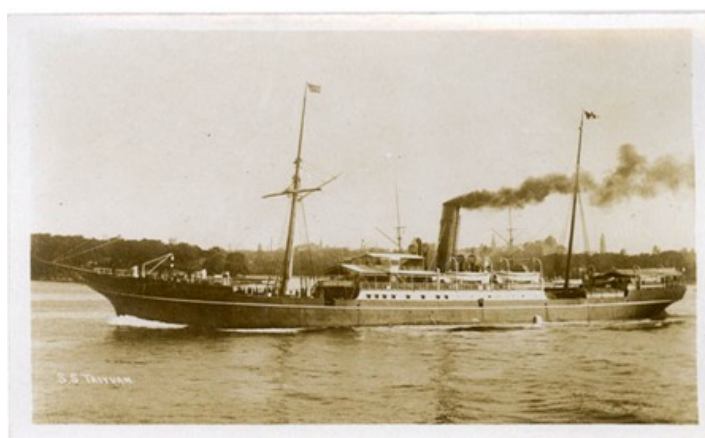


S.S Taiyuan

The Taiyuan was built by Scotts Greenock in Glasgow for the British, China Navigation Company and was launched in September 1886. It was built for the popular route between China, Australia and New Zealand, carrying passengers and cargo. While it was a steamship, it was also rigged for sail power when required. In 1912 it was sold to the Australian Oriental Company, and was eventually scrapped in 1925 after thirty-nine years of service.¹ Over the course of its long life traversing the Pacific, there was one occasion where the ship's specie-room was robbed of ten boxes; a loss of 7000 sovereigns. The Taiyuan was also a regular visitor to North Head, having been quarantined five times during its lifetime. In 1894, 1912, and 1923 for smallpox, and in 1913 and 1914 for bubonic plague.²



On Sunday, December 30th, 1923 the steamer arrived in Sydney harbour flying a yellow flag, indicating contagion on board the vessel; in this case, smallpox. The patient was a Chinese man who was detained on Thursday Island's quarantine station, while the steamer proceeded to Sydney. Despite no new cases of smallpox being found among the passengers and crew, S.S. *Taiyuan*

remained at North Head Quarantine Station for fumigation, and passengers were kept at the station under quarantine until January 10th, 1924.³ As standard procedure indicated that individuals who had potentially been exposed to the contagion were required to remain isolated during the known incubation period.

While the exact author of the inscription is unknown, the portrayal of the journey and the author's regret over being separated by "vast oceans" from parents, as well as references to the moon and cuckoos (metaphors for homesickness in Chinese literature) seems to indicate that this was the first lengthy journey the author had taken.⁴ Considering the use of allusions to Chinese literature, the inscriber is well educated and most likely a passenger aboard the ship rather than a member of the vessel's crew. This personal experience of a journey upon the *Taiyuan* is a nice contrast to another inscription also relating to the vessel, which can be found in the wharf area of the Quarantine Station. The elaborate inscription commemorates the first quarantine of the Taiyuan in 1894. Featuring the company's logo and dragon motifs, it later had the date 1912 added during the ship's second detention.⁵

¹ Hoskin, J. 2009. 'Flotilla Australia', Web: <http://flotilla-australia.com/nsw-other.htm#changsha-yuil>

² Sin, Maria, 'Quarantine Project database, University of Sydney'

³ "The Yellow Flag", *The Maitland Daily Mercury*, December 31st, 1923.

⁴ Sin, p.19

⁵ Peter Hobbins