

## Tuesday English News Report

*The Chinese in Britain: personal tales of a journey to a new land*

Broadcast Date: 4<sup>th</sup> November

Today, 400,000 **ethnic** Chinese call Britain home. But their 325-year history of labour **contributions** to the UK, from being 17th-century seamen to establishing London's world-famous Soho Chinatown, have often gone undocumented and unnoticed. Some of their stories are below.

In 1685, Jesuit priest Michael Alphonsius Shen Fu-tsung became the first Chinese person on record to visit Britain. While he was in the country, he went to work cataloguing Chinese-language books for the Bodleian Library, in Oxford.

Since then, hundreds of thousands of Chinese sailors, **chefs**, students, doctors, laundrymen (and women), **artisans** and others have contributed much to British society, although this has gone largely undocumented.

Their cultural influence is everywhere, from menus featuring chicken chow mein and sweet and sour pork dishes to the **consumption** of herbal teas and the use of loan words such as "ketchup" (literally "tomato sauce") and "chop chop". Long time no see? That's Chinese syntax.

In 2012, the Ming-Ai (London) Institute, supported by the **Heritage** Lottery Fund, began a three-year oral history project, collecting information about the Chinese people who settled in the British Isles. When the project ends, about 90 residents of Chinese heritage will have been interviewed. Their stories are being published online at the British Chinese Workforce Heritage website ([www.britishchineseheritagecentre.org.uk](http://www.britishchineseheritagecentre.org.uk)) and will feature in exhibitions shown across Britain from next year.

As stories **emerge** (one of which follows), this marvellous resource promises to redefine both other people's understanding of the Chinese **diaspora** and that community's **perception** of itself.

### **Chang Yew, 93, (1919-2012), seaman**

"I was 19 when I started sailing in Hong Kong with a Dutch shipping company. China was already at war with Japan.

"I first came to Britain in 1941. I was below deck and my job was as a **stoker**. I would wake up at six o'clock every morning for work, two shifts of four hours each. I was responsible for getting the engines running. I had to fuel them. It was very hard work because the firebox blew out hot air and the hold became very hot.

"Later, I worked as the ship's chef and cooked for the **crew**. I cooked Western food, fish and chips, and Chinese food, dumplings and stir-fries. There were dozens of workers onboard, from all over the world, including Indians, Africans and Chinese.

"When not working, my Chinese workmates liked to play mahjong or poker. The ship's beds were separated into upper and lower bunks, two people per bunk; one room had more than 10 people in it. Clothes would be washed twice a day and we had to bathe daily because the ship was very hot and dirty.