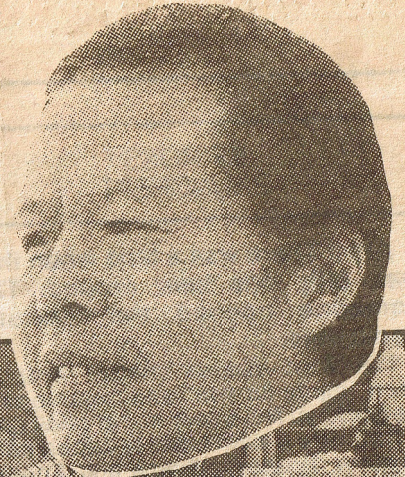


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It was his dearest wish to see Melbourne alive with happy people of all origins enjoying themselves together



Mrs Mabel Wang fulfilled the dearest wish of her late husband, David, by bringing the Big Dragon to Melbourne from China.

David Wang's dream comes true

THE *Glenda Banks*



INTERVIEW

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*Young
Banks*

INTERVIEW

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Mrs MABEL Wang is the quintessential Oriental woman.

Her feminine frame is draped in softly falling charcoal figured-silk.

Peach-bloom skin and lively dark eyes belie her 62 years.

She has been a widow for seven years, and in that time has quietly built on the dream her husband, import entrepreneur David Wang, conceived just before he died.

Mr Wang, nine years a Melbourne city councillor, had a vision of a brighter, busier city, unfettered by strictly regulated shopping hours and dour "don'ts".

Today's Chinese New Year celebrations, shared by many non-Chinese Australians, are seen by his family as the culmination of David Wang's efforts.

"David would have been so proud today," says Mrs Wang.

"When he first came to Australia, things were a lot different. This would have seemed an improbable, if not impossible, dream.

"We were not accepted as well in those days as we are now.

"David was in Australia for 14 years before he was permitted to become an Australian citizen.

"Every year until that, he had to report how the business was going to see if he was doing well enough to be allowed to stay. If not, he would have had to leave."

Mabel Wang was under no such

THIS is the Year of the Rabbit. And today Victoria's Chinese community celebrate their new year with their most lavish festival ever in the heart of Melbourne. Thousands of non-Chinese are expected to attend. But for one woman the day has special meaning. She is Mrs Mabel Wang, widow of the former city councillor who led the push for a brighter, better Melbourne . . .

threat herself, being a third-generation Australian.

"My grandfather came here from China in the 1850s, at the start of the gold rush.

"He didn't make a fortune in the gold fields, though. He brought 100 laborers with him and cleared most of the land on the north-east border of Victoria, where it joins with New South Wales.

"Albury is built on land my grandfather cleared.

"I was born Australian, but in the late 1940s when David first came here you

couldn't stay just because you married an Australian.

"David was a captain in the Chinese Army, posted here because Singapore fell to the Japanese when his unit was on the way to defend it.

"By the end of the war he had fallen in love with Australia and decided to make his home here. That was when we met.

"Being in the army for so long, he had no trade or profession.

"So we did the only thing we knew; started a small importing business, to sell Chinese furniture and artifacts."

The small importing business grew to the David Wang chain of more than 15 outlets and, indirectly, led to the Wang family's involvement with today's celebrations.

The business, and Cr Wang's dream, are now the responsibility of his sons, Christopher and Mark.

A highpoint of today's Chinese New Year festival is the parade of the Big Dragon.

Eighty metres long, and covered with hundreds of mirrored "scales" recently replaced at a cost of \$12,000, it will wind its way through the inner city streets.

"Mark and I are particularly proud to have brought the Big Dragon to Melbourne," says Mrs Wang.

"In 1979, The Young Chinese League came to see my husband to ask him to help them obtain a new dragon as theirs was very old.

"I remember how delighted he was to be involved and his big plans for raising

the money to buy it.

"But he died a month later. Because I knew how much it meant to him, Mark and I took on the job of having it made and bringing it back to Australia.

"We went to China and found out it would be \$22,000, which was a lot of money in those days.

"But we were able to raise the full amount and bring the dragon over time for the 25th anniversary Moomba.

"David was so happy when Australians were interested in our celebrations.

"He always said that one day Australia would be a truly multi-cultural society in which we would not only allow but enjoy each other's customs.

It was significant for Mabel Wang and her sons that their Chinese dragon made its debut at an Australian celebration.

But a year later it set the pace for the Chinese community's new year parties.

"The dragon really started all this. Until then, there was really nothing much happening. No cohesion among our people or with non-Chinese.

"This year's new year celebration with the opening of the Australian Chinese Museum, will be the best ever.

"It is my tribute to my husband that I was able to help achieve this.

"It was his dearest wish to see Melbourne alive with happy people of all origins enjoying themselves together.

"My only regret is that he didn't live to see his dream come true . . ."