Chapter 3
The Presbyterian Years
1863-1875

Peng-nam’s conversion in 1860, his employment as a Presbyterian catechist (lay evangelist), and the subsequent improvement in the family’s financial circumstances that followed call for some reflection about his motivation, i.e., did he convert from conviction or for family advancement? There is nothing in his writings or in the reports in the Presbyterian church press to suggest that anyone questioned his sincerity or that of his immediate supervisor, the ‘Rev’ William Young. The evidence is that he was a sincere Christian and one measure is that his son, Cheok Hong Cheong and Cheok Hong’s children, were to remain permanently identified with Christianity.

The few surviving extracts from Peng-nam’s journals reveal him as a willing catechist although the combined efforts of Young and Peng-nam were not marked by many baptisms.\(^1\) Young’s early reports, with the Victoria Chinese Mission (1855-1858) and then with the Presbyterians, (1860 onwards) show a good deal of ‘pious fraud’ but this faded with the passage of the years.\(^2\) Peng-nam’s reports include the evangelical call for conversion, commitment and a change in lifestyle but he was intelligent enough to realise that his employers expected such language. The following is one example of his style:

July 27. Engaged this forenoon in conversing with friends . . . about gospel truths. In the afternoon, went to a number of shops in the Main-road, and pointed out to the people the great evil of opium smoking. I urged them speedily to give up the habit. Some of them said they were aware of the injury they received from it but felt they could not give it up. Others said that their smoking of opium was not worse than the drinking of spirits indulged in by Europeans in hotels. It was in this way they entertained guests, and talked over worldly affairs. I told them of the power opium had of gradually undermining their constitutions; and that body and soul were endangered thereby. Why did they

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1 For evangelical Christians, a conversion (turning to Christ and away from sin) occurs prior to baptism. It was the normal practice in all the Victorian Missions to the Chinese to publish pre-baptismal testimonies as evidence of the prior conversion experience.

2 Pious Fraud involved three strands. First, Britain’s (and Europe/North America) imperial influence was given by God to extend Christianity to the world. Second, God would intervene to influence the pagan to believe and, third, that converting the Chinese in Australia (and elsewhere such as New Zealand and North America) would hasten the conversion of China. As an example, the founder of the Victoria Chinese Mission, the Congregational minister, Rev. John Legg Poore said in 1855: ‘China with its 300 millions of heathens is not far off. But China is sending a portion of her population to this land, and thousands of the inhabitants of that vast empire are now learning the English language on our gold-fields and will return to explain the Christian religion to their countrymen.’ The Mount Alexander Mail, 9 March 1855. The Church of England Record, January 1856, p 3.
not believe the doctrines of the gospel, and trust in the name of Jesus to deliver them from this practice of entertaining guests. They would then find peace in this world, and life everlasting in heaven. Would not this be delightful? Young’s ministerial supervisor at Ballarat East, the Rev. Duncan Fraser, whose parish of Ballarat East included the Presbyterian Chinese Mission, told the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1863 that: ‘Mr. Young, from his faithful, zealous and earnest spirit, made but little noise, and consequently he was not . . . heard of as some people in the same field might be’. And quiet Young and Peng-nam certainly were! From 1855 to 1864 the two men were not directly responsible for one baptism although several converts prepared by Young before the collapse of the Victoria Chinese Mission were baptised by the Methodists at Castlemaine in 1858. Not surprisingly Young, as the Superintendent, became a target for criticism of the mission’s effectiveness. He resigned in 1867 when, through the good offices of a leading Presbyterian ruling elder and businessman, James Balfour, he was appointed Chinese Interpreter-General. In the two years Young held the position he produced his Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population of Victoria. His effectiveness as Interpreter-General must be doubted given that, as mentioned in Chapter 1, he did not speak Taishanese/Cantonese, the dominant Chinese dialect in Victoria. He held the government appointment for about two years before he resigned and resumed his duties with the Mission until replaced by the Rev. William Matthew.

In an 1899 interview Cheok Hong described the family’s background, albeit with some hyperbole:

Mr. Cheok Hong Cheong . . . is superintendent missionary of Victoria. He conducts the services, and is the principal head and front of the whole movement. He was born 23rd December 1853, in Fatshan, Kwong-Tung Province, China. He received his early education in that city which he left with his parents in 1863. His grandfather, a banker of considerable standing, was ruined at the time of the Taiping rebellion, which caused a general upheaval in Chinese society, and the son, Cheong pengnam, decided to leave his native land for Australia, where he hoped, if possible, to restore the fallen fortunes of his family.

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4 The Age, 11 November 1863.
5 James Balfour was a Presbyterian lay elder. In September 1855 he founded the Geelong Chinese Evangelisation Society (See Welch, Ian (1980), Pariahs and Outcasts, Christian Missions to the Chinese in Australia, MA, Monash University. Although several biographies have appeared, none deal with his evangelical interests or his long-term support for Chinese evangelisation — See Harper, Andrew, (1918); Balfour, G H (1931); Lemon, Andrew, (1982).
7 In 1885 Cheong was appointed to lead the Anglican Chinese Mission, see Chapter 5.
8 1851 is suggested in some sources and is followed in this study.
9 The Weekly Times, 2 August 1899, p 14. This report was written after an interview with Cheong. The family claims of banker status are Cheong’s.
In 1892, the Rev. Dr. James Legge, a former missionary of the London Missionary Society and head of the Anglo-Chinese College in Hong Kong, met Cheong at an anti-opium meeting in London. After prompting from Cheong, Legge ‘remembered’ meeting Cheong and his family at Hong Kong in 1863 while the family was en-route to Australia. Whether Legge actually did recall them, or was just being polite, is unknown. There is no record of Legge ever having any written communication with Peng-nam or Cheok Hong. Cheok Hong later claimed that his family had a close relationship with Legge and other prominent China missionaries:

I myself have had the pleasure of being associated with men who have laboured long & devotedly in Canton Province, such as the Rev Dr Legge DD LLD, G Piercy, F Storrs Turner BA, Silvester Whitehead, T G Selby, Wm Young and Daniel Vrooman MA. . . I have had occasion moreover to act the part of an Interpreter to the Rev Wm Young and Daniel Vrooman MA while they respectively were attempting to impart instruction to my Father’s and my own Bible Class although they have an average of over twenty years China experience.

As the statement stands, his claims to ‘being associated’ means no more than having met the men mentioned, perhaps just once or twice during his six-month visit to England in 1891-2 on behalf of the British Anti-Opium Society. Cheong indulged in ‘name-dropping’ from time to time. This character trait should be kept in mind when considering later statements, including his claims about his grandfather’s status in the 1899 interview cited above.

Cheok Hong’s claim about his family can be compared to Peng-nam’s restrained testimony in 1860 (Chapter 1). Cheok Hong claimed that his grandfather, Cheong Ming Cham, was a ‘banker of substance’ in Fatshan. Peng-nam stated that his family was ‘in business’ but makes no reference to what the business was. Peng-nam and Cheok Hong agreed that the family had fallen on bad times hence Peng-nam’s arrival in Victoria in 1854.

Whatever the Cheong’s status may have been in China there is no doubt that Cheok Hong made a significant impression on those who met him in his early years in Victoria. A report in the Presbyterian Church newspaper stated:

When Peng Nam was here at Christmas, he brought his son with him, a fine intelligent young lad, about sixteen. He is a scholar in one of our common schools in Ballarat and is quite intelligent. Could means be provided, especially for this object, he could be trained in the Scotch College, Ballarat, and afterwards

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10 *The Friend of China*, July 1892, p 137.
11 Personal communication from Dr Lauren Pfister, Baptist University of Hong Kong, an expert in Legge’s writings.
12 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Very Rev G O Vance, Dean of Melbourne, 25 November 1897.
join the University and Divinity Hall in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{13} Had Cheok Hong remained in China he may have achieved high scholarly rank.\textsuperscript{14} Status in Imperial China was achieved through highly competitive examinations at district, provincial and national levels. Only well-off families could afford to keep a boy at school for the necessary twenty years or more.\textsuperscript{15} Village schools were taught by men who did not achieve the higher standards needed to secure government positions.\textsuperscript{16}

Cheok Hong Cheong achieved more in Victoria than he could reasonably have expected had he lived in China. In Australia he experienced a different intellectual and socio-cultural formation and had a lifestyle entirely different to that of his peers in China. Had he stayed in China he might have been just another of China’s labouring millions.

The published testimonies of Christian converts suggest that most Chinese had some village primary schooling but literacy levels were low. The Rev R M Cobbold of the CMS China Mission wrote:

Boys are at school four or five years before they can understand a single word of what they read: they only say their lessons like a parrot, without knowing a word of the meaning of what they utter.\textsuperscript{17}

The majority of Victorian Chinese converts said that they had less than three years’ schooling. Lo Sam-yuen reported meeting some men at Ballarat who took fright when he produced a book:

Today I went to the Gravel Pit and had a talk with five persons in a store. They were all illiterate men, and seeing me take out a book and read it they appeared alarmed and said, we are all uneducated men, were you to read the book to us it would be of no use.\textsuperscript{18}

Cheok Hong seems to have been exaggerating Chinese literacy when he stated in 1879: Ours is a well-educated people. Indeed, it is but seldom that you could discover a Chinaman incapable of reading, writing, and ciphering. Can you assert the same of all English and Irish men?\textsuperscript{19}

The following table, constructed from prebaptismal testimonies in Victoria, provides a sample of the education, age and occupations given by converts in their pre-baptismal testimonies (See Appendix 10).

\textsuperscript{13} The Christian Review, February 1869.
\textsuperscript{14} Even today, Guangdong people are rarely found at the top of Chinese government. Only one of the nine members of the Politburo of 2002 is from Guangdong Province.
\textsuperscript{15} See Miyazaki, Ichisada, (1976), China’s Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China, London and New Haven, Yale University Press.
\textsuperscript{17} Church Missionary Intelligencer, Vol II No 5, May 1852, p 64.
\textsuperscript{18} Journal of Lo Sam-yuen, Ballarat, 16 March 1858.
\textsuperscript{19} Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong, Louis Ah Mouy 1879, p 10, (See discussion in Chapter 3).
Table 3.1
Chinese Immigrant Education, from Victorian Testimonies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Age at baptism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul Wan Yuk Chau</td>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>33 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Tam Hsi Man</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>54 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Lee Man Ching</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>30 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Ham Yeng Tang</td>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Hun Bak Tsing</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>25 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thos Leong Yek Foong</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>47 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ye Ling Pong</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>30 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lum Khen Yang</td>
<td>Eleven yrs</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Ham Yan Toi</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>39 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwaan Tsip Hing</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>43 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Kwaan Choi Yau</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>43 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Chung Ah Shaw</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>36 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Quon Hoe Gee</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>31 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Chung Kat</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>30 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonah Lee Yim Sung</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>36 years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The traditional Chinese respect for educated men continued in Australia. Jacob Hung Wah Fat, a Methodist convert, had been a village schoolteacher and was described as a ‘man of substance’. He prospered and there are several references to him hosting Christians from the country districts at his home in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond. Leong On Tong, the Methodist catechist and later ordained minister, was described as ‘having a good Chinese education.’ Peng-nam claimed a full schooling, perhaps twelve years.

An American missionary in China described Chinese village schooling in 1875:

Every village and neighbourhood has its school, every town its academy, every county its college, every state its university, and the empire its imperial college at the imperial capital . . . The Chinese primary school . . . teacher gathers his own pupils, and derives his support from tuition fees paid by the scholars. The Celestials build no schoolhouses. The teacher obtains the loft of a . . . house, a room in a common dwelling, an apartment in the village or neighbourhood temple, and the rent, if any, is assessed upon the scholars, included in the term bills . . . In the primary school, the master has about twenty scholars, seated on bamboo stools, at wooden tables, furnished with the Sangche-king, the Three-Character-Classic, . . . containing about a thousand words, and about half that number of separate characters. The first great object is to learn the characters, by repeating them, line by line, after the teacher, as he pronounces them to the class. Both teacher and scholar use a singsong tone and a high key. Every one of the twenty scholars studies and recites at the top of his voice. A Chinese schoolroom is a bawling Babel, and at all hours of the day parents have audible evidence that the children are studying their lessons.

China was unique in the 19th century world in having a nationwide provision of privately

20 The Wesleyan Chronicle, 20 March 1869.
funded village primary schools following a common curriculum although these fee-based schools provided only for those who could pay.\textsuperscript{22} At village level, roughly equivalent to Australian and American Grades 1-8, the Chinese primary school curriculum comprised just three texts — The Thousand-Character-Classic; The Three-Character-Classic; and The Hundred Names. A boy who completed village schooling would have memorised about 2000 characters in all.\textsuperscript{23} The curriculum shaped a common intellectual culture that was valued and respected by all Chinese and provided the common element of Chinese identity, sometimes labelled ‘Confucian culturalism’, that transcended the many ethnic and cultural differences within China.\textsuperscript{24}

The impact of the traditional curriculum upon the culture of China described by Chen was an almost pathological fear of disorder and in consequence a tradition, if not always a reality, of conformity and obedience. Chinese schooling conveyed no sense of individual rights or of a rule of law above family. It presented a view of China as an extended family in which the will of the Emperor was supreme in the same way as the will of the father in the family. There was no concept of civil authority that was preeminent over the Emperor’s, or the father’s, whims. Young Chinese learned that success in society:

Rested on a reward and punishment system in which all people were to obey a heaven-ordained emperor and behave according to the hierarchical order prescribed by Confucianism. In the Confucian hierarchical order, subjects should obey rulers, sons should obey fathers, and wives should obey husbands. This cultural psychology set the authoritarian tone for the political and social order of Chinese society and the Chinese family. Disobedience to or rebellion against authority was punishable at both family and state levels.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} Rawski, op cit. Research into the Kucheng Mission of the Church Missionary Society indicates that in that province, schools were few and far between. The CMS employed many scholars to teach in village primary schools in which the Bible, as well as the traditional Chinese classics, were taught as a means of evangelism and enculturation of the children of converts. Unlike Chinese schools, Christian primary schools for girls were also available, although less common than for boys.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. Literacy was a prerequisite to full participation in the higher levels of the Chinese cultural heritage. Primary schooling (i.e., 2000 characters) does not constitute real literacy in Chinese.


There is nothing in Cheong’s letterbooks about the standard of education he reached in China or its long-term impact on his way of thinking. It is only by comparing his age upon arrival in Australia against the usual conventions of village education that his Chinese primary school education can be assessed. His Chinese studies ended when he was enrolled in the colonial school system. His eldest son, the Rev. James Cheong, MA, (see Chapter 5) spent hours developing an educated hand. James’ efforts suggest that Cheok Hong did not have the background to provide a Chinese classical education to his family. Brotchie suggests that Cheong did teach some Chinese to Melbourne candidates of the China Inland Mission. No evaluation is available.

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26 The Christian Review, December 1870.
27 Brotchie, Phillip Edgar, (1999), The Importance of the Contribution of Australians to the Penetration of China by the China Inland Mission in the Period 1888-1953, with Particular Reference to the Work of Australian Women Missionaries, PhD, Deakin University, Geelong.
When he arrived in Ballarat in 1863, Cheok Hong was enrolled in the Ballarat East Common School. The Victorian education system then, as now, had two parallel school systems. The equivalent of the state or public school was the Common School, funded by the government with low fees. The churches ran a parallel system of schools, also funded by the government through the Denominational Schools Board but charging higher fees. Secondary education, other than through the church system, was not available for most children.

The Cheong family in Ballarat saw at first hand the fate of children whose parents were not able to afford school fees. Young’s opening of a mission school for Chinese, mixed ethnicity and poor European children, at Golden Point, reinforced Peng-nam’s views about the importance of a good education. The Ballarat Chinese Presbyterian Mission primary school was a ‘ragged school’ financed by a prosperous and philanthropic Presbyterian elder, James Murdoch, a bush carpenter turned successful chain grocer. The extent of Cheong’s role is unclear although he seems to have been a ‘monitor’ working with younger children while Young taught the older ages. This was a common practice at the time. Although Cheong claimed that: ‘He was . . . given the full charge of a Mission Day School when only 18 years of age’, this is not confirmed by the Mission archives.

The Victorian Education Act of 1872 provided that primary education would be secular, free and compulsory for all children although it was another generation before virtually all children finished primary school. Young made a passing reference to the introduction of universal primary schooling in 1872:

> The new Education Act that has come into operation will put educational advantages still within the reach of the particular class for which our school was intended, so that they will not be left destitute of teaching; as they were before our school was established; and I am glad to see the parents of this class availing themselves of the advantages the new Act offers them. While the State, then, provides these children with secular education, I shall do my best to provide them religious instruction, combining with it lessons in singing, which, as I have already stated, the children are exceedingly fond of. By this means I hope to keep them still linked to the mission; to let them drift away entirely from us would materially lessen our influence over the Chinese population.

The legislation included all children of primary school age, irrespective of their ethnic background, a significant step at a time when North American public schools excluded Chinese.

29 Minutes of the Chinese and Aborigines Mission Committee, 18 October 1871; 28 November 1871; 14 February 1872.
30 Cheok Hong Cheong to Rev Canon S L Chase, 20 May 1891.
32 This is another of the many issues that remain unresearched at the time of writing this thesis.
In July 1866 the Presbyterian *Christian Review* announced the baptism of Peng-nam’s family, by the Rev. Duncan Fraser, at St John’s Presbyterian Church, Peel Street, Ballarat East. Fraser kept a press clipping of the event in his Bible for nearly half a century until his death, when his daughter passed it on to Cheong. Those baptised were Mrs Cheong (Yeet Kwy Phang See) aged thirty-two years; Cheok Hong, thirteen years; the elder daughter, Fong-sen, twelve years of age; and Ah Chin, aged nine. The church paper reported that the baptismal responses were made by the family in Chinese (i.e., Taishanese/Cantonese) and were repeated in English by Cheong Peng-nam.

A few additional words to those in Chapter 2 are needed to place Cheong in the predominantly evangelical religious culture of 19th century Victoria and its British origins. For evangelicals, salvation is attained only by a personal acceptance of Christ’s substitutionary atonement (conversion — *chongsheng dejiu jingli*) that was evidenced, or proven, by a changed personal life. Cheong reflected these values in his account of one prominent (Anglican) Christian convert and catechist:

William Ching Wah, a man of humble rank and modest education, but full of zeal in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ, he was instant in season and out of season . . . among his countrymen. For a considerable period he laboured as an honorary evangelist, and while devoting his spare time to the work of preaching the Gospel he supported himself by the labours of his own hands.

The 19th century test of an evangelical conversion was the changed life that was expected to show itself in ‘disinterested benevolence’, i.e., doing good to others with no expectation of anything in return. The overall view was summed up in the *Evangelical Magazine*:

When a man tells me, ‘That he knows his sins are forgiven, that Christ loved him and gave himself for him, and that his eternal life is safe in his hands, I do look for more than words: *actions*, that speak louder than words, in this case, are necessary for my conviction. I am not satisfied with negative righteousness, without the additional suitable deportment to glorify God.
The Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* of 1571. Article 12 - Good Works states that:

> Albeit that good works, which are the fruits of faith and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins and endure the severity of God's judgement, yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.

One significant outcome of ‘disinterested benevolence’ among British evangelicals following the religious revival of the late 18th century was the creation, during the 19th century, of a wide-ranging reformist strand of voluntary aid societies. ‘Disinterested benevolence’ is grounded in Jesus’ statement about loving one’s neighbours without limit in defining ‘neighbour’. Disinterested benevolence was held to be the Christian’s proper response to God’s unmerited love for the redeemed. The emphasis in 19th century evangelical voluntary societies was on the transformation of individual lives rather than the reconstruction of society as a whole. Inevitably the structures of society itself came to be seen as factors contributing to individual suffering. Among the people most influenced by this trend was the Scottish evangelical Christian and co-founder of the British Labour Party, Keir Hardie. A similar pattern of Christian participation in everyday politics also occurred in Australia as part of a theological process labelled, the ‘social gospel.’

The benevolence cum missionary strand of evangelicalism was exemplified, in Cheong’s experience, by the Church Missionary Society of Victoria (1857) and its two successors, the Church Missionary Association of Victoria (1892) and the Church Missionary Society of Victoria, Reformed (1898). All three relied on the support of individual Anglican clergy and laity. They received no institutional financial support from the Anglican Church and relied on voluntary contributions from sympathetic parishes and individual church members.

Cheong’s baptism in 1866, just three years or so after his arrival in Ballarat, and in a context of a formalised family ritual where his mother and sisters were also baptised, requires some consideration of his ‘conversion’. Without a genuine experience, the ‘inner warmth’ that John Wesley famously described, acts of benevolence, while laudable enough in their own right, say nothing of the grace of God in enabling salvation or of the

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believer’s duty to God. In classical British theology, good works done without faith, or works of supererogation, do not attract God’s approval but rather divine condemnation.

Article 13 - Works before Justification in the Anglican Church’s Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion declares that:

Works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea, rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

Article 14 - Works of Supererogation, states clearly and unequivocally that:

Voluntary works besides, over and above, God’s commandments which they call Works of Supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogance and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for His sake than of bounden duty is required: Whereas Christ said plainly, When you have done all that are commanded to you, say, We are unprofitable servants.

Cheok Hong Cheong affirmed his personal faith on at least two significant occasions. He participated in a confirmation service in 1872 and made a public declaration of his faith and his acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith at his induction as a Presbyterian ruling elder at the Napier Street, (Fitzroy), Presbyterian Church in 1884. There is nothing in Cheong’s Letterbooks or other sources to indicate if Cheong ever had the kind of conversion experience that so changed his father’s life. When Cheok Hong was admitted to the Presbyterian Theological Hall and ten years later when he was offered, and accepted, the Superintendency of the Church Missionary Society of Victoria and the Church Missionary Association of Victoria, no doubts were ever expressed about the genuineness of his Christian commitment.

Everyone who knew the young Cheok Hong Cheong could see his promise and there was a genuine interest in advancing his education. In an address to the 1870 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, the Rev. Duncan Fraser declared that:

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43 A significant study of the impact of conversion in foreign missionary work will be found in Jarrett-Kerr, Martin, (1972), Patterns of Christian Acceptance: Individual Responses to the Missionary Impact, 1550-1950, London, Oxford University Press.
44 Cheong’s initial formation was as a Presbyterian, and he received his theological education within that Christian tradition. The much longer Presbyterian ‘articles of religion’ are set out in the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647. Chapter XV1-Of Good Works, presents a more tightly formed argument than the Articles but the substance is similar, i.e., ‘Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intention. Westminster Confession of Faith, (1981), Edinburgh, Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.
45 The Christian Review, December 1873.
47 Campbell, Rev A J, (1889), Fifty Years of Presbyterianism in Victoria, Melbourne, M L Hutchinson, p 165.
He wished now to point out that, while they were looking abroad for a competent European superintendent for the work they had in hand, there was among them a young man — a full-born Chinese — nineteen or twenty years of age, a baptised Christian, a good English scholar, and capable of teaching his countrymen: why not employ him?

The Minutes of the Chinese and Aborigines Missions Committee read, ‘Mr. R O McCoy, Headmaster, Ballarat College, sends bill for Cheok Hong Cheong’s education but encloses personal cheque in full payment.’ Cheok Hong received his junior secondary schooling in 1870-1871 and was a featured speaker at the Speech Night at the close of the 1871 school year.

The few glimpses of the family style of Cheong Peng-nam show that in immediate domestic matters, he followed the Chinese custom of the senior male being the decision-maker. Peng-nam arranged Cheok Hong’s marriage, when he was about seventeen years old, to a young Chinese woman, Miss Wong Toy Yen, a daughter of one of the few Chinese families in Ballarat. The two were married on 4 October 1869 at the Ballarat mission with William Young and Peng-nam as witnesses. Toy Yen was born on 10 October 1849 in Hockshan, a district adjoining Taishan to the north and west. Her mother’s name was recorded as Young Cheong Se. Her lineage village was part of a cluster of villages at the meeting point of Xinhui, Taishan, and Hockshan that contributed many Chinese immigrants to Victoria. The bride was older than the groom and Peng-nam may have negotiated a good dowry for her marriage to a young man with prospects. Although now a married man Cheok Hong had to continue his secondary schooling if he was to enter the Presbyterian ministry. His father remained the family provider.

Entry to the Presbyterian Theological Hall, a part-time institution, required Cheok Hong to matriculate into the University of Melbourne. Matriculation classes (Year 12) were only available in Melbourne but Peng-nam had more than this on his mind. On the 19th June 1872, Mrs Cheong Peng-nam passed away at the age of forty years after what the papers described as a long and painful illness later attributed to cancer.

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48 Minutes of the Chinese and Aborigines Mission Committee, 29 December 1870. Ballarat College was affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of Victoria but in 1971 came under the jurisdiction of the Victorian Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia as Ballarat and Clarendon College.

49 Victorian Pioneer Index. Mrs Cheong’s name was recorded on the marriage certificate as Wong Toy Yen. Apsey 108-9 records Mrs Cheong’s name from an unknown source as Choy Ying Nong.

50 Apart from this information from mission sources, attempts to identity the Wong family in Ballarat have been unsuccessful.

51 In general, Chinese wives tended to be younger than their husbands but this tradition was exaggerated in the diaspora communities. There is discussion of this issue in 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.


53 Illustrated Australian News, 15 July 1871, p 143.
In September the Mission Committee accepted Peng-nam’s resignation as a result of ‘scandalous’ reports but the exact nature of the scandal cannot be identified. Peng-nam’s subsequent active church participation suggests that the whole affair was ‘stage managed’ by Peng-nam to facilitate moving his family to Melbourne.54 Peng-nam set up business as a wholesale banana merchant in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. It is possible that Lowe Kong Meng, a key player in the banana industry in Victoria, was again of some help to the family, as he had been in 1863.55 Cheok Hong worked alongside his father in the business and received his family’s full keep.

The family attended the Napier Street Presbyterian Church, Fitzroy. The Minister, the Rev. Robert Hamilton, asked Peng-nam to form a Chinese Bible Class. Hamilton was convener of the Mission Committee and his action suggests that the scandal in Ballarat was not of sufficient concern to disqualify Peng-nam from evangelistic work. Cheok Hong became Hamilton’s regular Chinese Interpreter with ‘encouraging results’.56

The Mission Committee arranged Cheok Hong’s enrolment at Scotch College, during 1873 and 1874 to complete the equivalent of today’s years 11 and 12. The school was then in Victoria Parade, Melbourne. His fees were again paid by one of his teachers, Alexander Morrison, uncle of the famous Australian journalist, ‘Chinese’ Morrison.57 Cheong said that his preparation at Scotch College included:

A course of two years in English Literature and Elocution and prepared for my entrance examination in Logic, Natural Philosophy, Mental Philosophy, History of the British Empire and Scripture.58

When Cheok Hong came to Melbourne he spoke English with a Chinese accent. The elocution classes resulted in a cultivated English dialect acceptable to all sections of colonial society. In December 1874 he passed the entrance examination to the Presbyterian Theological Hall 59 and in March 1875 signed the Matriculation Roll of the University of Melbourne.60 He was twenty-three years of age. Theological education in Victoria in the 1870s was a struggle for all denominations.61 From its foundation, in 1853, the University of Melbourne has been a secular institution without a theological program. The courses

54 Minutes of the Chinese and Aboriginal Missions Committee, 17 September 1872.
56 Minutes of the Chinese and Aborigines Mission Committee, September 1873.
57 Annual Report of the Chinese and Aboriginal Missions Committee, Presbyterian Church of Victoria, November 1874.
58 Cheok Hong Cheong to Archdeacon Samuel Williams, Te Aute, New Zealand, 4 February 1898
59 The Christian Review, December 1875, p 16.
60 Records of the University of Melbourne.
attended by Cheong were provided by a part-time theological hall operated by the Presbyterian Assembly of Victoria.

The key personalities in shaping Victorian Presbyterian theological education in 19th century Victoria were the Rev. Dr Adam Cairns62 and a short-term tutor, the Rev. J O Dykes, a young minister of the Free Church of Scotland who was in Australia briefly for medical reasons. Cairns and Dykes were earnest evangelicals. Dykes introduced the neo-Calvinist writings of the American Presbyterians, Charles and A A Hodge of Princeton University, to Victorian Presbyterianism.63 Dyke’s successor was the Rev. A J Campbell, a local parish minister, with a conventional evangelical outlook and a pastor rather than a theologian or biblical scholar.64 Campbell’s practical experience encouraged Cheok Hong towards a Christian reformist view of social, cultural and political issues.

The first session of the Theological Hall commenced in 1866 with evening lectures in the homes of the professors. In 1868 the Hall met in the vestry of Chalmers’ Church, East Melbourne where Cheok Hong Cheong attended. It later moved to the Assembly Hall in Collins St and finally to Ormond College in the University of Melbourne. There were on average five students 1865-70, ten 1870-75, rising to fifteen 1875-85, so that by 1887 about one third of the ministers of the Victorian Presbyterian Church were locally trained.

The curriculum of the Theological Hall rested on the authority of the Bible as, to use the standard Presbyterian formulation, ‘the supreme standard of faith.’ As an evangelical, Cairns stressed the necessity of personal conversion with two further elements basic to evangelical theology. First, an emphasis on the Crucifixion of Jesus rather than his Incarnation, i.e., a crucicentric theology. Second, the concept of Christ giving his life as a substitute offering to God to atone for the sins of the whole world, i.e. substitutionary atonement. A belief in Biblical authority, together with conversion, crucicentrism and substitution remains at the core of evangelical belief.65

Cheok Hong’s Christian outlook was also shaped by his own life experience. Although he had only a child’s memory of China he was familiar with the everyday life of Chinese in Australia although, as mentioned in Chapter 1, he was never really experienced a

63 The substance of their approach to Christian theology can be found in Hodge, A A, (1879), Outlines of Theology, reprinted many times, any edition.
65 Bebbington, D W, (1989), Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, A History from the 1730s to the 1980s, London, Unwin Hyman. The leading exponent of evangelicalism in the United Kingdom since the 1950s has been the Rev John Stott, Rector Emeritus of All Souls Church, Langham Place, London. Stott’s prolific writings demonstrate the continuing importance of the four points mentioned. See also McGrath, Alister, (1994), Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity, London, Hodder and Stoughton.
Chinese-Victorian lifestyle either as a poor man or, more importantly, as a member of the merchant-elite. He accompanied his father on his visits and saw Chinese life in Ballarat at first hand. In Melbourne he was a regular, if not enthusiastic, visitor to the Chinese market garden areas and to the ‘Chinatown’ of Little Bourke Street and the surrounding streets and alleys. In the country areas of Victoria his visits to his own countrymen were, by his own admission, brief and rare (see Chapter 5). His participation in the Chinese community was as an useful elitist at the interface of European impact on the Chinese community rather than at the centre of community power, influence and status.

Peng-nam and Cheok Hong were well aware of the impact of enculturation on the attitudes of the Chinese to Christianity but they seem to have avoided any suggestion of syncretism or compromise. In Cheong’s view, a Chinese Christian had to reject elements of the Chinese culture that would impede their growth in Christian faith. He wrote:

> It is no rare thing therefore to find traces of their early up-bringing clinging still to converts and their teachers. To illustrate this and to show you their need to be more perfectly instructed in the way of God, let me give you a few instances that have come within my personal knowledge. At one mission station, in company with the Catechist, I visited a Chinese medical practitioner who professes Christianity and has been received into the visible church through the Sacrament of Baptism. In speaking of a condemned man who was about to be executed he expressed the hope that "at his next transmigration of soul the criminal might fare better than he was about to do in this life!" I waited to see if the Catechist would correct him before saying what I was about to say myself, but nothing came from his lips.

Peng-nam’s Christian faith, and biblical emphasis on conversion, was expressed at the baptismal service in the Napier Street Church for James Ah Kee on 14 September 1873:

> I am happy seeing you here tonight, so I must preach a few words of the gospel to you, from the text of John iii.5; Except a man be born of water and of spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus said to Nicodemus. At that time, Jesus was in the world. Then Nicodemus knew him to be a teacher come from God. His doctrines that He taught to the people are above all human teachings; so he came to Jesus by night to receive his instruction. Alas! he does not know Jesus is a Saviour who was sent by God to the world; therefore Jesus said unto him, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. But Nicodemus did not understand the meaning of what Jesus said, a man must be born again; so he answered and said to Jesus, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mothers womb, and be born? Therefore Jesus proclaimed the meaning of a man being born again, that it is of water and of spirit, because the water could cleanse the outward things which

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66 Christians in China (Catholic and Protestant) were not encouraged, and indeed were usually forbidden, to take part in any form of ancestral worship or to attend any formal acts of respect for Confucius. This ban was revoked for Catholics by Pope Pius XII in 1938. Chinese Protestants still generally do not take part in such domestic or family rituals. See Lo Lung-kwong, (2002), 'Identity Crisis Reflects in Romans 14:1 – 15:13 and the Implications to Chinese Christians' Controversies in Ancestor Worship', Vanderbilt University.

67 Cheok Hong Cheong, Address to the 1889 Annual Meeting of the Church Missionary Society of Victoria. The Australasian Missionary News, 3 January 1890.
were polluted, and spirit converts the human heart. A man must be converted in repentance, and change his old propensity; then he knows Jesus is a Saviour that would have him go into His kingdom. This friend who has been baptised tonight is just the same as a man born of water and of spirit. That is, God saved him by the washing of regeneration and renewing in the Holy Spirit, so he could enter into the Christian church. It is a great difference to his former condition; he is become a new creature now, namely, Jesus said, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Therefore Paul says, If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Dear friends, I think you have enjoyed seeing this sight here. I hope God will give His Holy spirit to fasten your faith until the end, never to change, and other friends who have not yet been baptised, that they will make haste, come to the path of truth and salvation; then will we be Christian brothers, to obtain the everlasting happiness all together in heaven.\textsuperscript{36}

When Cheong invited the English Baptist evangelist, Henry Varley, to preach in the Anglican Mission Church in Little Bourke Street, he asked Varley to seek conversions.\textsuperscript{68} He knew, from his father’s change of life circumstances, the impact of conversion on individuals.\textsuperscript{69} In his history of Chinese Missions in Victoria, Cheong wrote:

But some may be inclined to ask, “Are the converts you speak of genuine ‘good men & true’?” My experience extends over 62 years of Mission History in this country; I can unhesitatingly affirm that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has proved to them as it has proved to the more favoured Colonists “The power of God unto Salvation”.\textsuperscript{70}

That power could be seen not only in acts of benevolence but equally important when conversion motivated people to undo, where possible, any shortcomings in their pre-Christian behaviour. Cheong continued:

The first fruit of our Melbourne Mission was a gay spendthrift, distrusted and shunned by the respectable portion even of his own clansmen. For it had been his habit, not only to spend all he earned, but all he could borrow. Amid that wild career, however, he was suddenly seized with serious thoughts. He accepted my invitation to attend our Mission Services, and continued to do so most regularly for about eight months, and then applied for baptism. We, however, thought it wise to place him under further instruction for four or five months more, and then received him into the Church, through the Sacrament of Baptism. That was about two years ago. He has since proved the sincerity of his professions by his holy walk and conversation. He is now the sober and industrious man of business, respected and esteemed by those who formerly despised him. He has been very helpful to me in my work. Another was formerly a storekeeper, but had failed through indiscriminate credit. He came to Melbourne in the hope of repairing his broken fortune, but not finding anything suitable to his circumstances and business experience he fell into a lottery agency. It was there that we found him. We pointed out to him the iniquity of the traffic, not forgetting at the same time to deliver to him the Gospel of love.

\textsuperscript{68} There is a discussion of Varley’s contribution to Victorian life in Davison, Graeme, David Dunstan and Chris McConville, (1985), The Outcasts of Melbourne, Essays in Social History, Sydney, Allen and Unwin.

\textsuperscript{69} See conversion testimonies in Appendix 10.

\textsuperscript{70} Cheong Cheok Hong, (c 1898), Pamphlet, Christian Work Among the Chinese—What it has done, Melbourne, Church Missionary Society of Victoria, Re-formed.
He gave up the lottery agency and became a Christian. Sometime afterwards, he returned to the country whence he came, restarted in business and prospered. In a visit I paid his district last year, I heard of him and saw him. He had then repaid all his creditors, the largest of whom made this remark when he presented himself with the amount he owed him, “Well, I never expected it, and if you had not become a Christian, I suppose, you would not have troubled about paying it.” . . . Since he became a Christian he has felt himself involved in another and far heavier debt—even the debt of gratitude to his Saviour. To discharge that debt was utterly beyond his power. What then did he do? Well, he did simply this. He went and diligently sought out all those for whom Christ has left a legacy of love and endeavoured in that way to show his gratitude to his Saviour.71

Although Cheong pursued conversion, he tended to focus more on the right of the Chinese to equality and social justice, and this led him into serious conflict in his years with the Anglican Church (see Chapter 5). He saw, as many critics of evangelical individualism have observed, that conversion was not enough when the circumstances that caused men to suffer and to fall into sinful ways remained unchanged. He believed that his countrymen should enjoy equality of rights and freedom from discrimination and demonstrated this in his various attempts to influence colonial opinion that are discussed in subsequent chapters.72 He knew that among the principal Chinese objections to Christianity was its foreignness and its attacks on Chinese traditions, especially the practice of filial piety that tied family members to their ancestors.73 He did not believe, as his father seemed to imply in his 1865 Sandhurst address already cited, in an ‘evangelical orientalism’, i.e., that conversion of individual Chinese would put everything to rights in China. He accepted, like most Chinese committed to reform, that there were problems not only in the way Chinese society operated but in the values upon which actions were based.

The Rev. Arthur Smith, an American missionary tried to explain the relationship

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71 Ibid.

between Chinese culture and Christian theology.\textsuperscript{74} In commenting upon Smith’s best-known work, \textit{Chinese Characteristics}, Hayford noted that:

To put the matter too baldly, Smith, on the one hand, professes an Evangelical Orientalism, a conviction that China can become Christian and transform on the basis of its ancient civilization without Europeanising itself. On the other hand, Smith argues implicitly that only by transforming its inherited cultural and social characteristics along lines that we now see are actually European can China undergo the process of what we would now class ‘modernization.’ We feel a contrast between what he consciously argues and what he clearly but indirectly demonstrates.\textsuperscript{75}

Cheong was always in an ambivalent position as he tried to balance his call for conversions with his equally strong commitment to achieving social, economic and political justice for the Chinese in Victoria. He was in a constant tension between his Chinese ethnic heritage and his lifestyle as a middle-class colonial Christian who dressed like a European, was European educated, lived among Europeans and pursued some of his major business interests with Europeans.

Nothing symbolized this lifestyle challenge for Cheong and other elite members of Chinese-Australian society more than their domestic circumstances (see Chapter 1). What were the vast majority of impoverished and lonely Chinese to make of a man such as Cheong who chose never to live among his countrymen and who built a European ‘gentleman’s residence’ when he moved to \textit{Pine Lodge}, his luxurious home at Croydon (Chapter 6)? Why did he employ Europeans to renovate the property, rather than provide work for his fellow countrymen? Why do his occasional references to farm labour indicate that the employees were Europeans, rather than his own countrymen?

The barriers to conversion represented by the inherited ‘traditions and customs’ of China were described in the catechists’ weekly reports and the question arises why, given the obstacles, thousands of Chinese in Australia, and in North America, as well as in China, accepted Christianity? This is essential to understanding Peng-nam’s conversion and Cheok Hong’s life as a Chinese Christian and community leader. The question of Cheong’s identity, as a Chinese and a Christian, will be discussed more fully in Chapter 11.

The journals of the Chinese catechists (missionaries) show Sunday mornings spent encouraging Chinese to come to the afternoon church service that was usually followed by


an evening meal. Shared meals generated a friendliness that is characteristic of many Chinese Australian churches. Saturday nights were almost always a social gathering, usually in the missionary’s house. There was often a mid-week Bible class and meal at the catechist’s house that was located among other Chinese housing. In his testimony the Methodist convert David Hun Back Sing stated:

Mr. Leong-on-Tong removed to Yapeen, where I had been residing for three years. . . my tent was near to his, when he had leisure during the evening, he had conversations with me, and explained to me the truths of God, and told me what it was that constituted sin—what it was to have guilt. In the morning and evening he used to pray for me that God would give me his Holy Spirit to enlighten my mind. In this way, day-by-day, month-by-month, the darkness of my mind was gradually removed.76

The Rev. Robert Hamilton could see that Cheok Hong had no possibility of independent growth while he was totally dependent upon his father. At Hamilton’s instigation, the Mission Committee appointed Cheong as the English teacher, at a salary of £2 a week, in the Presbyterian Chinese Missionary Institution established at a special Committee meeting on 17 May 1875. The Institution opened in June 1875 in King William Street, Fitzroy.77 Cheok Hong’s only obligation was to provide the trainee catechists with one hour of English lessons a week, for which his £2 was very generous payment. A full-time catechist did not receive more.

The Institution was seen, and not only by Presbyterians, as a significant step towards providing theological education and ultimately ordination for all Chinese Christians after the Anglicans agreed to send their missionary students to the Institution. The Presbyterian Church paper announced with the usual evangelical triumphalism that the mission was about to enter a new stage with men trained, for the first time, for evangelism.78 Although the Institution soon failed the concept was sound and remained a permanent strand in Cheong’s thinking for many years (See Chapter 5). Five men, all with close personal associations with the Cheong family, were enrolled.

Ah Chue had been converted in the Anglican Mission at St Arnaud. He was baptised, with a man named Ah Pack, in the Napier Street Presbyterian Church on 9 July 1876. The interpreter at the service was Cheok Hong Cheong.79 James Ah Chue later became an ordained minister and Superintendent of the Presbyterian Mission. Ah Chue brought a friend, Daniel Leong Tsi, converted in a Methodist mission in Talbot, who later served for many years as an honorary Presbyterian catechist at Talbot.

76 The Wesleyan Chronicle, 20 December 1865, pp 183-186.
77 The Christian Review, December 1875, p 16.
78 Minutes of the Chinese and Aboriginal Missions Committee, 10 May 1875; 17 May 1875.
Paul Ah Chin was a convert of the Methodist Mission who had spent some time working as a Presbyterian catechist on the Otago goldfields in New Zealand. The South Island climate proved impossible for a man with a lifelong bronchial weakness and he returned to Melbourne.\(^{80}\) Ah Chin was a close friend of Peng-nam who, with the Rev. William Matthew, had been a referee for the job in Otago. After his return from New Zealand he worked with the Rev. William Matthew on a Chinese newspaper and a Chinese hymnbook based on one prepared in Amoy.\(^{81}\) Despite his frequent illnesses he became the longest serving Chinese Christian catechist spending many years working from the Brunswick Presbyterian Church.

John Young Wai was baptised at the Maryborough Anglican Church. He served as a Presbyterian catechist and subsequently became an outstandingly successful Presbyterian minister in New South Wales and an influential leader within the NSW Chinese community.\(^{82}\) Stephen Cheong was an Anglican convert. He returned to China after the Institution closed and worked with Anglican and Presbyterian missions.\(^{83}\)

The curriculum of the Presbyterian Missionary Institution was less about evangelism than it was about communication. Cheong’s appointment reflected a concern to give students enough skill in spoken English so that they could communicate with European ministers. There was general acceptance in all the Victorian Chinese missions that the lack of a good Chinese education, inadequate theological understanding and poor English created problems in supervising and managing Chinese catechists. European parochial supervisors and other church members had no real way of measuring the quality of the catechists’ work. The Methodist Mission sent some of Leong On Tong’s Chinese journal notes to the Rev. George Piercy in China for translation and evaluation. Piercy reported very favourably, noting the value of On Tong and the ‘freshness and clearness’ of the prebaptismal testimonies.\(^{84}\) The Bishop of Melbourne, in his presidential address to the 1884 Anglican Synod, summed up the concerns felt by all the Chinese mission committees:

> At present no one can thoroughly understand the reports of the Chinese missionaries, and, worse still, no one can test the real character of their labours by direct communication with those who profess to be converts.\(^{85}\)

The concept of a Chinese training centre was well grounded in the practical needs of

\(^{80}\) *The Christian Review*, September 1876, p 10.
\(^{81}\) The fonts and other items for these projects were financed by the Presbyterian elder, James Murdoch, who had earlier supported Young’s ‘ragged’ school at Ballarat. It is not known what became of the equipment.
\(^{82}\) Young Wai’s grandson, Dr John Yu, is the head of the New South Wales Children’s Hospital, Chancellor of Macquarie University and a one-time Australian of the Year.
\(^{83}\) Butler, Peter, (1977), *Opium and Gold*, Waiura, Martinborough, New Zealand.
\(^{85}\) *The Church of England Messenger*, 8 October 1874, p 11.
Chinese evangelism but the Missionary Institution was totally dependent on Hamilton. He made a number of unsuccessful attempts to secure government financial support as a primary school under the provisions of the 1872 Education Act mentioned earlier in connection with the Ballarat mission. Adding the Institution to his other roles as a busy parish minister and mission committee member affected Hamilton’s health. Upon medical advice he decided that he could no longer direct the work of the Institution and it closed after less than six months. The students were offered to any country parish that would accept them. At the beginning of 1876 the Institution re-opened and the students were recalled. The Committee was confronted with a demand for an improved curriculum and a request for full catechist rates of pay for the months they had spent working in various parts of Victoria. Hamilton and the Mission Committee were surprised and deeply disappointed to find that Cheok Hong Cheong was behind the student unrest. They had misread him, not comprehending his strong character, his deep ethnic pride, and his ambitious personal goals. His skills were grounded in his practical experience of dealing with people, initially in the context of the Ballarat mission, then in the family business, and also in his growing acceptance by the leading figures of the Chinese business community. The Committee reluctantly agreed to raise the student allowance from fifteen shillings to seventeen shillings and sixpence a week (i.e., £45 a year compared to the usual £100 for a Chinese catechist). As a money-raising venture it was agreed that other Chinese could board at the Institution and James Ah Kee, a friend of the Cheongs, was accepted as a paying boarder.

Cheok Hong further upset the Committee when he asked for payment for extra English classes that he had been giving to the students. The Committee had not authorized the classes and pointedly asked him if the extra work was affecting his theological studies. The Cheong family did not miss the hidden threats behind the formally polite exchanges. Cheok Hong knew he was risking his hopes of ordination as a Presbyterian minister.

Behind the episode was Cheong’s belief that Chinese Christians needed to control their own affairs and should not be accountable to Europeans who had no understanding of their culture or aspirations and took little interest in their day-to-day circumstances. The case of Leong On Tong at the Methodist Mission demonstrated the general European disinterest. The Chinese Methodist church at Castlemaine, a wooden building opened over

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86 The Christian Review, December 1875, p 16; January 1877, p 10; October 1877, p 15. Minutes of the Chinese and Aborigines Missions Committee, 7 June 1875; 18 January 1876.
87 Minutes of the Chinese and Aboriginal Mission Committee, 13 April 1875, 7 June 1875; 28 July 1875.
88 Minutes of the Chinese and Aborigines Missions Committee, 20 June 1876.
twenty years earlier, leaked every time it rained. It was so bad that people had to put up umbrellas while attending worship. His house was even worse. He had to build his own kitchen chimney without assistance although this was, nominally, a parish responsibility. It is a measure of his commitment that he put up with it.89

The insuperable problem for the Chinese Christians was that financial accountability was so tied up with European managerial oversight that it was impossible for the Chinese to make any decisions on their own. The best example is that of Cheong himself in his relationships with the Board of the Church Missionary Society of Victoria (see Chapter 5). Not only was there a cultural difference in the way leadership, status and authority were approached but there was always, despite the best of spiritual intentions, the influence on Europeans of anti-Chinese feelings that led Christian men to distrust the Chinese (see discussion in Chapter 7 on the shaping of European-Australian views of the Chinese).

Faced with Cheong’s apparent ingratitude, and ignoring the underlying questions his actions represented, the Presbyterian Mission Committee appointed a sub-committee comprising Hamilton and Alexander Morrison of Scotch College to talk with Cheok Hong about his future, i.e., to bring him to his senses. Cheong, at no personal expense, had successfully completed his second year at the Theological Hall.90 He told the sub-committee that when ordained, he would expect to receive the same income as a European minister. It was a fair comment and made in the knowledge that the Methodist Chinese ministers received less than Europeans working in subsidised ministries. It was not, perhaps in the circumstances, the most tactful way of negotiating but Cheong was not, as his later relationships with the Anglican Chinese Mission showed, a gifted or patient prevaricator.

While the discussions were continuing between the Mission Committee and Cheong Hong Cheong, Peng-nam went to Tasmania. There is no explanation for his choice of a holiday location other than a very vague reference to some Chinese friends who had moved from Victoria. While in Tasmania he died and was buried in the Newtown Cemetery in Hobart.91 Peng-nam was just forty years old at the time of his death. It was impossible for Cheok Hong to be a full-time theological student and at the same time manage a business and care for his family.92

Negotiations centred on the question of Cheong’s obedience to authority in the church.

89 The Spectator, 4 March 1876, p 525.
90 Minutes of the Chinese and Aborigines Missions Committee, 20 June 1876.
91 Cheok Hong Cheong to Premier of Tasmania, 19 February 1891.
92 Minutes of the Heathen Missions Committee, 15 January 1877; 13 March 1877; 12 June 1877; 1 October 1877; 14-18 December 1877.
When Cheo ng refused to yield to the committee’s authority his candidature for the ministry was cancelled and his enrolment in the Theological Hall terminated. His withdrawal from the Theological Hall was attributed to his new family responsibilities following the unexpected death of his father. The minutes of the Committee do not contain any negative comments other than disappointment that the Mission had lost a promising candidate.

There is no surviving detailed record of Cheong’s theological education. Brief handwritten notes in the Theological Hall archives held at Ormond College in the University of Melbourne suggest that his raw examination scores were above the average for his group. He later claimed to have completed:

- A four years course in Moral Theology, Sacred Languages (Hebrew, Greek and Chaldee), Exegetics, Dogmatics, Homiletics, Apologetics, Natural Sciences in relation to Christianity, Church History, Historical Theology under four regular Professors and two Lecturers five of the Staff being Doctors of Divinity & the 6th an expert on the Natural Sciences. 93

The records of the Theological Hall indicate that Cheong completed just two years of study and his claim to have completed the full four year course was an exaggeration.

Cheok Hong continued as an active member of the Napier Street Presbyterian Church. The family business prospered and he purchased an unidentified property in George Street Fitzroy and later Montgomery Villa in Gore Street, Fitzroy, where the family lived until they moved to Pine Lodge at Croydon nearly twenty years later.

As if the argument with Cheong had not been enough of an annoyance for the Mission Committee the Superintendent, the Rev. William Matthew, left without giving the usual six months notice. 94 A heated exchange between Matthew and the Committee followed in which Matthew claimed that he had been appointed principal of a school in Portland. He actually returned to Stawell where members of his former congregation set up a new church that soon failed financially. When he later wrote to the Committee asking for a statement of service and a personal reference he was given the first and denied the second. The Mission Committee decided to look outside Australia for a superintending missionary with relevant experience and no local commitments.

The Committee recruited the Rev. Daniel Vrooman from Guangdong Province. Vrooman was an American Presbyterian with wide experience in Canton, including a time

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93 Cheok Hong Cheong to Archdeacon Samuel Williams, Te Aute, New Zealand, 4 February 1898.
94 Welch, Ian (1980), Pariahs and Outcasts, Christian Missions to the Chinese in Australia, MA, Monash University.
as Honorary American Consul in the 1850s, and he had also worked for a time with the Presbyterian Chinese Mission in San Francisco.\textsuperscript{95} He was the most capable European, on paper at least, to engage in missions to the Chinese in Australia.\textsuperscript{96} Vrooman accepted an offer of £300 a year and accommodation and with his third wife, Anna Rosa Vrooman, he arrived in Melbourne on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} April 1878. His first task was to tour the mission centres and advise on the future directions of the mission.\textsuperscript{97}

Vrooman arrived at a difficult moment with the colonies in the midst of a major national maritime dispute and he was unaware how deeply the Chinese felt about the anti-Chinese polemics that filled the newspapers and popular journals (See Chapter 4).\textsuperscript{98} Chinese resentment surfaced when Vrooman dismissed Paul Ah Chin for undefined ‘insubordination’. Ah Chin was re-employed within a few weeks but the episode damaged Vrooman’s credibility with the Chinese catechists and lessened his status in the eyes of the Committee. Vrooman in turn was infuriated by the behaviour of the catechists and the lack of support given to him by the Committee.\textsuperscript{99} Vrooman’s behaviour was inseparable, in the minds of the Chinese Presbyterians from the wider industrial issue which in turn was an emotive symbol of what Chinese saw as their second-rate status.\textsuperscript{100} Behind the scenes, and the amanuensis for the catechists’ written protests about Vrooman, was Cheok Hong Cheong.

The depth of Chinese irritation with Vrooman, and with Europeans generally, was shown by John Young Wai’s decision to use Cheong Peng-nam’s old tactic of sending his reports directly to the Committee instead of forwarding them through Vrooman. It was his way of showing his lack of confidence in Vrooman. Young Wai was widely respected by everyone who knew him and the situation became critical when the other catechists

\textsuperscript{95} Condit, Ira, (1900), \textit{The Chinaman as we see him}, New York, Fleming H Revell, p 204.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{The Presbyterian Review}, April 1878, p 73; May 1878, p 96.Wylie, Alexander, (1867), \textit{Memorials of Protestant Christian Missionaries to the Chinese}, Shanghai, American Presbyterian Mission Press. Personal message from Dr Gary Tiedemann summarized: Rev. Daniel Vrooman, minister of the American Presbyterian Church. Arrived Canton, China, 15 March 1852, as missionary of American Board of Foreign Missions. First wife Elizabeth C or G, born Akron, Ohio, 14 June 1826. Died Macao, China, 17 June 1854. Vrooman returned USA February 1857. Returned China 1860 as independent missionary. Returned San Francisco USA June 1865 with 2nd wife, Maria W who died Brooklyn, CA, 29 August 1866. Mrs Maria Vrooman may have been of Chinese ethnic origin. Served with Presbyterian Chinese Mission. Married 3rd wife, Anna Rosa Vrooman c 1871. Attempts to trace Vrooman’s life and writings in the United States have proved unsuccessful. Apart from two items in a university museum in Wisconsin, no archives relating to his missionary career have been located. There is a brief mention of his work in Canton with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in: Strong, William E, (1910), \textit{The Story of the American Board}, Boston, Pilgrim Press, p 257.
\textsuperscript{97} Minutes of the Heathen Missions Committee, 4 April 1878; 28 April 1878; 27 June 1878. See also Strong, William E, (1910), \textit{The Story of the American Board}, Boston, Pilgrim Press
\textsuperscript{98} European maritime workers staged a ‘national’ strike over the employment of Chinese crew on Australian coastal shipping by the Australian Steam Navigation Company, see Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{99} Minutes of the Heathen Missions Committee, 22 November 1878; 6 January 1879; 11 March 1879; 26 November 1879; March 1879, pp 427-428.
\textsuperscript{100} See Chapter 4.
followed his example. Vrooman accused the Committee of not doing enough to maintain his authority.\textsuperscript{101} The catechists complained about Vrooman’s overbearing attitude. In an action interpreted by Vrooman and the Committee as deliberatively disruptive James Ah Chue asked for leave of absence to visit his family in China. Vrooman refused his application.\textsuperscript{102} The Committee asked John Young Wai to mediate. Ah Chue’s stipend was suspended for three months for ‘gross insubordination and disrespect’ to Vrooman. This mild slap on the wrist effectively ended Vrooman’s leadership.\textsuperscript{103} After an acrimonious exchange of views and opinions the Committee paid the Vrooman’s fares home to America.\textsuperscript{104}

With Vrooman’s departure the Committee offered to help Cheok Hong Cheong complete his theological studies. When his assistance to the catechists in resisting Vrooman’s directions was revealed it was taken as further evidence about Cheong’s unsatisfactory attitude to authority. The negotiations ended and the Committee minuted that Cheong: ‘cannot be regarded as fitly qualified for the position’.\textsuperscript{105}

There was a great deal behind the Chinese resistance to Vrooman that involved the Chinese linkage of the poor relationship between China and foreign powers at an international level and the way in which they were treated in Australia. By 1878 Cheong and other diasporic Chinese were viewing the international status of China during the nineteenth century as a cause of the contempt of colonial authorities. Immigration restrictions, applied to Chinese only, were a humiliating demonstration of the weakness of their homeland and created continuing problems of self-image for all Chinese-Australians who had no illusions about foreign claims to cultural, religious or ethnic superiority.\textsuperscript{106}

The Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong was quoted as saying:

> On hearing that I was an English missionary, . . . they exposed the inconsistency of my attacking their habit of smoking opium, while my countrymen brought them the means of indulging it.\textsuperscript{107}

In an 1865 address during an evangelistic campaign at Sandhurst (Bendigo) Peng-nam commented that Chinese civilisation went back more than four thousand years — a proud claim that Cheok Hong was to repeat throughout his life. Cheong, and other expatriate Chinese, wanted China (and therefore themselves) accepted as an equal among the nations.
and given the respect due to China’s long and proud cultural history.

Cheok Hong Cheong supported leading Chinese political reformers such as Liang Chi Chao (Liang Qichao), Kang Yu-wei (Kang Youwei) and the Chinese Empire Reform Association but was always lukewarm about revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen. Cheong’s Letterbooks remain silent on all Chinese domestic political matters after a passing mention of the visit of Liang Chi Chao. Liang was a colleague of the leading Chinese conservative reformer, Kang Yu-wei and the key figure in the Chinese Empire Reform Association in North America and, subsequently, in Australia. Cheong provided Liang’s accommodation in his own home during Liang’s stay in Melbourne but he failed to persuade the Australian government to admit Kang Yu-wei.108

In 1906, funded by the British Anti-Opium Society, Cheong accompanied the Secretary of the Society, J G Alexander, on a visit to China to speak against opium. Alexander was anxious to speak against militarism but on the advice of Chinese Christians he finally left all public comment on the issue to Cheong who was active in the peace movement in Victoria.

Cheong’s twenty-odd years as a Presbyterian provide the background to his subsequent Anglican work that is discussed in Chapter 5. His theological studies and his view of the world profoundly influenced his involvement in the secular affairs of the Chinese community. His evangelical theology combined with the values of his Chinese heritage gave him a strong sense of duty and a sense of personal responsibility that he showed to the full in his various leadership roles. It led to an invitation to join the leading Melbourne merchants, Louis Ah Mouy and Lowe Kong Meng in preparing a defence of the Chinese against attacks made in the course of the strike by seamen protesting against the employment of Chinese on Australian coastal vessels.109 That collaborative venture is the subject of the next chapter.

108 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Minister for External Affairs, 18 March 1909.
109 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80, Melbourne. (Appendix 1)