



[Home](#) | [Current issue](#) | [Back issues](#) | [Feedback](#)

[Contents](#)

Journal of Chinese Australia, Issue 2, October 2006

Willie Chung Sing's account : English translation

I was born in a poor family in the rural area. The hardships I went through were as follows: When I was over three years and one month old, my father died at the age of 28, when my mother was 26. My mother wanted to commit suicide several times after my father died. We had no money or properties or any other means to make a living. The only support we got was from my grandfather, who cut firewood in the mountains and grew some yams for food. My maternal grandmother had only one daughter and became a widow when she was young, so she was also helpless. Fortunately, a neighbour had pity on us, and she did some needle work for others to make some money and rice. She gave us some money so that I could go to school. At that time the tuition was one liang of silver, but the teacher knew I was poor and charged me only seven qian two fen. I attended primary school for four years, from 9 to 12. At 13, I also went to the mountains to collect bamboo leaves and firewood. At 14, the scholar from the village, Zhong Wenfei, opened a school. Because he was my close relative, he asked me to attend school without paying the tuition. He stopped teaching when I was 15. At 16, the nearby villages hired a teacher to teach at an ancestral hall, and I learned from him for two years. I also worked as a cook for him. At 18 the teacher returned to his own village, and I stayed behind. I thought that I couldn't continue studying for there was no rice at home, so I went to collect bamboo leaves in the mountains. From 19 to 23, I learned to farm two mu of land and cut firewood sometimes.

At 23, I left the village for the New Gold Mountain with 5 other young men of the same family name. It was the Feb. 13th, the 13th year of Emperor Guangxu [1887]. We walked to Huangchong in the morning, took a boat from there to shuanshui, then boarded another boat to Macao, and took a steam-ship to Hong Kong. We stayed at Hexing Hotel, then boarded the ship Changsha to Australia on Feb. 17th. We arrived

at Sydney port on March 8, but for two days the passengers were not allowed to disembark. At that time, the Sydney authority restricted the number of Chinese to enter, so each passenger had to pay a poll tax of 100 pounds before he is allowed to get off. The ship *Changsha* stayed for a couple of days and returned to Hong Kong, for it had been scheduled to ship tea next time. We got on another ship and arrived at Melbourne on March 11th, and the six of us got off the ship and stayed at the garden run by my brother for several days. We boarded another ship on March 21st and arrived at Launceston on March 22nd. That night we stayed at Zhong Run's garden.

I took the train at 3 p.m. on March 23rd and got to Hobart at 9pm. I worked at the Shuisheng garden for five months without pay. At that time the pay for labour was 8 shillings per week, and still no employers would hire you. My old uncle had a small garden, and he sold his produce door to door by carrying them with a pole. As he was becoming old, he decided to sell it and return to China. He was looking for someone to take over the garden. In August I paid 13 pounds for that and worked for one year and 8 months, making about 60 pounds. Then a shareholder of Shuisheng garden wanted to return to China, and my cousins asked him to transfer the shares to me. One friend told me not to buy it but to work on my own garden for one more year, then we would return to China together. I was in a difficult situation. So far I had some savings of about 40 pounds and wanted to return home, but Australia had passed a new law to forbid the Chinese to enter. It was the 16 th year of Guangxu. So I went to Launceston with my cousin Chengzheng, and contracted a garden with two other Chinese there for two years. Each made about 20 —30 pounds each year, we had to send money home, so how can we have savings?

There were about 100 Chinese in Launceston, of them 60 were from my village and were farming on gardens. There were three laundries, two grocery stores owned by Taishan people that sold goods at tin mines. Because there was no store run by us Xinhui people, we decided to collect 20 pounds from each and set up a store of our own with several hundred pounds, we sent the money to Hong Kong to buy the stuff. I worked there for over ten months, and although the business was maintained with a small margin of profit, it was not so good. So we decided to sell it to a fellow villager, Zhong Yaying, who came over from Melbourne with several hundred pounds to take over. He tried to persuade me to join stock with him, but I heard that he was not honest, so I turned down his request and returned to Hobart. I had only dozens of pounds left, while some brothers still asked to borrow money from me.

I borrowed dozens of pounds from my brothers and went to New Zealand with two others in July or August, the 20 th year of

Guangxu. I got onboard at Hobart, and the ship sailed for three days to get to New Zealand. We crossed three towns to get to Wellington and stayed there for the night. The next day we took the train to get to a small vegetable garden at Marstown. We hired four people, and I drove the carriage to the market six days a week. I worked there for two years, then I caught a disease and didn't recover for over twenty days. The owner took me to Wellington where we met Rev. Zheng Lu from Heshang. He sent me to a big hospital where the doctors treated me well and I recovered in two weeks. I stayed there for seven week before total recovery. It was fifty years ago and I am still grateful to Rev. Zheng and the doctors.

Then I returned to Marstown to thank the fellow workers and the owner. I wanted to quit the job and go to another place. The owner had been making little profit in the previous years. After I came, we profited 20 pounds the first year. So he closed the business and let me take over, I stayed with seven workers who were paid about 20 pounds per year, very cheap. We worked for two years, and some of them either returned to China or took up other jobs. Finally only three remained, and we moved to the suburbs to open a new garden. The three of us worked there for 3 years continuously and each made about 200 pounds. In May, the 28 th year of Guangxu, I returned to Hongkong, then back to Jiangmen and from there took the ferry to Chongkou, Sancun. I went with three other people. When I passed Zhongxin Li, I thought of my maternal grandmother, so I told the workers to go home with the other people first, and I dropped in to see her. My mother had died in the previous September and I didn't get the news until nine months later. I cried heartedly when I saw my grandmother.

I returned to my village in early May, and found my original house broken, so I bought a house nearby to live. I got married in August, and stayed home to rest from toil. I saw the villagers working hard everyday, so I also went to collect firewood and grew some yams and vegetables. There was a pond in front of the village, and the six lanes between the rows of houses carried lots of sand into the pond every year. The villagers had to clear the pond of the sand and dumped it in other places, which caused quarrels between the villagers. I thought that I had been away for over ten years and should do something good for the village, so I took the lead and asked other people overseas to make donations for building a fence, watergates and cement sewage pipes. I reported this to the four branches of the clan and with their agreement we chose a lucky day to start the work of building the pipes at the mouth of the lanes with cement. I also handled the cash to buy back the land that had been mortgaged. Before I left, I ?? transferred the account book to another person in the village.

I stayed at home for two years and three months, and by then I had used up all my money. So I had to borrow money and prepared for going to New Zealand. I had a return visa to New Zealand. But I didn't ask for one when I left Australia. My friend asked me to go to Hobart with him, for we might start business together. He managed to obtain some false naturalization certificates with other names for me I paid 30 Hong Kong dollars for that and ventured to go. When the ship arrived at Melbourne, six persons who were all from Yamen, Xinhui and three persons from Taishan who used false documents were refused entry. Because I had entered Hobart before and had experience and knew a little English, I managed to answer the questions by the custom officer and was allowed to disembark.

But when I returned to Hobart, the friend paid no attention to me, and I had to go to New Zealand. One friend agreed to lend me some money, and I ran a garden for three years. I was 44 then and had a daughter before, yet I would like to have a son, so I let out the garden and returned home again. I stayed home for one year, and my wife bore me a son after I left again. But several months later, I got news that the baby had died. Five years later I returned home again, and my wife gave birth to twin boys later, but they all died soon after they were born. I had no way out then. It happened that the fence of my ancestral fields was not completed, with tens of meters left open, which caused fighting among villagers. So the fellow villagers who were abroad agreed to donate money to complete it, and I carried the money back home. It is over thirty years after the completion, and the villagers had been getting along peacefully ever since.

This was written on February 15, 1950 by Zhong Chengji
(Translated by Wu Qianlong, August 6, 2005)

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Back to [Decoding historical scripts in Chinese](#).

[Back to top](#)

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