

**Document 6.7: Excerpts from the “Autobiography of Mr. Kwan Hong Kee,”
describing his early years in Australia, January 1938**

In 1885, Kwan Hong Kee borrowed \$100 from his brother to pay for his passage from Hong Kong to Australia. He worked as a cook on board the vessel. After arriving in Sydney, he borrowed more money to send a letter home, letting his family know he had arrived safely, and to buy European clothes. His first job was in Newcastle as a cook in a Chinese store. He was provided with room and board but received no pay.

Each day after cooking breakfast, I worked as a hawker selling goods until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, when it was time to cook the evening meal. I did this for a period of three months, after which through another friend I got work in Sydney at ‘Sarm Choy’ store. This store imported and sold Chinese goods. My wages were fifteen shillings a week. After two years I was promoted to salesman and received one pound a week.¹

After four years in that position, the company sent him to work as a clerk and delivery man in a branch store. In the evenings he studied English. His pay gradually increased, and in 1892 he returned to China to be married. Two years later, he left again for Australia, but his wife couldn't travel with him and died shortly after. A friend introduced him to the manager of a grocery store, which in time expanded to sell hardware, drapery, and clothing. His pay rose again.

My work included selling, back store work, receiving and delivering goods, in fact all general work. I tried my best, my boss was pleased with my work over the six years. I then returned to China again and married...

In 1901, Kwan sailed for Australia again, this time with his wife and a nephew, back to his job in the store.

[A]fter [six years] I was offered a partnership (free partnership share of one hundred

¹ One pound equaled twenty shillings.

pounds), in recognition of my good work for the firm. When Mr. Wong Hoon Narm took leave and went back to China, I took over as general manager. The business prospered even more each year, which pleased the shareholders... Mr. Wong Hoon Narm returned after one and a half years, and we worked together as joint managers during which profit rose from two to three thousand pounds annually. At Mr. Wong Hoon Narm's suggestion, I returned to China for seven months with the family [wife and five children] at the firm's expense....

Source: Kwan Hong Kee, "Autobiography of Mr. Kwan Hong Kee," Hong Kong, January 1938. *Golden Threads*, Australian Museums & Galleries Online, Nov. 2003.