Chapter 11
The Cultural Fabrication of Identity
1851-1928

Words such as ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘culture’, ‘religion’ and ‘identity’ are caught up, in 19th and 20th century usage, with concepts such as ‘citizenship’ and ‘nationality’. In earlier times, in Europe, the words ‘Christian’ and ‘Christendom’ might also have been added in trying to define an individual. In China, for more than a thousand years, ‘Confucian’ and perhaps ‘Buddhist’ and ‘Daoist’ probably performed a function not unlike that of ‘Christian’ in Europe.

Cheong’s life is a case study of an ethnic Chinese whose adult identity was shaped outside China by a different set of cultural influences to those that would have applied if he had lived out his life in Guangdong Province, or in the other centres of the Chinese Diaspora. He differed from most diaspora Chinese in that his family, as a result of his father’s conversion to Christianity in 1860, and his subsequent work as a Presbyterian catechist, provided educational and other opportunities that were rare among his ethnic contemporaries in Australia.

It is a commonplace to observe that migration brings about more than just a generational change in the children of immigrants. Few Chinese families, and fewer Chinese children, migrated to Australia during the 19th century. Although evidence is scanty, it is a reasonable estimate that less than twenty families emigrated from China to Victoria and the number is probably less than that. The majority of ‘Chinese’ children identified in the various Victorian census collections were of mixed origins, usually with a Chinese father and a Chinese mother. For the greater part, their lifestyle differed little from the European majority.

Most of the Chinese who chose to emigrate to Australia in the 19th century were single men whose vision of themselves was framed around their place of origin in South China and their intention to return in the shortest possible time. For the Cheong family, China was no longer ‘home’ in that sense. Yet Cheok Hong never lost sight of his Chineseness.
To be ‘Chinese’ in a sense that reflects his life involves a complex set of interactions, values, and attitudes. Reid pointed out in 1999 that the word ‘Chinese’ is:

Another contested word . . . is ‘Chinese’ . . . , which we somehow use to include some purely English-speaking Australians, purely Indonesian-speaking Indonesians, purely Thai-speaking Thais, and a range of multilingual others speaking a variety of languages deriving from south China, north China, south east Asia and England. The one thing virtually unknown in this 'Chinese' diaspora category is a monolingual Chinese-speaker. What gives the unsatisfactory everyday term some analytical usefulness is the tensions it creates in all those of Chinese or partly Chinese descent outside China, between heritage and environment.¹

Kidd has made this comment about the emergence of the modern idea of identity in a North Atlantic context:

One of the major implications of the modernist consensus has been to stimulate an awareness that national and ethnic identities are unstable over the longue durée. Historians are becoming more vigilant in their avoidance of the fallacy . . . that nations enjoy ‘an entirely objective existence’. Within modern historiography and the social sciences most approaches to national and ethnic identity nowadays emphasise their fictive dimensions. Historians and social scientists have become increasingly aware that ethnicity is not a straightforward reflection of common biological descent: rather, ethnic identities are now recognised as cultural fabrications, which can be imagined, appropriated or chosen, as well as transmitted directly to descendants . . . [thus] all ethnic and national identities are, of necessity, artificial constructs though none the less authentic facets of the human experience . . . there is a keen awareness throughout the field that ethnic identities are not timeless, but provisional and pliable, with an elasticity permitting a considerable degree of invention and reinvention. . . . Ethnicity is now a question of processes and relationships rather than of ethnic and cultural essences.²

Cheong’s first-hand experience of China, including his birth and his Chinese primary schooling, totalled less than thirteen years. He spent fifty-five years in Australia (see Chapter 3), travelling overseas for less than a year in 1891-2 to the United Kingdom and for a few months in China in 1906. His letterbooks show no correspondence or references to family in China. The same absence of contact or correspondence with family and homeplace in China is found in the letterbooks of James Cheong who, despite nearly three years residence in Hong Kong from 1900-1903, does not mention any family contacts.

Cheong’s few business letters to friends in China are to people whom he met in Victoria, such as the successive Chinese Consul-Generals. His relationships with other

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¹ Reid, Anthony (1999), Opening Remarks, Conference, Reconceptualising the Southern Chinese: From Community to Diaspora, Australian National University, 27 February 1999.

Chinese were essentially businesslike, either in terms of his role as a Christian lay minister and church leader, or in relation to his various business activities. There is little information about his home life but Toylaan Ah Ket, daughter of William Ah Ket, recalls spending holidays at the Cheong home in Croydon and there are some passing references in his letterbooks that suggest he was equally hospitable to Europeans, provided they met his social standards. He does not seem to have had much to do with the run of the mill Chinese labourers who made up most of the Chinese community, other than as an authority figure providing advice in time of need.

Cheok Hong Cheong was never part of the rural farming tradition or the world of the small businessmen of Guangdong Province with which his father had identified the family (Chapter 3). He understood enough about status in China to encourage people to view him as a scholar-gentleman (Chapters 6 and 9) although his education was overwhelmingly European. In short, from his earliest years in Australia Cheong was involved in fabricating an identity that was functional in achieving status and wealth.

Cheong saw himself, and was seen by others, as a Chinese, but he was shaped as much, if not more, by Europe as by China. All immigrants adopt multiple responses to the circumstances of their new environment the only difference being the extent to which, in cases such as that of Cheok Hong Cheong, they choose to retain or emphasise their Chineseness in terms of their response to Australianness.

Cheong achieved a social and economic position exceeding most Australians of his era. His contact with the leading members of the Chinese merchant-elite created a pressure to excel among his fellow countrymen. His demand for salary equivalence with European ministers demonstrated his appreciation of his worth. He may have been driven by the fact of discrimination to prove himself superior to the critics of the Chinese.

In Chapters 1, 2 and 7 it was shown that many Chinese immigrants succumbed to the

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5 Perhaps there is a link to what has been described as ‘imagined communities’ as discussed in Sinclair, John, (1996), op cit.

6 Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), The Chinese Question in Australia, 1879-80, Melbourne. (Appendix 1, para 22).
difficulties of immigrant life and were poverty stricken and socially isolated. Some became
gamblers or sought escape through narcotics (Chapter 7). Cheong turned the challenges
facing him into energizing forces revealing him as a man of exceptional strength of
character and rare determination.

When Cheok Hong Cheong arrived in Victoria in 1863, less than one hundred years had
passed since James Cook claimed the eastern coast of Australia for Great Britain. The first
permanent European settlement at Sydney had been made just seventy-five years earlier.
The ‘official’ settlement of Victoria took place in 1837, just fifteen years before the
Victorian gold-rush of 1854. The gold-rush occurred just three years after the ‘Separation’
of the Port Phillip District from the Colony of New South Wales and only a year before
self-government in 1855. In discussing 19th century Victoria and relationships between
European and Chinese immigrants, it is important to describe the colony as a ‘work in
progress’ — a place in which everyone was a ‘new chum’ in a ‘frontier’ situation far
removed from the settled civil society of contemporary China or Great Britain. Against
that framework the life of Cheong can also be viewed as a ‘work in progress.’

Looking back over the experiences outlined from the first chapter onwards a picture
emerges of a man constantly adapting to the rapidly changing world around him. The
difficulties in relationships described in Chapters 3 and 5 were inseparable from the issues
being addressed by all immigrants seeking to establish a place in an unstable and
unsettled society, at least in comparison to the long history of China. It is not surprising
that he could be a difficult, even infuriating, person or that he was not always consistent in
his presentations.

Cheong’s life paralleled the emergence of anti-Chinese sentiment in Australia. The
majority of the colonial population had no background in being responsible citizens of a
democratic society. Most had not enjoyed voting or civic rights in their homelands. They
had little experience of participatory politics or responsive elected governments. Although
grounded in English political traditions, Victoria, despite its self-governing status, was not
at any time a monocultural community or an established nation-state.

Victoria inherited divisive elements from the British Isles that influenced domestic

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7 There were earlier settlements in what is now Victoria but none provided the frameworks upon which
the Colony of Victoria was to emerge after 1837 and the foundation of Melbourne.
8 See commentary on Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, (1879), The Chinese
Question in Australia, 1879-80, Melbourne in Chapter 4
affairs well into the 20th century. European colonists had little to guide them about relationships with a non-European, non-Christian minority other than the unhappy history of slavery or the longer-standing and horrible history of anti-Semitism. The English state had a long and unhappy history in Ireland but the high proportion of Irish immigrants and their voting power changed relationships in the Australian colonies. The conflicts between the Irish and Chinese that occasionally emerged in Cheong’s letterbooks has not been explored in Australia as it has in the USA.

The Colony of Victoria had a European identity against which the Chinese were seen to cast an alien shadow (see Chapter 7) that loomed somewhat larger than the shadows from Great Britain and to a lesser degree, from the unrest of the pre1850s experience of Europe. Wealth was the measure of colonial success and survival and the Chinese were viewed as an economic threat. As the colonial population exploded with the goldrush the promise of a 'golden' future encouraged a determination, in so far as individuals could, to secure that future by a mixture of private effort and publicly funded support mechanisms. Pragmatism, problem-solving and practicality loomed larger than abstract ideas and principles.

The overall social thinking of 19th century Australians included a repudiation of aristocracy, serfdom, slavery and indentured labour, partly for ethical reasons but more importantly because any of the above represented a threat to the living standards of European working families whose economic security depended, as in the promotional image below, on becoming successful immigrant settlers.

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O'Farrell, Patrick, (1987), The Irish in Australia, Kensington, University of New South Wales Press.
The idea of the ‘Rights of Man’ and other radical views from Europe were heard and seen as in the Victorian example overleaf from 1858 but the old arguments, in the constantly changing colonial environment, were far removed from everyday life. As the drawing implies colonial politics were framed more by the concept of rewarding hard work than by imported abstract ideals symbolised by the revolutionary cap. It is no accident that the lyrics of ‘Advance, Australia Fair’ first played publicly in 1878 include the words, ‘and wealth for toil’. While egalitarian talk was common, it took the practical form of ‘a fair go’, i.e., the removal of barriers to achievement by personal effort and the provision of an economic and social ‘safety net’ for difficult times.

The Coming Man

Melbourne Punch, 13 May 1858  State Library of Victoria
On the goldfields wealth was as much a matter of luck as of effort and no amount of radicalism could help as the Eureka uprising showed. The colonists shared collectivist values from the old countries, had a Christian-based ethical system and most had experienced or glimpsed poverty. The primary goal of the entire society was to survive and prosper. A spirit of collectivism dictated that government should have an active role in securing the individual and common good.

Their collectivism took the form, over time, of publicly funded infrastructure in roads, railways, water supply, universal free education, publicly funded health services, and state resourced pensions for the sick, disabled and unemployed. The colonial vision of people prospering by their own efforts, free of the ties of extended family, and without the impositions of a ruling elite was something with which Cheong Peng-nam and Cheok Hong Cheong could readily identify.

In Cheong’s identity, private and public, there was, apart from the values inherited from his father of filial piety and his vision of the family as a collective economic unit, an enduring respect for Chinese social morality. But, even as he was defending the virtues of China and defending the rights of the Chinese in Victoria Cheong offered no fundamental defence of China’s polity. His developing identity is apparent in his contribution to the 1879 pamphlet discussed in Chapter 4. and in his other writings (Appendices 1-5). The best example of his acceptance of the principles of liberal representative democracy and the primacy of the constitutionally based principles of the rule of law can be seen in his exchanges with Premier Gillies during the Afghan/Burrumbeet episode (Chapter 8).
In 1863 when Victoria abandoned anti-Chinese restrictions, the colony had just eight years’ experience with constitutional self-government. British-European values dominated the colony and the colonists were British subjects, a legal identity embracing multiple cultures that developed alongside British imperialism in the 19th century.\textsuperscript{14} Sovereignty remained with the British government in London until the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 and some matters, such as legal appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and a distinct Australian citizenship, remained until the passage of the \textit{Australia Act} in 1986.\textsuperscript{15}

Cheong obtained the 19th century Victorian equivalent of permanent residence under the \textit{Chinese Act}, 1891.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{VICTORIA,}
\textbf{GOVERNMENT GAZETTE}
NO 122, Friday, October 2, 1891, (page 4052)
Chinese Act 1890, Exemptions
By His Excellency the Right Honorable John Adrian Louis, Earl of Hopetoun, etc etc.
Whereas by Part 1 of the \textit{Chinese Act 1890} (54 Vict. No 1073) it is amongst other things enacted that it shall be lawful for the Governor in Council from time to time by Proclamation to be published in the Government Gazette, to exempt any person or class of persons from the provisions of the said Part of the said Act, and to declare that such provisions shall not at any time, or for any specified period, apply to a person or class of persons mentioned in such Proclamation: Now therefore I, the Governor of Victoria, by and with the advice of the Executive Council thereof, do by this Proclamation exempt the persons named hereunder from the provisions of Part 1 of the \textit{Chinese Act 1890} aforesaid, and do declare that such provisions shall not at any time apply to the said persons, viz.:-
Revd Cheok Hong Cheong, Superintendent Church Missions to the Chinese in Victoria
Mrs Cheong, James Cheong, Joshua Cheong, Caleb Cheong, Grace Cheong, Christine Cheong, Nathaniel Cheong, Benjamin Cheong.
Given under my Hand and the seal of the Colony, at Melbourne, this twenty-eighth day of September in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and ninety-one.
\end{quote}

The inclusion of the children was a defensive step that was unnecessary, on the face of it, because they were all colonial British subjects by birth. As the Federation movement gathered pace during the 1890s Cheong may have thought that their rights under colonial law could be abrogated in the final form of the new Federal Constitution (Chapter 10). There is evidence that the issue of the status of the Chinese was one of the reasons why

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] \textit{The Daily Telegraph}, 1 October 1891. The Age, 1 October 1891.
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citizenship was not dealt with in greater clarity in the final Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1901.\textsuperscript{17}

Cheong chose not to seek naturalisation as a British subject even though that option was open to him for twenty-five years after his arrival in Victoria in 1863. His reasons are unclear. By 1888, when Victorian legislation closed the option (Chapter 10), he had all the rights that naturalisation offered except a British passport. He may have exercised caution in his desire to maintain a leading position in the Chinese community. As Chapters 8 and 9 discussed he was excluded from the inner circles of the colonial Chinese leadership and may have thought that his Christian commitments represented a sufficient barrier. On the other hand leading merchants such as Kong Meng and Ah Mouy found no contradiction between their Chinese ness and their status as British subjects and nominal Christians (Chapter 2).

There is a letter in his correspondence that suggests that after Federation, and well after naturalisation was withdrawn under colonial law in 1888, Cheong explored the possibility of naturalisation under federal law.\textsuperscript{18} The description is, or appears to be, of himself:

13th Dec 1904  
The Right Honorable the Prime Minister  
Dear Sir — A Chinese Resident who has been domiciled in the Commonwealth for over 40 years wishes me to enquire whether he may be admitted to the full rights of citizenship by naturalization.

He is married and has a family and both personal and real estate of the estimated value of close on £10,000.

The majority of his family who have attained to manhood and womanhood have and do exercise the rights of citizenship as likewise all his European tenants.

I need only add that he is a man of high character and repute as he shall be able to show from the testimonies of men of position and influence.

An answer at your earliest convenience will greatly oblige him.

Among the rights normally thought of as restricted to British subjects was participation in the colonial electoral system but Cheong had secured that through the colonial property franchise. He set out his claim in a letter to the Shire of Lillydale (sic) in 1909:\textsuperscript{19}

Croydon 12/5/09  
The Shire Secretary, Lillydale


\textsuperscript{18} National Archives of Australia – AA1911/14641 records show the following statistics for colonial naturalisations of Chinese. Victoria, post 1887, nil.; NSW, none between 1862 & 1867, none after 1888; South Australia, none after 1887; Western Australia, none after 1891; Queensland, granted up to 1 January 1904; Tasmania, granted up to 1 January 1904.

\textsuperscript{19} See \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 3 May 1888 for a supporting remarks about the property franchise.
Dear Sir — As my son Joshua, on your roll as a ratepayer is leaving the State for New South Wales would you please substitute my name for his? There will then be as before three names to represent this property — my own & my sons Nathaniel & Benjamin. My name has been on the roll of Ratepayers for Fitzroy for some 30 years & likewise other suburbs of Melbourne. My right to vote for parliamentary elections is secured under section 41 of the Federal Constitution.

With Federation in 1901, Cheong’s right to vote in Victoria gave him the right to vote in Federal elections under Section 41 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia (see letter above). It was an unusual transitional outcome resulting from the compromises needed to obtain the federation of the six Australian colonies. As so often in his life, Cheong proved the exception rather than the rule.

Nineteenth century immigrants in Australia were not a homogeneous group. Although the majority were from ‘British’ backgrounds that label, in identity terms, was about as useful as the label ‘Chinese’. ‘British’ immigrants were not a homogeneous group ethnically, socially, religiously or economically (Chapter 4). Although most colonists identified with Britian as a ‘national’ entity their core identities were centred on family and outside Australia on localised cultural and religious entities.

The English-speaking population did not constitute a monoculture and the same is broadly true of the Chinese at a national level although people of Cantonese origin were the predominant linguistic and cultural group. In Victoria, moreover, the Siyi (Chapters 1 and 2) were the predominant group but, within the Four Districts, there were very wide variations, not least the belief of urbanised (Sam Yap) Cantonese that the people from Taishan, the largest single group of Cantonese-Victorians, were little better than crude country bumpkins. Christine Inglis has drawn attention to the diversity of identities within the Chinese communities of 19th century Australia:

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20 Section 41 reads: — 41. No adult person who has or acquires a right to vote at elections for the more numerous House of the Parliament of a State shall, while the right continues, be prevented by any law of the Commonwealth from voting at elections for either House of the Parliament of the Commonwealth.

21 Wang Gungwu suggested two decades ago that ‘Chinese ethnicity derives from cultural identity’, i.e., that it is a subjective judgement made by an individual and the existence of an entity — China — and some sense of national identification with that entity is not the central issue. See Wang Gungwu, (1999), ‘Chineseness: the Dilemmas of Place and Practice’. Chapter 3, 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.


It is extremely difficult, I would argue, to characterise the Chinese population in Australia in the 19th century as constituting a ‘community’ with all the implications which actually follow from this of being settled and with permanence and the emergence of their own locally developed institutions and sense of identity. True, there were many of the material attributes that go with a ‘community’ in a spatial sense:— shops, temples. But their presence often concealed the movement through them of a predominantly itinerant population — certainly one which, in the concept of a diaspora as a group with strong ties to a homeland to which they planned to return, was a more accurate description.22

It was almost universally believed, in China and in the English-speaking countries of the Pacific Rim, that the Chinese were not permanent settlers (Chapter 4). At the very beginning of the goldrush, in 1853, the Rt. Rev. George Smith, Bishop of Hong Kong23 (see Chapter 5) said of the goldrush emigrant rush:

Our age has witnessed the discovery of goldfields . . . Who will venture to calculate the probable consequences to the human race, and especially the empire of China, of the tens of thousands of her sons who are hastening across the broad Pacific or to the shores of Australia to supply the increased demands of labour and to bring back thence the fruit of their toil.24

An article in a British journal noted that Britain had:

Not only opened the Canton river for ourselves, but for the Chinese. [We] have delivered the people from the bondage of the ages; and like all other nations, the Chinese are consciously mingling in the march of the world towards unknown and unlooked-for destinies.25

The large-scale arrival of Chinese in 1854-1855 presented the European colonists with a challenge about the long-term makeup of the colony’s population. The majority of European colonists could not accept that the Chinese had any legitimate claim to share in Australia’s wealth (Chapter 4). Few European colonists paused to reflect on the way in which their claims to ownership of Australia was established. Europeans and Chinese were caught up in a process few understood, i.e., the birth of a new nation — nationalism itself was a word that only entered dictionaries at the end of the 19th century. They were living in a circumstance in which the identity brought from their old world would be replaced by another identity, itself constantly evolving.26

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22 Inglis, Christine, (1999), Remarks at Conference, Reconceptualising the Southern Chinese: From Community to Diaspora, Australian National University, Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora, (CSCSD), 27 February 1999.
23 The correct title was Bishop of Victoria, Victoria was the town built as the centrepiece of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. To avoid confusion, as the title Bishop of Victoria was initially used in Australia, the terms Bishop of Hong Kong and Bishop of Melbourne are used.
24 *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol 1, No 1, p 74.
Reid’s comments at the beginning of this chapter recall a similar comment by Ien Ang, an Australian of Chinese-Indonesian background who remarked in 1994 that:

Chineseness should not be seen as a fixed racial and ethnic category, but as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora. That is to say, what it means to be Chinese varies from place to place, moulded by the local circumstances in which peoples of Chinese ancestry have settled and constructed new ways of living. There are, in other words, many different Chinese identities, not one.27

Chineseness today may reflect what one Chinese-Australian has referred to as a ‘corporeal malediction’ — the biological fact of ‘Chinese’ appearance.28 Appearance, as Chan and others have mentioned, is a ‘blind historical force’. ‘Call it fate or destiny, the Chinese — wherever they may reside — can never escape China for the simple reason that they look ‘Chinese’.29 This view is in contrast to 19th century reports from Foochow in which missionaries reported that people in one district were quite prepared to accept them as Chinese from another district, an indication that appearance is not the only determinant of identity. People were inclined to excuse their oddities as those of people from ‘out of town’.30

Reliance on appearance assumes that there is a distinctive Chinese appearance, a proposition that begs the question about other peoples of Asia.31 As the three Australian images below suggest, appearance is a very variable measure of identity. The first image is
a stereotype; the second shows a successful Chinese Anglican business man, a friend of Cheong; the third shows a poor, apparently elderly unskilled Chinese rural worker from eastern Victoria. Each image is an authentic representation of Chinese identity.

Although biology and heredity predetermine physiognomy the three images demonstrate that perception and environment play an equally important role, as in the case of Samuel and Hedley Tong Way, the Australian-born sons of the Rev. John Tong Way, a long-serving Presbyterian minister. When their father refused to approve their enlistment in the Australian Army in World War I, the boys had to point out to their Chinese-born but naturalised father that they saw themselves as Australians, not as Chinese.

Appearance is only a negative when, as James Cheong said, the ‘prestige’ of the ethnic group with which an individual is identified is low (Chapter 6).\footnote{32} In general terms the starting point for the low status experienced by Chinese living in colonial Victoria (see Chapters 4 and 7-10) was more than the totality of their appearance, i.e., biology plus environment (especially clothing), a situation recognised by the rules of the See Yup Association forbidding the wearing of Chinese split trousers (See Chapter 2).\footnote{33} The fact that their homeland was viewed as a weak member of the world community was an important as physical appearance.

The next page provides several different views of the prominent Sydney businessman, Mei Quong Tart. It would be difficult, simply by biological appearance, to place Quong Tart in the same category as ‘Miley’ on page 284.

Cheong chose to ignore biology and to view the status of Chinese in Victoria as inseparable from China’s ‘national’ humiliation. He expressed this by by asserting an idealised Chinese ethnic and cultural superiority as superior to British culture (See Appendices 1-5).\footnote{34} Advancing the concept of ‘corporeal malediction’ reflects the continuing disappointment of people whose chosen identification with China as the

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\textit{32} The Rev. James Cheong to Dr W Embling MLC, 7 December 1905. The issue of prestige and identity among immigrant Asians, including Chinese, is discussed in Broinowski, Alison, (2001), About Face: Asian Representations of Australia, PhD, Australian National University.

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\textit{34} This kind of cultural reconstructionism is characteristic of many immigrant cultures.
principal source of their identity has to cope with two nation-wide revolutions and several regime changes that have not delivered the international prestige and ethnic pride that Chinese nationalists believe existed prior to the 19th century.
The impact of the ethnic homeland’s low status on an Australian of Chinese ethnic heritage is revealed in the experience of William Wang who described being teased at primary school and going home to ask his mother if he was Chinese.

As a child it never occurred to me that I was a Chinese and of a different race from other Australians. Someone at school called me ‘Ching Chong Chinaman’. It bewildered me because I didn’t know what he meant, but I knew from his expression that he was being horrible to me. I was about six at the time. I went home seeking assurance. I said to my mother, ‘he said I was Chinese, I’m not, am I?’ My mother replied, with great severity, ‘You are.’ . . . My elder brother . . . chimed in with the authority of someone who was four years older and so much more experienced in the world, ‘Yes, you are Chinese, and you’d better get used to it.’

Wang added:

It was her tone that shocked me. I understood immediately that being Chinese was some terrible curse. . . my first feelings about being Chinese were entirely negative and they remained that way for over thirty years. There wasn’t a single advantage to it.\(^{35}\)

In contrast to the negative self-image of Wang’s family the Cheongs chose to emphasise their Chinese identity with the kind of self-perception referred to by the contemporary Chinese writer, Wang Meng, as ‘cultural patriotism’\(^{36}\).

Wang Meng relates cultural patriotism to people living in a setting where China provides the historical underpinnings of the dominant culture, as in China, Taiwan or perhaps Singapore but it is a concept that can be readily extended to Chinese living in other cultures. In his determination to change the perception held of China and the Chinese in Victoria, Cheong highlighted the grandeur of China’s culture (Appendices 1-5) and his educative work in the Anglican Mission incorporated some of the great ethical teachings of Confucius (Chapter 5).

William Wang’s discovery that his Chinese appearance was not an advantage underwent a significant change when he later experienced something like the cultural patriotism described by Wang Meng:

Once I found out about China and the Chinese culture, it became obvious that the Chinese had a great civilisation. The culture was rich and refined. There was a deep spiritual core to their existence. Compassion and warmth were at the centre of their customs. This was nothing to be ashamed of. This was something to be proud of . . . my general impression and experience of China was positive . . . I felt I had been

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See also Wang, William, (1994), Family Pictures, Sydney, Angus and Robertson
admitted back into my lost family . . . I had returned to the motherland. I had come back to my second home.\textsuperscript{37}

Cheong’s identity was a mix of apparent contradictions. His writings denounce the injustices experienced by Chinese but the concept of ‘justice’ to which he appeals, with its reliance on the rule of law, is Anglo-European. His father’s Christianity provided the English language skills upon which his adult utility to the Chinese community depended (see Chapters 8-10). His European education had the effect that he was unable to provide the Chinese merchant leadership with the skills associated with a classical Chinese education although he was careful not to acknowledge his limitations publicly. The Cheongs never claimed a traditional Chinese scholarly/literati background and their model of a gentleman was probably a mixture of observation in Victoria together with accounts of the village and district level elites of China.\textsuperscript{38} Almost uniquely among the leaders of the Australian Chinese community, Cheong never wore traditional Chinese costume nor did he ever accept honours or distinctions from the Chinese Government. His affectation of the long fingernail shows that he was fully conscious of the status accruing to a Chinese scholar and its privileges in a Chinese context. Cheong’s ambivalent position as a Chinese leader is reflected in a continuing strand of modern Chinese identity:

The cultural problem of preserving the best of Chinese tradition while adopting modern Western culture was mirrored in intellectuals’ desires to maintain their traditional involvement in national affairs (and their elite status) while adopting the Western theories and concepts that formed the basis for their position of cultural authority . . . Defining a modern identity involved accepting Western knowledge as superior to Chinese, but maintaining the position of elite leadership meant identifying with a traditional role of ‘taking all under heaven as one’s responsibility.’ \textsuperscript{39}

Chineseness, and in particular the scholarly status issue, was vital to Cheong’s identity and was influential in his problems with the Presbyterian Church (Chapter 3) and later with the Anglicans (Chapter 5). His desire to be the learned teacher training others for the work of evangelism obscured the lack of interest he seems to have had for the work of evangelism for which, in the Anglican context, he had been employed.

For Chinese traditionalists Christianity was a symbol of his alliance with the enemies of

\textsuperscript{37} Wang, William, op cit.
\textsuperscript{38} A simple overview of the Chinese social system and relative positions within it, from governmental and traditional Confucian models will be found at http://ww2.lafayette.edu/~barclayp/248/shf04.html
China whereas his Chineseness and his Christianity were highly valued by the Boards of the Presbyterian and Anglican Chinese Missions.

Although Cheong threatened that he might return to China, James’ university education and the church school education of his children is indicative of the family’s acceptance of Western values. Unlike many other Chinese Australians Cheong never sought a Chinese education for any of his children nor did he finance a period of residence in China to assure their familiarity with Chinese culture.

James’ residence in Hong Kong (1900-1903) when he explored employment with the Chinese Government points to ‘patriotic’ ties to his ethnic ‘great tradition’ culture. In the photograph below, James unconsciously reveals by his dress his identity as a cultivated ‘European’ gentleman and this is reinforced by the traditional young scholar dress of the student at his side.

James found life in colonial Hong Kong, with its Chinese majority, less comfortable than his life at Oxford that echoed his eight happy years at the University of Melbourne (Chapter 6). After settling in at Cuddesdon College he wrote to his mother:

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 experience in Hong Kong was a mirror image of the life story of the Cheongs and other Chinese-Australians who chose the complex path of integration and accommodation without totally abandoning a sense of cultural patriotism. They had to work through a balance between a more generalised sense of Chineseness, and their Australianness. James Cheong reflected their distinctive if ‘anomalous’ identity in a letter to Sir John Madden, written from Hong Kong in 1900:

I am in the peculiar [he originally wrote anomalous but crossed it out for peculiar] position as an Australian of pure Chinese descent, of undoubted British status, and of Western (English) education.  

The unique problem with Australianness was that the Chinese, alone, were faced with restrictions on their freedom of movement into and out of Australia, and across colonial borders. They alone faced special taxes. They alone, after the 1880s, were denied the right to naturalisation. Even when born in Australia, and possessing a British passport, they alone were interrogated by immigration officers because of their physical appearance. It is undeniable that under federal immigration law, and some other residual discriminatory legislation from the colonial era, Chinese were the subject of bureaucratic discrimination. It is not difficult to understand why a term such as ‘corporeal malediction’ might arise.

Cheong’s writings are proof of the strength of the Chinese reaction to discrimination. He knew the everyday problems of discrimination although he and his family seem to have been freer from day to day prejudice than most of his countrymen. Cheong had personal experience of the barriers to intercolonial travel when he was unable to visit his ‘father’s sepulchre’ in Hobart or to speak at public meetings in Sydney without first paying the poll-tax, even though the Tasmanians promised an instant refund as he left the colony. He complained only once of a discriminatory affront to him personally when a bumptious policeman subjected him to a body-search at Port Melbourne while he was farewelling friends travelling to China (Chapter 10).  

40 James Cheong to Mrs Cheong, 3 March 1903, James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne.  
41 James Cheong to Sir John Madden, 20 March 1900, (James Cheong Letters, Trinity College Archives, University of Melbourne).  
42 Cheok Hong Cheong to Hon P O Fysh, Premier of Tasmania, 19 February 1891.  
43 Cheok Hong Cheong to Sir George Dibb, Premier of New South Wales, 29 June 1893.  
44 Cheok Hong Cheong to Governor of New South Wales, 1 July 1895.  
44 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Hon J B Patterson, Commissioner of Customs, 28th July 1889.
Cheong’s distinctive contribution to the defence of the Chinese community was exercised through the press, publications, public lectures and newspaper correspondence. Other Chinese operated differently as was shown in the private interactions between the merchant elite and the Victorian Government during the Afghan/Burrumbeet negotiations (Chapter 8), and between the elite, the Imperial Commissioners and the European leaders of the Australian colonies (Chapter 9).

Cheong’s letterbooks demonstrate his concern with propriety in his personal dealings but when Chinese sought to overcome disadvantages created by unjust laws he accepted their contempt for discriminatory law and its administrators and ignored their attempt to subvert injustice (Chapters 8-10). He knew a good deal about crime within the Chinese community and was aware of immigration avoidance schemes (Chapter 7). He chose to keep his information to himself and not to risk his reputation and broader community status by becoming an informer to those who in the minds and experience of many Chinese constituted an enemy.

Although cultural patriotism is a useful concept Cheong’s life was probably closer to Wang Gungwu’s sense of Chineseness as psychological identification that was mentioned earlier in regard to James Cheong’s three years in Hong Kong:

The only reliable test of a person’s identity is a person’s self-identity as a Chinese, and other people agreeing that the person is Chinese, even to the point of insisting on it whether the person likes it or not. The former centers on aspects of psychology and the latter largely on physical attributes.

James Cheong, the Tong Way brothers and Quong Tart are exemplars of the kind of multiple identities implicit in Wang’s observation. In a letter to a Victorian parliamentarian during the debates over proposed anti-Chinese amendments to the Victorian Factories and Shops legislation in 1905 James, perhaps unconsciously, noted the way in which his identity reflected multiple responses to his circumstances whether it was as a British subject, an Australian and a person of Chinese psychological identification:

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45 St Augustine’s statement that ‘an unjust law is no law at all’ was widely repeated by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in his non-violent resistance movement in the United States. As a former theological student Cheong would also have known of Christian teaching on the issue of obedience to unjust laws.


We have the elements of a great nation in this Commonwealth of ours with her glorious heritage & her venerable traditions from the Motherland, but woe be to her if for vanity or selfishness or love or ease she miss her God-given opportunity — It would indeed be national suicide. Now speaking as a Chinese I cannot withhold my humble quota of gratitude to you for the way you spoke in [our] defence.  

James Cheong’s scholarship was in European ‘classics’, rather than the classical lore of China. He was an Anglican Christian by religion; a British subject by birth and Chinese by appearance and self-identification. James was the only member of the Cheong family to make a serious effort to master the Mandarin dialect by studying the classic Confucian texts and learning to write Chinese in a scholarly style. It is possible that Joshua also took some studies in Chinese when he was working with the On Cheong Company in Sydney and later with the Chinese Times newspaper in Melbourne but there is no information available. Perhaps because he was confident in his status as a British subject and an Australian James was prepared to be a little ‘more’ a Chinese, in an educated sense, than his father. He shared his father’s outrage at the denial of justice to Chinese in Australia that was personalized by his humiliating experience of interrogation by immigration officers when he arrived at Fremantle in 1904 on his way home from Oxford. (Chapter 10, Appendix 17).

Appearance is obviously an important strand in the issue of identity but identity may also involve a person in a self-registering way that reflects either ‘cultural patriotism’ or psychological factors. The issue of language assumes especial importance in today’s world because of the war of cultural legitimacy between Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Neither political entity places much importance on the identity of Chinese who do not speak Mandarin but the fact of Chinese dialects is inseparable from Cheong’s experience and that of almost all Chinese in 19th century Victoria. Important as Mandarin obviously is in terms of the cultural patriotism of competing Chinese states it is Cantonese/Taishanese and English that is at the heart of the study of the 19th and early 20th century Chinese-Australian heritage. Cheong spoke Cantonese/Taishanese and

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48 Rev. James Cheong to Dr W Embling MLC, 7 December 1905.
49 Cheok Hong Cheong to the Secretary, External Affairs, 26 September 1904.
perhaps other Cantonese dialects but had little or no knowledge of Mandarin.

Stress is also, I think, unnecessarily laid on ‘ideas’ about the dialect which I speak — I say unnecessarily because 99% of the Chinese in Australia are from the province of Canton in whose provincial capital I was born and brought up\textsuperscript{52} and whose dialect, ‘the English of the province’ which I naturally speak is the one which is familiar to the vast majority of Colonial Chinese. And mixing with them as I do for the last 27 years and identified with their every interest it would have been difficult for me, even if I had chosen it, to remain ignorant of the little provincialism of the small minority. But I did not so choose and flatter myself with being to speak as many Cantonese dialects as some of the most accomplished linguists among them.\textsuperscript{53}

Cheong’s language skills underpinned his resistance to anti-Chinese prejudice, not least the pathologising process surveyed in Chapter 7. He was comfortable with the Cantonese dialects spoken in Victoria. He could communicate in English on equal, if not superior, terms to most Europeans. He subscribed to English language journals and to evangelical missionary publications from China and was an avid reader of the Victorian daily papers.\textsuperscript{54} There is no record that he subscribed to any Chinese language papers from China although he did contribute to the local Chinese paper in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{55} There is no information about his contributions in terms of whether Cheong wrote them in Chinese or English. There are few Chinese language items in his letterbooks but the actual writer of the Chinese characters is unknown.

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English was the official and common language of all the Australian colonies. By the last twenty years of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century when a majority of Victorians were locally born and educated, the regional Anglo-Celtic dialects of English that accompanied the mass international public conference held at the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne, 8-10 October 1993, Melbourne, The Museum of Chinese Australian History.

The recording of names from gravestones and publication only in the Mandarin form effectively excludes Australians of Chinese ethnic descent who only know relatives by the Anglicised form of their Chinese name used in the family and other records. A family known as the descendants of Ah Ket, for example, might be surprised to see a reference to Zhang, the Mandarin form of his family name, Cheong (William Ah Ket’s Chinese name was Cheong Mar Shem). Similar work by the Golden Dragon Museum on gravestones in Bendigo is reported to be giving both Mandarin and Cantonese/English forms.

Cheok Hong Cheong to Rev. S L Chase, 20 May 1891. It is difficult to know what Cheong was claiming about his place of birth. According to most records, the Cheong family living at Fatshan (Foshan) a major provincial trading centre on the Pearl River at the time of Cheong Peng-nam’s departure for Australia. Fatshan is on the opposite bank from Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong Province. It may be that this reference is a shorthand version that he thought would be more readily understood by the European to whom he was writing. Alternatively, Peng-nam may have moved from his parents to Guangzhou.

Cheok Hong Cheong to Rev. Canon S L Chase, 20 May 1891.\textsuperscript{53}

It is unfortunate that his personal library has not been identified. The letters referred to in this work were preserved by the Rev. George Thomas, one-time Missioner, who gave them to the writer on his death-bed.

Cheong read and contributed to the \textit{Chinese Times}. Joshua Cheong worked briefly for the paper as an advertising salesman.\textsuperscript{55}
immigration of settlers was transforming into a near uniform Australian-English dialect. This helped to reduce the kind of social division that was associated with dialects in the United Kingdom — indeed, it proved increasingly impossible to stereotype Australians by their speech. One effect of the standardising of the Victorian-Australian dialect of English, in the case of the Cheong family, was an encounter between Joshua and E W Cole, a prominent bookseller in Melbourne:

A few months ago I had a rather curious experience with respect to the similarity of the Chinese character and our own. Mr. Cheong had invited Mrs Cole and myself to come and visit his homestead. We accordingly went, and remained all day until after dark, when some of the family got the buggy ready to drive us to Croydon station. The driver and my wife got up on to the front seat and I got up on the back one. One young man, whom I thought to be one of the Cheongs, got up beside me. We drove on, but as it was quite dark I could not see his face, and as he went on talking about various things just like an Englishman, I thought I must have been mistaken. ‘This cannot be a Chinaman; probably it is some Englishman that they have to help them to pick fruit or work on the farm.’ I put several questions to him, and these were answered just as an Englishman would answer them, and I positively believed I was talking to an Englishman until we came to a lamp on the station, and then I saw the Chinese features of Joshua Cheong. What he said, the way he said it, and the tone of his voice were exactly English . . .

Anti-Chinese prejudice made pragmatic, if not ethical sense, when seen through the filter of the economic fear of most European colonists. Although most people grasped that the resident Chinese offered no threat to them it was a different matter when demagogues played on the threat of invasion by hordes from the north (see theatre poster next page) or pictured an Australia dominated by non-Europeans. Australians, themselves invaders and conquerors of a small indigenous population, were well aware that a small population occupying the coastal fringes of a huge land mass, with more than half the continent uninhabited, presented a case for invasion by a land hungry world.

The institutions of the Colony of Victoria were modelled along British lines. There was a bi-cameral legislature, with a democratic (males only) system of elections for the Lower House, the Legislative Assembly. There was a restricted franchise based on property and/or education for the Upper House but at least the Victorian Legislative Council was elected and not, as in other colonies, appointed. As in Britain, an independent judiciary interpreted the law, not always to the comfort of the elected governments as the Victorian and New South Wales Governments learned at different times, most notably in relation to

There is a useful introduction to Australian English in the Macquarie Dictionary.

the Afghan issue.

Colonial institutions helped in Cheong’s career as a property investor. He accumulated a property portfolio bringing in an annual income that he reported to be in excess of £1500 a year (Chapter 6).\textsuperscript{58} His property investments were so successful that, at his death in 1928, he left assets of some £A100,000, worth in today’s values, perhaps $A10 million (Chapter 6).\textsuperscript{59} He undoubtedly took risks in investments to the point where, as mentioned in Chapter 6, his wife expressed grave doubts about their financial security as his health began the decline that resulted in his death in 1928. He described his success to one of his strongest supporters, Mrs Maria Moriarty, in 1906:

You are aware that for the last 7 years I have been working in the Mission without any charge to it, the Lord whom I serve having blessed all my investments so that I have near a rental income equal to the salary I used to derive from the Mission which besides providing a living for self and family has solved the question of a retiring allowance and provision for the family.\textsuperscript{60}

Colonial law placed a strong emphasis on property rights. Cheong’s choice of property investments was facilitated by a colonial innovation, since copied around the world, simplifying the recording of land ownership by the Torrens

\textsuperscript{58} In 1904 he estimated his assets as being £10,000. Cheok Hong Cheong to the Prime Minister of Australia, 13 December 1904.

\textsuperscript{59} The actual value of his estate in 1928 was approx £A100,000. It is difficult to know how to translate that into 2002 values. For want of anything more accurate, the only reasonably authoritative sources appear to be: House of Commons, \textit{Inflation: the value of the Pound 1750-1998}, Research Paper 99/20, 23 February 1999. The reservations in the Introduction to that paper demonstrate the difficulty of making too confident an assertion. This index would suggest an estate valued at close to $A10 million. Another calculation is at http://www.globalfindata.com/ which suggests a British consumer price index increase of approx 28 times between 1928 and 2001. Assuming a rough parity between the British and Australian pounds, this would value Cheong’s estate at perhaps £3 million or perhaps $A7 million. See also John J. McCusker, "Comparing the Purchasing Power of Money in Great Britain from 1264 to Any Other Year Including the Present" Economic History Services, 2001. http://www.eh.net/hmit/ppowerbp/ If McCusker’s scaling is taken, and applying today’s approximate exchange rate with the British pound, i.e. approx $A1 = 40 British pence, Cheong’s estate could valued at over $A9 million.

\textsuperscript{60} Cheok Hong Cheong to Mrs Maria Moriarty, 2 May 1906.
Title system of registration. This favoured Cheong whose investments included buying up deceased estates at mere pence on the pound of their original value (Chapter 6) as in this instance where he mentions buying a property valued at approximately £14000 but sought a loan of less than half the amount. Even allowing for possible finance from other sources, it is significant that he sought the maximum overdraft limit:

Pine Lodge 29/2/08
The Sub-Manager, Union Bank, Melbourne
. . . if you are agreeable to accommodate me to the limit of £6250 on the securities of which I have given you a list & whose value I have set down roughly at £14000 I shall be glad to at once open an account with your Bank.

Once ownership was registered, the title certificate became an instrument against which loans could be financed by the lender holding the deed as security until the loan was paid – all mortgages etc were registered on the certificate preventing a borrower from selling the property until each loan was discharged. Cheong’s letterbooks contain dozens of letters dealing with real estate agents, owners and the banks from which he borrowed (Chapter 6). The following letter is just one of many examples of his close attention to property matters:

14th Dec 1904
Dear Mr Swan — Re Brunswick St land I have your favour of the 7th. since receiving which I have heard that young Ted has remarked to Mr Griffith of Langridge and Son that the land was no good to them (the Apps) and that he was for selling it at any price. Mr Griffith then enquired whether he may negotiate for me. I replied ‘Thank you, but I have already asked Mr Swan to enquire for me.’ 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 as just been sold on the opposite side at £12 per foot. At the figure it would be worth some £400.
Yours Truly, CHC
Mr Thos Swan

Butlin concluded that the real genius of colonial Victoria was to create a system of government that was reasonably efficient and broadly democratic. Despite colonial boom and bust economic cycles Victorian governments facilitated a high standard of living for most people, including what was reputedly the highest family income and the highest incidence of family home ownership in the world. Beneath the self-confident facade there

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61 First introduced in South Australia in 1858, Torrens Title transferred ownership in real estate, usually including all 'improvements' added to the land, such as a house, by the simple act of registering the transfer with a government property registry and paying appropriate stamp duties. Ownership by registration replaced the old English system of land ownership derived from medieval times. For an introduction and online discussions of Torrens Title, see http://www.femail.com.au/torrenstitle.htm

62 Australian home ownership rates have traditionally been around the 50-70% mark or higher. See Commonwealth Year Book 2002.
were real and enduring social problems sufficiently widespread to engender fears of ill-health, unemployment and poverty. Although Cheong left a number of letters dealing with federal land tax matters, and local municipal charges, nothing is known of the income of the Chinese community as a whole although the evidence advanced earlier indicates that most were poor by the usual standards of their time.

Demagogues can always find a platform but the general community seemed well able to distinguish between threats of invasion by the legendary hordes from the north and the individual Chinese they met day by day. At the height of the ‘ratepayer’ meetings sponsored by the anti-Chinese movement people defended the Chinese and rejected extremism. Arguments against mass Chinese immigration were generally supported but few colonists felt personally threatened and this helps to explain the wide support given to the Poon Gooey family (Chapter 10 and Appendix 14).

The discrimination experienced by the Chinese has been acknowledged but overall, the impact of restrictive legislation was felt by a relatively small number of affluent members of the Chinese community, rather than the community as a whole. The poll-tax on arrival was, for almost everyone, a one-time cost that was, for most men, repaid as part of their credit ticket debt, usually within twelve months or so of their arrival. Poll-taxes on intercolonial movements and special tariff charges mostly affected merchants but the net effect was small. Wilton’s studies of a merchant community in the New England region of New South Wales shows how sophisticated management overcame these difficulties. The clearest expression of the economic well-being of the Chinese is in the Petition written by Cheong to the Chinese Commissioners (Appendix 2) and the Commissioners report of their findings following their return to China (Chapter 9). The Commissioners reported that the injustice done to the Chinese was not in levying taxes but in singling out the Chinese.

In terms of his ignorance of the Chinese ‘Great Tradition’ Cheong was better off than most of his countrymen few of whom could read any kind of book, and least of all

Confucius, Mencius or other Chinese philosophers (Chapter 2). Cheong could read and
cite their works in English translations. James’ search for information about employment
opportunities in China showed that Cheok Hong Cheong was not familiar enough with
China to guide his son. James sought advice from experienced Europeans, such as the Rev.
Dr. Ernest Eitel, and later sought the advice of Chinese leaders in Hong Kong (Chapter 6).
There is little doubt that once away from his father’s control, James experienced a sense of
personal freedom that, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, he was never inclined to
surrender.

The Rev. Dr. Arthur Smith remarked that in his experience the Chinese did not readily
adopt anything new but this was untrue about the Chinese of the diaspora and the
Chinese who frequented the Treaty Ports. 66 Chinese Australians whose families had been
farmers for generations became miners and when that failed, they became, in no particular
order: fencing contractors, laundrymen, furniture manufacturers, shearsers, farm labourers,
land clearing specialists, cooks, and anything else that paid. Market gardening was
especially popular. Immigrant Chinese were engulfed by the need to constantly adapt and
change if they were to survive. Cheong is a symbol of a Chinese identity marked by
innovation and enterprise that emerged as immigrants responded to their new and
constantly evolving situations.

After parting with the Presbyterian Theological Hall in 1875 Cheong spent the next ten
years managing the fruit business established by his father in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy
after the family moved from Ballarat in 1872. (Chapter 3). He did well enough to purchase
a separate dwelling, ‘Montgomery Villa’, in Gore Street, Fitzroy, to replace the combined
shop and residence in which the family had lived in Brunswick Street and also purchased
a property in George Street, Fitzroy, although nothing more is known about that
purchase.67

The Cheongs were among the small number of ethnic Chinese families who lived in the
general community, i.e., outside the security of the Chinatowns. Apart from the merchant-
elite such as Lowe Kong Meng or Louis Ah Mouy (Chapter 4) there were others, including
Chinese medical practitioners such as James Lamsey or ministers of religion such as the
Methodist ministers, the Rev. James Moy (Mouy) Ling and the Rev. Leong On Tong and

67 Cheong mentioned his income several times as being between £300-£400 a year. Cheok Hong Cheong
to Mr R Ewing, Acting Commissioner of Taxation, 30 November 1917.
the Presbyterian minister, the Rev. John Tong Way. The Chinese lawyer, William Ah Ket (Cheong Mar Shem), who lived in Caulfield-Malvern, had an enormous range of contacts through his legal work and also through his support of horse-racing and regularly entertained Europeans at his home. Cheong also provided accommodation and entertainment at Pine Lodge for Europeans and others.

Men who were married to European women were a very small group within the total Chinese population of Victoria. Their wives usually wanted their children to be integrated into the dominant culture and almost always chose to live among their European neighbours and send their children to local churches, schools and other community facilities. Economic resources and willingness to conform in outward lifestyle were the keys to residential location even if not, as William Wang’s story indicates, to peace of mind.

The Cheong family did not share the precarious economic existence of so many of their hard-working countrymen. Cheong Peng-nam’s children, and grandchildren, never experienced the social isolation of many, and perhaps most, Chinese immigrants. Whereas poverty and loneliness kept many men looking inward to their memories of home the Cheong family was constantly looking outward.

At any point in his career Cheong might have become a nominal Christian or reverted to Chinese traditional beliefs as his sister did after accompanying her nominally Christian husband, Dr Ng Wing Fat, back to China. Cheong maintained his, and his family’s, active participation in the Napier Street Presbyterian Church in Fitzroy until he became the lay superintendent of the Anglican Chinese Mission in 1885. His wife remained active in the women’s work of the Chinese Presbyterian Mission for many years. His sincerity as a Christian was recognized by members of the Napier Street congregation in 1882 when he was elected a ruling elder by an all-European Session and was authorised as a lay preacher. His election to the eldership had no connection with any role in the

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68 As late as 1890 Cheong mentioned that there were only three Chinese Christian women in Melbourne. The three were Mrs Cheong, Mrs Cornelius Poon Why (Anglican), and Mrs James Lee Mouy Ling, wife of the Methodist minister. Cheok Hong Cheong to Mrs Ah Bon, the European wife of Mark Ah Bon, Anglican catechist at Daylesford, 13 November 1890.

69 Cheong Peng-nam had made baptism a prerequisite for Wing Fat’s marriage to Fong-sen.

70 The Australian Times and Anglo-New Zealander, 4 February 1882. A Presbyterian Session comprises spiritually minded ‘ruling’ lay elders who share the religious government of the congregation with the minister who is sometimes referred to as the ‘teaching’ elder. The Session decides, for example, who is to be admitted to the Holy Communion and who, for spiritual reasons, is to be excluded. The business affairs of the congregation are handled separately by the Board of Management.
Presbyterian Chinese Mission — he had none. After the events of 1898 described in Chapter 5, he spent most weekends attending the Mission of the Epiphany in Little Bourke Street, travelling in and out by train and the family maintained a connection with the local Anglican church in Croydon.

His participation in the publication of The Chinese Question in 1878-1879 (Chapter 4 and Appendices) established him as the English-language apologist for the Chinese community of Victoria. He became the English language ‘secretary’ (and later chairman) of the Victorian Chinese Residents’ Association (Chapter 8). He established an advisory connection with the Church Missionary Society of Victoria in 1882 that led to his appointment as Superintendent of the Anglican Chinese Mission in 1885 (Chapter 5). His investments became vital after his problems with the Anglican Church Missionary Association described in Chapter 5 but he always insisted that business was secondary to his work as a missionary. He remained an active Anglican until his death and was buried in the Anglican section of the Box Hill Cemetery.

Cheong’s public life was grounded in two strands. The first was his belief, as an evangelical Christian, that conversion and a lively involvement in society was inseparable from the duty of Christians to serve their neighbours. His Christian involvement in society was tied up with the second strand, his Chineseness in two ways — as a missionary and an advocate.

From the First Opium War onwards China’s history became a litany of foreign wars and internal rebellion that, taken together, produced the low esteem in which China and Chinese were held internationally. A list of China’s nineteenth century experiences is essential if there is to be any understanding of the underlying sense of personal and national humiliation that is revealed in Cheong’s references to his homeland and in his written papers it is given as the primary cause of the discriminatory treatment of Chinese in Australia.

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<th>First ‘unequal’ Treaty</th>
<th>First Opium War</th>
<th>1839-1840</th>
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<td>Taiping Rebellion</td>
<td>1850-1864</td>
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<td>Second ‘unequal’ Treaty</td>
<td>Second Opium War</td>
<td>1859-1861</td>
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<td>Miao Rebellion</td>
<td>1865-1872</td>
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72 Cheok Hong Cheong to William Ah Ket, 25 September 1907. Cheong asked Ah Ket to tell him who was responsible for describing him as an ex-missionary
73 Now the Anglican Chinese Mission of the Epiphany and still in the premises he established at 121-123 Little Bourke Street, Melbourne in 1904.
The most widespread domestic conflict of the 19th century, especially for South China, was the Taiping Rebellion during the 1850s and 1860s. The Taiping use of Christian terminology identified the movement with the foreign threat to China. There were smaller associated uprisings including the Red Turban revolt in Guangdong led by Triads, a society of people united in resistance to the demands of landlords and officials. The insurgents captured the towns of Fatshan and Shunte which they held for a short time but were soon driven out. The memory of these events lingered. After a discussion in Ballarat in 1873, the Presbyterian catechist, Paul Ng Chan Quong, recorded:

July 23. To-day went to several places on the Main-road, and ultimately entered Kwong-Fat’s shop; there were four men there with whom I entered into conversation of the subject of the worship of idols by the Chinese, which was a thing contrary to the dictates of reasons, and also a sin against God. They said, from ancient times it has been asserted ‘that men depend on the power of the gods, and herbs looked to the spring for life;’ but you insist, they said, that we are not to believe in the gods; is that in accordance with reason? At the time that the red-turbaned rebels created insurrection, and invested Sin-woey (Xinhui), the Imperialist forces within the city were not able to hold their position. At this critical juncture, Kwan-tai [the patron ‘saint’ of the dynasty] all of a sudden manifested his divine power, and routed the rebels, and restored peace to the inhabitants. Now in this case, did not help come from the power of the gods?

There is no doubt that most Chinese in Victoria saw Christianity as inseparable from

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74 The nominal President of Sun’s first attempt at a Chinese Republic was a man named See, born and educated in Bathurst, New South Wales.
77 The Christian Review and Messenger of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, January 1874:8-9.
European imperialism and privately saw the work of European missionaries as a device designed to weaken China’s cultural strength and unity. Understanding the values and cultural perspectives of the 19th century Victorian Chinese community requires an appreciation that emigration was a direct consequence of the spread of social, economic and family difficulties, resulting in part from the growth of foreign influence in South China, especially in Guangdong and Fukien Provinces but also further north.

The distrust of Europeans and Christianity was so widespread among Chinese that it motivated Cheong’s decision in 1898 to earn his own income although the decision was also related to the fact that the income of the newly formed, or in Cheong’s words, reformed Anglican Chinese Mission, would not have provided the salary and other benefits he had previously received (Chapter 5). This was linked to the decline in the income of the Missions to the Chinese in Australia following the overseas missionary awakening described in Chapter 5.

Cheong’s action was something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand it freed him from dependence upon foreigners and the constraints of being seen as their hired man. In 1917 he referred to this in a letter to the Federal Land Tax Office:

[I was] a salaried official in receipt of £400 a year but which I gave up 18 years ago because of occasional taunts from my heathen brethren that I preached because I was paid to do so.78

On the other hand, he had to balance his business and missionary activities. The purchase of Pine Lodge at Croydon, in 1899-1900, and the improvements and enlargements that took nearly two years to complete, suggest that he already had substantial savings from the sale of the family business and his mission income prior to 1898.

Despite anti-foreignism many Chinese entrepreneurs insisted that, under the unequal treaties, Chinese were guaranteed the right of free entry to British possessions. Cheong’s approach was simplistic to the point where at times he seems to have thought that all China’s problems could be solved by an Australian ‘open door’ to unrestricted Chinese immigration (Chapter 4). Cheong was deeply offended by the ill-informed rhetoric of those who opposed Chinese immigration and labelled the Chinese an inferior people:

The ignorance which prevails regarding the mental and moral character of the Chinese nation induces me to add a few statements of facts on Chinese Civilization and Attainments especially as epithets such as “semi-civilized” and “barbarians” are

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78 Cheok Hong Cheong to Mr R Ewing, Acting Commissioner of Taxation, 30 November 1917.
so frequently levelled at us by the “intelligent” Press and platform, and not infrequently, also, by many of the law-makers themselves.\textsuperscript{79}

The search for a workable identity among immigrants is important when trying to understand Cheong’s approach to the problems facing the Chinese in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Australia. The Chinese were the major non-European immigrant group to take part in the ongoing British invasion of Australia and they represented the same potential threat to colonial European self-image as foreigners did to China. Although modern Australian history recognises the ‘invasion’ concept underpinning European sovereignty in Australia it was not used by European settlers in Victoria or, for that matter, in any of the British overseas colonies of settlement where indigenous populations were forced aside.\textsuperscript{80} Few Chinese have chosen to place themselves alongside Europeans in the category of invaders of Australia and disposessors of the Aboriginal people. The Chinese-Aboriginal nexus has tended to view the relationship as a fellowship of the oppressed.\textsuperscript{81} Docker illustrates the ease with which Europeans seized the lands of others and promptly ‘nativised’ their conquest:

The experiences of diaspora have complex relations with the history of colonialism. Since the tumultuous events of 1492, European colonists have exhibited a curious contract with history, that wherever they go in the world, and despite the little time they may have been in a new place, and despite themselves having often been victims of colonial contempt and violence, they are not aliens or outsiders from distant continents but the immediate rightful settlers at home in this their new home with the confidence to do immediate injury to those already there or not from Europe or not from the right part of Europe: people who can be immediately designated by the new settlers as aliens or outsiders or not belonging. In these terms diasporic communities can experience racist hostility, disdain and contempt from a majority society. But in the history of settler-colonies diasporic communities — whether European or Asian — are migrants in a more general sense just like the migrants of the majority society; that is, they are colonizers in relation to the colonised and they can be perceived by the colonised as another set of invaders, not brothers and sisters on the margins, not the fellow oppressed and dispossessed. Yet they can also be perceived as fellow subjects of racism, creating commonalities, the attraction of outsiders to fellow outsiders.\textsuperscript{82}

The Chinese were the only group that represented a significant presence against whom the

\textsuperscript{79} See Appendix 5.

\textsuperscript{80} That is not to say that the issue was not understood and discussed. See The Meeting for Sufferings, (1840), \textit{Tracts Relative to the Aborigines}, London, Edward. (A seminal work describing British injustices to indigenous populations in British territories including Australia. Evidence from Australian residents was included).


\textsuperscript{82} Docker, John, (1999), ‘Opening remarks’, at Conference, Reconceptualising the Southern Chinese: From Community to Diaspora, Australian National University, 27 February 1999.
‘nativist’ insecurity of European-Australians could be directed. There was no equivalent fear of the Aboriginal people whose long-term survival was considered doubtful. The ‘nativist’ myth so beloved of 19th century Australians (exemplified by the formation of the Australian Natives’ Association in 1871) saw a policy of racial exclusion emerge to deter potential challengers to Anglo-European control of Australia.\textsuperscript{83} It happened to take an anti-Chinese form but was also applied to Pacific Islanders and more broadly to all non-Europeans, people from the Arab-Mediterranean region, and to some southern Europeans.

Just as British settlers insisted on maintaining their values and institutions, Cheong and his closest friends did not resile from their Chineseness although the identity that formed in Victoria was moving further and further from China. Cheong’s sense of law, religion, lifestyle and business dealings were closer to those of a British-European colonist than to those of China.

The images on the next page provide a visual record of multiple identity although not this time in terms of the ‘malediction’ alone. The earliest known image of Cheong, at left, was taken within ten years of his arrival in Australia (i.e. c 1870), shows that he had already abandoned, assuming he had one as a teenager, his Chinese queue (pig-tail). He is wearing a simple Chinese costume. The photograph at right was taken in 1928, just before his death, at the same time as the family group shown at page 156. He is wearing a Chinese costume and the passage of the years is plainly visible. On the basis of the costume in both pictures, right down to the velvet collars, this was his usual practice in private. In public Cheong never wore Chinese costume and, if the image of the family at page 164 is any indication, neither did his family. The portrait of Cheong as a successful businessman in the middle was a commissioned work revealing Cheong’s chosen public image. In the 1901 Federation parade he walked with other Chinese leaders but, while everyone else, including his Methodist colleague, the Rev. James Mouy Ling, wore traditional Chinese costume, he wore conventional European dress.

\textsuperscript{83} The changing nature of British citizenship during the nineteenth century is discussed in Hall, Catherine Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall. (2000), \textit{Defining the Victorian nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
It often came as a surprise for the children of Chinese immigrants to find their ‘Chinese’ identity challenged when they visited China. Accustomed to thinking of discrimination and prejudice as European failings, they were taken aback to find that, although they were ethnic Chinese, they were a source of amusement. Despite their biological Chineseness, the local people saw them as foreigners, an experience still reported by families visiting China. The Fay family reported:

Members of the Fay family from the Hong Yuen store in Inverell visited Hong Kong and China in the early 1930s. Joyce Sue Fong (nee Fay) recalled her visit to the family’s ancestral village: Well [Dau Tau] was strange at first. All little Chinese children running around with no shoes on and just playclothes. And when we first went there, they all followed us and called us -- you know, how we call people ‘Ching Chong Chinaman’ here. They called us the opposite when we went over there. Because we looked different ... we had English clothes on and they had Chinese clothes on, pants and that. Joyce Sue Fong's sister, Eileen Cum, added: I can also remember the Chinese kids used to throw stones at us and call us ‘white girl’ -- Ton Yang.84

An example of the pressure to conform to cultural norms that occurred when emigrants returned to China was described by a 19th century American missionary:

A young man, a member of the church, came home from California and found that his mother had betrothed him to a heathen woman. The ceremonies were gone through, he utterly refusing to worship the idols and ancestors. He was awakened

one night and found a rope around his neck and his wife trying to strangle him! As she failed in that purpose, she went home to her own family; and now his friends are angry at him because he has driven his wife away, and they are urging and commanding him that he shall worship the idols and ancestors in order to get her back. Another way of getting control over those that return is this; the father or uncles get hold of his money. He, with the filial confidence which the gospel teaches, is ready to trust his friends, and when they get hold of his money, they will only give it to him on condition of his complying with their wishes. I have known an instance where an uncle refused to let a young man have any of his own money to come out from the country to the city to visit the Christians.  

Within the Chinese-Australian identity spectrum others accommodated the dominant culture only when necessary. Cantonese was spoken at home and in business. Men who were outwardly highly conformist and always appeared in European dress showed a different facet of their identity within their families. In many homes traditional dress, traditional furnishings, and wives from China were the normal state of domestic life. Some families were very Australian in public life but sometimes chose to send their Australian-born children to China for their education and on occasion to marry a Chinese to preserve the ethnic heritage of the next generation. Janis Wilton wrote about some of her contacts with Chinese business people in northern New South Wales:

Within the family circle they adhered to traditional Chinese views and behaviours while in business they adapted to servicing, very effectively, the needs of their overwhelmingly European customers. Behind the scenes, however, storeowners worked through their network of associates which stretched through Sydney and Hong Kong to home villages in Chungshan to negotiate the immigration of family members, and to further their business interests. It was here that the cultural and social needs of Chinese employees were looked after. It was here that the mainly young men brought out from China contemplated the strangeness of their new environment and sought to put down foundations for some sort of life. Recollections of the routines involved in working in the stores provided a sense of the specifically Chinese community and traditions which underpinned business and employment practices. Overseas and Australian-born, young Chinese men were provided with jobs, accommodation and food, and worked in an atmosphere permeated by paternalism and a Chinese work ethic. 

An account of families of Chinese ethnic heritage in the northeast of Victoria from the first to the fifth generation reveals a continuing attachment to Chinese food although in almost

85 Rev. Dr Andrew Happer, American Presbyterian Mission, Guangzhou to Rev. Robert Hamilton, Convenor, Presbyterian Mission to the Chinese, Melbourne in The Christian Review, October 1877. This comment can be related to the kidnapping of Peng-nam’s youngest child, discussed in Chapter 3.

86 Images held by the State Library of Victoria (James Lamsey of Bendigo) and the State Library of New South Wales (Mei Quong Tart) which show both men in European and traditional Chinese dress. One of Ah Mouy’s sons married a Chinese girl in St Peter’s Church, Eastern Hill. Unfortunately she was on a visitor’s exemption certificate and was refused permission to remain in Australia.

all other respects the family appears European. In a delightful article Janet Wu, an American had this to say about Chinese food in China:

The food made us sick. I was depressed to learn that most of what I thought to be Chinese food was actually a kind of Western bastardization. That summer in China, I remember eating mostly entrails and fungus. One gourmet meal left me traumatized. My smiling uncle proudly pointed to the turtles and eels splashing about in the family bathtub. They would be our dinner that night.

Integration should be a two way street with settlers and immigrants accepting each other as equals. Ideals and realities are not always congruent, even in the most sincere and motivated circumstances. Accounts from China show that some missionary families kept themselves apart from the people they were trying to evangelise. Chinese observed that many ‘conversions’ occurred when servants adopted the religion of their employers generating the belief in China that people became Christians not out of real faith but in a desire to keep their job and the income that went with it, hence the expression ‘rice Christians’, a concept that Cheong almost certainly had in mind when he decided to make his own way financially in 1898.

Cheong drew attention to the lack of acceptance of Chinese among Victorian Christians when he mentioned that the catechists were rarely invited into the homes of the European members of the congregations in which they served and were also virtual strangers to the ministers who were their nominal supervisors (Chapter 5).

The picture collections of Australia’s libraries show that Chinese followed other immigrant groups in forming their own ethnically based sporting teams, engaging in in-house entertainments, and pursuing inter-marriage. The separation between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians in sport and entertainment demonstrates that the desire to mix with people of a like mind is not necessarily evidence of racism although it may point to discriminatory practices.

89 A ‘Western bastardisation’ is something of a misnomer. The transformation of food presentations was not limited to Asian cuisine. The most famous such transformation generated the term, the ‘pizza effect’, rusty, old bread topped with a little tomato sauce to make it palatable and softer provided a hearty and inexpensive meal. With growing economic prosperity, many of these émigrés began to put meats, vegetables, and cheeses on their fresh-baked bread and sauce; pizza became a food of a wealthy class of Italian Americans. This Americanized product was now introduced back into Italy; gone was the working-class lunch of stale bread and tomato sauce: the true pizza — a pizza that had always been Italian—had been realized by a slight detour.’ http://litmuse.maconstate.edu/~glucas/archives/000044.shtml
The Cheongs were an ethnic Chinese family with a heritage from which James and his siblings gained psychological strength, exemplified in their retention of their spoken dialect and James’ efforts to master classical written Chinese. Their experience stands in contrast to the upbringing of the Australian photographer, William Wang some of whose reminiscences were cited earlier:

My grandparents on both sides migrated from China to Australia. I call myself a third generation Chinese Australian. I would describe my mother as an assimilated Chinese-Australian because she chose the values of the Australian society by which to bring us up. I can understand why she did this — the Australian way of life had more to offer. It was the dominant culture, there were more possibilities. (Any migrant culture, just by living in an Australian environment, will become Australian sooner or later, to a greater or lesser degree.) The drawback in our case was the Chinese side was denied. As a child it never occurred to me that I was Chinese and of a different race from other Australians.91

If Cheong’s children found their life experience somewhat better than Wang did, a good deal of the credit lies with their parents’ efforts to provide them with the competencies to balance their Chinese heritage with the skills needed to pursue success in mainstream Australia. It is interesting that after Cheong’s death the boys maintained their involvement with China. As shown in Chapter 10 there were visits to China and in the 1940s Caleb was involved in the purchase of furniture from China.

Another of the complexities of identity in a society formed through continuing immigration is the extent to which each newly arrived immigrant group is a time capsule preserving lifestyles, values, etc., that have changed or even disappeared in the old country, i.e., older forms of cultural competency. In the case of the Anglican Chinese Mission the original ethnic Cantonese membership, overwhelmingly Australian-born, found it difficult, in the 1980s and later, to adjust to the introduction of Mandarin for new arrivals from China. When the Missioner (priest-in-charge) urged the introduction of Mandarin language services, the Australians felt resentful of what they saw as a potential denial of their Chineseness.

The same issue has arisen in American Chinese Christian churches.92 The solution in Australia and North America has been the growing use of English-language services,

especially for the younger members. English is, for the Chinese and other non English-speaking immigrant groups in Australia, the inevitable common language.\textsuperscript{93} Speaking a Chinese dialect, as Reid pointed out, is no longer the vital evidence of Chinese identity. It can be added to appearance as another variable in what constitutes Chineseness.\textsuperscript{94}

Cheong’s sense of Chinese identity and his support of Chinese reform movements was as much about, and in practice inseparable from, his own status and self-identity in Victoria.\textsuperscript{95} He had, after all, no intention of ever becoming a resident of China or of subjecting himself or his Australian family to a lifestyle dominated by traditional Chinese values. As Ien Ang put it: ‘There are . . . many Chinese identities, not just one.’\textsuperscript{96} Cheong’s choice was to create his own Chinese Australian identity, to pursue his own career choices and to make his own independent lifestyle decisions.

The Chinese, like the other Australian immigrant communities, have developed multiple responses to the demands of Australianness as they have to what constitutes continuing Chineseness. It is not difficult, as noted earlier, to comprehend why some would want to argue that it is biological appearance that constitutes the irreducible minimum of a Chinese identity although what that actually means, all else being equal, is impossible to interpret other than through Docker’s concept of multiple consciousness. Docker uses, instead of identities, the term ‘consciousness’ or a ‘state of inbetweenness’:

Diasporas constitute themselves in double or multiple consciousness, of being both here and there, now and then, a state of inbetweenness in relation to a perhaps distant mythological origin and an eschatalogical or messianic future.\textsuperscript{97} A person may, therefore, continue to describe themselves, when it suits them, as a Chinese while living a life that is in all respects identical to another person who chooses to identify as an Australian or whatever identity is selected. A similar point has been made by Trocki in discussing his work on the Chinese in Southeast Asia:

\textsuperscript{95} In her story of the life of the Rev. Ng Pong Chew, of San Francisco, Hoester makes the same analysis, i.e., that Chew rejected the revolutionary approach to reform in China and, like Cheong, avoided any overt support for Sun Yat-sen and the Kuomintang. Both Chew and Cheong supported the peace movement in China in the hope, unsuccessful as it was to prove, of limiting militarism and warlordism. Hoester, Corinne K, (1976), From Canton to California: The Epic of Chinese Immigration, New York, Four Winds Press.
It has struck me that many of the old clichés about the Chinese in Southeast Asia, long ago dismissed as ‘orientalist’, ‘colonialist’ and simply as racist by scholars, have re-emerged as elements of the culturist or essentialist explanations for the economic success of the overseas Chinese. I went to a conference on Chinese business history last year in Kuala Lumpur and we spent the entire morning of the first day of the conference debunking a laundry list of stereotypes and clichés such as: Chinese never assimilate and are therefore unreliable as citizens of other states; Chinese are secretive, devious and stubborn; Chinese are good at making money and are natural-born businessmen and traders; Chinese naturally form organizations and combinations; Chinese are loyal to their families and always build their businesses and enterprises around the family; Chinese have a natural tendency to create networks; Chinese are motivated by personal relationships and guanxi and not by ‘objective’ criteria. To this list we added some colonial perceptions from the nineteenth century: Chinese are physical cowards; Chinese are addicted to gambling and opium-smoking; Chinese are hard-working; and Chinese are unfit for governmental positions because they are inherently corrupt. It was refreshing to see these issues systematically killed off at the beginning of the session. It was, however, quite disappointing to hear some of our colleagues who had sat through that session immediately fall back upon those stereotypes when they read their papers. Clearly these people had not read the things written by the historians and anthropologists over the past two decades.98

Cheong seems to have demonstrated ‘multiple consciousness’ throughout his life. His business correspondence provides examples. When writing to Christians, he used a different discourse to that used in his business letters. In the business letters there are differences between those to business ‘equals’ and those to tradesmen. His letters to ‘English’ friends show a more culturally critical content than those to strangers. His letters on controversial issues are quite different in tone to his general correspondence. His exchange with Premier Gillies in 1887-1888 showed open sarcasm and exasperation with the Premier’s position or, perhaps more closely, contempt for the evasions and ‘spin’ of a politician (Chapter 8).

The fulcrum of modern Australian identity seems now, as it was in Cheong’s time, to be at the intricate meeting point of globalisation and familialism.99 The possibility of the overall 19th century Victorian Chinese community maintaining purely Chinese values and a separate lifestyle was unlikely in the diversity of cultures present in the colony and the process of integration as the different ethnic and cultural groups continuously adapted to the local situation.

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The myth of what constituted Chineseness in China gave way to the myth of Chinese-Australianness. Australianness was not the only product of a remaking of identity and its associated reappraisal of myths and legends, or reconstruction of reality. This returns the discussion to the comment by the Rev. Andrew Happer regarding the changed outlook of Stephen Cheong, a Chinese Christian from Victoria, upon his return home.\footnote{Not related to Cheok Hong Cheong.} Whatever his Chineseness was before he left, and during much of his life in Australia, he was deeply troubled and resentful when his relatives expected him to slot back into a situation in which they had remained unchanged.\footnote{Rev. Dr Andrew Happer, American Presbyterian Mission, Guangzhou to Rev. Robert Hamilton, Convenor, Presbyterian Mission to the Chinese, Melbourne in the \textit{The Christian Review}, October 1877.} If that was true of Stephen Cheong, how much greater were the lifestyle adaptations made by Cheok Hong Cheong, not least his decision to make Australia, or more particularly, the Colony and later State of Victoria, his home.

Great care has been taken throughout this thesis to avoid placing Cheok Hong Cheong on a pedestal, as a kind of superstar in the Chinese community or, on the other hand, to suggest that his life was unexceptional. There are obvious dangers in moving from the particular to the general, i.e., assuming Cheong’s experiences to be characteristic of all members of the Chinese community or, on the other hand, assuming that he shared all the disadvantages of his countrymen.

The thesis has emphasised that his English language education, combined with the elocution lessons he undertook at Scotch College, Melbourne, during 1873 and 1874, was fundamental to the role he created for himself. He showed his awareness of this personal asset as he showed in a letter to the Victorian Premier on the opium issue in 1889.

\textit{Sir, In the course of my duties as Superintendent of the Church Missions to the Chinese in Victoria I have been implored on all hands by victims of the opium habit to use my English tongue on their behalf in an endeavour to persuade the government to prevent the introduction of that noxious Drug except for medicinal purposes.}\footnote{Cheok Hong Cheong to the Hon. Duncan Gillies, Premier of Victoria, 23 July 1889.}

His eloquence in public speaking was attested to by many contemporaries, European and Chinese. No other Chinese could compare with his ability to present apologetic lectures to sell-out audiences in Melbourne and Sydney. As the many letters cited in the thesis have shown, he had a retentive memory and a capacity to attend to details that made him a formidable tactician in his public affairs, whether in challenging governments, confronting church leaders or dealing with business matters.
His intellectual gifts did not always result in tolerance with those with whom he disagreed. He had a tendency to self-righteousness, showed an equally strong tendency to resent any slight, however trivial, and could be unforgiving as evidenced by his rejection of the long delayed peace-making letter from the Rev. E J Barnett quoted in towards the end of Chapter 5.

On the other hand, as mentioned in Chapter 6, he could display great generosity of spirit, especially in business dealings. It cannot be said that he ever displayed much of a sense of humour. He was intense, focussed, and perhaps borrowed some of the legendary dourness of Scots Presbyterianism.

While he seems to have escaped the worst kinds of discrimination, beneath the surface appearance to reveal the deep passion that drove him and that arose, in very large part, from his analysis, and understandable resentment, of the injustice of the circumstances in which the Chinese were placed in Victorian and after 1901, Australian community life.

While being cautious about overstating the contribution of individuals in history, it is impossible not to see Cheong as a unique figure who did far more as a community leader than almost any of his contemporaries. He was a witness of key developments in Australian history and although his contribution has been seen, as it were from a distance, this thesis seeks to bring him into the mainstream.

The structure of the thesis has sought to place Cheong, as stated in the Introduction, in the context of the emergence of Victoria as a goldrush driven and dynamic British colony of settlement. Chapter 1 outlined the importance of the goldrush in transforming a thinly populated southern grazing district of New South Wales into a self-governing British colony with a energetic modern industrial economy that was to influence Australian business for more than a century and played an important part in the growth of the organised labour movement. Chapter 2 provided insights into the immigration of Chinese and the circumstances, from personal accounts, that encouraged more than 40,000 Chinese to come to Victoria in the course of the second half of the 19th century. In terms of European settlement Chapters 1 and 2 cover familiar ground but the two chapters present new insights from the Chinese perspective, including personal accounts, that have not previously been examined. It is against that background that the story of Cheong is then considered through his participation in the major events affecting the Chinese in Victoria and in the broader Australian context after 1901. It should not be forgotten that he was a
member, and often the leader, of almost every national Chinese delegation to the Federal Government between 1900 and the time of his death.

The thesis has tried to emphasise his distinctive contribution while still placing him firmly within the community with which he was so strongly identified, not only in his leadership activities but in his everyday life. It is also, perhaps, important to add that this is an account of an individual who spent almost all his life, from 1872 onwards, in the inner metropolitan area of Melbourne. It is primarily a history centred in the experiences of Chinese in that city, in the Colony and then the State of Victoria and that can be seen most clearly in Chapters 3-10. While Cheong did visit Sydney and was a welcome speaker there, his interstate visits were rare occurrences and peripheral to his overall lifestyle and achievements. Although he exercised a national role, it was not a major part of his life and should not be interpreted as placing him in the forefront of a non-existent Australian-Chinese movement. It was more an outcome of his leading role in Victoria and the simple fact that until the Federal Parliament moved to Canberra in 1927, Melbourne was the seat of government for Australia.

It will be apparent in reading the successive chapters that Cheong was part of the wider historical issues involved in the emergence of Australia’s distinctive approach to immigration policy. Unusually among the nations of the world, Australia has actively recruited immigrants for nearly one and a half centuries. In the process, at least two strands stand out. The first was the preference for most of the past 150 years for British immigrants and, when that source started to decline, for European immigrants generally. The second has been the White Australia Policy (WAP), designed as a consequence of the British/European preference but applying a racist strand that has become, as Cheong prophesied, a national source of shame and an international source of embarrassment. That embarrassment resulted in the progressive dismantling of the WAP after the 1960s and its total disappearance by the 1980s. Although the WAP affected all non-European immigrants the reality was that as only the Chinese ever sought to come to Australia in any numbers, it was seen by them as being primarily an anti-Chinese policy and that, in turn, led the Chinese to the not unreasonable conclusion that Anglo-Celtic-Australians viewed them as second-rate human beings. It is against the anti-Chinese position generally, and the concept of lesser humanity in particular, that Cheong’s efforts were primarily directed.
The Board of Management of the Chinese Mission of the Epiphany reported the passing of Cheok Hong Cheong on 20 June 1928 at the age of 75 years. The Minutes of 30 June 1928 record,

We owe so much to Mr Cheong. Undeterred by adverse circumstances he persevered in his work for his fellow countrymen and it is to him that we chiefly owe the splendid position of the Mission, both from the spiritual side and from the financial standpoint.

Under Cheong’s leadership the Anglican Chinese Mission was one of a number of institutions that helped to sustain a form of Chinese cultural identity in Victoria. Perhaps the best assessment of Cheong’s contribution was made in a letter to the Rev. James Cheong by the Dean of Melbourne in 1928 shortly after Cheong’s death:

My dear Mr. Cheong

I was deeply grieved that I was far away when your note arrived at the Cathedral this morning and that at the hour of the funeral I was bound by an engagement in the City. Your father was much in my wife’s thoughts and my own at home. We cannot regret that the period of his suffering has mercifully been curtailed. Pain and anguish were written so visibly on his face when I last saw him that it was impossible to pray for his long continuance in life under such conditions of physical discipline. There are few men in Melbourne who have served not only their own people, but the community at large, who will leave behind them a memory of so affectionate regard as your father. His wonderful mastery of our tongue, his measured speech and balanced judgement, his fatherly kindness, deeply impressed me from the first day that I met him. A veritable patriarch to his own people is taken from them in him. To me he always seemed to be a stately embodiment of the dignities of an ancient Empire at its best. East and West can meet and do meet. He was the equivalent to some of the truly fine old gentlemen whom I know on ancient estates near Windsor at Home in the early years of my ministry. He will live in my memory as a perfect Christian gentleman, whose gifts and character transcended all national distinctions, while at the same time he devotedly laboured for his own people from the such perils as the opium curse and also for their whole material and spiritual uplift. Please convey the affectionate sympathies of my wife and yourself to all in your home.

What makes Cheong’s story particularly important, in the broad sweep of Australian history, is the role that he played in resisting anti-Chinese feeling in years from the 1880s onward, in his representations to colonial politicians during the lead-up to, and achievement of, the federation of the Australian colonies in 1901.103 He was not the only Chinese in the immediate pre- and post-Federation efforts to bring about some

103 One example is his paper on Chinese Civilisation and Attainments first published in The Age, 6 May 1893 although it was originally drafted in 1888. A letter to William Anderson, a Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly mentions an interview with Premiers during the 1890 Federation Conference in Melbourne. Cheok Hong Cheong to W Anderson MLA, 25 February 1890. See also mention of Cheong in Yong, C F, (1977), The New Gold Mountain, Richmond SA, Raphael Arts, pp 29-31.
amelioration of the injustices perceived by the Chinese community but he was undeniably a leading figure.

Federation, in the form of the White Australia Policy, was an ethical issue, involving attitudes that continue to exert a profound influence on the immigration policies of Australia. As an issue in the shaping of Australian foreign and defence policies, the racism implicit in the White Australia Policy and its unfair discrimination against non-Europeans in general but especially the Chinese contributed to a long-term, and continuing, dilemma in Australia’s relations with its neighbours in Asia that is far from being resolved as Australia moves into the 21st century.

The Chinese-European interface may be only a small part of the overall history of Australia after the European invasion in 1788 but its influence is certainly disproportionately more important than numbers might suggest. Its significance lies in the demonstration of the point that Cheong himself made, that a society that tolerates injustice to any of its people risks exposing all of society to injustice in due course. It also reminds Australians that it is impossible to ignore its place in a neighbourhood in which China is an omnipresent political, economic and cultural element.

But there is more than a discussion of Australia-China relations implicit in Cheong’s endeavours. His focus on issues affecting Chinese in Australia points to Australia’s geographic location. It directs the attention of Australians to the necessity of recognising and accommodating the values and aspirations of all the countries and cultures in this part of the globe. In recognising and arguing that Australia’s location is not European and needs to be capable of multiple and diverse responses Cheong merits recognition.

Cheong built his personal identity and his place in Victorian society around familialism and measured integration. His objective, as he told Maria Moriarty, was to secure financial security and solve ‘the question of a retiring allowance and provision for the family’. He to the end of his days he was accepted by the Chinese community, and by Europeans, as someone who was Chinese although his Chineseness was not the kind of identity that was usually identified with Victoria’s Chinese community. Yet whatever his cultural patriotism or psychological identification in relation to China itself it did not extend to leaving Australia or rejecting its central institutions, i.e., his Australianness was as pronounced a part of his identity as his Chineseness even though he may not have

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104 Cheok Hong Cheong to Mrs Maria Moriarty, 2 May 1906.
recognised that in himself.

In terms of domestic identity Cheong’s life should encourage Australians to refrain from seeking to impose any specific model of identity on individuals but to allow them to come to terms with society in their own way. This implies, incidentally, more than is encompassed by cliches such as unity in diversity, or multiculturalism, or simple tolerance. It demands a fundamental agreement about what constitutes the fundamental and non-negotiable rights of individuals in Australia to be different to their neighbours. It also implies, as a corollary, the individual’s need to appreciate the need for balancing rights with other individuals who together make up modern Australia.