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**NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA**

# Fact sheet

# Australia's diplomatic relations with China

Australia has a long history of contact with China, but formal relations between the two countries only consolidated more recently. The first Chinese Consul-General to Australia arrived in Melbourne in 1909, but it wasn't until 1921 that Australia established representation in China through a trade commissioner, an effort that was disbanded the following year.

Australia's first diplomatic mission in China opened in 1941, but closed again only eight years later after the Communist victory over the Nationalist Kuomintang and the subsequent establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Cold War fears of Communism characterised Australia's relations with China over the next two decades, with Australia refusing to recognise either the Communist government of the PRC in Peking (Beijing) or the Nationalists in the Republic of China (Taiwan).

In 1966, under Prime Minister Harold Holt, a diplomatic mission was established in Taipei. Seven years later, when the Whitlam government established diplomatic relations with the PRC, the Taipei embassy closed and an embassy was opened in Peking.

## Records relating to Australia–China relations

A selection of records relating to Australia and China is listed below. These records are all held in Canberra.

### Records of the Department of External (later Foreign) Affairs

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series, item number |
|---|---|---|
| Chinese representation in Australia | 1945–73 | A1838, 3107/38/2 part 1 |
| Political relations – including commercial treaty | 1945–48 | A1838, 494/4/3 |
| China conditions in Nanking | 1949 | A1838, 491/7/18/7 |
| Australian policy towards Communist China | 1949–53 | A1838, 3107/40/38 part 1 |
| Recognition of Communist China | 1949–66 | A1838, TS3107/33/1/1 |
| China–Australia relations – visit by Miss Roper and Mr Dixon | 1963–66 | A1838, 3107/38/12/3 |
| Opening of mission in Taiwan | 1966 | A1838, 1500/2/62/1 |
| Visits by Australians to China – officials and delegations | 1968–73 | A1838, 3107/38/12/2 part 4 |

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|---|---|---|
| Foreigners in China – tourism | 1969–78 | A1838, 3107/33/8 part 2 |
| China–Australia relations – statements by Minister for Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister and others | 1971–72 | A1838, 3107/38/3 part 7 |
| Dr Stephen FitzGerald – Ambassador to PRC | 1972–76 | A1838, 1500/2/89/2 part 1 |
| Conditions of service for diplomats – Peking | 1972–76 | A1838, 3107/38/1/1 part 1 |
| Correspondence between Department and Peking Embassy on its role | 1975–78 | A1838, 3107/38/1/4 part 1 |

# Records of Australian missions in China and Taiwan

The first Australian Minister to China was appointed in 1941. The Australian Legation was based in Chungking, relocating to Nanking in 1946. In 1948 the mission was upgraded to an embassy, but closed after the Communists gained power in late 1949.

## Australian Legation/Embassy, Republic of China (Chungking and Nanking) (CA 1978 and CA 1979)

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|---|---|---|
| Correspondence files | 1945–48 | A4144 |
| Folders of departmental despatches | 1948–49 | A4146 |
| Correspondence files | 1949 | A4145 |

In 1966, the Holt government established diplomatic relations with the Nationalist Chinese in Taiwan, and appointed an Australian Ambassador to Taipei. In early 1973 the Australian embassy in Taiwan was closed after Australia established diplomatic relations with the PRC.

## Australian Embassy, Republic of China (Taipei) (CA 1976)

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|---|---|---|
| Correspondence files | 1966–73 | A4262 |
| List of series A4262 | 1969–73 | A4263 |

Between 1949 and 1972, no Australian government recognised the Communist-ruled PRC. In December 1972, the Whitlam government agreed with the PRC to establish diplomatic relations. An Australian embassy opened in Peking the same year.

## Australian Embassy, People's Republic of China (Peking/Beijing) (CA 1977)

| Title or description of record | Date range | Series number |
|---|---|---|
| Correspondence files | 1973–77 | A10028 |
| Correspondence files | 1978–95 | A7326 |

# Further sources of information

Australia's relationship with China is documented in records created by the Department of Trade, the Prime Minister's Department and within the papers of individual prime ministers including Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser. These records can be located using the RecordSearch database, initially by a keyword search of relevant terms such as: china, chinese, taiwan, australia, relations. Limiting the search with a date range will reduce the number of results.

More information about Australia's diplomatic and trade relationship with China can be found in publications by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), including David Goldsworthy (ed.), *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Volume 1, 1901 to the 1970s* (Melbourne University Press, 2001) and David Lee and Stuart Doran (eds.), *Australia and Recognition of the People's Republic of China* (DFAT, 2002).

The National Archives publication Chinese–Australian Journeys by Paul Jones is a guide to records of migration, travel and settlement of Chinese people in Australia.