

“The Most Beautiful Joss House”: Chinese Temples in Emmaville and Tingha¹

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Abstract: The histories and place of the Chinese temples that served the northern New South Wales tin mining towns of Emmaville and Tingha provide insights into the role of temples as an integral part of Chinese diasporic communities: they tell of items, beliefs, practices and rituals brought from China, and they hint at support networks and organisations. They also indicate the complex and changing place of the temples and, implicitly, the Chinese as integral parts of their local Australian communities – as exotic, as exciting, as sometimes threatening and also as familiar. This article identifies the variety of sources that have emerged to document these histories and, drawing on the insights offered through recent work on the history and heritage of the Chinese in Australia, adds to our understanding of the complexities of the history of the Chinese in Australia. By focusing on historic sites in regional New South Wales it also honours the significant work done by Barry McGowan.

Keywords: temples, Chinese, regional New South Wales

Introduction

In the 1980s and early 1990s Ernest Sue Fong (born 1916) and his sister Bessie Chiu (born 1912) (figure 1) were interviewed about growing up as Chinese Australians in the small town of Emmaville in northern New South Wales.² Their father, George Sue Fong, had migrated to Australia in the late 1870s. He first spent time on the Palmer River Goldfield before moving south to the tin fields that opened around Emmaville. Here he worked as a miner, gardener and then as a storekeeper. Here he also married Elizabeth Gorkong and, on her death, her sister, Minnie Gorkong. They were the daughters of Chinese-born Charles Gorkong and Irish-born Mary Maloney.³

Among the rich and varied memories Ernest Sue Fong and Bessie Chiu shared were some fleeting images of Emmaville’s Chinese temple that, in keeping with the language of the time, they referred to as the ‘joss house’. Ernest Sue Fong associated the temple with the beliefs and values of his parents. He recalled how his mother regarded the place as evil and a place of idols. He also recalled how his father, while adamant about sending his children to church on a Sunday, still visited the temple to get advice:

My father was still a Christian but he still had that suspicion ... he had that Buddha suspicion and when he used to go to Sydney to buy, he used to go in there and ask the old priest what did he think about the thing, would it be safe for him to go down

¹ With thanks to Paul Macgregor who inspired me to revisit research on the Chinese temples of northern New South Wales. Thanks also to Doris Yau-Chong Jones and Kok Hu Jin for thoughtful and insightful research and commentary, especially in relation to Chinese inscriptions, beliefs and practices that informed earlier versions of this article. I trust that I have not misrepresented their insights. Thanks also to the referees who provided insightful comments and further details.

² Ernest Sue Fong interviewed by Janis Wilton, Inverell, 14 and 15 February and 27 September 1984, 18 August 1987 and 27 March 1990, University of New England (UNE) Archives; and Bessie Chiu interviewed by Janis Wilton, Gold Coast, 24 September 1991, UNE Archives.

³ “George Sue Fong” and “Charlie Gorkong”, Golden Threads records P180 and P403, UNE Archives; and *New England Immigrants* [online database], Records P287 and P362, <http://hfrc.une.edu.au/heritagefutures/neimmigrants/index.html>.

and buy, you know. I said, “what are you asking for?” ... if they said “oh no, bit dangerous or that something’s going to happen”, he wouldn’t go.⁴

Ernest Sue Fong’s memories were framed by the Christian beliefs and attitudes of his mother, his father’s apparent conversion to Christianity, and arguably by those contemporary views that placed traditional Chinese (or indeed any other non-Christian) beliefs and practices as at best exotic and at worst as evil. They were also framed by his father’s continuing attachment to traditional Chinese practices. Ernest Sue Fong’s glimpse of his father visiting the temple to seek advice about business journeys evokes images of his father shaking the fortune stick container and seeking the wisdom and guidance available in the fortune papers. His father was also the one who organised the exhumation of bodies from the Chinese cemetery that was established near the Chinese settlement in Emmaville, and it was his father who took out insurance on the temple building.⁵



Figure 1. Sue Fong family members in Emmaville, about 1920. Left to right: Frank, George holding Henry, Bessie, Maisie holding Bert, Eva, Ernest. (Courtesy Sue Fong family)

Ernest Sue Fong also shared fond memories of visiting the temple. This was a tactile and visual experience. He remembered “the big idol there” and also “that big marble they used to have. I’d love to get that marble out of his hands”.⁶ His sister Bessie Chiu similarly had strong visual memories. Hers, however, were of the outside of the temple. She repeatedly talked about how “beautiful” the temple was, “the most beautiful joss house”. She also remembered the garden and how “they used to get the bottles and upturn the bottles and have them all around like rocks”.⁷ On

⁴ Ernest Sue Fong interview, 27 March 1990.

⁵ Sue Fong interview; and *Armidale Express*, 9 September 1932, p. 4. See Rebecca Lin Yit, “The Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement”, BA Hons thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 2005, pp. 99–106 for her surface survey of the cemetery site.

⁶ *Glen Innes Examiner*, 10 September 1932, describes the main deity in the temple as “3 feet high by 14 inches wide in a sitting position, and in one hand held a small ball which was said to be of gold”.

⁷ The Hou Wang temple in Atherton, North Queensland, similarly used upturned bottles in the garden; see Hou Wang Miao, Queensland Heritage Register, Item 600010, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=600010>.

being asked whether the outside was painted, she answered simply and directly: “it was red”.⁸ Bessie Chiu also remembered how the temple was a distinct tourist attraction. She recalled how “people used to come and ask me in the shop ‘Excuse me, could you tell me where the joss house is?’, time and time again”.⁹

These fleeting memories shared by Ernest Sue Fong and Bessie Chiu capture key elements of the place and role of Chinese temples, not just among the Chinese communities in Emmaville but the broader local community as well. The interview excerpts touch on the significance of Chinese temples as places for the maintenance of traditional Chinese beliefs and practices (George Sue Fong seeking guidance and advice) in an Australian country town; as tourist destinations (Bessie Chiu regularly being asked directions to the temple); as sometimes threatening – or at least exotic – places (Ernest Sue Fong’s memories of his mother’s views of the temple); and as integral, if not always understood, parts of a local community.

These perspectives are enhanced and textured through a close look at the variety of sources that talk to the nature, role and significance of the Chinese temples in Emmaville and in nearby Tingha. Local histories, local newspapers, photographs, objects, archival records, oral histories, archaeological surveys, and local and family knowledge offer insights and also mark gaps, silences and myths. From an interdisciplinary reading and interpretation of these sources emerges a sense of the history of the temples, what they looked like, how they were viewed and used, and where they – and the items associated with them – sit in terms of the past, present and future of these local communities and their heritage. They also provide examples of the ways in which a focus on particular sites is informed by and contributes to the increasingly diverse and rich scholarship on the history of the Chinese in Australia and in other overseas locations.¹⁰

Locating the Temples

Emmaville and Tingha were towns at the core of the tin mining boom that affected their part of northern New South Wales from the 1870s into the early twentieth century. The booms brought dramatic increases in the size of the populations of the localities and among those attracted to the tin fields were a significant number of Chinese, many coming from other minefields in eastern Australia. In and around Emmaville (originally known as Vegetable Creek), at the peak of the mining boom in 1881, there were approximately 1200 Europeans and 1500 Chinese.¹¹ In Tingha at the same time, there were about 900 Chinese and 600 European miners.¹²

The Chinese presence and their practices attracted comments and descriptions in the local newspapers and elsewhere. These are the familiar contemporary descriptions that reveal much about the cultural blinkers of the writers and express a mixture of fear, wonderment and incomprehension. Mining practices, food, gambling, opium, living conditions and shops attract descriptions, as do the temples. And it is through these descriptions – coupled with the knowledge

⁸ Bessie Chiu interview. Yit, “Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement”, p. 89, has a photograph of a remnant of the temple fence showing that it was painted red.

⁹ Bessie Chiu interview.

¹⁰ For an overview of this research and scholarship, especially in relation to regional New South Wales, see Janis Wilton, “Histories of the Chinese in Regional NSW 1850–1950”, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 105, no. 1 (June 2019): 49–69.

¹¹ Deborah Malor, “Rites of Accession: Some Design/ations of Domestic Archival Practice”, BA Hons thesis, University of Sydney, 1989, Appendix D.

¹² Elizabeth Wiedemann, *World of its Own: Inverell's Early Years, 1827–1920* (Inverell: Inverell Shire Council, 1981), p. 84.

and folklore shared by local historians and residents – that the dates and location of the temples can be identified.

In 1878, in reporting on the large number of Chinese (“there must be fully 300 of them”) on the Vegetable Creek tin fields, a local newspaper also noted that “they have set up a ... joss house”, averring that when “Ah Sin does that he usually means to abide”.¹³ It was just under a decade later, on 29 April 1887, that the temple remembered by Ernest Sue Fong and Bessie Chiu was built. It opened with great celebration and was reported in a number of newspapers. Mention was made of the costs with varying amounts identified – £1000 to £1600 for the building, £600 for the interior fittings and items.¹⁴ There were descriptions of the “gorgeous”, “elaborate” and “extensive” interior decorations; the festivities, procession, music, food, firecrackers, number of visitors – Chinese and European – with one report enthusiastically declaring it as “the largest joss house in the colony”. One article also observed that the “interior adornments ... have been imported from China”.¹⁵

The Emmaville temple, located on the still existing Joss House Road, survived until 1932 when it was destroyed by fire. A newspaper report on the destruction reflected on the size of the temple (40 feet long and 30 feet wide), “the interior decoration of tapestries and the special timber from China used in its construction” and “the Oriental god, 3ft high and 14in. wide ... set on a special stage at the northern end of the house” and “in one hand” holding “a small ball which was said to be of gold”.¹⁶

The dates and exact locations of the temples in Tingha are more difficult to establish. Contemporary reports and local histories assert that there were three temples.¹⁷ One opened in February 1874, soon after the discovery of tin and the first tin mining rush. It was “celebrated by the firing off of about five pounds worth of crackers”.¹⁸ Another opened in February 1883, with the total cost estimated at £1500, and the opening celebrated by a procession, band, banners and much feasting, with the band described as “the specialty of the affair, and the noise created one of the most discordant and unearthly that ever fell on our ear”.¹⁹ By 1885 there were “three joss houses”.²⁰ A hand-drawn plan dated 1905 locates one temple near what was the original bridge across Cope’s Creek, and a second one described as “Let Sun Den Joss House”²¹ next to G.G.

¹³ *Maitland Mercury*, 21 March 1878, p. 7. Lindsay Smith, “Hidden Dragons: The Archaeology of Mid to Late Nineteenth Century Chinese Communities in South-Eastern New South Wales”, PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 2006, p. 256, notes that setting up a temple soon after arrival in a particular locality was a feature of the pattern of Chinese settlements in the mining areas of southern New South Wales.

¹⁴ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 7 May 1887, p. 13 and 28 May 1887, p. 16; and *South Australian Advertiser*, 30 April 1887, p. 5.

¹⁵ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 28 May 1887, p.16; *Daily Telegraph*, 30 April 1887, p. 6; and *Sydney Mail*, 7 May 1887, p. 959.

¹⁶ *Singleton Argus*, 16 September 1932, p. 6. Compare Ian Lobsey, “*The Creek: A History of Emmaville and District 1872–1972* (Emmaville: Emmaville Centenary Celebrations Committee, 1972), p. 36, where the fire is dated as 1939.

¹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 March 1885, p. 4; *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 28 September 1895, p.12; Wiedemann, *World of its Own*, pp. 84–85; and Helen Brown, *Tin at Tingha* (Armidale: Helen Brown, 1982), pp. 34–35 and 100–101.

¹⁸ *Armidale Express*, 14 February 1874, p. 4. See also *Armidale Express*, 23 November 1873, p. 6 where it is reported that “a Joss house will shortly be erected for the benefit of the ‘Heathen Chinees’”.

¹⁹ *Armidale Express*, 9 February 1883, p. 6; and *Illawarra Mercury*, 27 February 1883, p. 4.

²⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 March 1885, p. 4.

²¹ Note that the transliteration of Chinese terms and names in this article are generally based on Cantonese pronunciation. They do not follow a standard format as they have been transliterated by different people with different approaches and the original Chinese characters are often unknown or uncertain.

Hoy's store in Diamond Street.²² A third temple – usually described as the main temple – was on Howell Road. Family and local knowledge maintains that this is the temple that dates from 1883. In the early twentieth century, local resident Albert Smith acquired the building. It was eventually demolished and the timber re-used. Some of the items from the temple were then re-located to the local Chinese Masonic Society building.²³ In 2005, Rebecca Lin Yit conducted a surface archaeological survey of the Howell Road temple site.²⁴

Views of the Temples

As with descriptions of the opening of the temples, images of them that emerge from contemporary newspaper reports and local memories are filled with words and phrases that cast the temples as exotic and often exciting places where strange and perhaps evil activities occur, and where there are idols, colours and practices that are both captivating but difficult to understand. In 1901, for example, a visitor to one of the Tingha temples observed that: "From the outward appearance of this temple one would never suspect it contained anything uncommon, but once inside a sight never to be forgotten was presented." The article describes the "hundreds of fierce and desperate looking images in fighting attitudes ... hideous-looking, unnatural animals ... [and] saintly-looking pigtail figures of brass and other metal." The two rooms "were aglow with gold-painted and brass animals, images and strangely designed things".²⁵ Marie Hunnam, who grew up in Tingha and could remember the remaining temple, vividly recalls the "idols, candles and money" and being scared when, as children, she and her friends used to sneak inside the building.²⁶ Similarly, Mavis Pratt, long-term owner of the Wing Hing Long store and daughter of Chinese residents Jack Joe and Fong Quain Lowe, remembers the fierce looking statues around the walls.²⁷ In Emmaville, an 1894 account of New Year celebrations referred to the "brilliantly illuminated" temple; the "deafening din ... commingled of drum, gong, cymbals, reed instruments as sweet as bagpipes, Chinese fiddle and a profusion of crackers"; and the "feasting and gambling" that followed.²⁸ In 1895 there was also a widely disseminated report asserting that the Chinese miners in Emmaville had become so frustrated by the lack of rain and the consequent impact on their mining that "they prayed to their joss for some time, and then losing patience chopped him up, burnt him and installed a new joss". Reportedly, rain fell soon after.²⁹ Phoebe Wilson, who grew up in Emmaville in the interwar years, remembered that as children they used to be frightened of the temple – they were told that if they went in there something bad would happen to them,³⁰ and Wally Stevenson who, as a child, lived alongside the temple, recalled coming back from Sunday School to watch "Tai Him" (identified as the temple caretaker) praying

²² Reproduced in Elizabeth Wiedemann, *Holding its Own: The Inverell District Since 1919* (Inverell: Inverell Shire Council, 1998), p. 215.

²³ Ross Smith, pers. comm., 21 August and 30 September 1998; *Inverell Times*, 14 April 1978, p. 8; and Brown, *Tin at Tingha*, pp. 34–35 and 100–101.

²⁴ Yit, "Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement", pp. 57–69.

²⁵ *Sydney Mail*, 3 August 1901, p. 291.

²⁶ Marie Hunnam, pers. comm., September 1991.

²⁷ Mavis Pratt interviewed by Janis Wilton, Tingha, February 1998, UNE Archives.

²⁸ *Brisbane Courier*, 20 March 1894, p. 6.

²⁹ *Colac Herald* (Victoria), 24 September 1895, p. 3. Versions also reported in *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 28 September 1895, p. 19; *Traralgon Record* (Victoria), 24 September 1895, p. 2; *South Australian Chronicle*, 28 September 1895, p. 11; and *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, 12 October 1895, p. 14.

³⁰ "Notes from a Conversation with Phoebe Wilson", Emmaville, 7 June 1997, Golden Threads Field Notes, UNE Archives.

and ringing his bells. Stevenson also remembered the roasting of pigs “in the deep stone lined pit at the back” of the temple.³¹

The temples and the activities that centred on them attracted comment. They were noticed. They were different. They were both an integral part of their local communities (everyone got to participate, view, enjoy) and exotically different. This is captured well in a description of Emmaville published in 1897. The article identified the buildings in the town that were worthy of note. Alongside, for example, the hospital, churches, convent, police station, post office and a hotel, the author lists the “Chinese Joss-house” for the “aspect of Oriental splendour” that it provides to the town.³² Similarly, a 1922 report includes the “elaborate Joss-house” among “other relics of decaying greatness” in Emmaville. It also notes that “in Emmaville’s palmy days the flat fronting the Joss house was worked by a horde of Chinese, and their fete days provided weird and wonderful spectacles for the edification of the beholder”.³³

It is within this context of viewing the temples as exotic and memorable features of their local environments that extant photographs of the temples initially need to be framed. Here clear guidance comes from Deborah Malor’s work in contextualising, describing and explaining a photograph album that was given to her great grandfather, Alexander McGillivray.³⁴ McGillivray was the manager of the Great Britain Mine at Emmaville from the late 1880s until about 1937. In 1899 he was presented with an album of twelve photographs of the Great Britain Mine and its locality taken by mining agent and amateur photographer Robert Newby Kirk. The album included images of Chinese miners in the landscape and ended with two views of the Emmaville temple (figures 2 and 3). Malor reads these views of the temple as “touristic views”. She notes that the album does not name or locate the temple and that, even though the location and identity are known to the photographer and to the person for whom the album was a gift, it could easily be “a Joss House in Hong Kong, Darwin, or in Glebe”. More significantly, she notes that it was “perhaps taken in the knowledge that even in 1899 the idea that Emmaville was an exotic mining town was fading fast”.³⁵

Other photographs of the temples are similarly framed by this sense of capturing something different in the Australian landscape and of places worth visiting for their exotic nature. A close-up photograph of what is identified as a section of an altar in the Tingha temple (figure 4), for example, accompanies descriptions of the “never to be forgotten” sight of uncommon, fierce-looking and saintly figures, colours and “strangely designed things” to be seen inside the temple.³⁶ The author asserts that the photograph was taken against the express wishes of the temple caretaker, and that there was a notice at the entrance to the temple that declared: “While we are pleased to see Europeans, we wish it distinctly understood that visitors must not touch anything, and smoking is prohibited.”³⁷ Here was evidence that Europeans were expected as visitors to the

³¹ Wally Stevenson, pers. comm., 12 November 1991.

³² *Freeman’s Journal*, 26 June 1897, p. 21.

³³ *Cessnock Eagle and South Maitland Recorder*, 7 April 1922, p. 5.

³⁴ Deborah Malor, “Collected Views and Momentary Glimpses (A Landscape Photographed)”, paper to the Art Association of Australia Annual Conference, Canberra, 1997; and Malor, “Rites of Accession”. For a detailed discussion of the interpretive value of photographs of Chinese Australians that includes, but also importantly moves away from, the focus on the tourist or exotic view see Sophie Couchman, ‘In and Out of Focus: Chinese and Photography in Australia, 1870s–1940s’, PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 2009 and her articles, for example, “Making the ‘Last Chinaman’: Photography and Chinese as a ‘Vanishing’ People in Australia’s Rural Localities”, *Australian Historical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011): 78–91.

³⁵ Malor, “Collected Views”, pp. 8–9.

³⁶ *Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser*, 3 August 1901, p. 291. See text quoted for footnote 24 previously.

³⁷ *Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser*, 3 August 1901, p. 291.

site and that they were attracted by the 'uncommon' sights. There is also a photograph identified as the altar in the Emmaville temple (figure 5) that offers a similar sense of the different types of altars and interiors to be experienced in the Chinese temples.³⁸

As with the small number of surviving photographs of temple interiors, extant photographs of the exteriors of the temples were most likely taken by visitors, or local residents, who saw the temples as unusual and different. A side view of the Emmaville temple (figure 6) is identified by the handwritten caption – "Joss House Emmaville" – in the bottom right-hand corner.³⁹ It is unclear whether the caption was written at the time the photograph was taken or subsequently. It does indicate that whoever identified the site thought it important to do so perhaps because the distinctly Chinese inscriptions over the front door might be missed. The image is arguably inviting a viewer to pause and look for something exotic in this building in Emmaville or it is a reminder of something viewed or remembered as an exotic part of the locality.

The tourist visit and gaze is evident in other photographs of the Emmaville temple. One of these (figure 7) captures two women in hats, and a man in overcoat and hat on the front steps of the temple.⁴⁰ They are framed by the inscribed panels around the doorway, and the skyline is marked by the uniquely tilted upwards detail of the roof. In 2012, the photograph was on display in the Emmaville Mining Museum and identified the visitors as local residents "Roy Wyman, Jean Barr, Jean Curnow (nee Witherdin)".⁴¹

Different readings of a photograph (figure 8) of the exterior of the main Tingha temple offer a different narrative. Published in Elizabeth Wiedemann's 1981 local history with the caption "Miner's cottage near Tingha, 1890", it was subsequently identified in Rebecca Lin Yit's archaeological study as a "view of Tingha temple, looking south (showing side quarters)".⁴² Yit brings to the photograph her understanding of the identifying features of Chinese temples located in nineteenth-century Australian rural communities, and her findings from the surface archaeological survey she did of the site. Similarly, on viewing the interior photograph of the Emmaville temple (figure 3), Kok Hu Jin employs his deep engagement with the nature of Chinese temples to discern the following details:

This shows the sky-well at the central section of the temple. This area was defined by a square sunken area ... with four outer columns (round) each wrapped about with a panel of a couplet. ... At the centre of the sky-well was a rectangular cast iron burner designed to depict a palace or pavilion with dragon and phoenix.⁴³

Kok also explains that there were three steps on either side of the sky-well (in the photograph one set of steps is seen to the right of the sky-well) that led to the inner section of the temple where

³⁸ Reproduced in Lobsey, *The Creek*, p. 35. A copy of the photograph is on display in the Emmaville Mining Museum. For other photographs of the interiors of Chinese temples in northern New South Wales see figures 3 and 18, and Golden Threads record 10262.

³⁹ Reproduced in Keith Bowes, *Memories of the Past: Emmaville* (Glen Innes: Keith Bowes, 1994), p. 33 and on the cover of *Land of the Beardies History House Bulletin* 21, no. 2, 1993. See also *Sydney Mail*, 20 May 1903, p. 1244, for a similar photograph and caption.

⁴⁰ Reproduced in Bowes, *Memories of the Past: Emmaville*, pp. 32 and 35.

⁴¹ Visit to Emmaville Mining Museum, 2012.

⁴² Wiedemann, *World of its Own*, p. 180; and Yit, "Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement", p. 58.

⁴³ Kok Hu Jin, pers. comm., 14 August 2013.

the shrine and altar were located. The two horizontal inscribed panels seen in the middle of the photograph are located between the sky-well and altar.⁴⁴

Through these readings the tourist gaze drops to the background and attention is paid to understanding the construction, nature and function of the temples as sites of significance for the local Chinese communities of the times.



Figure 2. Entrance to Emmaville temple
photographed by
Robert Newby Kirk, 1899.
(Courtesy Deborah Malor)



Figure 3. Interior of Emmaville temple
photographed by
Robert Newby Kirk, 1899.
(Courtesy Deborah Malor)

⁴⁴ Kok, pers. comm.

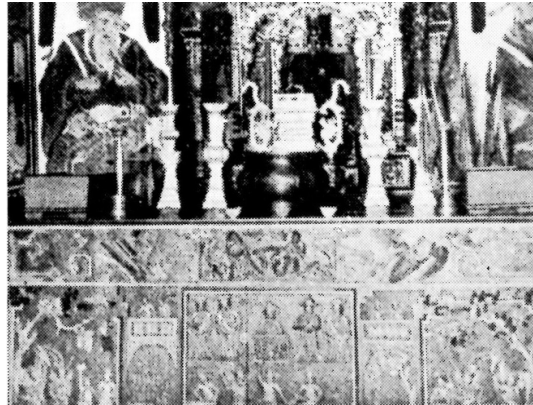


Figure 4. Detail of the altar, Tingha temple, about 1900.
(Reproduced from Elizabeth Wiedemann, *World of its Own*, 1981, p. 85)

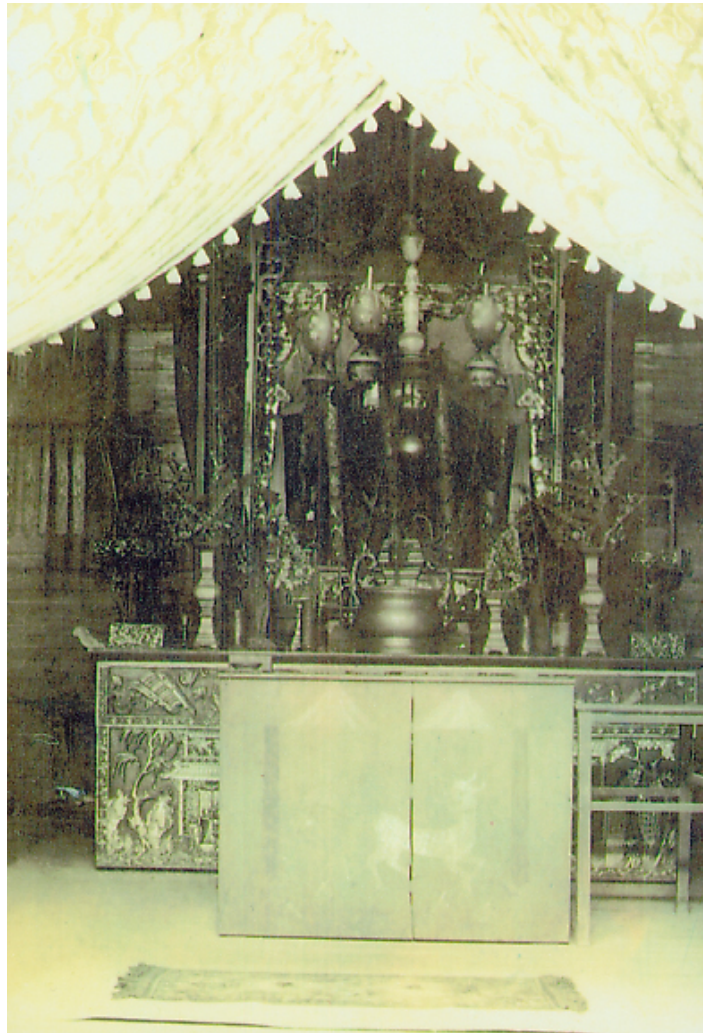


Figure 5. The altar in the Emmaville temple, undated. (Emmaville Mining Museum)



Figure 6. Side view of Emmaville temple, undated.
(Land of the Beardies History House Museum)

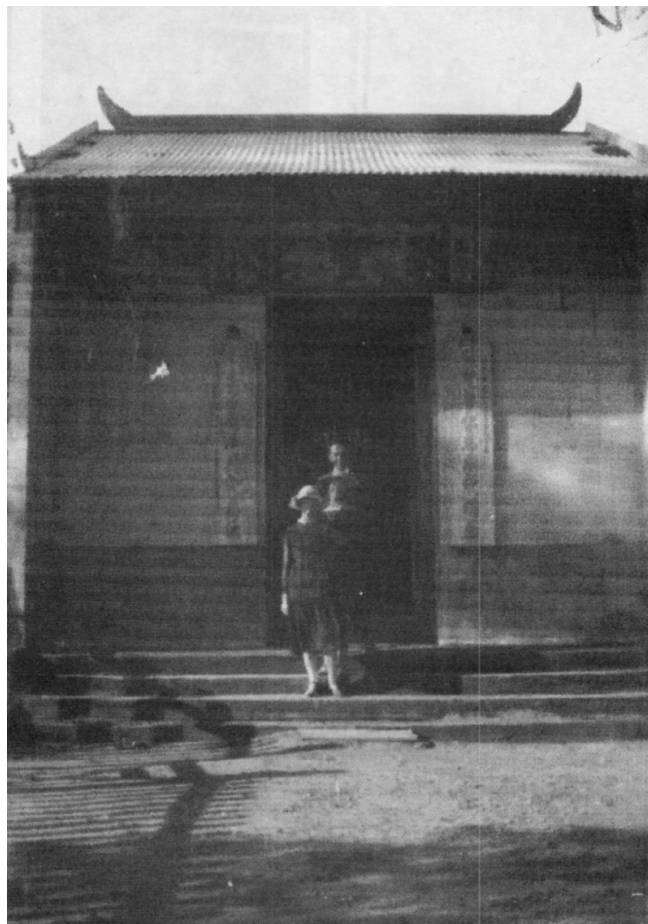


Figure 7. Entrance to Emmaville temple, 1920s. (Emmaville Mining Museum)

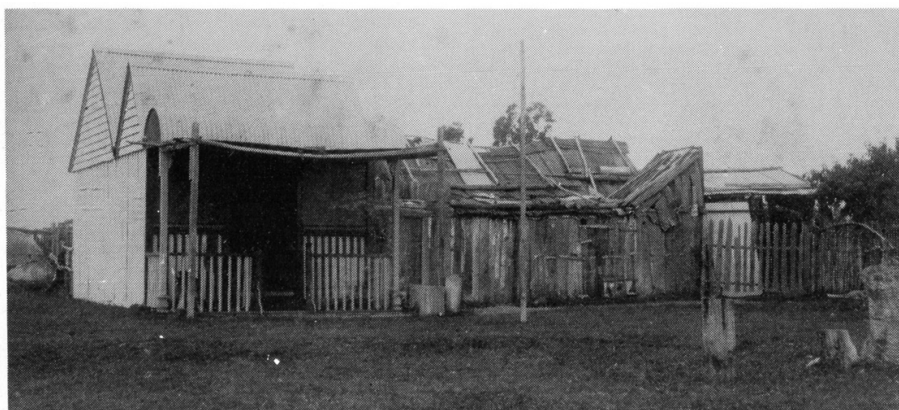


Figure 8. Tingha temple, undated.

(Reproduced from Elizabeth Wiedemann, *World of its Own*, 1981, p. 180)

Understanding the Temples

Since the late 1980s, there has been increasing interest to document and understand the Chinese temples that emerged across nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Australia in localities where there were significant numbers of Chinese residents. The focus has been on understanding the nature, role and function of these temples for the Chinese communities they serviced. It is a focus that sits within emphases in the study of the Chinese in Australia that seek to move beyond concerns with White Australia policies and their impact, and to explore the 'Chineseness' of the Chinese experience, as well as locating the Chinese in Australia within global networks.⁴⁵

Specific temples have been studied with publications and reports focusing on archaeological findings, the layout and functions of different parts of the temples, the practices and beliefs characteristic of them, the significance and meaning of architectural features and of the objects and panels from the temples, and the different groups and associations responsible for different temples.⁴⁶ There are also research projects that identify and categorise as many of these temples as possible, along with the variety of ways in which their existence and histories are

⁴⁵ For overviews of these developments see, for example, Adam McKeown, "The Continuing Reformulation of Chinese Australians", in *After the Rush: Regulation, Participation, and Chinese Communities in Australia 1860–1940*, eds. Sophie Couchman, John Fitzgerald and Paul Macgregor (Melbourne: Otherland Literary Journal No. 9, 2004), pp. 1–10; and Keir Reeves and Benjamin Mountford, "Sojourning and Settling: Locating Chinese Australian History", *Australian Historical Studies* 42, no. 1(2011): 111–125.

⁴⁶ Site specific studies include, for example, Gordon Grimwade, "Gold, Gardens, Temples and Feasts: Chinese Temple, Croydon, Queensland", *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 21 (2003): 50–57; Paul Macgregor, "Joss Houses of Colonial Bendigo and Victoria", in *An Angel by the Water: Essays in Honour of Dennis Reginald O'Hoy*, ed. Mike Butcher (Bendigo: Holland House for Bendigo Trust, 2015); Jinx Miles and Maureen Lillie, "Hou Wang Miao and Atherton Chinatown Conservation Plan", Report for National Trust of Queensland, Brisbane, 2000; Jutta Niemeier, "The Changing Role of the See Yup Temple in Melbourne", in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, ed. Paul Macgregor (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995), pp. 327–40; Ann Stephen, *The Lions of Retreat Street: A Chinese Temple in Inner Sydney* (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing and Hale and Iremonger, 1997); Benjamin Penny, "An Immigrant Chinese Sea God in Australia: The Chinese Background to Sydney's Retreat Street Temple", *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 2 (2008): 54–81; Lindsay Smith, "Hidden Dragons" (sections throughout on temples); and Powerhouse Museum and Yiu Ming Society, *Yiu Ming Temple Precinct: A Conservation Report on Its Architecture and Objects* (Sydney: Powerhouse Museum and Yiu Ming Society, 1996). See also Kok Hu Jin's 12-volume series entitled *Chinese Temples in Australia* (Bendigo: Golden Dragon Museum, 2005–2011); Barry McGowan and Genevieve Mott, *True Australians and Pioneers: Chinese Migration to the Orange Region of NSW* (Orange City, Blayney and Cabonne Shire Councils, 2017), pp. 125–126; and Janis Wilton, *Golden Threads: The Chinese in Regional NSW 1850–1950* (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2004), pp. 89–99.

documented.⁴⁷ This growing body of literature provides a comparative base for understanding the Chinese temples in Emmaville and Tingha.

The influence of this comparative base and of the use of a variety of sources is clearly apparent in the work done by Rebecca Lin Yit on the sites of the Emmaville temple and one of the Tingha temples. Through her archaeological surface work, and drawing on photographic and other evidence, Yit provides initial descriptions of the physical features of the sites and their surroundings, and the layout and building materials of the temples. For both sites, she observes that the temples were located with a propitious topographical orientation, with the Emmaville temple having an orientation that is “the most propitious in China itself”.⁴⁸ As Yit explains in relation to the Emmaville temple:

The main hill looms behind, i.e. to the north, while there are ridges on both its eastern and western sides and the creek meandering in view to the south, permitting the temple to occupy a classic “armchair-like” position conforming to principles of *feng shui*.⁴⁹

The Emmaville and Tingha temples also shared other features. As Yit observes in her summary:

Both were made of weatherboard with a corrugated iron, gabled roof. They shared a common plan with an entrance porch, a front and a rear section separated by a “heavenly well”. ... In both there were west wings that served as residence and kitchen for the priest.⁵⁰ Both had evidence that there were deliberately placed trees and gardens in the vicinity and both have a large earthen mound about 3 m in diameter within 20 m of the temple itself that must have been a communal oven.⁵¹

Yit concludes by observing that these features are evident in other temple sites in Australia, and she particularly references the work of Gordon Grimwade in Queensland and Lindsay Smith in Kiandra, New South Wales.⁵²

Further understanding of the temples emerges from surviving objects. The interior photographs of the Emmaville and Tingha temples (figures 3 to 5) coupled with the marvelling descriptions provided by onlookers, and shared memories and knowledge of the nature of such temples, affirm the craftsmanship, ornate and symbolic nature of many of the fixtures and fittings. Significantly, for the Tingha temples, some of the objects have survived. They are scattered in a number of public and private collections.⁵³ Their specific provenance is not well documented. They do,

⁴⁷ For lists of Chinese temples in Australia see Smith, “Hidden Dragons”, pp. 284–85, and Jack Foster Waltham, “Chinese Temples in Australia”, Adelaide, Flinders University Department of Archaeology, 2014.

⁴⁸ Yit, “Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement”, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Yit, “Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement”, p. 92. For discussions of *feng shui* in relation to temple sites see Derham Groves, “Some Similarities Between the *Feng-Shui* of Chinese Joss Houses in Australia and Post-Modern Architecture”, *Grainger Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1 (2011): 55–73; and Smith, “Hidden Dragons”, p. 40.

⁵⁰ Kok, pers. comm., observes that it is more likely that the “priest” referred to by Yit was a caretaker or other official.

⁵¹ Yit, “Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement”, p. 120. Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: A History of the Chinese in the Riverina* (Wagga Wagga: Museum of the Riverina, 2010), p. 44 states that most of the temples in the Chinese camps in the Riverina had pig ovens for ceremonial use. See also Gordon Grimwade, “Crispy Roast Pork: Using Chinese Australasian Pig Ovens”, *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 26 (2008): pp. 21–28.

⁵² Yit, “Archaeology of Chinese Urban Settlement”, p.120.

⁵³ The collections include Inverell Pioneer Village, McCrossin’s Mill Museum in Uralla, Wing Hing Long Store and Museum in Tingha, and the privately owned Smith’s Museum at Green Valley Farm near Tingha. There are also items in private collections. On the items in McCrossin’s Mill see Michael Williams, *New Gold Mountain: The Chinese at Rocky River*, McCrossin’s Mill, Uralla, 2018.

however, provide insights into the beliefs, practices, sounds, smells and services encountered in the temples. They also, as Kok Hu Jin cogently demonstrates, provide a means to trace links between Chinese in different localities, their common backgrounds and experiences, and their shared philosophies and practices – provided one has the cultural and linguistic knowledge to understand them.⁵⁴

Kok clearly enunciates the various functions of temple artefacts, and the significance of their “design, decoration and inscriptions”.⁵⁵ He locates these within the Taoist and Buddhist beliefs that shaped the nature and purpose of the temples, as well as their functions as centres for providing support for members. In the temples, members performed rituals to assist in their daily lives as well as to honour and respect ancestors. The temples also provided a gathering place to seek and find assistance when in need, support in negotiating with colonial governments and their representatives, and a network of people who shared similar backgrounds and beliefs.⁵⁶ Kok, as with other scholars, emphasises that the temples – at least when they were first established – were associated with specific clan or lodge groups.⁵⁷ Hence, for Henry Chan, the mention of three temples in Tingha suggests that there were at least “three distinct Chinese groups” in the locality.⁵⁸

Against this background, surviving objects and photographs from the Tingha temples, and photographs of the Emmaville temple, add to our understanding of their history and functions. There are, for example, a number of panels and objects with inscriptions.⁵⁹ These inscriptions serve a variety of purposes. They can identify the deity or deities to whom the temple is dedicated, name the people involved in the establishment of the temple, provide advice (often encrypted) about ways to behave, show gratitude for “benefits and favours”, and “affirm one’s aspirations and one’s roots”.⁶⁰

The inscription in figure 9, for example, states that this is the hall of the boy Sun Chai, the child messenger of wealth and riches,⁶¹ and the inscription on an incense burner (figure 10) that this is where Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy, presides.⁶² Another panel (figure 11) identifies the temple – or a room in the temple – as “All Saints Palace”.⁶³ The same inscription and identification is on

⁵⁴ Kok Hu Jin, “Chinese Temples – Australia Heritage”, paper presented at Dragon Tails Conference, Wollongong, 9–11 July 2013, p. 14. Kok puts this into practice in his 12-volume series, *Chinese Temples in Australia*.

⁵⁵ Kok, “Chinese Temples”, p.15. For an example of a detailed inventory and interpretation of the items in a specific temple see Powerhouse Museum and Yiu Ming Society, *Yiu Ming Temple Precinct: A Conservation Report on Its Architecture and Objects* (Sydney, 1996); and Suzanne Chee and Angus Tse, “Federation Feng Shui: Reading the Temple Objects”, in *The Lions of Retreat Street*, ed. Ann Stephen (Sydney, 1997), pp. 40–57.

⁵⁶ Kok, “Chinese Temples”, p. 3; Smith, “Hidden Dragons”, pp. 37–49; and Wilton, *Golden Threads*, pp. 89–99.

⁵⁷ Kok, “Chinese Temples”, p.3.

⁵⁸ H.D. Min-hsi Chan, “A Decade of Achievement and Future Directions in Research on the History of the Chinese in Australia”, in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, ed. Paul Macgregor (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995), p.421.

⁵⁹ Doris Yau-Chong Jones, Research notes, Golden Threads Project, UNE Archives, provides transcriptions, transliterations (in Cantonese), translations and commentaries; Kok, pers. comm., provides further translations and commentaries; McCrossin’s Mill Museum records also include translations for items in the museum’s Chinese collection. The latter inform Michael Williams, *New Gold Mountain: The Chinese at Rocky River* (Uralla: McCrossin’s Mill Museum, 2018).

⁶⁰ Kok, “Chinese Temples”, p. 15.

⁶¹ Kok, pers. comm.

⁶² Jones, Research notes.

⁶³ Jones, Research notes; Williams, *New Gold Mountain*, p. 22; Golden Threads record 10254. Kok, pers. comm., translates this as “Hall of the Ranking Sages” and, on p. 16, identifies the specific sages.

other items and in photographs from the Tingha and Emmaville temples indicating that these temples housed a number of deities.⁶⁴

There are also inscriptions that, cryptically, mix references to deities with comments on the opportunities available to those who came to northern New South Wales and on desired behaviour and values. The layered meanings are reflected in different translations and interpretations of the inscriptions. The saying on one panel (figure 12) is variously interpreted as a “direct reference to Australia and its location in the southern hemisphere” and as a reference to Guan Di “who is entrusted ... with the task of guarding the southern gate of heaven”.⁶⁵

Another panel (figure 13) makes reference to the benefits of finding or having gold. Interpretations include an exhortation to work together, reference to the ways in which gold can “benefit the people and relieve the world”, and the observation that the deity distributes gold “according to beneficence in relief”.⁶⁶

There are inscriptions that offer dates of manufacture and/or the gifting of the item, and the names of those associated with the temples. There are two panels in Inverell Pioneer Village that provide the date (between 7 November and 7 December 1866) when the items were presented to the temple, who presented them, and the names of the members of the lodge associated with the temple.⁶⁷ These two panels are clearly a pair. The date of 1866, however, suggests that the panels were not originally made for any of the Tingha temples, as those temples were not established until the 1870s.⁶⁸ It is a date that adds weight to assertions (discussed in the next section) that at least some of the items in the Tingha temples originally came from the Rocky River goldfields, located about 120 kilometres south-east of Tingha. By contrast, the inscribed panels in the photograph of the entrance to the Emmaville temple (figure 2) include a date that corresponds to the period 25 December 1886 to 24 January 1887,⁶⁹ indicating that these were created and presented in time for the opening of the second Emmaville temple in April 1887.

⁶⁴ The same inscription is on standards in McCrossin’s Mill Museum and on the inscribed panel above the door to the Emmaville temple (figure 2). Williams, *New Gold Mountain*, p. 22; Kok, pers. comm.; Golden Threads Records 10045, 10255 and 10432.

⁶⁵ Williams, *New Gold Mountain*, p. 23; Kok, pers. comm.; Golden Threads record 10026.

⁶⁶ Accession Record, 983.1.14, 12 April 1983, McCrossin’s Mill Museum, Uralla; Jones, Research notes; Williams, *New Gold Mountain*, p. 23; Kok, pers. comm.; Golden Threads record 10025. For further examples of inscriptions that offer auspicious sayings and encrypted messages, and the different translations and meanings attributed to them, see Golden Threads records 10006, 10035 and 10432.

⁶⁷ Kok, pers. comm.; Jones, Research notes; Golden Threads record 10036.

⁶⁸ Although, as indicated by the clapperless bell and incense burner in the Hou Wang temple in Atherton, there are instances where communities appear to have started acquiring key artefacts ahead of the temple actually being built; Gordon Grimwade, pers. comm., June 2019.

⁶⁹ Jones, Research notes; and Kok, pers. comm.; Golden Threads record 10432.



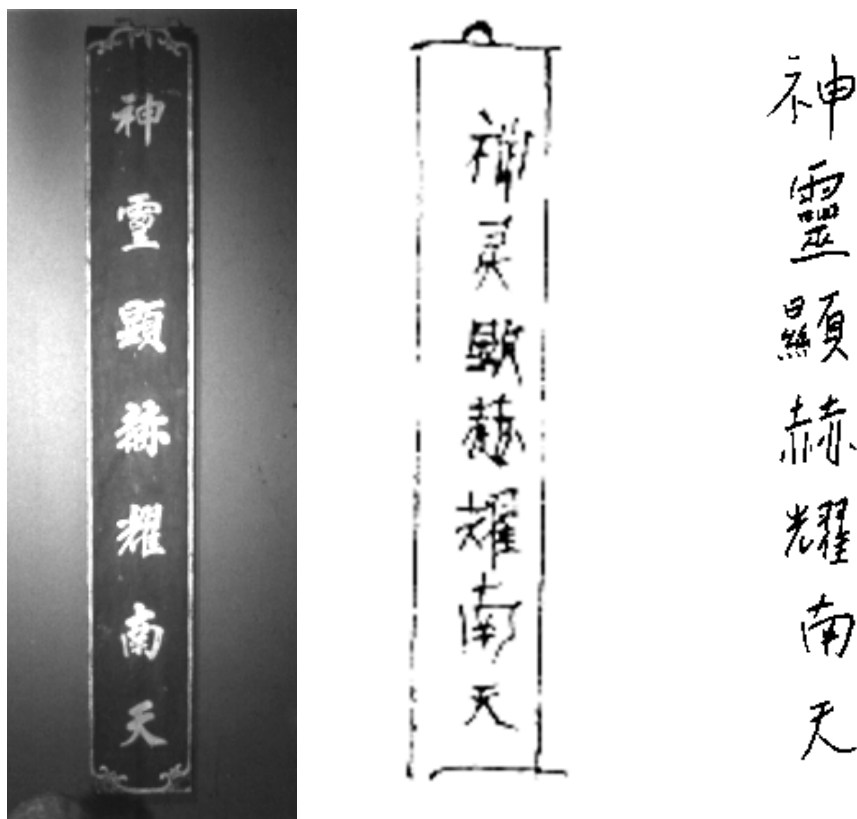
Figure 9. Inscribed panel, 'Hall of Sun Chai'. (Private collection)



Figure 10. Incense burner, 'Kuan Yin De'an'. (Wing Hing Long)



Figure 11. Inscribed panel, 'All Saints Palace' or 'Hall of the Ranking Sages'.
(Smith's Museum, Green Valley Farm)



Figures 12a, 12b, 12c. Inscribed panel and transcription of the inscription.

(McCrossins Mill Museum)

The names of manufacturers, all in China, and sometimes the date of manufacture are inscribed on some items. The bell now hanging in McCrossin's Mill Museum (figure 14) identifies the donor ("Chan Kai Go"),⁷⁰ the manufacturer ("Song Cheong Metal Casting") and a date (either of manufacture or donation) – "On an auspicious day in the 9th year of Emperor Kwong Shui" (1883).⁷¹ Similarly, candlesticks from the Tingha temple and now at Wing Hing Long in Tingha provide the name and place of the manufacturer ("Ming Cheung from Hui Sui, Kwangchow"), the name of the donor ("Chan Koon Chet") and a date that is now difficult to read.⁷² Finally, the inscription that can be seen on a drum (figure 15) on display at Smith's Museum in Green Valley Farm lists the name of the manufacturer ("Sing Cheong, Canton East, Tai Sun Street").⁷³ These inscriptions offer leads to trace the items to their origins, to mark more overtly their transnational lives, and to affirm in greater detail the observation made in descriptions of the interior of the

⁷⁰ Michael van Leeuwen, "New Gold Mountain – The Chinese at Rocky River", *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal* 27 (1984): 25–26 notes that this same person is also listed as a donor on one of the standards in the McCrossin's Mill Museum.

⁷¹ Jones, Research notes; McCrossin's Mill Museum records; Golden Threads record 10006. The McCrossin's Mill Museum records note that the bell is on loan from the Armidale Folk Museum, and is thought to have come from one of the Rocky River temples.

⁷² Jones, Research notes; and Golden Threads record 10490. Jones found a fragment of a document in the Wing Hing Long archives that also had the name "Chan Koon Chet".

⁷³ Jones, Research notes; and Golden Threads record 10171.

Emmaville temple that many of the items and indeed the building materials were brought from China.⁷⁴

There are also objects attributed to the Tingha temples that do not have inscriptions but which provide a sense of the sights, sounds, smells and rituals in the temple. A fortune stick container, along with a printing block for pages consulted to provide advice and predict whether an action or date would be auspicious,⁷⁵ offer images of members seeking advice, the sound of the fortune sticks rattling, and the request to the temple attendant to find the corresponding advice. It is the practice that Ernest Sue Fong remembered his father, George Sue Fong, continuing to observe.



手握黃金憑利濟

手握黃金憑利濟

Figures 13a, 13b, 13c. Inscribed panel and transcription of the inscription.
(McCrossins Mill Museum)

⁷⁴ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 28 May 1887, p. 16; and *Singleton Argus*, 16 September 1932, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Golden Threads records 10016 and 10040. Wilton, *Golden Threads*, p. 93 has a photograph of the container, the printing block, and a transcription and translation of one of the pages.



光緒九年吉日

神靈顯赫耀南天

Figures 14a, 14b, 14c. Temple bell and inscriptions. (McCrossins Mill Museum)



東粵大新街
勝昌造

Figures 15a, 15b. Drum and inscriptions. (Smith's Museum, Green Valley Farm)

Incense sticks⁷⁶ are a reminder that the burning of incense was a constant in the temples and that, not unsurprisingly, put the temples at even greater risk of catching fire. Altars, decorative edges, a marvellous triptych screen, carved figures and other surviving furniture and items evoke the colour and symbolism that settled in each corner and layer of the temples.⁷⁷ Importantly, there are also domestic items – bowls, ladles, spoons, chopsticks – that possibly came from the Tingha temples, and were used as part of temple rituals or, more simply, as the domestic items of the caretakers who lived on site.⁷⁸

Object and Site Biographies: Temples in their Local Contexts

Photographs, sites, objects and other evidence offer insights into the temples when they were a central part of the lives of the Chinese communities in Emmaville and Tingha. They provide starting points to develop deeper understandings that draw on the growing scholarship on Chinese temples in Australia and on traditional Chinese beliefs and practices. They also provide starting points for seeking more details through tracing back items to their Chinese manufacturers, identifying people associated with particular temples, and understanding the ways in which local circumstances may have influenced the shaping of beliefs and practices brought from China. This heritage is important and needs further research. There is, however, another aspect to understanding the histories to which the temples relate. This involves not just tracing the temples and temple objects to their origins in China and understanding their adaptations and functions as parts of Chinese communities in Australia and as indicative of transnational histories. It also involves understanding where and how the temples – and the items that help to document their significance – sit in relation to the history and heritage of the wider local communities they served. This involves following the histories of the temple sites and temple objects beyond their specific functions as and within the temples.

The objects, photographs and knowledge about the Emmaville and Tingha temples have survived because they were valued – albeit for a variety of reasons – by members of their local communities. At one end of the spectrum, survival relates to those exotic views and gazes referred to earlier in this paper: keep these items or share this knowledge about the different (alien, evil) practices of the temples as it adds an exotic flavour to the town. At the other end of the spectrum are those who valued the items because they related to the history and heritage of the Chinese communities in the districts and, in turn, local history and heritage. Perhaps in the middle are those who just happened to be in the right place at the right time, and managed to acquire items and/or knowledge.⁷⁹ Within these narratives is further evidence about the place and function of the temples within their local communities and within local memory, past, present and perhaps future. A few examples illustrate the possibilities.

⁷⁶ Golden Threads record 10024; and Jones, Research notes. When viewed in 1997 the wrapping of the incense sticks was disintegrating. It was still possible to read some of the Chinese. Translated it read “Chun Lung Hing, dealer in best quality joss stick, Macau, China”.

⁷⁷ Golden Threads records 1001, 1003, 1008, 10073, and 10292.

⁷⁸ Golden Threads records 1009, 10027, 10030, and 10638.

⁷⁹ For earlier discussions of the keepers of objects and their stories see Janis Wilton, “Objects and their Stories”, *Golden Threads: Stories* [archived website], 2001, <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/47223/20070731-0650/archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/downloads/Objects.pdf>. Note also Brown, *Tin at Tingha*, pp. 101–102 where she shares local stories about sinister ways in which some of the items from the Tingha temples were relocated. These accounts are difficult to corroborate.

Ross Smith and May Ruming are both the children of Albert Smith and both, in the late 1990s, talked about their father acquiring the building that had housed the Tingha temple that was located on the Howell Road. Ross Smith recalls:

The joss house was in an old, ramshackle building, pit sawn timber, like others in Tingha. My father owned it. My sister was born in it.⁸⁰

It is a description that certainly accords with the photograph (figure 8) identified as this Tingha temple. May Ruming remembers “living in the joss house” when she started school. Her father had done it up into “a beautiful home”. She also talks about the “three joss houses” in Tingha – the big one on the Howell Road and how, when the Chinese moved from that, “they fitted all the good stuff into the smaller joss houses” and were going to burn everything else. She maintains that her father “was a good friend to the Chinese” and didn’t want to see the items destroyed. So he bought some from them.⁸¹ Some of these items remained with May Ruming’s descendants. Among them is a piece of furniture (figure 16) constructed from different temple pieces and, at some stage, painted and touched up by a family member.⁸² The furniture remained as a utilitarian item and a talking piece which has kept alive the presence of the Chinese temple – and implicitly the Chinese who had established and been sustained by the temple – at least within one local family, although the purpose, function and symbolism of the carvings on the furniture were probably never a part of the story that family members acquired or passed on.

Similarly re-used items are two bells. One of these bells (figure 14) is on display in McCrossin’s Mill Museum and, hence, its current use is as a museum item deployed to provide a sense of what the interior of the Chinese temples looked like. The museum records note that the bell is on loan from Armidale Folk Museum, that it came from the Rocky River Chinese temple and that, at some stage, it was painted orange (the orange paint is still there), upturned and used as a flowerpot.⁸³ There are no details about how it came into the possession of the museums, or evidence of its link to the Rocky River temple (although this might be revealed through close examination of the inscriptions). Its possession and use narratives, however, are indicative of the lack of interest in – and often denial of – Australia’s Chinese heritage during the early to mid twentieth century and then how, as cultural diversity became an acknowledged and encouraged (rather than buried) feature of national, local and family history, revived interest brought about the ‘discovery’ of items and evidence documenting the depth and complexity of the Chinese in Australia’s history.

⁸⁰ Ross Smith, pers. comm., 30 September 1998.

⁸¹ May Ruming interviewed by her granddaughter, Caroline Croft and others, 14 April 1999, copy in author’s possession.

⁸² May Ruming interview; and Golden Threads record 10264.

⁸³ Loan agreements L.985.7.1 to L.985.7.6, 7 May 1985, McCrossin’s Mill Museum; van Leeuwen, “New Gold Mountain”, p. 26; and Golden Threads record 10006.



Figure 16. Sideboard created from pieces of temple furniture. (Wing Hing Long)

The narratives relating to the second bell (figure 17) also reflect this late twentieth century public acceptance of cultural diversity following a period of relative silence about the Chinese presence. Local Tingha resident Fred Symes explains that the bell came from the last of the temples in Tingha, and that his father, James Symes, purchased it sometime in the 1930s and gave it to the local Anglican Church (St Andrews). He recalls: "I can remember him taking it up there [to the church] and it was rigged up in the tower of the church in those days".⁸⁴ The temple bell then rang not for boisterous and noisy Chinese festivals, but to mark Christian time and Christian services or to hang silently. In the 1980s, there was a change. As a part of the Australian Bicentenary and the church's centenary restoration project, the bell was restored and relocated to its current position in a custom-made – and 'Chinese-style' – stand in the grounds of St Andrews Anglican Church. The plaque at the base explains the history of the bell and concludes: "The bell's restoration commemorates the church centenary and the Chinese contribution to Tingha's cultural history". The bell now sits as a marker of the Chinese heritage of the locality and of the Chinese temples that serviced the community, although it does so within the grounds of the local church.

James Symes' acquisition of the bell (and Albert Smith's acquisition of the former temple premises and of temple items) are indicative of the fate – and survival – of other temple objects. Local Tingha identity and miner Clarrie Smith turned his gem-collecting hobby into a museum and, from the 1970s until his death, Smith's Museum was open to the public on the edge of Tingha. It was filled with gemstones, rocks, stuffed animals and local history items including items from the Tingha temples.⁸⁵ In her local history, Helen Brown states that the temple artefacts were given to the museum by "two of Tingha's old Chinese miners" (Billy Long and Athol Judges Kay) who had rescued them following a fire in the "Let Sun Den" temple that was located in Diamond Street and

⁸⁴ Fred Symes interviewed by Janis Wilton, Tingha, 20 March 1997, UNE Archives.

⁸⁵ Janis Wilton, "Notes on Visit to Tingha", 1983.

had been run by G.G. Hoy.⁸⁶ Smith's Museum – including many of the temple items – is now located at Green Valley Farm about ten kilometres east of Tingha.

In 1978, there was a sale of items from what was identified as the Chinese temple that stood “where the ‘Buff’s Hall’ now stands” (the Howell Road site).⁸⁷ The description of items includes “cedar planks with Chinese writing” and there is a photograph of the then owner, Les Jack, holding one of the inscribed panels. The article also maintains that Les Jack’s father, Quin Jack, was the builder and owner of the temple, and that some of the items from the temple went to what is described as “a Chinese clan club, known as the Chinese Freemasons” with the remaining items going to the Jacks’ home.⁸⁸



Figure 17. Temple bell in the grounds of St Andrews Anglican Church, Tingha, March 1997.

Another group of temple items surfaced in the early 1980s. Kent Mayo from McCrossin’s Mill Museum tells this narrative. He writes about seeking items for the newly emerging museum and visiting Tingha in his search. What was ‘discovered’ were “an altar from a temple”, “a beautifully painted wooden Chinese screen” and, generally, “a great jumble of Chinese artefacts”. These were all in the premises of a Tingha hardware store and former funeral parlour.⁸⁹ The items were

⁸⁶ Brown, *Tin at Tingha*, pp. 100–101 on G.G. Hoy and the Let Sun Den temple, and pp. 119–120 for Brown’s description of the temple items in Smith’s Museum.

⁸⁷ *Inverell Times*, 14 April 1978, p. 8. The “Buff’s Hall” refers to the Buffalo Hall. This is the site surveyed by Yit.

⁸⁸ *Inverell Times*, 14 April 1978, p. 8. The information about Quin Jack (for example, Brown, *Tin at Tingha*, p.109) is repeated in other publications. Quin Jack’s descendant, Kira Brown, is currently piecing together her family history. See Kira Brown, *Chen Quin Jack History: Tracing My Chinese-Australian Family History* [website], <https://chenquinjackhistory.com/>. The reference to the “Chinese Freemasons” was a reference to the local premises of the Chinese Masonic Society.

⁸⁹ Kent Mayo, *McCrossin’s Mill ... Many Hands ... & Me* (Uralla: Uralla Historical Society, 2002), pp. 97–98. Brown, *Tin at Tingha*, pp.113–114, describes some of the items in situ in E.J. Walker’s shop: “... used as a counter, the altar ... has a

acquired for the museum and provide the core of the re-creation of a temple interior that remains the key feature of the exhibition about the Chinese in Rocky River that occupies the second floor of the museum.⁹⁰ Mayo and the curator, Michael van Leeuwen, speculated that at least some of the items may have originally come from the Rocky River goldfields, located near Uralla.⁹¹ Local histories certainly affirm that Rocky River had a series of three Chinese temples built sequentially in 1857, 1866 and 1877 on the one site, and there is a photograph (figure 18) identified as the interior of the last of the Rocky River temples.⁹² The urn and bell in the photograph bear resemblance to the urn at Wing Hing Long (figure 10) and the bells at McCrossin's Mill and still in Tingha (figures 14 and 17). As well, as stated earlier, the pair of inscribed panels now housed at Inverell Pioneer Village, bear a date in the late 1860s which corresponds with the Rocky River goldfield and temple dates rather than the later Tingha tin field and temple dates. It certainly seems, as Kate Bagnall establishes in Indigo, Victoria, that as Chinese moved within Australia they also relocated temple items.⁹³



Figure 18. Interior of Rocky River temple, about 1908. (Private collection)

beautifully scrolled end and brass inlay on the front and end ... [and] a panel of Chinese three dimensional carving is bracketed to the wall". The account continues that Walker obtained this item from "Athol Judges Kay, an old Chinese tin miner who had it stored in the loft of his house after the joss house closed".

⁹⁰ van Leeuwen, "New Gold Mountain", pp. 23–28, for an account of the development of the exhibition and the identification of the items; Williams, *New Gold Mountain*, for a recent catalogue and commentary on the collection.

⁹¹ van Leeuwen, "New Gold Mountain", pp. 25 and 27.

⁹² Arnolde Goode, "Tunnel, Dredge and Drought: The Rocky River 1860–1900", *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal* 27 (1984): 1–22.

⁹³ Kate Bagnall, "Landscapes of Memory and Forgetting: Indigo and Shek Quey Lee", *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 6 (2013): 8. There are also unconfirmed reports of Chinese in Queensland moving from one Queensland locality to another and taking temple artefacts with them that later became a part of a new temple; Gordon Grimwade, pers. comm., June 2019.

Another significant feature of the McCrossin's Mill Museum narrative is that the collection of items 'repatriated' from Tingha became a drawcard for attracting other items relating to Chinese temples – and to the history of the Chinese in the locality more broadly: the bell (figure 14) came from Armidale Folk Museum, and a beautifully carved longevity figure came from an Armidale resident.⁹⁴ As well, a modern Guan Di appeared. The same happened at Wing Hing Long in Tingha. The store became a locally managed museum in the 1990s. The aim was to conserve the store and its contents as they were at the time of acquisition as an example of a rural general store that, since its founding in the 1880s, had been owned and managed by Chinese Australians.⁹⁵ The existence of the store attracted the donation and loan of a range of items relating to the history of the Chinese in the town, including temple items. From private, local ownership and now on public display are candlesticks, the incense burner (figure 10), a longevity figure, the reconstructed furniture (figure 16) kept across generations of the Smith family, and a variety of tableware and other items. These are all likely at some stage to have been used in one of the Tingha temples.

Conclusion

Memories like those shared by Ernest Sue Fong and Bessie Chiu, newspaper reports, photographs, local histories, site studies, objects, museum records and narratives are all contributing to an understanding of the history and significance of the Chinese temples that were in Emmaville and Tingha from the 1870s into the early to mid twentieth century. They provide insights into the role of the temples as an integral part of Chinese diasporic communities; they tell of items, beliefs, practices and rituals brought from China; and they hint at support networks and organisations. They also indicate the complex and changing place of the temples (and implicitly Chinese people) as integral parts of their local Australian communities – as exotic, as exciting, as sometimes threatening and also as familiar. Extending the biographies of objects and sites beyond the existence of the temple buildings also provides markers of the ways in which the Chinese history and heritage of these sites – and, indeed, the history and heritage of the Chinese individuals, families and communities they reference – has gone through a cycle of denial, silence, and then reappraisal and finally public display. What is challenging is that this cycle means myth and misinformation, layered memories, silences, with use and reuse as much a part of the history and heritage of the sites as the information and insights gained from an informed understanding of the sites themselves, their buildings, interiors and the networks, beliefs, rituals and practices they supported.

⁹⁴ Loan Agreements, L.983.91 and, L.985.7.1 to L.985.7.6, 7 May 1985, McCrossins Mill Museum Records.

⁹⁵ Janis Wilton, "Wing Hing Long: From Store to Museum", *Golden Threads: Stories* [archived website], 2001, <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/47223/20070731-0650/archive.amol.org.au/goldenthreads/stories/whl.html>; *Wing Hing Long & Co: Chinese-Australian rural general store, 1881–1998*, NSW Migration Heritage Centre [archived website], <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/winghinglong/index-2.html>; and Wing Hing Long store, NSW State Heritage Register, Item 5044708, <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5044708>.