

His Excellency *HWANG HON CHENG*

Chinese Commissioner
Photograph taken 1906

This large photograph, hanging in 'Box Cottage', shows a rather youthful, but unsmiling young man grandly dressed in a brocaded Chinese costume, on closer inspection there is a peacock feather at the back of his hat. The photo is dated 1906, (*ie. 104 years old*), and is a little faded, with some minor damage. To date, no MHS member had any information about the photograph. In fact, Commissioner Hwang Hon Cheng's likeness has just "hung around", inscrutably gazing down on us, his history completely unknown. *Finally*, both Robina's and my curiosity was aroused and we set out to learn more about Hwang Hon Cheng and his role in Australia. The following is the outcome of both Robina's *considerable* research, as well as some input from your correspondent.



Despite his *very* youthful appearance, this young man, His Excellency, Hwang, (also known as Huang), Hon Cheng, visited Australia from 1906 until 1907 in the official capacity of Chinese Commissioner. Mei-fen Kuo, PhD Thesis', (Latrobe University), "Making Chinese Australian", informs us that Hwang's visit was in response to an urgent petition from well-respected Chinese Australian business leaders. In an email, this month, she advises:

CHINESE IN AUSTRALIA.

A VISITOR FROM PEKIN.


Melbourne, November 4.

Prefect Hwang Hon Cheng, the Commissioner appointed by the Chinese Government to enquire into the question of appointing consular agents in Australia and New Zealand, arrived in Melbourne by the Sydney express on Saturday. About 100 Chinese greeted him at the railway-station, and later on presented him with a memorial, stating that they had been subject to oppression and harsh treatment, which they trusted would now disappear. The Commissioner will remain in Melbourne about a week. **The Advertiser Nov 1906**

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"The major purpose of Huang's visit was in response to a petition submitted by Chinese-Australian business leaders in 1906 that was sent to the Chinese Ambassador in Britain. The 1906 petition sought support for the appointment of an Australian Chinese consular representative, with a view to easing the escalating discrimination and the immigration restrictions in Australia."

On arrival Hwang was feted first in Brisbane, and then travelled on to meet with government officials and Chinese representatives in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart. We know that the youthful Hwang Hon

Cheng's visit was successful, as in 1908 after reviewing Hwang Hon Cheng's findings and recommendations, Britain agreed that the *first Chinese Consul-General should be appointed to Australia*. Accordingly we read on page seven of the Sydney Morning Herald, Friday 17th July 1908: 

WHAT WERE THE MAIN ISSUES THAT GALVANISED THE CHINESE COMMUNITY TO PETITION THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT?Read on!

CHINESE CONSUL-GENERAL.

MR. LEONG LAN FUN APPOINTED.

MELBOURNE, Thursday.

Last year Chinese residents in the Commonwealth cabled to the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, urging the necessity of consulates throughout Australia. A few months ago Mr. Hwang Hon Cheng visited Australia to report on the condition of the Chinese in this country. As the result of his report, Mr. Leong Lan Fun, Taotal of Swatow, has been appointed Consul-General for the Commonwealth. His headquarters will be in Melbourne, and he is expected to arrive here towards the end of September.