

Yett Soo War Way Lee 葉繡華 (1852-1909)

Merchant and Chinese community leader



Yett Soo War Way Lee
c. 1907

Chinese-born Way Lee immigrated to Sydney in 1874. By 1878 he had established Way Lee & Co, an importing business in Adelaide, and soon had trading interests across Australia.

Way Lee was well respected in South Australian business circles, but had to battle constantly against widespread anti-Chinese sentiment and discrimination.

Many European Australians wanted a 'White Australia'. They feared large-scale Asian immigration, and resented Chinese labourers toiling in the goldfields for long hours and little pay. Anti-Chinese leagues were common, and Chinese people were denied many rights routinely granted to Europeans. They were also subjected to additional taxes and restrictions on movement.

Way Lee used his influence to rally against the poor treatment of his countrymen. He campaigned for better education and improved conditions for Chinese migrants, tried to facilitate inter colonial travel for the Chinese and called for restrictions on the importation and use of opium. He also promoted international trade, correctly predicting the strong trading relationship that Australia and China share.

Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia, zham15906300_c

Way Lee – sign at West Terrace Cemetery. Well-respected Adelaidean.
A building is named after him at Uni SA City West Campus.



The Sym Choon family – well-known merchants in the East End of Adelaide. There is still a shop named after them.
Gladys was born in Unley in 1905.

