Alien Son
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The Life and Times of
Cheok Hong CHEONG, (Zhang Zhuoxiong)
1851-1928

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Except where otherwise acknowledged
this thesis is based upon my own original research
For Denise
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A Summary of the Life of Cheok Hong Cheong

Presbyterian Church of Victoria
Baptised (1866), confirmed and communicant member.
Elected ruling (lay) elder of Napier St Fitzroy congregation.
Theological Student, Presbyterian Theological Hall.
English Tutor, Chinese Missionary Institution, Fitzroy.

 Anglican Church of Victoria
Communicant Member
Appointed Lay Superintending Missionary of the Church Missionary Society of Victoria, 1885 (No direct connection to CMSE).
Dismissed 1898 following amalgamation of CMSV with the Church Missionary Association of Victoria, the Victorian auxiliary of the Church Missionary Society, London (CMSE).
Formed Church Missionary Society of Victoria, Re-formed 1898 (CMSVR) now known as the Anglican Chinese Mission of the Epiphany.

The Chinese Christian Union Victoria
(A fellowship of Chinese Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Christ and Baptist Churches).
China Famine Relief Appeals.
Poon Gooey Deportation Case.
Liaison with Chinese Consulate General.

The Victorian Chinese Residents Association
English language assistance to merchants.
The ASN Affair and Chinese Response 1879.
Chinese Imperial Commissioners, 1887.
The Afghan and Burrumbeet Cases, 1888.
Goot Chee Deportation Case, 1915.
Chinese Republic Newspaper Editors Case, (Ng Hung Poi; Chiu Kwok-chun).
Poon Gooey Deportation Case, 1911.

Other Commitments
Australian Chinese Residents Committee 1920.
Chinese Empire Reform Association.
Victorian Temperance Alliance (anti-opium).
Victorian Peace Society (anti-militarism) - Visiting Lecturer in China, 1906.
Anti-Sweating League (protection of workers from exploitation).
Melbourne Famine Relief Committees.
Victorian Anti-opium Committee.
British Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade. Australian corresponding member of the Committee. Visiting Lecturer in Great Britain, 1892.
This thesis contributes to the ongoing discussion of modern Chinese identity by providing a case study of Cheok Hong CHEONG. It necessarily considers Australian attitudes towards the Chinese during the 19th century, not least the White Australia Policy. The emergence of that discriminatory immigration policy over the second half of the 19th century until its national implementation in 1901 provides the background to the thesis. Cheong was the leading figure among Chinese-Australian Christians and a prominent figure in the Australian Chinese community and the thesis seeks to identify a man whose contribution has largely been shadowy in other studies or, more commonly, overlooked by the parochialism of colony/state emphasis in many histories of Australia. His role in the Christian church fills a space in Victorian religious history.

Although Cheong accumulated great wealth he was not part of the Chinese merchant class of the huagong/huaquiao traditions of the overseas Chinese diaspora of the 19th and 20th centuries. His wealth was accumulated through property investments following the spectacular collapse of the Victorian banking system during the 1890s. His community leadership role arose through his position in the Christian Church rather than, as was generally the case, through business. His English language skills, resulting from his church association, were the key to his role as a Chinese community spokesman.

Cheok Hong Cheong left an archive of some 800 documents in the English language covering the major people, incidents and concerns of his life and times. His Letter-books, together with the archives of the various Christian missions to the Chinese in Australia in the 19th and early 20th centuries, shed light on one person’s life and more broadly, through his involvements on the complex relationships of Chinese emigrants, with the often unsympathetic majority of Australians.

This is a case study of a Chinese identity formed outside China and influenced by a wider set of cultural influences than any other Chinese-Australian of his time — an identity that justifies the description of him as an ‘Alien Son’. Cheong’s story is a contribution to the urban and family history of an important ethnic sub-group within the wider immigrant history of Australia.

While Cheong remained a Chinese subject his identification with Australia cannot be questioned. All his children were born in Australia and he left just twice after his arrival in 1863. He visited England in 1891-2 and in 1906 he briefly visited China. Identity and culture issues are growing in importance as part of the revived relationship between the Chinese of the diaspora and the economic renewal of the People’s Repub-
lic of China and this thesis is offers a contribution to that discussion.
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The early gold recoveries were from surface waterways where gold was washed down from a ‘mother lode’ in the higher country. There were also underground deposits about ten to fifty metres underground as at Ballarat where water carried (alluvial) gold was found in a dark blue clay. Deeper still were quartz reefs that required fewer and fewer workers as mechanization replaced human sweat and the capital intensive corporations replaced the individual. The working out of the alluvial gold, already obvious by 1857, was followed by the departure of the majority of the Chinese who arrived in 1854-55. By 1863, fewer than 1000 Chinese arrived in Victoria each year and the Chinese population went into a long-term decline. The decline of the rural mining populations was matched by the movement of people to the provincial towns and to Melbourne.

Mobility was a characteristic of the gold-rush societies of the 19th century world reflecting a life style much less sedentary than in the older European countries or, of course, in China. There were pockets of Chinese on every goldfield with small groups of fossickers remaining at locations where the majority of European miners had long departed but small earnings could be made by reworking abandoned fields and the mullock or waste heaps left behind. The maps show the centres which had a reasonably significant Chinese population during the second half of the 19th century. Many, although not all, had a Chinese Christian fellowship or sometimes a chapel (see Appendix 9).

The diggings covered almost every likely spot for miles around the actual place names shown and, as is so often the case in Australia, a named location does not represent a major population cluster. Many of the places shown on these maps have, other than a few ruins lost in the regrowth of the eucalypt forests, disappeared to all but the most determined searchers. Many survived as small towns servicing local farmers until modern transport and a declining rural population saw them also fade.
away into history.

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The following maps are based on the Reader’s Digest Association, (1999), Reader’s Digest, Book of the Road, Surry Hills NSW, Reader’s Digest Association.
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Introduction

This is a contextual biography of the life and times of Cheok Hong CHEONG, a leading figure in the Chinese-Australian community in the late nineteenth (19th) and early twentieth (20th) centuries. ‘Contextual’ refers to his role as a spokesman for the Chinese community in Victoria, Australia. Although a broad chronological structure has been adopted a balance had to be struck between a rigid chronology and discussion of the religious, social and political issues in which he participated.

Cheok Hong CHEONG was a Cheong lineage member whose place of family origin (guxiang) was the district of Taishan in Guangdong Province, South China.

The majority of 19th century Chinese who migrated to the English-speaking countries of the Pacific Rim from the Four Districts of Guangdong Province known variously in English and Chinese romanisation as See Yup, Sze Yup, See Yap, pinyin Siyi. The sign over the wrought iron gateway to the Chinese Temple in Raglan Street, South Melbourne reads ‘See Yup’ (next page) and this form is used in this study.

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1 Cheong Cheok Hong changed his name order to Cheok Hong Cheong while a theological student with the Presbyterian Church of Victoria in the early 1870s. When Europeans started calling him Mr Hong he decided to adopt the European order, placing his family name last. The Weekly Times, I, 2 September 1899, p 14.

2 The China Taishan Website (www.taishan.com) states that the district is ‘native place to about 1.3 million overseas Chinese people from over 80 countries, more than its local population of 1 million.

3 Maps 2.1 and 2.2.
Some eighty percent of See Yup natives in Victoria came from the Taishan and Xinhui districts of Guangdong Province and nine family/lineage groups accounted for half the Chinese population of the colony.  The Cheong family lineage village is located at the northern end of the border where Xinhui and Taishan districts (see Map G) meet but there is no evidence that Cheong Peng-nam, father of Cheok Hong Cheong, or his family ever lived there. Cheok Hong’s wife came from the adjoining district of Hockshan.

There was much more determining Cheong’s identity than his lineage, clan or home district. The Cheongs were migrants within Guangdong Province long before they came to Australia. Cheok Hong’s father, Cheong Peng-nam explained in his testimony at the time of his employment by the Presbyterian Church that the family had left Taishan District and was living in the city of Fatshan, near Guangzhou (Canton) when Cheong Peng-nam decided to emigrate to Australia.

Cheong’s life-work was as a Chinese Christian leader in a predominantly European colonial community. There have been some studies of the attempts of the Protestant Christian Churches to evangelise the Chinese who came to Australia during the 19th century. A relatively small number of Chinese in Victoria, perhaps

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5 Re-emigration is the term commonly used to refer to internal migration in which people move from their home district to another, or from one province to another. It is a long-standing practice in China. See Chapter 2.

6 Most Aboriginal people accept the de facto political situation but deny the moral right of post-invasion settlers to be regarded as the first ‘owners’ of Australia.

2000-3000, came to see Christianity as offering life choices that were impossible under the traditional Chinese value system. Chinese Christians in Australia were always struggling to retain their Chinese identity in a delicate and not always comfortable balance with the culture of the European settlers. The choice of Christianity was made all the more difficult because most Chinese saw Europeans as the oppressors of their nation. The impact of the West on 19th century China has left many scars on Chinese identity not least, a sense of continuing humiliation.

Cheong insisted that his countrymen were driven by economic need to take advantage of the 19th century ‘unequal treaties’ that, in the Chinese view, gave them a ‘right’ to emigrate to any country that was signatory to those treaties (Chapter 4). Cheong’s writings (See Appendices) refute any suggestion that the majority of

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9 See list of Australian Chinese Christian catechists or missionaries at Appendix 9.


Ong Aithwa, (1999), Flexible Citizenship: the Cultural Logics of Transnationality, Durham, Duke University Press, identifies the importance of overseas Chinese investment in modern China and the role of the overseas communities as storehouses of pre-Communist values and the way in which neo-Confucianists seek to use these, in place of discredited Communist economic theory, to advance China’s economic interests.

Dikotter, Frank, (1996), ‘Culture, Race and Nation: The Formation of National Identity in Twentieth Century China,’ in Journal of International Affairs, Special Issue, Contemporary China, Vol 49 No 2. Dikotter argues, and the writings of Cheong confirm, that the concept of racial nationalism is as important in Chinese identity as political and cultural nationalism. Dikotter makes the point that racial humiliation is an important concept in understanding the issues of diaspora Chinese identity. The term ‘corporeal malediction’ seems to have been used by some writers of Chinese ethnic origin to describe the fact of distinctive Chinese physical appearance and to link it to subsequent disadvantage, notably in predominantly European societies.

11 See discussion in Chapter 4 on the ‘unequal treaties’ and Cheong’s interpretation of Chinese rights. Twentieth century historiography of China endorsed anti-imperialist interpretations of the treaties and ignored the weakness of China under the Manchu dominated government.
the Chinese who came to Victoria during the key gold-rush years (c 1854-1860) were contemplating long-term settlement. Their decisions about entering or leaving Australia were primarily economic. That some did stay and become settlers was a consequence of a number of factors, among which must be included failure to achieve their original economic goals.

Ozolin’s observation about the link between permanence of settlement and the speed with which most non-English-speaking settler/immigrants acquired English-language skills highlights the disinterest of most 19th century Chinese in permanent settlement or in social and economic integration. There was no attempt by the Chinese community to arrange for English-language instruction. The Chinese merchant-elite preferred that the majority of their countrymen remained culturally and socially subordinated to their leadership (Chapters 1, 2, 4). Cheong, advantaged by his English-language education (Chapter 3), does not seem to have been an advocate of English-language instruction other than for Christian catechists. The Chinese Christian Missions used English-language instruction as a means of evangelism, using the Bible as the textbook. Few Chinese ever achieved real fluency in spoken or written English, a fact that made Cheong all the more important.

Further evidence of the temporary residence intentions of most 19th century Chinese is the relatively small incidence of men who sought naturalisation, perhaps five percent at most. It is assumed that men intending permanent settlement would have sought naturalisation for its social and economic benefits (Chapter 10).

Two other factors are relevant when considering the intentions and therefore the makeup of the Chinese population. The first is that only a few Chinese sought to establish family life in Australia (Chapter 2). The other is the short stay of most men as shown in arrivals and departures (Chapter 1). Although some 40,000 Chinese arrived in Victoria between 1854 and 1860, the overall resident population during those peak years did not exceed 20,000 to 25,000 as men came and went, few staying longer than three to five years. By 1863, when alluvial gold recovery ended

13 There is no comprehensive national study of Chinese naturalisations in Australia.
the Chinese population began a steady decline from which it never recovered. Chinese residence, as discussed later, was not affected markedly by the undeniably discriminatory restrictions on Chinese immigration.

When discussing Chinese settlement in Australia it is impossible to measure the influence of anti-Chinese feeling on the decisions that the Chinese, individually, made about staying in Australia or going. It is unlikely that anti-Chinese feeling played much part as far as individual Chinese were concerned. Australia was not in the first, second or even third rung of the Chinese emigration ladder, and once alluvial gold ran out it was Chinese with an existing family and business links who sought admission. In absolute numbers, few Chinese came to Australia compared to those who went to the various colonially ruled countries of Southeast Asia. The statistical data regarding Chinese immigration to Australia is shown in the following tables.

Introductory Table 1 becomes clearer when the nearest Southeast Asian destinations are extracted. One hundred thousand (the most generous estimate for Chinese migration to Australia) is insignificant against the more than ten million men who emigrated from China to Southeast Asia during the 19th century, (Introductory Table 2).

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15 The Australasian colonies did not have the constitutional power to refuse entry to a Chinese immigrant who was prepared to pay the landing or poll-tax or held the status of a British subject, either by birth or naturalisation.
Introductory Table 2
Chinese Emigration, Southeast Asia, between 1840 and 1900,

When the total of Southeast Asian immigration is compared to the less than fifty thousand men (again using a generous estimate) to Victoria the contrast is even greater. More than half this number came and went in the years between 1854 and 1867, this discussion of Cheong’s life in Victoria is against the background of the declining population shown in Introductory Table 3.

Introductory Table 3
Victoria: Chinese Population

The Australasian colonies imposed increasingly restrictive laws on Chinese immigration that resulted in the White Australia Policy in 1901 but legislative
restrictions were of limited impact on Chinese immigration. Chinese migration patterns were governed by more important personal agendas.

The author believes that ethical considerations alone merit the strongest condemnation of a racially discriminatory immigration policy. Australia’s anti-Chinese immigration restrictions were known by 19th and 20th century policy makers and administrators to be pointless in terms of the lack of Chinese interest in Australia and were implemented for domestic political goals rather than any genuine fear of the Chinese (Chapter 8).

Discriminatory legislation, while pleasing to the anti-Chinese racial prejudice of many Europeans, was a political diversion of no significance other than to pander to the fear of isolation that distance imposed upon settlers who insisted they were, for the greater part, Britons linked by ties of blood and culture to their British homelands. Underlying their prejudice was the need for their isolation to be protected by the might of the British Empire and, in particular, the Royal Navy.

The White Australia Policy was a useful tool for those anxious, for economic and nationalist reasons, to achieve a single ‘Commonwealth’ out of the seven British colonies in Australasia irrespective of the long-term consequences on Australia’s relations with the Asia-Pacific region. That restrictive immigration became, and remains, an issue in Australian policy is an outcome of a series of manipulations of the ‘Chinese Problem’ that were reified in the 1880s and enshrined in the Immigration Restriction Acts of 1901 and later laws and regulations. But, to repeat, it was a political process with no basis in the presence of the Chinese community.

Cheong’s personal letterbooks were preserved by the Rev. George Thomas, one-time chaplain to the Anglican Chinese Mission of the Epiphany in Melbourne. Just before his death he gave them to the author. The original letterbooks have been deposited with the National Library of Australia.

Additional letters and articles by Cheong were obtained from state and federal archives, from church archives, and from secular and religious newspapers. The text of Cheong’s collected papers will be included in a database as part of the Chinese History at Australian Federation website located at Latrobe University,

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16 The best evidence is the absence of official statistics on Chinese arrivals and departures in the Colony of Victoria from the early 1860s to the late 1870s.

17 The notebooks were standard small books (13x20 cms) with highly acidic paper. It is important that all similar papers be archived with a reputable library that can treat the paper to arrest the process of decay.
Victoria. Cheong’s papers constitute the largest English-language archive on an individual Chinese-Australian and possibly any diaspora Chinese.

His writings and associated papers cover the period from 1879 to 1927 and comprise some 800 separate documents. His letterbooks for 1901 and 1902 were lost within two or three years of their creation but some items have been recovered from other sources. The archive includes references to missionary work, immigration, the anti-opium movement, the right to work, etc. After 1900, the letterbooks tend to focus on Cheong’s investments and family matters (Chapter 6).

Cheong’s preferred Melbourne daily newspaper, the evangelically owned Melbourne Daily Telegraph, is used extensively to present events within the broad context in which Cheong and the Victorian community experienced them. It has not received the notice of its contemporaries, such as The Argus, The Age, or The Bulletin, because it closed in the fall-out from the Victorian bank crash of the early 1890s and has not been indexed. Unfortunately, the text of letters or articles written by Cheong and published in Chinese language newspapers were not available to the author.

Information has been gathered from Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian Church archives in Australia and overseas. These include personal testimonies by Chinese Christians and first-hand observations of Christian missionaries, European and Chinese. The religious sources include previously unknown personal accounts of Chinese life in Australia written by Chinese catechists and others by European clergy and laity. This material will also be included in the Chinese History at Australian Federation database mentioned above. Extracts have been included in Appendices 10 and 11.

In the course of research many photographs and statistics were collected. Many of the photographs are more than illustration — they are basic documentation as important, historically, as any verbal items. The statistical tables may be exploited by other historians and deployed in other contexts.

The appendices include a selection of public papers written by Cheong (Appendices 1-7); a table showing links between Christian missions in China and those in Australia (Appendix 8), a list of people engaged in the evangelisation of the

19 The full collection of Cheong’s papers, and other related items have been transcribed and will be available electronically on http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au, the website of the Chinese History at Australian Federation project.
20 See photographs in the Chinese History at Australian Federation (CHAF) website: http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/. See also PictureAustralia and the picture archives of the various State and other libraries.
Chinese in Australia (Appendix 9); some examples of prebaptismal testimonies of Chinese converts (Appendix 10); extracts from the daily journals of Chinese Christian catechists (Appendix 11); and the first baptismal register of Chinese converts to Christianity (Appendix 12). There are details of Chinese lepers in Ballarat (Appendix 13), some notes about the Chinese Christian Union (Appendix 14), a petition from the Chinese Christian catechist, Chu a Luk to the Victorian Governor in 1857 (Appendix 15), and a list of Chinese deaths in mining activities (Appendix 16). The list of mining deaths is a reminder that racial violence was statistically and numerically insignificant when considering the deaths of Chinese in Victoria.21

The baptismal register, much of it the result of detailed field work by the Rev. Dr Keith Cole of Bendigo, will interest family historians and demonstrate the way in which Chinese immigrants integrated themselves into Australian society through marriage and acceptance, even if nominal, of Christianity. The baptismal list have attracted interest from researches in China seeking to trace the connections between Christian converts in Australia and the growth of the Christian Church, particularly in the emigrant districts of South China.22

After refusing a salary for his mission work from 1898 Cheong became a very successful property investor. His ventures demonstrate that Chinese, whether naturalised or not, were not restricted, in Victoria at least, from ownership of real property.23 Cheong was always a missionary and viewed his business activities as secondary, a means to an end providing him economic security to pursue what he saw as his life purpose (Chapter 6).

The writer does not speak, write or read Chinese and consequently this study does not draw on Chinese language materials. The archives used are in English and come directly from Cheong, the catechist’s journals, and from contemporary colonial English language sources that relate to issues that were publicly discussed

21 Despite claims in Cronin and in Saunders et al, statistical evidence for anti-Chinese violence has yet to be presented and sourced.
22 The Rev. Cr Michael Poon of the Institute for the Study of Christianity in Asia is one researcher drawing on this information. The register is available at http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/
23 Two myths have been promulgated in recent years without any evidence being advanced to sustain them. The first is that mentioned above regarding real property. Another is that it was illegal for persons of Chinese descent to serve in the armed forces. See Chan, Henry, (2000), “From Quong Tarts to Victor Changs: Being Chinese in Australia in the Twentieth Century” CSCSD Public Seminar at the Australian National University, 24 May 2000 where it was stated: ‘for it was difficult if not illegal for anyone not "substantially of European descent" to enlist in the Australian forces.’ As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, more than 100 men, some of full Chinese ethnicity, enlisted in the 1st Australian Imperial Force in World War I and their names and photographs show their origins beyond argument.

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at the time and in which Cheong was directly or indirectly involved. In general, the
terminology in use during Cheong’s own time has been followed, except for some
occasions when modern romanised terminology is more appropriate or in common
use. The classic contemporary example is Canton the City (Guangzhou), and
Canton the Province (Guangdong). Where Chinese characters are used, they have
been taken from Yong, C F, (1977), The New Gold Mountain, Richmond SA, Raphael
Arts. Some romanised Chinese terms have been presented as given in the relevant
sources and these generally follow the older system known as Wade-Giles. The
toleration of Chinese-literate persons is likely to be sorely tested but the author can
only plead forebearance.

Cheong was unique and there seems to have been no other figure quite like him
in Australia or elsewhere. The evangelisation of the Chinese was not a uniquely
Australian issue nor was Cheong the only Chinese Christian to achieve prominence
as a defender of his countrymen but he was, by any measure, an outstanding figure
in the history of the Chinese diaspora in Australia.