Cheong’s place and identity in Victoria have been discussed initially against the background of the Victorian goldrush (Chapter 1), then against the colonial network of relationships of the Chinese community (Chapters 2 and 4), and then within his association with the Presbyterian and Anglican Churches (Chapters 3 and 5). Although these chapters are not in strict chronological order, it seemed preferable to start the chapter dealing specifically with his family and business dealings with his own marriage arrangements rather than away from the working out of his family commitments and, with them, the investment program that provided the family income from 1898 onwards, following the events described in the previous chapter.

Within five or six years of his arrival in Victoria in 1863 Cheok Hong Cheong became, at around sixteen or seventeen years of age, a married man. He was still a secondary school student at the time. Cheok Hong Cheong and Wong Toy Chen were married for nearly sixty years. Mrs Cheong died at the family home, Pine Lodge, Croydon, on 14 February 1927, just eighteen months before Cheok Hong Cheong’s death in 1928. She delivered nine children. James was born in Ballarat in 1871 and died in Melbourne on 3 October 1941. The other children were born in Melbourne. Joshua (1873-1928); Caleb (1876-1943); Oi Chan died at birth (1877 or 1878); Grace Mary (1879-1898); Nehemiah (1881-1884); Christina (1883-1936); Nathaniel (1886-1956) and Benjamin (1888-1970).

Cheong Peng-nam’s Australian family history reflected Chinese society of the period. Colonel Tcheng-Ki-Tong, the Chinese Military Attaché in Paris in 1884, wrote a small booklet, *China Speaks for Itself*, in which he offered several comments on the status of the family in 19th century China and the purpose of marriage.

The family is the corner stone of the Chinese Empire. Chinese society may be defined as the totality of its families, and the Chinese family may be compared to

---

1 Attempts to identify Mrs Cheong’s family in Ballarat have not been successful.
an organised society. It attains the dignity of a religious order with a settled rule; its income constitutes a common fund, from which provision is made for the education of children, for (dowries), for an allowance to young men beginning their career, for pensions to the sick, the aged, or those who are out of employment.

The eldest of a family is the head; every important action is decided by him, and he signs legal papers in the name of all the other members . . .

It is usual for all the generations of one line to live in one house, so that the seven ages may sometimes be found under the same roof . . .

The obligations of children to parents are held as so solemn that the distinction of the former redounds to the advantage of the latter, and honors are transmitted backwards: if a public functionary is ennobled, his parents are ennobled with him, and his rank, if sufficiently high, ascends to more remote progenitors.

The idea of succouring the ills of the stranger, of humanity, in short what we term philanthropy or general benevolence, is incomprehensible to them; they have the charity that begins at home in its widest sense, but the Christian relation of the ‘neighbor’ is unknown to them, and by inference the Good Samaritan would have been set down as a fool, in China.

The Victorian colonial environment in which Cheong Peng-nam sought to retain his Chinese cultural and social heritage was very different from China but he made every effort to retain the core family values mentioned by Tcheng in the extract above. Peng-nam’s Chineseness shaped Cheok Hong Cheong and, despite his children’s much closer involvement with colonial life, were important in Cheok Hong’s handling of his family.

The presence of ‘Confucian’ literature in the Anglican Chinese Mission that was reported by the Rev. Dr Ernst Eitel (see Chapter 5) was part of Cheong’s sincere commitment to the land of his fathers:

The C.M.A. committee asked for advice as to certain of their future plans from Dr. Eitel, who was the best expert in the Chinese available. . . . He is amazed that the books provided in our Melbourne Church of England Mission seemed to be

---

'a heterogeneous growth of Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and especially Confucian literature.'

It is not known what the ‘Confucian’ materials comprised but, based on Cheong’s own writings, it is possible that works of Confucius, such as the Analects, and other Chinese writings on ethical and moral traditions that did not directly confront Christianity, were included. Cheok Hong’s upbringing was different from his father’s but it included much of the traditions and practices of the old country. Whether from Chinese or Christian values, and probably a mix of both, he sought filial obedience in all things. In 1909 he told the daughter of a family friend that:

I am Chrissie’s & the boys Banker. I make all the investments for them & receive all the rents & dividends on their a/c.

The few references to the issues raised by Tscheng that are contained in Cheong’s letterbooks, such as that above, indicate that, responding to colonial legal and taxation practices, he did not hold all the family assets in his own name taking care to distribute his holdings among his children during his later years.

The discussion of Cheong’s family life in this chapter comes from his letterbooks and relates only to the three older boys — James, Joshua and Caleb. Cheong’s letters were in a very formal style but occasionally, as in his references to Grace, his elder daughter; in his efforts to protect James from the humiliations of the White Australia Policy; and most explicitly, in his fury with Caleb; he revealed the passionate nature discussed in Chapter 5 that always lay behind his calm, patrician exterior. His public persona was cultivated carefully towards what, in Chinese terms, was the style of the shen shih, the educated man. A contemporary described him as, 'short and rotund and his speaking voice showed no sign of an [Chinese] accent. His hands were soft and white, with long nails on his little fingers indicating, in the Chinese tradition, that he was a scholar.'

Cheok Hong Cheong followed his father’s example by giving his children access to the best European education possible. James attended Melbourne Grammar School.

---

3 The Church of England Messenger, 1 December 1898.
4 See comments by Sam Tong Way in Chapter 5.
5 Cheok Hong Cheong to May Poon Why, 7 May 1909.
while the other boys attended Scotch College, Victoria Parade, and. The girls attended the Methodist Ladies College.

James Cheong, MA.

Cheok Hong supported his elder son financially, at least until he returned from England in 1904. James was the most distinguished, academically, of the Cheong family. His school and university record was outstanding and his achievements were a matter of great pride to his father.
Cheong always added the MA after his son’s name. The degree was awarded without further examination on the basis of his undergraduate degree results. James’ only ‘competition’ within the family might have come from his sister Grace, had she not died prematurely. It is possible that some of the difficulties that Cheong had with the other members of the family arose from resentment of the privileges granted to James. This is particularly relevant in the case of Caleb, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

1889  Head Boy of Melbourne Grammar School
Ayers Prize for Head of School
Speakers Prize for Classics
English Essay Prize
Original Greek Essay Prize
Midwinter Form Prize
Bishop Perry’s Scripture Prize
Critical Prize for Latin and Greek
1889 Matriculated with 1st Class honours in classics
1890 Second year with 1st in classics, Trinity College, University of Melbourne
1896  B.A. Hons - Trinity College, University of Melbourne
1898 M.A. classics without further examination, University of Melbourne.

James’ university record was distinguished although taken at a leisurely pace. Eight years of living in Trinity College imposed a heavy financial burden upon his father as outlined in the following letter to Archdeacon Samuel Williams of New Zealand (see Chapter 5):

My Dear Archdeacon, James has been much affected by the demise of a dear sister [Grace] the flower of the family as he calls her & longs to fulfil her desire & that of his own to become a Medical Missionary (ordained), the layman’s idea, he said, was an alternative if the way be not clear for him to carry out his original purpose. I have already done my best for him in supporting him in a long-expensive course until he had graduated with first honours in the School of Classics & Comparative Philology which entitled him to the higher degree without further examination . . . He admits that he is disposed towards a different school of thought to that of his father and would rather not study under Principal Monk. But he is young and if his father can give him a little time to direct him in his studies, aided by a dear sister’s memory & the illumination of the Holy Spirit, I have strong hopes of his recovery from a point which before he entered Trinity College he has characterized as Popish . . . Of course it may only be a father’s fond wish but having gone over a wider field of theological
literature side by side with some of the most distinguished University Dons I feel that some impression might be made on his young mind.  

The uncertainty about what James was to do after completing his eight years at Melbourne University is the major strand in Cheong’s comments to Williams. Grace's untimely death in 1898 removed an important influence from his life. He enrolled, briefly, as a theological student at St John's College, East St Kilda — a short-lived diocesan college staffed by part-time lecturers — in 1898 but does not seem to have undertaken any courses. In early 1899 James left Australia for Hong Kong. He had been writing to an English Anglican priest enquiring about the pronunciation of Chinese, a mark of James’ concern to speak and write Chinese as a Chinese scholar might do. The Cheong family’s knowledge of spoken Mandarin, the official language of China, was poor or non-existent. James' letterbooks show how hard he practised written Chinese by copying many of the Chinese classics. The family identity might, in other circumstances than those created for his children by Cheok Hong Cheong, have been described as simply Chinese, if it were not for the fact that their Australianness was inseparable from their total identity.

Archdeacon Samuel Williams met James when father and son visited New Zealand shortly after the amalgamation of the CMSV with the Church Missionary Association of Victoria in 1897 (See Chapter 5). Williams was very impressed by James' striking intelligence and attractive personality. Williams offered, with missionary service in mind, to help James by financing his theological studies in England and/or a medical course at the University of Melbourne. Cheong later wrote to the Archdeacon to inform him of the costs involved in the medical course:

My dear Archdeacon — When James and I were under your hospitable roof you were good enough to enquire when the boy would be ready to proceed to England for his theological course. I replied that I thought this year. But since in the letter he wrote me when I first visited you he expressed his desire to become an ordained medical missionary. That is to go through a medical course &

7 Cheok Hong Cheong to Archdeacon Samuel Williams, 1 April 1898.
8 Rev. J Dyer Ball to James Cheong, 3 March 1898. (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne).
thereafter seek ordination. And he retains the same desire if anything more strongly developed and feels that he could be of the most use in that position. Although my own view and that of a personal friend of the family is that he would be of the most use if after a good sound Theological course he took up Training work. However in view of his strongly expressed desire I can only bid him God speed in an equally Divine calling to heal bodies and souls of men. If therefore you approve he can begin at once. If it be at the University here the fees for the First Term have to be paid on or before the 25th Feb.

According to a friend of ours (Dr Macgibbon) who went through his course here the cost per annum if economically managed is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University fees, books and instruments</td>
<td>£50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital Fees</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing, keep and personal expenses</td>
<td>50£</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will however enquire of Professor Allen, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine to verify the correctness of Dr Macgibbon's estimates.

Yours Very Faithfully, CHC

PS If James studied here he will have the opportunity of improving his Chinese knowledge. If in England he will have more eminent instructors. Kindly let me know your pleasure.  

James' interest in medicine ceased when the University of Melbourne ruled that he lacked the necessary prerequisites to enter the medical course.

Differences of personality, religious outlook, worldview, life experience and personal ambition had emerged between father and son. The differences had their origins in the difference between the somewhat haphazard style of worship that James experienced as a youth in the mission chapel and the far more dignified and intellectually satisfying rituals of his eight years worshipping in the Trinity College

---

10 Cheok Hong Cheong to Archdeacon Samuel Williams, 28 January 1898.
11 Ridley College opened in 1911. It did not become an affiliated college of the University of Melbourne until 1965. Cheong believed the influence of Trinity College staff was the starting point of James move towards the Anglo-Catholic tradition, what might have been the outcome had Ridley College, an evangelical college, existed when James attended the University of Melbourne.
chapel. While in Hong Kong (1899-1902) and later as a student at Cuddesdon Theological College (Oxford University) in England in 1902-1903, James found that he preferred a highly formalised style of public worship alongside a life of personal devotion and contemplative prayer.

Cheong’s attempts to direct his children’s lives affected them differently. The indecision that marked James’ choice of a career affected all Cheong’s children. James’ followed his father into full-time Christian service reflected his acceptance of the underlying value of Christianity and Christian ministry. Christine and Benjamin retained links with the Mission as Trustees. Cheong’s letters show that he thought his other boys lacked a work ethic.

The Rev. Dr Ernst Eitel (see Chapter 5) wrote to James with an enquiry about a young Chinese from Hong Kong. In his reply James sought Eitel’s advice on his future. Eitel suggested that James go to China and improve his Chinese language skills. Eitel warned James not to be taken in by attitudes and values in Hong Kong where commercial and not scholarly or Christian values predominated. He referred James to Sir Kai Ho Kai, a leading Chinese Christian, with a warning to listen carefully to what Ho Kai said and then make his own assessments and draw his own conclusions. He suggested that James consider a career with the Chinese Foreign Office.

Cheong conveyed Eitel’s views in a letter to Williams. He felt that his original plan for James to be ordained and become a medical missionary was much to be preferred to the well-paid job of a diplomat:

My Dear Archdn My son James had a letter from the Rev. Dr Eitel some time ago asking him to make enquiries concerning a young man named Wong Ko-

---

12 Eitel, E J, (1895), Europe in China, Hong Kong, Kelly and Walsh. Eitel’s letter is known from Cheong's note to Archdeacon Williams (see footnote 15). Upon his retirement in Hong Kong Eitel had accepted a call to a Lutheran Church in Adelaide and was also lecturing part-time at the University. In replying, James sought Eitel's advice about his future, especially in regard to his poor Chinese language skills.

13 Smith, Carl T, (1985), Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen and the Church in Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Oxford University Press.

14 Choa, G H, (1981), The life and times of Sir Kai Ho Kai: a prominent figure in nineteenth-century Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Chinese University Press. Ho Kai was a relative of the catechist Ho A Low who served with the Victoria Chinese Mission from 1855-1857 and later as a Government Interpreter in the Colony of Victoria and in New Zealand.
tong formerly a student under Bishop Burdon but one in whom the Bps hopes have been blasted. In sending Dr Eitel the results of his enquiries James sought the advice of the veteran from China upon several matters & received the enclosed reply. I might say that Dr Eitel himself left the service of the London Missionary Society ten or fifteen years ago to enter government employ as Inspector-General of Schools in Hong Kong & did retain his interest in but his inspectorial duties gave him but little time to devote the work of the Mission . . . I shall be very glad and thankful to know if you approved the suggestion contained in my letter of the 28th Jany re a medical course. As when we were with you were kind enough to tell James that you were willing your generous promise should go either towards a theological or medical course. The other part of Dr Eitel's letter is a candid confession though he is reckoned with Dr Chalmers the two most distinguished Chinese scholars amongst the missionaries of Kwan-tung Province he has but a smattering knowledge of Chinese. In that he corroborates the statements of other missionaries some of whom I have quoted.\(^{15}\)

James decided to follow Eitel's advice and go to Hong Kong. On the way, he stopped briefly in Sri Lanka and later, during his time in Hong Kong, visited Shanghai and Japan.\(^{16}\)

James was never physically strong, suffering endless lung infections that may, in part at least, explain his rather leisurely progress through university. While studying at the University of Melbourne he had to take a rest with the family of the Rev. J C Love, Vicar of St Paul’s Church, Geelong.\(^{17}\) In England, he had to take time off from theological studies to recuperate from illness. A three-week trip to Tasmania, after his return from England, turned into a three-month recuperative holiday.

Prior to James departure for Hong Kong in 1899, his father obtained a number of personal references and had them printed up as a booklet.\(^{18}\) The Warden of Trinity College outlined James’ academic successes and paid tribute to his ‘high character and

\(^{15}\) Cheok Hong Cheong to Archdeacon Samuel Williams, 4 March 1898.


\(^{17}\) Love was a pioneer clergyman in Victoria. See Love, J C, (nd), \textit{Seventy Years of Church Life in the Diocese of Melbourne}, Melbourne.

\(^{18}\) A copy is held in the National Archives of Australia.
A former teacher of classics at Scotch College, and later Melbourne Grammar School, wrote that James was 'a thoroughly educated and refined English gentleman.' In his reference the Archbishop of Melbourne endorsed James and, perhaps out of recognition of past events, described Cheok Hong Cheong as 'an able man.' Another of James' referees was the Chief Justice and Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, Sir John Madden, who had been retained by the Victorian Chinese Residents Committee in 1888 to argue the case for the Chinese in the Victorian Supreme Court hearing into the Afghan case (see Chapter 8). The Rev. J C Love (see above) raised the possibility of James' ordination in the Anglican Church in China. Dr H Wollaston, the Colonial Secretary for Trade and Customs, described James as a ‘young man of great capacity and most excellent character’, and added that he recommended him for employment in the diplomatic service or the Imperial Customs Service. Eitel provided James with letters of introduction to Ho Kai and Wei Yuk (Hong Kong Legislative Council members); to the Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong; the Headmaster of Queen’s College, Hong Kong; and a former London Missionary Society minister, the Rev. T W Pearce, who had been an Inspector of Government Schools during Eitel’s period as Director of Hong Education.

On the basis of his references and university qualifications James secured a teaching appointment at Queen’s College, Hong Kong and became an active lay reader in the Diocese of Hong Kong. The headmaster said in his reference:

Mr James Cheong, graduate in Classics of Melbourne University has been acting as Assistant Master in this college during the last three years and a half [April 1899-31 August 1902]. It is with the greatest pleasure that I bear testimony to the

19 Dr Alec Leeper, Warden of Trinity College, 8 October 1898. (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne).
20 From Lancing College, Sussex, 15 January 1899. (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne).
22 Sir John Madden, 10 May 1900. (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne).
24 H Wollaston, 10 February 1899. (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne.)
character and attainments of Mr James Cheong. He is a good disciplinarian, a kind and sympathetic teacher, with a natural aptitude for imparting knowledge. His classes passed well at the Annual and Midsummer Examinations. Mr Cheong takes with him the best wishes of the whole staff for success and happiness in his future career. It is a matter of regret to myself, that it was impossible to secure the advantage of his services on the permanent staff.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite his success at Queen’s, James did not consider a career as a teacher. A year after his arrival in Hong Kong, he wrote to Sir John Madden outlining his activities after leaving Melbourne in March 1899. As far as employment with the Chinese Government was concerned, James told Madden:

\textit{They one and all, particularly the Chinese members of the Legislative Council, dissuaded me from original intention of entering the Chinese Imperial Service, on the ground that Chinese politics were in a hopeless mess as the result of Chinese official conservatism, incapacity and corruption.}\textsuperscript{26}

James asked Madden’s help in securing a cadetship with the British Foreign Service that was open to him as a British subject. He now spoke some Mandarin and saw work involving China as a ‘natural sphere’ for a person with his ethnic background although he later seems to have reconsidered his ideas. James asked Madden to provide him with a certificate using a format he found in the Hong Kong archives by which Madden, as Administrator of the Colony of Victoria, could nominate him to the British Foreign Office:

I have read in the columns of the Hongkong Government Gazette (1862 p 291 ff) the correspondence which passed between the then Secretary of State and the Hongkong Government in re the status of British-born children of foreign parents, wherein their birth rights and privileges were duly acknowledged . . . I herewith enclose my formal application together with my testimonials.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} Geo H Watson Wright DD Oxon (Headmaster), 1 September 1902.
\textsuperscript{26} James Cheong to Sir John Madden 20 March 1900, (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne).
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
James asked Madden to forward the papers direct to London with his personal recommendation which Madden did on May 10th, 1900.28 James also discussed his future with the Bishop of Hong Kong who told him that he was an ideal candidate for the ordained ministry:

Mr James Cheong has been intimately known to me for three years during two of which he has been a licensed lay reader; and I can heartily recommend him as an earnest, faithful, God-fearing man of first class European education. He himself is desirous of taking Holy Orders, and if a thoroughly educated Christian Chinaman is wanted for work amongst Chinese, or indeed amongst Europeans, I shall have no hesitation in recommending him as a candidate for Holy Orders; nor should I hesitate to accept him as such myself, should he be called to offer himself for work in this Diocese.29

---

28 Ibid.
29 Bishop of Victoria, Hong Kong, 20 March 1902.
There may have been another factor at play in James’ decision not to proceed further with his application to join the British Foreign Service. Eitel’s earlier warning about Hong Kong had proved correct, as James was to reflect after enrolling, in February 1903, at Cuddesdon College, a theological college affiliated with Oxford University. It probably explains, at least in part, why he did not take up the bishop’s offer of ordination and service in the Diocese of Victoria, Hong Kong. James wrote to his mother after his arrival at Oxford:

The life here is so different from that in Hong Kong. There the racial feeling is so strong that unconsciously I began to suspect even friends of not being sincere in their friendship. I used to feel there, rightly or wrongly, that their manifestations of friendship to me were forced.  

James found that although a 'High Church' centre, the college had 'next to nothing of ritual'. Services, including the Holy Communion, were conducted in traditional Anglican 'Surplice, Cassock & Hood and Stole' rather than the mediaeval style of eucharistic vestments that was reappearing in Anglican worship. James joined the Society of the Sacred Mission, an Anglo-Catholic monastic order following Franciscan traditions. James took the traditional vows of ‘chastity, poverty, and obedience’ that shaped the rest of his life. Quite apart from the fundamentally different religious values that now divided father and son it would have been a great sadness for Cheok Hong that his son had rejected his filial duty as the oldest male child, i.e., to marry, establish a family and undertake family-wide leadership responsibilities. James was made deacon in London in 1904, at Southwark Cathedral, on Letters Dimissory from the Archbishop of Melbourne, and returned to Australia. His father’s paternalistic intervention was seen in a series of letters to the immigration authorities seeking to have James avoid the usual interrogation given to Chinese entering Australia, whether carrying a British passport or not (See Appendix 17).

30 James Cheong to Mrs Cheong, 3 March 1903. (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne).
31 James Cheong to Mrs Cheong, 3 March 1903.
32 The only member of the family to have children was Caleb, whose wife was a European-Australian, There are descendants from the marriage.
33 The original documents relating his ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood are held at the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Cohen Place, Melbourne.
After meeting the Rev. Ernest S. Hughes in England, James made up his mind to seek to work with Hughes at St Peter’s Church, Eastern Hill, the parish within which the Anglican Chinese Mission was located. St Peter’s was the leading Anglo-Catholic parish in the Melbourne diocese (Chapter 5). Hughes wrote to Cheong about James’ future and received the following reply, amply illustrating what was said earlier about Cheong’s determination to direct his son’s future:

Dear Mr Hughes — I am much obliged to you for your favour of the 5th. ult. and for your kind consideration in urging James’ speedy return to Melbourne to give his Father the absolute rest he has been ordered by his medical attendant to take and for which he has for many years past felt severely the need.

It is exceedingly kind of the Bishop and yourself to suggest the possibility of James’ promotion in the Diocese but that need not I hope take him away altogether from the direct work of the Mission nor involve his residence with the other clergy at S. Peters’, at all events not at present.

As to the future so far as I’m personally concerned James can please himself as to where he lives and what preferment he accepts which the Bishop may be good enough to offer him after his Father has rested to recruit his strength and if he will while his Father labours thereafter for the liquidation of the debt on the Mission. But while he thus acts for his Father James must in accordance with our Established Custom and usage live with his people, be thoroughly at home with them and accessible at all times to them.

For that reason, we declined a previous offer of the late Mr. T. M. Millar to board and lodge our Catechist at Brighton gratuitously as we felt that its acceptance would make the Catechist inaccessible to his people and thus lose that influence for good which we desire our Missioner to exercise.

James must therefore in the interests of the Mission and as a filial duty wait patiently until his Father’s health has been reestablished before he could think of living elsewhere and accepting preferment outside of the Mission. Although I am of opinion there is no preferment in the Church to be compared with that of a Missionary especially when the work is amongst the sojourners from the land of Sinim whose vitality and importance as a people is not only written in history but also indelibly inscribed in Holy Prophecy.
I am persuaded therefore James can have no higher vocation or more ennobling work than that of sharing in the ingathering of these from the land of Sinim into the fold of the Christian Church.

With the kindest regards and best wishes for your new estate of wedded bliss.34

While James was en route to Australia in 1904, Cheong continued with his own construction of James’ reality.35 In Cheong’s thinking James would undertake the everyday pastoral work of the mission while leaving policies and priorities to his father. He was to live in the Missioner's apartment on the top floor of the mission building with the certain knowledge that his father would stay with him when in the city, i.e., every weekend and most Fridays and Mondays.36

James was prepared to be appointed Missioner but as an ordained priest he was determined not be subservient to his lay father. Anglo-Catholic tradition views ordination as a sacrament that endures for life and forever distinguishes a priest from all other people. Although the evangelical view is, theologically, somewhat different, conventions were much the same. When Cheong fell out with the CMAV, and the Secretary, the Rev. E J Barnett, in 1897-8, the CMAV sought to weaken his position by declaring that: 'Mr Barnett is Executive Secretary, and his being a clergyman in priest’s orders settles finally the question of relative authority.’37 Cheong's response was that he was as well educated theologically as most clergymen which, considered against the overall standard of Victorian Anglican clergymen of the time, was probably true. Unfortunately for Cheong, it was an issue on which ordained clergymen, irrespective of the finer points of theology, held common views about the relative status of ordained and non-ordained people.

As the disagreement between James and his father deepened, Cheong astounded everyone when he said in 1909 that it was against Chinese custom for him, as head of

34 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Rev. Ernest Hughes, 20 September 1904.
35 See Chapter 5, Part D, for copies of Cheong’s letters to the immigration authorities seeking James unimpeded admission to Australia.
36 Cheong to Secretary, External Affairs, 15 April 1904.
37 The Church of England Messenger, 1 December 1898, p 178.
the family, to kneel before his son to receive the communion elements.\textsuperscript{38} It was all the more extraordinary because, although never an enthusiastic communicant, Cheong had previously received the communion from James without comment. Cheong sought to explain his change of attitude in terms of Chinese filial piety. He set out his views to the Honorary Chaplain, Archdeacon Cresswell:

Dear Mr Cresswell, I have been seeking an opportunity to talk over the subject of your very kind letter but have been hindered hitherto.

Public opinion & sentiment among the Chinese is very different to what it is among Europeans. For example, it is not only possible but a fairly common practice among English people for a parent to show his affection for a son by carrying his luggage for him. The following is an instance given me. The parent of an Oxford student thought it very becoming not only to accompany his son to the Railway Station but also carry his luggage for him & thus free him from all impediment but being only of the peasantry class the son to cover the shame as he thought it of his lowly origin & to have the honour among his fellow students at the station dismissed him with no other ceremony than taking the luggage from him & handing him a shilling as if he were a hireling cabman.\textsuperscript{39}

This latter part of the son's conduct I know is not approved but I have known many instances of a prosperous son hiring his father or mother to work for him for wages. Such action passes not only unrebuked but also unremarked.

Among the Chinese however the son has to honor his parents not only with his substance but with his personal service e.g. if a servant brings in a cup of tea to refresh his father or mother it is the proper filial thing for the son to take the cup from the servant & hand it personally to the parent. Moreover his means & belongings & indeed his whole fortune are at the disposal of his sire the only limitations are the limitations of righteousness & humanity.

Thus the family is strictly under patriarchal government, the state is only the larger patriarchy.

\textsuperscript{38} His rich life as the perpetual curate at St Peter's is discussed in Holden, Colin, (1995), \textit{From Tories at Prayer to Socialists at Mass}, St Peter's Eastern Hill, Melbourne, 1846-1990, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.

\textsuperscript{39} This was a Christian humility story that was widespread in evangelical circles for many years. It is in the same category of tale as what is known today as an 'urban myth'.

178
And further the father is always the officiating priest at the family altar & the Emperor the High Priest of the nation. So profound is the respect held to be due to one's parents in China that the Jesuit missionaries allowed ancestral worship of their converts indeed advocated it as a species of Saint worship hence the ecclesiastical strife which raged between the Franciscans & Dominicans in China which the Pope settled by deciding in favor of the latter while the Emperor Kienlung the most illustrious and cultured of the Sovereigns of the present dynasty rejected the Pope's decision & insisted that ancestral worship was the duty of every son of Han.\textsuperscript{40}

You will see from this the strength of the filial feeling amongst my people. If the father is present on any occasion he always takes precedence of his son. I have thought it wise to therefore not to grate upon the feelings of my people by taking a position which is contrary to their views of propriety. Hence my absence.\textsuperscript{41}

It was a curiously unconvincing and flagrantly self-centred argument from a theologically literate man with an evangelical formation, and even more unconvincing for those, like Marston Bridger, who found Cheong’s attitude to the Holy Communion to be casual, at best (see Chapter 5).\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{41} Cheok Hong Cheong to Archdeacon Creswell, Melb 14 June 1909.

\textsuperscript{42} The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church deal specifically with the relationship between the human person of a clergyman and his role as an officiating minister. Although Article XXVI is more about the moral worthiness of ministers, the principle underlying it applies. The full text is and the relevant principle is highlighted:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Article XXVI. Of the unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the Sacraments.}

\textit{ALTHOUGH in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometime the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the word and sacraments; yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ's, and do minister by His commission and authority, we may use their ministry both in hearing the word of God and in the receiving of the sacraments. Neither is the effect of Christ's ordinance taken away by their wickedness, nor the grace of God's gifts diminished from such as by faith and rightly do receive the sacraments ministered unto them, which be effectual because of Christ's institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men.}
\end{quote}
Some two years later Cheong complained to the Archbishop about ‘innovations’ in the mission chapel introduced by James with Hughes’ support. The innovations centred on the placing of candles on the altar and the introduction of auricular confession prior to the Eucharist. Nothing could have been more insulting and provocative to the evangelical, low church Christian and neo-Confucian father than what he construed as flagrant disrespect by his son. Cheong removed and hid the candlesticks and refused to replace them despite a direction from Hughes in his role as the parish priest.

Normal Anglican practice required Hughes to discuss the proposal with the parish council although it had no jurisdiction over the Mission Chapel. Hughes should have consulted the Mission Trust and the Board and only then sought a ‘faculty’ or approval from the diocesan bishop before introducing ‘ornaments’ (i.e., the candlesticks) to the building. Hughes appears to have ignored all the usual rules and conventions. It was arrogant and presumptuous behaviour by the two clergymen. Cheong fired off a letter of protest to the Archbishop who was not prepared to take sides in what he probably saw as a matter over which he no authority to intervene:

Dear Mr. Cheong, I have seen both Mr. Hughes & your son upon the subject of your letter. With regard [to] the candlesticks placed by your son on the Communion Table at the Mission I heard of it for the first time from you. I do not think your son will consent to remove them but the chapel is not one of the churches of my diocese & I can only leave you to urge further your wishes. Your son is licensed as Curate of St Peters & I cannot withdraw this license so long as your son gives no occasion to do so. I deeply regret the difference of opinion between you & him but it ought to be capable of adjustment between

Nevertheless it appertaineth to the discipline of the Church that inquiry be made of evil ministers, and that they be accused by those that have knowledge of their offences; and finally, being found guilty by just judgement, be deposed.

43 Anglican evangelicals tended to avoid placing candles on the Communion Table (or altar) because of a rejection of all things associated with the Catholic tradition in worship. Under the evangelical traditions of Bishop Perry there were few altar candles in the Diocese of Melbourne for many years. Among the churches in which they were unknown in the early years of the diocese was St Peter’s, Eastern Hill. A photograph in 1877 shows a small wooden altar without candles.
you. I learnt from with surprise that you feel as his father some difficulty in accepting ministrations at his hands.  

Hughes had shown strong moral leadership in finding James a place in his parish when most other clergymen would have yielded to fears of congregational bias. Hughes was a member of the Bishop-in-Council, the principal administrative pillar of the diocese where he had performed well. **James also had the Archbishop’s support as the following letter makes clear:**

My dear Mr Cheong. I have for sometime wished to offer you something which will mark my sense of the services you have rendered to the Church in this diocese. When I have proposed you for one or two parishes the racial objection has been raised. With this I have no sympathy and now I am able to put before you a proposal which I hope will be acceptable to you. Your work as Chaplain in the Hospital is generally highly valued. I want you therefore to accept a full Chaplaincy at £250 a year. Whilst you will have to give your whole time to the work, you can choose your own place of residence.

James became a popular radio broadcaster with the Australian Broadcasting Commission and enjoyed a steady exchange of letters with listeners. His personal notebooks include examples of appreciative letters written to him by listeners. He remained at St Peter's until his death in 1943, from cancer at the good age of 72 years. Despite the reluctance of at least two parishes to accept his nomination as parish priest, there is no suggestion that he personally experienced racial prejudice during his long ministry at Eastern Hill. His gentle personality (when not reacting to his father) and a well-earned reputation for wise counsel attracted a strong following among clergy and laypeople. He was widely valued within the Anglican Church as a gifted counsellor and spiritual director. A report on the 1910 Melbourne diocesan clergy retreat ended:

In 1993, fifty years after his death, a commemorative service of Holy Communion was held in St Peter’s. The service was conducted using the 1928 revised order for the Holy Communion from the same book that James had used to conduct his last service before

---

44 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Archbishop of Melbourne, 28 June 1911.
his death. The church was packed and among the many wanting to honour him were bishops and clergy from every part of Australia, members of the parish who remembered his care for parents and friends, and friends. At a dinner in the parish hall after the service people told their memories of James Cheong.
Joshua Cheong

Both James and Joshua worked as casual shop assistants in Coles Great Book Arcade while they were secondary school students. Their employer, the prominent Melbourne bookseller, E W Cole, visited the family and later referred to Joshua as a thoroughly Australian young man. In 1904, Joshua worked in Sydney with a Chinese firm (On Cheong and Co). In 1906, he made a business visit to Fiji on behalf of his employer. Upon his return to Sydney he experienced the humiliation of being identified as a person (i.e., a Chinese) required for interview by the customs officers.

One letter from Cheong to Joshua suggests the high expectations he set for his family and seems to imply a rebuke to Joshua’s outlook on life:

My Dear Joshua, I am enclosing herewith a cutting from the Argus in which is contained Sir Albert Spicer’s views & suggestions as to how to obtain success in life. He is President of the British Chamber of Commerce & has himself build up a great business And whilst working hard at the same to attain the dimensions to which it has reached he has devoted no little time to the cause of Christian philanthropy & is a pillar of the London Missionary Society & other good objects. Thus though engaged in doing the best for himself he has not been unmindful of his duty to his fellow-men & has done his best also for them.

All of Cheong’s surviving letters to Joshua are about business matters. In the instance above, he discussed his real estate investments and a disastrous court case over a loss on an export of apples to Europe. He wrote one extraordinary letter to Joshua urging him to consult business contacts (including the On Cheong Co) in Sydney about the possibility of leasing Melville Island to harvest buffalo meat to sell to Asian buyers.

48 Cheok Hong Cheong to Joshua Cheong, 3 September 1909.
49 Cheong had consigned a cargo of apples to Germany. The cargo was off-loaded in Bombay where the fruit rotted and was lost. It is the only occasion where Cheong actively undertook a court action. He lost the action, and the fruit and the cost of shipping it. He tried to avoid paying his lawyer’s fees and it was nearly three years before he finally settled the matter. He never again resorted to legal means of securing his ‘rights’.
50 Cheok Hong Cheong to Joshua Cheong, 4 October 1909.
Joshua later worked as an advertising representative for *The Chinese Times*. After resigning he worked in the Croydon orchard. In 1912 when a fire broke out on the Cheong property, Cheong handled the matter, telling neighbours and the Victorian Railways that a spark from a passing railway engine was the cause and he subsequently claimed and received compensation from the Victorian Railways.

**Caleb Cheong**

To Cheong’s long-term irritation Caleb had developed a ‘happy-go-lucky’ approach to work. While on his way to London in 1891, Cheong wrote his fifteen-year-old son a ‘concerned father’ letter in the formal style he used even when writing to his children. The second paragraph provides the best insight into his concern over Caleb’s work ethics, or perhaps lack of them:

RMS Carthage, Mediterranean, 13 November 1891

My Dear Caleb

During the last few days I have seen a wonderful piece of human industry — the Suez Canal — and what a perfect revolution it has achieved for commerce! Why Bombay one of the cities of India has risen to the proud position of being next to London the greatest commercial city of the British Empire. The trade of that City alone is now nearly £200,000,000 a year, chiefly through the opening of the Suez Canal.

I had for my fellow passengers a very large number of Indian Officials both in the Civil and Military Service of that Empire and these officials nearly all of them young men who have risen to their positions by earnest application to their studies and have therefore become a credit to themselves and the families to which they belong. They are now going home to enjoy a well-earned though brief holiday. I hope and trust that you will also prove a credit to yourself and the family to which you belong by an earnest application of mind to your studies and acquit yourself well at the examinations.

---

51 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company, 1 December 1909.

52 Cheok Hong Cheong to Mr Charles Wedge, Mountain View, Croydon, 20 February 1912. See also Cheok Hong Cheong to Commissioners, Victorian Railways, 30 January 1905; 17 February 1905; 23 March 1905.
The way to secure this is never to waste time — by this I do not mean that you are not to take recreation, but never idle or fritter away your time which ought to be devoted to study, or in your duty to your mother and family.

Above all things, remember, in all that you do ask God's blessing upon it, as devout men always do. "Establish Thou the work of our hands O Lord, the work of our hands establish thou it."

Yours very affectionately, Cheok Hong Cheong.

The relationship between Caleb and his father never recovered from a disastrous episode in 1917 when Caleb, then in his early forties, visited China on behalf of a consortium of Melbourne Chinese businessmen among whom was his father. The purpose of the visit to China is explained in a letter to a business acquaintance in which Cheong shows parental pride in the responsibility entrusted to his son:

Dear Miss Brenan . . . My son Caleb has just been sent to China per SS Tango Maru by the Anglo-China Traders Coy to develop Trade between China and Australia & among its imports silks will figure prominently as they already have substantial orders from leading firms here & in Sydney.

The Anglo-China Traders Coy was offering Australian agency for Chinese businesses seeking export trade opportunities. Cheong wrote to the Chinese Consul-General indicating that his own family company was a leading member of the consortium:

Dear Mr. Tseng, I am in receipt of your favor of the 23rd Inst & in reply beg to say that Caleb's name in Chinese is . . . & his age is 41 having been born on 26/1/76. I am sending this by my son Joshua who will pay the usual fee for the passport. I feel quite confident that with your valued assistance the commercial venture of Cheong & Co Proprietary Ltd will prove a great success. The members of the company are not only men of substance but also men of probity & honor & will not fail to recognise your assistance in this connection but will hope that when your way is clear to have you associated with them in a prominent position.

53 Cheok Hong Cheong to The Secretary, Mutual Life and Citizens Insurance Company, 24 April 1917.
54 Cheok Hong Cheong to Miss I Brenan, 4 June 1917.
55 Cheok Hong Cheong to Chinese Consul-General T K Tseng, 25 April 1917.
In a letter, on company letterhead, to Liang Lau Hsun and others in China Cheong further outlined the purpose of Caleb's visit. Hopes of a profitable orchard business had failed and Cheong was hoping that this venture would strengthen the family's economic future:

My Dear Mr Liang, as you see from the above heading my family are interested in the Commercial venture which the said heading bespeaks. My son Caleb has taken his passage in the Tango Maru which sails from Sydney at noon today & if he should be able to visit Canton I have asked him to call & pay his respects to you. He & his brother Joshua at the suggestion & with the support of several well-known firms in this city who are shareholders & directors in this Coy are interested in opening up Commercial relations between Australia & China and anything you can do in your official capacity to facilitate their object will be esteemed a great favor.  

Caleb was entrusted with the hopes of investors, including the family in general, his brother Joshua and his father's friends in Melbourne, whom Cheong claimed were willing to invest £100,000. Cheong's own integrity was the bond for Caleb's participation. He was heartbroken to hear from Liang that Caleb had not kept his appointments and had spent most of his time in the bright lights of Hong Kong with a cousin.

Cheong was humiliated by his son's behaviour and ordered Caleb to return home immediately. Once home Caleb asked for unpaid salary and expenses because his trip had been cut short. Not surprisingly the company rejected his demands and Caleb grandiloquently threatened to sue. Cheong wrote to Caleb labelling him a fool and a week later followed up with another note:

Dear Caleb, It saddens me to note that the attitude you have assumed is an amazing one & is comparable only to that which Shakespeare’s characters had taken up. ‘By my soul I swear there is no power in tongue of man to alter me. I stay here on my bond.’

56  Cheok Hong Cheong to Liang Lau Hsun, Director, Customs, Canton; Tang Shao-yi, President Venus Ins Co, Shanghai; Wong Yung-Liang, Director, Foreign Bureau, Tientsin; Lo Hong, Director, Foreign Bureau, Amoy; Liang Chi-Chow, Address unknown. 27 April 1917.

57  Cheok Hong Cheong to Callaway, 1 May 1917.

58  Cheok Hong Cheong to Langford, 21 November 1917.
That infamous Jew had a design on the life of the merchant. And from all I hear you also have a design on the life of the Coy which employed you & which sent you on a Mission full of promise of the brightest future for you & for the Coy, but you started it in a manner which blighted all hopes of success by telegraphing to one whose career here you knew should have proved a warning & not an example & judging by the a/c of expenses you claimed you have followed him very closely in a course of the wildest extravagance & thought very little of the interests of the Coy & did less visiting only two places on business out of the thousands of centres of industry in that vast empire & was impatient to return to your jollification with your kindred spirit. And though you still had over £90 of the Company's money in hand according to your own showing when you returned to Hong Kong you were unconscionable enough to cable for £25 more & claimed $15 for cabling expenses.

Are you yet awakened to the fact that serious trouble is awaiting you unless you very promptly turn over a new leaf?59

Relationships between father and son went from bad to worse:

Dear Caleb, I found before coming yesterday that you have made no effort in settling Swallow & Ariels account though it is many weeks since I requested you to do so. An account now two years old but which you treat as of no consequence. And last evening another a/c addressed to me from T. Crawford for £4/5/- which has been due since Apl last or 8 months ago it seems also no more notice has been taken of it by you than the other.

I do not know how many more such a/cs are owing by you. And yet you always talk in that grandiose style which indicates a serious moral lapse or want of character. And this too not without a reminder from your father & mother but you seem now devoid of all filial feelings of respect for same without any hope of amendment. And that that being so I must ask you to at once leave the property here so that we may not be further annoyed by the appearance of such a/cs of your lapses & delinquencies.60

59 Cheok Hong Cheong to Caleb Cheong, 27 November 1917.
60 Cheok Hong Cheong to Caleb Cheong, 11 December 1917. Swallow and Ariel were a major biscuit manufacturer. The firm continued to trade into the late twentieth century.
Caleb remained a shareholder in the family company, Cheong and Co, but Cheong made separate and lesser provision for Caleb and his children in his will. It is indicative of Cheong’s feelings towards Caleb that the family photograph early in this chapter, probably taken just after Mrs Cheong’s death, did not include Caleb.61

Grace Cheong

There is not a great deal in Cheong’s letterbooks about his two daughters, Grace and Christine. Grace died at just eighteen years from complications following a bout of influenza. A brilliant student, she had been unable to go to school for nearly two years. She was hoping to resume her studies at the Methodist Ladies College when she died. Cheong described her long illness in a letter to Archdeacon Samuel Williams:

This I am very sorry to say was owing to the influenza epidemic among several members of my congregation and the serious illness of my Eldest Daughter Grace which added to my ordinary duties deprived me of the opportunity of seeing the Prof. Indeed Grace's condition was pronounced to be so serious during the last visit of Dr Snowball (our family doctor) & the small hopes he entertained of her recovery that considering the Doctor's eminence in his profession his words threw quite a shadow over the family though I never for a moment doubted that there is a Divine purpose in her present illness as well as for the future. His visit today however reassured us that the danger at first apprehended he finds does not exist after a more thorough examination, and that she is suffering simply from Anaemia or a poor condition of the blood. The fact is that seeing she had been kept home for two years she felt she ought to apply her mind to study and study she did. She took up no less than ten subjects with such avidity that though at the beginning of he year she was well below the class average in nearly every subject, at the Christmas exams she reversed the order and got considerably above the class average in nearly every subject & ran very close to their respective prize-takers. The effort however has overtaxed her strength and the Doctor has just ordered her away for a change to recruit. She is

61 From the internal evidence of Cheong’s appearance, and the impression of the respective ages of the family members this photograph would appear to have been was taken when the family gathered at Croydon following the death of Mrs Cheong in early 1928, and not the earlier date suggested by the Trinity College website.
18-1/2 years of age & should have had at least a years work at the University had not other circumstances interfered.62

Grace’s academic achievements and strong personality gave her great influence within the family. She was as intellectually able as James and Cheong told Williams he had decided that she would go to university. Her influence on James was considerable and it may have been her death that contributed to his final shift, while at Trinity College, towards what was for him a more emotionally satisfying form of Christian belief and practice.63

Christine Cheong

There are few references to Christine in Cheong’s letterbooks. She seems to have been disinterested in academic or business matters and remained at home with her parents during their lifetime. When her mother died Christine became housekeeper for her father and unmarried brothers and continued in that role after her father’s death. There is a passing comment from Cheong that points to this conclusion:

We are also I hope only temporarily without a regular servant other than a young girl of 13 (whose father had been employed by me at orchard work) so that all the cooking and much of the other household duties fall on our Chrissie.64

After Cheong’s death, Christine took his place on the Trustees and throughout her life was an active participant in the life of the Anglican Chinese Mission. She never married.

The Family Provider

Towards the end of his life Cheong began to bring his various business interests into a form that would ensure financial security for his family after his death. Despite their

62 Cheok Hong Cheong to The Ven. Samuel Williams, 25 February 1898. It is interesting to note that Cheong refers to ‘my congregation’ signaling his claim to status as a ‘minister of the Gospel’ a claim he used elsewhere. While theologically correct, and reflecting late 20th century references to lay ministry, it was not a claim that was used in the late 19th century. It is symbolic of Cheong’s lifelong search for a recognized status within the leadership of the Christian Church as part of his wider search for identity that is reviewed in the closing chapter.


differences Cheong continued to regard James as the future head of the family. In a letter to James about family matters Cheong mentioned that Mrs. Cheong was always anxious over the family’s economic future. Although he died a wealthy man, he always had a high debt to asset ratio that undoubtedly lessened the balance of his estate received by the family members. He told James:

I want you to look carefully into the whole matter of the family estate as I am feeling at times thoroughly exhausted and heart failure may call me home at any moment. And your mother who as mother is properly executrix but she has had no business training and but little knowledge of the world. As evidenced by the fact that she wept bitterly when I sold the Little Bourke St property (Cnr Market Lane) and bought with it the two shops in Brunswick Street (Cnr Moor St) but by this Exchange I netted £950 and likewise Gwalter Terrace she was inconsolable for more than a week fearing I might become insolvent and yet Gwalter Terrace gave me a nett profit of £650.65

Mrs Cheong was always the mediator between father and children. Throughout the disagreements between James and his father it was Mrs Cheong who conveyed messages when they were not on speaking terms. While James was studying in Hong Kong and later in England, he wrote to his mother about his life but there are no similar letters to or from his father in James’ letterbooks. The same was true of Joshua and Caleb. To judge by the outcomes, Cheong’s maintenance of authority over his children was, overall, counter-productive.

Cheong saw his primary role within the family as being a good provider and example for his family culminating in the move to Croydon in 1902 and enlarging a small cottage into what he referred to as a gentleman's residence. In a letter to the Shire of Lillydale concerning the value of the property for rating purposes he described it as consisting of:

82 acres of bush paddocks (including 58 acres I bought from Wiseman Bros at £4.15/- per acre), 40 acres of scrubby ground with stumps unremoved, 42 acres grazing and cultivation paddocks and 36 acres Orchard about half of which consists of newly planted trees.66

65 Cheok Hong Cheok to Secretary, Shire of Lillydale, 24 September 1904.
The original house was a cottage with three bedrooms, a family kitchen, a sitting room and a small bathroom. In 1905 he recorded the building of a new kitchen and the conversion of the old kitchen into a dining room. By the time his renovations were completed *Pine Lodge* was a substantial house of 10 main rooms, 2 smaller ones together with bathroom, pantry, storeroom and dairy. The house was pulled down around the 1950s when the property was subdivided for housing. The section of the old property south of the railway is known as Cheong Park, and is the only public memorial to an important early Chinese family in the district.
One of Cheong’s closest friends was Cornelius Poon Why. No details of Poon Why’s Christian conversion are known but appears to have been fairly long-standing. He was a co-founder with Cheong and others of the Chinese Christian Union, an interdenominational Chinese organisation initiated by Cheok Hong Cheong (See Appendix 14). The Poon Why family is mentioned in a letter from Cheong to the wife of the catechist, Mark Ah Bon written in late 1890. Cheong refers to just three Chinese Christian women in Melbourne, including his wife, Mrs Mouy Ling, the wife of the Methodist missionary, and Mrs Poon Why. The earlier mention of Cheong’s scrupulous honesty and his paternalistic and controlling personality is reinforced by his dealings with Poon Why and his children by his first wife.

When Poon Why decided to return to China after the death of his first wife, he gave power of attorney over his Australian assets to Cheong, asking him to manage his affairs on behalf of his two Australian born children, May (daughter) and Ming (son). Cheong’s letterbooks contain letters covering his handling of Poon Why’s affairs during the years from 1906 to 1912. The first reference is a payment of legal costs to Cheong’s solicitor on 13 February 1906. In April, Cheong reports having received two letters from Poon Why. Cheong’s reference to the second of the letters suggests that Poon Why was barely literate in English and relied on his daughter, May Poon Why, to conduct his correspondence for him:

Re letters from Cornelius Poon Why. I have had two letters in Chinese from him. The first one was written by some friend for him, the second which I enclose herewith was written by himself & must have cost him at least a day in the composition. This second letter dated 6th of the 1st Moon in the 32nd year of Kwong-Sii corresponding to 30th January 1906 in English date, made request among other things, for a remittance of £50 in sovereigns per gold box of Chinese firm he named but instead of sending the money in the way he desired I thought it wiser to forward it to him direct per Bank Draft enclosed in registered letter bearing date 5th February last & received acknowledgement of same in

---

67 The name Cornelius Poon Why does not appear in Appendix 12.
54 Cheok Hong Cheong to Mrs Bon, 13 November 1890 (Original in Museum of Chinese Australian History, 22 Cohen Place, Melbourne.
69 Cheok Hong Cheong to D Herald, Solicitor, 13 February 1905.
letter dated 7th ult by his daughter May Poon Why who is his Amanuensis in his ordinary correspondence on account of his own defective education. I shall thank you to take care of the enclosures & to return them to me together with C. Poon Why’s Statutory Declaration as soon as you have done with them.\textsuperscript{70}

In May, Cheong’s nephew, Tim Young, reported that Poon Why was dead.\textsuperscript{71} Young had hoped to marry May Poon Why but Cornelius had forbidden the marriage because Young was thirty-six years old at the time and May was just sixteen.\textsuperscript{72} They kept in touch down the years until Tim married a young woman from Warrnambool.

In his next note, Cheong reminds May that he and a solicitor, a Mr Webster, a friend of her father, were the executors of Poon Why’s will. From this letter it emerges that Poon Why had purchased two separate properties in Cobden Street. The frontages of the two wooden houses were just thirteen feet each and Cheong decided that they should be sold and the money invested in better property. His main point was that once the existing houses were removed, the blocks of land were too small to give any worthwhile return.\textsuperscript{73}

**Cheong’s Property Investments**

Cheok Hong Cheong’s property investments show that he experienced no restrictions on buying and selling real estate. Australia was indeed the ‘Lucky Country’ and ‘New Gold Mountain’ for a boy who arrived in Ballarat aged twelve years in 1863 and whose father had earned just £100 a year as a Presbyterian missionary to the local Chinese community.

As Superintendent of the Church Missionary Society of Victoria Chinese Mission from 1885, Cheong received a salary of £300 to £400 a year, plus £100 a year for housing. Before taking on that position he had made enough from the family fruit business to purchase a free-standing, double fronted, solid brick house, Montgomery Villa, in Gore Street, Fitzroy.

After the creation of the Church Missionary Society of Victoria, Re-formed (CMSVR) in 1898, he refused a salary. He was motivated by ‘occasional taunts from my heathen

\textsuperscript{70} Cheok Hong Cheong to W E Wells & Sons, 23 April 1906.
\textsuperscript{71} Timothy Young was the son of Cheong’s sister, Fong Sen.
\textsuperscript{72} Cheok Hong Cheong to W E Wells & Sons, 6 May 1905.
\textsuperscript{73} Cheok Hong Cheong to May Poon Why, 25 May 1906.
brethren that I preached because I was paid to.\textsuperscript{74} He was well aware of the Chinese belief that people became Christians only because they acquired a temporal benefit, i.e., they were ‘rice Christians’\textsuperscript{75}.

His property investment program began when he mortgaged \textit{Montgomery Villa}, the first family home in Gore Street, Fitzroy, to purchase \textit{Gwalter Terrace}, in Park Street, Brunswick. \textit{Gwalter Terrace} in turn was used, with the \textit{Villa}, as collateral for a series of bank loans to purchase deceased estates, including the \textit{Pine Lodge} property at Croydon in 1904. His annual capital debt liability, allowing for variations in any given year, was around £10,000 on which he paid interest at around 4 percent or some £400-£500 a year. Cheong claimed that living expenses, including school fees, etc, did not exceed £1000 a year for a family of seven including five young adults, suggesting an income in excess of £1500 a year (2001 = approx $A100,000). It was a very comfortable lifestyle at a time when most workers were lucky to earn £100 (2001 = approx $A 7000) a year.

From 1904 onwards the family enjoyed free lodgings at the mission at 121-123 Little Bourke Street. Cheong spent most weekends there, arriving Thursday evening or Friday morning and usually returning to Pine Lodge late Monday, or if he had business, late Tuesday. His church and business letters often begin with the address of the Mission that he referred to as his ‘city offices.’

His decision to live from investments was possible because of the major economic recession in Victoria in the wake of the 1890s financial crisis marked by a disastrous bank crash.\textsuperscript{76} Property prices remained depressed for many years.\textsuperscript{77} Cheong became a specialist in buying deceased estates and paid, as an example, just one-sixth of the price that Philip Kitchen had paid for \textit{Pine Lodge}.\textsuperscript{78} The purchase of inner city properties from the estate of a suicide, T P Fallon, a leading merchant and tramway speculator bankrupted in the crash of the 1890s, was also made on exceptionally

\textsuperscript{74} Cheok Hong Cheong to Acting Commissioner of Taxation. 12 May 1917.

\textsuperscript{75} There is a relevant discussion in \textit{The Church Missionary Intelligencer}, Vol III No 3, March 1852, pp 67-68 about economic motives for conversion. Also Vol III, No 11, November 1852, p 255.

\textsuperscript{76} A standard work is Davison, Graeme, (1988), \textit{The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne}, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press.

\textsuperscript{77} Cheok Hong Cheong to Mr J. O’Callaghan, 26 Park St, W. Brunswick, 1 March 1909.

\textsuperscript{78} Cheok Hong Cheong to the Manager, Bank of Australasia, Collingwood, 11 March 1908.
favourable terms.\textsuperscript{79} Other examples included land in Brunswick. He wrote to a real estate agent acting on his behalf:

The land I reckon is worth between £400 and £500. But without making him any offer you can get to know if he will come down to about my mark as land has just been sold on the opposite side at £12 per foot. At the figure it would be worth some £400.\textsuperscript{80}

As his note to Swan cited above shows, Cheong kept a close watch on price movements in the vicinity of his properties, as in this reference to his interests in Smith Street, Collingwood:

Then the singular fact re Smith St. values. Whereas Paterson & Kiernan had to pay £4650 to secure 15’ X 187’ from Mrs Treadway in July 1912 the same lady offered me in Mar. 1914 the adjoining block (52’ 2” X 187’) at £12,500 with much more valuable buildings in proportion and at the corner of Stanley St. The abnormal price paid as the Bank Managers will tell you was in consequence of pressure of space by Paterson & Co for their time payment furniture business. Mrs Treadway knew of the fact & charged accordingly. And as Paterson & Co had besides the 15’ 1” freehold, a leasehold they were obliged to secure the adjoining property (40’ X 187’) at £160 per foot including brick buildings on long & easy terms.\textsuperscript{81}

In 1909, he valued his property holdings at a total of £16,344/10/0 or in today’s values about $A1,200,000 but he also had considerable liabilities, mostly in the form of outstanding loans from the banks.

Cheong honesty was tested in his exchanges with the taxation authorities and other governmental agencies, such as the Victorian Railways, the Lillydale (sic) Shire, and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (water supply). The letters show a man trying to pay what the law required and no more. It would have been

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{79} Davison, Graeme, (1988), \textit{The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne}, Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press, p 219.  \\
\textsuperscript{80} Cheok Hong Cheong to Thomas Swan, 14 December 1904.  \\
\textsuperscript{81} Cheok Hong Cheong to Mr R Ewing, Acting Commissioner of Taxation, 27 May 1917. Cheok Hong Cheong to Erville, Manager, English, Scottish and Australian Bank, Ascot Vale, 31 March 1905. Note reference to his China visit in 1906.
\end{flushleft}
inconceivable to Cheong to evade taxes but he certainly did his utmost to minimize them.

He was precise to the point of obsession about propriety in business dealings. In 1904 he hired a Fitzroy plasterer to undertake some work for him. The contract resulted in the following exchanges, which need no commentary:

Pine Lodge 1/3/05 dear Sir — Would you be so good as to explain the item of £3 for plastering? Your engagement was to do it at the usual rate of 2/6 per yard. I have waiting some days in Town to see you after the message you sent by my son but you have evidently not called so soon.

Croydon 9/3/05 Dear Sir — You are not correct in saying you gave no understanding to do the plastering at 2/6 per yard. You will remember that I would not go on with it until you said to me that the matter was a simple one — the usual rate for such work being 2/6 per yard. To which I replied, “Oh then go on with it?” I must say I was surprised when I saw the amount of the a/c for what was done and after the understanding that was come to. Your present statement about the difference between patching and new work was never mentioned when you undertook to do the work. I shall be glad to know therefore the number of yards of plastering that was done if there was anything extra that you did not foresee in such work.

Croydon 16/3/05 Dear Sir — Your letter of the 11th has not replied to mine of the 9th in respect of the number of yards of plastering that was done. Please let me have your reply upon that point.

Croydon 20/3/05 Dear Sir — I am sorry you should now be so wide of the mark after agreeing upon a definite rate and mentioning the same as 2/6 per yard. You know very well that even in your own trade I required a definite sum stated before I gave you the work and that it was only when you suggested that there might be more plastering to do after the old paper had been stripped off that I agreed to the rate instead of the definite sum. You are however seeking now to charge me about twice as much as you are entitled to or is ordinarily charged for similar work. In regard to your suggestion about the 3 months I cannot accept as a compliment that which I am not in need of. You yourself delayed sending in the a/c and when it came there was the serious discrepancy. You know very
well that when everything was clear you have never been kept waiting for what was your due and you have had many a cheque from me before this.

His ‘nit-picking’ in business matters is shown after the purchase of a horse-drawn vehicle. His comment in the second letter, (highlighted) is worth noting:

Dear Sirs — I am in receipt of your letter of the 16th in reply to mine of the 15th in which the writer says “the buggy mentioned by you has since been sold” & beg to say that the new vehicle which was one of those I negotiated for was not called ‘buggy’ but that Mr Coffey designated it a “Physician’s Phaeton” . . . it was after we had driven down to my city offices that I noticed the oil cloth cover & lining of the Phaeton needed a few stitches. And the alternative of asking you to make good your guarantee to keep the Phaeton in repair for 12 months was to immediately change it for the new Physician’s Phaeton by paying you the difference of £12.10/- I thought that would be satisfactory to you & to us. Besides a new vehicle is a better means of advertising than an old one. Please refer the matter to Mr Coffey the elder & oblige.

Dear Sirs — I am sorry you should fall into another mistake. £45 was Mr Coffey’s quotation for the Physician’s Phaeton. My offer was £40 with Harness which after a while he said he would get his brother to accept. I then noted it down on the card (that he had on the Monday previous written down his offer of the vehicle with the extension top) Physician’s Phaeton & Harness £40, Phaeton & Harness £27 & showed him the prices. His only objection was against the Phaeton & Harness being set down at £27 he wanted 10/- more. I then added 10/- to the latter’s price & showed him again what was noted down: 1 Buggy Phaeton with extension top £26 (written by Mr Coffey himself) 2 Physician’s Phaeton & Harness £40, 3 Phaeton & Harness £27.10/- to which he gave his assent as correct. In matters of business I never take anything for granted [author’s emphasis] but had it noted down in black & white for the reason that tho’ I have a retentive memory myself the person I am dealing with may forget. Hence I noted down the particulars, read it out to Mr Coffey & then showed it to him. You are not therefore justified in assuming I was under a ‘wrong impression’ as my memory is as clear as the facts & figures that have been noted

82 Cheok Hong Cheong to Messrs Coffey Bros, Carriage Builders, 18 and 23 November 1909.
83 Note the little touch of hyperbole..
down. We are exceedingly sorry that in the first place Mr Coffey should have assured my wife & myself that the Phaeton was in ‘splendid condition’ & secondly when we found that it is not as stated to write & say that the new vehicle ‘had since been sold’ & 3rdly when I urged that that was impossible to question the correctness of the price agreed upon.

Cheong’s Property Portfolio

ORIGINAL FAMILY HOME AND BUSINESS

Retail shop, 189 Brunswick Street,

Brunswick. Purchased 1872

Cheong Peng-nam brought his family to a shop at 189 Brunswick Road after leaving the Ballarat Presbyterian Mission in 1872, following the death of his wife. Peng-nam started a fruit business with the assistance of Lowe Kong Meng.

FAMILY HOME 1894-1903

Montgomery Villa, 269 Gore Street, Fitzroy

Montgomery Villa was the second Cheong family home, purchased in 1894. It was demolished after the Second World War. The term villa is used in Melbourne to describe a single story house with a central front door and hallway and rooms opening on either side. Cheong used Montgomery Villa as collateral for loans. He later rented the house to a Mrs Smith who subsequently purchased it.\(^8^4\) Cheong held other property in Gore Street, including vacant land sold to Mrs Smith’s son.\(^8^5\) He sold four cottages and two terrace houses (274 and 276).\(^8^6\) He also owned 283 and 285 Gore Street.

\(^8^4\) Cheok Hong Cheong to Mrs Smith 10 February 1905.

\(^8^5\) Cheok Hong Cheong to A. Mackintosh, 15 May 1906.

\(^8^6\) Cheok Hong Cheong to Swan, 16 December 1905 re cottages. Cheok Hong Cheong to Messrs G D Langridge, 21 May 1906 re sale of Terraces to W A Fowler.
FAMILY RESIDENCE

Croydon

3 Houses and Orchard Property 240 acres

Purchased 1899

‘Pine Lodge’, 12-room house

‘Pine Cottage’ 5 room house

‘Dell Cottage’ 6 room house

Approx 30 acres orchard The remainder mostly uncleared timberland

Cheong purchased Pine Lodge in 1899. It was a small cottage with 3 bedrooms, sitting room and a kitchen. In 1904 he extended the house to ten main rooms, two smaller rooms, a bathroom, pantry, storeroom and dairy.

‘Gwalter Terrace’,

10-20 Park St, Brunswick

Purchased c 1900 for £3250

The terrace, with Montgomery Villa, was the financial basis or collateral for Cheong’s subsequent property portfolio. The houses were leased and provided a steady flow of rental income (£249.12/ p.a.).

27-29 Market Lane,

Off Little Bourke St, Melbourne

Purchased 1905

A restaurant and an electricity sub-station now occupy the site. The original property extended to the corner of Little Bourke Street. Sold to purchase two shops in Brunswick.

Two shops, corner Brunswick Street and Moor St, Brunswick

317-325 Exhibition St, Melbourne

Horp Hing, a furniture manufacturer, negotiated to buy Cheong’s properties purchased from Allan’s estate at 317-323 Exhibition St, Melbourne. In 1916 the

87 Cheok Hong Cheong to The General Manager, Colonial Bank, 6 November 1911.

199
Melbourne City Council’s Health Officer ruled that the properties were unfit for habitation. The site is now a major telephone installation.

42-46 and 54-56 Latrobe St, Melbourne

Cheong leased the premises to Horp Hing furniture factory but after difficulty over rentals sold the properties to the tenants.

Cnr Little Lonsdale St and Davidson Lane, Melbourne

There is one reference to this property, that enables the general location to be identified but not the specific property.

259 Rathdown St, Melbourne

The only reference is a letter to the tenant offering to sell the premises for £1500.

Cnr Mackenzie St and Latrobe St, Melbourne

Purchased 1906

A dispute with the Melbourne City Council about the cost of sealing a laneway at the rear of the property is the only mention of this investment.

Vacant land (8 acres) bounded by Van berg, McPherson, Albino & Tennyson Sts, Essendon

First offer to buy in 1904 was refused. Subsequently purchased 1905 for £120 and sold progressively to 1916.

Cheong had the property subdivided that increased the value. He recovered his original purchase price by the sale of just one housing block. By 1911, the area of some six acres remaining was valued at £250.

---

88 Cheok Hong Cheong to E. I. Horton, 13 October 1916. Miss M.A. Brenan, Estate Agent, 2 December 1916.
89 Cheok Hong Cheong to D. H. Herald, Solicitor, 13 February 1906
90 Cheok Hong Cheong to C.H. Middleton, 62 Rathdown St, Carlton, 6 September 1917.
91 Cheok Hong Cheong to The Town Clerk, Melbourne February 1908.
92 Mr. E.L. Oakley, Estate Agent, Collins St, 18 August 1904, 13 August 1904.
94 Cheok Hong Cheong to The General Manager, Colonial Bank, 17 April 1911.
Another deceased estate (Fallon Estate) The owner suicided following the 1891 financial crash. Part of the property was occupied by an institution for homeless boys known as the Ragged Boys Home, one of many evangelical voluntary agencies mentioned in earlier chapters. To finance this purchase, Cheong planned to sell two cottages in Rivers Street, South Yarra.

226-8 Smith St, Collingwood

(Corner Stanley and Little Oxford Sts.)

Purchased 2 March 1914 from the ‘Hall Estate’ 2 storied brick building on basement of massive masonry 52’ X 187’; 3 storied attached same material; s yard paved with stone pitchers. Bluestone shop 57’ X 17’ 6” cr Stanley & L Oxford Sts 2 brick cottages L Oxford St Cottage & Iron sheds. The 1914 State Land Tax value was £110 per foot of frontage to Smith Street. In 1916 it was valued at £170 a foot.

Two cottages

‘Tamar’ and ‘Derwent’,

River St, South Yarra

Purchased 1907. Sold 1908 for £725

River Street runs parallel to Chapel Street. Very few houses are now left in a street that is now very mixed with industrial and residential properties mixed together.

Six brick shops,

Burwood Road, Hawthorn,

Purchased 1917

These properties were near the corner of Glenferrie Road. They cannot be identified with certainty.

95 Cheok Hong Cheong to Messrs C T Ham and Estate Agents, 11 March 1908, I.
96 Cheok Hong Cheong to Manager, Bank of Australasia, Collingwood, 28 April 1908.
97 Cheok Hong Cheong to Mr. R. Ewing, Acting Commissioner of Taxn, 14 November 1916.
98 Cheok Hong Cheong to McQuie, Bank of Australasia, Collingwood, 18 September 1916.
99 Cheok Hong Cheong to The Manager, Bank of Australasia, Collingwood, 28 April 1908; 11 May 1908.
107-109 Little Bourke Street

**Purchased for Peter Ng Hong Nam to whom it was transferred the same year**

154-156 Swanston St, Melbourne

**Purchased £15,000**

An unidentified press clipping in James’ Cheong’s Letterbooks reported:

“Mr Cheok Hong Cheong, a leading Chinese merchant, who died the other day at Croydon, was a strong prohibitionist. Some years ago he made a big financial sacrifice for the sake of his principles. For a large sum he purchased a hotel in Swanston Street, a transaction which brought criticism from certain people, who wondered why a prohibitionist should dabble in hotel property. He quietened his critics by announcing that he had purchased the hotel for the purpose of having it delicensed. After the purchase Mr Cheong could have resold the property as an hotel at an advance of £25,000 or alternatively for a bonus of about £10,000 in addition to a high rental for five years. Both offers were declined and the hotel was delicensed.”

Two villas, Winter St, Malvern

Purchased 1907. Value £3000

The Winter Street properties were purchased in September 1907 for a price below the valuation above. From a subsequent offer to sell, it appears that Cheong probably purchased these houses for around £2500.

Villa, 4 Seymour Ave, Armadale

**Purchased 1907 from Hoarey’s Estate**

This property has been defaced through unsympathetic renovations but is still occupied.

1,3,5 Lambeth St, Armadale

**These houses are still in good condition.**

---

100 Cheok Hong Cheong to Mr Wm I. Fookes, 414 Lt Collins St, 7 April 1905.
101 Cheok Hong Cheong to Messrs Duncan & Weller, 25 September 1907.
102 Cheok Hong Cheong to Mr B I Parkinson, Solicitor, 29 March 1917.
111-117 Bridport St, Albert Park

Four two-story brick shops,

Purchased 1909 for £2050.103

Part of an island of shops in Bridport Street. The four shops are still in use.

The properties listed above are those mentioned by Cheong in his letterbooks. Items held at the Chinese-Australian Museum, Cohen Place, Melbourne show other business interests. Cheong and his boys were shareholders in Walter Burley Griffin’s Castlecrag Estate, a subdivision of land in Sydney. Another shareholder was ‘Red Ted’ Theobald, Treasurer in the Federal Labor Government of the depression years.104 In 2002 the National Library of Australia purchased a painting of a house described as being owned by the Rev. Cheok Hong Cheong on the Castlecrag subdivisions. Walter Burley Griffin designed the subdivision of the ‘Pine Lodge’ estate, as mentioned earlier.

Cheong’s participation in the Anglo-China Trading Company was probably ended through Caleb’s misbehaviour. The existence of such a company, and Cheong’s involvement with it, may point to other investments in Victoria and interstate that are not mentioned in his surviving papers.

Apart from his support for his sister’s children there is no reference to other family highlighting the complete separation of the Cheong family in Australia from relatives in China. The large estate described in his will is in striking contrast to his mentor Lowe Kong Meng, who left just £1000 to his Australian wife and children.

When Cheong died in 1928, his estate was valued for probate at £78,000. Over several years he had carefully divested himself of a number of properties through gifts to family members, e.g., ‘Pine Lodge’ and the Smith Street shops. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the value of his personal investments had exceeded £150,000. Using data provided by the House of Commons Research Office, which suggests an inflation factor of 35 times between 1930 and 1999, this would have given Cheong a gross worth around $A10 million at year 2002 values although all such comparisons are unreliable. It is probably enough to say that he died a wealthy man.

103 Cheok Hong Cheong to The General Manager, Colonial Bank, 20 November 1909.
Cheong’s reputation for integrity is confirmed by the thoroughly decent manner in which he looked after his tenants. He purchased a rental property in Lawes Street, Hawthorn on behalf of his friend, Cornelius Poon Why and instructed that renovations be undertaken promptly and was annoyed when the tenants told him the work had not been done.105 When the tenants of a property he owned in Little Bourke Street property complained about smoking chimneys he ordered immediate repairs. Similarly, when the tenants of the property in Winter St Armadale drew attention to leaks in the roofing it was immediately fixed. His treatment of the former tenant who purchased Montgomery Villa revealed a gentle and courteous style that he did not always display publicly, especially when he thought he was being unjustly dealt with.

There is no comprehensive study of the property holdings of Chinese business people in Australia although Yong provides some starting points for New South Wales. This, along with the issue of naturalization, is a worthwhile field for further study particularly in relation to the exploration of the human and civil rights of Chinese, both aliens and naturalized British subjects, in 19th century Australasia.