sing and Company in Emmaville. Percy Young's son Roger and his family opened and operated the Busy Bee store in Glen Innes, and his son-in-law Arthur Yee opened Kwong Sing in Bundarra.⁶² Just how extensive this process of expanding existing businesses and starting up new ones for the benefit of close family members, can be seen at a glance in the following diagram.

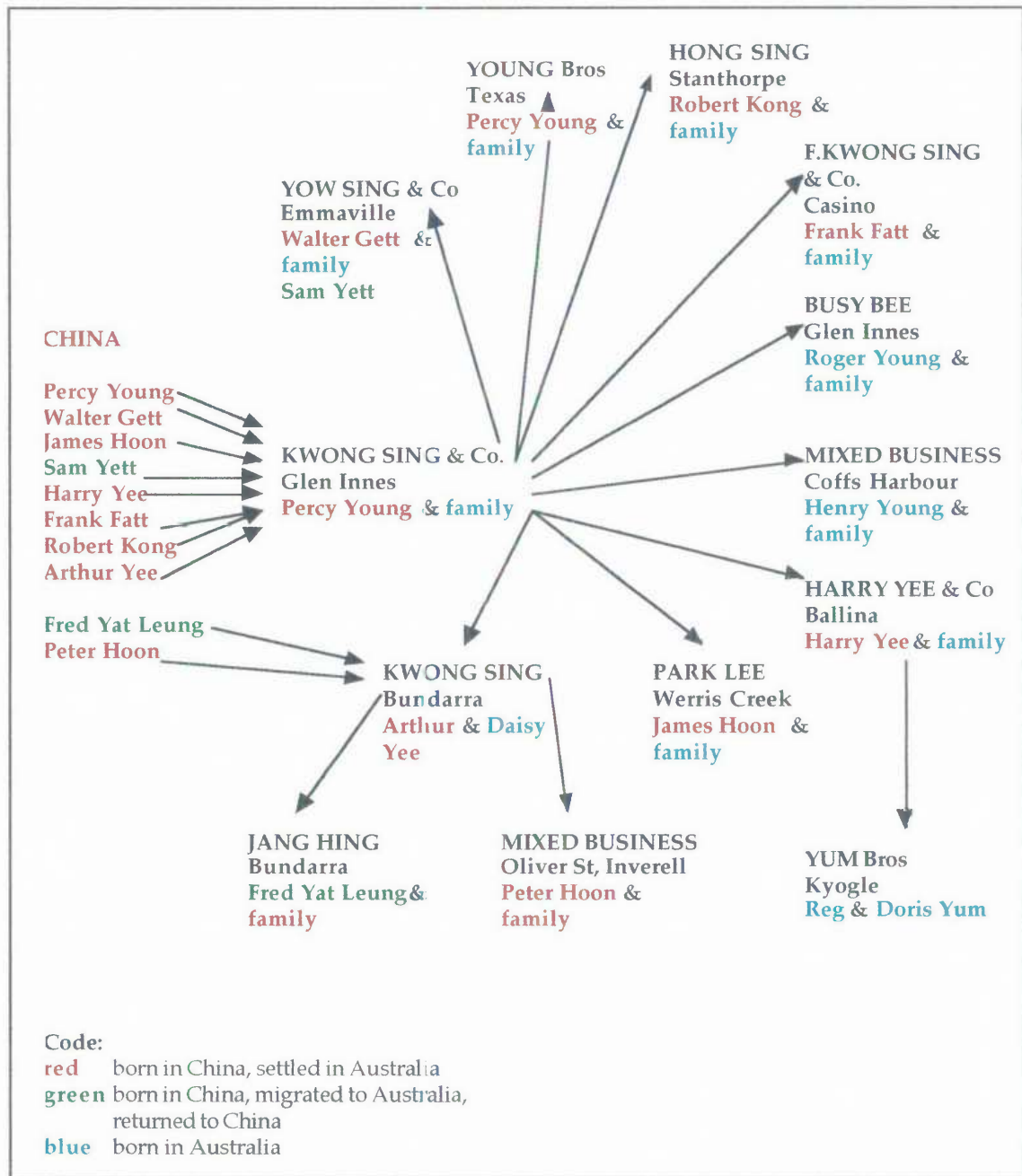


Diagram 3: Kwan clan sponsorship and stores.⁶³

⁶² *Kwan Reunion Newsletter*, 3, 1986; and Interviews with Ken Gett, Brisbane, 23 February 1990 and 22 September 1991.

⁶³ Consult Appendices C and E at the end of this thesis for details about particular individuals and stores.

Stores set up by past employees of other Chinese stores in the district, continued the pattern, at least for a while. They provided a starting point for new arrivals who, eventually, branched out to establish new stores and businesses, or to buy existing stores. Arthur Yee in Bundarra, for example, sponsored his brother Fred Yat Leung to come to Australia and to set up his own small store in Bundarra.⁶⁴ Peter Hoon moved to Inverell through buying his uncle, George Kue's, corner store in Oliver Street.⁶⁵ Harry and Dulcie Hon in Tenterfield sponsored a number of relatives and fellow villagers from China, among them Joe Hing who set up his own radio store, R.J. Hing, in Tenterfield.⁶⁶

- **Negotiating Immigration Legislation**

The expansion and multiplication of the stores was arguably not just a reflection of business acumen and the ability to accommodate family needs and obligations, it was also influenced and perhaps partly stimulated by immigration regulations which, in turn, provoked the development of astute and effective strategies for lobbying government agencies.

The immigration legislation dictated that for firms to sponsor and retain Chinese-born shop assistants under exemption, they had to prove a certain level of import/export business and, from 1934, they had to have an annual turnover of £500 for each assistant.⁶⁷ Some business practices reflected the need to ensure that a specific store could justify employing its overseas-born assistants. Daisy Yee, Percy Young's eldest daughter, explained it this way:

*Dad brought all the nephews out one after the other. He had to take out a bond of £100 for each member, and he had to import/export a certain amount of goods for each member - I can remember apples. He brought the nephews out gradually.*⁶⁸

The pressure, indeed need, to comply or at least to adapt to the regulations, sometimes entailed moving employees from one store to another. It also required ensuring that the one store did not seem to sponsor an oversupply of Chinese-born assistants.

The negotiations required by the regulations are reflected in correspondence to the Department of Interior accompanying Harry Fay's many requests for extensions of Certificates of Exemption in order to allow employees to remain in Australia. The applications provide specific details on the turnover of the various stores, the amount of import/export business, the number of assistants under exemption and their employment history in the store. In 1932, for example, in response to a request to extend the certificate of

⁶⁴ Interviews with Derrick Yee, Inverell, 28 February and 5 June 1990.

⁶⁵ Interview with Betty Young, Glen Innes, 25 June 1991.

⁶⁶ Field notes, 11 May 1990, 23 May 1990 and 2 March 1990.

⁶⁷ For details on the regulations see C.Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1975, pp. 38-41 and Appendix I, pp. 113-114; and A.T. Yarwood, *Asian Migration to Australia: The background to exclusion 1896-1923*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967, pp.104-115.

⁶⁸ Interview with Oscar Fatt et. al.

Harry Fay's nephew, Joe Mah, the Department of the Interior expressed concern that his then employment in the fruit and confectionery section of the store, '...will not be of any great advantage to him in the matter of developing overseas trade on his return to China'. Hence, approval of the extension was granted subject '...to his being transferred to some other branch of your firm in which there are better opportunities of his acquiring a knowledge of overseas trade conditions'.⁶⁹ At about the same time, Harry Fay sent a lengthy submission to the Department of the Interior requesting the changes in status and the extensions of certificates for a number of family members and employees. In this letter, he was careful to detail the extent of his business interests, citing a turnover of about £100,000 for the Inverell store, £52,000 for Moree and £21,000 for Texas with outstanding debts to him 'personally' of about £45,000. He was also careful to detail that, of his approximately sixty permanent employees, thirty three were Australians '...while the rest are made up of Australian-born Chinese with only seven Chinese from China'.⁷⁰ It was important to emphasise not just the financial success of the stores, but also the extent to which they employed non-Chinese labour and the limited number of overseas-born Chinese among their employees. In a similar vein, in 1938 in applying for extensions of Certificates of Exemption and in requesting permission to sponsor two students, Harry Fay pointed out that on 23 February that year he had formed his business into a limited liability company with capital of £100,000, that he intended to establish a company in China, and that the students he was seeking to sponsor would not '...prejudice the position of any of my present employees'.⁷¹ In 1941 Hong Yuen received a warning from the Department of the Interior, through the Consul-General for China, that the store now had '...assistants under exemption in excess of the number usually allowed for local businesses'. Consequently, further requests for assistants were likely to be viewed unfavourably.⁷² Even as late as 1952 when Australia, slowly and reluctantly, was moving towards the dismantling of the white Australia policy, directives were still being received to improve overseas trade or transfer employees to 'some firm eligible for their services'.⁷³ Clearly it remained an advantage to have a network of stores in which Chinese under exemption could be employed.

Similar evidence confirming the need to adapt business practices and even ownership in order to accommodate the immigration legislation comes from the Hong family of Tenterfield. In response to a question about her mother's part ownership of Hop Sing and

⁶⁹ Secretary, Department of the Interior, to Messrs Hong Yuen and Co., 25 November 1932. Mar Papers.

⁷⁰ Harry Fay to Secretary, Department of the Interior, undated (1933?). Mar Papers.

⁷¹ Harry Fay to Hon. E.J.Harrison, M.P., 19 September 1938. Mar Papers.

⁷² B.R. Watson for Secretary, Department of Interior to Consul-General for China, 2 January 1941. Mar Papers.

⁷³ B.C.Wall, Commonwealth Migration Officer to the Proprietor, Hong Yuen, Inverell, 15 February 1952. Mar Papers.

Company in Tenterfield, Elaine Jang observed:

*It was the only way I think she could stay, so my father transferred the business to her name so that she could stay.*⁷⁴

The observation is backed up by Mary Hong's naturalisation file. She arrived in Australia under a Certificate of Exemption in November 1931. In 1933 she became the sole proprietor of the firm and this was used in subsequent applications for extensions of her Certificate of Exemption.⁷⁵

Apart from the exemption clause for shop assistants, Chinese in this part of New South Wales also utilised the exemption clause for students. This allowed entry to Australia under a Certificate Exemption initially for one year and, from 1912, renewable for six years.⁷⁶ There were a number of examples of people brought in first as students, being transferred to shop assistants under exemption, having their certificates regularly extended until, finally, they were able to settle permanently. Harry Fay's two nephews, Lawrence and Sidney Ping Kee, followed this route. They were initially sponsored as students, had their status converted to shop assistants, were moved to the Hong Yuen branch in Moree where they became the owner-managers of the store and were able eventually to get permanent resident status.⁷⁷ Percy So Quan was similarly permitted to enter Australia as a student in the early 1940s when he was 15 years old. Sponsored by Harry Fay, he spent two and a half years at the convent school in Inverell. While at school, he helped out in Fay's Cash and Carry. By the mid 1940s he was employed as a shop assistant under exemption at the Cash and Carry store. When that store closed, he transferred to the main Hong Yuen store where he remained employed as a shop assistant in the grocery department.⁷⁸ In Tenterfield, both John and Mary Hong and Harry and Cecilia Hon also utilised the exemption clause for students to sponsor relatives and fellow villagers, most of whom spent some time helping or working in the family stores. Those brought in included Dick Ap, Theo Chew, Betty Chor, Phillip Doo, Robert Joe Hing, Arthur Hong, Margaret Gee, Keith Go, Eileen Hong, Elaine Jang, Jang Wai Sue, and Raymond Wong.⁷⁹

The need to apply regularly for extensions and, indeed, to apply to sponsor new arrivals in the first place resulted in a sophisticated network of intermediaries used to ensure that certificates of exemption went through and were regularly extended. In recalling the

⁷⁴ Interview with Elaine Jang.

⁷⁵ Australian Archives (NSW): sp1122/1; N59/4920.

⁷⁶ Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, p.114.

⁷⁷ Harry Fay to Secretary, Department of the Interior, undated (1933?); Harry Fay to Secretary, Department of the Interior, 18 October 1933; Collector of Customs, NSW, to Mr Harry Fay, 5 December 1933, and 9 September 1935; J.A. Carrodus, Department of the Interior to Hon. E.J. Harrison, MP, 5 August 1936; Harry Fay to HM Customs, 11 October 1938; Harry Fay to Honourable E.J. Harrison, 20 February 1939; Harry Fay to Acting Commonwealth Migration Officer, 30 December 1947. Mar Papers.

⁷⁸ Department of Immigration, Form D (Particulars to be furnished by Chinese employers who have the services of Chinese under exemption), Hong Yuen, Inverell, 1946, 1947, 1949, 1955. Mar Papers. The forms have different dates for Percy So Quan's time of entry and for the date of his joining Harry Fay's staff. Also Interview with Percy So Quan.

⁷⁹ Australian Archives (NSW): sp1122/1; N59/4920; Interviews with Betty Chor, Dulcie Hon, Henry Hong and Elaine Jang.

means used to sponsor new arrivals, Elaine Jang, for example, recalled that her father, John Hong, used contacts in Sydney:

*I think ... my father knew the people in Sydney who had business [in assisting with immigration papers] and he'd write to them to give them names of people who could want somebody from China as an assistant of a shop. That way the law said you can be brought out to help ... That's one of the ways that he brought people out. There were other ways as well but this was the main one - business people bringing out as assistants in the shop and then they worked there for some years.*⁸⁰

Archival and personal papers provide specific examples of this networking and assistance. Harry Fay's brother-in-law, William Liu, for example, often interceded on behalf of individuals Harry Fay sought to sponsor and/or keep. William Liu developed a high profile within the Chinese community especially as an advocate for amelioration of the restrictive immigration legislation and as a spokesperson for improved relations with China.⁸¹ The considerable skills and contacts brought to these tasks were also used in lobbying for Hong Yuen staff. In the early 1930s, for example, he wrote to Harry Fay advising him on the documentation needed to apply for his brother, Ernest Lun's, return to Australia and on the appropriate procedures and forms for applying for extensions of Certificates of Exemption.⁸² He also wrote to the Collector of Customs about an earlier application for the entry of Ernest Lun and his family, and of the addition of a baby son who would be coming with them.⁸³ Twenty five years later he was still lobbying on behalf of compatriots associated with the Hong Yuen network. In 1957, he wrote a number of letters to the Commonwealth Migration Officer advocating quick action in offering permanent residency to Henry Wah Sun Ping Kee and Harry Day and their families. He argued:

*Together with their respective Australian-born children, all consider themselves as Australians and none of the three (sic) families have any plans of ever returning to China, except, maybe, as occasional visitors.*⁸⁴

In diplomatic style, William Liu sent a letter of thanks when news arrived that the applications and lobbying had been successful. Imbedded in the gratitude was a hint of Liu's long running campaign to improve the status of Chinese in Australia and of Australia's relations with China. He commented:

Because of his Chinese descent, Harry Day, now an accepted Sino-Australian, ... will be able to continue his life here as a useful link in furthering understanding and friendship

⁸⁰ Interview with Elaine Jang.

⁸¹ Wang Gungwu, 'The life and times of William Liu: Australian and Chinese perspectives' in J. Hardy (ed.), *Stories of Australian Migration*, NSW University Press, Sydney, 1988, pp.109-124; and Mo Xiangyi and Mo Yimei, *William J. Liu, OBE. - Pathfinder 1893-1983*, Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New South Wales, Sydney, 1991.

⁸² William Liu to Harry Fay, undated (1933?), and William Liu to Harry Fay, 28 October 1933. Mar Papers.

⁸³ William Liu to Collector of Customs, Sydney, 27 January 1934. Mar Papers.

⁸⁴ William Liu, Sydney, to Mr B.C. Wall, Commonwealth Migration Officer, 27 June 1957. Australian Archives (NSW): sp1122/1; N56/5481.

*between the land of his ancestors and the Commonwealth.*⁸⁵

The influence of William Liu's sentiments, and perhaps his letter writing skills, is also evident in other correspondence lobbying governments and their officials. In a 1934 letter to the federal MP for Wentworth, E.J. Harrison, Harry Fay gently suggested that an easing of the immigration and exemption regulations

*...will be a means of promoting real friendship between Australia and China, and ... I feel confident that there would be more orders for Australian goods from China.*⁸⁶

Also active in providing assistance to negotiate the immigration requirements were Charles and Thomas Wong See, relatives of Cecilia Hon in Tenterfield. Marina Mar recalled that Charles Wong See did a lot of interpretation and letter writing for her father, Harry Fay. She remembered her father stating that 'I educated those kids [Charles Wong See's sons] with the money I gave Charlie See'.⁸⁷ In an interview recorded before his death, William Liu confirmed Charles Wong See as 'one of our great interpreters at the time'.⁸⁸ Correspondence from 1934 shows Charles Wong See at work lobbying for extensions of Certificates of Exemption, and offering suggestions to Harry Fay about providing donations to E.J. Harrison's election campaigns as a wise political move.⁸⁹ Harrison subsequently became the Minister for the Interior. Thomas Wong See, Charles Wong See's son, fulfilled a similar role for Chinese in northern New South Wales. In 1945, for example, he was recorded as the agent acting for Mrs Jang Hong (Mary Hong) in her application for a five year extension of her Certificate of Exemption. He was still acting on her behalf five years later in her ultimately successful application for '...permission ... to remain in the Commonwealth without it being necessary to apply for periodical extensions of the validity of the Certificate of Exemption'. In supporting the application, Thomas Wong See, emphasised her sole ownership of Hop Sing and Company from 1933 to 1950, and her equal partnership (with her husband) in the business since 1950.⁹⁰ Support for applications to enter and stay in the country also came from Sydney Chinese merchants like D.Y. Narme, Spence Mah Hing and Choi Mon Ping. Their signatures appear as guarantors for the bonds required for Chinese to enter the country.⁹¹ From his correspondence files, it is evident that Harry Fay also appealed to members of parliament to follow through and lobby for particular individuals, and local non-Chinese residents provided affidavits attesting to the good character of the

85 William Liu, Sydney, to Mr L.T. Gamble, A/Commonwealth Migration Officer, Sydney, December 1958. Australian Archives (NSW): sp1122/1; N56/5481.

86 Harry Fay to E.J. Harrison, Federal Member for Wentworth, Sydney, 21 March 1934. Mar Papers.

87 Interviews with Marina Mar, 24 July 1987 and 22 May 1990.

88 Marina Mar interview with William Liu, Sydney, c.1981.

89 C.W. See to Harry Fay, 9 April 1934; 27 August 1934; 31 August 1934; 3 September 1934; 12 November 1934. Mar Papers.

90 T.F.W. See, Public Accountant, Sydney, to The Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra, 24 November 1953. Australian Archives (NSW): sp1122/1; N59/4920. See also Interviews with Henry Hong, Tenterfield, 7 July 1983, 2 March 1990 and 11 May 1990.

91 For example: Customs and Excise Office memorandum, 8 November 1931. Australian Archives (NSW) sp1122/1; N59/4920; Form No. 27, Immigration Act 1901-1935, 5 May 1939. Australian Archives (NSW): sp1122/1; N56/5481.

applicants. During the 1930s, for example, there are a number of letters from Harry Fay to E.J. Harrison arguing the case for extensions of certificates and for the suitability of his businesses under the regulations.⁹² In 1936 there is a letter from J.A. Carrodus of the Department of the Interior to E.J. Harrison indicating that Harrison had supported requests for extensions for Joe Mah, Lawrence Ping Kee and a J. Hong.⁹³ In 1949 there is correspondence between Arthur Calwell and William Scully relating to permission for Len Mah, Tim Leong and Miss Cheng E. Lan to extend their Certificates of Exemption.⁹⁴

The lobbying had success. Chinese immigrants brought in initially for a short period, ended up staying for longer and longer periods, many eventually settling in Australia. Their sponsors, storekeepers like Harry Fay and Harry Hon,⁹⁵ negotiated the legislation in order to bring in relatives and others who were obliged, at least for a time, to remain in the employment of their sponsors.

- **Staff**

The staff for the Chinese stores were drawn from three distinct groups. There were the overseas-born Chinese sponsored under the immigration legislation. There were also Australian-born Chinese and non-Chinese employees.

Some of the Australian-born Chinese came through a network which extended from Sydney through northern New South Wales to Queensland. Others were born in the local area. Their routes to employment in the stores are illustrated through the work histories of individuals. Sam Woo, for example, was born in Georgetown, Queensland. During the 1920s he laboured first as a station cook then as a shop assistant in and around Cairns and Ingham. In the 1930s he had a friend who was working at the Hong Yuen store in Moree. As Sam Woo explained:

I had a friend that worked in Moree. He was on those haberdashery vans, and he told me there was a job offering in Moree, and that induced me to leave Ingham to come down. I thought, oh well, I'll go down and have a look. The day I landed in Moree, George Ping Kee told me Harry Fay wanted men up in Inverell. So the same day I landed there [in Moree] I was on my way to Inverell.⁹⁶

Sam Woo managed the hardware section of the Hong Yuen store in Inverell before moving on to Coonabarabran in the late 1930s. His brothers, Bill and George Woo, also joined the Hong Yuen staff for a time.⁹⁷

⁹² Harry Fay to E.J. Harrison, 21 March 1934, 19 September 1938, 6 October 1938, 10 November 1938. Mar Papers.

⁹³ J.A. Carrodus, Department of the Interior to Honourable E.J. Harrison, MP, 5 August 1936. Mar Papers.

⁹⁴ Arthur Calwell to the Hon. W.J. Scully, 8 April 1949; Arthur Calwell to the Hon. W.J. Scully, 14 September 1949. Mar Papers.

⁹⁵ Other storekeepers from the Glen Innes, Inverell, Tenterfield district who sponsored shop assistants and students included Jack Joe Lowe, Tommy Young, John Hong, Percy Young and their relatives.

⁹⁶ Interview with Sam Woo.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

Like Sam Woo, Thomas Loy had grown up in Queensland. His first employment, however, was a labourer. A family connection eventually brought him to Inverell.

I was one of twelve kids, the third youngest. I left school at the age of thirteen. that was about 1927. We just all had to go to work. Wages were small, but we lived mainly on golden syrup and dripping on bread.

Anyway, I started work at the age of thirteen. For about five months I worked on a dairy farm, miking, everything. Then I went droving to Longreach and places like that. That was pretty grim. So much black soil, all the time you'd be stopping to scrape the mud off the calves' feet. I also tried cane cutting, and I even worked on the roads. I was just up there, working around, roughing it.

In 1934 I decided to go on a two week holiday ... to Inverell where I had a sister married to a fellow working at Hong Yuens. On the Saturday afternoon I played football and, on the Sunday, they wanted to put me in the Inverell team. ... Then they wanted me to stay. Harry Fay offered me a job at Hong Yuen. ... I thought, why not? All I was going back to in Queensland was the roughing around.⁹⁸

The Yum family provides another example. Along with six of his brothers, Albert (Abbie) Yum worked for the Chinese stores in Inverell and Glen Innes, especially Hong Yuen and its various branches, during the 1930s and 1940s. They had first met Harry Fay during his buying visits to Sydney. Their mother and sisters made clothes for Ruby Fay and her daughters.⁹⁹



The Yum Brothers, c.1935. 100

⁹⁸ Interview with Thomas Loy.

⁹⁹ There was a total of fourteen children in the Yum family: ten boys and four girls. One boy died when an infant. The six who worked at Hong Yuen and its various branches were Albert, Charles, Edward, Ernest, Norman, and Reginald. Interview with Albert Yum.

¹⁰⁰ Yum Photographs. For profiles of each of the brothers consult Appendix C at the end of this thesis.

The store owners also employed Australians of Chinese descent from the district and, in so doing, provided them with livelihoods and futures in the area. By 1913, for example, among the employees of Hong Yuen in Inverell were two brothers and two sisters, Dick and Harvey Guan, and May Munsie and Beatrice Winmill. Their grandfather, John Guan, had migrated from China and appeared in the district in the 1870s. He was unusual among the early Chinese in that, by the time of his death in 1894, he owned properties in the main street of Inverell and had land at Dog Trap outside the town.¹⁰¹ Their father, James Guan, who had married a local non-Chinese woman, Mary Ann Rolfe, did not follow his father's footsteps. His occupations were more in accord with the patterns of other Chinese in the district. He was a wool and skin buyer and, later, a gardener.¹⁰² Beatrice Winmill worked at Hong Yuen until her retirement in the 1960s. Her son, Gordon, was also employed in the store.¹⁰³

The children of miner and Tingha resident, Charles Duck Chong, and his wife, Susan Chun, also found employment at the Chinese stores. Eldest son, Arthur, worked at Sam Kee in Tingha and later, at the Hong Yuen branch store, Fong Lee, in Inverell where he was joined by another brother, James Duck Chong. Their younger brother, Robert, had work at both Wing Hing Long and Sam Kee in Tingha before he joined the Salvation Army. Sister, Ivy, also worked at Sam Kee in Tingha.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, the children of market gardener and Emmaville resident George Fong Garr began their working lives employed in the Chinese stores. As George Fong Garr's second youngest son, Kevin Garr, recalled on being asked why he joined the staff of Hong Yuen (Inverell):

*I guess because we knew people. My cousin, Ernie [Ernest Sue Fong], was working there. My brother, Eric, worked in Texas then at Moree. Frank [brother] worked at Texas. Dorrie [sister] worked at Hop Sing in Tenterfield, and then on to Hong Yuen in Texas. Stella was also at Hop Sing.*¹⁰⁵

Australian-born family members provided another part of the labour force in the stores. The expectation was that nephews, cousins, and eventually children, if not grandchildren, would help in (and perhaps benefit from) working in the family business. Sometimes, there was little alternative, especially for smaller stores where it was beyond the income of the store to employ outsiders. To this end, there are memories of helping out in the family stores as children, and of the expectation that family members would eventually join the staff. Pat Yee, for example, remembered assisting in her parents' small general store in

101 *Inverell Times*, 28 February 1913 and 4 March 1913 which provide details of John Guan's estate.

102 Field notes, 24 June 1991.

103 Interview with Beatrice Winmill. See also Appendix D: Descendants of John Guan at the end of this thesis.

104 Interview with Robert Duck Chong, Sydney, 26 April 1991.

105 Interview with Kevin Garr.

Bingara during the late 1930s :

I can remember Neville, my older brother, and myself, we used to have to often stay in the shop. We would have been only about six or eight or something, and we used to serve in the shop. You know, we'd sit in the shop and ... we'd just serve the lollies, or whatever it was, and if something came up we couldn't manage, well we'd just call Mum and Dad.

We used to work in the store after school, at weekends, and then, when we left school, both my brother and myself were full-time in the store and Dad didn't have to employ anybody.¹⁰⁶

Pat Yee stated this very matter-of-factly. It was simply expected. How else could the family survive? What alternatives were there? Dulcie Hon expressed a similar sentiment. She observed:

I was thirteen when we went to Tenterfield [in the early 1920s], and I left school then and started in the shop. At first there was my father, and Eric [brother] and me. Mainly immediate family members worked in the store...¹⁰⁷

The store, Sue Fong and Sons, in Emmaville was partly staffed by family members, sons and daughters of George Sue Fong. As Ernest Sue Fong explained:

Bessie, she was a really, really smart girl. She was 13 I think when she got her Intermediate and all that sort of thing, and they sent books around, they wanted her to go away to school, but father wouldn't allow it. He said, 'Oh, no, girls, I don't want the girls to leave home. It's no good, you must stop at home.' So she worked in the store... She was Dad's bookkeeper ... Maisie, Frank, Mary, Sidney - they all worked in the store too.¹⁰⁸

The stores also employed non-Chinese staff. Along with the Australian-born Chinese they were especially engaged as shop assistants and in providing other services which required frequent contact with customers. The 1936 photograph reproduced on the following page illustrates the composition of the staff at the Hong Yuen store in Inverell. Of the fifty staff in the photograph, at least twenty were local residents with no Chinese ancestry.¹⁰⁹ Of these twenty, the majority were young women who worked as shop assistants or in the store office. Photographs of the Kwong Sing store in Glen Innes similarly demonstrate that local non-Chinese employees were a part of the staff there.¹¹⁰ The pattern was repeated although, for many of the smaller stores, the amount of business meant that, at most, there was one non-Chinese staff member.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Pat Yee, Inverell, 4 June 1990.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with Dulcie Hon.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Ernest Sue Fong, Inverell, 14 February 1984.

¹⁰⁹ Based on information about individuals in the photograph provided by Marina Mar.

¹¹⁰ Refer back to photographs of Kwong Sing on pp.105 and 115 previously.

¹¹¹ This applied, for example, to Hop Sing and Sun Sun in Tenterfield. Interviews with Dulcie Hon, Henry Hong and Elaine Jang.



The staff of Hong Yuen and Company, Inverell, 1936.¹¹²

Despite the practice of employing non-Chinese staff and the employment opportunities this opened for local residents and families, the majority of employees were Chinese. In their efforts to ensure that the businesses were profitable, storekeepers sought to use, and possibly overuse, all available labour.¹¹³ Fellow countrymen, especially when job opportunities were otherwise limited, provided an obviously suitable and almost captive labourforce: where else could they get work? Those brought from overseas were virtually bound by the immigration regulations which had allowed them entry to work in a specific store, for a set period, and under certain conditions. Australian-born Chinese were similarly caught in a situation where seeking employment outside the network of Chinese businesses was difficult. The racism which underpinned the immigration restrictions had also ensured

¹¹² Fay Photographs. Marina Mar and Albert Yum provided the following list identifying people in the photograph. *Back row, left to right:* Harold Wei, Henry Sue Fong, Bon Quetcher, Jim ?, Joseph Chen See, Tom Loy, Jim Ming, Dick Guan, Algie Fong, Trevor Jack, Gordon Winmill. *Second row from back, left to right:* Bill Morton, Albert Yum, George Woo, ?, Thelma Fay, Dot O'Brien, Eileen Fay, Hazel Munsie, Jo Arkinstall, Bill Manwar, Charles Yu, Herb Mons. *Second front row, left to right:* Harry Pope, William Liu, Gladys Morton, ? Morton, Dulcie Arnold, ? McKenzie, Dorothy Sue See, Molly Arnold, Rene Arkinstall, Hilda Goldman, Edna Worland, Jean McKenzie, ? Monkton, ?, Phyllis Ison. *Front row, left to right:* Sam Woo, Albert Look, Harvey Guan, Walter Hoy, Rene Bartier, Beatrice Winmill, Harry Fay, Jessie McKenzie, Ted Lumbewe, Owen Ling, Edward Fong, Joe Mah. Mar Papers.

¹¹³ This is a characteristic identified in the expanding literature on ethnic enterprises. Roger Waldinger, Howard Aldrich, Robin Ward and others, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant business in industrial societies*, Sage, Newbury Park, 1990 provides a good overview of issues and approaches. Specifically in relation to the long hours and diligent labour required from compatriots and from family members, and in relation to the overseas Chinese see Victor Nee and Herbert Y. Wong, 'Asian American socioeconomic achievement: the strength of the family bond', *Sociological Perspectives*, 28/3, July 1985, especially pp.287-291 and 296-299; and Jim Kitay and Constance Lever-Tracy, 'From Survival to Success: working in Chinese restaurants in Australia', Paper to the International Working Party on Labour Market Segmentation Conference, Trento, Italy, 1990, especially pp.18-19

available were those in which other Chinese were already involved.¹¹⁴ The Depression years added a further restricting factor. As Ernest Sue Fong recalled of his early years at Hong Yuen:

*it was hard to find work and Mr Fay'd give 'em [itinerant Chinese] a couple of days work. Often he couldn't give any more than that.*¹¹⁵

The stores provided employment opportunities in a restricted market.

- **Working Conditions**

When they joined the staff of the stores, Chinese employees were greeted by working conditions shaped by traditional Chinese business and family obligations and practices, by the need to accommodate Chinese needs alongside those of non-Chinese staff and customers, and by the specific demands of working as shop assistants and storemen in general stores in a rural part of New South Wales.

For the Chinese staff, Australian-born and overseas-born, accommodation and meals were a part of the employment package. Ernest Sue Fong, who joined the Hong Yuen (Inverell) staff in the 1930s, provided a description of the daily routine for those like himself who served in the store:

I worked at Hong Yuen for 25 bob and keep. I lived in the shack with about seven other Chinese boys from all over. Another five lived upstairs [above the shop].

The shack used to be Mr Fay's old home. Upstairs was a bit classier. But it was all clean and well set up.

Now the way it worked: At 7.30 in the morning the cook would ring the bell, and everyone would go down to the kitchen including Harry Fay and Eddie Fong (he was the head grocer then, a 'fine bloke'), and we'd have a Chinese breakfast with rice and Chinese food. Then into the shop until the shop opened and we'd cut up bacon, fill the shelves, jobs like that. At lunchtime, the bell would ring again and all the staff [Chinese and non-Chinese] would go for lunch. It would always be English meals. ...Then back to work.

At 6 pm supper was served. Chinese food this time. Even some of the married fellows [those not living on the premises] would come down. Some nights, say two or three a week, we'd go back to the store to, for example, bag up sugar, depending on what was needed. We'd work until 9 pm.

*Always, on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, we'd also work. Everything came in bulk in those days, and we'd have to bottle the metho and honey and kero.*¹¹⁶

114 Refer to Chapter 5, pp. 94-98 previously for details about the restricted employment opportunities available to Chinese.

115 Interview with Ernest Sue Fong.

116 *ibid.*

Tom Loy also recalled his initial employment at Hong Yuen in Inverell during the mid 1930s:

We didn't work any set hours but we worked for about 70 hours a week. On Saturdays we'd be weighing up and on Sundays bottling up - the honey and metho and shellite and benzine. Sometimes we'd work Wednesday and Friday nights as well.

Upstairs [above the shop] there were about five of us living. In the house out the back, another seven or so.¹¹⁷

The tradition of providing employment, food and accommodation for Chinese employees meant that the kitchens and backs of stores had features unlikely to be found in other country stores. Descriptions of Kwong Sing in Glen Innes provide graphic examples. A long-standing resident of the town, A.B. Drummond, recorded his account of the store in the 1920s:

At the counters there was always a predominant number of locals employed, while the 'back store' and packing departments were usually manned by Chinese, who received instruction in their duties as well as being given tuition in English, as most of them were new arrivals in Australia.¹¹⁸

The variety of sheds and work sites at the back of the store is indicated by a 1920 plan of the store which indicates the amount of bulk storage needed, the support amenities - stables, stalls, generator, motor garage - for the store, and the accommodation set aside for employees.¹¹⁹ The dwellings at the back of the plan were the houses occupied by members of Percy Young's extended family, the Kwan clan. Using this plan as a trigger for his memory, Percy Young's grandson, Harvey Young, visualised the back of the store in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Among the boiling water used for melting honey, the sheds, the stables, and the loading bays for chaff, wheat, super phosphate and rock salt, he could remember:

Growing vegetables round the back of the shop. There was quite a bit of land there.

Chooks and ducks. They used to kill those quite regularly.

Then there were the cooks. They used to make noodles out the back of the shop. Fresh noodles. And the old method then was on a table with a bamboo pole which was tied at one side and a person with one leg over it jumping up and down on this thing to make fresh noodles.¹²⁰

Harvey Young's sisters, Valmai Au and Olma Gan, recalled the accommodation and facilities available for the cooks and other staff. They remembered specific employees and where they stayed:

There was George Woo and Jimmy Sheah ... They were in the bedrooms upstairs, on the side facing Tattersalls Hotel. And I think the cook lived there too. Though not Kum Jew [one of the cooks] ... he lived in a room close to the kitchen.

117 Interview with Thomas Loy, Inverell, 15 February 1984.

118 Kwong Sing and Company: One Hundred Years of Service, *Glen Innes Examiner*, 1986, p.5.

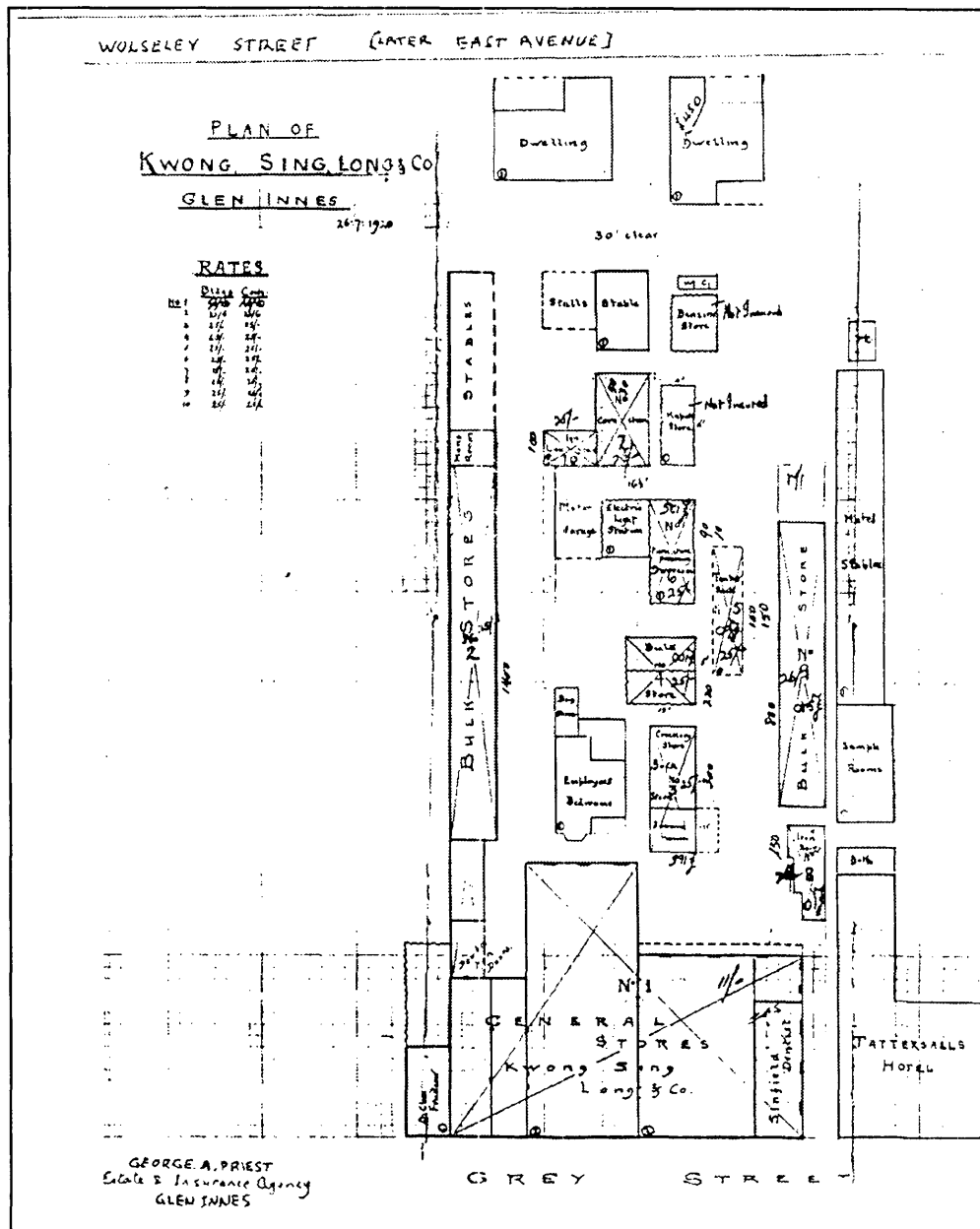
119 See the plan on the following page.

120 Interview with Harvey Young, Glen Innes, 16 February 1990.

There was another cottage, separate cottage, at the back of the shop which has now been pulled down. The kitchen was there. ...And then there was the dining room where the staff used to eat...¹²¹

Leona Tong also remembered the Kwong Sing cooks whose presence figured in her childhood:

I can remember three or four different cooks in my time. When I was little there was big fat Long Go. He was bald and big like a giant. He ate a great bowl of rice. Then there was George Lay. He had long finger nails. I can remember him stirring the rice at night with a big stick.¹²²



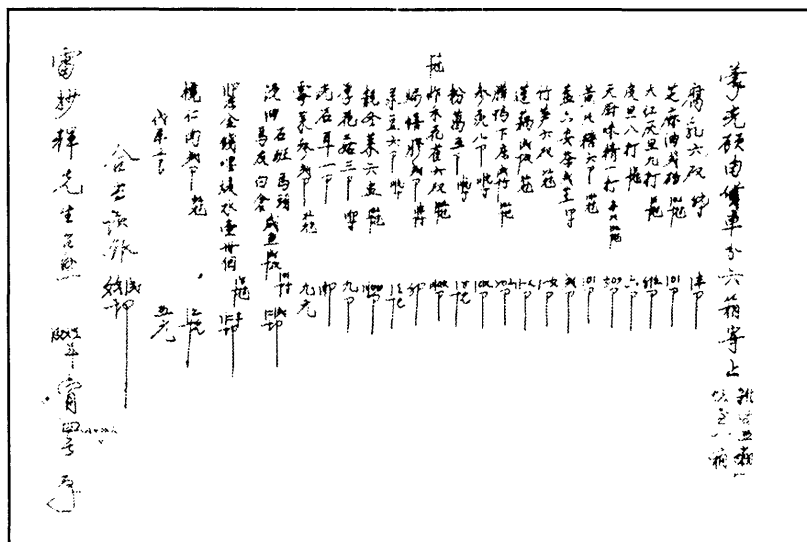
Plan of Kwong Sing and Company, Glen Innes, 1920.¹²³

121 Interview with Valmai Au and Olma Gan.
 122 Interview with Leona Tong, Brisbane, 24 September 1991.
 123 Kwong Sing Papers.

Business records show that, in order to provide the Chinese ingredients for meals, supplies were bought from Chinese stores in Sydney. Hong Yuen, for example, purchased Chinese ingredients from Hong Sing and Company in Sydney. Invoices dating from 1943 to 1959 record regular purchases of, among other items, preserved duck, ginger, Chinese sausage, roast pork, dried vegetables, rice, chestnuts, black beans, canned fish, Chinese mushrooms, shark fins, oyster sauce, Chinese tea, squid, salted fish, bamboo shoots, glutinous rice flour, soy sauce, bean curd, preserved plums, and lychees.¹²⁴ Another regular supplier of Chinese ingredients was the family business of C.M. Ping and Company, 12 Campbell Street, Sydney. As Constance Choy, daughter of the owner, Choy Mon Ping, recalled:

*We sold Chinese groceries, imported Chinese groceries, and we supplied the country people with groceries.*¹²⁵

Hong Yuen business records confirm this trade. In June 1943, for example, Hong Yuen received an invoice for leg ham, melon seeds, three Chinese woks, pens and preserved ducks.¹²⁶



Invoice from Hong Sing and Company, Dixon Street, Haymarket, Sydney to Louie Mew Fay, 1949.¹²⁷

124 Various invoices and correspondence from Hong Sing and Company, Haymarket to Mew Fay, 9 March 1943, 4 August and 9 August 1943, 6 May 1945, 9 September 1945, 1 February 1946, 23 February 1946, 3 January 1947, 20 February 1947, 31 May 1947, 30 December 1947, 26 September 1948, 7 February 1949, 21 February 1949, 22 March 1949, 4 June 1949, 2 and 12 August 1949, 23 October 1949, 4 and 23 November 1949, 20 and 29 March 1950, 20 April 1950, 18 May 1950, 15 and 23 August 1950, 27 and 29 November 1950, 13 December 1950, 11 and 21 February 1951, 6 August 1951, 4 December 1951, 12 March 1953, 16 June 1953, 12 August 1953, 8 October 1953, 16 November 1953, 20 February 1955, December 1959, and number undated. Mar Letters 62, 120, 167, 182, 183, 186, 365, 369, 372, 373, 379, 418, 422, 424, 425, 428, 429, 431, 432, 434, 435, 439, 459-463, 469-471, 478, 480-4, 490, 498, 512-513, 527-528, 533-536, 538.

125 Interview with Constance Choy, Sydney, 23 May 1990.

126 Mon Ping to Hong Yuen, June 1943. Mar Letter 319. See also Mon Ping to Mew Fay, June 1936, December 1936, June 1937, June 1938, December 1938, December 1939, June 1940, December 1940, December 1941, June 1942. Mar Letters, 235 315a 315b, 316, 317a, 317b, 318a, 318b, 319, 320, 321, 328a, 328b

127 Mar Letters 463. (Translated by Vivian Lai).

The supply of Chinese groceries was, of course, only a small part of the trade carried on by the stores. Their main goods came from the large wholesalers like Robert Reid, J. Ireland, D. & W. Murray, Sargood Gardiner, Hoffnung, Briscoe and F.H. Praeger who supplied other country stores.¹²⁸ These goods reflected the produce and products required by local customers: the groceries, hardware, haberdashery, crockery which occupied the shelves in the shops. In the bigger stores, it was also increasingly the case that local non-Chinese staff were among those serving customers. However, it was the activities at the back of the stores and after hours which ensured that the goods and services available for local customers were on hand, and it was these activities in particular which were shaped and flavoured by the need to cater for Chinese employees.

- **Paternalism?**

Family members, and other overseas-born and Australian-born Chinese formed the core of the staff. They were provided with bed, board and work. It was, at least on the surface, very much the paternalistic and moralistic tradition identified by Yen Ching-Hwang in his study of the Wing On company which was established in Shanghai and Hong Kong during this period¹²⁹. It was the responsibility of the father-entrepreneur to look after his employees and to treat them as members of an extended family, inculcating in them traditional Chinese values of loyalty, hard-work, and thrift. Indeed, at Kwong Sing, Percy Young framed and hung on the wall some Chinese proverbs demonstrating the values he honoured and that he, presumably, exhorted his employees to follow. Under the heading, 'Work hard and save money', they included, for example:

When men are born they all want to be wealthy, but you have to learn to be satisfied with what you have in your daily life.

If you are poor it is because you are lazy.

*Work hard at your business and never complain of hardships.*¹³⁰

This closeknit and paternalistic network clearly provided some overseas-born and Australian-born Chinese with employment and with a base for future employment and business opportunities. Gratitude and appreciation underpin the recollections of many of those who worked at the stores. The system, however, was also open to exploitation. This was particularly the case for overseas-born Chinese who were virtually bound to remain with their sponsor in order to remain in Australia. Arthur Gar-Lock Chang was outspoken about his experiences in this regard. He was sponsored to work at Wing Hing Long in Tingha in the

¹²⁸ Interviews with Dulcie Hon, Trevor Jack and Sam Woo.

¹²⁹ Yen Ching-Hwang, 'The Wing On Company in Hong Kong and Shanghai: A case study of modern overseas Chinese enterprise', *Proceedings of Conference on Eighty Years History of the Republic of China*, Volume IV, Taipei, 1991, pp. 91-92.

¹³⁰ Kwan Family History, Kwong Sing Papers.

mid 1930s. He has bitter memories of his time there:

I was brought out first as a student, then became a shop assistant. I was exploited. Long hours, no pay. My boss was horrible to me ... standing over me, checking all I did. That 'White Australia policy' was evil...¹³¹

Documentary evidence adds detail to his recollections. Correspondence from the Department of the Interior indicates that, in 1940, Arthur Locke Chang [sic] applied for transfer from Wing Hing Long to Hong Yuen in Inverell. His application was supported by Harry Fay who argued that Arthur Locke Chang had been poorly paid and that, through no fault of his own, had been dismissed with short notice from Wing Hing Long.¹³² The application for transfer was successful.¹³³ In Arthur Gar-Lock Chang's recollections, however, circumstances did not improve. Embittered by his experiences and resenting the binding effect of the immigration regulations, he took the first opportunity to escape from employment in the stores. As he explained:

The day Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, I thought now I can't be deported because Hong Kong and Singapore were cut off. So I packed my bags and went to Sydney.¹³⁴

Arthur Gar-Lock Chang's grievances have been made quite public and explicit. There are hints that other Chinese employed in the stores found their situations uncomfortable or, at least, not adequately catering to their needs. Louie Yun Lum, for example, arrived in Australia in the late 1930s. He started work in the kitchen at Hong Yuen. However, he decided to leave Hong Yuen and seek work elsewhere. In a letter written after spending some time in Sydney, he asked Harry Fay to 'release my unpaid wages'. The letter was written in Chinese and, in its politeness and underplay of criticism, shields the discontent Louie Yun Lum felt. As a prelude he explained his resignation from Hong Yuen:

I recall my resignation from your company. I admit that I was silly in making a hasty and thoughtless decision. I did not repay you for your generous support... please excuse me for leaving your company in a hurry. It was because of inflation in my hometown [in China]. I demanded higher wages out of poverty. I was having financial problems in supporting my family [back in China]... I hope you understand my situation and forgive me for my greed and naivete.¹³⁵

Joe Mah also indicated that, after ten years working at Hong Yuen and its offshoot, Yee's Cafe, he wanted a change. He recalled the long and hard hours he put in when he first arrived:

Anyway, my whole life is working there in the back store in the morning. Get up,

131 Field notes, 10 October 1994.

132 Harry Fay to Dr Pao (Chinese Consul-General), 3 December 1940. Mar Papers.

133 B.R. Watson for Secretary, Department of the Interior to Consul-General for China, 2 January 1941. Mar Papers.

134 Quoted in Morag Loh and Judith Winternitz, *Dinky-Di: The contributions of Chinese immigrants and Australians of Chinese descent to Australia's defence forces and war efforts 1899-1988*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p. 107. For an account of Arthur Gar-Lock Chang's experiences during the war years consult *ibid.*, pp.106-109.

135 Louie Yun Lum to Harry Fay, n.d. Mar Letter 335. [Translated by Vivian Lai]

*sweep the yard, clean the toilet - no sewerage at that time - and finished up gotta help in the kitchens. Not only seven days a week. It would be more than seven days a week. Long hours. Every night 12 o'clock. At nighttime, sweep up, fill up shelves in the groceries.*¹³⁶

Even when he moved on to a more responsible position in Yee's Fruit Shop and Cafe, he mainly remembered uninviting conditions:

*No time to do any damn thing. On Sunday, got to come back [to the store], put coat on and cook again. Hard work. And poor salary, wages.*¹³⁷

Whether justifiably disgruntled or not, it is evident that not all new arrivals settled comfortably into the demanding routine of long hours and hard work in relatively isolated communities, and that the paternalism and support offered was not always seen as caring and effective. Yet, for many, the Chinese stores provided an important base.

- **Conclusion**

For the owners and their families, the stores provided a route to settlement in Australia and to at least an economic upward mobility. For employees, they provided a site of employment and, often, a foundation for eventually branching out and establishing their own businesses. Significantly, the choice of stores as the conduit for these activities and the nature of some of the practices which underpinned the stores were shaped by a mixture of factors, some of which clearly related to the status of the Chinese as immigrants in Australia and as relative outsiders in small rural communities. As immigrants the Chinese brought with them certain cultural practices and obligations which were well accommodated in the demands and opportunities of storekeeping. In particular, there was the concern to fulfil family obligations and to benefit from family support. This provided an impetus to expand businesses. The impetus was heightened by immigration regulations which only permitted certain categories of Chinese - especially those related to storekeeping and merchants - to enter Australia. Storekeeper-sponsors had then to establish ways and means of successfully negotiating the immigration regulations in order to ensure that they could continue to import overseas-born Chinese. The employment practices which were then applied to Chinese staff, both overseas-born and Australian-born, reflected traditions and practices brought from China including a paternalism which treated staff as members of an extended family, and which regarded their labour as almost an obligatory contribution. This system, aided by the restrictions imposed by immigration legislation, also invited exploitation and dissatisfaction among the Chinese themselves. These factors worked within a local environment in which Chinese stores had to fight for their share of the local market. To do this they employed marketing and business strategies which showed an ability to move between the worlds

136 Interview with Joe Mah.

137 *ibid.*

which they had brought with them, and those they had encountered in Australia. The public face of the stores was geared to attracting local customers; the private world was inhabited by a medley of imported, adapted and new practices and traditions, and by a network of negotiation and lobbying. It was this complex mixture which provided the base for the lifestyles which evolved. This chapter has considered the backgrounds of the Chinese staff employed in these country stores and the working conditions they encountered. The next chapter considers the social and community life experienced beyond the work environment.