

## My Chinatown: Restaurant Kids

31 January - 22 February 2003

Exhibition Curator: Jennifer Kwok

Exhibition team: Linda Goodman, Aaron Seeto

Volunteers: Natalie Seiz, Mei Ling Sun, Owen Leong, Evelyn Leong, Denise, Michelle Santos

**My Chinatown - Restaurant Kids** is an official event of the City of Sydney Chinese New Year Festival and has been supported by Big Colour Imaging Artarmon



### Acknowledgements

**Exhibition Sponsors:** City of Sydney, Star City Hotel and Casino, Big Colour Imaging Artarmon, Martell Cognac and Penfolds Wines.

**Exhibition Contributors:** David Lim, Lim family, Arthur Gar Lock Chang, Sally & Norman Pad and the Pang family, Gwenda Bau, King Fong, Amber & Daniel Ma, Daisy Klemmer, JC & DL Lung, Allan Yip, Doris Jones, Wong family, Lee-Young family, Cecil Parkee, Lai family, Helen and Keep Fong, Mrs Leong, Martin Kwok, Laurens Tan, Shirley Lowe, Rachael Young, Susan Pang, Lous McEvoy, Cecil Parkee, Marin Ma, Evelyn Leong

asia-australia arts centre  
gallery4a

181 - 187 Hay Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Tel 9212 0380  
Fax 9281 0873  
info@4a.com.au

Director: Linda Goodman  
Curator: Aaron Seeto  
Director Public Relations: Jennifer Kwok



The Asian Australian Artists Association inc gratefully acknowledges our principal sponsors James Fairfax AO and Chinta Ria, the assistance of the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its funding and advisory body, the NSW Ministry for the Arts and the City of Sydney.



## My Chinatown: Restaurant Kids

31 January - 22 February 2003

Image: *Lim's Cafe Early 1950s*  
Photographer unknown  
courtesy: David Lim and family

asia-australia arts centre  
gallery4a



image: *Chequers 1955*  
courtesy: Daniel and Amber Ma

## INTRODUCTION

***My Chinatown: Restaurant Kids*** is an Asia-Australia Arts Centre project which explores the dynamic social history of the Chinese-Australian community in Sydney many of whom have lived here for five generations. The exhibition showcases their experiences through their personal photographs and objects.

*Restaurant Kids* is the third exhibition in the *My Chinatown* series. It traces many of the old Chinese restaurants in Sydney's evolving Chinatown through four generations of kids who grew up within a Chinese restaurant environment. Their personal photographs and objects date back as far as Quong Tart's Tea Rooms in the 1880's in Sydney, charting the phenomenon of the Chinese restaurant in Campbell Street (the site of the Capitol Theatre) to the current centre in Dixon Street. *Restaurant Kids* explores the impact of Chinese Restaurants on Australian culture and cuisine and reveals the Chinese-Australian community as a dynamic social group experiencing continual change.

## Chinese restaurants in Sydney

The Chinese arrived in Sydney in search of gold during the Gold Rush period in the mid 1800s. Many passed through and settled in The Rocks attracted by lower rents in the Haymarket & Surry Hills area they began to move into this area and set up small businesses and restaurants predominately along Campbell Street.

Some of the first well known restaurants included Shanghai Cafe, Tientsin Cafe, Canton, Nankin Cafe who mostly served Cantonese cuisine. The nearby grocers and Beimore Gardens supplied the restaurateurs with their fresh ingredients and produce.

By the early to mid 1940s, restaurants began expanding along Campbell Street into George, Dixon and surrounding streets. Some of these restaurants were Lims Restaurants and the Modern China Cafe on George Street. Along Campbell

Street restaurants included The Far East Cafe, Jim Lee's Cafe & The Hong Kong Cafe.

In Dixon Street the Lean Sun Low had been operating since the 1930s. During the 1940s and 1950s more appeared including the Eastern Cafe, Tai Ping and grocers Say Tin Fong and Hong Sing & Company.

In the 1950s and 1960s more restaurant & nightclubs such as Chequers and the Ling Nam appeared. Offering caberet style dinners and shows these nightspots were alluring places attracting high society, who came to see famous international stars such as Shirley Bassey and Sammy Davis Junior. During this period other restaurants included; Paradise, Cathay, Bamboo, Mandarin, Sun Sun, Mandarin Club and in Dixon Street many more restaurants established their premises such as the Dixon, the Sunah, Green Jade, Yips Inn. Dixon Street became the final Chinatown, we have today.

In 1965 the immigration laws allowed Chinese chefs to expand their businesses into the suburbs to establish new restaurants. By the 1970s Chinese restaurant had become widespread, many restaurateurs moved to the suburbs. Chinese restaurants now serve every thing from yum cha to almost any variety of Chinese cuisine. Chinese restaurants have had a huge influence on Australian culture and cuisine today. Chopsticks, & woks have become common Australian household items and rice a staple.



image: *Eastern Restaurant c 1955*  
Photographer unknown  
courtesy: Gwenda Bau