

## **They stuffed the bones with Gold - Those Tenacious Chinese.**

“Above the Turon River in the Great Dividing Range, Australia, a lonely Chinese grave looks down on long abandoned gold diggings. Locals in the Sofala pub will tell you the old market gardener used to wash and clean the bones of fellow diggers who had died, fill them with gold and send them back. When his time came, there was nobody to send him home.” Quote from: ‘Damien Murphy’.

Did anyone see the TV program on the worlds first trans continental railway built in the US in the 1860's? Just as well boatloads of Chinese, fleeing from persecution, turned up on the West coast at the right time, or the one foot per day progress across some of the highest mountains in America, would never have been achieved.

But Australia has its own stories of those amazing Chinese

Historian Janis Wilton commented that the Sofala grave illustrates the loneliness of the Chinese living in an adopted culture that never really recognized them as Australian sons. "On one hand the Chinese were seen as a menacing threat, on the other, they were an exotic presence, often forced to live a secret existence, the silence of which continues to reverberate down the generations to their present-day descendants," she says

"But these people today have the stories of those men and women who came to Australia for the first gold and tin rushes. They were handed down by word-of-mouth, and remind the rest of us of the contribution they made to our society"

Dennis Sue-Fong's grandfather, George, (his new Australian name) at the age of thirteen came ashore at Cooktown in the late 1870s. Those early Chinese adventurers were tough people. George, along with many other Chinese immigrants, eagerly trekked on foot to the Palmer River gold fields to find his fortune but like so many unlucky ones this was not to be and so disappointed but not without hope he again traveled on foot all the way south to Sydney where he labored a while for just keep, before returning north some years later to the small tin mining town of Emmerville.

His traveling was no mean feat when you consider that the place was full of snakes and man-eating crocodiles along with a lot of narrow minded Englishmen who pulled his pig tale and called him names. A lot of the old Chinese used to hire themselves out as cooks in the sheering camps. Some of them married the locals and the resulting combination of Chinese and Aboriginal blood, called 'yella fellas' produced some of the best horsemen of the northern territory.

Dennis' ancestors eventually shifted to a place called Inverell on the north western slopes of the Great Dividing Range in New South Wales. It was here that Dennis' other grandfather started a variety store called Hong Yuen & Co which eventually became so viable that it was one of the largest in town. As a large general store it could practically supply anything you desired. As a credit to the family's business acumen, in 2006 the store is still operational; Dennis' mother had been a shareholder while his father shared in management.

His father, Ernest, also operated a large sapphire mine from where Dennis learnt about sapphires. Occasionally working with his Uncle who had started a wholesale Jewellery business he became quite familiar with the industry. It was at this point that I came in contact with him and introduced him to the opal industry. We are both still involved in that industry today. [www.opalmine.com](http://www.opalmine.com) is a site that features the stones we deal in.

Dennis was dealing in sapphires and sapphire Jewellery when I first met him. He had established his own wholesale business but was struggling with falling sapphire demand. I suggested that opals were a much more appealing proposition to get into because of the increasing tourist trade with Japan and the USA. That was back in the late 80's. We have been associated in the opal business ever since. In the mid 1990s I personally saw the great potential of the internet and quickly established the internationally known <http://www.opalmine.com> with its encyclopedia of opal and a chat forum with contributions from all over the world.

In early 2005 Dennis was about to embark on another of our opal selling trips around Australia when his dear wife Debbie became seriously ill with cancer. We are all hoping she will get well soon.

[peter@opalmine.com](mailto:peter@opalmine.com) [www.opalmine.com](http://www.opalmine.com)

'Opal Ridge' Australian outback opal fields Lightning Ridge