

CHAPTER 1  
**CLIMBING NEW GOLD MOUNTAIN**  
1863-1863

This chapter places the Cheong family in the context of the Colony of Victoria, Australia, and the economic, social, religious, and political development of the colony in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In just ten years (1851-1861) a goldrush saw the population increase from 100,000 to 500,000. Within a few years Victoria was producing nearly one-third of the world's gold output and was a mecca for the greedy and gullible. The rapid settlement of Victoria from virtually no Europeans in 1837 to half a million by 1861 is central to understanding the tension that developed between European and Chinese immigrants during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

Victorian colonial institutions and values were, for the most part, drawn from 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and included a patronising attitude to foreigners generally and hostility towards the Chinese in particular that increased as the century passed.<sup>2</sup> A Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly, made an excellent summary of overall anti-Chinese sentiment:

The Chinese, because of total dissimilarity of habits and ideas obstructed the miners, whose dislike grew with envy and jealousy; others condemned the Chinese because they were, like many others, sojourners who contributed little to the permanent settlement or prosperity of the colony; still others including the Statesman and the Christian, viewed with extreme anxiety these all-male immigrants, pagans in religion, and addicted, as was loudly asserted, to unnatural practices.<sup>3</sup>

The history of the Chinese in Victoria, and in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia more generally, is inseparable from 19<sup>th</sup> century British imperialism and its close if not always sympathetic associate, 19<sup>th</sup> century British evangelicalism.<sup>4</sup> The arrival of the Chinese in Victoria stimulated an initial ecumenical Protestant Christian evangelistic outreach (Victoria Chinese Mission 1855-1858) followed by Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian missions

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1 The best, and almost sole analysis of the economy of the Colony of Victoria is Butlin, N G, (1964), *Investment in Australian Economic Development, 1861-1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.  
2 Day, David, (2001), *Claiming a Continent, A New History of Australia*, Sydney, Harper Collins. See Ch 8 for an assessment of the European colonists response to the Chinese.  
3 Cited in Hocking, Geoff, (2000), *To The Diggings*, Lothian, Port Melbourne. P 176.  
4 The old cliché 'gold, gospel, glory' is a reminder of how close the imperialist pursuit of wealth, the Christian pursuit of conversions, and the personal pursuit of status was for much of the period of European overseas expansion.

commencing in 1859-1860 and later in the century, by other Protestant churches. There was a short-lived Roman Catholic mission in Ballarat in the early 1860s looked after by a priest from Macau who attracted little enthusiasm from the Chinese population and after he was moved to Elsternwick, in southeastern Melbourne, the xenophobic Irish refused to come to church when Father Lee was officiating.<sup>5</sup>

Table 1.1., from census data published in the 1925 Year Book of Australia, shows that the Chinese population in Victoria was in decline from 1857 onwards. As the most significant anti-Chinese actions, in terms of legislation and the formation of public opinion, occurred during the 1880s the table suggests looking beyond the petty discrimination of colonial Victoria for explanations of the sense of injustice that permeated Cheong's life. He could, had the burden become too great, have joined the majority of his countrymen who returned to China.

**Table 1.1**  
**Victoria: Number of Persons of Chinese and Part Chinese Ethnicity, 1854-1921**

YEAR	Chinese Ethnicity			Part Chinese Ethnicity		
	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALES	TOTAL
1854	2,341	-	2341	n/a	n/a	n/a
1857	25,421	3	24524	n/a	n/a	n/a
1861	24,724	8	24732	n/a	n/a	n/a
1871	17,795	31	17826	n/a	n/a	n/a
1881	11,795	164	11950	74	95	169
1891	8,355	134	8489	417	471	888
1901	6,236	111	6347	504	498	1002
1911	4,491	216	4707	465	429	894
1921	2,918	244	3162	515	502	1017

The decline in the Chinese population of Victoria signalled in the 1861 Census occurred independently of the anti-Chinese prejudices of European settlers or restrictive immigration legislation. The Chinese population fell by more than half in just twenty years between 1861 and 1881 at a time when the Victorian economy and the European population was expanding.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese, unquestionably, experienced prejudice and discrimination but the decision to stay or go was made by hard-headed men who concluded that the benefits of living in Victoria were insufficient compared to opportunities in China or elsewhere. Equally hard-headed decisions, in the opposite

5 Welch, Ian, (1980), *Pariahs and Outcasts, Christian Missions to the Chinese in Australia*, MA (unpublished), Monash University.

6 Butlin, N G, (1964), *Investment in Australian Economic Development, 1861-1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

direction, were made by some who, like Cheong Peng-nam, father of Cheok Hong Cheong, not only decided to stay but also to bring their wives and children to Victoria.

Cheong Peng-nam arrived in Victoria in 1854. His purpose was to send his savings home and restore the economic future that, he stated, his family lost as a result of the widespread rebellion and unrest that had affected South China. He was about twenty-seven years of age and a married man with a wife, a son and a daughter in China. A third child (a daughter) was born after a brief visit home in 1856-1857. When Peng-nam died in 1875, he was about forty-eight years old.<sup>7</sup> Cheong Peng-nam explained his decision to come to Australia in his testimony given in connection with his employment with the Presbyterian Chinese Mission at Ballarat in 1860:

I am a native of the district Oye Wooey, in the department of Sew Hing [*Sin Ning/Taishan*], of the Kwong Tung [*Guangdong Province*]. I was living with my father at Fat Shan during my youth. It was to be hoped that I might make myself useful in the life of business. Years passed, I was full-grown, and I was obliged to cease my learning to go to business. It happened that the insurgents were creating confusion in all parts of the Kwong Tung Province and in consequence business was unable to be carried through from one place to another. I left off business, and returned to Canton, where I met with some of my friends returning from Australia, who told me that the state of affairs in this country was very good, and that the government here was most friendly to foreigners. I was glad of the news. I reported the matter to my parents, and instantly took my passage to Australia.<sup>8</sup>

Peng-nam's conversion and his appointment as a catechist (lay missionary) with the Presbyterian Chinese Mission at Ballarat in 1860 led to his family's arrival at Ballarat in 1863 when his son, Cheong Cheok Hong, was twelve or thirteen years of age.<sup>9</sup> Cheok Hong was born in 1851, probably in Fatshan, of a lineage from the northern end of Taishan District, in the Siyi region about 150 miles southwest of Guangzhou (Canton) in Guangdong Province.<sup>10</sup>

Cheok Hong Cheong was an example of the reaction by 19<sup>th</sup> century members of the Chinese diaspora to events in China., They saw a government beset by internal troubles and weakened by the 'unequal treaties' imposed on China by foreign governments. Many

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7 See discussion in Chapter 3. Cheok Hong Cheong to Hon P O Fysh, Premier of Tasmania, 19 February 1891 and 24 February 1891. The Tasmanian Pioneer Index does not list Cheong Peng-nam under any formulation of the name.

8 *The Australian Messenger and Presbyterian Review*, August 1861, p 173.

9 The Colony of Victoria abolished the Chinese Residence Tax of £4 per person per year in 1862. No statistics on Chinese arrivals and departures were kept in Victoria for more than decade.

10 Appendix 12 shows that home villages disappear from the formal records quite early. Most places of origin became 'Canton' or 'China'. Cheok Hong Cheong never mentions his lineage village by name in his letterbooks, nor on his marriage certificate.

Chinese, including Cheok Peng-nam and his son, Cheok Hong, felt a sense of national humiliation and with it a resentment of foreigners that became part of their identity.

Cheong Peng-nam was one of the thousands of Chinese men who came to Australia in the 1850s.<sup>11</sup> Tables 1.1, 1.2 (Census data), and Table 1.3., (from Young's 1867 *Report*) with Table 1.4, shows that few Chinese women came, a matter of negative comment among Europeans who interpreted the situation as showing a lack of commitment to the colony.<sup>12</sup> A British-European society that knew of homosexual practices in the navy, army and prisons and tolerated a high rate of female prostitution, feared the presence of so many Chinese with no acceptable means of sexual release. Nonetheless, attempts by the Christian churches to persuade the colonial authorities to provide assisted passages to Chinese women fell on deaf ears.

Table 1.3 highlights the tiny number of Chinese women. Of the 132 in 1881, and the 259 in 1891, a majority were the daughters of mixed Chinese-European relationships. Table 1.4 is Young's estimate 1867 estimate, i.e., 63 relationships including de facto as well as legal marriages that produced 149 children.<sup>13</sup> The collective statistics do not match reflecting the variations in the ways information was originally gathered and recorded. Table 1.5 shows the growth in the number of females with Chinese ancestry in the overall Australian population.

Christian ministers in the colonies ignored ethnic origins and perhaps their personal prejudices when conducting inter-ethnic marriages. It was universally believed that marrying European girls to Chinese males, when the families and the women insisted, was preferable to no marriage at all. The Rev. John Inglis of St John's Church, Ballarat East) wrote of the exemplary marriage of a Chinese-Scotch couple in the parish.<sup>14</sup> The Rev. R S Patterson (Presbyterian) reported a happily married couple at Urana in New South Wales.<sup>15</sup>

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11 Lists of nineteenth century immigrants to Victoria are available on-line Chinese names are given only in English transliterations, and usually in the form of Ah Cheong, or Ah Lee. Without the Chinese characters, it is impossible to identify individual Chinese immigrants.

12 Papers Presented to Parliament, Legislative Assembly, Victoria, '1867, Rev William Young, *Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population of Victoria*'. *Census of Victoria*, 1881, note 109 p 35 states: 'In every one of the colonies Chinese females, even including the half-castes, bear a very small proportion to Chinese males. In Victoria, the former, at the Census, amounted only to a fraction over 2 percent. Of the latter, and in most of the other colonies the relative proportion of females was still smaller. In the colonies, taken as a whole, the Chinese females numbered only 362; and as the Chinese males numbered 43,344, the proportion of the former was less than 1 to every 100 of the latter.'

13 *ibid.*

14 *The Christian Review*, January 1871, p 10.

15 *The Christian Herald and Presbyterian Record of New South Wales*, September 186, p :71.

During a visit to Deniliquin, the Rev. Edward Youngman baptised a Chinese who had been persuaded to accept Christianity by his European wife.<sup>16</sup> The list of baptisms at Appendix I2 includes a number of child baptisms resulting from such marriages. The baptisms and records of service of Australians of Chinese ethnic descent suggests that the majority of intermarriages were Anglican and Protestant.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 1.2**  
**Victoria: Birth Places of the Population, 1881**

Victoria Incl	Other Abor Aust	England & Wales	Scotland	Ireland	Other British	France	Germ	USA	China	Foreign	Other	TOTAL
<b>M</b> 247528	19051	85426	26224	41226	2348	1042	6144	1645	11743	5898	3818	452083
<b>F</b> 261671	20715	62027	21929	45507	1311	292	2427	698	56	795	2856	410263

Census of Victoria, 1881, p 48, Note 163, Table 1.2B

**Table 1.3**  
**Victoria: Chinese Females, Census Data 1861-1891**

1861	1871	1881	1891
8	36	132	259

Cronin 1982, p 140

**Table 1.4**  
**Victoria: Marital State of the Chinese 1867**

	Chinese Males	European Wives	Children
Ballarat	800	21	48
Smythesdale	1500	3	14
Avoca	250	4	9
Ararat	1000	4	10
Maryborough	1400	2	4
Castlemaine	1000	7	20
Daylesford	1021	4	9
Beechworth	7000	10	20
Sandhurst (Bendigo)	3500	6	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17671</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>149</b>

Young, Report . . . 1867

<sup>16</sup> *The Spectator*, 2 June 1882, p 53.

<sup>17</sup> A list of Australians of Chinese ethnic descent who served in the armed forces during WWI and the list of baptisms at Chinese History can be found at the Australian Federation website (CHAF) at Latrobe University, Victoria. <http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/>

**Table 1.5**  
**Australia: Number of Persons of Chinese and Part Chinese Ethnicity, 1881-1921**

YEAR	Chinese Ethnicity			Mixed Chinese Ethnicity		
	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
1881	38274	259	38533	n/a	n/a	n/a
1891	35523	298	35821	n/a	n/a	n/a
1901	29153	474	29627	1556	1534	3090
1911	21856	1148	17175	1884	1771	3019
1921	19011	1146	17175	1884	1771	3655

From Year Book of Australia, 1925)<sup>18</sup>

Cheong Peng-nam understood European prejudices about all-male Chinese immigration.<sup>19</sup> To protect his son's reputation, for reasons that related to his education and possible employment in the Presbyterian Church, Peng-nam arranged Cheok Hong's marriage to the daughter of a Chinese family, the Ngs, who used Wong as their English name and were also settled in Ballarat. The Ngs came from Hockshan District, adjoining Taishan.

Peffer states that Australasia and North America were the only places in the countries of the Asia-Pacific Rim to which Chinese women did not emigrate and this is perhaps the best indication of the short-term intentions of most Chinese migrants.<sup>20</sup> In an important statement that provides reason not to take all his earlier comments at face value, Cheok Hong Cheong declared that Chinese men did not bring their families because:

the vast majority, if not all, of the Chinese residents here, are but sojourners having not the slightest intention of settling down which the bringing of their wives and families necessarily involves. Besides there is the yet stronger reason that though marriage is held to be an ordinance of Heaven and its duties sacred, yet filial piety which is a prominent feature in the Chinese character, and one which has secured for the nation 'length of days in the land' and many other blessings of this life, implies, in their view the honoring of their parents with personal service as well as

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18 Note from *Year Book of Australia 1925*, op cit, 'Though many of the Chinese who came to Australia settled here permanently, the fact that so few brought their womenfolk with them indicates that the majority had intended, sooner or later, to return to China.' According to the Census of 1911, only 801 Chinese were recorded as living with wives. Of the latter, 181 were born in China, 485 in Australia, 63 in England, 15 in Scotland, and 22 in Ireland.'

19 Although the generalisation holds true, a recent article demonstrates that in North America, as in Australia, some Chinese families did succeed in establishing themselves. See Ling, Huping, (2000), 'Family and Marriage of Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Chinese Immigrant Women', pp 43-63 in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol 19, No 2, Winter 2000.

20 Peffer, George A, (1999), *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration before Exclusion*. Urbana/Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

with substance, and so wives and families are considered properly left behind to render the one while themselves laboring to earn the other. Such being the case and my statement is supported by the whole history of the past and the facts of the present that Chinese families are very few and very far between and that such of them as we have, I am bound to say, reflect no discredit upon the nation to which they belong.<sup>21</sup>

Cheong's description of the Chinese as 'sojourners having not the slightest intention of settling down,' was unequivocal.<sup>22</sup> He used the term 'sojourner' consistently when explaining why immigrants were determined to retain their 'Chineseness' – they did not intend to settle and so there was no point in bringing wives or in integrating too closely.<sup>23</sup> It was not only the Chinese who were regarded as sojourners – Victorian Governor Barkly applied the term to anyone who did not intend to make the colony their permanent home but the label stuck to the Chinese rather than Europeans, most of whom could not afford the return trip to Europe and for the most part had nothing worth returning to.

Cheong advanced a somewhat different argument twelve years earlier, in 1879, when he co-authored *The Chinese Question in Australia 1878-1879* (Chapter 4). In that pamphlet he said that the absence of women was due to the violence of Europeans on the goldfields (Appendix 1). Although Cheong refers to women being involved in the riots at the Buckland River in Victoria and Lambing Flat in New South Wales he did not mention that most females living with Chinese in Australia (Table 1.4) were Europeans, not Chinese.<sup>24</sup> During the Buckland riot the only woman hurt was a European married to a Chinese.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to his son's claim in 1879, Cheong Peng-nam, who was in Victoria at the time of the 1857 troubles on the Buckland River, must have rated the risk of violence as minor or he would not have brought his family to Australia.<sup>26</sup> The same judgement,

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21 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Hon James Munro, Premier of Victoria, 21 June 1891. See discussion of an earlier version in Chapter 4 in which Cheong attributed the absence of Chinese women to European violence.

22 See works by Wang Gungwu in the bibliography as an indication of his thinking on the 'sojourner' issue, e.g., Wang Gungwu, (1996), 'Sojourning: The Chinese Experience in Southeast Asia', pp 1-14, In Reid, Anthony, ed, (1996), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, (Asian Studies Association of Australia, Southeast Asia Publication Series, # 28).

23 The expectation of a short time abroad was noted in New South Wales. Cole, G R Fitzroy, (1878), 'John Chinaman Abroad,' p 447 in *Fraser's Magazine*, October 1878.

24 New South Wales, Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, Vol 2 *Report Upon Chinese Camps, (Brennan and Quong Tart), 15 January 1884.*

25 Adcock, W E, (1977), *The Gold Rushes of the Fifties*, Glen Waverley, Vic, Poppet Head Press, with notes by J. Flett, pp 130-132.

26 Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press also assumes that violence was a reason for the shortage of Chinese women.

presumably, was made by the Ng family, Cheok Hong's relatives by marriage.<sup>27</sup>

A database of mining deaths in Victoria shows that Chinese were far more at risk in their mining work or from illness than from violence instigated by Europeans (Appendix 16).<sup>28</sup> An *Argus* reprint of a report from the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* stated that between 1 July and 31 August 1857 there were 87 deaths among the Chinese at the goldfields of the northeast.<sup>29</sup> In just one week twenty men died of disease, possibly beri-beri, i.e., more deaths than all the anti-Chinese violence discussed in the daily press.<sup>30</sup>

Pneumonia and other lung disorders caused many Chinese deaths.<sup>31</sup> In 1857, Dr Allison of Ballarat, following a request from the Anglican evangelist, Lo Sam-yuen (Luo Shenyuan), gave health lectures at the Red Hill Chinese camp.<sup>32</sup> He warned men to tell their friends in China not to come to Australia in the southern winter and to bring warm clothing and sufficient money for food when they did migrate. Both of these issues are discussed in Lo Sam-yuen's journal.<sup>33</sup> It was not only poorly dressed and impoverished Chinese who died. A Canadian digger told his family that all of the children who had been on the ship that brought his family to Australia were now dead.<sup>34</sup> The Pennyweight Flat cemetery, near Castlemaine is one of the many goldfields graveyards where children are buried as a direct result of their parents hopes of wealth and the prevalence of child mortality on the diggings.

Meals on the diggings were basic – meat, bread and potatoes for Europeans; rice and where possible, vegetables for Chinese.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly malnutrition was widespread

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- 27 There is as yet no definitive study on Chinese families in Australia. A detailed study of intermarriage in New South Wales is being undertaken by Kate Bagnall (University of Sydney).
- 28 Despite the claims of continuing violence against Chinese no verified account of the injuries allegedly received by Chinese in Victoria has been published. The people best situated to collect and report such data, at least on the goldfields, were the Chinese Protectors and the police, and then the coroner's inquests. Until such research is done the discussion of anti-Chinese violence will remain based on isolated and unconfirmed reports. Cheong, probably the best read (in English) and informed Chinese makes only a fairly superficial reference to violence in the report he co-authored in 1879 and as mentioned above, his evidence is not reliable enough to make the case. The journals of the Chinese missionaries do not mention anti-Chinese violence at all.
- 29 *The Argus*, 7 September 1857.
- 30 Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, p 21. Rolls, Eric, (1992) *Sojourners: The epic story of China's centuries old relationship with Australia*, St Lucia, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, pp 174-175
- 31 *The Mount Alexander Mail*, 9 November 1855.
- 32 Lo Sam-yuen, *Journal* (Ballarat) Mss, copy held by Ian Welch. See Welch, Ian (1980), *Pariahs and Outcasts, Christian Missions to the Chinese in Australia*, MA, Monash University.
- 33 *The Argus*, 2 November 1857. Lo Sam-yuen, *Journal*, Ballarat 1858-9.
- 34 Robertson, James W, fifteen letters, cited by Wynn, Graeme, 'Life on the Goldfields of Victoria'. pp 258-275 in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol 64 Pt 4, March 1979.
- 35 Rolls, Eric, (1992) *Sojourners: The epic story of China's centuries old relationship with Australia*, St Lucia, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, p 174 discusses the prevalence of *beri-beri*.



and made worse by poverty. Illness was widespread and is represented by the noted goldfields artist, S T Gill, in the picture below of a sick digger. It is one of at least two paintings Gill made of sick diggers on the goldfields.



S. T Gill

State Library of Victoria

The vast majority of Chinese who lived in Australia were desperately poor. Some men were reported to be sweeping the roads at Ballarat and panning the dust to extract any gold that might have fallen from pockets or wagons.<sup>36</sup> Others were given permission to melt down the iron stamping heads used to crush the gold-bearing ore, so that they could extract any gold that had merged with the iron.

The other day, whilst in conversation with Mr Jopling, of the firm of Jopling and Cunningham, the iron-founders, of Ironbark-hill, Bendigo, our attention was attracted to a Chinaman, who was busily engaged in seeping up the refuse outside the foundry door. It was not ordinary surfacing he was after, for the dirt he had scraped together was evidently a recent deposit, and from its black-looking

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36 *The Wesleyan Chronicle*, 1 January 1959:31.

appearance, must have had its origin in the foundry. Having filled his buckets, he hooked one on to each end of his bamboo, and shuffled down, in true Chinese fashion, to the bottom of the hill with his treasure. Surely, we thought to ourselves, that fellow has not discovered the philosopher's stone, and so profiting by the secret, occupies himself with transmuting iron filings, charcoal, and slag into pure gold. Turning round to the person with whom we have been in conversation, we inquired what possible object could the sweeper have in taking away the rubbish, as it is the last place in the world where one would think of looking for gold, outside a founder's shop. 'That is where we break up the old worn-out stampheads, and disengage the shanks from the heads,' was the reply we received. It appears, as we learned by further interrogatories, that there is always attaching to old stampheads more or less gold, which lies concealed in the crevices, more particularly in the hollow where the shank has been inserted. Gold is also found in the honeycombs of the stamp-boxes. Not being worth the while of the founders to bother about recovering it themselves, they allow the Chinese to pay their periodical visits undisturbed, for the purpose of collecting and removing it. Our informant showed us a sample of gold (about three pennyweights) that he himself had obtained the week before upon breaking up an old head: but such a find as that is of rare occurrence. We are told that when an old stamp-box, much honeycombed, is thrown down outside, the Celestials may sometimes be observed fossicking about it for days together. It is remarkable how ready they are to turn the slightest waste of the precious metal to account. They seem to delight in infinitesimals. Europeans might with advantage take a few lessons from the Chinese, in thrift and perseverance.<sup>37</sup>

The successful men saved hard and put all their efforts into repaying their indenture and then saving for a triumphal return home. Others, for a variety of reasons, failed in both regards. Suicides were not uncommon. There were instances of men of all ethnic backgrounds dying of starvation. Disease, particularly respiratory tract infections, dysentery and even leprosy, was common. Some men, for a variety of reasons, became mentally ill.<sup>38</sup>

The Reverend John Garlick, minister of All Saints Anglican Church in Bendigo, said that the Christians associated with the Anglican Mission in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were reduced to reworking old diggings. He wrote that many of the men he knew:

eke out a precarious livelihood by 'fossicking' among the 'tailings' which have already passed at least once through the puddling machines or diggers 'cradle',

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37 *The Mining Record*, August 1862, reprinted in *The Ballarat Miner and Weekly Mining Records*, a Souvenir Guide to the Sovereign Quartz Mine Surface Works and Mining Museum, Sovereign Hill, Ballarat.

38 Jong Ah Siug, (2000), *A Difficult Case, An autobiography of a Chinese Miner on the Central Victorian Goldfields* (c1887). Daylesford, Vic., Jim Crow Press. See Shen Yuan-fang. (1999), 'Sojourners or Settlers? Early Chinese Immigrants in Australia', *Reconceptualising the Southern Chinese: From Community to Diaspora*, Australian National University, Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora, (CSCSD), 27 February 1999. See also Shen Yuan-fang, (1998), *Dragon seed in the Antipodes: Chinese Australian self-representations*, PhD thesis, Australian National University

hence as a rule they are miserably poor.<sup>39</sup>

It was better for everyone when a growing number of Chinese moved into the supply of fresh vegetables, initially on the diggings and later in the towns of the colony.<sup>40</sup> Many men, such as Cheong Peng-nam, avoided the risks of mining by finding jobs in service industries. – Peng-nam worked in a restaurant and as a carter in northeast Victoria after initially working as a miner at Castlemaine. All kinds of ‘service’ occupations flourished. Supplying the goldfields with transport, food, shelter, and equipment was highly profitable and much safer than digging. Chinese owned businesses were staffed, for the greater part, by Chinese and the specialist literary skills needed provided employment for the small but socially significant number of Chinese scholars who arrived in Australia.

Transporting men from China to Australia (and elsewhere) was a highly organised entrepreneurial business. A network of emigration recruiters in South China was reported in a Western Australian chapter of a history of Chinese life in Australia published by the Australian branch of the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang/Guomintang*):

At that time, there were slave traders in Singapore and Hong Kong. They went around to lure people. They pretended themselves to have come from overseas and invited their friends to teahouses and restaurants. They boasted of their wealth and related to them fairy-tales such as gold mines and silver hills in Australia and that it was easy to become rich overnight. So skillfully and cunningly did these slave traders paint a rosy picture of Australia that not even his closest friends or relatives could detect a hint of untruth in his make believe story.<sup>41</sup>

Chinese who went abroad by indenture or ‘credit ticket’ contracts did so as a result of the difficulties in Guangdong Province mentioned in Peng-nam’s testimony.<sup>42</sup> The existence of emigration entrepreneurs and schemes was a direct outcome, according to Cheong, of the ‘unequal treaties’ imposed on China by foreign powers. Chinese complained endlessly about the injustice of the treaties but they claimed they provided a legal basis for Chinese emigration to British territories.<sup>43</sup> The British Government always stated that the treaties did not encompass the mass arrival of Chinese labourers in Australasia although Britain

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39 *The Missionary, at Home and Abroad*, March 1885:228.

40 Email contributions on the ANZ-CH WWW discussion site in 2002, together with pictorial material accessible by PictureAustralia, provide evidence of the existence of Chinese market gardens at virtually every 19<sup>th</sup> century mining site and many other settlements across the country.

41 Sheer Zu-Tang, (c 1935), ‘History of the Development of the Kuomintang in Australia, Ch 3, The Party in Western Australia,’ *The Kuomintang Journal*, Sydney. Chinese and English copy held in the Battye Library, Perth. See also Cole, G R Fitzroy, (1878), John Chinaman Abroad, *Fraser’s Magazine*, October 1878, p 447.

42 This is more fully considered in Chapter 11.

43 See Cheong’s comments in Appendices 1 and 4 as exemplars.

did little to assist the Australasian colonies clarify the issue with the Chinese Government.<sup>44</sup> British policy was governed more by the interests of British businesses trading with China than by the protests of the colonial governments over Chinese immigration.

The acquisition of capital was the principal motivation for Chinese immigration.<sup>45</sup> Many Victorian immigrants identified themselves in their pre-baptismal testimonies as rural labourers motivated to emigrate by a shortage of land and rising land rents hoping to accumulate capital so that the family could buy land. The rules of the Ballarat Branch of the See Yup Society confirm that the goal of Chinese immigrants to Victoria was not permanent settlement and the mining of gold was not for reinvestment in the colony. The gold, the rules stated, 'is for China'.<sup>46</sup> The majority of Europeans remained and invested their earnings in the colony while the focus of the Chinese was always to return to China as quickly as possible.<sup>47</sup>

Further evidence of the short-term emphasis of Chinese migration was the lack of interest in becoming naturalised British subjects. Chinese had the right until 1888 to become naturalised British subjects but only a small minority bothered. Among those with no interest in naturalisation were Cheong Peng-nam and Cheok Hong Cheong.<sup>48</sup>

Greed drove the colony. An English visitor wrote:

The one great principle of the colony is the Dutchman's maxim: 'Get honestly, if you can; but at all events get!' People avow the principle. They come here, in fact, as they go to India, to make fortunes, and then - 'go home'. That is the phrase. Everybody talks of England as home.<sup>49</sup>

The baptismal testimony of Lew Jim, from Xinhui District, stated:

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- 44 Price, Charles, (1974), *The Great White Walls are Built*, Canberra, Australian National University Press. Price notes the inconsistency of condemning the unequal treaties on the one hand while seeking to take advantage of them on the other.
- 45 Chen, Yong, (2000), *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943. A Trans-Pacific Community*, Stanford, Stanford University Press. Introduction, pp 1-10.
- 46 Papers Presented to Parliament, Legislative Assembly, Victoria, 1867, Rev William Young, *Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population of Victoria*.
- 47 The discussion of 'sojourning' in its Chinese context is essential reading, see Wang Gungwu, (1996), 'Sojourning: The Chinese Experience in Southeast Asia', pp 1-14, In Reid, Anthony, ed, (1996), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, (Asian Studies Association of Australia, Southeast Asia Publication Series, # 28
- 48 Naturalisation is a topic requiring further research especially given the ban imposed in all colonies after 1888 (Chapter 10). See the discussion in the Victorian Supreme Court, Ah Toy v. Musgrove, *The Daily Telegraph*, 11-12 July 1888.
- 49 Howitt, William, (1855), *Land labour and Gold: or two years in Victoria with visits to Sydney and Van Diemens Land*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, cited in <http://www.sbs.com.au/gold/story.html?storyid=125>

Fortunate was it that God opened up the goldfields of this country, and made my covetous desire of gain the means of my coming hither.<sup>50</sup>

Peng-nam said in his testimony that he met friends who had returned from Victoria and had told him that he could make a good deal of money in a short time. Lum Khen Yang said in his Methodist pre-baptismal testimony that:

We happily heard intelligence concerning a new goldfield in an English colony. We were told men from all over the world were congregated there, and obtained permission to dig for gold, and that money was easily to be made there.<sup>51</sup>

A Presbyterian convert, Enoch Hang Pang (Ya Yang Pong) was just as direct as Peng-nam about his purpose in coming to Australia.

After a while, hearing of the discovery of the gold-fields in Australia, and that the English people there were very kind to the stranger from a distant land; and learning also that those who went to Australia made fortunes, and were enabled to return to their native land, the desire to obtain wealth all at once sprung up in my mind. I got together the means to provide for my passage to that inviting country.<sup>52</sup>

The opportunities were certainly there, although luck played a big part, as in the case of a European whose 'confidence trick' on two Chinese proved a costly error:

Last week an unfortunate digger, who had bought a 66ft allotment at Berlin for £1 found bottom at 3 feet, and seeing no appearance of gold, pronounced it a 'duffer' and tried to sell out to his neighbour for 5 shillings without success. Two Chinamen, 'new chums' who were passing, looked at the hole and after much persuading ventured to give 12 shillings . . . for the claim. Before sundown, they had taken 67 pounds of gold from the hole, which produced them £3296 — a pretty good profit on their investment.<sup>53</sup>

Missionaries in China reported hearing stories that:

The gold was taken up with pocket knives a few inches below the surface in such profusion that one man filled a quart pot with nuggets in the course of the day.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand an Englishwoman wryly observed that: 'Success at the diggings is like drawing lottery tickets — the blanks far outnumber the prizes'.<sup>55</sup>

Rather than draw a blank ticket on the diggings armed robbery was widespread. An Englishman named Edward Snell, an experienced railway engineer, writer and sketcher, left a diary of his experiences on the Victorian diggings in the early days of the gold-rush

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50 *The Christian Review*, June 1866, p 10.

51 *The Wesleyan Chronicle*, Vol II No 2, February 1859, pp 45-46.

52 *The Christian Review*, July 1866, p 8.

53 *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 1870. (At 2002 gold price their takings were \$220,000).

54 *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, May 1858, p 227. See also an account from Castlemaine Vic, in Bradfield G, Ray, (n.d.), *Campbell's Creek*, Castlemaine, The Author.

55 Clacey E.. (1853), *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings*, republished by Lansdowne 1965, p 102.

from which the following extracts are taken.<sup>56</sup>

This is a precious country for robbery and murder. I wish I had a revolver, it's hardly safe to be about even in day time without firearms, and my rifle is rather cumbersome to me and every body here seems to be provided in that way and about 1500 shots are fired in the Golden Gully every night.

Bob brought down another load at night with the intelligence that Tom had been out at 12 o'clock on Sunday night robbing another person's hole. If he cuts these sort of capers I hope he'll be caught at it and then his life won't be worth twopence at the diggings.

The Diggings (sic) look very pretty at night, thousands of fires in all directions, the flash of a gun or pistol every few seconds, two or more rows always going on, and every here and there the noise of a fiddle playing . . . make the place quite lively.

James Douglas Ferguson wrote to his parents in Northumberland describing the violence on the diggings:

Believe me for wickedness and vice this crowns the globe. We all live in tension in the diggings. I should not think there is a man on the diggings but has a brace of pistols ready for action under his head every night . . . if anyone comes round your tent at night you are justifiable in shooting them.<sup>57</sup>

A Canadian, James Robertson, working at Bendigo in 1853, wrote to a friend in New Brunswick that:

I would not advise (sic) any friend to come here that can make a living at home for there is many hardships to encounter that are never thought of by those who rush madly from a plentiful and happy home. In the 1<sup>st</sup> place we have to live in canvass tents, which cannot protect us from the cold rain which falls here in winter, 2<sup>nd</sup> we have to sleep with loaded pistols under our pillowes and gleaming knives in our bosoms to defend us from the robber and assassin.<sup>58</sup>

Another man wrote to his family in England that:

No one intending to turn digger should leave England without a good supply of firearms. In less than a week, more than a dozen robberies occurred between Kyneton and Forest Creek - two of which terminated in murder.<sup>59</sup>

A journalist wrote:

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56 Snell, Edward, (1988), *The life and adventures of Edward Snell: the illustrated diary of an artist, engineer and adventurer in the Australian colonies 1849 to 1859*, edited and introduced by Tom Griffiths with assistance from Alan Platt, North Ryde NSW, Angus and Robertson and the Library Council of Victoria. Cited in <http://www.sbs.com.au/gold/story.html?storyid=125>

57 Ferguson, James Douglas, (1854), Letter from McIvor Diggings, Victoria, 4 June 1854. From <http://www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/art/ferguson.htm>.

58 Robertson, James W. Wynn, fifteen letters cited in Wynn, Graeme, 'Life on the Goldfields of Victoria'. pp 258-275 in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol 64 Pt 4, March 1979. This report is supported by the reminiscences of Hall, William H, (1852), *Practical Experiences at the Diggings of the GoldFields of Victoria*, London, Effingham Wilson.

59 Clacey E., (1853), *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings*, republished by Lansdowne 1965 cited at [http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/education/notes\\_sec\\_law.shtml](http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/education/notes_sec_law.shtml) © Copyright, Sovereign Hill 2001.

There can be scarcely conceived a greater or more apparent difference than exists between the staid and sedate inhabitants of rural districts, and the motley group of miners, professional men and merchants, thickly interspersed with sharpers, refugees, and a full selection from the dangerous classes that swagger, armed to the teeth, through the diggings and infest the roads leading to the newly discovered gulches, where lies the object of their worship – gold.<sup>60</sup> Communications were appalling. There was hardly a metret of hardtop road in the colony. A British immigrant, Mary Skinner, reported that the journey to Beechworth in northeast Victoria by a respectable passenger wagon, took eight days in 1854 (it takes about three hours today).

The goldfields were a chaos of diggings, often with barely discernible tracks between claims. Mrs Skinner noted that one evening she walked from the township to her house, a bark hut, across one mile of diggings. 'In places the track was very narrow with holes on either side.'<sup>61</sup> People disappeared, by accident or by design, into the many flooded and abandoned shafts that covered the diggings.

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60 Cited in <http://www.sbs.com.au/gold/story.html?storyid=125>

61 Duyker, Edward, (1995), *A Woman on the Goldfields, Recollections of Emily Skinner, 1854-1878*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.



The Victorian diggings were an extraordinary meeting-place of ethnic and particularist populations. Residential separation was a matter of choice resulting from a sense of solidarity among men of like background, rather than a product of racism. Cronin states:

The various British, Russian, Danish, Italian, French, German, American and Chinese communities were segregated and often separatist. Ballarat, typically, had sizable Cornish, Irish and German towns, a thriving American quarter and several Chinese settlements. Writer James Bonwick claimed that the 'clannish spirit' was so strong that even the 'Adelaide men hang together, and the Derwenters of Tasmania are strongly influenced by party feeling.' In the countless intemperate quarrels that marred gold-field life, national and regional prejudices ran high. Italian miners were victims of digger-chauvinism and the Tipperary lads regularly featured in sectarian conflicts. In one such encounter, Ballarat Irish waged pitched battles against English,



Scots and American miners.<sup>62</sup>

It is beyond dispute that anti-Chinese violence occurred but it is surprising that, allowing for the dislike of so many Europeans for the Chinese, it was not worse than it actually was. A good example of how easily anti-Chinese sentiment could be controlled was the case of William Campbell Denovan of Bendigo. At an anti-Chinese meeting Denovan called for the Chinese to be driven off the Bendigo fields, the due date being 4 July 1857. After a meeting with Lachlan McLachlan (Bendigo Mac) the hard-headed local magistrate and ex-Tasmanian policeman, Denovan publicly reneged, citing threats of his own imprisonment if a riot occurred. It was not that McLachlan liked the Chinese but that he, and the majority of colonists, disliked criminal behaviour even more.<sup>63</sup> Denovan underwent a change of attitude, writing in 1859:

I am as much opposed to extensive immigration of Chinese into this colony as ever I was, but it does not necessarily follow that . . . I should be in favour of maltreating those already here.<sup>64</sup>

Racism was less important in generating anti-Chinese sentiment than greed – the feeling that the Chinese were reducing opportunities for Europeans.<sup>65</sup> Chinese and Europeans alike jumped claims whenever and wherever they could get away with it. Where the Chinese were in the majority, they threatened European miners just as they were often threatened. Cheok Hong Cheong observed:

Human nature is human nature all the world over; and the Chinaman is just as fond of money, and just as eager to earn as much as he can, as the most grasping of his competitors.<sup>66</sup>

The major anti-Chinese riots were driven by very small groups of people – Rowland suggests just forty or so precipitated the Buckland episode – whose purpose appears to have been the hope of finding hidden caches of gold, rather than racism per se.<sup>67</sup> A mining district report of the events on the Buckland stated:

As the eviction continued down the stream, the rogues of the locality mustered to

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62 Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, p 41.

63 Hocking, Geoff, (2000), *To The Diggings*, Lothian, Port Melbourne, p 175.

64 *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 22 May 1859,

65 Yarwood, A, (1973), 'Attitudes Towards Non-European Migrants,' p 176 in *Historian*, # 25, October 1973, but see discussion in Small, 1997, op cit.

66 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, para 19).

67 Rowland, E C, (1968), 'The Valley of History: The Story of the Upper Ovens', pp 45-64 in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol 54, Pt 1, March 1968. The importance of questioning assumptions about behaviour on the goldfields is raised in Small, Jerome, (1997), *Reconsidering White Australia. Class and racism in the 1873 Clunes Riot*. BA Hons, Latrobe University. <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions/raceriots.htm>

gather booty and acts of brutality and robbery were numerous. . . . In place of men, the remnants of their tools, clothing and dwellings everywhere. . . . Broken shovels, cradles, picks, torn garments, ripped up bedding, half-burnt clothing, battered buildings, whole quarters of beef and mutton trodden into the mire, the earth bestrewed with rice, empty sugar bags, and broken tea-boxes, were the chief features of the late home of the Celestials.<sup>68</sup>

There were few serious injuries and no outright killings on the diggings that did not feel the full weight of the law. There were no murders of Chinese at Australia's two most serious and widely reported goldfield riots; the Buckland or at Lambing Flat a few years later in New South Wales.<sup>69</sup> Racial vilification was widespread but as Andrew Markus observed, miners at large opposed violence on the diggings.<sup>70</sup> Straight forward propaganda, rather than any widespread fear of violence against Chinese, may be the best explanation of Cheong's references to the Buckland in the 1879 paper discussed in Chapter 4.<sup>71</sup>

The apparent passivity of the Chinese in Australia contributed to a mistaken belief among youthful Europeans that the Chinese were an 'easy mark'. In reality Chinese reacted forcefully to European bullying as in an instance at Blackwood in 1857 when a group of Chinese decided to defy mining rules and cut a dam belonging to some European miners.<sup>72</sup> A dozen Europeans approached the Chinese to complain. The European spokesman was challenged to a fight by one of the Chinese but before many blows could be exchanged Chinese armed with picks and shovels attacked and dispersed the Europeans.<sup>73</sup>

Charles Ah Goon, a storekeeper and his employee, Ah Shing, were assaulted in Little

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68 Adcock, W E, (1977 reprint original edition 1912), *The Gold Rushes of the Fifties*, Glen Waverley Vic, Poppet Head Press, p 132.

69 A fuller account of the events is given in Chapter 4.

70 Markus, A, (1973), 'Deeds Not Words: Community Violence Against Non-European Racial Minorities in Australia 1850-1900,' *Journal of History*, Vol 4, # 2, May 1973, pp 37-56.

Markus, A, (1973), 'Working Class Methods of Dealing with Chinese Competition,' *Historian*, # 25, October, pp 10-26.

Markus, A, (1979), *Fear and Hatred, Purifying Australia and California 1850-1901*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger.

71 See *The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, resolutions of the European Parliament* — (June 11 1986) issued a Declaration Against Racism and Xenophobia passed a Resolution on the Fight Against Racism and Xenophobia (May 29 1990) and created a Declaration on Racism and Xenophobia (December 29 1991), Racial Discrimination Legislation Amendment Bill (1992) Australia. The NSW Anti-Discrimination Act was amended some years ago by the addition of two offences entitled "Racial Vilification" and "Serious Racial Vilification" See discussion in Johns, Louise, (1995), 'Racial Vilification and ICERD in Australia', in E-Law, Murdoch University, Vol 2 No 1, April 1995. See also <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/library/legislation/>

72 An original Woodblock with Chinese characters setting out Regulations governing the construction sluice water holes is held in the State Library of Victoria. Accession Numbers H27877, LTPP 81

73 *The Mount Alexander Mail*, 16 October 1857.

Bourke Street, and their reaction provides another example of Chinese willingness to engage in defensive violence. The two went back to Ah Goon's shop and got a knife. Unfortunately, as all Europeans look alike, they picked the wrong people and finished up in gaol themselves but the point is that they were more than ready to do battle.<sup>74</sup>

Most instances of violence against Chinese were committed by young European males, often affected by drink and mob bravado. One early example of loutish behaviour occurred during a Chinese funeral at Ballarat in 1857. Food offerings were placed on the grave and a group of young Europeans stole the food and ate it before the ceremonies were completed.<sup>75</sup> The rise of the 'larrikin pushes' or gangs of young men who terrorised inner city Australia in the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was widely reported in the press and Chinese suffered along with the rest of the community.<sup>76</sup> Much of the 'racism' reported from 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia has its origins not in any organised or widespread acceptance of anti-Chinese violence but in the idleness of unemployed youths, often affected by drink, who picked targets of opportunity among whom were often Chinese. One of the most common forms of assault against Chinese was either stealing from their gardens or attacking them while selling their produce door to door. A young man named James Bateman was convicted and fined for destroying a Chinese garden in Islington Street, Collingwood with a gang of friends. The paper reported in a very disapproving tone that:

It has long been the practice of a number of ill-bred youngsters to meet in the neighbourhood and destroy the substance of the patient Chinaman labouring there.<sup>77</sup>

It is important to emphasise that assaults were treated seriously by the authorities. Yee Tung was walking in Kew when he was struck by a stone thrown by either Joseph Adams or Wm Jos. Smith. When Yee protested, the two men beat him with a pick handle and a shovel. They were both fined £1 with costs or seven days imprisonment.<sup>78</sup> A few months later two young Europeans decided to steal fruit from two Chinese hawkers in Hawthorn. When the Chinese objected they were beaten up while a crowd watched. A passing Justice of the Peace called the police and laid charges against the two louts. On another occasion, stable-boys from Connelly's Stables in Caulfield threw stones at Ah Hing and Ah Young

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74 *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 1888.

75 *The Argus*, 17 August 1857.

76 McLachlan N D, (1970), Larrikinism, An Interpretation, MA thesis, University of Melbourne.

77 *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 June 1870.

78 *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 April 1888.

who were just passing by. Ah Young caught a boy named Lawson and the other youths then attacked him. Ah Young picked up a pitchfork and jabbed James White in the leg. He was beaten insensible by the gang and Ah Hing thought Ah Young was dead. The boys involved were fined £1 each and paid 42s in court costs.<sup>79</sup>

Cheok Hong Cheong used one such incident to persuade the Church Missionary Society of Victoria to obtain a mission site in Little Bourke Street.

The third great want of our mission is a central hall in Little Bourke Street . . . True, a small mission-room has hitherto been kindly lent by Canon Chase; but it is situated in Carlton – right out of the centre of Chinese population, in a part not frequented by them, and unknown to the most of them. The attendance consequently is very small, and this is made smaller still by the annoyance and danger with which the young roughs of the neighbourhood would beset them, for it is no rare thing to find them jostled and pelted whilst on their way to service. Just last Sunday afternoon a highly respectable business man had a large piece of road metal aimed at him just as he was entering the gate of St . John's. And frequently also we have been startled in the midst of our service by stones rattling on the roof of the mission-room. With a mission hall in a central position in Little Bourke Street, . . . all this unpleasantness will be avoided.<sup>80</sup>

Because anti-Chinese prejudice was so obvious earlier studies, such as those of Price and Yarwood, focussed on restrictive legislation. Overall, most historians, such as Cronin and Rolls, have highlighted violence as a particularly anti-Chinese phenomenon while ignoring the day-to-day climate of mutual greed mentioned above in which people on the goldfields lived and worked.<sup>81</sup> In referring to the declining Chinese population, violence and discrimination have been emphasised while there has been a pattern of ignoring stronger motivations for men to return home. First, achieving their financial goals and, more importantly, the declining availability of alluvial gold shown in Table 1.6. Economic issues, specifically the quick recovery of alluvial gold, dominated the decision of people of all ethnic backgrounds to emigrate to Victoria.

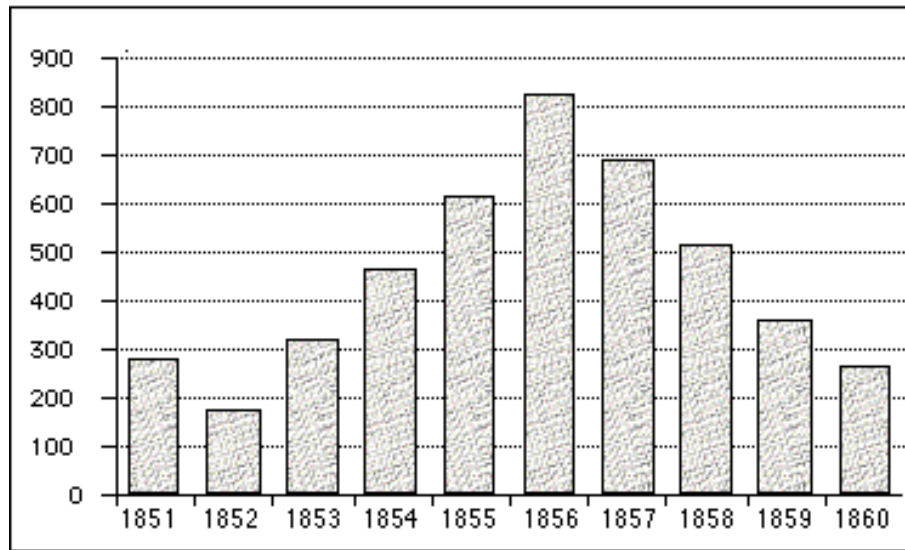
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79 *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 November 1889.

80 *The Australasian Missionary News*, 3 January 1890.

81 Price, Charles, (1974), *The Great White Walls are Built*, Canberra, Australian National University Press. Yarwood, A, (1964), *Asian Migration to Australia: The background to exclusion, 1896-1923*, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press. See also comments by Chan, Henry, (1999) 'Rethinking the Chinese Diasporic Identity: Citizenship, Cultural Identity, and the Chinese in Australia'. Paper presented to a conference Chinese in Australasia and the Pacific: Old and New Migrations and Cultural Change, University of Otago, New Zealand.

Table 1.6  
Alluvial Gold Recovery, Ballarat  
(in 000' of ounces,



Source: Ballarat Miner and Weekly Star, 19 September 1961.

Chinese emigrants usually borrowed their fares and initial subsistence from a form of family managed credit union or bank or from entrepreneurs by 'credit ticket' arrangements. Unlike European emigration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese credit contracts often included the return fare at the end of the contract period. Although outbreaks of sickness were common, Chinese emigrants had a better chance of arriving alive at their destination.<sup>82</sup> Repayment of the original immigration loan was the first priority after arriving in Victoria. Chinese debtors were supervised by the local branch of their district association until the loan was paid and this occurred, for most men, within twelve months or so of their arrival.<sup>83</sup>

An English commentator said that it was rare for Chinese returning home to take more than £100 from their five years or so in Australia. Australia seems to have been a better destination than the United States.<sup>84</sup> An American diplomat thought that \$US30 a year was a very good effort. The Chief of Police in Sacramento, Charles P O'Neil, considered that between two hundred and three hundred US dollars (a little less than £100) over a five

82 Coleman, Terry, (1992), *Passage to America: A history of emigrants from Great Britain and Ireland to America in the mid-nineteenth century*, London, Pimlico.

83 See discussion of Chinese Associations in Chapter 2.

84 *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1888.

year period was a 'pretty good stake.'<sup>85</sup> The Reverend Grainger Hargreaves commented:

I have not met with any man of wealth who has returned to China from the colonies. Sometimes perhaps a Chinaman when returning home goes to a bank and gets a draft for £300 or £400, and this impressions gets abroad that the Chinese are taking a good deal of money away, but this requires explanation. Filial piety is the strongest article in the Chinaman's creed and when one returns a considerable number of his friends will ask him to take two, four or five pounds to their parents, and in this way the £300 or £400 will be made up. <sup>86</sup>

Unfortunately, the journey home became an impossibility for a minority. Ah Hing told a typical story of dashed hopes in his pre-baptismal testimony:

When at home I was a farmer. I obeyed my parents when young. Being poor, my mother wished me to go to the goldfields, that I might make money and then return and support her. When I first came here I was always thinking about my mother, and sent money to her as often as I could. I entered into a business but did not succeed. I wished to go home but could not because I had no money. I have been in many parts of the country, and gone through much hard work.<sup>87</sup>

Ah Hing's comment that he had been in many parts of the country was similar to Peng-nam's account of working around Victoria. Prior to his conversion and baptism at Beechworth in 1860 and his settling with the Presbyterian Mission at Ballarat in 1861, Peng-nam worked at Castlemaine, the Avoca, the Ovens, and the Buckland. All of Peng-nam's Christian friends in northeast Victoria had been at Castlemaine and then worked elsewhere, i.e., Fan A Wye, Leong Pong Sien, and Lo Sam-yuen (Luo Shenyuan). Until the time of his conversion and baptism Peng-nam had been as rootless as any other immigrant. The endless search for gold hovered between poverty and the hope that today's work would find a rich pocket of nuggets and allow a man to return home as a 'man of substance' who had contributed to an improvement in his family's lifestyle and status.

As the Chinese population in one place declined the older camps withered and stores closed. Chinese avoided purchasing land or buildings that might be abandoned at short notice as a gold-field was abandoned. Most men held land under mining leases on payment of an annual fee.<sup>88</sup> The Chinese did not normally purchase land, not because they were unable to do so (because of discrimination), but because it would have been a

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85 California 1878, pp 101 and 184.

86 *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1888.

87 *The Wesleyan Chronicle*, 19 December 1874, p 192.

88 See discussion on mobility in May, Cathie R, (1984), *Topsawyers, The Chinese in Cairns*, Townsville, James Cook University.

bad business decision. When the population stabilized in the provincial towns and in Melbourne, those who could afford to buy properties did so. Cheok Hong Cheong is the archetype of a successful Chinese property speculator (See Chapter 6).

Despite his ethnic pride, Cheok Hong Cheong was unlike other Chinese Australians (Lowe Kong Meng, Louis Ah Mouy, James Lamsey, William Ah Ket of Melbourne and Mei Quong Tart, George On Lee and William Liu of Sydney, come immediately to mind) in that he never received a Chinese imperial award or 'button'. One possible explanation is given at the close of Chapter 9. If such an offer was ever made, and there is no evidence either way, it is hard to understand why it might have been rejected. As the discussion in Chapters 4 and 9 will show Cheong's importance as a bridge between the Europeans and the Chinese did not admit him into the innermost circle of the Chinese merchant-elite in Victoria from whom recommendations for Chinese honours originated. That exclusion may, perhaps, imply a distrust of him as a Chinese who was also Australia's most prominent Chinese Christian.

In the next chapter Cheong's preparation for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, and the shared plan, by family and church authorities, that he would become the Superintending Missionary of the Chinese Presbyterian Mission in Victoria, is discussed. It is this period of his life that established him in the role that he was to perform for most of his life. But more important still, it gave him the English language skills that also established him as the leading Chinese spokesman and apologist to the European population of the Colony of Victoria and, after Federation, to the population of Australia.

The story of the Cheong family needs to be taken against the background of the Chinese rush to the Victorian goldfields that is outlined in this chapter. Whatever the later career of Cheok Hong Cheong, his family was just one of many whose lives were profoundly changed by a decision of a male family member to migrate to the Australian diggings. They were driven by the hope of acquiring enough capital to enable to family to buy land in an increasingly and therefore expensive land-short Guangdong Province. Although Cheong Peng-nam remained determinedly Chinese, his decision to move his immediate family to Australia brought about an Australianising process. Although Peng-nam and Cheok Hong never became citizens of their new home, i.e., British subjects resident in Australia, and although the account of their lives that emerges in this study shows their determination to remain Chinese in culture and identity, they nevertheless

underwent a similar process of identifying more and more strongly with their place of residence rather than their place of origin. It is a remarkably simple fact of life that identity is determined as much by where we live as by who we think we are in terms of where we came from.