

**Chapter 4**  
**The Victorian Merchant-Elite**  
**And the Chinese Question**  
**1878-1879**

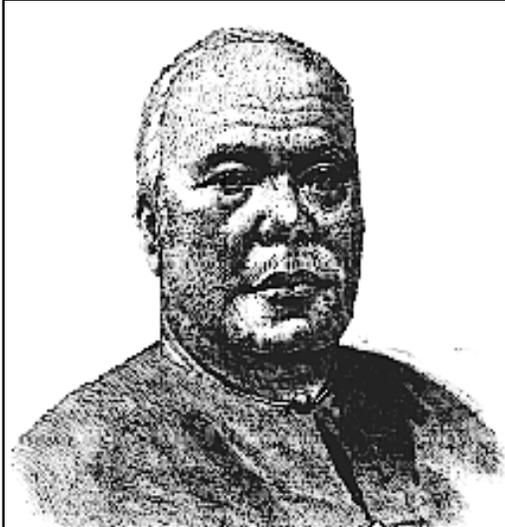
Cheong's role as a Chinese community advocate began when he joined the Melbourne Chinese Merchants' Association in 1875-1876.<sup>1</sup> The leaders in the Association were Louis Ah Mouy and Lowe Kong Meng representing See Yup (Ah Mouy) and Sam Yup (Kong Meng) businessmen.<sup>2</sup> The two co-opted Cheok Hong Cheong in the publication of a response to anti-Chinese polemics following a decision by the Australian Steam Navigation Company (ASN) to replace Europeans with lower paid Chinese crew on its Australian routes.<sup>3</sup> The pamphlet that resulted was *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1878-1879*. A contemporary reviewer wrote:

The Chinese have spoken with no uncertain sound in their own behalf. Three Chinese merchants of Melbourne, Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, have issued a pamphlet, in which the case is discussed from their side with great force. They are not supposed to have written this paper, but the fact that they have been the means of giving so excellent an argument to the world does them the greatest credit.<sup>4</sup>

The domination of the Victorian community by the two merchants made a response easier than in New South Wales where the Chinese community comprised a wider spread of Chinese district backgrounds with a smaller See Yup element (less than 50 percent); a vigorous Hakka community; a sizeable Sam Yup (*Sanyi*) population; and a strong Zhongshan community.<sup>5</sup> The Co-Authors of the 'Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80'.

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- 1 The Association is a shadowy body about which little is known beyond the key players mentioned in this chapter. No archives are known to exist.
  - 2 A later list of members appeared in connection with a formal merchants reception for the Chinese Imperial Commissioners during their visit to Melbourne in 1887. See *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 1887 and 9 May 1888.
  - 3 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. See discussion in Willard, M, (1923), *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press. (Reprinted 1967), pp 51-59.
  - 4 Wisker, John, (1879), The Coloured Man in Australia, p 85 in *The Fortnightly Review*, London, July 1, 1879.
  - 5 A significant study of key personalities of the Australian Chinese merchant community, primarily focussed on New South Wales, is Yong, C F, (1977), *The New Gold Mountain*, Richmond SA, Raphael Arts. brief discussion of the difference between the entrepreneurial breadth of merchants in Victoria and NSW is found in Fitzgerald, John, (n.d.) The Guo Brothers and the Yong An Company, (Cantonese: The Kwok

**The Late Mr Kong Meng**



*The Australasian Sketcher* 29 November 1888  
State Library of Victoria



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Family and the Wing On Company), at  
[http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/20743/20020104/www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/guo\\_bros.html](http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/20743/20020104/www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/guo_bros.html)



The Seamen's Union strike against the Australian Steam Navigation Company (ASN) did not seriously affect Victorian Chinese but Kong Meng and Ah Mouy believed that a public comment was needed.<sup>6</sup> The literary style of the publication points to Cheok Hong Cheong being the principal writer.

Louis Ah Mouy (1826-1918) came to Victoria in 1851 from Singapore as an indentured carpenter for a trading company.<sup>7</sup> He gained a fortune goldmining at Yea and invested in goldmines across Victoria and in tin mines in Malaya. At different times he owned goldmines at Yea, Ballarat, Elaine (near Ballarat), Mount Buffalo, Bright and Walhalla.<sup>8</sup> His real estate speculations included the development of Armstrong Street, Middle Park. He died at his home, 16 Nimmo Street, Middle Park, on 28 April 1918.<sup>9</sup> With his wife, Ung Chuck, he had eleven children including eight boys and three girls. All his children received a colonial, i.e., European style education and one of his sons became a telecommunications engineer with the Post Office. The picture below shows terrace housing in Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, where he was living around the time the pamphlet was published. The entrance to Ah Mouy's house is at the extreme left of the picture.



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- 6 It may have adversely affected the banana trade although the delivery of fruit to Victoria seems to have been a problematic affair. Cronin mentions that deliveries by the ASN Coy were often unusable. Cronin, Kathryn, (1975), 'The Yellow Agony: Racial attitudes and responses towards the Chinese in colonial Queensland,' pp 235-340 on Evans, Raymond, Kay Saunders, and Kathryn Cronin, (1975), *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination, Race Relations in Colonial Queensland*, Sydney, ANZ Book Co, p 253.
- 7 Yong, C F, (1969), Ah Mouy, Louis, 1826-1918, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography: 1851-1890*, Vol. 3, pp.19-20, Melbourne University Press.
- 8 There is additional information about Louis Ah Mouy in Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.
- 9 *The Herald*, Melbourne, 30 April 1918.

Ah Mouy wrote to his brother in Taishan District telling him to emigrate and the letter is said to have stimulated the Taishanese-See Yup emigration stream to Victoria. In 1854 Ah Mouy was the founder of the Victorian branch of the See Yup Society<sup>10</sup> and the principal purchaser of the land at South Melbourne for the See Yup Temple (Chapter 2).<sup>11</sup> He was naturalised as a British subject in self-governing Victoria but Victorian naturalisation did not give him the status of a British subject in the other Australasian colonies.<sup>12</sup> His day-to-day business interests centred on his wholesale tea business in Swanston Street, Melbourne, and his rice milling activities.<sup>13</sup> The cartoon below appeared in 1856 and shows the See Yup site purchased by Ah Mouy (centre, behind horse and cart).

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10 Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, p 17. Cronin uses the term Ghee Hing but the more commonly used version is Yee Hing. See the discussion in Glick, Carl and Hong Sheng-hwa, (1947), *Swords of Silence, Chinese secret societies, past and present*, New York, Whittlesey House.. Wu, William F, (1982), *The Yellow Peril, Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940*, Archon Books, Hamden, Conn., p 74.

11 Priestley, Susan,(1995), *South Melbourne, A History*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.

12 M N Ah Mouy to Dr G E Morrison, 18 February 1918, *Morrison Papers*, Mitchell Library Sydney.

13 See 'Ah Mouy, Louis (1826-1918)' by Yong in *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1851-1890*, Vol. 3 pp.19-20, Melbourne University Press, 1969.



Housing was a symbol of economic status and authority in the Chinese diaspora and the leading Victorian merchants followed convention in occupying imposing dwellings.<sup>14</sup> When the Reverend Josiah Cox, an English Methodist missionary in China, visited Victoria in 1871, he contrasted the living conditions of the ‘average’ Chinese workingman in Victoria with those of the richer merchants. The workers, Cox said:

are generally found in ‘camps’, which consist of one or more streets of low, ill-built brick or wood shanties, accommodating from three to eight hundred emigrants. In Sydney and Melbourne, the Chinese, with few exceptions, occupy the same street, and of course their houses are superior to the tenements of the up-country ‘camps’ . . . Both in Sydney and Melbourne are the Chinese merchants, who supply the up-country shopkeepers with Chinese produces and act as agents for the remittance of money and other interchanges of the Chinese emigrants with their native land. Among these merchants are a few men of wealth and of high commercial position. The smaller tradesmen and a good number of the hard working ‘diggers’ feed and clothe well themselves, and also make regular remittances to their relatives in China. Probably, however, one-half of the emigrants are living from hand to mouth; and instead of the

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14 See Wang Gungwu, (1990), *The Culture of Chinese Merchants*, Working Paper Series No 57, University of Toronto/York University. Wang Gungwu, (1991), *China and the Chinese Overseas*, Times Academic Press, 1991.

speedy fortune and return home they anticipated, have now the prospect of a life of drudgery in this land of the stranger.<sup>15</sup>

The freedom with which these Victorian community leaders moved their homes answers any proposition that Chinese, at least in Victoria, were denied the right to buy land and property.<sup>16</sup> The fact that Kong Meng, Ah Mouy and Cheong, to name but three, bought and sold a number of properties, and lived among Europeans without adverse comment calls for caution in claiming residential discrimination in the Australian colonies. The unimpeded residential mobility of Chinese in Victoria, and their right to live among Europeans was matched, at least in New South Wales, by Mei Quong Tart, another Taishanese immigrant and successful merchant. Where Chinese and Europeans lived and the schools to which they sent their children in Victoria was determined by income. When compulsory primary schooling was introduced in 1872 children were enrolled without ethnic discrimination. Some families chose to send children to China for a traditional Chinese education but this was not forced by a denial of access to schooling. Men such as Ah Mouy, and Lowe Kong Meng (see below) took the lead in community affairs, to the point where, when the See Yup Association building in South Melbourne in 1866, they presided over the ceremonies (see Chapter 2).

Lowe Kong Meng came from a wealthy immigrant family in Malaya and attended the Penang Free School.<sup>17</sup> His father, Lowe Ah Quee and an uncle were the owners of Ah Goon Freres of Penang, a trading company with interests in Mauritius, Calcutta and Singapore.<sup>18</sup> He acquired British citizenship by birth in the British Crown Colony of Penang. When he was sixteen years old his family sent him to Mauritius where he added French to his English and Chinese. His first visit to Victoria was in 1853 in a ship owned by his family.<sup>19</sup> He returned in 1854 and established himself in Little Bourke Street at the corner of Celestial

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15 *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, London, August 1872, pp 17-18.

16 There appears to be a belief that ownership of property in New South Wales required naturalization. No evidence has been found to support this allegation, which would have been contrary to British law on the treatment of aliens. The only relevant text seems to be an interpretation from Appendix 1 to the Minutes of the Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question, 1888, in which there is a reference to naturalized persons owning property. That has apparently been interpreted to mean that Chinese who were not naturalized could not own property for which there is no supporting statement.

17 *The Daily Telegraph*, Melbourne 2 May 1887. The name Lowe, is a variation of Lau, with other variations including, Liu, Low, and Liew. One version of the family history places the origins of the family in the Shanghai region, c 1200AD. <http://www.for.nau.edu/~alew/personal/other/toisan/index.html>

18 Enquiries about this firm through academic and library sources in Malaysia have so far only confirmed its existence in the Chinese community at Penang.

19 Rolls, Eric, (1992), *Sojourners: The epic story of China's centuries old relationship with Australia*, St Lucia, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, p 105.

Lane. His business interests extended throughout Australia and the South Pacific.

**Low Kong Meng's First Premises, *Sun Kum Lee*  
Cnr Little Bourke Street and Celestial Lane**



Enhanced from original in

the State Library of Victoria

In 1860 Kong of the Sam Yup the Sam Yup (now Soon) Association a

Meng was President Association. He gave known as Num Pon clubhouse in Little

Bourke Street, Melbourne, remaining the trustee of the building until his death.<sup>20</sup> His close friend, Chun Yet, succeeded him as Trustee. His presidency and trusteeship of the Sam Yup clubhouse suggests that his family origins were Sam Yup although Cronin suggests he was See Yup by background.<sup>21</sup>

20 Victorian Heritage Register H485. One of his successors was Chun Yut.  
See [http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/20743/20020704/www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/image\\_birth1.html](http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/20743/20020704/www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/image_birth1.html)  
21 Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, p 33.

In 1860 Kong Meng married a European (Mary Ann Prussia) born in Tasmania.<sup>22</sup> It was apparently for her that he built his second and far more elaborate dwelling and business premises at 112 Little Bourke Street. It was to this house that Kong Meng invited Cheong Peng-nam and his family after their arrival in Victoria in 1863. The house became a matter of open, if supercilious and envious, discussion in the Melbourne press:



lan Welch

Kong Meng is a Chinese citizen resident in Melbourne. He is a man of great importance, holding equal sway amongst his countrymen with that of a petty prince in India. Mr. Meng is rich and . . . highly respected. Besides being 'a rich merchant' Kong is a courteous and affable gentleman, well known as such to us barbarians, and esteemed accordingly. Kong Meng has long been resident in Little Bourke-street, or at all events has transacted a large business there. 'Kong Meng, merchant' being as

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22 There is additional information about Lowe Kong Meng in Cronin, op cit and Yong, C F, op cit.

familiar to us as the sign of Bath's or the George Hotel to you. Highly as Signor Meng has hitherto been held in our estimation, he yet did not altogether escape the imputation of being fond of 'narrow streets and dirty houses.' His place of business looked dingy – there is no denying that, – and it is situated in Little Bourke-street. Suddenly Kong Meng is superior to filth, and 'comes out strong.' He waits upon the architect of the Parliament houses and orders a design for a building. One is furnished, the specification stating that the interior walls are to be of brick, and the front of stone. And Kong orders his house to be built, when lo! There arises a beautiful edifice with a front of elaborately carved freestone. Kong in short is soon to be master and owner of a really handsome building but – alas for his taste, – it is built in Little Bourke-street.<sup>23</sup>

The commercial importance attached to Chinese business and the prominence of the two merchants was highlighted when they were invited to join the board of directors of the Commercial Bank of Australia whose banknotes already carried Chinese characters.<sup>24</sup>

Kong Meng's growing wealth and influence that was signalled by the transfer from the humble building of the 1850s to the elaborate house of the 1860s was recognized in other ways. In 1863 the Emperor of China appointed him a Mandarin of the Blue Button (Civil Order).<sup>25</sup> He was elected a member of the Royal Society of Victoria, the premier intellectual body of the colony.<sup>26</sup> Ah Mouy and Kong Meng chose a public path but many more Chinese businessmen preferred privacy. Although most men did not parade their wealth publicly, their financial resources were known in colonial business circles. One successful British immigrant made this observation about Victoria's Chinese businessmen:

The import trade from China, and the homeward passenger traffic, are largely, if not exclusively, in the hands of the Chinese merchants, whose commercial reputation is of the highest class. They do not obtrude themselves, and when they are sought out, the surprise of the stranger is natural when he is informed that cheques of five figures are not infrequently honoured by bankers.<sup>27</sup>

Although Yong has identified many of the leading Chinese-Australian merchants in the early twentieth century, especially in New South Wales, there does not appear to be a similar account for 19<sup>th</sup> century Victoria.<sup>28</sup> Some names appeared during a Chinese reception for the

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23 *The Star*, Ballarat, 14 March 1861.

24 Oddie, G, (1961), 'The Lower Class Chinese and the Merchant Elite in Victoria, 1870-1890', *Historical Studies*, Vol .10, No 37, November, p 67. In most colonies, banknotes were issued by banks in their own name rather than by the central government as is now the case. Coinage was British.

25 A recent personal contact of the author reports that some of Kong Meng's Chinese regalia, and other important items including letters from his parents, are in the possession of family members in Goulburn New South Wales.

26 <http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/smv/164.html>

27 Patterson, J A, (1863), *The Gold Fields of Victoria*, Melbourne, Wilson and McKinnon, p 132. See also Just, P, (1859), *Australia or Notes Taken During Residence in the Colonies from the Gold Discovery in 1851 until 1857*, Dundee, p 209.

28 Yong, C F, (1977), *The New Gold Mountain*, Richmond SA, Raphael Arts, Part II, pp35-111. Further work on links between Chinese Christian businessmen in Sydney and China is being undertaken by Mrs. Denise Austin of Queensland Institute of Technology, Brisbane.

Imperial Chinese Commissioners in 1887 but little is known of these men.<sup>29</sup> Fifty years later the prominent banker and colonial historian, Henry Gyles Turner, wrote:

Of the better class of Chinese merchants, the commercial community and Australian bankers can bear testimony to their honourable dealings and scrupulous regard of their obligations.<sup>30</sup>

The Rev. Richard Fletcher, Secretary of the ecumenical Victoria Chinese Mission (1855-1858) and Congregational minister at St Kilda, described the wealth handled by merchants such as Kong Meng and Ah Mouy, (the price of gold at the time was £5 an ounce and in 2002 values was worth around \$A300 or approx £100 an ounce].

You may have some idea of the extent of the commercial intercourse between the Chinese of Victoria and their connexion in China, when I tell you that upwards of 100,000 ounces of gold are sent by them annually, or a full half-million (*pounds sterling*) of the precious metal.<sup>31</sup>

**Lowe Kong Meng's third house,  
206 Clarendon St, corner Albert St, East Melbourne.**



Victorian Heritage Register

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- 29 Yee Shew, Sun Goon Shing, Mee Chin, Moon Mee, Fee Yick, Ti (Tye) Shing, Ti (Tye) Kew, (Lowe Kong) Ah Meng, Soe Kee, Oh Hong, Chin Lung Ho, Li Mac, Lung Hung But, Kwan Chew, Lung Gee, Kung Hock, Way Yin, Keng Chung, Yen Chung, Hock Li, Wah Ye, Lee Leong Fung.
- 30 Turner, H G, (1904), *A History of the Colony of Victoria*, London, Longmans Green, Vol III, p 233.
- 31 Rev. Richard Fletcher to Arthur Tidman, Secretary, *Australian Correspondence, London Missionary Society*, 1 February 1859. His information came from The Legislative Council of Victoria, Votes and Proceedings, *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on Chinese Immigration*. See *The Mount Alexander Mail*, 20 November 1857 for the full text of the report. The equivalent value in today's gold market would exceed \$A30-\$A40,000,000.

A good deal of the gold mentioned was despatched on behalf of ordinary Chinese emigrants but every ounce handled by the merchants attracted a service charge and so added to their net worth. There was no aspect of communal life from which they did not acquire profit. When considering their views on Chinese immigration their self-interest must be kept in mind. With such opportunities it was not surprising that the living standards of the Kong Meng family improves year by year until his death in 1888.<sup>32</sup>

The Kong Meng family's fourth Melbourne residence, 'Longwood', was at the corner of Toorak Road and Elizabeth Street, Malvern. The property, of some 86 acres, extended through to Malvern Road and Gardiner's Creek. It included a tobacco plantation and drying shed and market gardens operated by men who were essentially sharecroppers.

Cooper's *History of Malvern* gives an amusing account of a European who tried, unsuccessfully, to embarrass Kong Meng.<sup>33</sup> It demonstrates the kind of annoyance experienced by Chinese-Australians:

Kong Meng was a cultured Chinese gentleman. His manners were graced by old-time courtesy. The Kong Meng family often travelled from Malvern to Prahran in a bus run by a Prahran cab owner called 'Red Lamp Gunn' from Prahran along Malvern Road to Tooronga Road, the journey's terminus. One evening a well-dressed man entered the bus at Prahran and seeing Kong Meng alone in the bus addressed him familiarly as 'John,' and made an attempt to start a patronising conversation with him in pigeon English.<sup>34</sup> Kong Meng, the Mandarin, was silent, but the man persisted in trying to force conversation. Kong Meng at last said with a smile to his fellow traveller, who obviously considered himself 'a very fine gentleman': 'Sir, I do not understand your broken English, perhaps it happens that you speak French somewhat better or — — —' Kong Meng paused, and eyed his fellow passenger — 'maybe perhaps you speak Chinese? My name is Kong Meng; I am a Melbourne merchant, and a British born subject. I have not the honour of knowing you; pray, sir, who are you?' For the rest of the journey to Malvern only the rumble of the bus disturbed the silence.

At his death in late 1888 Kong Meng left his family just £1000. The family sold 'Longwood' and purchased a hotel in St Kilda. A little later the boys and their sister, Alice Maud, with her husband, Arthur Tipp, purchased and worked a property near Euroa that they named 'Longwood'.<sup>35</sup> Herbert and George Kong Meng served with the Victorian Mounted Rifles

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32 See Wang Gungwu, (1990), *The Culture of Chinese Merchants*, Working Paper Series No 57, University of Toronto/York University. Wang Gungwu, (1991), *China and the Chinese Overseas*, Times Academic Press, 1991.

33 [http://www.stonnington.vic.gov.au/library/coopers\\_history\\_of\\_malvern\\_chap11.htm](http://www.stonnington.vic.gov.au/library/coopers_history_of_malvern_chap11.htm)

34 The name 'John' was used in North America and Australia as an appellation for all male Chinese. Chen, Yong, (2000), *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, p 124.

35 Arthur Tipp was the son of Michael Chun Tipp (nephew of Chun Yet, Kong Meng's business partner and Sam Yup Trustee) and Mary Benson.

(later the 8<sup>th</sup> Australian Light Horse Regiment) and Herbert served with a Light Horse Regiment in France in World War I until invalided home. Arthur Tipp, 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was killed in action in France on 9 November 1917.<sup>36</sup>

Cheok Hong Cheong's involvement with Ah Mouy and Kong Meng in the writing of *The Chinese Question in Australia* occurred when he was in his mid twenties and a comparative unknown outside the Presbyterian Chinese Mission and the Chinese merchant community. Kong Meng's kindness to Cheong's family and Cheok Hong's own need for recognition on non-church terms were more than enough reason for him to agree to take part in the publication of the pamphlet. Important as his role was he was always the junior partner, a position that did not change throughout the years he was associated with the two merchants.

*The Chinese Question in Australia* affirmed the historic richness of Chinese culture and sought to demonstrate the falsity of the anti-Chinese movement in Australia. The pamphlet used historical and cultural references in a political/polemical context to argue a case that was, at its roots, a defence of the interests of the Chinese merchant-elite rather than the whole Chinese community.<sup>37</sup>

The document presents the British Empire, and the Australasian colonies, as the villains in a conflict between Chinese and European ethics. The arrival of the Chinese abroad, it declares, was the direct outcome of European oppression that 'battered down the portals of the empire' and destroyed China's 'contented isolation' (paragraph 2) assertions where the position adopted by the authors is open to question.

The three Melbourne Chinese leaders were quite right to claim that the Colony of Victoria, as part of the British Empire, had to adhere to treaty obligations entered into by the British Government even where colonists saw these as opposed to their best interests (summed up in para 29):

This, then, is the position of the Chinese in Australia, relative to British colonists. By a treaty forced upon his Imperial Majesty, our august master, your nation compelled him to throw open the gates of his empire to the people of Western Europe. In return, you bound yourselves to reciprocity. The freedom to come and go, to trade and settle, which you insisted on claiming for yourselves, you also accorded the subjects of his

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36 Information provided by Mrs. Olwynne Fenton, of Euroa. Military details provided by Mrs. Mary Boland, Lyneham, ACT. A database is being prepared and will be entered on the Chinese Heritage at Australian Federation database (CHAF) at Latrobe University.

37 The paragraph numbering system used in the text printed in Appendix 1 is that of the present writer, not the co-authors. It is used to facilitate access to this discussion of a paper that is some 8000 words long in its English version — no Chinese version is known and it is unlikely that one was prepared.

Imperial Majesty. He has fulfilled the first part of the compact, and the trade of Great Britain with China has trebled during the past fourteen years, to say nothing of the indirect commerce transacted with that country via Singapore and Hong Kong.<sup>38</sup>

Most colonists were aware, and not a few embarrassed by, British determination to maintain a market for the opium produced in British-controlled India. At about the same time that Cheong and his colleagues were drafting their pamphlet, Bishop Moorhouse, the second Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, referred to the Sino-British treaties as being extracted at 'the butt-end of a musket' in order to open trade.<sup>39</sup> It was certainly true that the two sets of treaties with Britain, i.e., the Treaty of Nanking 1842 and the Treaty of Tientsin 1858, following the First and Second Opium Wars, applied to the Australasian colonies but Chinese immigration to Australia was not mentioned.<sup>40</sup> A decade after the pamphlet was published, at the time of the Afghan incident in 1887-1888 (Chapter 9), William Trenwith, a prominent figure in the Victorian labour movement, spoke at an Anti-Chinese League meeting in the Melbourne Town Hall declaring that the future makeup of the Australian population should not be subject to the mercantile interests of a few British traders in China.<sup>41</sup>

The pamphlet expresses the hope that the colonies will not 'sanction an outrage' against the Chinese over the employment of Chinese on Australian coastal shipping owned and operated by British maritime interests. The authors' claim to the high moral ground is summed up in the final paragraph (31):

Tze-Kung, one of the disciples of Confucius, asked the latter on a certain occasion, is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life? The master answered, Is not reciprocity such a word, meaning thereby what was sought by your own Great Teacher, 'all things whatsoever ye would that men would do unto you, do you even so to them'. Upon this reciprocity we take our stand.<sup>42</sup>

On this basis, the pamphlet tries to link the Seamen's Union resistance to the employment of Chinese seamen on Australian coastal shipping as an abrogation of treaty obligations, hence the earlier comment about interpretation of the treaties and the questioning of the position

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38 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, paragraph 29).

39 *The Church of England Messenger*, 2 December 1879, p 5.

40 The text of the Treaty of Nanking 1842 - <http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~jobrien/reference/ob24.html>  
The Treaty of Tientsin, 1858 - <http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~jobrien/reference/ob28.html>

41 Rolls, Eric, (1992) *Sojourners: The epic story of China's centuries old relationship with Australia*, St Lucia, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, p 466.

42 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne (Appendix 1, paragraph 31).

adopted by the authors. The implication was that the Australian colonies were legally obliged not only to allow the Chinese seamen into Australia but to dismiss the Europeans already employed as crew on ASN vessels.

There was no colonial denial of the right of Chinese to enter the Australasian colonies but there was no obligation under the treaties to provide guarantees of employment. While Chinese immigrants suffered the discrimination of a poll tax the New South Wales Supreme Court ruled that provided the poll tax was paid, a man must be allowed to enter and the same principle was applied elsewhere in the colonies.<sup>43</sup> It was an entirely different argument to insist that the treaties assured preferential employment benefits to Chinese.

There was another strand implicit in the treaties that the co-writers chose to gloss over. Cheong and his colleagues were on sound ground in condemning foreign aggression against China but less so in ignoring the accelerating decline in Chinese governmental administration and the denial of protection to missionaries and Chinese Christians, an issue that was specifically dealt with in the Treaty of Tientsin. The China they present in the pamphlet is a peaceful, culturally united nation whose ethical, educational and cultural standards were far ahead of Europe or North America. Nineteenth century China was not quite like the picture they chose to present.

In their fulsome praise of Chinese culture the three men ignored the Confucian inspired conservatism that had inhibited China's technological and administrative advancement and contributed to successful foreign intervention and China's century of humiliation. They chose to place China's troubles, along with the injustices experienced by Chinese in Australia, solely upon the evils perpetrated by foreigners, particularly the British, against China. Although the Australasian colonies were self-governing (excluding Western Australia), their relations with other countries, such as China, were controlled by the sovereign power, Great Britain, and so they shared in responsibility for Britain's actions.<sup>44</sup> The three co-authors' view of a peaceful and united China skipped over the internal rebellions against the Chinese Government shown in Map 4.1 and the incompetence of Chinese government leadership in the wars against foreigners, some of which reflected earlier Chinese aggressions.

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43 Various attempts, such as exclusion legislation in New South Wales and Queensland, and actions by the Parkes Government in New South Wales (see Chapter 8) were overturned by the courts or repudiated by the British Government in the case of the draconian legislation above.

44 Western Australia was a Crown Colony under the direct rule of London.

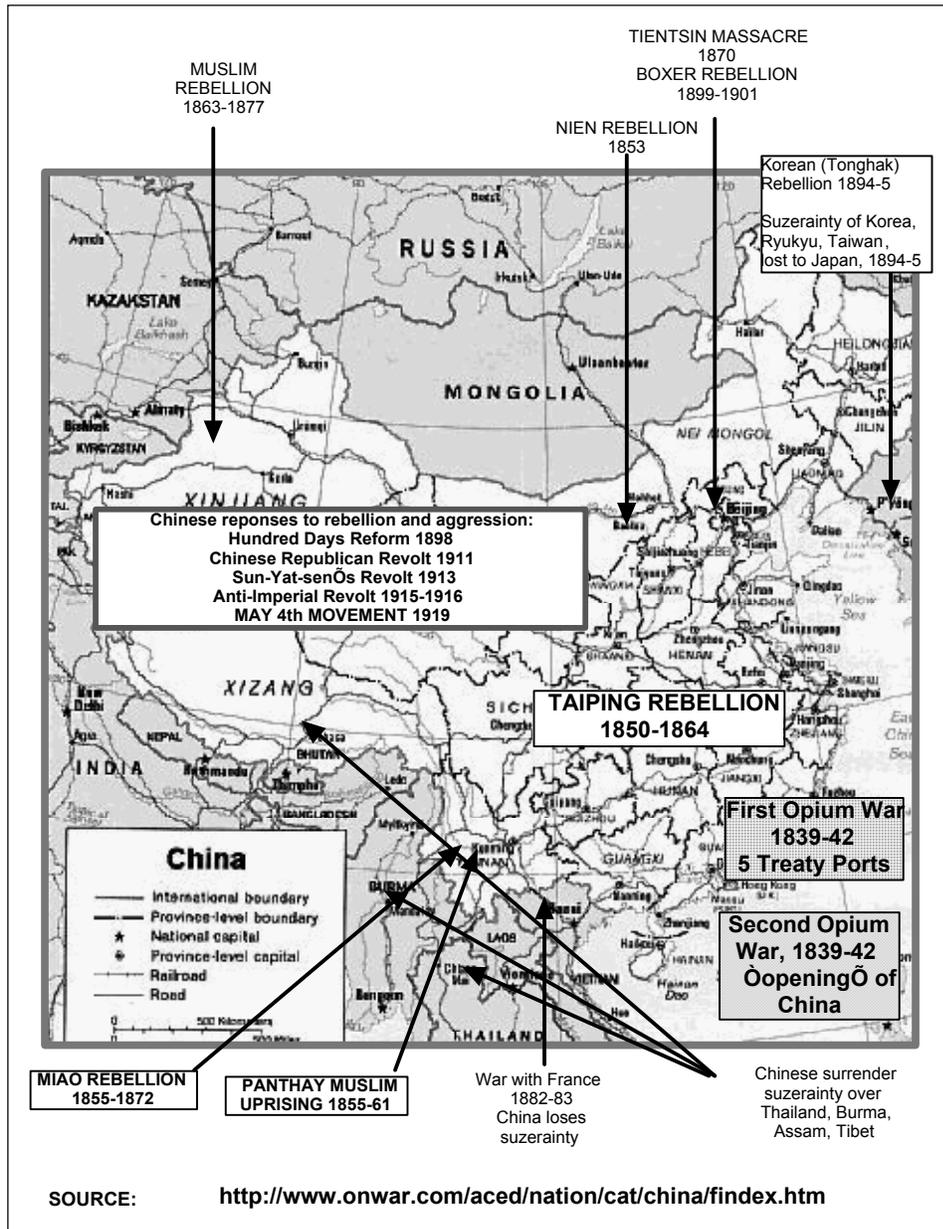
The British Government always maintained that mass immigration by Britons to China or Chinese to the British possessions was not part of the treaty agreements. The British negotiated freedom of movement for British merchants and were prepared to allow similar freedom to Chinese merchants. It is unlikely, given the Chinese ban on emigration, that a mass movement of labourers was in the mind of Chinese or foreign officials. Baron de Worms, Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, in an 1888 statement to the House of Commons said that:

No treaty existed under which China had the right to send her subjects to the British colonies and if they were so sent Great Britain was not in any way pledged to admit them.<sup>45</sup>

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45 *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 June 1888.

**Map 4.1**  
**China's Century of Humiliation**  
**Foreign Aggression and Internal Revolt in the 19th Century**





The British view matched the position taken by the Chinese Government in treaty negotiations with the United States. The Burlingame agreement (1868) agreed on the right of Chinese to live and work in the USA but in a later amendment (1880) provision was made for a ban on the immigration of labourers.<sup>46</sup> This was the position, as early as 1877, of the Chinese Consolidated Benefits Association of California (The Six Companies).<sup>47</sup> By 1888 Cheong was arguing that the entry of Chinese to Australia might be moderated by allowing the same number of Chinese merchants to enter Australia as the Chinese Government permitted British merchants to enter China.<sup>48</sup>

The pamphleteers claimed that irrespective of treaty obligations, an oddity bearing in mind that the starting point of their argument was the colonial obligations under the 'unequal' treaties, there was a higher duty to provide opportunity for human improvement, reflecting a similar line of argument used by Protestant liberals in the United States but rarely heard in Australasia.<sup>49</sup> The 'unequal treaties' had allowed Chinese to learn a good deal about the world including Australia (paragraph 3) a 'land of promise'. Australia, they observed, was a rich and empty land and the British should be willing to share it:

When we heard . . . that there was a great continent [i.e. Australia] nearby half as large again as China, and containing only a few hundreds of thousands of civilised people thinly scattered around the coast, that is was only a few weeks sail from our own country, numbers of Chinese set out for this land of promise.<sup>50</sup>

Two new propositions followed although neither had any relationship to the treaty system. The first was the call for preferential employment rights. The second was that Australia was an empty land of promise to which the Chinese had a humanitarian claim to immigration that Britain, under the treaties, had a moral duty to provide.<sup>51</sup> Cheong and his co-authors were reflecting a view of the settlement of Australia that was also held by some Christians. A Wesleyan layman, Richard Gluyas, wrote a lengthy letter to the church newspaper on the issue:

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46 Ingersoll, Robert Green, (1898), 'Chinese Exclusion', *North American Review*, July 1898.

47 Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, (1877), *Memorial: of the Six Chinese companies; an address to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States*. Testimony of California's leading citizens before the Joint Special Congressional Committee, San Francisco, CCBA. See also Pun Chi, 'A Remonstrance from the Chinese in California to the Congress of the United States,' in Speer, William, (1870), *The Oldest and Newest Empire: China and the United States*, Hartford: S. S. Scranton, p. 589.

48 *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 1888

49 Tseng, Timothy, (1994), *Ministry At Arms Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of American Mainline Protestants, 1882-1952*, PhD, Union Theological Seminary, New York, Chapter 5.

50 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne (Appendix 1, paragraph 3).

51 *Ibid.*

Sir – There are certain rights and privileges to which every man is entitled. One of these is his liberty – the liberty to go where he pleases on God's earth, always providing that he does not interfere with the rights of others. . . God formed the continent of Australia to be inhabited and people must, as a matter of course, leave their own country for this the land of their adoption. It was God's command to men "to replenish the earth and subdue it," and this land being peopled by an industrious race, whether from China or England, must needs be in keeping with His original design. I would here ask a question: Has God given this vast Australian continent to the Anglo-Saxon race? Does the fact of their discovering this country give them an exclusive right to it? . . . Any man with common sense will not fail to perceive that this land is not given to us exclusively, if it is given to us at all. . . . I have mentioned this on account of one reverend gentleman speaking of "this land which God has given us." I fail to see where we have a Divine title to it any more than the Chinese. The right that we have to possess this country is the right of might. If this country was taken from us by the Chinese, and a Chinese Government established here, the Chinese would have quite as good a title to this country as we have at present, and as good a right to call it the country that God had given them. Now, the argument drawn from the fact that we have not an exclusive right to this country is a very clear one.<sup>52</sup>

In the early part of this chapter mention was made of the underlying assumption of the co-authors that the treaties had created an entirely new situation for China and the Chinese (see page 78). In paragraph 2, the authors insisted:

And we beg it to be particularly remembered that this outflow of our population was never sought for by us. Western powers, armed with the formidable artillery with which modern science has supplied them, battered down the portals of the empire; and, having done so, insisted on keeping them open. They said, in effect, 'We *must* come in, and you *shall* come out. We will not suffer you to shut yourselves up from the rest of the world.

This view of Chinese emigration has been examined in recent times, as in Reid's work showing that the movement of Chinese abroad began well before the Opium Wars and well before any significant British presence in East Asia, i.e., that the treaties were marginal as far as Chinese overseas migration was concerned.<sup>53</sup> The co-author's assertion that the British were obliged to accept primary responsibility for Chinese overseas emigration ignored the overseas migration initiated and conducted by Chinese entrepreneurs long before 1842.

Trocki has commented on the long-term dominance of Southeast Asian trade by Chinese businessmen who preferred to bring in their own labour force:

The British did not initiate the process of 'bringing in the Chinese', and despite their best efforts to gain some control over the process of recruiting, despatching and employing - not to mention governing - populations of Chinese laborers, they were

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52 *The Wesleyan Chronicle*, 29 June 1888

53 Reid, Anthony, ed, (1996A), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, (Asian Studies Assoc of Australia, Southeast Asia Publication Series, # 28).

never as successful as they wished to be. Chinese certainly came to European settlements and indeed found it possible to live in these places with greater security than in 'native' states, but very often places like the Straits Settlements were no more than staging areas for Chinese enterprises in the Malayan, Sumatran, Bornean and Siamese states. In fact, if we look at the actual chronology of events, we could argue that it was not the British who brought the Chinese to Malaya, but it was the Chinese and the Malays who brought the British.<sup>54</sup> This is not quite as far-fetched as it may seem to those unfamiliar with some of the discussions forty or so years ago about the purpose of British settlement in Australia and the possibility of the British seeking to use Australia as a base for naval and economic expansion in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>55</sup>

The British settlers of Australia, amongst whom were businessmen and officials experienced in dealing with the Chinese in East and Southeast Asia, had some grounds for concern about uncontrolled Chinese immigration with the example before them of Singapore and the Straits Settlements that transformed tiny Malay villages into Chinese merchant communities.

The Colony of Victoria, in 1879, was still only forty years beyond its settlement and less than thirty years from the first exercise of responsible self-government, i.e., its future remained uncertain. Many colonists understood the dominant role that the Chinese exercised in the economies of the British colonies of East and Southeast Asia. The vision of an Australia, settled and governed by Europeans, being dominated by Chinese business interests was not a popular image. It was a nationalistic, perhaps xenophobic concern that was reflected in similar, if opposite concerns by officials in China who were troubled by the implications of a growing foreign presence. Of course, as discussed in Chapter 1 and acknowledged in the pamphlet, much of the discussion about Chinese immigration was a smokescreen given the steady and voluntary decline in the Chinese population of Victoria that had first been noted in the early 1860s. The concern of the three merchants was primarily to protect the self-interest of those who remained.

Perhaps Cheong and his co-authors did not fully understand the leading role played by Chinese entrepreneurs in the expansion of Chinese emigration in Southeast Asia and its potential impact on a British Australia. Cheong, with no known direct contact with South China's historic merchant entrepreneurs, might have lacked such knowledge. Mouy Ling, a former carpenter turned businessman might also be excused although his leadership in the Yee Hing, the principal Cantonese vehicle for managing Chinese overseas emigration and

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54 Trocki, Carl, (1999), 'The Fall and Rise of the Study of the Chinese in Southeast Asia', Conference, Reconceptualising the Southern Chinese: From Community to Diaspora, Australian National University, 27 February 1999. See Wickberg, Edgar, (1999), 'Location and the Organisation of Overseas Migration in the Nineteenth Century, in Hamilton, Gary, (1999).

55 Martin, G (ed), (1978), *The Founding of Australia, The Argument about Australia's Origins*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger.

the knowledge gained from his Malayan investments points to some knowledge of the issue.<sup>56</sup>

The position of Lowe Kong Meng is another question altogether. A sophisticated businessman, from a family that had been trading in Southeast Asia since the early 1800s, Kong Meng's family was part of the Chinese expansion into the Southeast Asian region. He demonstrated those connections through his entrepreneurial role in managing Chinese entry into the North Queensland goldfields and his business interests in the islands of the South Pacific. The family business, Ah Goon Freres, of Farquhar Street, Penang, was trading to Mauritius and Singapore well before the opening of China in 1840.<sup>57</sup>

A further example of selective ethical principle occurs in Paragraphs 3 and 4, The authors claim that the Chinese in Victoria were astonished and hurt by the Buckland River riot in 1857, over twenty years earlier, that they label, a 'cruel and wanton outrage'. The following statement is based on items in the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* and other contemporary reports.

Buckland riot – More than 2,000 Chinese on Buckland River, in three main camps along the river – outnumbered Europeans by at least 3:1. Forty or 50 European (Irish and American?) miners threatened the Chinese and drove them out of their camp on Lauder's Flat and claims about the junction of the two river branches – then torched the camp (46 tents and 2 stores). Then moved down river to Stony Point camp, drove out Chinese and set fire to their 30 tents. Further downstream, past Rocky Point, burned about 20 tents on Chinese Point. Largest Chinese camp on Lower Flat – about 200 'tenements', a joss house and stores – all burnt. Stores looted, Chinese knocked down and robbed, their possessions thrown in the river. 'As the eviction proceeded down the stream, the rogues of the locality mustered to gather booty, and acts of brutality and robbery were numerous.' A European wife of a Chinaman was attacked and 'dreadfully cut about the head', and a Chinaman's finger was cut off to get the ring he wore on it. After Lower Flat, the wildest of the mob pursued the Chinese to the ford across the Buckland River, about 4 miles below Lower Flat – the Chinese were helped across a fallen log by a number of 'manly diggers'. Official report next day of the scene of the Chinese camps: 'In place of men, the remnants of their tools, clothing, and dwellings everywhere met our eyes. Broken shovels, cradles, picks, torn garments, ripped up bedding, half burnt clothing, battered buildings, whole quarters of beef and mutton trodden into the mire, the earth bestrewed with rice, empty sugar bags, and broken tea boxes, were the chief features of the late home of the Celestials. In the chief encampment, the charred frame of the joss-house, with emblematic flag at the door, now torn and defaced, are the only vestiges of the temple which was opened with so

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56 See discussion in Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.  
57 The company is known to have existed from early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

much pomp and ceremony but a few days since.' In August 1857, three men were found guilty of unlawful assembly, and one with riot.<sup>58</sup>

In the light of the above the summary presented by Cheong and his co-authors cannot be faulted:

They were set upon by other diggers, chased from their claims, cruelly beaten and maltreated, their tents plundered and then burnt down. We do not think this was doing as you would be done by.<sup>59</sup>

The authors were right to say that an attack on foreigners in China would have generated strong protests and demands for reparations.<sup>60</sup> They misrepresented the Victorian episode by claiming that: 'no atonement was offered to the poor Chinese diggers who were violently expelled from the Buckland, who were plundered by the stronger and more numerous race.' It is inconceivable that the three authors would not have known that the colonial authorities paid reparations to the Chinese victims.<sup>61</sup> Peng-nam was in Victoria at the time as were Kong Meng and Ah Mouy. It was not true that the Chinese were outnumbered on the Buckland diggings where they were the majority and continued to be when they reappeared on the diggings less than a year after the riots. The Buckland actions were, as the authors argued, 'very disagreeable evidences' of a lack of brotherly love on the part of Europeans, i.e., they proposed that such actions had popular support rather than being the actions of a small minority of the Europeans on the Buckland diggings at the time.<sup>62</sup> The co-authors had to look back twenty years to find events to suit their argument of prejudice and violence. The Buckland riot, and its Lambing Flat counterpart in New South Wales a few years later, were exceptions and not the normal state of affairs (see discussion in Chapter 7).

The allegation by the co-authors that 'no atonement' was made ignored the dismay of the majority of Victorians to the events on the Buckland. As mentioned in Chapter 1, colonists

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58 Cited in Adcock, W E, (1977 reprint), *The Gold Rushes of the Fifties*, Glen Waverley, Vic, Poppet Head Press.

59 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, paragraph 3).

60 Ibid, paragraph. 4. They chose to ignore the role of government officials in anti-foreign riots in China.

61 The Victorian Government paid compensation for property damage of more than £7000.

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

The extent of similar anti-foreignism outrages in China and its effect on British (and Australian) interests has not been examined in discussions of relationships between China and Victoria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1880s it was apparent that Europeans in China lived at risk. Only twenty years after the issue of the pamphlet two young Victorian missionaries were murdered. See discussion of the martyred Saunders Sisters in Chapter 5 and more generally, the classic study of Chinese anti-foreignism, Cohen, Paul A, (1963), *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Anti-Foreignism, 1860-1870*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

viewed breaches of the law as a threat to the stability of colonial society and to their own safety. The Victorian Governor's<sup>63</sup> report to London stated:

So deplorable, in fact, was the havoc, so disgraceful the pillage committed by some of the parties concerned, that a decided reaction in favour of the unfortunate victims was produced throughout the other goldfields; . . . the miners, on the whole, seem satisfied to leave the Legislature to deal with the question, and matters, even at the Buckland, have resumed their wonted course.<sup>64</sup>

*The Mount Alexander Mail* described the Buckland episode as a national disgrace. When a small group of Chinese at Golden Point was threatened a few weeks later (by Bengalis and Malays and not Europeans), the paper warned that Castlemaine had only just escaped 'a repetition of the Buckland outrage'. The editor, Charles Saint,<sup>65</sup> a long time advocate of justice for the Chinese and labelled a 'veritable saint' by anti-Chinese advocates, wrote:

People who hear of the Buckland outrage, who read of the unresisting Chinese being hunted from their homes, and of the suffering to which they were exposed, are at a loss to believe that the perpetrators are Englishmen, whose special pride it is to spare the weak, with whom from childhood it is a point of honor not to 'strike a man when he is down', or injure an unresisting foe.<sup>66</sup>

The pamphlet states in paragraph 4, falsely, as the writers must have known, that Chinese died on the Buckland diggings. It is true that three already infirm Chinese died but all sources agree that they died of hypothermia through falling into the ice-cold river while escaping the crowd of rioters rather than as the result of injuries suffered in the attack on the Chinese camp.<sup>67</sup> Their original illness was probably beri-beri (vitamin B1 deficiency) that afflicted many Chinese on the Buckland through inadequate diet. It is wrong to say that their deaths were 'owing to the injuries they had received' (see also discussion in Chapter 1 of deaths in northeast Victoria).<sup>68</sup>

The pamphlet implies that fear of violence was never far from the minds of Chinese in Australia. Individual Chinese did experience unprovoked violence from time to time (see Chapters 1 and 7), but so did many Europeans. Using the Buckland as an exemplar of a

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63 The Governor was Sir Henry Barkly, an evangelical (Wesleyan Methodist) and at the time of the Buckland episode, patron of the Victoria Chinese Mission. See McCaughey, David, Naomi Perkins and Angus Trimble, (1993), *Victoria's Colonial Governors, 1939-1900*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.

64 Willard, M, (1923), *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press. (Reprinted 1967), pp 25-26.

65 There is a brief summary of Saint's career and role as a defender of the Chinese in Welch, Ian (1980), *Pariahs and Outcasts, Christian Missions to the Chinese in Australia*, MA, Monash University.

66 *The Mount Alexander Mail*, 31 July 1857.

67 Markus, A, (1979), *Fear and Hatred, Purifying Australia and California 1850-1901*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger provides a balanced account of both incidents and compares the Australian record of violence with California.

collective Chinese fear of violence may be acceptable in a polemic political context but should not be accepted as indisputable historical fact.<sup>69</sup> The missionary, Chu A Luk, wrote in 1857, that:

We also express our gratitude to the British people of this colony for the sacred protection given to our lives, property, and liberty; and we most humbly beseech your Excellency to sanction no law against us which is not in accordance with your glorious constitutional laws, against strangers and foreigners.<sup>70</sup>

A Brisbane Chinese said in 1895 that he could only speak in praise of the way in which Chinese were treated while a friend said that Chinese enjoyed the protection of the authorities.<sup>71</sup>

What must be questioned is the extent of anti-Chinese violence. As the most prolific of all Australian Chinese writers in English, references to violence are absent from Cheong's archive of more than 800 letters and articles. The archives of the Chinese missionaries in the 1850s and afterwards do not mention assaults during the period from 1855 to 1861, the period when the Chinese population of Victoria, and potential envy over gold recovery, was at its peak (see Appendices 10 and 11).

Cheong refers only once to being touched in an unpleasant manner and that was not an attack but an inappropriate and insulting search of his clothing by a policeman at Port Melbourne.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, he made just one comment about violence against Chinese Christians, and that was in the context of his sustained pressure to establish a Chinese Anglican mission hall in Little Bourke Street (Chapter 5) and that consisted of drunken larrikins throwing stones on the roof of the meeting hall. None of his children experienced any kind of violence. That Cheong, a wealthy and influential man, escaped the kind of offensive behaviour experienced by many Chinese (Chapter 7) comes as no surprise but, given his public role as a community spokesperson, it is surprising that his only major mention is in the context of this chapter and then about an episode of which he had no direct personal knowledge.

In paragraph 5, the co-authors ask, rhetorically, 'What are we to think of the strong

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68 Willard, M, (1923-1967), *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press. p 25 .

69 Ibid, p 27. The Governor mentioned in his report to London that the Chinese were believed to gloss over discrepancies and bolster up evidence, and this seems to have some justification in the arguments presented by the three authors.

70 Chu A Luk to Sir Henry Barkly, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1857, Castlemaine.

71 *The Church Chronicle*, {Brisbane}, 1 October 1895, p 14.

72 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Hon J B Patterson, Commissioner of Customs, 28th July 1889.

measures which are being resorted to for the purpose of excluding Chinese sailors and stokers from steamers trading to and between Australian ports?' No examples of these measures are given although there are reports of damage to Chinese property in Brisbane and Sydney that followed anti-Chinese meetings.<sup>73</sup> Cronin mentions only one incident involving violence against a Chinese seaman, in Rockhampton, but hot air seems to have been more the style of anti-Chinese protests.<sup>74</sup> In paragraph 6 the co-authors declare that working class men were threatening 'personal violence' against Chinese market gardeners. Yong, author of the most detailed examination of Chinese market gardening, reports that 'sporadic complaints' were made from time to time but 'no strong action was ever taken' against the Chinese.<sup>75</sup> It seems that the pamphlet is referring to resolutions passed at meetings of Europeans in almost every colony demanding either additional restrictions on Chinese immigration or, as in Victoria, total exclusion.<sup>76</sup> As all the authors, and especially Cheong, knew of the constitutional subordination of the Australian colonies to the United Kingdom, and they would have been well aware of the refusal of the British to assist in any proposition to implement exclusion or deportation against Chinese, these comments must be viewed as political posturing.

The reference to 'working class' men reflects an underpinning value of the authors — that they were making an appeal to the right-minded hard-working self-improving European colonists, not the 'working class' for whom all three Chinese leaders felt contempt. As they put it in paragraph 11:

Nothing, we submit, can be more unreasonable, unjust, or undeserved, than the clamour which has been raised against the Chinese by a portion of the people of this colony; for we refuse to believe that that clamour expresses the opinions and feelings of the great bulk of the community.

Extracts from the Melbourne Police Court reports in *the Daily Telegraph* from January 1870 to July 1870 and from January 1885 to December 1885 show that anti-Chinese violence was not an everyday, every week, or even an every month event.<sup>77</sup> An unexpected outcome of the review of the newspaper reports was the rarity of assaults on Chinese in Melbourne

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73 Cronin, Kathryn, (1975), *The Yellow Agony: Racial attitudes and responses towards the Chinese in colonial Queensland*, pp 235-340 in Evans, Raymond, Kay Saunders, and Kathryn Cronin, (1975), *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland*, Sydney, ANZ Book Co.

74 *Ibid*, p 312.

75 Yong, C F, (1977), *The New Gold Mountain*, Richmond SA, Raphael Arts, p 37.

76 Price, Charles, (1974), *The Great White Walls are Built*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, pp 163-164.

77 The author used a 'slice' approach, selecting two periods, five years apart, to assess the extent of anti-Chinese violence that resulted in court hearings.

although it might be reasonably suggested that not all assaults were reported. As there is no way of checking unreported assaults it is reasonable to examine those cases that did result in court appearances and the punishments that followed. The Police Court reports confirm May's statements (from separate Queensland sources) that police responded to breaches of the peace and that magistrates imposed appropriate penalties.<sup>78</sup>

In a comparative study of California and Australia, Andrew Markus observed that the Chinese in Australia benefited from 'the determined action of the authorities to uphold the law and from the refusal of the general body of diggers to take the law into their own hands'. He concluded that there was 'an abiding respect for human life in the Australian mining communities for, even on the Lambing Flat, infuriated miners stopped short of taking the lives of their Chinese enemies'.<sup>79</sup> This restraint was exercised despite the high level of violence on the goldfields outlined in Chapter 1.

After deploring the 'strong measures' that Chinese experienced, the authors contrasted anti-Chinese discrimination in the colonies (paragraph 6) with the benefits that accrued to Britain from providing refuge to all comers. They launch a diversion that fits perfectly into their constant efforts to present themselves in the best possible ethical light by introducing a further new concept that irrespective of the 'unequal treaties' the Chinese should be regarded as refugees from the problems of China, the country that they had earlier described as living in 'contented isolation' (paragraph 2).

They add to their call for employment preference and the 'dog in the manger' theory of an empty land to claim that colonists were denying the Chinese the basic human right to obtain the means of subsistence and to bring to colony the economic benefits of an 'open door'.<sup>80</sup> In paragraph 6 it is asserted that colonists were forgetting, or ignoring, what Britain had gained from foreign settlers: 'It blessed those whom it welcomed to its shores, and it blessed its own industries by the arts and processes which these aliens communicated to their hosts.'

The claim that the Chinese would bring economic benefits would have persuaded few among their target audience of self-made European businessmen who believed that Chinese

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78 There is a lack of clarity on this issue pointing to the need for further detailed investigation. Cronin, Kathryn, (1982), *Colonial Casualties*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press takes the view that the Chinese did not receive proper protection from police and suffered at the hands of the magistrates. May, Cathie R, (1984), *Topsawyers, The Chinese in Cairns*, Townsville, James Cook University takes the alternative view that, taken overall, Chinese were treated fairly.

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

merchants closely guarded their monopoly of trade with China. European merchants were highly critical of the lack of Chinese investment in the colony and resented even more the repatriation of capital needed by the colony to China.

The authors underscore the most important Chinese contribution to Australia by outlining the role of Chinese farmers as the major suppliers of fresh vegetables and of Chinese fishermen as significant contributors of seafood to the cities and towns of the Australian colonies. This was a worthwhile argument and a better basis for their defence of their countrymen than previous propositions. The pamphleteers wrote:

Had it not been for them, the cultivation of vegetables, so indispensable to the maintenance of health in a hot climate like this would scarcely have been attempted in the neighbourhood of some of the goldfields; and the mortality of children would have been very much greater than it really has been. Lease or sell half an acre of apparently worthless land to a small party of Chinamen, and, if there is access to any kind of water or manure, they will transform it, by their system of intensive husbandry, into a most prolific garden, and will make it yield such a rapid succession of crops as will excite the astonishment and admiration of European market-gardeners. As fishermen and itinerant fishmongers, our countrymen have been equally serviceable to the community.<sup>81</sup>

In New South Wales Chinese were nearly three-quarters of the total workforce in market gardening in 1891 and only marginally less in 1901. In Victoria, in 1901, nearly half of the market gardeners were Chinese. The 1911 Australian Census showed that of the 21,856 Chinese males in Australia one third were market gardeners, making this the most important Chinese occupation. Another 1200 were greengrocers and fruiterers.<sup>82</sup>

The Melbourne Trades Hall followed up a Royal Commission into the Victorian Factories Act, aimed at driving the Chinese out of furniture manufacturing, by presenting Premier Thomas Bent with demands including the elimination of Chinese from the fruit and vegetable

business as well as from furniture manufacturing and laundries.<sup>83</sup> Bent knew that the Chinese contribution was so important to the health of Victorians that he rejected the proposal out of hand. Other attempts by the labour movement, in both Victoria and New

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80 The 'means of subsistence' develops later into a call for Australia to accept the Chinese as economic refugees, a curiously modern proposition.

81 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, paragraph 6).

82 Yong, C F, (1977), *The New Gold Mountain*, Richmond SA, Raphael Arts, (see references in the Index) pp 36-39.

South Wales, to ban the Chinese from market gardening and other niche occupations were always rejected by the politicians for the same reasons given by the authors, i.e., the health of the community.

Paragraph 6 concludes with another oddly balanced appeal that it is oddly out of place when referring back to the 'contented isolation' described in Paragraph 2. Quite apart from its external difficulties, 19<sup>th</sup> century China was hardly a 'contented' place. Reference has already been made to the frequent internal rebellions. The contradiction lies in the reference in Paragraph 6 to the failure of China to feed its own people, despite having a nation-wide system of grain storage intended to prevent such disasters. In the 1870s North China experienced one of the worst famines ever with estimates that perhaps fifteen million or more people died. All three authors served on Victorian China Famine Relief Committees and for Cheong, in particular, Chinese famine relief was one of several causes that he supported throughout his life. Subscriptions from Victorians, predominantly Europeans, to China famine appeals were the highest, on a per-capita basis, in the world.<sup>84</sup>

Paragraph 7 draws attention to the fact that Chinese were singled out for discriminatory treatment. The only possible reason, the co-authors advance, is that the Chinese are regarded as unsuitable immigrants and in Paragraphs 7 to 11 they attack the widely held view of European colonists that Chinese were an 'inferior race'. While the argument advanced has considerable merit the illustrations and arguments were less than politic when couched in the form used by the co-authors.

Few informed colonists of the day would have disagreed with the general proposition that the Chinese 'had reached a high stage of civilisation while Britain was populated by naked savages.' The problem was that the Chinese met by most colonists were men of peasant origins whom the local Chinese district associations had warned against wearing traditional open-bottomed Chinese trousers and squatting to defecate in public.<sup>85</sup> In 1894, to give just one example, one of the first Australian women to serve as missionaries in China with the Church Missionary Association of Victoria wrote to her mother, you mustn't judge

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83 *The Age*, 15 September 1904. Similar proposals were made in New South Wales. See Yong, C F, (1966), *The Banana Trade and the Chinese in NSW and Victoria 1901-1921*, *ANU Historical Journal*, Vol 1 No 2, 1965-66, pp 28-35.

84 Bohr, Paul Richard, (1972), *Famine in China and The Missionary: Timothy Richard as Relief Administrator and Advocate of National Reform, 1876-1884*, Harvard East Asian Centre Monograph 48, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

85 Rules of the See Yup Society on Ballarat in Papers Presented to Parliament, Legislative Assembly, Victoria, '1867, Rev William Young, *Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population of Victoria*.

the Chinese by the specimens you see in Melbourne.’<sup>86</sup> The colonists could not equate the men they met with the upholders of China’s ‘Great Tradition.’ As the co-authors acknowledged in paragraph 17, many Chinese did offend European sensibilities and there was some justice in the complaints made that Chinese residential areas were sometimes dirty and squalid although, as the co-authors mention, this was as much the fault of greedy European landlords and incompetent municipal officers (see Chapter 7 for more on this issue).<sup>87</sup>

In a direct challenge to colonial complacency about the superiority of British civilisation the authors used British sources to portray why the Chinese might view Britain as a ‘nation of devils’.

Let us suppose that, thirty or forty years ago, when the English nation forced us, at the point of the bayonet and the mouth of the cannon, to open our ports and harbours to British shipping, and our country to British travellers and settlers, that some of our Mandarins, who had been in the habit of reading the English newspapers forwarded to the missionaries in China, had concluded that Great Britain must be a nation of devils, because the atrocities recorded in these publications, day after day, were so horrible and revolting; and that, therefore, the British must be kept out of our country at all hazards – what would have been said? Would not those very newspapers have been loud and vehement in their condemnation of the obvious injustice of identifying the character and conduct of a whole people with those of its criminal classes? Yet this is what is being done in Australia in regard to ourselves.<sup>88</sup>

The picture of Britain in paragraphs 11-13 is far from flattering and in paragraph 14, the authors draw parallels elevating specific incidents or events into generalizations that present a poor image of a whole nation:

Now, if the Emperor of China and his chief councillors had concluded from these undeniable facts that the English were a nation of murderers, opium-eaters, slave drivers, wife-beaters, swindlers, prostitutes and scoundrels, how cruelly they would have wronged a whole people. Yet this is precisely what is done with respect to our own countrymen, concerning whom the utmost ignorance prevails.<sup>89</sup>

And in paragraph 15:

The ignorance thus complained of continues to this very hour; and the vilest epithets are bestowed upon our countrymen by speakers on platforms, who know nothing

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86 Topsy Saunders to Mrs. Eliza Saunders, in Berry, D M (c1901), *The Sister Martyrs of Kucheng, Memoirs and Letters of Eleanor and Elizabeth Saunders*, London, James Nisbet, p 141.

87 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne, (Appendix 1, paragraph 17).

88 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, paragraph 11).

89 Ibid, paragraph 14.

whatever about China or its people; and who condemn a whole nation on account of the vices and crimes of a small minority.<sup>90</sup>

The authors claimed that man for man the Chinese were morally superior to Europeans and gave a list of ethical precepts that Chinese village school children learned by heart: <sup>91</sup>

These are only a few out of thousands of wise-maxims and pious precepts, which are daily taught in every school throughout the length and breadth of China. Not only so, but the loftiest and wisest principles of government, of social polity, of political economy, of metaphysics and morals, of domestic regulation and personal conduct, are also inculcated at that period of life when the heart and the intellect are the most susceptible of such beneficial lessons. The young are instructed that 'all things are according to heaven;' that God, 'confers happiness on the good, and misery on the evil;' that 'the doctrines of heaven are opposed to selfishness;' that 'of ten thousand evils, lewdness is the chief;' and that 'of one hundred virtues, filial piety is the first.' And yet the people who are thus educated are stigmatized as 'ignorant pagans' and 'filthy barbarians' by persons who have never been in China: who know nothing of its moral, intellectual and social life, and who form hasty judgements and entertain violent prejudices against its people from a very slight acquaintance with immigrants.<sup>92</sup>

Having warned against generalizations and the need for substance in allegations against Chinese settlers the co-authors fall into the error of exaggeration that they have just condemned. They argue that the risk of violent assault at the hands of infuriated ruffians demonstrated at the Buckland would cause sensible men to refuse to expose their womenfolk to 'ignominious and contumelious treatment:<sup>93</sup>

It is objected that they did not bring their wives and sisters with them. Can it be wondered at? We have shown what scandalous treatment they received on the Buckland; and is it to be imagined that, when the news of this atrocity went home to China, any woman of average self-respect would expose herself to be chased through the country by a band of infuriated ruffians, and to see her children burnt to death, perhaps, in her husband's flaming tent. Treated as pariahs and outcasts by the people of this great, free country, the Chinamen in Victoria have hitherto had but scanty encouragement to invite their wives to accompany or to follow them. Subject to be insulted and assaulted by the larrikins of Australia, what Chinaman could be so destitute of consideration for the weaker sex as to render them liable to the same ignominious and contumelious treatment?<sup>94</sup>

Chinese credit ticket emigration, intended mostly for short-term emigrants, did not provide for wives to travel overseas and quite often wives and children were given as security for the repayment of emigration loans. An important reason for women to stay at home was to

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90 Ibid, paragraph 15.

91 Ibid, paragraph 8.

92 Ibid, paragraph 10.

93 See discussion of this in Chapter 1.

94 Ibid, paragraphs 14-16.

protect the absent husband's rights to his share in family property.<sup>95</sup> Cheong acknowledged the rarity of Chinese female emigration in later correspondence:

Filial piety which is a prominent feature in the Chinese character, and one which has secured for the nation 'length of days in the land' and many other blessings of this life, implies, in their view the honoring of their parents with personal service as well as with substance, and so wives and families are considered properly left behind to render the one while themselves laboring to earn the other. Such being the case and my statement is supported by the whole history of the past and the facts of the present that Chinese families are very few and very far between and that such of them as we have, I am bound to say, reflect no discredit upon the nation to which they belong.<sup>96</sup>

The absence of Chinese women continues to be presented, quite falsely, as a product of Australian anti-Chinese sentiment including absurd claims that intermarriage was prohibited. In materials for school children this comment appears:

Governments sought, by keeping Asian women and children out, and by restraining intermarriage, to prevent the Chinese, Indians, Japanese and others already living in Australia from multiplying.<sup>97</sup>

The pamphleteers recognized that criticisms of the Chinese in Australia did not come from colonists as a whole but primarily from the larrikins of the inner cities, i.e., it was a small minority of Europeans who committed offences against Chinese.<sup>98</sup> The larrikin groups comprised juveniles and young unemployed adults who were a thorough nuisance to everyone, not just the Chinese.<sup>99</sup> It is to be assumed that in the minds of the authors these youths were the offspring of the 'idle and dissolute' European working class.

In paragraphs 18-20 the authors answer the accusation that Chinese would work for lower wages than Europeans by stating that the Chinese would prove to be as hedonistic in lifestyle as their European neighbours:

Living among people who have invented thousands of artificial wants, and thousands of means of gratifying them, the expenditure of the Asiatic will soon rise to the European level, because his habits and his mode of living will approximate to those of his neighbours; and, as it is, it cannot escape the observation of persons who have been brought much into contact with the Chinese in Victoria, that the diet of such of them as

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95 Price, Charles, (1974), *The Great White Walls are Built*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, PP 53-60. See also Wickberg, Edgar, (1999), 'Localism and the Organisation of Overseas Migration in the Nineteenth Century, in Hamilton, Gary G, (1999), *Cosmopolitan Capitalists; Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the end of the twentieth century*, Seattle, University of Washington Press.

96 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Hon James Munro, Premier of Victoria, 21 June 1891.

97 Ip, David, Ikuo Kawakarni, Karel Duivenvoorden and Lee Chang Tye (c1998). 'Images of Asians in Multicultural Australia'

<http://asia-for-teachers.educ.utas.edu.au/CD/cdx/units/unit6/module4/lernact1/images.htm>

98 Willard, M. (1923), *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press. (Reprinted 1967) p 55 cites *Town and Country Journal*, 7 December 1878 in support of this view.

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

are tolerably prosperous becomes more generous and costly in proportion to the improvement of their circumstances, and that those who marry and settle here conform to British methods of housekeeping, and are not less liberal and hospitable than their European fellow-colonists.<sup>100</sup>

From paragraph 21 to paragraph 27 the authors bring up the situation of the Chinese in California where European workers also objected to the Chinese.<sup>101</sup> The three men viewed the labour movement with animosity. They had no patience with the idea that organised labour should be able to intervene in their business affairs. As far as they were concerned, and it was a view shared by other self-made colonists, the labour movement was the main source of anti-Chinese feeling and comprised:

The idle, the dissolute, and the drunken; men who insisted upon receiving very high wages for working during three days of the week, and who devoted the other three to dissipation and debauchery. To such persons, the patient, plodding habits of the Chinamen, always at his post, never loafing about, never in liquor, and never plotting and caballing to drive his employer into a corner, and extort higher wages from him, was an intolerable offence.<sup>102</sup>

There are few references in Australian Chinese sources linking the employment of Chinese to their principal Californian rivals for jobs, the Irish, who received starvation incomes in Ireland but did not accept lower wages in Australia. It was almost certainly the Irish who are referred to as plotters and drunkards, a view that was widely held among 'respectable' Protestant businessmen.<sup>103</sup> Analyses of the Irish role, if any, in the anti-Chinese movement in Australia have yet to be undertaken.<sup>104</sup>

Although racism was important in terms of providing a coherent framework for many of the points presented in the pamphlet, it is not the core issue in the co-author's analysis of anti-Chinese discrimination in Australia. When responding to the outcomes of the Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question in 1888 (Chapter 10), Cheong referred to a note sent to the British Government by the colonial premiers:

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100 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, paragraph 20).

101 The Bibliography includes a large number of American studies of the anti-Chinese movement in North America.

102 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, paragraph 22).

103 Blackburn, Kevin, (1997), The Protestant Work Ethic and the Australian Mercantile Elite, 1880-1914, *Journal of Religious History*, Vol 21 # 2, June 1997.

104 There is a revisionist debate in the United States over the precise roles of the Irish and the trades unions in the institutionalization of anti-Chinese discrimination. See discussion and references in Lyman, Stanford M, (2000), 'The 'Chinese Question' and American Labor Historians', *New Politics*, Vol 7, No 4 (new series). The discussion in Price, Charles, (1974), *The Great White Walls are Built*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, pp 262-263 is also relevant.

In their joint memorial to the Imperial Government, they submitted that – ‘The objection to the Chinese is not altogether one of colour or race, but is founded in a rational view of the danger to those British communities which might, in course of time, flow from a people numbering more than four hundred millions, whose language, laws, religion, and habits of life are alien to those of Her Majesty’s subjects in Australasia, and whose geographical position makes the danger more imminent.’<sup>105</sup>

In paragraph 26, the authors, having already claimed to have observed a darkness of soul within the Americans and English, ask that if the evils done to the Chinese are an ‘outcome of your Christianity, let us entreat you to send us no more missionaries . . . for the purpose of converting or perverting our countrymen.’<sup>106</sup> The logic of the statement becomes clear later in the paragraph. If the basis of discrimination is their homeland’s current military weakness then: ‘If so, must we conclude that [*English speaking peoples*] are cowards to the strong and tyrants to the weak?’

Their bitter conclusion demonstrates the pain of personal identity and national self-image experienced by the Chinese in the English-speaking countries of the Pacific Rim as a result of the ‘century of humiliation’ mentioned earlier, i.e., the sequential failures of the Chinese Government that provoked internal rebellions and external invasions. Foreign incursions into China were seen by the authors as contributing to the lack of respect for Chinese subjects living abroad creating a record of humiliation whose effects were, in terms of personal identity and self-respect, collectively a worse offence than attacks on individuals. It demonstrates the daily experience of collective embarrassment shared by people aware of their inheritance of a great civilisation. The evil, if relatively isolated, acts of the larrikins might have affected the entire colonial population but their impact on the Chinese was far more serious because of the deeper failing of intercultural relationships between Europeans and Chinese that were magnified by the ongoing mortification of the Chinese nation.

The importance of this dimension in the ideas expressed in the pamphlet cannot be ignored. The co-authors constantly refer to the treaties and the fact that they represent negotiations between nations and hence demonstrate the equality of China, even if in a rather disadvantageous manner. During an 1888 exchange of letters with the Victorian Government about the detention of Chinese immigrants on the ship *Burrumbeet* Cheong wrote:

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105 Cheok Hong Cheong, *China and the Chinese: Being a public contribution to the better understanding of the Chinese Question*, Public Address, 1888 (Appendix 4).

106 *Ibid.*, paragraph 26.

We cannot, of course, say that we are altogether taken by surprise, since the Government that would strain and wrest the law to gratify some noisy clamour, would, in strict consistency, deny us the rights which the law of the land, however inequitable in our view, never for a moment questioned. We would, however, point out that our nation is at the present time, and has been for many years past, happily at peace with the great nation which your Government represents in this colony; that, moreover, a treaty of peace and friendship exists between them which confers reciprocal rights, and until such treaty has been abrogated the 'surreptitious proceedings' of the Government are alike dishonourable and dishonest.<sup>107</sup>

He returns to the theme in the Petition of the Victorian Chinese to the 1888 Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question (see Chapter 5):

Our own land has no equal on earth for fertility and resources, which by and by will cause her to weigh heavy in the scale of nations, and therefore we assure you, honorable Sirs, that the question whether a few stragglers should emigrate from such a stupendous empire like China, is one of perfect indifference to her Government and her people. But the evil treatment of the few that are here or who have been recently turned away from these shores is a different matter altogether. We hope it may not be, but fear it may, that a deep wound has been inflicted that will rankle and bear evil fruit in the near future.

In 1898 Cheong told the Victorian Legislative Council that:

The Poll Tax . . . is enforced upon every one who is unfortunate enough to be born in that weak and despised Empire of the Far East.<sup>108</sup>

The authors conceded that if power and not ethical principle was to govern relationships between peoples Europeans would succeed in excluding the Chinese but Australia must face 'terrible consequences':<sup>109</sup>

If you substitute arbitrary violence, hatred, and jealousy, for justice, legality, and right; it may be that you will succeed in carrying your point; it may be that a great wrong will be accomplished by the exercise of sheer force, and the weight of superior numbers; but your reputation among the nations of the earth will be irretrievably injured.<sup>110</sup>

In paragraph 27 the co-authors take up the proposal first made by the Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco and in so doing confirm the view expressed earlier that their real concern was not the interests of the Chinese community as a whole but those of the

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107 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Premier of Victoria, 1 June 1888. *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 1888.

108 Cited in Yarwood, A, (1964), *Asian Migration to Australia: The background to exclusion, 1896-1923*, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press, p 104.

109 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. paragraph 28. Cheong is referring to Vattel, Emer de, (1793), *The Law of Nations*, London GGJ & J Robinson and Whieldon and Butterworth.

110 *Ibid*, (Appendix 1, paragraph 34-38).

merchants living in Australasia. They asked, 'why not limit the number of immigrants on each steamer to a very few?' Tonnage and passenger limitations were a long-standing practice in Australia and in accepting the legitimacy of the guiding principle of colonial anti-Chinese immigration policy since it was introduced in Victoria in 1857 the co-authors confirm that it was not restrictions as such that Chinese found objectionable but their application only to them.

The closing argument (paragraphs 28-29) challenge the conventional colonial assumption that European Christianity represented the most advanced form of human existence:

In the name of heaven, we ask, where is your justice? Where your religion? Where your morality? Where your sense of right and wrong? Where your enlightenment? Where your love of liberty? Where your respect for international law? Who are the pagans, you or we?<sup>111</sup>

Even if the Chinese position was no more than an ethical objection to anti-Chinese sentiment, the *Melbourne Punch* thought it superior to the viciousness of the European mob that based its objections to the Chinese on the crudest of racist denunciations:

Three Chinese merchants in Melbourne have put forth an appeal to the reason, the justice, the right feeling, and calm good sense of the British population of Australia, as against the clamour that has been raised by anti-Chinese agitators, here and elsewhere. Such an appeal is entitled to respectful hearing.<sup>112</sup>

The Anglican press praised what it described as the measured language of the Protest but failed to apply any further analysis to the statements made by the three Chinese leaders.

It is to be hoped that the manly and temperate appeal of our Chinese fellow citizens, Kong Meng, Hong Cheong and Ah Mouy, . . . will not have been made in vain. The

arguments urged by these gentlemen for toleration and fair play to their countrymen in these colonies appear to be unanswerable. In effect they amount to this – We have extorted by force of arms more than one treaty from the Government at Peking, throwing open Chinese ports to British commerce, and guaranteeing the utmost freedom of ingress and egress to English subjects in China, and in return to natives of China in all English possessions. We have freely used the rights thus secured to us, and in doing so have been upheld by the Government and police of the Celestial Empire; but Chinese immigrants, claiming under the same treaty to be admitted as colonists, have in violation of all faith and honour been refused their undoubted rights, have even been driven out with outrage from one of our goldfields, and are now, it seems, to be excluded from serving as sailors or stokers in our intercolonial steamers.<sup>113</sup>

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111 Ibid, (Appendix 1, paragraph 29).

112 *Melbourne Punch*, 16 January 1879.

113 *The Church of England Messenger*, March 1879.

Perhaps their elite distrust of the labouring classes is the reason the co-authors do not at any time try to address the economic concerns of Europeans in Victoria. They do not acknowledge the attempts of colonial employers to exploit workers nor the attempts of the Chinese business elite to take advantage of Chinese labourers by paying as little as possible that was to lead to the Chinese furniture workers strike in the 1890s. This is made all the more obvious by the praise Cheong gave to 'the better class' of Europeans in the Victorian Chinese Residents' Association petition to the 1888 Intercolonial Conference on the Chinese Question:

Though as yet we have had no Colonial Statesmen to protest against the injustice we have been subjected to, yet in this connection we are glad to admit that in our intercourse with the best class of Colonists we have found amongst them a feeling of repugnance at, and an utter detestation of, the treatment which our countrymen have received at the hands of the various Colonial Governments.<sup>114</sup>

As Cheong was to do again in his arguments in the 1888 *Afghan* affair (Chapter 8), the pamphlet argued that injustice not only affects the victims, it creates a cancer than can infect a whole society. It is a mark of the selective morality that underpins the entire pamphlet that the injustice that the ASN Company intended to do to the European seamen by replacing them with lower paid Chinese workers is not condemned or found 'repugnant' to sound ethical practice. The authors sum up:

This, then, is the position of the Chinese in Australia, relative to British colonists. By a treaty imposed upon his Imperial Majesty, our august master, your nation compelled him to throw open the gates of his Empire to the people of Western Europe. In return you bound yourselves to reciprocity. The freedom to come and go, trade and settle, which you insisted on claiming for yourselves, you also accorded the subjects of his Imperial Majesty.<sup>115</sup>

Cheong's first venture into public debate established him as a significant and able spokesman for the Chinese community. That was no small achievement despite the questionable selection of incidents, events and moral challenges that have been discussed. *The Chinese Question* was unsuccessful in bringing about a change in colonial attitudes in relation to the short-term ASN case or in regard to the development of Australian immigration policies. It was nonetheless a well-presented response to the self-serving arguments produced by anti-Chinese polemicists among the colonists.

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114 Appendix 4 of the Minutes of the Intercolonial Conference held in the Legislative Council Chamber at Sydney 12-14 June 1888 to consider 'A Bill for the Restriction of Chinese Immigration'.

115 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), *The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80*, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, paragraph 29.

For the first time in nearly thirty years attacks on the Chinese were answered and attracted sympathy for the Chinese among some Europeans, not least the leaders of the churches. Cheong found himself being courted by the managers of the Anglican Chinese Mission. He impressed people enough that in 1885 he was appointed Superintending Missionary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society of Victoria. His contribution to the pamphlet was the first step in his subsequent career.