The Cheong family’s place inside and outside the web of relationships within the Chinese community in Victoria was an important factor not only in Cheong’s early years after his arrival in Ballarat in 1863 but also in his subsequent life after 1872 in Melbourne as he emerged as the primary English language defender of his countrymen.

The majority of Chinese immigrants were focused on maximising income and minimising expenses to enable them to send money to their families in China. Confucius said that: ‘the ignorant commoners always harbour a desire for material gain (xiaoren huai hui)\(^1\) while Cheong’s version was that all men are naturally greedy. Greed certainly applied to the Victorian goldrush immigrants. Making money was the universal objective. Housing was normally the cheapest obtainable and, given the growing anti-Chinese sentiment in the colony, accusations of overcrowding and accusations that Chinese residential areas were sources of disease became part of a full-scale demonizing of the Chinese (see Chapter 7).\(^2\)

Housing is symbolic of family status and success in most communities. Well into the early years of the 20\(^{th}\) century there were still Chinese (and many Europeans who lived in rough wooden huts patched with odd pieces of corrugated iron or flattened kerosene tins (next page). Successful, men like Cheong (see Chapter 6) and other Victorian community leaders built substantial houses to demonstrate their achievements (see Chapter 4) but, for the greater part, the housing of Chinese in Victoria was below the standard of their European neighbours.

The all-male nature of Chinese immigration and the pressure on men to send money home to the family in China was described in Chapter 1. Declining earnings from gold mining and a lack of marketable labour skills meant that most long-staying Chinese in

\(^{1}\) Information provided to the author by members of internet site ANZ-Ch.

\(^{2}\) Census of Victoria 1881, para 42 reported that just under half were living in huts, some in tents and a very few camping out.
Victoria were poor and often had lost contact with their families through shame that they could no longer afford to send money home, still less save enough to return to China. Their poverty, as Mrs. Skinner mentioned in Chapter 1, led them to engage in many petty
thefts, often involving chickens.\(^3\) Although there are some letters, mostly concerned with rented land, in Cheong’s letterbooks, the poor were not high on his agenda and, worse still, as an evangelist he did not spend much time in personal conversations with them or in seeking to ameliorate their living conditions (see Chapter 5).

One of the key relationships that Cheong had to manage was the gap between the European and Chinese views of the law of the land. A summary of the gap in Chinese and European viewpoints came from a Californian Senate investigation that described the:

Existence among the Chinese population of secret tribunals unrecognised by our laws and in open defiance thereof, an imperium in imperio that undertake and actually administer punishment, not infrequently of death. These tribunals exercise the power of levying taxes, commanding masses of men, intimidating interpreters and witnesses, enforcing perjury, punishing the refractory, removing witnesses beyond the reach of process, controlling liberty of action and preventing the return of Chinese to their homes in China.\(^4\)

Cheok Hong Cheong was criticised by European friends for failing to report opium dealers to the police and his response was that his primary calling was to the conversion of the wicked rather than to their temporal punishment (see Chapter 7). It was a less than satisfactory answer unless due account is taken of the complexity of relationships within which he lived and worked as a Chinese who was also a Christian and a missionary. Cheong’s ‘hands-off’ approach worked better than that of Mei Quong Tart, the leading Sydney Taishanese merchant:

In 1892... [a] problem arose from differences over gambling which sparked off a faction war in the Goulburn-Campbell Streets Chinatown between groups known as “Dwoon goon” and “Go Yen” respectively. When Quong Tart heard of the dispute he convened a meeting of Chinese merchants who arbitrated, according to Chinese custom, and found in favour of the Go Yen party. When the other side refused to pay the amount in question court proceedings were taken... There were riots

---

\(^3\) See Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, Table 13, p 148. See also a list of convictions recorded at Ballarat in *The Star*, Ballarat, 10 June 1861.

between Chinese in the city and affairs looked like taking a most serious turn when the Dwoon Goon faction held a meeting at which they condemned the way in which Quong Tart had presided over the deliberations of the arbitration committee and informed him that his services in Chinese matters would no longer be welcome.5

Cheong Peng-nam’s careful planning for his family, before and after his conversion, provided a lesson in balancing his Chinese identity with the European dominated Victorian environment that Cheok Hong applied to his own family.6 The Cheong family in Victoria never lived in poverty and in later years, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, the family lived well above the standards of most Chinese Victorians.

Cheong Peng-nam did not spend his earnings in opium smoking, gambling, or in repatriating money to his family in China. His careful money management financed a journey to China in late 1856 or early 1857 that resulted in the birth of his youngest child. He saved enough to go home a second time in 1863 to bring his wife and children to Ballarat although those costs were reimbursed by the Presbyterian Chinese Mission Board of Management. There is an enigmatic mention in 1863 that he had trouble gathering all the children, with his youngest being held by bandits. It seems more likely that the little girl was held by relatives until Peng-nam made a payment to release him from future family obligations.7 This may explain why the Cheong archives do not mention the lineage village or any family members in Taishan District.

While housing had an important symbolic role (see Chapter 4) it was only one of several elements in Cheok Hong Cheong’s life in Australia that set him, and his family, apart from most of the Chinese in Victoria. The Cheongs were part of a small minority of Chinese-Australians who found a new sense of personal freedom away from the pressures and restraints of traditional Chinese family and village life.8

An experienced American missionary in China said of the men who returned from the United States:

The great body of these emigrants are persons of very little position or influence in China. They go back to their homes in the city or country, and entertain their friends with the story of their adventures for a short period, and then it loses its novelty, and

7 The Age, 10 November 1864
they settle down to the quiet routine of their everyday life. The fixedness of customs . . . in China is too great to be readily affected by such slight influences.9

The 'father' of Chinese emigration studies, Chen Ta, observed that:

The emigrant as an individual rarely enters to any very large extent into the life of a foreign community. Even when he does not join an older member of the family abroad, he almost invariably continues to live in a Chinese social environment, usually under a Chinese employer, and under circumstances requiring no great changes in his habits.10

This was the case in Victoria where most Chinese lived in relationships that reflected the family-village customs of the district from which they had come.11

| Table 2.1 |
| Victoria Chinese Age Distribution as percentage of total |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10-19 years</th>
<th>20-29 years</th>
<th>30-39 years</th>
<th>40-49 years</th>
<th>50-60 years</th>
<th>Over 60 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>10-19 years</td>
<td>20-29 years</td>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>50-60 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Victoria: Census Data. See Census of Victoria, 1891: para 222

Titles of respect such as ‘uncle’, and ‘nephew’ were common although few involved close relatives. The sense of extended family was reinforced by clan associations comprising men from the same administrative district in China and, men who claimed the same lineage. There were just nine lineage groupings within the Victorian See Yup community.12

The Cheong lineage was one of the smallest and least influential. The marriage of Cheok Hong to Wong Toy Yen in 1869 may in some part have been with a view to linking Cheok

---

Hong to the Wong lineage, one of the largest lineages in Victoria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Taishan</th>
<th>Hoiping</th>
<th>Xinhui</th>
<th>Yanping</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wong</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louey (Lui)</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lau (Liu)</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam (Lin)</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ng (Wu)</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chin (Chan)</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leong (Liang)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheong (Chang)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2754</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>1579</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Cheong was a family autocrat (see Chapter 6) he did not seek more than a utilitarian relationship with the relationships represented by the Victorian Chinese associations. In becoming an outstanding figure in the Chinese community, and its premier English-language apologist and spokesperson, he had to respect the structures of the community if he was to exercise a leadership role. This reality was influential in his handling of the opium issue (see Chapter 7) but also in his defence of the Chinese in 1879 (Chapter 4) and in the great immigration debates of 1887-1888 (Chapters 8-10).

Overseas Chinese communities were the product of chain migration, i.e., people from the same general area following each other to the destination. The ‘Rev.’ William Young commented:

One of the Chinese teachers has found in these diggings, he tells me, some thirty or forty of his nephews (first and second cousins I think he means) and a great number of acquaintances. From these he has met with a very warm reception, and he will, I am persuaded, use the influence he seems to possess over them for the purpose of bringing them into contact with the Word of God and the ordinances of religion. The greater number of them seem to have settled at Forest Creek.

Chinese district associations were the local link in an overseas migration chain that started with emigration entrepreneurs in South China. Most Victorian Chinese came from the northern townships of Taishan District and from Xinhui, Hokshan and Hoiping Districts.

---
14 The Argus, 15 November 1855.
15 Lee, Rose Hum, (1960), The Chinese in the United States of America, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, p 143.
They were eligible for membership of the See Yup Hui Kuan (See Yup, Sze Yup, See Yap – Mandarin Siyi = Four Districts). As the district association (hui kuan) of the largest group of emigrants to the English-speaking countries of the Pacific Rim, the See Yup Association was influential throughout Australia but especially in Victoria and North Queensland. The next largest number of immigrants came from Xinhui District and were members of the Kong Chew Hui Kuan.

Immigrants retained their identification with their home district and village in China even after death. The Collins Collection of photographs of Chinese funerary ovens in Victoria at the State Library of Victoria provides an invaluable visual record of the maintenance of funerary traditions in Victoria. The membership fee included a nominal sickness benefit and an assurance, usually honoured, that should they die, burial would be arranged along with the eventual return of their bones to China. Ray Bradfield published this contemporary report from the Castlemaine diggings.

As a proof of the respect the Chinese have for their dead, and that they never seem to forget them, I need only mention that, on the occasion of my visit, two Chinamen came expressly from Ballaarat to pray at the shrine of a friend, who died nearly six years ago. They brought with them four oranges, some cakes, tea, pork chops, brandy, wax tapers, and joss sticks. After praying they collected them together in a basket, first offering cakes and brandy to those around. Frequently, after obtaining a Coroner’s warrant, the remains would be exhumed, some time after burial, when the body, teeth, the nails, having been extracted, whole, were burned to ashes in a remote corner of the ground. The fragments were then collected, tied up in a white satin bag, and placed in a small chest. They were then despatched for China, to the deceased’s relatives.

This was yet another instance where Cheong’s views diverged from those of other Chinese and the associations. In his address to the 1889 Annual Meeting of the Church Missionary

---

16 Hui Kuan is the Chinese term usually translated association
17 The original spelling of Ballarat was Ballaarat.
Society of Victoria, Cheok Hong Cheong remarked on the actions of a catechist of either the Presbyterian or the Methodist Chinese Mission.

A fortnight ago I heard that a Catechist of another church had come up to the cemetery in the neighbourhood to gather up the bones of his deceased fellow-townsmen for transportation home to China. In this case I do not know whether he did it to oblige his friends at home, or that he was identified with their superstitious belief in geomancy. To my mind, however, he should at least have allowed the dead to mind the things of the dead, his own business being simply to follow Christ. 19

The objectives of the district associations were described in information from the San Francisco branch of the See Yup Association to the Rev. William Speer:

The objects to which the subscriptions to the Company have been devoted are as follows:
1. The purchase of ground and erection of the buildings used by us.
2. The salaries of agents and servants.
3. For fuel, water, candles, and oil.
4. To assist the sick to return home.
5. For the bestowment of medicines.
6. For coffins and funeral expenses of the poor.
7. For the repair of tombs.
8. Expenses of lawsuits.
9. Taxes upon our frame house at Sacramento.
10. Drayage and other outlays for passengers landing or departing by ship. 20

The report from William Speer mentioned above described the outreach and authority of the See Yup Association in San Francisco:

As well as providing services to members, the associations acted as ‘hidden’ government following Chinese traditions. 21 The leaders of the associations in each place, i.e., in any emigrant destination country and in each major Chinese settlement in each country, exercised magisterial powers over the local members and sought to prevent any Chinese dispute being taken into the wider community and especially into the European courts. 22

The functions outlined in the American and Australian examples of See Yup rules suggest a common origin in Guangdong Province as part of the process of internal migration in China. A man who did not join risked social isolation and was to be regarded as:

19 The Australasian Missionary News, 3 January 1890.
21 American sources confirm this pattern including Chen, Jack (1982) and Chen, Yong, (2000), as well as the US Senate and Californian Senate Reports. See also http://yerkes.mit.edu/mbla/Chinatown/community.html.
an outside man. Should he get involved in any quarrel or sickness, or in the case of death or trouble in mercantile matters, he having no ticket . . . to produce, any member of the society who shall interpret for him shall be fined the sum of £10 . . . There shall be no deviation from this rule.23

Every man had to be certified free of debt before he could leave Victoria. This was enforced by shipping companies requiring the association’s certificate before issuing a ticket or allowing a man to board a ship leaving for China:

In the matter of receiving credit, borrowing money, and repaying what the capitalist in China has advanced to any member, all our countrymen must be careful to observe good faith. They must not repudiate any obligation. Any person doing so shall have his name posted up in the club-house, and he shall be compelled to pay in full the sum he owes; after that he may be permitted to take his passage on board ship, and return to China.24

When Ho A Low, a Victorian catechist (Victoria Chinese Mission, 1855-1857), was asked in 1856 what the See Yup building in Little Bourke Street was used for he replied that it was a clubhouse providing short-term accommodation for men moving to and from the goldfields and that he stayed there himself when in Melbourne.25 Francis Hsu states that a hui-kuan in California usually had some dormitory space and offices.26 The Rev. Augustus Loomis, a missionary to the Chinese in California, said of the San Francisco associations:

Each of the six companies owns its house and lot, and some of these company houses have large rooms, to which the immigrants from the ship are permitted to come and lodge until they find employment, or until they can make arrangements to get to their work on the railroads or in the mines. Also Chinamen coming from the country to embark for China are permitted to take their baskets and blankets to the company houses and lodge while waiting for a ship. These buildings are, in fact, like the caravanseries of the East.27

Not all Christian Chinese were as relaxed as Ho A Low about staying at an association lodging house. Some Christians in San Francisco did not like to use them because of the presence of a temple as a normal part of the facilities. Some Christians even refused to keep up their association membership, preferring to cut themselves adrift and rely on the Christian group as a replacement fellowship group.28

Temples also served as meeting places, administrative centres for the local members of

---

24 Young, op cit, pp 18-19.
25 The Church of England Record, April 1857, p 33.
28 Ibid, p 448
the association, provided for religious observances and as court-rooms for the trials of men who broke the rules. By virtue of their lineage links with Taishan District, the Cheong family was eligible for membership of the See Yup Association but there is no evidence that Cheong ever joined although he was associated closely with several former presidents including William Wong Shi Gean and Peter Fanggeth. It was probably easier to be independent in Melbourne than in the goldfields Chinese villages.

In 1855 a small temple was opened in Castlemaine. Local people say that Castlemaine had at least three temples that remained fairly intact until just after the Second World War. Some of the decorative panels from these buildings are now in the local museum. The opening of the See Yup temple at Spring Hill near Beechworth also attracted mention in the press.

In front of this galaxy of glories [image of Kwan Ti] a seat is placed for the head man of the camp, who presides, protected from the ‘common herd’ by a railing; and around the room for the whole length [about 30 feet long with side rooms] a line of benches is arranged for the audience & jurors. the walls are adorned in places by proverbs, or trite sayings, by Confucius and other eminent philosophers, inculcating an observance of the laws, respect for old age and for property of other people — a code which cannot be too widely disseminated. The judges, whose decisions are, we believe, never impugned in cases of theft, are competent to award the criminal punishment which is administered by his own relations and personal friends. . . . The hall, by the side of low-pitched tents, presents a most imposing appearance, and has great advantages over its opposite neighbour in Beechworth in size, a liberal supply of candles, and a comfortable box for the reporters.29

As the illustrations on the next two pages show, the See Yup Association possessed the finest Chinese temple in Australia in South Melbourne and had buildings in almost every major Chinese site in Victoria, as well as in other colonies. It was an influential body and for most of the 19th century it was part of the web of relationships within the Chinese community with which Cheong and other Christian leaders avoided disagreements. As

29 The Argus, 25 August 1857.
Other See Yup Temples in Victoria
Secretary and later Chairman of the Victorian Chinese Residents’ Association, Cheong used the Kong Chew Hall (Xin Hui Hui Kuan) for Chinese community meetings on matters such as immigration (Chapter 10) and famine relief fund-raising. Peng-nam stated that he once took Cheok Hong to the See Yup temple in Ballarat on the Emperor’s birthday as an affirmation of his loyalty to China and by implication, to his fellow countrymen in Ballarat.30

In the early days of Chinese immigration Christians were active in association affairs. Chu A Luk (Victoria Chinese Mission 1855-1857) who came to Victoria in 1855, was a leader of the 1857 colony-wide See Yup protest against legislation intended to increase taxation and reduce immigration (Appendix 15).

On Monday, the streets of Castlemaine presented an unusual appearance. Hundreds of Chinese were parading, about 600. The object of their gathering was of a political nature. . . . they had determined on holding a meeting of protest against Mr. Haines' bill relating to them, and for this purpose they had come to Castlemaine from all parts of the district. . . . It was the first meeting of the kind held by the Chinese in this colony. During the morning many of the Chinese had visited the [Victoria Chinese Mission] chapel on the hill for the purpose, as we were informed, of signing the petition to be afterwards submitted to the meeting, and having performed this duty, they departed, but there remained on the hill between 1,200 and 1,800 to take part in the proceedings. On the arrival of Chu A Luk, the interpreter and missionary stationed there, an old box was procured, upon which Chu A Luk mounted and explained the purpose of the meeting . . . Chu A Luk was appointed to take charge of the petitions.31

Pon Sa, or Leong Pong Seen, who was another of the speakers at the 1857 See Yup protest meeting in Castlemaine, was later baptised by the Methodists and was one of the Christians at Beechworth who befriended Cheong Peng-nam and helped persuade him to become a Christian. At his baptism in Beechworth (Christ Church, Anglican), in 1860 Peng-nam gave his home district as Taishan and his parents as Cheong Ming Cham and

31 The Argus, 7 August 1857. See Appendix 15.
Ng See.\textsuperscript{32} In 1856, Ho A Low resigned from the Victoria Chinese Mission and the See Yup Association helped him obtain appointment as the Chinese Interpreter at Beechworth. Chu A Luk was also offered alternative work by the Chinese leaders but he chose to continue as a missionary until he returned to China in 1857 following the collapse of the Victoria Chinese Mission.\textsuperscript{33} By the time Cheong became Superintending Missionary of the Anglican Chinese Mission in 1885, the influence of the district associations had waned along with the fall in the number of Chinese in Victoria.

Tension between the associations was reported. In his Fifth Report from the Victoria Chinese Mission at Castlemaine, to give one example, William Young mentioned that:

Chinese both of the Heang-shan [Zhongshan] and Su-iap [See Yup] clans met at the first service. Perhaps it is not generally known, that between these two clans, though they come from the same province in China, there exists a state of feeling not unlike that which subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans of old. I have not been able to ascertain what circumstance has given birth to this feeling of deep-rooted animosity; but I never see these two clans encamping together, or working together in any large bodies. One of the Chinese, in describing their characteristics, said that the one [See Yup] was peaceably disposed and yielding, and other pugnacious and haughty [Zhongshan]. Disputes, too, on the gold fields, which have arisen among them, have tended to widen the breach that originally existed.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1857 Chu A Luk spoke to some Zhongshan [Heong-shan] men at Campbell’s Creek whose comments reflected the deep distrust held by many Chinese towards Christianity:

He told them that he had come with a good object in view, and that was, to erect a chapel for the use of the Chinese. One of them replied that he was a Heong-shan Chinese, and had resided in Hong Kong about ten years, but he never saw a single instance of a Heong-shan Chinese becoming a Christian; that the people of that clan disliked Jesus because he was of foreign race. The very name of Jesus they could not bear to hear.\textsuperscript{35}

In the 1850s the Melbourne \textit{Argus} mentioned several disputes between Chinese groups in

\textsuperscript{32} Peng-nam’s mother was from the Ng lineage. The term ‘See’ indicates that she was a married woman.


\textsuperscript{34} \textit{The Mount Alexander Mail}, 14 December 1855. Heang-shan is a variant of the more common Chungshan/Zhongshan and Su-iap is a variant of See Yup. Chungshan people were few and far between in Victoria although in Brisbane they represented more than half the Chinese population and were also significant in Sydney.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{The Mount Alexander Mail}, 15 May 1857; 16 October 1857. The same prejudice is mentioned by a German missionary, Rev C R Hager in 1886, ‘There seems as much bitterness against the Gospel as ever. A year ago we were almost hooted out of the same city; and this time the mob tried its power [but] signally failed.’ \textit{The Chinese Recorder}, January 1886, p 37.
Victoria. Similar tensions occurred in North Queensland. In 1875, two Queensland societies had a confrontation in which two men were killed. In 1878, the largest clash between Chinese known in Australia occurred at Lukinville. The See Yup were said to have mustered six thousand combatants against about two thousand Chung Shan [Zhongshan] men.

There is no evidence, other than public meetings of the whole Chinese community, that Cheok Hong Cheong or any of his family ever attended a Chinese temple. The Cheong family, through Peng-nam’s and Cheok Hong’s steady employment and financial acumen and the family’s Christian church connections, did not seek the support of the Chinese associations. An actual attack on Cheong was probably regarded by his opponents as too risky. Cheok Hong Cheong had a range of contacts among church members in the European community that exceeded those of any other Victorian Chinese. His acquaintances included members of the Victorian Parliament, cabinet ministers, senior administrators, judges, and other community leaders many of whose names appear in subsequent chapters.

In addition to the district associations and lineage groups, there were also secret Chinese societies. The best-known, and still operating, are the Triads, groups that originally came together in protective associations to resist the oppression of landlords and unjust government officials. Louis Ah Mouy and Lowe Kong Meng were prominent members of the Yee Hing Society, a See Yup branch of the Triads. Yong states that the Melbourne Yee Hing Society renamed itself the Chinese Masonic Society in 1914. By 1916 there were similar Chinese Masonic Lodges [Chung Wah Ming Kuo Kung Hui] in Launceston, Tumut, Brisbane, Cairns, Atherton, Gordon Vale, Toowoomba, Mackay, Rockhampton and elsewhere. He states that these bodies eventually merged into a new national body (Chee Kung Tong). This body was in active opposition to the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintan/Guomintang). The adoption of a Masonic identity by Triad

---

36 _The Argus_, 25 April 1855; 18, 21, 23 July 1856; 19 August 1856; 16, 23 September 1856; 17 September 1857; 8 October 1857; 14 December 1857; 18 February 1858.


societies is also reported in America.39

In a lengthy exchange of letters over the opium question, Cheong said the following about the criminal element of the Chinese community in Melbourne:

They pay liberally a standing Counsel who advises them in every move they make & how they might defeat the law... 40

Well remembering not very long ago when in a gambling case four reputable Chinese witnesses sheeted home the offence, the gamblers were able to bring forward by the advice of their lawyers, eight of their confreres to swear to the contrary! 41

I have as a matter of fact on several occasions reported to the police when violence was threatened against the peaceful members of the Chinese Community by the banded ruffians of a certain Secret Society. 42

He also claimed that his opposition to the trade in smoking opium led to the placing of big character posters in Little Bourke Street offering a reward for anyone who killed him.43 A rare public reference to a secret society appeared in a report from the Anglican mission in Bendigo deploring forceful opposition by a ‘secret society’ to Chinese who attended the mission services.44 It mentioned the:

very strenuous efforts of the members of a secret society recently established here who lose no opportunity of ridiculing the new religion and publicly taunting its professors.45

While the basis of the relationship is not known, an unusual aspect of the experience of Cheong Peng-nam and his family was the invitation to stay with the prominent merchant, Lowe Kong Meng, after their arrival in Melbourne in 1863. By taking the family in, Kong Meng signalled to the Chinese community that the Cheong family enjoyed his personal friendship and protection.46 The most significant product of the relationship was Cheong’s part in co-authoring of the 1878 pamphlet (see Chapter 4) and his later role as the English language spokesman for the Victorian Chinese Residents Association (see Chapter 8).

A further strand in the Cheong family’s relationships was the context within which Chinese Christian converts became part, admittedly on the fringes, of the colonial

---

40 Cheok Hong Cheong to Howat 15 April 1909
41 Cheok Hong Cheong to Howat, 22 April 1909
42 Cheok Hong Cheong to Howat, 27 April 1909
43 Cheok Hong Cheong to Howat, 20 March 1909.
45 The Church of England Messenger, 8 January 1874:11
churches. Among the Anglican and Protestant Europeans who came to Victoria in search of wealth were products of the evangelical movement with its emphasis on personal conversion and evidence of a changed life expressed through philanthropic and missionary ventures. Between 1855 and 1860 evangelical Christians established several interdenominational missions to the Chinese in Victoria at Castlemaine, Ballarat, Melbourne and Smythesdale. Accepting Christianity created an element of doubt about the Chinese identity of converts who were viewed, by some if not all Chinese, as siding with the religion of China’s oppressors. Their connection with local European Christians may have protected many men from the unfavourable opinions of their countrymen.

A further important difference in Cheong’s framework of relationships was his education in Victoria. Other prominent Chinese Christians in Victoria, including Ho A Low, Chu A Luk, Wat A Che, O Cheong, and Fan A Wye, had attended the London Missionary Society’s Anglo-Chinese College in Hong Kong. Originally established at Malacca in 1817 the College moved to Hong Kong in 1845 where it was intended to be a seminary for the preparation of Chinese Christian ministers. The Church Missionary Society established St Paul’s College in Hong Kong in 1851 for similar reasons. The only former student of St Paul’s confirmed to have worked in Australia was Lo Sam-yuen who is mentioned elsewhere in this thesis (Chapter 5). None of these men received schooling or higher education in English language and culture, or in theology, comparable to Cheok Hong Cheong or his academically gifted son, the Rev. James Cheong, MA.

The evangelical awakenings in Britain and North America during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the amazing successes of British imperialism, brought a new enthusiasm for overseas missions to the Anglican and Protestant churches of Britain. They held firm to historic Christian doctrines of the common origins and divine destiny of humanity, rediscovering St Augustine’s teaching that:

> Whoever is anywhere born a man, that is a rational, moral animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in colour, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is

---

47 See discussion in Chapter 3.
48 A general introduction is given in Welch, Ian (1980), Pariahs and Outcasts, Christian Missions to the Chinese in Australia, MA, Monash University.
49 Cheong refused to accept a salary from the Anglican Chinese Mission after 1898 because of his concern that some Chinese alleged that he only preached Christianity for payment, reflecting his concern that his work on behalf of the Chinese community be respected as those of a ‘real’ Chinese. See Chapter 5.
in some part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt he springs from one protoplast . . . if they are human, they descend from Adam.  

Augustine, in turn, drew from Paul’s address to the sophisticates of Athens (Book of Acts Chapter 17, verse 26 – New International Version) that reads: “From one man (i.e., Adam) he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth.’

The churches in Victoria were caught up in the pressures arising from the population explosion of the goldrush era. An entire infrastructure had to be created from nothing, demanding the maximum cooperation between clergy and people, including those who were at best nominal Christians. The need for the widest possible community support and cooperation created stresses in balancing the highest standards of Christian morality with popular opinion influenced by an all-pervasive climate of greed. Among many, and perhaps a majority of Europeans, the Chinese were perceived as taking resources that would otherwise have been earned by Europeans.

A distinction can be drawn between the struggles of the Victorian churches to defend the divinely given humanity of the Chinese against oppression and the attitudes of some Americans with experience of slavery. A former Presbyterian missionary in China, J G Kerr saw a direct link between the Chinese, as one section of the community, and the potential denial of rights to others. Kerr wrote:

He must have food and clothing for himself and family, and a roof to cover him from the cold and the storm. He and his wife and children and aged parents are as much creatures of God as the man with a white skin, and the fruits of the earth produced or earned by the sweat of his brow are just as much the gifts of our common Father to him as to men of any other race or color. God is no respecter of persons, and those who claim exclusive right to the blessings to be secured in any part of God’s earth are presuming upon a favoritism which does not exist in the Divine economy.

The Rev. William Boyce, a pioneer Methodist minister, returned to London to take up the post of Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. After retirement he came back to join his children, who had remained in Australia. He wrote to friends in England that clergy costs took a higher proportion of church income than in England while few


colonists were regular churchgoers. His comments on the state of the churches show the economic and social climate within which the various Australian Chinese missions operated:

If the English friends wish Australia to be thoroughly identified permanently with the foreign Missions work they must make haste slowly, taking into account the peculiar position in which the inhabitants of a new Country are placed from local claims which are of a far more pressing & necessary character than can exist in an old settled Country. A superficial glance at the circumstances of the middle and lower classes in the Australian colonies leaks the impression of the command of greater monied ability as compared with the same classes in England & this is to some extent true but it must be taken in connection with the existence of imperative local claims upon the voluntary givings which are not found to the same extent in England or any other long settled country.

The churches were constantly looking to Britain for manpower, technical advice and financial support. William Young described their circumstances to Dr Tidman, the Secretary of LMS, within six months of the opening of the first Chinese mission in June 1855:

In the infancy of almost every denomination here when each is required to provide its place of worship and is called to support a minister it is not to be wondered (that) a mission like the one in question cannot be entirely supported by funds raised on the spot.

Comments at an anti-Chinese meeting at Mount Alexander (Castlemaine) in July 1857 show the everyday prejudices of Europeans:

- Australia was discovered by European enterprise, and originally colonized by the same, we had therefore a prior right. Our religion and laws were altogether different from theirs, so much as to prevent any amalgamation of feelings and sympathies.
- An Englishman would find it impossible to obtain a living.
- Englishmen would be unable to provide for their wives and families.
- Chinese set a bad example to the rest of the community.

When the implementation of Australia-wide restrictive policies against Chinese immigration were discussed in the Methodist Conference of 1888, the Rev. Dr Watkin, led

52 In 19th century England, clergy salaries were paid by government. When this practice ceased, church endowments (chiefly the Church Commissioners) managed investments that provided for clergy costs. It has only been since the 1970s or so that Anglican parishes in England have been required to participate in funding clergy costs.
53 Boyce to Bunting, 20 February 1879, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Australian Correspondence, MSS.
54 Young to Tidman, 22 November 1855. London Missionary Society, Australian Correspondence, MSS.
55 The Spectator, 1 June 1888.
56 The Mount Alexander Mail, 31 July 1857.
the way in not allowing principles to over-rule pragmatism. Watkins told the Conference that the Wesleyan Methodists:

were, as a church, not sufficiently in touch with the working classes already. The working man had no quarrel with Christianity, but with the way Christianity was represented by many of its professors.57

When Chinese evangelisation began in Victoria in 1855 colonial belief in European superiority was universal and Christianity, superimposed on conventional 19th century racial ideas, became a religious explanation (and justification) for Anglo-Saxon world dominance that might, otherwise, have been attributed to the same greed that produced the Victorian goldrush.58 The Chinese accepted British influence but believed China to be a superior culture. A discussion reported by a Chinese missionary in Victoria reflected the assumption of British-Christian dominance:

On Saturday five men came to my house and I explained the Catechism to them. One or two were pleased and I gave books to them. Sunday forenoon, I went to Campbell’s Flat. In one tent there were seven men, and I preached to them how God created Heaven and Earth and all things and men in six days, so that all people ought to worship God and not worship images and sin against his law. One answered and said, ‘You say All things come from God.’ He said, ‘you say many. Some people are black some are white they live in different countries and not speak same language, they do not worship the same God. They do not come from one pair.’ I say to him, ‘Who was the God of China and who were the first parents of Chinamen?’ He say, ‘So long a time from then to now, he not know the first parents, but the Chinese are different from all other people.’ I said, ‘you are not a wise thought. You do not know the true God and do not know the climate of the world. If anybody live in the torrid zone, they are of black skin and complexion, if they live in the temperate zone they are white or light skinned and intelligent. If any people live in the frigid zone they are dwarfed and of little knowledge. You see the Europeans are white and so intelligent, they are living in the temperate zone, as Chinamen. How is it that the Chinese are not so intelligent as the Europeans. Because the Europeans have the truth of God and they believe in Christ the Saviour therefore their wisdom and intelligence comes from the true God. If you country people cast away ‘devil worship’ and images and worship the living God then they will have intelligence like those who live in other countries.59

Chinese intellectuals found it incomprehensible that barbarians could dominate the Middle Kingdom (See Chapter 1). Cheong Peng-nam said in an address in Bendigo in

57 The Daily Telegraph, 22 May 1888. See discussion of the Intercolonial Conference at Chapter 11.
Christian friends, I am very glad to meet you this evening. I beg to say a few words to you. I am employed by the Presbyterian church to preach the gospel to my country-men in Ballarat; some of them are willing to hear it, some are unwilling; others again ridicule, and show their hatred of it. And why is this? Because the Chinese value the doctrines handed down by their own wise men. From a boy I was taught that these doctrines were the true doctrines, and that they were first taught above 4000 years ago. But they say nothing about God’s creating heaven and earth in six days, and resting on the seventh—nor about Jesus coming into the world to redeem us from sin; and they do not tell us what we ought to do in this world; nor what we are to expect in the world to come. We cannot learn from them about God’s righteous judging of men at the last day; and therefore the study of the doctrines of China is not sufficient to enable us to regulate our lives. Although the ancient sages worshipped a supreme ruler, and called him the great Lord of Heaven and Earth, and also sacrificed to him; yet in after times, there being no Bible among the Chinese; the people gradually became darkened, and made all sorts of images and gods, and sacrificed to them, and to deceased ancestors, and tombs, and other objects, and thus served the devil, who in this way led them astray, until they were quite ignorant that God was the great Lord of heaven and earth, and believed that a dead man who was deified by one of the Emperors was the Supreme God; some of the Chinese also said that Buddha had power over heaven and earth; others again said, there were gods greater than Buddha who would exist when heaven and earth had passed away. Besides these errors, the Chinese believe in fortune-telling, witchcraft, and such things; and they believe to be true what they find in wicked books and novels; they believe also false doctrines, ghost stories, and other superstitions. Then there are educated men among the Chinese, who do not comprehend the importance of heavenly doctrines; but who adhere with great tenacity to the ancient doctrines of China, and argue with me, and maintain that these doctrines are the true ones; thus they stick to their errors and cannot be convinced, and Satan deceives them. They will not permit the Holy Word of God to be their guide. But by the efforts of good men who wish to spread the truth, the doctrine of salvation has penetrated China; and it is gradually removing the film that has darkened the minds of the people, and enlightening them, and bringing them out of death into life. In order to cause its universal spread it is of the first importance to get the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit, and next to obtain your assistance, Christian friends, to send laborers into the harvest—and what you sow, you shall reap—and thus the lost piece of silver will be found, and the glory of the triune God will be manifested, and your own happiness will be vastly increased. This is my heart’s wish.

Peng-nam declared that the Chinese had always believed in God but as a result of not having the Bible to guide the culture China had fallen away from that belief. Peng-nam did not suggest that China’s traditions needed to be replaced but brought back to first principles. With the availability of the Bible in Chinese China would resume its rightful place among the great nations of the world. Both Peng-nam and Leong A Toe left no doubt

---

60 *The Christian Review*, October 1865.
that China was the cultural superior of the West. From his writings (See Appendices 1 to 5) it is obvious that Cheok Hong Cheong shared the same basic values.

Cheong spent much of his life engaged in a complex emotional and intellectual balancing act between his Christianity, his European education, and his desire for status and authority within the Chinese community. Nowhere does this show out more than in his inclusion of Confucian literature in the literature supplied by the Anglican Chinese Mission. In 1897-1898 a report on the issue by an experienced former China missionary and public servant in Hong Kong, the Rev. Dr Ernst Eitel, resulted in considerable tension with the authorities in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, (see Chapter 5). It is an example of the balance that Cheong had to maintain in order to deal with the fact that many Chinese saw any toleration of European religion as a betrayal of China’s cultural superiority.

Despite the difficulties of overcoming 19th century Chinese anti-foreign sentiment there were many conversions that involved men looking past the issues on which the elite Chinese, such as Cheong and his father, spoke so strongly. Conversions were due, in most instances, to close friendships between individuals, sometimes Europeans but more often, Chinese. An example of a European friendship was given by Ham Yeng Tang in his testimony:

Last year, I met with a European Christian, Mr Philip Bennett, of Campbell’s Creek, who was very friendly with me, and invited me to go to the Wesleyan Church, in Campbell’s Creek, to hear the Gospel. After the service, many of the Christian friends came and spoke to me and appeared very glad to see me at Church. This I was surprised at. I thought there must be something in this religion to induce these persons, who were strangers to me, to be so kind to me, who could neither speak nor understand English.61

Another Methodist convert, Tse Tak stated:

When we went to Church, all Christian friends loved us very much, but this blacksmith most of all. Every Sunday he taught me English, and the Truth in his house, and his wife was to me as a mother.62

Chung Ah Shaw of Maldon gave a similar story, this time involving a Chinese Christian:

Not long ago, I became a gardener. A good many English friends invited me to go to Church, but I would not go. A Christian Chinaman, James Ham King Yong, a gardener, was very kind, and asked me to go with him and hear the truth, but I did not understand much English and could not gain much information. I only knew that church did the people good, therefore I went every Sunday until now, about

---

four years. Some English friends loved me like a brother, therefore I thought this
truth is good. 63

Leong On Tong’s conversion through friendship with Leong A Toe (described as Lean Ato
in the citation) was described by the Rev. Josiah Cox, of the English Wesleyan Methodist
Church in China, when he visited Castlemaine during a tour of Australia to advise the
Methodist Mission Committee:

He was favoured with a good Chinese education, which extended over seventeen
years. When about twenty years of age he came to the colonies, and resided, with
various success, at Ballaarat and Castlemaine for four years before he heard the
Gospel. At about this time, Lean Ato, the former catechist, invited him to the chapel,
and happily this lead to his finding the knowledge of Christ. The sincerity,
consistency and ability of Leong On Tong marked him out as successor to Lean Ato
when the latter removed to China. 64

Friendship was the basis of Peng-nam’s conversion. In 1859 he was carting goods to the
Chinese camps in the northeast goldfields where he met Chinese Christians associated
with the Anglican Church Missionary Society of Victoria (CMSV):

I returned from the Buckland to the Ovens . . . I happened to meet with Fan A Wye 65,
who advised me to strive to enter into the strait gate, and requested me to believe
upon Jesus Christ, whereby we shall obtain everlasting life. When I heard these
sayings, I thought it was mere advice to the world to do good, and to check evil.
Again I paid a visit to the chapel one Sunday. My attention was roused by Fan A
Wye’s sermons; this is the time to come, this is the time of repentance. When it was
over, I was asked whether I ever heard of the doctrines of the Kingdom of God. I
replied that I have heard of them, when first I landed in Melbourne but I could not
comprehend their particulars up to the present time, because I had to attend to my
business for the support of myself and my family, and had no leisure to discover the
truth. 66

Cheong Peng-nam and Lui Fun-sing were baptised in Christ Church (Anglican),
Beechworth on 22nd July 1860. 67 Soon afterward Peng-nam accepted the position of
Cantonese catechist with the Presbyterian Mission at Ballarat supervised by William
Young. 68 Young (a Fukienese speaker) did not speak Cantonese well enough to undertake
serious religious discussions. Peng-nam’s appointment reflected the profound cultural
barrier that separated the European and Chinese colonists:

65 Fan A Wye was a former student of the London Missionary Society’s Anglo-Chinese College in Hong
Kong.
67 Christ Church Beechworth, Baptismal Register, 22 July 1860.
68 For an overview of Young’s background see Welch, Ian (1980), Pariahs and Outcasts, Christian
Missions to the Chinese in Australia, MA, (unpublished) Monash University. See also Appendix 9,
footnote.
Mr. Young having represented to the Committee that it was impossible for him single-handed to oversight the work, they appointed Pong Nam, a baptised Chinese, to act temporarily as catechist. He is a young man of considerable acquirements, and apparently honest in his profession of Christianity. 69

British evangelical Christianity as practised in Victoria provided little help to Chinese converts about reconciling their traditional values and obligations with their new religious beliefs. Many, perhaps a majority, resumed their cultural traditions when they returned to China without necessarily renouncing their Christianity.

This is one of the most complex of all issues involving Christianity when, as is still the case for Christians worldwide, most people tend to practise their religion within the conventions of their community’s social, economic and cultural practices. Many Chinese, including many who remained in Australia, reflected the European norm of avowing a nominal form of Christianity but rarely attending a church. Denominational statistics suggests that less than half the Chinese who were baptised became regular communicants.

By the time of Cheong’s death in 1928 a wide gap had opened between the few 19th century immigrants and the majority of Australians of full or part Chinese ethnicity who were assimilated into the wider Australian society. This group was split between a minority, mostly of full Chinese ethnicity, who continued to identify with China as ‘home’ and a majority, often of part-Chinese ethnicity but including families such as the Cheongs, who saw only Australia as ‘home’. The growing complexity of ‘Chinese identity’ in the Australian environment meant that old ties, and particularly the web of traditional lineage and district relationships outlined in this chapter, faded away. The advent of the war with Japan followed by the Communist republic in 1949 further weakened the links between Chinese- Australia and mainland China.

In the longer term, the small minority of Chinese Christians in Victoria associated with the 19th century era of evangelisation were to experience a profound clash of cultures when, in the post 1960s, changes in China itself and changes in Australian immigration policy, saw the entry into Australia of an entirely new style of Chinese identity and with it, a more culturally affirmative version of Chinese Christianity.

Chinese Christianity in Australia has been affected by changes in China and in Australian migration patterns. In the period following the Great Proletarian Cultural

69 The Australian Messenger and Presbyterian Review, October and November 1861, p 263. Cheong Peng Nam was variously referred to as Ping Nam, Pong Nam, and Pen Ang. See also The Age, 11 November 1863).
Revolution experiment in the crushing of dissent instigated by Mao Tse-tung the small population of Christians from European missionary churches were mostly forced into the fellow-travelling Catholic and Protestant Patriotic Churches dominated by the Communist Party. What small contacts had been maintained between Chinese churches in Australia and those in China ended.

A small number of dissident Christians formed ‘underground’ churches. As the ‘missionary’ generation passed away most leaders of the ‘underground’ churches formed their belief system through Bible reading independently of foreign contacts and, although persecuted by the regime, were free of the old accusation of being friends of China’s enemies. These churches have expanded dramatically in recent years with some estimates suggesting more than fifty million Chinese Christians. Others, notably Catholics, went ‘underground’ to preserve an apostolic succession and ministry loyal to Rome.

Australia experienced an influx of Christians from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia many of whom had a different assessment of what it meant to be Chinese and of what it meant to be a Chinese Christian.\(^{70}\) To add to the complexity, many of the new arrivals spoke Mandarin and not the rural Taishanese dialect that dominated the Victorian Chinese community. The ‘new’ Chinese Christians possessed a worldview at odds with the Christianity of the ‘old’ Australian-born Cantonese churches left over from the evangelising efforts of the mainstream churches in 19th century Australia. This was to become a major issue in the case of the Anglican Chinese Mission when attempts by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne to instal a multicultural ministry based in the mission premises led, to a serious conflict (See Chapter 5).

In the next chapter, the scene moves from Cheong’s place in the Chinese community to his emergence as a candidate for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church and his first experiences as a leader of his countrymen.

---
