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From the gold rush to Crazy Rich Asians, the ABC examines the Chinese-Australian relationship with *Waltzing the Dragon with Benjamin Law*



Journalist, author and broadcaster Benjamin Law presents the two-part documentary *Waltzing the Dragon with Benjamin Law*, starting on ABC and ABC iview on Tuesday 30 July at 8:30pm. The series takes a fresh eye to the “sweet and sour” of the China-Australia relationship, digging deep into the overlapping histories of the two countries, unpacking the present and looking to the future of Australia’s waltz with the dragon.

Benjamin, a Queensland born and bred, self-described “ABC” (Australian born Chinese) who speaks “yum-cha Cantonese” investigates his own Chinese-Australian heritage and asks how his family’s journey fits in with those of the other 1.2 million Chinese Australians – a question that is not just relevant to him, but to all Australians as the nation’s ties with China continue to deepen.

Over two episodes, Benjamin first goes road-tripping with his wonderfully hilarious mother Jenny, and then his ambitious entrepreneur father Danny. They embark on a fascinating journey to trace the Chinese-Australian history, from long before the days of the gold rush, to Bob Hawke’s post-Tiananmen Square Massacre immigration intake, to Crazy Rich Asians. As Benjamin gains more of an understanding of how the two countries are entangled and China’s increasing sway over Australia’s fortune, so too will the viewer through his insightful and often witty narration.

So many Australians think of the Chinese in Australia as a side-note to Australian history,” Law says. “That included me, before working on Waltzing the Dragon. To fully understand how the Chinese engineered Australia’s first global trade – centuries before the First Fleet – and that we’ve been here well before the Gold Rush, was revelatory to me.”

“Australia’s economic past, present and future has always been married to China’s, and we can’t begin to understand how to grapple with Australia’s future with China unless we understand our past. On a personal level, to travel with my parents across Australia and China to trace our roots was equal parts emotional and hilarious. As much as it’s a homecoming for me and my family, this show will resonate with Australians who have at least one parent born overseas.”

In episode one, ‘Homecoming’, Benjamin and mum Jenny look for the ties of blood that bind China and Australia today and that have kept its people at odds in the past. They travel from Caloundra to Canton in search of her mysterious family roots. Above their former Chinese restaurant, they recall a tough, but iconic Australian family life which, for Benjamin, was shattered by Pauline Hanson’s election in 1996. In rural Queensland they bust myths surrounding colonial Australia, discovering Chinese shearers and farmers who transformed the state, as well as Chinese miners who beat discriminatory laws to marry and start proud Australian dynasties. During their time in China, Jenny and Benjamin discover their ‘Australian-ness’ and uncover their place in a vast family lineage previously unknown to them.

In episode two, ‘Fortune’, we meet Benjamin’s workaholic Dad. Entrepreneur Danny, who is part of a more than 300-year-old tradition of Chinese seeking their fortunes in Australia, recalls his early business and property development days in Queensland during the post-White Australia Policy Whitlam era. Father and son explore their connections to the tradition of Chinese market gardeners in Australia, the banana trade and the economic forces that shaped Australia’s antipathy to Chinese people for most of the 20th Century.

Benjamin travels to Arnhem land to learn more about the pre-colonial Australian-Chinese trading between Indigenous Australians of the North Coast and Indonesian and Chinese merchants, and heads to the NSW town of Young, a place now keen to attract Chinese tourists, but that until recently commemorated its history of Anglo Celtic rioting against Chinese miners in the gold rush era.

Finally, Danny and Benjamin travel to booming southern China where Danny is closing a deal that Benjamin knows little about. It's in the village of Danny’s birth that Benjamin sees his father in a new light and finds a nexus between China’s and his own family's pursuit of wealth, the call of duty and love.

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Production Credits: *Waltzing the Dragon with Benjamin Law* is a Headland Media and WildBear Entertainment Production for the ABC.

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