Section 3

INTERACTIONS

Anglo-Chinese families and white Australia

Chinese-European couples and their Anglo-Chinese families were at first a novel curiosity in the Australian colonies. In Sydney and Melbourne, and scattered throughout the camps and settlements that had grown up with the gold rushes, their presence was ‘discovered’ by journalists, church workers and the government through surveys, inquiries and inspection visits. One journalist with the *Bendigo Mercury*, for instance, spent a day in the Chinese camp at Bendigo with a government warden, several police constables and a Chinese interpreter in April 1859. After his visit, he reported that:

> In the suburbs of the village there is a nice piece of ground, fenced off as a garden, but at present only containing the remains of some water melon vines. This belongs to a Chinaman, who has been coupled in the bonds of matrimony with a fair daughter of Erin, who has brought him in due course a daughter, in whose face the amalgamation of the two races is singularly blended.¹

The presence of children in the colonies whose faces reflected the blending of Chinese and white heredity was met by commentators such as the *Bendigo Mercury* reporter often with surprise, sometimes with horror, but usually with an interest which reflected a deep fascination with miscegenation. Over the passing decades of the second half of the nineteenth century this fascination changed from benign curiosity to fearful concern at the presence of a growing ‘piebald race’ in colonies that were heading towards a future as ‘White Australia’.

This shift is demonstrated by the marked contrast between the quiet family life suggested by the *Bendigo Mercury* in 1859 and that of another domestic scene

¹ ‘The Chinese in Bendigo’, reprinted from the *Bendigo Mercury* in the *Border Post*, 9 April 1859.
presented in a 1902 cartoon entitled ‘Piebald possibilities—a little Australian Christmas family party of the future’ (see Image 27). Published in the Bulletin in December of that year, less than two years after the newly federated nation of Australia passed the Immigration Restriction Act, this image by Livingstone Hopkins presented the worst nightmare of the new nation—a family (or citizenry) comprised of people who were not only white, but black and Chinese, as well as everything else in between. One of the major motivating forces behind the federation of the Australian colonies had been the theme of racial purity, and Hopkins' image presented a future in which concerns over the racial make-up of the new nation had been ignored. Family portraits (of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden—‘my family tree’, monkeys in a tree—‘my wife’s family tree’, a caveman hunting a mammoth—‘my great great great great … grandfather’, a turbaned man—‘son-in-law Achmed’, and a cannibal cooking a man in a top hat in a pot—‘cannibal relative by marriage’) hang on the wall above the dinner table, while the white patriarch surveys his motley family. One elegantly-dressed white daughter is being touched on the back by a black man complete with bone necklace, tattoos, earrings and top-knot, while another is holding a dark-skinned baby.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, fear of the creation of such a ‘piebald race’ in Australia had been central to discussions of Chinese migration to the colonies from their beginnings in the 1850s. The debate on the first anti-Chinese legislation in NSW in 1860 had spoken of the pollution of the Anglo-Saxon race which would occur by allowing Chinese to come to the colony. It was stated that the Chinese would inevitably have children with ‘lower class’ white women, which in the words of liberal member John Lucas, ‘must result in the raising up of a generation that would always be lower in the social scale than the pure descendants of the Anglo-Saxons’.

During the later decades of the nineteenth century, the central fear that miscegenation would lead to racial degradation and then to social and national decline was raised in

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both scientific and popular discourse—in the works of social Darwinists like Herbert Spencer and Charles H Pearson, in publications like the *Bulletin* and William Lane’s *Boomerang*, and in other less overtly racist journals. 4 The language used in these discussions—of ‘hybrids’, ‘half-castes’, and ‘interbreeding’—were terms which indicated pollution, weakness, danger and ultimately, racial destruction. The results of miscegenation could not be positive, as English scientist and proponent of social Darwinism Herbert Spencer stated in 1892:

> There is abundant proof alike furnished by the intermarriages of human races and the interbreeding of animals, that when varieties mingled, diverge beyond a certain slight degree, the result is invariably a bad one in the long run. 5

The ‘half-caste’ body, mind and character were assumed to be different from those of the two races from which they had formed. They were ‘above’ their ‘coloured’

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4 See Walker, *Anxious Nation*, in particular chapter 4, ‘One hundred work as one’.

5 Herbert Spencer, 1892, quoted in Richard Hall, *Black Armband Days: Truth from the Dark Side of Australia’s Past*, Vintage, Milsons Point, 1998, p. 120.
ancestry but ‘below’ that part which was ‘white’. The result of racial mixing between blacks and whites in the Americas was well-known to commentators in Australia, and while the situation in Australia was considered different from the Americas, comparisons were still drawn between the two. America was primarily used as an example of what to avoid. Joseph Kidger Tucker wrote in 1868 that:

Half-castes of an inferior race are always objects of pity, and they are sometimes very troublesome. They are above the native race, with whom they associate, and whose habits they acquire, and when they are treated as outcastes by a superior race, they become reckless and vindictive. This has been witnessed in America and in Africa, where the half-castes are the most impracticable portion of the population.6

The mixing of blacks and whites as in America was familiar, but that of Chinese and whites was much less studied: ‘What the future character of the offspring of such unions may be, it is an interesting question for those curious on the subject of races; but certainly the Celtic and Mongolian character combined will be something new in the history of mankind’ wrote P Just in 1858.7

In nineteenth-century Australia, the notion of hybridity carried with it few of the positive aspects suggested in current hybridity theory.8 The ‘half-caste’ of whatever racial mixture represented the destruction of the white race and consequently Australia as a white community. As Nikos Papastergiadis has written, ‘whether it highlighted physiological or cultural difference in identity, [hybridity] served primarily as a metaphor for the negative consequences of racial encounters.’9 It was only very rarely that racial intermixing was promoted or accepted as an idea that could benefit both races. In 1923, geographer Thomas Griffith Taylor shocked many

7 P Just, *Australia; or Notes taken during a Residence in the Colonies from the Gold Discovery in 1851 till 1857*, Durham & Thomson, Dundee, 1859, p. 209.
Australians with his suggestion that Anglo-Chinese miscegenation might be a good thing for Australia. As David Walker has described, Taylor:

... maintained that there should be no concern about inter-marriage between whites and ‘Mongolians’; the ‘Mongolian race’ was of a high racial character, closely related to the ‘Alpine group’ to which whites supposedly belonged. In the past, this admixture had produced ‘a strong, virile race’ that was at least the equal of its parts. This would again occur when Australians married Chinese. Such inter-marriage provided a viable alternative to the White Australia Policy.\textsuperscript{10}

Taylor also suggested that the Anglo-Chinese children who had already been born in Australia were possibly at an advantage to their white peers, stating that the children of lower-class Chinese fathers and white mothers were ‘healthier and better cared for than the white children in the same environment with similar white mothers’.\textsuperscript{11} Taylor’s comments about the healthiness of Anglo-Chinese children were exceptional for his time, yet they echo those of the earlier generation which is the focus of this study. Forty years earlier, for example, the \textit{Evening News} stated that the children of Chinese men and white women of Castlereagh Street in Sydney were ‘almost the cleanest, the best dressed, and best fed in the neighbourhood’, and Melbourne’s ‘Vagabond’ commented that ‘the children resulting from such unions are generally strong, healthy, and intelligent-looking’.\textsuperscript{12} The fact that Taylor’s comments were contrary to long-held conventional opinion on the subject was clear from the intense criticism his comments sparked in the Australian press, with articles and cartoons stressing the horror and tragedy of such occurrences.\textsuperscript{13}

Miscegenation and the mixed race populations which resulted were a problem for the Australian community which increasingly defined itself by the imagined racial purity

\textsuperscript{10} Walker, \textit{Anxious Nation}, p. 193.\

\textsuperscript{11} Thomas Griffith Taylor, ‘Geography and Australian national problems’, in WRB Oliver (ed.), \textit{Report of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science}, Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Wellington, 1924, p. 481.\

\textsuperscript{12} ‘Chinese women in Sydney’, reprinted from the \textit{Evening News} in the \textit{Port Denison Times}, 6 April 1878; John Stanley James, \textit{The Vagabond Papers: Sketches of Melbourne Life, in Light and Shade}, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1877, pp. 172-3.\

\textsuperscript{13} See, for example, \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 25 June 1923. This cartoon is reproduced in Walker, \textit{Anxious Nation}, plate 24.
of its people. As a result, Anglo-Chinese families were subjected to observation, investigation and comment from many quarters, much of it not very welcome by the subjects of inquiry. During an investigation into Sydney’s Chinese by the *Sydney Mail* in 1879, a journalist and his guide entered uninvited into the home of a white woman and her Chinese husband—only to be met with ‘the surprised looks of the tidy housewife in the clean print dress and the white collar, and her indignant inquiry as she [ran] across from a neighbour’s of “What is it, Johnny?” to the guide, “What is it? Explain yourself.”’ 14

As explored earlier in this thesis, reports of the Chinese and colonial Chinatowns commonly fell back on well-accepted images of dirt, disease and depravity, and investigators looking at the situation of Anglo-Chinese families in the colonies often began with these pre-conceived notions of what they would find. They expected to find the horrors so frequently repeated in rhetorical postulations on the results of racial mixing, but what they found was often far from it. A reporter from the Albury *Border Post* commented that he had found an 1881 visit to the Albury Chinese camp, made together with the government medical officer, a police constable and the municipal Inspector of Nuisances, ‘agreeably disappointing’. They had found not more than fifty Chinese ‘and but one European woman’, the wife of one of the local head men. The only thing about the situation in which she and her Anglo-Chinese child were living about which he could complain was that the child needed to be vaccinated. 15

The development of an Anglo-Chinese population in the colonies occurred as the Australian community was beginning to control its racial make-up through legislative means. This occurred concurrently with desires to shape society through other social reforms and legislation, much of which resulted in increasing state intervention into or control of the lives of its subjects. This chapter examines three such areas—child welfare, education and nationality—to consider how the problematisation of the ‘half-caste’ Chinese population intersected with the state’s desire to mould its population

14 *Sydney Mail*, 15 February 1879.
through legislative measures. Child welfare legislation and the establishment of government bodies to manage ‘problem’ children primarily affected poor and lower-class families; educational reforms which saw the introduction of compulsory education impacted on the lives of most children and their families in the colony; and the tightening racial definition of who was and who could become a member of the Australian community (subject/citizen) and what rights that entailed had particular impact on Chinese and other non-white residents of NSW. These three particular areas of state concern had implications for the lives of Anglo-Chinese children and their families. Mixed race families were considered a problem population, threatening the imagined foundation by which the Australian community was coming to define itself, but as this chapter will explore, the ways in which Anglo-Chinese families interacted with the wider community and government authorities suggest that their treatment was not based on race alone. Other considerations, such as class, respectability and cultural knowledge were factors which affected how Anglo-Chinese families interacted with government and church authorities and the broader white community around them.

Counting
People of mixed race, predominantly those of white and Aboriginal parentage, were subjected to particular scrutiny and intervention by authorities in the Australian colonies. Historian Regina Ganter has written that the paternalistic colonial state ‘sought to maintain a clear distinction between white and black, or desirable and protected populations’ and the growth of a ‘coloured’ population, one that was neither wholly black nor white, challenged such racial categorisation. Anglo-Chinese born in the colonies were a smaller, but similarly problematic group. Reports from the 1860s suggested that the Anglo-Chinese population in NSW was growing, but authorities had no clear idea of their numbers or the conditions under which they were living. As the government was trying to shape and develop the colony and its people, it was considered important to know and understand social groups living within its bounds, particularly those cast as problematic.

Section 3: Interactions

Nikolas Rose has written of how numbers are linked to problematisation. To problematise certain practices or populations, such as drunkenness or insanity, authorities first need to count them because ‘to count a problem is to define it and make it amenable to government. To govern a problem requires it to be counted’.\(^{17}\) For colonial authorities, the first step in knowing and then ultimately dealing with potential problem populations, such as Anglo-Chinese, was therefore to count them.

Police Inspector-General Edmund Fosbery’s survey of the Chinese in 1878 was the first in NSW which sought to enumerate the numbers of Anglo-Chinese children, as well as white children, living among the Chinese.\(^{18}\) The report came at a time when there was widespread concern over the ‘immorality’ of the Chinese as manifested in their living conditions and their influences over children. Inquiries by the Sydney Sewerage and Health Board and the Select Committee on Common Lodging Houses in Sydney during 1875 and 1876 had reported on the presence of young white girls and the occasional Anglo-Chinese child confronting terrible poverty and apparently ‘immoral’ conditions among the Chinese in inner Sydney. Off Castlereagh Street, for instance, Mr Chapman of the Health Board had noted ‘four half-caste children strongly resembling the Mongolian race running about the place’ who were living in a home that was clean but smelt of opium—a smell, he said, which was ‘sufficient to disgust any one except a Chinaman’.\(^{19}\) These revelations disturbed Sydney’s white residents. In August 1876 after the Lodging Houses report was made public, a petition of 206 residents was sent to the government requesting that something be done about the Chinese who were ‘exposing childhood to [their] brutal lusts and unnatural vices’.\(^{20}\)

It was against this backdrop that the police in various districts around the colony responded to Fosbery’s request for information on the Chinese households in their

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18 Fosbery, *Information Respecting Chinese Resident in the Colony*. See also SMH, 20 November 1878.
19 Eleventh Progress Report of the Sydney City and Suburban Sewage and Health Board, p. 57.
20 Common Lodging-Houses – Petition of Certain Residents of Sydney, NSW LA V&P, 1875—76.
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midst. The report found that there were 300 Anglo-Chinese boys and 286 girls, as well as 26 white boys and 12 white girls, living in ‘Chinese’ households. (See Figure 4.) No report was made of the numbers of Anglo-Chinese adults. The majority of these children lived in rural areas and, as well as individual families scattered across the colony, Fosbery’s statistics identified small pockets of Anglo-Chinese children: at Inverell and Gunnedah in the north; Mudgee, Orange and Bathurst in the west; Young and Major’s Creek in the south; and Shoalhaven in the east. In the metropolitan district of Sydney, there were 38 Anglo-Chinese boys and 32 girls as well as three white children among a total Chinese population of 960. Fosbery’s report noted that among these populations there was not one child under the age of sixteen, either white or Anglo-Chinese, who was a ‘reputed opium smoker’, nor did any of the remarks note children living in ‘immoral’ situations. Interestingly, although other sources reveal the presence of Chinese women and full-Chinese children in NSW at the time, Fosbery’s survey contained no mention of either. From their absence from Fosbery’s report it is clear that the presence or not of Chinese families was not what was of concern, but families of mixed race were.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No. of children living with Chinese Europeans</th>
<th>Half Breeds*</th>
<th>No. of such children of fit age and not attending school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-eastern</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-western</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-western</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namoi</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Term used in the original report

Six years after Fosbery, the inquiry undertaken by Police Sub-Inspector Martin Brennan and Quong Tart was similarly charged with enumerating the numbers of children living among the Chinese. Focussing on the Chinese camps of the Riverina,
their report found that there were 68 children—40 boys and 28 girls—living among a total population of 800 Chinese men, one Chinese woman and 73 white women. The children were distributed as follows: Narrandera, 10 children; Wagga, 16 children; Deniliquin, 17 children; Hay, 14 children; and Albury, 11 children. (See Figure 5.) The report did not distinguish between full-Chinese, half-Chinese or white children, but as there was only one Chinese woman listed as living in the camps it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the children were of mixed parentage. Of the eleven recommendations arising from Brennan and Tart’s enquiries (primarily concerning opium, gambling and sanitation), not one related specifically to children, demonstrating that Brennan and Tart found little specifically about the condition in which the children were living that needed attention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Chinese camp</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>No. of European women</th>
<th>No. of Chinese women</th>
<th>No. of Chinese men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrandera</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagga Wagga</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deniliquin</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5. People residing in the large Chinese camps of NSW, October 1883**
Source: Martin Brennan and Quong Tart, Reports Upon the Chinese Camps, 1884.
*There is some discrepancy in the figures given in the text and appendices of Brennan and Tart’s report. These figures are those given in ‘Appendix A’.*

As the nineteenth century progressed, concerns over the place of the Chinese in the colony shifted to those about the future make-up of the new nation of Australia. Despite anti-Chinese legislation, there was evidently a ‘settled’ Chinese population which was likely to grow further, so the imperative to understand the Chinese population and its mixed race component in NSW grew. The inquiries of the 1870s discussed above had shown that there was a small but significant number of Anglo-Chinese children growing up in the colony, yet it was not until 1891 that ‘half-caste’ Chinese were considered a separate category in census calculations. Victoria had included ‘half-caste’ Chinese in their calculations from 1881. According to census statistics, over the subsequent twenty years (1891-1911) the Anglo-Chinese population...
in NSW grew from 867 to 1132, and was divided almost equally between males and females. (See Figure 6.)

The censuses found that the majority of Anglo-Chinese in NSW were Australian-born, with only a handful born in China or Hong Kong, and these Australian-born Anglo-Chinese significantly outnumbered Australian-born full-Chinese (at a ratio of more than 5 to 1). There were only 81 Australian-born full-Chinese females in NSW in 1901 compared with 508 Anglo-Chinese, and 114 Australian-born full-Chinese males to 520 part-Chinese. (See Figure 7.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Part</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Empire</td>
<td>9862</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9940</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>185</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>1150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Australian States</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straits Settlements</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Countries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10063</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>10590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10222</td>
<td>1041</td>
<td>11263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Census data was obtained through questionnaires, census schedules, designed to collect information for a single household or dwelling. These schedules were completed by the *householder* on census day, and were to record all persons in that household on the census day, whether that was their usual residence or not. The census schedules were subsequently gathered by the census collector.21 Completed

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census schedules themselves have been destroyed, but in the extant census collectors’ books, we can see that as well as recording Chinese and Aboriginal males and females separately, collectors also made note of ‘half-caste’ Chinese listed on schedules. For example, in returns for the town of Adaminaby there is the Anglo-Chinese family of storekeeper John Booshang in Denison Street. The household consisted of one Chinese man (John Booshang), one white woman (Anastasia née Thomas), four ‘half-caste’ males, four ‘half-caste’ females (their eight children) and two other white males.  

22 (See Image 28.)

Image 28. Extract from the Census Collector’s Book for Adaminaby in the Cooma/Monaro district, 1891

As the census schedules were completed by householders themselves, it was their own definition of racial identity that was used to demarcate who was ‘Chinese’, who was ‘half-caste’ and who was ‘white’. In her study of Chinese residency in the Haymarket, Janice Wood has noted that consequently part-Chinese could be under-represented in the census calculations for two reasons: because some people may have hidden their own Chinese ancestry or because white mothers listed their half-

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22 Details of the Booshang family are listed in John Booshang’s unsuccessful naturalisation application. See NAA: A1, 1923/6086.
Chinese offspring as European. In some cases, too, Anglo-Chinese children living in Chinese households may have been counted as full-Chinese.

However the statistics were arrived at and however accurate they were, it was evident that the number of people of Anglo-Chinese parentage was increasing in the colonies and that this was of interest and concern to those in government. After the turn of the century, their presence as part of the population was increasingly at odds with Australia’s idea of itself as a white nation. The *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* for 1925 included a special article on the Chinese in Australia, and within it a section on ‘Half-Castes’. Compiling figures for all colonies/states of Australia from the 1850s to the census of 1921, the article showed that while the numbers of full-Chinese men were generally decreasing with the passage of time, those for ‘half-caste’ Chinese and for full-Chinese women were growing. (See Figure 8.) Such figures showed, the article claimed, ‘the extent to which Chinese blood has been mixed with the white race’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Full-blood*</th>
<th></th>
<th>Half-caste*</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>38 274</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>38 533</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>35 523</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>35 821</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>29 153</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>29 627</td>
<td>1556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>21 856</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>22 753</td>
<td>1518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>16 011</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>17147</td>
<td>1884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figure 8. Number of Chinese in Australia, 1881—1921 Source: *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1925* * Term used in the original report

A population of concern

By gathering and analysing statistics, authorities hoped to know and understand the Anglo-Chinese population, together with other problem groups (in particular Aborigines and other non-white populations), in their midst. Knowledge of such problem groups was the first step in governing them—but how exactly that should happen was another question. For some commentators, the only option regarding a

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mixed race Chinese population was to prevent it developing in the first place; they saw that there was no possibility that children of mixed Chinese-European heritage could become part of a white society:

The two races [Chinese and British] are so opposite that they cannot exist together. One must make room for the other. If they were, say, Russians who came to settle among us, whether they took wives from our circle or brought their own wives with them, their children would be white, and we should soon be one people. But with the Chinese the case would be different. No matter who the child’s mother was, or where he was born, he would be a Chinese still.25

Others believed that mixed race children could be absorbed into the white community through education, environment and religious instruction. EW Cole’s 1918 publication, The Better Side of the Chinese Character — in a chapter headed ‘Chinese, under the Same Conditions, Much Like Ourselves’ — used the example of the children of Reverend Cheok Hong Cheong in Melbourne as proof of this. The Cheong children were full-Chinese but, having been raised and educated in Australia according to Western fashion, according to Cole they showed how the Chinese could match Europeans in culture, education and manner if raised in the ‘correct’ environment.26

In the particular case of Anglo-Chinese children in NSW, it was presumed that the more educated or respectable Chinese father and his white wife would raise their children in Western fashion and that accordingly ‘the children of such unions [will] invariably become merged in the white race’.27 These children would be sent to schools where they would learn the language and culture of white Australia and they would attend Christian churches where they would learn its religions. This meant that as they grew up they could assume a place in the broader white community and importantly, they could then marry into that same community.


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Such ideas reflect those of both cultural and biological absorption, programs adopted around Australia from the 1880s, which were designed to render Aboriginal inheritance invisible by promoting both the socialisation of ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal children as white, and their subsequent marriage into the white community.\(^{28}\) According to Russell McGregor:

> This was to be accomplished by the most totalising of means: the biological, social, cultural, political and economic incorporation of individuals into the national community in such a way as to prohibit their identification as persons of mixed descent – and equally to prohibit their self-identity as such. Biological absorption…would have precluded persons of mixed ancestry retaining any sense of identity as descendants of the indigenous inhabitants. They would be, literally and indistinguishably, white Australians.\(^{29}\)

While never a formalised policy, as Aboriginal absorption became by the 1930s, nor as clearly articulated, the absorption of ‘half-caste’ Chinese into the white community was the future preferred and expected by most white commentators. Anglo-Chinese William Liu, who worked with the Chinese Consul-General in Melbourne in the years before World War I, recalled that at around that time one member of staff of the Minister for Home Affairs said to him, ‘By 1940 there will be no Chinese in Australia. The old-timers are dying, no new migrants will be allowed in, and the children are sent back’. William Liu responded, ‘It looks as if you are going to do to the Chinese what you did to the Tasmanians’.\(^{30}\)

Ideas of class and respectability were important elements in discussions on Anglo-Chinese children in the Australian colonies. Children raised as described above, in line with how respectable, white Australians raised their own children, were assumed to fairly unproblematically become part of the general white population through that


\(^{29}\) Russell McGregor, ‘“Breed out the colour”: Reproductive management for white Australia’, in Martin Crotty, John Germov and Grant Rodwell (eds), A Race for a Place: Eugenics, Darwinism and Social Thought and Practice in Australia, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences—University of Newcastle, Newcastle, 2000, p. 62.

\(^{30}\) Liu, 5th Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations, p. 21.
upbringing. This could apply to both middle- and lower-class families. Again, similarities to the idea of Aboriginal absorption are apparent, a process which involved ‘ameliorating the social, cultural, economic and education circumstances of “half-castes”, partly to acculturate them into the ways of White Australia, partly to render them fit spouses for white Australians’. As long as Anglo-Chinese families were conforming to acceptable standards of respectability and raising their children accordingly, they were not of particular concern to government and church authorities. Concern lay instead with those children who were growing up outside the bounds of respectable society—primarily those children whose Chinese fathers were less familiar with Western language and customs and were less acculturated or assimilated to white society, as well as those whose mothers were considered almost equally removed from respectable society. These were the children living among marginal communities of the Chinese camps and the slums, places perceived as dangerous to the development, safety and well-being of children, both physically and culturally.

One group who sought to change the lives of Anglo-Chinese families were the Christian churches, who saw intervention as part of their duty to convert the Chinese in the colony. They felt that their work was needed to ensure that the children of lower-class Chinese men (and their white mothers) were not ‘lost’. Their concern centred on the notion that Anglo-Chinese children raised as Chinese in the wrong environment, that is without the influence of Christianity, would lose their whiteness and the culture and ‘civilisation’ that somehow inherently came attached to that whiteness. According to this line of thinking, children were susceptible to bad influences and social and moral degradation from living among the Chinese and efforts had to be made to ensure that this did not happen. Joseph Tucker, of the Diocese of Sydney, addressed this question in 1868:

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31 McGregor, ‘“Breed out the colour”’, in Crotty et al. (eds), ‘A Race for a Place’, p. 61.
Many of the Chinese are now making a permanent settlement in the colonies. They have contracted marriages, and their children are growing up about them. In many instances these families are industrious, and well trained—if however the Chinese are left as untaught heathen, and their children are neglected, what must the result be? … We have no reason to fear any such [negative] consequences from the families of Chinese if we give them instruction,—but if they are neglected and treated with contempt and derision by the most degraded portion of our digging population, they must arise a terrible social evil in the colony. Under the instruction of Christian teachers, these families may become useful and respectable members of the community.32

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, mission projects in Sydney were set up with the aim of assisting the wives of Chinese men, as well giving their children a Christian education. This was the result, Shirley Fitzgerald has argued, of their placing a greater emphasis ‘on the Chinese as a community of families, with children and local roots’ due to the numbers of naturalisations and marriages with white women.33

In Sydney in around 1889, Canon Moreton suggested that a ladies committee should be established within the Church of England Chinese mission to visit the wives and children of the Chinese. The aim was to counteract the influences of the ‘pagan’ fathers on their wives, ‘who would fall into that state’, and their children, ‘who would grow up the same’. Canon Moreton’s call for special attention fell largely on deaf ears, however, as although a Committee of Ladies was appointed and districts were assigned to them, with the aim for them to work in pairs visiting Chinese families, little work was actually done.34 Another attempt was made in March 1893, when the Women’s Crusade was established in the centre of Sydney’s infamous Wexford Street. The Crusade aimed to stop opium use among the women there, to provide medical assistance particular to their needs and to spread ‘religious and moral knowledge among children by means of Sunday classes’. The first Sunday school class held by the two mission workers, Misses Fuller and Harley, was attended by about eleven

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32 Tucker, The Aborigines and the Chinese in Australia, p. 44.
33 Fitzgerald, Red Tape, Gold Scissors, p. 104.
34 Andrew Houison, Chinese mission c. 1896, ML MSS B332, pp. 60-1.
Section 3: Interactions

children—‘one half of them had English Christian-names and Chinese surnames’. Whether these particular endeavours were successful or not, most Anglo-Chinese children were in fact raised as Christians, nominally at least. Journalist John Plummer commented at the turn of the century that the children of Chinese men married to white women were ‘reared as believers in the truths of Christianity’.36

A dangerous environment
One of the dangers white commentators saw in children living in Chinese environments was the threat of abuse. They thought that Chinese men were sexual predators towards children, both boys and girls. Sensational reports on the Chinese from the 1870s and 1880s focussed heavily on the seduction and corruption of young white girls, typically those aged fourteen to sixteen, by Chinese men in Sydney, but the idea of the Chinese man as sexual threat to children was present from the 1850s.37 Particular concern was expressed for white children who were living amongst the Chinese or in Chinese households. For example, the four white children who appeared in the statistics for the Inverell sub-district in Fosbery’s 1878 inquiry provoked a particular comment:

The four European children are at Tingha. Boys—one 12 years of age and one 16. Girls—one 5 years and one 12 years. The mothers are married to Chinamen, and the children well looked after.38

Such comments about the children’s well-being were made because of the common perception white commentators had of the conditions under which children lived among the Chinese. The racial element compounded an existing discourse of concern for children who were living outside the bounds of respectable society, in particular the children of the ‘slums’, children who were found in the liminal area of the streets, in gambling ‘dens’, in cheap lodging houses, in brothels.

35 Truth (Sydney), 9 April 1893. See also the Evening News, 23 March 1893.
36 John Plummer, ‘Federated Australia: The disappearing Chinaman’, Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 81, Mitchell Library, p. 60. There are no available figures for NSW, but census figures for Victoria in 1891 and 1901 state that almost all ‘half-caste’ Chinese were Christian, 91% and 96% respectively. Census of Victoria, 1891 and 1901, in Yong, The New Gold Mountain, p. 267.
37 See, for example, ‘The inoffensive Chinese’, Bell’s Life in Sydney, 29 May 1858.
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A series of articles from the *Sydney Mail* in February and March 1879 demonstrates how concerns about children in Anglo-Chinese families fitted in to concerns over slum and other neglected children. The four-part series on the Chinese in Sydney covered the usual range of Chinese ‘haunts’ and activities - crowded lodging houses, opium, gambling and ‘larrikin’ women, as well as ‘respectable’ Chinese businesses and families. It also devoted one article to the question of Sydney’s slums in general, with no reference to the Chinese at all, with the aim of providing a context in which to view Chinese living conditions and habits:

It is well to see not only whether the late outcry against the Chinese was based on accurate information respecting their conditions and habits; but also, whether we have not in our midst classes of people, with skins as white as our own, whose condition and habits are much worse than those of Chinese residents…

The *Sydney Mail* article of 15 February 1879 described in detail the conditions under which one Anglo-Chinese family was living in the corner of a Chinese lodging house in a lane near Redfern railway station in central Sydney. (See Image 29.) This family in particular had attracted the journalist’s attention among the other Chinese dwellings, and most of his discussion was devoted to the children, two boys and a girl named Cissy. Cissy was described as having a face ‘as knowing and as vindictive as that of a woman, and yet it [was] the face of a mere child’. She worked at a local public-house earning 5 shillings a week. The journalist explained Cissy’s hardened look by the environment in which she was growing up—‘a public-house in a low neighbourhood and those associated with the practices of the lowest class of Chinese’. Of her brothers, the journalist commented that one was thin, perhaps malnourished, but the other was ‘a curly-headed little fellow that any one might love if he were out of his present...

39 *Sydney Mail*, 1 and 15 February, 8 and 15 March 1879.
40 *Sydney Mail*, 15 March 1879.
41 The loss of childish innocence among slum children was often noted by late nineteenth century writers. Jan Kociumbas has written that ‘the tragedy of the children of the slums [was envisaged] as comprising the fact that they were not really children at all … having lost their childish vulnerability and dependence, they were seen as “ancient”, prematurely aged by the complexities of adult responsibilities and corrupted by parental brutality.’ Jan Kociumbas, Children and society in New South Wales and Victoria 1860—1914, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1983, p. 70.
habitation and well washed’. The children had another brother, Andrew, who had died, aged six weeks, several weeks previous to the journalist’s visit.

Image 29. A Chinese lodging house in Parramatta Street, Sydney

Sydney Mail, 15 February 1879

Despite the physical privations suffered by the children, their family unit was intact and their mother, while being described as ‘not a total abstainer’, was hard-working and displayed a love and pride in her children. In spite of this obvious maternal affection, the journalist expressed a desire for some means through which the children could be removed from their surroundings, suggesting that the care provided in state institutions, specifically Biloela Industrial School for Girls and the Nautical School Ship (NSS) Vernon, would be preferable to the ‘degrading Chinese dwelling, the public-house, and the streets’. He went even further, wishing ‘half-unconsciously’ that Cissy and her two brothers could find the same fate as their infant brother—that is, death.42

42 Sydney Mail, 15 February 1879.
The concluding *Sydney Mail* article published a month later described a non-Chinese slum dwelling, this one inhabited by a white grandmother, mother and daughter aged ten or twelve years old. The daughter, like Cissy, was described as looking much older than she actually was, with ‘that look of precocious impudence common to children of a certain class’. Despite the conditions under which this girl was living being as bad as or even worse than Cissy, the journalist’s pity was not extended to suggest ways and means through which this girl could escape the poverty and drunkenness around her. He instead noted the sadness of her surroundings and the fact that she would grow up neglected, further stating she was only one of a very large number of children living in such a situation.43

It would appear that despite his endeavours to demonstrate that lower-class Chinese in Sydney lived much as their white counterparts did, the situation of Cissy and her brothers living in a ‘degrading Chinese dwelling’ (my emphasis) was particularly shocking. There was something particular about racial mixing which made Cissy’s position much more precarious than those of the girl in the non-Chinese slum. His comments about desiring to remove Cissy and her brothers from their home and family echo ominously those towards part-Aboriginal children being raised in their Aboriginal families—‘it made little difference what the family situation was or how the children were cared for, because being Aboriginal was in itself reason to regard children as “neglected”.’44

**Child welfare**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, government authorities were taking increasing interest in and responsibility for the welfare of children. Part of this was

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43 *Sydney Mail*, 15 March 1879.

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concern about the abandonment of children born out of wedlock and calls were made for the men who fathered such children to be held responsible for their offspring. Chinese men were included within these calls. In 1876, a 20-month old Anglo-Chinese girl named Eliza was brought before the court in Albury as an abandoned and destitute child. Eliza’s mother had left her in the care of a Mrs Bailey when she had gone to Melbourne, but Mrs Bailey was no longer willing to care for the child. The court ordered Eliza to be sent to the Asylum for Destitute Children in Sydney. The write-up of the case in the Albury Border Post concluded with the statement: ‘John Chinaman should be made to make provision for his offspring, like the “barbarians” [white men] and not be allowed to leave their burdens on the State.’\textsuperscript{45} Another white commentator noted in the early 1880s that ‘half-breeds’ were ‘thriving apace … but the fathers of this hybrid progeny [felt] not the slightest compunction in abandoning them in all their helplessness’.\textsuperscript{46} The Chinese community resented these accusations, coming as they did on top of a raft of other complaints—a petition from 352 Chinese residents to the NSW parliament in 1878 attempted to counter such suggestions, stating that the ‘industrial schools, Magdalen and foundling institutions of this colony exhibit no undue proportion of the Chinese element’.\textsuperscript{47}

Many Anglo-Chinese children were born to parents in unstable relationships. Some were born to women working as prostitutes, while others were born into families that faced poverty, ill-health, alcohol and opium use. Poverty and the shifting nature of many relationships meant that often the fabric of family structure broke down and children were not raised in a stable home environment. In some instances these circumstances resulted in tragic events, such as the death of the newly-born daughter of Mary Jane Ah Tow of Bathurst, who died from ‘want of attention from its mother’ in 1910, or the murder of Sarah Donalds by her Chinese partner Ah Dett in Quirindi in 1890 which resulted in her two-and-a-half-year old son George being sent to the NSS Vernon.\textsuperscript{48} Another tragedy was the death of four of the five children of Jane Ah

\textsuperscript{45} Border Post, 22 October 1876.
\textsuperscript{46} Anon., Yellow Agony, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{47} SMH, 18 February 1879.
\textsuperscript{48} SRNSW: CGS 343, X2088-89, Reel 2764; and Tamworth Observer, 7, 10 and 21 May 1890.
Foo, who herself died in 1873 at age twenty-eight as the result of the opium addiction she had had since she was about sixteen.49

The first legislation in NSW concerned with child welfare was introduced in 1866. The Industrial Schools Act and the Reformatory Schools Act provided for the establishment of residential government industrial and reformatory schools for destitute and delinquent children in the colony and, in the words of John Ramsland, they were ‘to remain the dominant legal forces controlling, educating, training and reforming neglected, destitute and delinquent children throughout the rest of the nineteenth century’.50 By 1867, an Industrial School for Girls was established at Newcastle, later moving to Biloela (Cockatoo Island) in Sydney Harbour, and the NSS Vernon (and later the Sobraon) was set up as a similar school for boys. These two institutions functioned alongside the Protestant and Catholic orphanages, the Randwick Asylum and the ragged schools (amongst others) in rescuing ‘neglected’ children in the colony. After 1881, after a new piece of legislation was enacted creating the State Children’s Relief Board, a system of boarding-out was introduced. Boarding-out took the emphasis away from large-scale institutions and allowed the State Children’s Relief Board to remove children from institutions and place them with families. The State Children’s Relief Board was also responsible for the approval of adoptions of children in state care.

The Industrial Schools Act was designed to enable authorities to deal with children who were on the streets or in otherwise threatening situations:

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49 Hales, Between two cultures, p. 23.

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The act defined the category of child to be dealt with by compulsory placement in a government Industrial School: the child had to be under sixteen at the time of apprehension who had been found ‘wandering’ or ‘living’ in the company of ‘reputed thieves’, ‘common prostitutes’ or persons ‘with no visible lawful means of support’, or had been found ‘begging’, or loitering in streets or public places, or ‘sleeping in the open air’. 51

As Shurlee Swain has noted, this legislation placed child welfare ‘firmly within a criminal justice framework, applying to children the vagrancy provisions used to keep threatening adults in control’. 52 It was the police who removed children from the streets, taking them before justices of the peace or magistrates to be dealt with under the act. Importantly, the act did not enable authorities to remove children from their families, so white or Anglo-Chinese children living in familial situations could not be forcibly removed, however destitute those families may have been. In some instances there appears to have been a reluctant acknowledgment by white commentators that there was no way that the legislation could be used to remove children living in ‘Chinese’ households. In Fosbery’s report of 1878, for instance, the comment was made that the conditions under which children were living in the Murray district were much worse than even in Sydney but that there were ‘not any children who, at any rate at present, can be brought under the provisions of the Industrial Schools Act’. It was not should not be brought under the act, but could not. 53

Some Anglo-Chinese children or white children living among the Chinese were taken into state care, usually having been removed by the police under the Industrial Schools Act or in the case of white girls found in Chinese brothels, the Vagrancy Act. These children were placed in institutions or, after the introduction of the boarding-out system, they were sent to live with families. Most of these children were orphaned, abandoned, or living in situations without suitable parental control and supervision, in some cases because their parent was institutionalised or imprisoned. Eva Ah Doon, for instance, was just three years old when she was ‘found living with prostitutes’ in

51 Ramsland, Children of the Backlanes, p. 115.
53 Fosbery, Information Respecting Chinese Resident in the Colony.
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1893, the whereabouts of her mother unknown. Another three-year old, Elsie Ah Chu, had been abandoned by her parents and adopted by a woman named Nellie Chew King who was then gaolled for vagrancy in 1897. Ellen Ah Moy, an eleven-year old whose mother was dead and whose father could not ‘control her’, was said to frequent Chinese brothels when she was taken to the Benevolent Asylum in 1893.\(^{54}\)

Anglo-Chinese children in care had often faced physical and sexual abuse, neglect or illness before coming under state control. Dinah Hales has recounted the experiences of the Law Sin family of Tambaroora. Three sons of Charley and Margaret Law Sin (later Lawson) ended up on the NSS \textit{Vernon}, two for stealing and the third because his father had thrown him out of the house. One of these boys, Thomson Lawson, had been repeatedly sodomised at the age of nine by a Chinese man who lived nearby to the family and another, Alfred, had been the victim of their father’s cruelty—as an eleven-year old he was chained by his father to a post in the house and had been whipped for minor matters.\(^{55}\)

Edwin Ah Kit was another Anglo-Chinese boy who found himself on the NSS \textit{Vernon}. By the age of nine, Edwin’s mother was dead and he was living alone with his hawker father, Ah Kit, on his garden at Little Wombat near Young. His father was frequently away from home and often left Edwin to his own devices. Notes on his case in the \textit{Vernon} Entrance Book from 1886 state:

\begin{quote}
He has been for the last two months constantly wandering about the streets day & night … From inquiries made by the Police I find this boy has only attended school for five days during the last 2 months.
\end{quote}

A further entry, when he was readmitted to the \textit{Vernon} two years later, notes that Edwin’s parents were by then both dead, that he had been unsatisfactorily boarded out several times and had also been charged with stealing. On his third admission to the \textit{Vernon}, in 1890, he was described as ‘Chinese—stubborn—unpresentable—

\(^{54}\) SRNSW: CGS 13358, Dependent children registers, 1883—1923.

\(^{55}\) Hales, Between two cultures, p. 24. Details taken from the Tambaroora Bench Book (Court of Petty Sessions) and the Entrance Books to the NSS \textit{Vernon}, all held by SRNSW.
troublesome'. In his own defence he stated ‘I was boarded out by the State Children [sic] Relief Department before I got here. I did not like my place and went away’.  

The early lives of children like Edwin Ah Kit meant that they often did not fit easily into the rigours of life in state institutions, nor with the families they were boarded out to. It is unclear from the records what role, if any, their mixed race played in the difficulties they encountered; it certainly cannot have made their situations any easier. The way that their mixed race was pathologised is suggested by the annual reports of the State Children’s Relief Department, the body charged with their care. ‘Half-caste’ Chinese children were listed with those children who had ‘afflictions’—physical diseases, disabilities and other conditions such as ‘paralysis’, ‘weak intellect’ and ‘dirty habits’, suggesting that their non-white heredity was viewed as indicative of a deeper moral or behavioural condition.

A small number of Anglo-Chinese children who had been in state care were eventually adopted, most by Chinese men or families. Ben Hing, a well-to-do Sydney businessman, adopted Alfred Ah See in 1899, nearly two years after he had been ‘found wandering’ in Dubbo and taken into care. In 1900, Pauline Ah Lum was adopted by Wong Chee of the Kong Sing War store at Glen Innes when she was about three years old—she had been in state care for only a few months. James Choy Hing, a Sydney businessman and active member of the Chinese Presbyterian Church, and his wife Fanny, adopted Pauline Ah Hee in 1903, three years after she had been abandoned by her mother at the Ashfield Infants Home (see Image 30). These three children were all taken to China soon after their adoptions. That these children were

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56 SRNSW: CGS 3906, Vernon School Ship entrance books, 1886—1889 (8/1743) and 1889—1892 (8/1744).
58 Details of the children given as examples, and others, can be found under their entries in the Dependent children registers, kept by the State Children’s Relief Board between 1883 and 1923. SRNSW: CGS 13358, Dependent children registers, 1883—1923. For information concerning their travel to China and other details of their adoptive families, see NAA: SP42/1, B1905/405 and C12/7171 (for Alfred Ah See); A1, 1912/257; ST84/1, 06/116 (for Pauline Ah Hee) and Golden Threads database entry on Ruby Fay (for Pauline Ah Lum, aka Pauline Liu, Ruby Wong Chee and Ruby Fay), URL: amol.org.au/goldenthreads/collections; William Liu, Conversation with William Liu [sound recording], 17 February 1978, Hazel de Berg Collection, National Library of Australia.
59 For more on the experiences of Anglo-Chinese children in China, see Section 5 of this thesis.
adopted by Chinese men, and therefore back into the Chinese community, is significant, suggesting that providing the child with a ‘respectable’ family life was more important to authorities than removing them completely from a Chinese environment. Authorities, where possible, wished to remove themselves from responsibility and cost for the upkeep of ‘neglected’ children, and allowing Anglo-Chinese children to be adopted by these Chinese families was an appropriate way to do that. Ben Hing, Wong Chee and James Choy Hing were all businessmen of some property and standing in the community.

In other instances where parents were no longer able or willing to care for Anglo-Chinese children, alternative arrangements were made which kept them out of state care altogether. They were taken in by relatives or friends, both Chinese or white, and some were legally adopted. Sidney Ellis Johnson, born in 1888 to sixteen-year old Mary Jane Johnson of Inverell, was adopted by Chy Wong but given into the care of Fanny Cumines at the age of fifteen months. Fanny was part of the Cumines family who ran the King Nam Jang’s store, one of the long-established Chinese families living in the Rocks. Fanny had her own children but cared for Sidney until he was
eight years old, at which point he was taken back to China by his adoptive father.\textsuperscript{60} The option of taking children to China to be cared for by Chinese relatives was one taken by Chinese fathers when they found it difficult to look after them in Australia. For instance, Yum Sume, a market gardener from Willoughby, took his Anglo-Chinese daughter Petronella (Nellie) to China in 1913, leaving his ‘imbecile’ white wife in the care of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan in Sydney. Should anything have happened to Yum Sume while they were away, Nellie was to be returned to Australia and placed in the charge of the Sisters.\textsuperscript{61}

The Anglo-Chinese children in state care were there not because of their race, but because the fabric of their family structure had broken down and there was no one willing or appropriate to care for them. White commentators may have wished that children could be removed from the ‘Chinese slums’ in which they lived (see Image 31), but it seems that as long as they remained within some kind of family environment, particularly with their white mother, children were afforded a deal of protection against removal by government authorities. In some cases, children who came under the eye of church or state authorities remained within their own families or communities despite circumstances that might otherwise have been seen by those authorities to necessitate removal. The difference between these children and those taken into state care was the desire and ability of parents, extended family and community networks to care for the children.

The situation of Margaret, one of the witnesses to the 1891 Royal Commission on Alleged Chinese Gambling, offers one example of this.\textsuperscript{62} At the time of her appearance before the Royal Commission, twenty-three year old Margaret was living in Exeter Place in inner Sydney. For the five years prior to a recent separation, Margaret had been living with her Chinese ‘husband’ and together they had three children, now aged five, almost three and twelve months. Margaret was originally from Young; her family lived on a property some distance out of the town and she

\textsuperscript{60} NAA: SP42/1, C21/1102; SP115/1, Box 35A [Hwah Ping, 6 February 1921 Part 2]; ST84/1, Book 83, No. 77; SP11/6, Applications for admission into Australia of the Cumines family [Box 7].

\textsuperscript{61} NAA: SP42/1, C13/2896.

\textsuperscript{62} RCACG, pp. 404-8.
had received a reasonable education at a Catholic school, becoming a dressmaker when she left. She had been ‘seduced’ by a white man and left Young to come to Sydney where she found work in a tobacco factory. After getting in trouble with the police for assaulting another girl, she was bailed out by the Chinese boyfriend of a girl she knew and since then she had lived among the Chinese.

Image 31. Children in Stephen Street, Surry Hills in 1906
The streets of Surry Hills around Wexford Street were home to an increasing number of Chinese and Anglo-Chinese children in the later years of the nineteenth century
City of Sydney Archives 51/3963

Margaret’s home in Exeter Place consisted of one room and a kitchen in a larger house, for which she paid seven shillings a week. Two of her children did not live with her; one lived with her sister in Balmain and another was in care at a cost of ten shillings a week. Her Chinese husband was a cook, who lived and worked in Penrith during the week, returning to her on Saturday night. He earned 35 shillings a week and gave Margaret a pound per week to live on. She was also receiving one or two
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pounds per week from another man, her former lover, an Anglo-Chinese man from Hay. He and Margaret had been at school together in Young.

During the previous five years, Margaret and her Chinese husband had lived in several parts of rural NSW as well as Sydney, including Newcastle, Tingha and Armidale. It was at Armidale that she had met up again with her schoolmate and went to live with him after a row with her husband. After some to-ing and fro-ing between the two men, she returned to Sydney, taking out a summons against her husband as the father of her children for him to contribute to their maintenance. They had recently separated because, in her words, ‘he has a bad temper and so do I’. His temper arose out of jealousy at her spending time with other men and because of her opium smoking habit. After separating, he gave Margaret the money she requested to support their children and with this money and that given to her by her lover she was able to live and support her children. Margaret told the Commissioners that she did not need to resort to prostitution to live and she still saw her husband regularly.

The Commissioners questioned Margaret quite intently about her relationships with these men and her opium habit, particularly as to the effects that the drug had on her children. She stated that in infancy the children of opium-addicted women had the same cravings for the drug as their mothers—‘they are born with it’. Speaking from her own experience with her children, she said, ‘It is only while they are on the breast that it affects them. When I am opium sick they are sick, and as soon as I have my smoke they are all right.’ As her children grew older she did not allow them near her or to see her when she was smoking.

The way in which white authorities regarded Anglo-Chinese children was quite different from that of mixed race Aboriginal children. Mixed race Aboriginal children were removed from their mothers and families under government policies of assimilation, so that away from the influences of their Aboriginal families the children would learn to live as members of the white community. Because the mothers of Anglo-Chinese children were white, authorities saw that they would in most instances provide a satisfactory environment in which to raise their children—that is, it was presumed that they would raise their children to be ‘white’. Concurrent with
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this was a secondary and in some ways contradictory belief, that Chinese men were
good and responsible fathers, particularly in comparison with their drunken, opium-
addicted or dissolute wives. Where Anglo-Chinese children could be cared for by
their fathers or within the Chinese community itself, whether through formal or
casual adoption or fostering, the situation was also generally not interfered with. Race
alone therefore does not seem to have been a reason to remove Anglo-Chinese
children from their families.

Education

The question of how the children of Chinese men in the Australian colonies were
being educated was one common to a number of inquiries on the situation of Anglo-
had noted that ‘those Chinese who can afford it send their children to school; but
there are some who have not the means of doing so, and consequently the children
are growing up utterly neglected.’63 Similarly, the 1878 and 1884 NSW reports on the
Chinese by Edmund Fosbery and Martin Brennan and Quong Tart had looked not
only at the physical environment in which Anglo-Chinese families were living, but
the question of the education of children living in Anglo-Chinese families.

Fosbery reported in 1878 that of a total of 586 Anglo-Chinese and 32 white children
living with the Chinese, 154 of fit age were not attending school.64 The number of
children not attending school, almost 25%, may seem high but it was not until two
years later, in 1880, that school education became compulsory in the colony. In mining
camps and rural settlements, educational resources were scant, and children were
lucky to receive anything more than a basic education in literacy and numeracy.
Children, particularly those of the poor and those in rural areas, also provided
valuable labour either at home with domestic tasks or caring for younger siblings, on
the farm or outside the home. This labour contributed to the upkeep of the family. In
1880, legislation was introduced in NSW making education free, secular and
compulsory. Jan Kociumbas has noted however, that although schooling was meant

63 Illustrated Australian News, 2 October 1868.
64 SMH, 20 November 1878.
to be free, parents were still expected to contribute money to the school to pay for costs.\textsuperscript{65} This, plus the loss of income from the full-time labour of children meant that for poor families educating their children was often outside economic possibility and was sometimes perceived as having little relevance to the future of the child and the family. In NSW, eleven years after compulsory education was introduced, there were still more than 16,000 children not attending school, or around 7.65\% of the school-aged population.\textsuperscript{66}

Brennan and Tart’s 1884 survey of the Riverina Chinese camps provided a more detailed picture of the education received by Anglo-Chinese children in rural NSW. Brennan and Tart had specifically been charged with recording ‘whether the children receive any education, and by what means’ and Brennan wrote that ‘the Chinese appear to manifest great interest in the education of their children, and at the camps visited all of suitable age were attending school.’ He noted that there were sixteen children at the Wagga Wagga camp, five of whom were attending the public school, two who had already received ‘a fair education’ and nine who were not of school age. At Deniliquin, ten were not of school age and seven were attending the public school. Four went to the public school in Hay, another four to the Catholic school with a further six not of school age. In Albury, one went to the public school, nine were not of school age and one seven-year old boy was not attending school.

Anglo-Chinese children attended private schools of many kinds, including at ragged schools (privately run schools for the very poor), in Sydney and Melbourne. John Stanley James described the situation at one ragged school in Melbourne in the \textit{Vagabond Papers}. There were seventeen half-Chinese children attending the school who were well-dressed and cared for and were ‘decidedly the smartest’. James noted that they mixed with the other children in the classes and were not segregated in any way.\textsuperscript{67} Wealthy parents of Anglo-Chinese children could choose to educate their offspring alongside those of the white middle-class at exclusive private schools.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{65}Kociumbas, \textit{Children and society in New South Wales and Victoria}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{66}Census of NSW, 1891.
\textsuperscript{67}James, \textit{The Vagabond Papers}, pp. 166-8.
\end{flushright}
Quong Tart’s children, for instance, were educated at some of the most exclusive private schools in Sydney—his eldest daughter attended the Presbyterian Ladies College at Croydon, his second daughter attended the Methodist Ladies College at Burwood and his elder son attended the Catholic Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview at Lane Cove. Other children attended public or national schools run by the government in the inner city and suburbs, as well as those in rural areas.

The education received by children in Anglo-Chinese families depended very much on their wealth and social standing and this could change with family circumstances. The children of Amoy-born John Tankey and his wife Catherine (née Wells) received varying kinds of education as the prosperity of the family increased. Their eldest son, William Charles (born 1858) received no formal education and grew up a ‘boy digger’ who worked alongside his father in mines in the Carcoar region. However, the family’s two youngest children, Elizabeth (born 1874) and Patrick (born 1877), were both sent to private Catholic colleges—Patrick to St Stanislaus’ College, Bathurst and Elizabeth to Mount Saint Joseph Convent School, Carcoar. Elizabeth went on to become a teacher and then a nun with the Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth in Wanganui, New Zealand.

For Anglo-Chinese families living in the bush, educating children was a difficult task, particularly if the family could not afford to hire a private tutor or there was no school nearby. In her reminiscences of the life of her Anglo-Chinese father and his siblings, Ruth Genat recounted the story of the efforts of her grandmother, Margaret Fong Clarke (whose story began the introduction to this thesis), to have her children schooled while they were living in the small settlement at Broken Dam, near Temora in south-west NSW. Margaret Fong left two of her older children, Lena and Jim, with their grandparents in Young for a period in which they attended school. Later Ruth Genat’s father, Walter, was sent to live with the same grandparents to go to school. Endeavours were also made to provide schooling for the children closer to home. At

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68 Lea-Scarlett, Quong Tart: A study in assimilation, p. 23.
69 Tankey, *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, p. 192. All details of the Tankey family are taken from this article.
one stage a neighbouring farmer employed a teacher for his own children and Walter was permitted to attend classes there, but he had to walk twelve miles a day to get there and home again. Margaret Fong also employed a teacher to teach in their own small schoolroom, but he did not stay long.71

Martin Brennan’s 1878 report told the story of one Anglo-Chinese boy, Jah Kee Govey, at Albury who was not being permitted to attend school. His situation was described by Brennan:

The reason assigned by the boy’s father, Ah Govey, an industrious gardener, is that the school-master refused to admit him to the public school because the child was wearing his hair in the queue, characteristic of Chinese customs.

He continued:

I am impressed with the conviction that the objection for the exclusion of this child, cleanly and intelligent in appearance, whose mother is a native-born British subject, from a public school, is not in itself a valid one, any more than it would if it were sought to be applied to European children going to school and wearing their hair in any one of the numerous and extraordinary styles which European custom sanctions.72

This instance is one of the few recorded examples of educational discrimination against Anglo-Chinese children in the colony, and centred less on the boy’s racial make-up than on his failure to assume the cultural practices of the dominant white community, since another Anglo-Chinese child was attending the school from which Jah Kee Govey was banned. Many more discriminatory instances occurred against Anglo-Chinese children in their encounters with their schoolmates. Annie Tankey, (born 1890) was only one-quarter Chinese, but she, for example:

72 Brennan and Tart, Reports Upon Chinese Camps, p. 2.
had no particularly fond memories of her school days as they coincided with the high point of the ‘Yellow Peril’ campaign. She vividly recalls the hostility and antagonism directed towards the Chinese in general and towards herself in particular. In her own words, she felt like a ‘second class citizen’ in spite of the fact that she was three quarters non-Chinese.\footnote{Tankey, \textit{Chinese in Australia: One Family}, p. 14.}

Whatever personal difficulties Anglo-Chinese children encountered in their school lives with the prejudices of white classmates or teachers, on an administrative level at least Anglo-Chinese and full-Chinese children were free to attend government schools in the Australian colonies and also in New Zealand. The situation was very different in the United States and Canada, where Chinese children were excluded from public schools because of their race, necessitating the establishment of a separate Chinese schooling system.\footnote{On the schooling of Chinese children in North America see Timothy John Stanley, \textit{Defining the Chinese Other: White supremacy, schooling and social structure in British Columbia before 1923}, PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1991; Marlon K Hom, \textit{Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown}, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987, pp. 29-30; and David Chu enyan Lai, \textit{Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada}, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1988, pp. 214-15.} In Australia, Chinese language schools were established in 1909 in Melbourne and 1910 in Sydney, but both of these schools had very small enrolments, around 20 to 30 pupils, and had closed by 1914.\footnote{Yong, \textit{The New Gold Mountain}, pp. 214-16.}

In part, differences in demographics between the states of North America and the colonies of Australia account for this difference. In Australia, numbers of Chinese and part-Chinese children were small and scattered, meaning that it was not viable to run schools exclusively for their use. More important, however, was the racial attitude towards the Chinese in the United States; there discriminatory and segregationalist policies discouraged or outlawed Chinese children from attending public schools. In Australia and New Zealand, efforts were more to integrate and assimilate Chinese and Anglo-Chinese children into white society rather than to exclude them, especially after 1901. In New Zealand, Reverend Alexander Don had opened a class for ‘half-caste’ children at the Dunedin Chinese Mission Church in 1897 but, according to James Ng, this endeavour proved short lived because the half-Chinese did not like to
be singled out.\textsuperscript{76} The parents of Chinese and Anglo-Chinese children in Australia similarly had little desire or need for a separate schooling system, and as CF Yong has argued, the failure of the first Chinese language schools related directly to the ‘fact that most Chinese parents had no hesitation to send their children to Australian schools’ (and also to the fact that those schools would, for the most part, accept Chinese pupils).\textsuperscript{77} That Anglo-Chinese children were not excluded from attending regular government and private schools fitted with white concerns about the development of a mixed race ‘underclass’ in the colony. Anglo-Chinese children were to be integrated and absorbed into broader white society rather than excluded.

\textbf{Nationality}

Despite concern about a rising presence of Anglo-Chinese in the colony, it was primarily families otherwise outside the bounds of respectable society who were subjected to interference by the state. In one particular way, however, Anglo-Chinese families who otherwise might have escaped notice by authorities were affected by the white community’s desire to shape and mould its population—through the Commonwealth \textit{Immigration Restriction Act} of 1901 and its colonial precursors. Of the three areas of state concern considered in this chapter, it was this legislation which had the most direct effect on the lives of Anglo-Chinese Australians because it was specifically aimed at the non-white population. It affected Anglo-Chinese families in the colony who were otherwise ‘unproblematic’, families who had enough money to travel back and forth between Australia and China or other destinations for business, family reasons or pleasure, families who were often an accepted part of the respectable white and Chinese communities. Anglo-Chinese Australians, together with full-Chinese, were set apart from white Australians because, in spite of birthplace or cultural knowledge, the Immigration Restriction Act was applied to them because of their Chinese blood. It rendered their membership of the Australian community fragile.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{76} Ng, \textit{Windows on a Chinese Past}, vol. 2, p. 250.
\textsuperscript{77} Yong, \textit{The New Gold Mountain}, pp. 216-17.
\end{flushright}
Kim Rubenstein has argued that the legal framework for membership of the Australian community (that is, nationality) was confused and unclear, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until the Commonwealth Citizenship Act came into being in 1948, Australia had no formal definition of Australian citizenship—those resident within its borders were either British subjects or aliens. Those who were born in Australia, including Anglo-Chinese and full-Chinese, became British subjects by the place of their birth (\textit{jus soli}) rather than by the nationality of their parents (\textit{jus sanguinis}) and most aliens could attain the status of British subject through naturalisation (a right denied to Chinese in colonial NSW after 1888 and in the Commonwealth from 1904 until the 1950s). Anglo-Chinese children born in NSW were British subjects, the same legal status as their white ‘British’ mothers (and those Chinese fathers who were naturalised). While their birthplace assured Anglo-Chinese Australians of the rights of British subjects, their Chinese paternity created a certain ambiguity about their status—they both belonged and did not belong because of who their parents were and where they were born. This ambiguity can be seen in the way Sydney Customs officer JT Donohoe described Anglo-Chinese Arthur Kee Chong on an exemption certificate issued under the Chinese Restriction Act of 1888. Kee Chong’s ‘nationality’ was ‘Chinese’, but he was ‘by birth a British Subject’ (see Image 32).

Colonial governments and then the Commonwealth took few measures to control the Chinese population within Australia; they were generally legally free to live, work and marry as they chose. There was, however, strict control of the movement of Chinese across colonial and national borders through various colonial Chinese immigration acts and then the Commonwealth \textit{Immigration Restriction Act 1901}. The Immigration Restriction Act was the legislative backbone of what came to be known as the White Australia Policy and was the first piece of legislation enacted in the new parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. It was the culmination of decades of debate within and between the colonies on how best to keep Australia white and it replaced the various pieces of colonial anti-Chinese legislation. The Immigration Restriction Act introduced the status of ‘prohibited immigrant’: primarily those

\footnote{See Kim Rubenstein, \textit{Australian Citizenship Law in Context}, Lawbook Company, Pyrmont, 2002.}
immigrants who failed a Dictation Test of fifty words in a European (later any) language. In the act’s first iteration, certain persons were exempt from the Dictation Test, including those who were domiciled in Australia prior to 1901 and those who had been specifically granted certificates of exemption. Every Chinese immigrant entering or found within the Commonwealth was subject to the provisions of the act.
Section 3: Interactions

The onus was on Chinese entering Australia to prove their exemption from the Dictation Test. While white Australians or other white British subjects could come and go as they pleased, those with Chinese faces—even if they were Australian-born—had to prove their rights as British subjects born and domiciled in Australia through documents certified by government officials. This applied to both full and part-Chinese. In NSW, it was the Collector of Customs who had charge of administering the Immigration Restriction Act for that state and who was responsible for dealing with the documentation of domicile through the certification of birth certificates prior to departure and the issuing of Certificates of Domicile (CoDs), later called Certificates of Exemption from the Dictation Test (CEDTs). The Collector of Customs was also responsible for the Boarding Inspectors who met ships arriving at Circular Quay to assess whether Chinese passengers were entitled to land in Australia. Where decisions could not be made by Customs, the Department of External Affairs in Melbourne was referred to for advice and ultimate decision making.

One of the most dominant figures in the NSW Customs Service in the early decades of the twentieth century, a man whose knowledge and position gave him power over the lives of Chinese in the colony, was JT Donohoe. While legislation provided the framework by which to make decisions, much was left to the discretion of men like Donohoe in deciding who to allow to land freely or who to grant certificates to. For example, Anglo-Chinese who had left Australia before 1901 and then wanted to return after the new Commonwealth legislation came into force often did not have the documents required to prove their identity on arrival in Australia. These cases, such as that of Albert Yin Poon in 1903, were viewed with great suspicion by Donohoe. Yin Poon had travelled to China as a child and desired to return to his country of birth. He was asked to provide a completed application form, statutory declarations from ‘reputable persons’ to vouch for the correctness of his statements, and information on how he would be certainly identified on his arrival into Australia. His birth certificate was supplied to Customs in Sydney, but his file contains no record that he ever made an attempt to come back to Australia, his birthplace and home to both his parents.
perhaps he was deterred by the bureaucratic hurdles he needed to jump to prove his claim.\textsuperscript{79}

The Immigration Restriction Act defined Anglo-Chinese as ‘Other’ in both theory and in practice. With the stricter documentation of Chinese entering and leaving Australia after 1901 came stricter racial definitions on those documents. Anglo-Chinese Australians were no longer counted just as Chinese as they had been under colonial administration—after 1901 they were listed as ‘half-caste’ Chinese on their official documents. In the day-to-day operation of Sydney Customs, physical appearance was often used in considering the bona fides of those arriving in Sydney from China, of deciding who was Chinese, who was ‘half-caste’, who was genuine, who was an impostor.\textsuperscript{80} The separation of ‘half-caste Chinese’ from ‘Chinese’, knowing who had a white mother or not, was important to Customs officials in identifying those who may have been entering Australia fraudulently on birth and naturalisation certificates that they had purchased in Hong Kong or China.

The paranoia of Customs officials about fraudulent entry to the Commonwealth was not entirely without reason. Chinese did enter on purchased certificates, slipping past the keen eyes of men like Inspector Donohoe. In other cases, Customs officials rightly or wrongly questioned whether the holders of certificates were the real owners or not. It is difficult from the records, which primarily record the situations from the point of view of Customs and Department of the Exterior officials, to know whether fraud was really being attempted in many of these cases; but what is certain is that because Customs officials held that such practices were widespread, Anglo-Chinese Australians who were unknown to Customs officers had to deal with great suspicion about their claims to be legitimate residents of Australia, as well as the usual bureaucratic paperwork.

\textsuperscript{79} NAA: SP42/1, C1903/7816.

\textsuperscript{80} Similarly, the racial status of indigenous Australians was also frequently based on appearance. In the early twentieth century, electoral officers used appearance to decide whether an Aboriginal person was entitled to vote or not. ‘Half-castes’ were entitled to vote, full bloods were not and ‘[o]fficers used appearance, rather than a knowledge of people’s parentage, to decide whether or not an Aboriginal was an “octroon”, “quadroon”, or “half-caste”’. Pat Stretton and Christine Finnimore, ‘Black fellow citizens: Aborigines and the Commonwealth franchise’, \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, vol. 25, no. 101, October 1993, p. 530.
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Customs officials had the power to reject claims of identity and deny Anglo-Chinese Australians who had left Australia the right to return to live in their place of birth. Where an Australian-born Chinese person had left the Commonwealth, the legal question which decided whether they were subject to the Immigration Restriction Act or not on their return was whether they were returning as an ‘immigrant’ or whether they were returning to Australia as their home. In most instances, such matters were dealt with at the level of the boarding inspectors, Customs officials and officers of the Department of External Affairs. They used means such as personal acquaintance, the ability of the person to speak English and identification by ‘reputable’ residents of NSW, particularly family members, to assist in deciding if the person was returning home or not.

The right of Anglo-Chinese Australians to claim membership of the Australian community was most threatened by extended periods of time spent overseas. Russell McGregor has argued that White Australia was ‘far more than merely a doctrine of racist exclusivism’; it was a desire for coherence ‘in terms of common descent, culture and history, or in more recent terminology, of ethnicity’. It involved racial demarcation, but also a complex web of understandings about community membership and belonging through an (often fictive) shared past and culture. It was Anglo-Chinese Australians who no longer seemed to demonstrate this belonging whose ability to return to Australia was most precarious. In deciding who was returning to Australia as their home and who was an immigrant, officials were establishing and maintaining boundaries of community membership. That this process was not always easy is demonstrated by two cases of Australian-born Chinese (one Anglo-Chinese, one full-Chinese), heard before the High Court of Australia in 1908 and 1924. They also demonstrate the differences white Australians saw between Australian-born Chinese with white mothers and those with Chinese mothers.

81 McGregor, ‘“Breed out the colour”’, in Crotty et al. (eds), ‘A Race for a Place’, p. 65.
82 For discussion of the cases of Potter v. Minahan (1908) 7 CLR 289 and Donohoe v. Wong Sau (1925) 36 CLR 408, 409 in the context of the Chinese and citizenship, see Rubenstein, Australian Citizenship Law in Context, p. 59; Huang Tsen-ming, The Legal Status of the Chinese Abroad, China Cultural Service, Taipei,
James Francis Kitchen Minahan, otherwise known as Ying Coon, had been born in Victoria to a white mother and Chinese father in 1876. Although not married, his parents, Winifred Minahan and Teung Ming, had lived together constantly until ill-health had driven Teung Ming to return to China, taking his five-year old son with him. Whether he planned to return to Australia is unclear, but as his ill-health continued he remained in China until his death. James Minahan lived in his father’s ancestral village near Kongmoon for twenty-six years. He was schooled there and hoped after getting a degree to return to Australia to teach Chinese. After failing three times to get his degree he decided to return to Australia anyway, to look after his father’s remaining share in a store in country Victoria. On arriving in Melbourne in January 1908, Customs officer HJ Mercer doubted that Minahan was the person in the birth certificate he presented. Minahan then failed the Dictation Test because he could speak no English and he was arrested as a prohibited immigrant.

In his trial in the Court of Petty Sessions in Melbourne it was found that Minahan was returning to Australia as his home, as he had not abandoned his previous domicile, and then on appeal to the High Court this verdict was upheld. Minahan was found to be returning to his original home despite his inability to speak English and the fact he had no memories of his mother or of his early childhood years spent in Australia. Because his parents had not been legally married, the High Court held him to have the same domicile as his white ‘British’ mother.\(^3\)

In contrast, when Lucy Wong Sau’s case was heard before the High Court in 1924, the opposite decision was reached—that she was an immigrant under the provisions of the Immigration Restriction Act. Lucy On Hing had been born in NSW in 1883 to naturalised Chinese parents, members of the Church of England. Her father On Hing, a storekeeper at Gulgong, took his wife Ah Wah and their three children back to China in 1889 because he was ill, and he and Ah Wah both died there. Lucy was married in China to Wong Sau, a market gardener living at Ryde in NSW. After Wong Sau returned to Australia, Lucy lived with his mother in China until 1924 when she

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\(^{83}\) NAA: A10074, 1908/31 and \(Potter v. Minahan\) (1908) 7 CLR 289.
too decided to return to Australia, thirty-five years after she had left. Lucy produced her birth certificate on arrival in Sydney, but failed the Dictation Test and was charged with being a prohibited immigrant. She was sentenced to six months hard labour by the Central Police Court in Sydney, a decision which was quashed on appeal to the Court of Quarter Sessions. A further appeal to the High Court was mounted by the Commonwealth and after looking at her language, upbringing, education and sentiment, it was found none of them indicated that she was part of the Australian community and she was ordered to be deported.  

Of the two cases, Huang Tsen-ming has written:

In the latter [Minahan] case, the Court pointed out that the father took the birth certificate with him when leaving Australia, while in the former the certificate was procured for Wong Sau ten years after departure; this was taken to be an indication of lack of intention to return. Further, the mother of Minahan was an Australian of European stock, while Wong Sau’s mother was a Chinese and ‘there was not the slightest evidence of anything Australian about the respondent except her birth’. Here we have a person who, born in the Australian community of naturalised British parents but having no “real home” in Australia, was therefore held not to be one of its people.

In their dealing with Customs officials, Anglo-Chinese Australians could avoid such judgements by demonstrating their belonging to the Australian community in particular ways, such as by having attended school in Australia and speaking fluent English or by the testimony of white mother or friend, or even personal acquaintance with Customs officials. For example, on the return of Ellen Mon Howe (née Too Tong) to Sydney in 1913, the following comment was recorded next to her name in the Customs register of Australian-born Chinese who travelled on their birth certificates:

This lady is well known by Mr Donohoe. She speaks English perfectly. Father was a Chinese. Mother was a European. Her father lived in Australia for about 60 years continuously and died at age 89.

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85 Huang, The Legal Status of the Chinese Abroad, p. 133.
86 NAA: SP726/2.
Section 3: Interactions

While such means may have shown to local officials that Anglo-Chinese belonged to their own Australian community, when removed from situations in which they could demonstrate belonging, where they were not known or had no one to vouch for them, race again became the defining feature by which they were judged. Anglo-Chinese Australians had certain rights as British subjects in Australia, but in other parts of the Commonwealth these rights might not apply. For example, in 1911 when Margaret and Quong Tart’s son visited New Zealand he was stopped and interrogated by Customs officials on landing because he was ‘Chinese’—even though he was Australian-born, his mother was white, he spoke fluent English and was the son of a well-to-do middle-class family. Prior to his return to Australia, his mother wrote to the Sydney Customs officials, somewhat incensed, to ensure that ‘the unfortunate “Wellington mistake” ’ was not repeated when his ship landed at Sydney. Removed from the community in which he was known, he was treated as ‘just another Chinese’.

Conclusion

The idea of an Anglo-Chinese population in the Australian colonies caused concern for white colonists. Their presence was an uncertain and unknown possibility which arose from interactions between Chinese men and white women, and their rising numbers over the later decades of the nineteenth century precipitated government authorities and others to seek information about them. They were observed and counted, and questions were asked about how they lived, whether they attended church, what education they received, what their family life was like and how children were raised. This chapter has demonstrated however, that in the areas of child welfare, education and nationality, the fears evoked in rhetoric of racial destruction were a magnification and distortion of bureaucratic concerns about the real-life situations of Anglo-Chinese in the colonies. Most Anglo-Chinese families lived quiet domestic lives in various communities, rural and metropolitan, and through their education and community participation, Anglo-Chinese children became part of the wider white community, as was hoped by most white commentators. There was generally little government intervention into the day-to-day

87 Tung Wah Times, 28 January 1911 and NAA: SP42/1, C11/397. Quong Tart by this time had died.
Section 3: Interactions

lives of Anglo-Chinese families, except for those otherwise outside the bounds of ‘respectable’ society—in particular, the very poor and those who lived in marginal communities of the Chinese camps and urban Chinatowns, who came under greater scrutiny and interference by authorities. This was not, however, predominantly because of their race.

The Immigration Restriction Act was the greatest imposition of the state into the lives of Anglo-Chinese Australians. Its definition of Anglo-Chinese as ‘Chinese’ meant that they were not able to live fully secure in their rights and privileges as British subjects if they left Australia. However, there were contradictions in the way Anglo-Chinese Australians were treated in the administration of the Immigration Restriction Act. They were seen as simultaneously not belonging to the Australian community, because they were ‘Chinese’, and belonging, because of their birthplace, their mothers’ white blood and their frequent display of appropriate cultural knowledge. Fighting against negative perceptions, Anglo-Chinese Australians could demonstrate to white Australia their right to a place within that community in ways that full-Chinese could not and xenophobic fears gave way to acceptance when Anglo-Chinese Australians showed themselves to be like the rest of the community. This idea will be taken up further in the next chapter of this thesis, which explores the place of Anglo-Chinese Australians in both the white Australian and Chinese communities.
In 1893, a baby boy was born to Florence (née Thomas) and her husband, Liu Hee-Lum, in the inner-Sydney suburb of Surry Hills. He was their first child, and they called him William Joseph. His birth was recorded under two variations of his father’s name, Ah Lum and Lumb Liu. At the age of seven, William left Australia for his father’s hometown in Taishan, China with his younger brother, Charles Frederick Francis, who had been born in 1895 (see Image 33). There they lived with relatives of their father, and William took on a new name, Liu Kwong-Fook (Liu Guangfu), which meant ‘Bright and Happy’. Charles became Kwong-Wing (Guangrong), which meant ‘Bright and Sunshine’. When William returned to Australia in 1908 and used his birth certificate to prove his Australian domicile, a CEDT was issued to him in the name William Joseph Lumb Liu. That same year, he resumed his schooling in Sydney at the Christ Church St Laurence school, where he enrolled as William J Lumb. After finishing school and finding work, in 1916 William married Mabel Quoy, the daughter of Sydney businessman Gilbert Yet Ting Quoy and his Anglo-Chinese wife Edith (née Ah Gin). The name he used at the time of his marriage was William Lumb Liu. When he published a small book, entitled *Chinese-Australian Trading Relationships*, in 1932 it was under the name William JL Liu,¹ and by the time of his death in 1983, the name by which he was known to all those in the English-speaking community in Australia had been firmly established as William Liu. With those who spoke Chinese, he remained Liu Kwong-Fook.²


² Details of William Liu’s life and family have been taken from the following sources: NSW BDM, Births 1893/421, 1895/9870; Marriages 1896/4267, 1916/475; Deaths 1912/4310, 1936/12182; Liu, *5th Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations*; Liu, Conversation with William Liu; *Golden Threads*, database entry on Ruby Fay, URL: amol.org.au/goldenthreads/collections; David Walker and John Ingleson,
Section 4: Belonging

Image 33. William Liu (left), his father and younger brother, Charles, shortly before the boys went to China in 1900
Reproduced in Neville Meaney (ed.), Under New Heavens: Cultural Transmission and the Making of Australia

The many variations of William Liu’s name over his lifetime were typical for Anglo-Chinese Australians. Theirs were names which shifted and changed, across time and between communities, as Anglo-Chinese Australians themselves crossed between social groups in Australia and China. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the personal names of Anglo-Chinese Australians, using them to suggest the complexity

of mixed race, cross-cultural identity. Names are distinct marker of identity which tie people to particular family and social groups and as a representation of social identity, they establish racial, ethnic and family belonging. The names of Anglo-Chinese Australians reflected not only the dual ethnic and cultural heritage of Anglo-Chinese Australians, but the way in which they changed also demonstrated the strategic decisions Anglo-Chinese Australians made about who they were going to ‘be’—whether they were ‘Chinese’, ‘white’, ‘Australian’, or ‘Chinese Australian’. In this chapter I aim to show some of the ambiguities and challenges that confronted Anglo-Chinese Australians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as they negotiated a range of legal, cultural and social boundaries. Their identities shifted and swayed, both from choice and from necessity in seeking to find a place to belong between two very different communities that could each be highly prejudiced against those of mixed race.

White mothers and Chinese fathers like Florence Thomas and Liu Hee-Lum first chose the names by which their mixed race children would be known, yet this was but one part of their role in the development of their children’s sense of self, of who they were and how they fitted in with the communities around them. I will argue in this chapter that white mothers had a particularly influential role in the development of the racial and cultural identity of their children and families, and that through the upbringing they provided, their mixed race children gained a sense of their belonging to the (white) Australian community. I will go on to suggest, however, that Chinese fathers also played a role in fostering a sense of Chinese identity in their Anglo-Chinese children, endeavouring to pass on Chinese language and cultural knowledge to their offspring in the face of a number of linguistic, social and cultural obstacles.

Names
The one part of William Liu’s English name that remained constant over his life was his first name; it may have been shortened to Bill or Billy, but from birth to death he remained William. This name, like those of most other Anglo-Chinese Australians, reflected the heritage of his Anglo-Australian mother. For instance, Ellen Lupton and Sheong Foon Nomchong (married in Braidwood in 1881) named their children William James, Walter Rhys, Frederick Vaughan and Elsie Rebecca. Charlotte Birch
and Joseph Ah You (married in Young in 1882) had two sons, James and Robert and five daughters—Rose Ann, Alice, Sarah, Violet and Daisea. Among the ten children of Julia Hoolahan and George Keong (married in Sydney in 1856) were Mary, Patrick Benjamin, Bridget and Anna Maria. Only in much rarer instances were Anglo-Chinese children registered or christened with Chinese first names.\(^3\) The three children of Dang Ah Chee and Margaret Crothers (married in Tumut in 1876), were baptised into the Presbyterian Church at Tumut as Ting Yang Ting, Lan Hoy and Lan Ho\(^4\). The sons of Henry Lamson and Mary Ann Morby (married in Braidwood in 1864) were called William Waling, James Wah Chin and Joseph Waa Toy, their Chinese middle names including ‘Wah’ (possibly hua meaning ‘China’) as their generation name.\(^5\) The sons of Kong Sing and Ellen Mann (married in Sydney in 1866) were given Chinese names, Oppo and Ah Ho, while their sisters were given English ones—Edith, Justine and Una.\(^6\) These few examples of Chinese names are more the exception than the rule, however.

For the majority of Anglo-Chinese Australians, the part of their names which marked them as ‘Chinese’ to the white community was the surname they took from their fathers. Ann Waltner has written of how within the Chinese kinship system, ‘kinship was passed through the male line and … the marker of this was surname.’\(^7\) A man’s surname linked him not only to his father and paternal ancestors, but to a larger network of uncles, cousins and nephews. A woman’s surname was important in

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3 It was much more common for children with two Chinese parents to be registered with Chinese first names. For example, Moye Chan, born in 1876 to Yen Tah and Tue Sen in Sydney (NSW BDM, Birth 1876/1024) and Fong Chiek, born in Sydney in 1883 to Hock Ting and Quin Doy (NSW BDM, Birth 1883/2479).

4 Records of the Presbyterian Church, Tumut, held by the Tumut Family History Group, Tumut NSW. Dang Ah Chee donated money for creation of the baptismal font in 1883, and it is likely that this was done for the baptism of his own children. These births are also listed in the NSW BDM, with variations in the spelling of the names: Ting Yang Ting Ah Chee or Crothers (NSW BDM, Birth 1876/21119), Lan Owee Ah Chee (NSW BDM, Birth 1878/23064) and Sam Ho Ah Chee (NSW BDM, Birth 1879/24342).


6 NSW BDM, Births 1867/13524; 1869/15563; 1874/6504; 1880/24915; 1883/21638; NAA: SP42/1, B1905/1616 and B1907/1250; ST84/1, 1907/251-260; SP726/2; Weidemann, Holding Its Own, pp. 216-7.

identifying her clan group—because while she was only considered part of that family until marriage, there were strong prohibitions against marrying within the same surname group. A woman from the Chan family should not marry another Chan, for example, nor should a woman from the Wong family marry another Wong.

In English-speaking countries like Australia, the surnames by which many Chinese men and women were known were different from their ‘real’ Chinese surnames. Changes could be deliberate or accidental. In Australia, some Chinese men took on English surnames (e.g. John Peters), particularly those who arrived early to the colonies and those who became Christians. Others took on variations of their Chinese names which sounded English (e.g. Qwan to Cohen). Some adopted, or had adopted for them, the name of the family business as a surname (e.g. the Shun Wah family).

But probably the most common change that happened to Chinese surnames in English-speaking communities was that they in fact disappeared altogether and were replaced by anglicised versions of given names. Because of the different name order in Chinese (surname then given names) and English (given names then surname), Chinese given names were frequently assumed to be surnames. As William Liu described in John Sleeman’s White China in 1933:

For instance, a Chinese, Chun Sam Kee, comes to Australia or America, and his child becomes known as Charles Sam Kee, when in reality his surname is Chun and he should become known as Charles Chun.

In his own case, as mentioned above, William Liu’s father Liu Hee-Lum became known as Lumb Liu or Ah Lum, and his children consequently became known by various permutations of these names—Ah Lum, Lumb, Lumb Liu and Liu. These given-names-turned-surnames were often then anglicised as well, so that Kin became King, Hun became Hunt and Ah Chee became Archie. These name changes were not

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9 See Hales, Between two cultures.


11 Sleeman, White China, p. 325.
without consequence. William Liu commented that it was only by ‘keeping the correct Chinese surname [that] the marriage laws of the Chinese can be kept inviolate, and the family name is perpetuated’. The dominant use of ‘invented’ Chinese surnames in the English-speaking community in which Anglo-Chinese Australians primarily were raised meant that in many families the ‘real’ surnames were seldom used. As children born in Australia took on these new names, they gradually became the only name by which families were known and in many cases ‘real’ Chinese names eventually became lost to subsequent generations. One example of this is the extended Dang family who lived in the Tumut and Gundagai areas of southern NSW in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The descendants of Dang Leng Chee (also known as Dang Ah Chee) became known by the surname Ah Chee or Chee, those of his nephew Dang Quong Wing became the Wings and those of another relative, Teung (Dang) Doon became the Doon family.

Within Australian Chinese-speaking communities, Chinese surnames did continue to be known and used. The Australian Chinese-language newspapers, the Tung Wah Times and the Chinese Australian Herald, for example, used Chinese names, demonstrating how those involved with the Chinese community did not always ‘forget’ or abandon their Chinese names for newly invented or adopted English ones. Instead they could switch between the two, depending on which community they were in. When Anglo-Chinese families returned to China, they used their Chinese names and it was sometimes during a visit to China that overseas-born children were given Chinese names, which were then recorded in the family jiapu (genealogy) held in the ancestral village. Alice and Eric Wer Lee (children of George Wer Lee and Beatrice Nicholson, married in Melbourne in 1899), for example, were known to their Chinese family as Wong Fung Lan (Huang Fenglan) and Wong Fung Chai (Huang

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12 Sleeman, White China, p. 325.

13 Correspondence with Josephine Oh, Wooloowin QLD, October 2004. Another example is that of the three Louie brothers whose descendants came to be known by the surnames Ping Kee, Fay and Lun. Wilton, Golden Threads, pp. 49-50.
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Fengxiao) after they went to live in Zengcheng with their father’s Chinese wife in 1906.14

William Liu commented that he was ‘William Liu in Sydney, Kwong-Fook in China’.15 He was one of many Anglo-Chinese Australians who used different names in different circumstances and at different times. Time spent in China was one circumstance in which children and adults took on their alternative ‘Chinese’ identity, but other personal and familial situations within Australia also saw them change names and with the name, identity. For example, Anglo-Chinese children born out of wedlock were commonly given their mothers’ surnames at birth, but when their parents lived together as a family or the children were identified with their father (and his Chineseness) in some other way, they could use his surname. Records of the Sydney Collector of Customs show the differing ways Anglo-Chinese Australians used the surnames of their parents. Ormond Atkinson (born in Paddington in 1897 to Marion Atkinson) used his mother’s surname, the name his birth was registered under (see Image 34), as did his younger sister Mona until her marriage to Leong Wah Jang.16 Walter Reece and Harry Harrison were another two Anglo-Chinese who appear to have used their maternal surnames.17 In contrast, other children born out of wedlock appear in the records using their father’s surname. Ethel May, born to Charlotte Brown in 1901, used the name Quinn Sing when she travelled to China in 1914. Ellen, born in Inverell in 1878 to Mary Ann Williamson and Too Tong, appears in the records as both Ellen Williamson and Ellen Too Tong, as well as under her married name Mrs Mon Howe.18 Similarly, Charles Albert, the son of Frances Allen and Charley Gum born in 1896 in Sydney, who lived with his mother until he went to China when he was twelve, was known as both Charles Allen and Charles Gum.19

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15 Liu, Conversation with William Liu, transcript p. 14,905.
16 On Ormond Atkinson see NAA: SP115/1, Box 18 [Aki Maru 5 June 1916]. On Mona Atkinson see NAA: SP115/1, Box 45A [Marama 11 March 1924] and SP42/1, C22/2328.
17 NAA: ST84/1, 06-333 (Walter Reece); SP115/1, Taiyuan 4 July 1919 (Harry Harrison).
18 NAA: SP726/2. Elizabeth Wiedemann states that Too Tong also changed his name to Williamson. Wiedemann, Holding Its Own, p. 34 and 216.
19 NAA: A1, 1911/13854 and ST84/1, Book 22, Nos 31 and 46.
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Image 34. Ormond Atkinson used the surname of his mother, the name under which his birth was registered

Atkinson used his birth certificate to return to Australia after trips to China in 1913 and 1915.
NAA: SP115/1, Box 18 [Aki Maru 5/6/1916]

There are several possible reasons for the differing use of English and Chinese surnames. The use of Chinese surnames by Customs officials may have been an indication of their privileging of a Chinese identity over an Australian one because Anglo-Chinese Australians were having a piece of racially-based legislation applied to them. Those who were known by their maternal surnames may not have known their fathers or had grown up separate from them, meaning that they were never connected to his name, while those who used paternal surnames were demonstrating their belonging to a family unit complete with father, even if that father were Chinese.

By taking the names of their fathers in spite of their ‘Chineseness’, they demonstrated their family connections, something that was perhaps particularly important to those born out of wedlock. Similarly, Anglo-Chinese children who were adopted or fostered took on the surnames of their new families; white women who were not married adopted the surnames of their Chinese partners, as did white children whose mothers entered relationships with Chinese men. A perhaps more common situation however was where Anglo-Chinese children took on the name of white stepfathers. The children of Ellen Lupton and Sheong Foon Nomchong, for example, took the name of their white stepfather James Augustus Mitchell when their widowed mother
remarried and the family moved from the Braidwood area of NSW to Western Australia. Likewise, when Margaret Fong, whose story was told in the Introduction, remarried to Millington Clarke, all but one of her Anglo-Chinese sons took on his surname. The one who remained a Fong, Harry, retained his father’s name with the view that ‘if you can’t change your appearance there is no point changing your name’.

This discussion has suggested how the names used by Anglo-Chinese Australians were not necessarily static. They could use the surnames of their white mothers, the anglicised surnames of their Chinese fathers or Chinese names. Some were known by only one of these names, while others used English and Chinese names in different contexts, switching back and forth as they crossed cultural and linguistic boundaries. They used these names to demonstrate belonging to family and community. The names used by Anglo-Chinese Australians were but one part of a much more complex personal identity which developed throughout their childhoods and as adults; appearance was also used by others to identify and place Anglo-Chinese in relation to the white or Chinese communities and in relation to themselves.

**Appearance**

The bodies of Anglo-Chinese were often an irrefutable marker of their mixed race. Dark eyes and hair and Asian facial features were the most immediate way in which the white community identified them as ‘Other’. Likewise, features such as fair colouring and prominent noses marked Anglo-Chinese as foreign in the eyes of the Chinese. Physical appearance and external identification of ‘whiteness’ or ‘Chineseness’ had important implications for the ways Anglo-Chinese Australians were treated. Like other Chinese Australians, the treatment they received from white Australians was tied to the particular cultural meanings of being ‘Chinese’ and those whose faces marked them more obviously as ‘Chinese’ may have wished to be different, as Anglo-Chinese Canadian writer Winnifred Eaton did:

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20 Information on the Nomchong family held by the Braidwood and District Historical Society, Braidwood NSW.

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I myself was dark and foreign-looking, but the blond type I adored. In all my most fanciful imaginings and dreams I had always been golden-haired and blue-eyed.22

Other Anglo-Chinese invented new identities for themselves which suggested reasons for their colouring other than Chinese blood. Barbara Moore has written, for example, of the story told by Agnes Mary Ah Kin, the daughter of George and Mary Ah Kin of Craigie:

Agnes Mary had always told the family that she and her sister, Margaret, had run away from foster parents who lived on a farm near Wellington, New Zealand. The sisters never spoke about their life before coming to Sydney. Both being dark the family presumed they may have had some Maori blood and this was why they never spoke of their childhood.23

The way in which appearance was central to Anglo-Chinese Australians’ identification by the white community is evident in the story of Walter Way, an Anglo-Chinese boy who was adopted by a Chinese man and taken to China in 1904. In 1911, a boy claiming to be Walter arrived in Sydney to take up residence there. The boy’s identity was questioned and he was eventually found by authorities not to be Australian-born Walter Way at all, and so was deported. Whether he was or was not really Walter is not the point of discussion here, however; what is most interesting about the story is the way in which physical appearance was used by authorities in determining his identity. The boy had been met by Walter’s married sister, Florence Lamont, and a friend, Elizabeth Young, and authorities used differences in physical features of the boy and Florence to determine whether his claim was genuine or not.

Despite positive identification by both Florence Lamont and Elizabeth Young, the authorities were not convinced of his identity because he looked too different from his supposed sister and from photographs taken of Walter at age four before he left for China. In a letter to the Department of External Affairs in Melbourne, the Sydney


Collector of Customs explained how he also used skin colour as a basis for his judgement: Florence Lamont was ‘fair enough to pass for a woman of pure white blood, and a younger sister of Mrs Lamont is almost as fair, while the boy is quite Chinese in complexion and general appearance’. He also noted, however, that he had been told that Chinese girls often had fairer complexions than their brothers. Despite this and an acknowledgment that the boy in fact had a ‘striking likeness in profile’ with Florence’s younger sister, and a scar that had been noted in 1904 was still present on the boy’s head, the Collector of Customs was still not convinced.  

The comment that Florence Lamont was ‘fair enough to pass for a woman of pure white blood’ is telling, because this is precisely what many Anglo-Chinese Australians did – they passed as white. If their features and skin and hair were suitably European in colouring, they could mix in white society and, whether on purpose or by accident, not have their ‘coloured’ blood identified. Such a process of passing has been re-evaluated in the context of Aboriginal Australia. Darlene Johnson has written that passing ‘can be read as a positive cultural construction of acting out identity at different moments’. She further states that:

> the experience of ‘passing’ can be understood as a refusal to adopt either a hybrid identity or a strict dichotomy between a white identity or an Aboriginal one. The concept of ‘passing’ is more open, more complex and inherently unstable. It is used at moments strategically to achieve certain goals or aims and desires as a performance of identity.  

Rather than viewing passing as white as a denial or rejection of a ‘Chinese’ identity, the use of ‘whiteness’ by Anglo-Chinese Australians can be seen as a strategic tool in negotiating the racial boundaries of white Australia. Carole Tan has argued that Chinese-Australians were marked as a target for racism because of ‘their hypervisibility within white Australian society through the ineradicable markers of

24 NAA: SP42/1, C12/1298. Since I first viewed this file in the NAA Sydney office, it has apparently been misplaced. National Archives staff were unable to locate it for me in August 2004.

“Chineseness” carried in the body’ but in certain situations Anglo-Chinese Australians were able to use their more ‘ambiguous’ appearance to avoid this racist discrimination. They could use their more European appearance, together with other demonstrations of a white identity such as language and cultural knowledge, to live as ‘white’ in the white community. This passing enabled Anglo-Chinese Australians to later ‘forget’ their Chinese heritage if they married into the white community, thereby erasing ‘Chineseness’ from their descendants. Anglo-Chinese Australians primarily dressed in Western-style clothes, but there are numbers of photographs which show them dressed in Chinese outfits, in Chinese settings or with Chinese accoutrements (see Images 35 and 36). The photographs suggest that Anglo-Chinese could, through the changing of their clothing, assert a Chinese identity or at least acknowledge their Chinese cultural heritage. It is likely, however, that this was more for fun than anything else, perhaps a form of Orientalist dressing up for the camera in the way that white artists and their models did. To ‘really’ wear Chinese clothes would have immediately marked Anglo-Chinese Australians as ‘Other’, highlighting their difference, something which occurred where Chinese in the colony did wear traditional clothing.

White mothers and Chinese fathers and the family culture they created in their homes, together with those of the wider communities in which they lived, contributed to the development of this sense of being and belonging. The next part of this chapter will consider the ways in which white mothers and Chinese fathers took on the task of raising their mixed race children and the role they played in the formation of their identity.


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Image 35. Alexander James Ahpoo, son of James Ahpoo and Elizabeth Henault, born in Victoria in 1865

Image 36. Dorothy Chinn and Mrs Amy Moo Tong Young (left) playing Chinese instruments
This Amy Moo Tong Young was Anglo-Chinese, and it is likely that she is the same person as Kathleen Spence Ah Lum, the adopted daughter of James Ah Lum, who travelled to China in 1911.
Frank Chinn Collection, Chinese Museum, Melbourne
White mothers

White reactions to white women as mothers of Anglo-Chinese children varied, but the overwhelming public discourse about such women was less than complimentary. As the nineteenth-century progressed, fears concerning the decline in the birthrate and the future of the Australian race and nation emerged, culminating in the holding of the Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birthrate in NSW in 1903 to investigate the situation.\(^\text{28}\) The Royal Commission found that women who were choosing to limit the size of their families, through contraception and abortion, were placing their own ‘selfish needs’ above those of their children and more importantly those of their country. While little was directly said about white mothers of non-white children in this and other similar inquiries and reports, the nationalist and racial framework of the discussions about the declining birthrate made it clear that white mothers of non-white children were certainly not populating Australia with the kind of children imagined in the minds of most. As Rosemary Pringle has written, the anxiety over the declining birthrate was:

> based less on the supposed requirements of economic growth than on the threat of Asian fertility and the need to prepare for the inevitable invasion of Asian hordes. A high birth rate was required to provide cannon fodder, to maintain racial purity by ensuring that the fittest strains would survive, and to maintain a superior morality through the emphasis on family and religious values…\(^\text{29}\)

The idea that it was only white children who were valued by the new nation was more clearly articulated when the first child welfare payment, the maternity allowance, was introduced in 1912. ‘Asiatics’ were excluded from receiving these payments and mothers had to declare that they were not ‘Asiatic’ or of Aboriginal or Pacific Islander background when applying to the government for the payment.\(^\text{30}\)

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\(^{30}\) The term ‘Asiatic’ was a racial category and did not refer to birthplace, so mothers who were ‘Asiatic’, regardless of where they were born, were not granted the maternity allowance. See Tom Clarke and Brian Galligan, “‘Aboriginal native’ and the institutional construction of the Australian citizen 1901—1948”, Australian Historical Studies, vol. 26, no. 105, October 1995, p. 528. For an example of the maternity allowance claim form, see NAA: A1317, A2710.
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How the white mothers of mixed race children fared under the regulations needs further research, but an index book to maternity allowance matters between 1915 and 1939 from the Pensions and Maternity Allowances Office suggests that cases of part-Chinese mothers and of white mothers with ‘Asiatic’ husbands were of concern to those administering the maternity allowance.31

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia, Anglo-Chinese children were clear evidence of the ‘transgressions’ of the white mother, much in the same way that illegitimate children were for single mothers. There was little room to deny the racial paternity of a half-Chinese child and mothers were perceived differently when the ethnicity of their children was known. One account published in 1882 told of the meeting of a young man and a beautiful young woman on a bus. The woman had a baby in her arms and the young man, being fond of children, struck up a conversation with her. He thought ‘such a pretty mother, must have a pretty child’, but as the bus stopped and the young woman alighted he ‘saw the thoroughly defined features of a young Mongolian, and turned away in disgust, muttering that the Chinese question required immediate legislation, and that he could not imagine how—’.32 To those who condemned intermarriage, mixed race children were evidence of an act which was, to them, supremely abhorrent.

In the face of a white community which problematised mixed race children and their white mothers, a white mother was central to defining her children’s place in the white Australian community and in the formation of her children’s identity. Childrearing was a female occupation and during children’s early years their primary adult contact, the person who shaped their sense of who they were, their image of the world around them and their understanding of their place in it, was their mother. She alone might have the power to make her Anglo-Chinese children ‘respectable’ through her own whiteness and community standing—overcoming the blemish of their paternity in the eyes of the white community—or, conversely, further transgressive behaviour could threaten both her own respectability and the

‘whiteness’ of her children. Many white mothers made particular efforts, therefore, to counter any unfavourable opinions of themselves and their children. It was often noted by white commentators that Anglo-Chinese children were well dressed, well behaved and well educated, even when their families had little money or lived in difficult circumstances. The *Port Denison Times*, for example, reported in 1878 that:

> those [Chinese] in Castlereagh-street, who are married to European women, have no disreputable homes, no broken hearted wives, no ragged children. Their houses are clean, with plants and flowers to the very door, and their children are almost the cleanest, the best dressed, and best fed in the neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{33}

This description suggests that white wives and mothers strove to overcome the stigma of colour by proving that their children were well cared for and, in essence, no different from white children. Recent studies of white mothers of non-white children have similarly noted the compensatory needs they felt in caring for their children, in order to assert the equality and normality of their children and to compensate for unfavourable community perceptions.\textsuperscript{34}

White mothers were cultural transmitters. Through raising and teaching their children in the home, they taught their Anglo-Chinese children their own culture and language and that of the wider white community around them.\textsuperscript{35} Most Anglo-Chinese children grew up speaking English as their first language because as small children they spent most of their time with their mothers or other white women such as grandmothers and aunts. Some white wives and mothers had Chinese language skills, but only rarely would Chinese have been the common language spoken between parents. In 1906 Wer Lee, owner of a Melbourne cabinet-making business and father of three Anglo-Chinese children, described the role his white wife had in

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\textsuperscript{33} *Port Denison Times*, 6 April 1878.

\textsuperscript{34} See, for example, Carmen Luke, ‘White women in interracial families: Reflections on hybridization, feminine identities, and racialized Othering’, *Feminist Issues*, vol. 14, no. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 49-72.

\textsuperscript{35} CY Choi suggested in his 1968 study of the Chinese community in Melbourne that a high rate of intermarriage among Australian-born part-Chinese, that is that few were choosing to marry back into the Chinese community, was because ‘having Australian mothers, their up-bringing and education have usually been oriented away from the Chinese community.’ Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement*, p. 103.
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the children’s language development. She was Australian and could not speak
Chinese and Wer Lee felt therefore that his son could not be taught Chinese properly
in Melbourne owing to his wife’s ‘ignorance’ of the language. Reinforcement of
English language came as Anglo-Chinese children attended mainstream Australian
schools where they learnt to read and write in English and studied the same subjects
and were taught the same values as white children.

Having a white mother meant that the parts of Chinese cultural practice traditionally
passed from the mother to her children—particularly to her daughters and daughters-
in-laws—would rarely have become part of Anglo-Chinese family life. This included
the preparation of food, both for everyday consumption and for festivals and rituals,
Chinese religious customs and other practices such as footbinding. A comment by
Herbert, the great-grandson of English-Australian woman Eliza Cross and her
Chinese-born husband Samuel Hand, suggests how Anglo maternal culture was
passed down from generation to generation. Eliza’s daughter and grand-daughter
(Herbert’s grandmother and mother) also married migrant Chinese men, so the
family was one that was more ‘Chinese’ than not. However, in Herbert’s words:

We were an ordinary Australian family, even if we had Chinese faces.
We ate Australian food—just what my mother had learned to cook
from her mother, who had learned from that Englishwoman, Eliza.

Eliza’s influence on the culture of her family was still felt three generations on, as her
English recipes became part of her ‘Chinese’ descendants tie to the ‘ordinary’ and
‘Australian’ way of life. Religion was another aspect of maternal culture that was
passed on to subsequent generations as white mothers taught their children their own
Christian beliefs and religious customs. There are no available figures for NSW, but
census figures for Victoria in 1891 and 1901 state that almost all ‘half-caste’ Chinese

36 Argus, 21 March 1906.

37 As well as reinforcing their belonging through learning the language and culture of white Australia,
schools, as Carole Tan has noted, could also be the place where Chinese-Australian children first

38 Quoted in June Duncan Owen, Mixed Matches: Interracial Marriage in Australia, University of New South
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were Christian, 91% and 96% respectively.\textsuperscript{39} Journalist John Plummer commented at around the same time, at the turn of the twentieth century, that the children of white mothers and Chinese fathers were ‘reared as believers in the truths of Christianity’.\textsuperscript{40}

**Maternal ties to whiteness**

The place of Anglo-Chinese children within the white community and the acceptance of belonging by that community was dependent to a very large degree on the protection and influence of their white mothers. If we recall from the previous chapter, for instance, Martin Brennan’s comments about Jah Kee Govey, the Anglo-Chinese boy who was denied attendance at school at Albury because of his queue, Brennan mention that his mother was a British subject. This fact seemed to make the boy’s treatment unjust and unacceptable in Brennan’s eyes.\textsuperscript{41} Mothers, secure in their own whiteness and status as native-born British subjects, could intervene with external authorities, such as white neighbours, teachers and the government, to gain the equal and fair treatment of their children. Evidence of such interventions, in the form of letters and petitions to authorities for example, suggests that without this assistance their children were more likely to be treated differently. Without the protection of a white mother, the child became much more ‘Chinese’, much more of the ‘Other’ in the eyes of authorities and of the white community more generally.

The way in which this occurred is evident in case files created in the administration of the Immigration Restriction Act by the NSW Collector of Customs in Sydney. Anglo-Chinese Australians, together with full-Chinese, leaving or arriving back into Australia after overseas trips came under control of the Act after 1901, as was discussed in Section 3. In the files of full-Chinese children, Chinese fathers appear to have made the applications for CEDTs, written letters and dealt with authorities, while Chinese mothers rarely appear (in some cases they were absent from Australia, in others presumably because they had little English or it was more appropriate for


\textsuperscript{40} John Plummer, ‘Federated Australia: The disappearing Chinaman’, Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 81, Mitchell Library, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{41} Brennan and Tart, *Reports Upon Chinese Camps*, p. 2.
their husbands to deal with white authorities).  With Anglo-Chinese children it is precisely the opposite—white mothers appear to have taken the responsibility for dealing with authorities instead of their husbands.

There are a number of possible reasons why white mothers of Anglo-Chinese children appear more often in the files than the children’s Chinese fathers. White mothers spoke fluent English and were probably more literate in English than their husbands (although some women were illiterate or only semi-literate and needed the services of others to write the letters for them). They were also likely to have a better understanding and comprehension of the system and process through which to apply. However, considering that Chinese fathers of full-Chinese children dealt with authorities, thereby demonstrating a knowledge of English and an understanding of the bureaucracy, there is another important reason behind white mothers’ active part in writing and petitioning in their children’s interests. They had reasonable fears that authorities would treat their children as ‘Chinese’ and not allow them to return home, particularly if the children were overseas for an extended period. These white women knew that their children had a better chance of being recognised as ‘Australian’ (and therefore of being allowed to land uninhibited) if the authorities knew that the children’s mothers were white. Authorities placed a deal of faith in the truthfulness and sincerity of white women making declarations on behalf of their Anglo-Chinese children.

Intervention by white (and Australian-born Anglo-Chinese) mothers took a variety of forms. One principal way was by writing to authorities asking for CEDTs for their children before the children departed Australia. When George Joy of Alexandria planned to take his two-year-old son with him to China in 1903, to visit family and possibly to remain there for a more extended period, his wife wrote to Customs officials on his behalf after he had gone to China unaware of the paperwork required to allow him to return to Australia. Florrie, ‘a European woman who has been living amongst the Chinese for years past’ in the words of one policeman, knew him as a friend of other Chinese friends of hers. They had asked her to communicate with the authorities on his behalf as he was uneducated and did not speak English very well. NAA: SP42/1, C13/1121.

42 See, for example, the files of Sam Williams (NAA: SP 42/1, C13/2696) and Kee Lewis (NAA: SP 42/1, C1903/2609).

43 This was the situation in the 1913 case of one Ah Mee of Roseville in Sydney’s north. A white woman, Florrie White, wrote to Customs officials on Ah Mee’s behalf after he had gone to China unaware of the paperwork required to allow him to return to Australia. Florrie, ‘a European woman who has been living amongst the Chinese for years past’ in the words of one policeman, knew him as a friend of other Chinese friends of hers. They had asked her to communicate with the authorities on his behalf as he was uneducated and did not speak English very well. NAA: SP42/1, C13/1121.
officials in Sydney to ask for a return permit to be granted for her ‘little baby’. 44
Similarly, Mrs Jane Flood Sam of West Wyalong wrote to Customs officials in Sydney
stating that she gave permission for her son Percy to visit China with his father in
1915 and requesting that he be granted a CEDT. 45
When Anglo-Chinese children encountered difficulties overseas, their white mothers
were particularly determined in their attempts to elicit help from Australian
authorities. Frances Allen wrote to the Prime Minister, the Department of External
Affairs and finally the British Consul-General at Canton in efforts to have her son
Charles repatriated from Shekki, where he was living with his father’s relatives in
1911. Beatrice Wer Lee (whose ‘ignorance’ of the Chinese language was mentioned
earlier) went even further in her attempts to bring her son and daughter back from
Zengcheng where they were living with their father’s Chinese wife. She met
personally with the head of the Department of External Affairs to discuss the
situation, from whom the matter went to the Prime Minister, the Australian
Governor-General, the Governor of Hong Kong and finally the British Consul-
General at Canton. 46 Even Margaret Tart had cause to intervene on the behalf of her
son after he encountered difficulties because of his race during a visit to New Zealand
in 1911. 47 While the powers of Australian authorities to intervene in the cases of
Anglo-Chinese children in China was limited (because in China the children were
legally Chinese despite their status as British subjects in Australia), the officials who
dealt with these cases seemed to express some limited sympathy for the women.
White mothers were also important in identifying children who had returned from
overseas trips. Customs officials were suspicious of the fraudulent use of Australian
birth certificates and CEDTs by Chinese wanting to enter the country illegally and

44 NAA: SP42/1, C1904/1694. George Joy and Mary Ah Sheah had married in 1898 (NSW BDM, Marriage
1898/2692) and their son (Thomas) Henry was born in 1902 (NSW BDM, Birth 1902/8089).
45 NAA: SP42/1, C15/4032; SP115/1, Box 16 [St Albans 23 October 1915 Part 3]. Mrs Flood Sam also
wrote to authorities concerning her sons fighting in the Australian armed forces in World War I. See,
NAA: B2455, SAM H H.
46 See Kate Bagnall, ‘ “I am almost heartbroken about him”: Stories of Australian mothers’ separation
from their “Chinese” children’, History Australia, vol. 1, no. 1, December 2003, pp. 30-40 for more detail
on the cases of the Charles Allen Gum and the Wer Lee children.
47 Tung Wah Times, 28 January 1911 and NAA: SP42/1, C11/397. Quong Tart by this time had died.
they took great measures to ensure a match between the document and the person arriving with it. This situation could be complicated in the case of children who had grown and changed in appearance in the time they had been overseas. White mothers were called upon to identify their children on their return to Australia, particularly those whose identity was called into question by authorities. Australian officials placed a good deal of faith in their testimony, as they did in the opinion of white men who gave character references to Chinese. Because appearance and racial status were conceived of being representative of a deeper condition, Chinese men were rarely asked to identify Anglo-Chinese on their landing—uncles, neighbours and business partners who were Chinese were viewed with much greater suspicion than were white mothers, aunts or family friends. The testimony of Chinese men was generally only acceptable to Australian officials when they were known to be ‘respectable’ and settled with business and family in Australia.  

In February 1902, a letter arrived at the Sydney Customs House from a Wollongong man, Mr Churchin, who claimed knowledge of an incident involving the fraudulent entry of a Chinese girl into Sydney the previous year. The story as told by Mr Churchin was this:

This affair happened some time in June 1901 when one Paul ‘Kee Chong’ returned from China with part of his family to wit [sic] three or four Boys and one girl, the girl supposed to be one of his family. This girl was no such thing as she has since become the wife of T. Kee Chong Brother of the man who brought her out. These are facts who the Kee Chongs are: They are a firm of storekeepers in Nerrigundah via Moruya. The photoes [sic] of Kee Chongs girls can be obtained in Moruya. He left his own daughter and on[e] servant in China. They have plenty of money and prosperity.

\[\text{In the United States, too, those who were part-white were trusted above those who were full-Chinese. In 1903, the murder of a Chinese named Wong Yuk Chung precipitated a raid by US Marshals and Boston police on that city’s Chinatown. Hundreds of Chinese men who could not produce identification were arrested. One suspect, who spoke ‘impeccable English’ and whose face ‘had unmistakable evidence of Caucasian blood and good breeding’ was released primarily due to the belief the authorities placed in him from his appearance and speech. Alan Rogers, ‘Chinese and the campaign to abolish capital punishment in Massachusetts, 1870–1914’, Journal of American Ethnic History, vol. 18, no. 2, Winter 1999, pp. 37-72.}\]
At the time of their landing in Sydney, Kee Chong had produced his own NSW naturalisation certificate and birth certificates for the four boys and the one girl. Collector of Customs Donohoe stated that he ‘had a doubt at the time re the identity of the girl and would not sanction her landing without proof that it was his daughter’. As Kee Chong’s white English wife was in Sydney, Donohoe requested that she be summoned to the ship to identify the daughter, which she did the following day. Donohoe continued: ‘She stated that the girl was her daughter and received her in such a manner as to leave little doubt that it was her daughter. I then permitted her [the daughter] to land as British Born Subject.’ Donohoe had met Mrs Kee Chong on her arrival from Hong Kong a little while before. We cannot know for certain whether Mrs Kee Chong was assisting her husband in bringing in a Chinese girl as wife for his brother or whether in fact the girl was who she claimed to be. What is important to note for this argument was the faith that Donohoe placed in the testimony of the white mother in allowing the girl to remain in Australia.49

In the absence of the white mother, if she were dead or had remained overseas for example, other (usually white) women could be called by Customs officials to identify returned Anglo-Chinese or to give statements in support of those who landed and were suspected of being prohibited immigrants. In April 1913, sixteen-year-old George Poy arrived back in Sydney, the city of his birth, as a crew member on the Canton River, a dredge which had been bought in Hong Kong by the Sydney Harbour Trust. The boat was to remain in NSW and George wished to do the same. He was one of three children born to Christina (née Nolan) and George Poy senior. His mother and younger brother had died in 1902, George senior had remarried in 1905 and the family had gone to China several years later. Customs officials took statements from two women to confirm George’s identity on his arrival in Sydney. One was his white stepmother’s sister, Mrs Milham, and the other was Mrs Jane Yee, a friend with whom George had been communicating during his absence from Australia. On the testimony of these two women George was readmitted.50

49 NAA: SP42/1, C1902/656. See also NAA: SP11/28, B1924/3564 for copies of the birth certificate and re-entry certificate of Paul Kee Chong’s eldest son, Arthur Philip.

50 NAA: SP42/1, C13/1890.
These examples suggest the way in which the ‘whiteness’ or ‘Australianness’ of Anglo-Chinese children was tied to their white mothers or other white relatives. These mothers strove to ensure that their children were afforded the rights that their white blood and Australian birth should have made certain. They raised and educated their children to be members of the white community, keeping their homes and caring for their children in ways which demonstrated their family’s belonging to that community in spite of their race. White mothers were, therefore, their children’s primary link to an identity as ‘white’ as they were growing up and they played a dominant role in their children’s formation of identity as such.

Wang Gungwu has similarly considered the role of non-Chinese mothers in the cultural integration of mixed Chinese families in Indonesia, Malaysia and other parts of southeast Asia, describing the important part they played in the development of their children’s identity. In Malaysia and Indonesia, he argued, the ‘male chauvinistic’ and ‘strictly patriarchal’ culture of the Chinese combined with ‘male chauvinistic Islamic culture’ resulted in the preservation of a Chinese identity in the families of Chinese men and local women there. In other areas like the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, however, children much more followed the language and culture of their mothers because the local family cultures were more bilateral than patriarchal.51 The above discussion of the role of white mothers in Anglo-Chinese families in Australia suggests that this was also the case in Australia. The majority of cultural transmission in Anglo-Chinese families resulted from the contact Anglo-Chinese children had with their white mother, her family and the white, Christian, English-speaking community around them. Chinese fathers appear to have played a more limited role. The following part of this chapter, then, will consider what role Chinese fathers did play in their families and households and whether they passed on their language and culture to their children.

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*Fàan gwái or Chinese?*

In ways similar to white Australians, the Chinese both in China and in overseas communities viewed Anglo-Chinese children as problematic. In the foreign concessions of nineteenth-century Shanghai and Canton, some relationships occurred between European men and Chinese women. Their mixed race children, in the words of Jerome Ch’en, ‘were the insoluble problem’ as they were unacceptable to both sides, a situation which led to social ostracism. Frank Dikötter has similarly noted how intermarriage between Chinese and foreigners was ‘inconceivable’ and ‘considered shameful for the individual and for the country’. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, a number of Chinese reformers proposed that such mixing of the Chinese and white races could be a means to improve the Chinese race—the idea of ‘mixing the race to preserve the race’. Yi Nai, for example, wrote:

> A union of two of the same kind produces few offspring. Marriages between people with the same surname have been forbidden throughout the ages. Westerners, too, say the children of consanguineous couples are often epileptics. That is why China has forbidden marriages between cousins. But, if yellows would mate with whites, the children they would bear would necessarily be big and strong, healthy, good-looking and intelligent.

These ideas of hybrid vigour were similar to those of Thomas Griffith Taylor, discussed in the previous chapter, and Chinese reactions to them were as disapproving as white responses to Griffith Taylor. The idea of racial mixing was abhorrent and illogical to most Chinese, who viewed foreigners with great suspicion. Foreigners were barbarians who were regarded as uncivilised and their ways of thinking, culture and religion were regarded as threatening to the Chinese people and nation.

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54 See Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, pp. 87-91.
56 See Section 3: Interactions, pp. 4-5.
Section 4: Belonging

To most Chinese the world was divided between those who were Chinese and those who were not—one could not be simultaneously Chinese and foreign. The place of mixed-race Chinese people, therefore, was difficult to ascribe but more often than not they, like their foreign mothers, were thought of as faan gwái or foreign ghosts.

William Liu recounted the story of how villagers perceived him and his brother on their return to their father’s Taishan village in 1900. (See Image 37.) He described how the villagers contemplated:

What was to be done with the two Farn Kwei Doi (foreign devils) if war came between the white man and the Chinese. They said that as we were half European we might turn against them. One young fellow said perhaps they should put the two brothers in a pig cage and dump them in the pond, and a lot of the others seemed to agree until an old man with a long beard said, ‘Yes, yes, you’re right. But what about their Chinese half?’ That stopped them short and so they gave up the idea.57

It was only after he swore in front of his Chinese school teacher and classmates to fight to overthrow the ruling Manchus in order to protect China from foreign domination (as the teacher stated had happened in Hong Kong), that William was considered ‘Chinese’:

Never again did I ever hear anybody there calling me Farn Kwei Doi, Foreign Devil Boy, well I never heard anybody so therefore I was fully accepted into the community like all the others, as if I was China born.58

Similarly, in 1908 Anglo-Chinese James Minahan (also known by his Chinese name, Ying Coon) recalled the reaction he received in his father’s ancestral village of Shek Quey Lee near Kongmoon, to which he went as a five year old in 1882. ‘The boys at school called me Ying Coon. They also called me foreign devil. I swore at them,’ he stated. At first life in China was somewhat difficult for Minahan—‘I cried very much when my father shaved my hair, and the people about called me the little foreign devil boy’, he said—but Minahan ended up spending twenty-six years in Shek Quey


Lee. Like William Liu, he was given a Chinese education and learned to speak Chinese like a local. His identity as faan gwei persisted, however. At Minahan’s 1908 trial as a prohibited immigrant, Melbourne Chinese who knew Minahan and his father from Shek Quey Lee, still referred to him as being a ‘foreign devil boy’.  

This view of Anglo-Chinese as ‘foreign’ was not only held by those who remained in China, distant from contact with Westerners. Chinese in communities overseas could be equally prejudiced against those not of pure Chinese blood. Anglo-Chinese Canadian Edith Eaton wrote in 1909, for instance:

Some little Chinese women whom I interview are very anxious to know whether I would marry a Chinaman. I do not answer No. They clap their hands delightedly, and assure me that the Chinese are much the finest and best of all men. They are, however, a little doubtful as to whether one could be persuaded to care for me, full-blooded Chinese people having a prejudice against the half-white.

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59 NAA: A10074, 1908/31.
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More recent American scholars have also noted that Asians in the United States unequivocally ‘did not want multiracial people of Asian ancestry, and they told them they could not be Asians’. 61

Part of what was worrying about Anglo-Chinese children to the Chinese was the erosion of Chinese sensibilities, the ‘loss’ of culture and traditions which often came with intermarriage and the raising of mixed race children by non-Chinese mothers. In Edith Eaton’s ‘The Wisdom of the New’, written in 1912, a Chinese woman living in America warned a newly arrived immigrant wife of the danger of Americanisation—her own son had married a white women, and his children passed their grandma on the street without recognition, an ultimately unfilial action which demonstrated the way in which Chinese culture and the Chinese family could be eroded through intermarriage. 62 Similar sentiments were behind a two-part article published in Sydney’s Tung Wah Times in 1907, which offered advice to Chinese men who married white women. It stated that if your wife was not Chinese, then your children would not be Chinese either. The main problem with this situation, it commented, was that the next generation would lose any sense of Chinese culture and customs and would not understand their filial responsibilities to obey and respect their fathers and to look after them in their old age. The only possible remedy for men who did choose to marry non-Chinese women was for them to take pains to educate their wives and children to understand the Chinese language, culture and customs. 63

The white community in Australia tended to see Anglo-Chinese as ‘Chinese’ because of their outward appearance, but belonging to the Chinese community and being recognised as Chinese by the Chinese was not merely dependent on having Chinese features. In 1900, YSW Way Lee, the nephew of well-known Sydney merchant Way Kee, wrote in the Register about ‘half-bred Chinese’ who had been appointed as


63 Tung Wah Times (Donghua bao), 14 and 21 September 1907.
missionaries to China.\footnote{YSW Way Lee, ‘Missionaries in China’, \textit{The Register}, 1900, p. 5 in NAA: A6, 1901/319.} These were men, he stated, who had ‘never been in China, and [did] not understand Chinese habits or language or Chinese education’. Way Lee saw a problem in appointing such ‘Chinese’ to convert ‘the Chinese literary man’. ‘To explain exactly what I mean’, he wrote, ‘how would the educated English people like an ignorant Chinaman to go to them and endeavour to convert them to his way of thinking’. The ‘kind-hearted [white] ladies and gentlemen’ who gave large sums of money to train such missionaries believed that Anglo-Chinese Christians could work productively among the Chinese in China because of their half-Chinese heredity, because to them they looked ‘Chinese’. For Way Lee, however, a Chinese face did not equate to being Chinese — this only came through Chinese habits, language and education. It was, perhaps, for this reason that many Anglo-Chinese chose to assume a place in the white community — to be Chinese meant not only to look Chinese but to behave that way as well, and having been raised by white mothers in white communities they may have lacked the cultural knowledge to be considered ‘Chinese’.

\section*{Chinese fathers}

Contradictory ideas about Chinese fathers were evident in nineteenth-century writings by white Australians. Some believed that Chinese men treated their children badly, both in China and overseas, and they used examples of practices such as infanticide and footbinding as evidence of the barbarity of the Chinese towards children. R Thomson wrote in 1888, for example, that the Chinese man:

\begin{quote}
... has no wife; but merely a toy or a slave — a thing to gratify his lusts or a creature to be silent and obey. If he has more children than he requires, he either kills them in infancy — a practice which is recognised by his Government — or he sells them into slavery without the slightest compunction.\footnote{R Thomson, \textit{Australian Nationalism: An Earnest Appeal to the Sons of Australia in Favour of the Federation and Independence of the States of Our Country}, pp. 116-8 in CMH Clark, \textit{Select Documents in Australian History 1851 – 1900}, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1955, p. 795.}
\end{quote}

Chinese men were also reputed to be sexually abusive towards children and neglectful of their own offspring. One particularly vicious comment on Chinese men
as fathers mentioned the increase in half-Chinese children in the Australian colonies, saying ‘the fathers of this hybrid progeny feel not the slightest compunction in abandoning them in all their helplessness; such is the practice in Canton, and in other mixed communities in China’. It continued with a rhyme ‘Piebald little “chows” we are; but where the deuce is our papa?’\textsuperscript{66} In contrast to these suggestions, others suggested that Chinese men were kind to children—many hawkers, for example, were known to spoil the offspring of their customers with little treats of sweets or fruit or other gifts—and, as mentioned above, some white commentators noted that the children of Chinese men were often better looked after than neighbouring white children.

The ways Chinese men formed families in Australia is a better demonstration of their attitude towards children than the observations of white commentators, however. Underlying Chinese thoughts on children and childhood was a belief in the importance of kinship and, in particular, on the continuation of lineage. Mencius wrote \textit{buxiao you san, wuhou wei da}—there are three ways to be unfilial, the worst of these is to have no children—an idea which underpinned the formation of families in southern Chinese society and which, therefore, spread to overseas Chinese communities. It was a man’s duty to his ancestors to have sons who would tend to his and their graves and perform the appropriate rituals each year. In cases where a husband and wife had no children of their own—a situation that was often encountered in families of men who had migrated overseas—other ways of bringing children, and particularly sons, into the family were considered. These included the taking of a concubine or second wife or the adoption of children.

In southern Australia, numbers of Chinese men became the male guardians or step-fathers of the children of their white partners. Some white women entered relationships with Chinese men when they were already pregnant or after they had children from previous relationships and their Chinese partners took on these children, raising them as their own. Dang Ah Chee, for example, promised to marry pregnant Margaret Crothers if the child she was bearing turned out to be a boy, even

\textsuperscript{66} Anon., \textit{Yellow Agony}, p. 16.
though the child was not his. Their son was born in 1876 and christened Ting Yang Ting in the Presbyterian Church, Tumut in 1883, the same year Margaret and Dang Ah Chee married. Billy Ah Pan’s partner Margaret Fulham had had ten children by four different white fathers before they formed a relationship together in 1863 and added three more children to the family. Children such as these grew up familiar with the Chinese and sometimes developed strong ties to their Chinese stepfathers, their communities and culture. Bill King, for example, was ‘white’ (his pregnant English mother had married Chinese William Ah King soon after she arrived in Australia from England in 1872), yet he was sent to China by his stepfather and after his return to Australia fluent in Chinese, he acted as an intermediary for the Chinese who worked on the King family’s market gardens on Sydney’s lower North Shore.

Edmund Fosbery had noted in 1878 that there were 38 white children living among the Chinese in NSW, and it is likely that most of these were the offspring of women who later took Chinese partners.

As well as becoming fathers to the children of their white partners, some Chinese men took in or adopted Anglo-Chinese, and in rarer instances, white children. Adoption had a long tradition in China and, as mentioned above, was used as a strategy in the management of lineages, to provide progeny to carry on the family line when a couple had no natural children or no children that survived infancy. Its lesser and secondary motivation was in providing a home to unwanted or abandoned children. In the home counties of overseas Chinese in southern China, adoption was common when a husband and wife were separated for long periods of time or when they were married by proxy (while the man was overseas) and no children were able to be born

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67 Correspondence with Josephine Oh, Wooloowin QLD, October 2004 (Dang Ah Chee family); Information on the Ah Chee family held by the Tumut Family History Group, Tumut NSW; NSW BDM, Birth 1876/21119, Marriage 1883/1.

68 Correspondence with Marlene Peters, Lane Cove NSW, August 1999.

69 Rannard, Market garden days. A similar case is that of Senator Thomas Bakhap, who developed strong affinities to the Chinese culture and community of his Chinese stepfather even though he was white. Bakhap is often described as being one of the first Australian members of parliament of Chinese descent. Adrienne Petty-Gao, The life of a white man adopted by a Chinese, unpublished paper given at the International Conference on Quong Tart and His Times, July 2004.

70 Fosbery, Information Respecting Chinese Resident in the Colony.
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to them.\footnote{Madeline Y Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882 – 1943*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000, pp. 121-3.} It is believed that Quong Tart’s mother, for example, married him to a local Chinese woman and adopted at least one son for him, probably the child of his elder brother, when it became apparent that he was not going to return permanently to his home in Taishan nor to marry there.\footnote{Mei Weiqiang, Mei Guangda’s (Quong Tart) family and his Chinese sensibility, unpublished paper given at the International Conference on Quong Tart and His Times, Powerhouse Museum, July 2004.}

In southern China, the aims of adoption were primarily to provide descendants for the paternal line and particular traditions surrounding the practice had developed, such as the tendency to adopt boys who were part of the same clan. In Australia, while the motivations for adoption were essentially the same, it was removed from strict tradition and functioned in more pragmatic ways. As Wolf and Huang have noted, ‘the kinship system was rigid in its concern for continuity, but very flexible about the means by which this was achieved’.\footnote{Arthur P Wolf and Chieh-shan Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845 – 1945*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1980, p. 222.} Some of the Chinese men who adopted Anglo-Chinese children in Australia had no wives or children of their own here, while others were married but childless. A smaller number of men had both wives and children in Australia, suggesting that the motivation in these cases was more to do with the welfare of the children. Most of the children who were taken in or adopted by Chinese men were illegitimate, abandoned, in state care or unable to be cared for by their natural parents.

*The Vagabond Papers* records the story of one Anglo-Chinese boy, Billy Ah Sing, who was adopted.\footnote{James, *The Vagabond Papers*, pp. 166-7.} When ‘the Vagabond’ encountered Billy, he was five years old and attending a ragged school in Melbourne. Billy’s mother was Irish and his father Chinese, a once-wealthy man who had lost his fortune and apparently with it his wife. Billy’s saviour was his ragged school teacher, Mr Ellis, who had come upon Billy ‘half-starved, dirty and miserable, clad only in a shirt’. Billy’s father, Ah Sing, was happy to be ‘relieved of the nominal control of his child’ and Mr Ellis took Billy to Mr Ah Goon, a wealthy man married to a white woman, who was ‘childless, and had a
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love for male children’. For Mr Ah Goon, adopting Billy provided him with the male child he desired but did not have.

Adoption in the southern colonies of Australia in the late nineteenth century was mostly a civil arrangement, as there was no formal adoption law. Adoptions were privately arranged through charitable organisations or personal contacts. Often they were informal arrangements, more ‘fostering’ than adoption as it is today, but sometimes steps were taken to make them legally binding, with legal papers drawn up to ensure that the parents would not later claim the adopted child back. Jan Kociumbas has noted that in the white community there was generally a reluctance to adopt without such legal ties because of fears that the child’s natural parents would reclaim them when they had reached an age to be of use. As noted in the previous chapter, some adoptions took place after Anglo-Chinese children had been placed in state care but others functioned outside the system operated by the NSW State Children’s Relief Board. Whereas the usual arrangement in the white community was for a woman or couple to adopt children, many single Chinese men or ‘married bachelors’ (men whose wives remained in China) adopted Anglo-Chinese children.

One legal adoption was that of Walter Francis Way. Walter was born in April 1898 at Bombala on the south coast of NSW to Chinese-born carpenter William Way Quong and NSW-born Elizabeth née Twigg, who had married in 1883. Elizabeth and William had a total of eight children, of whom Walter was the youngest. In around 1900, father William returned to China, leaving his children in the care of their mother and a friend named Yet Chong. In 1902, when Walter was about four years old, his mother died and apparently his father also died in China at around the same time. The children were left orphaned and the five youngest were placed in the care of their elder sister, Florence. In December 1902, Walter was formally adopted by Yet Chong. The adoption papers were drawn up by a Sydney solicitor and the legal

75 The Child Welfare Act 1923 was the first legislation in NSW specifically regarding adoption. Western Australia had first introduced adoption legislation in 1899, with NSW and the other states following in the 1920s. Jan Kociumbas, Australian Childhood: A History, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1997, p. 156.
76 Kociumbas, Children and society in New South Wales and Victoria, p. 94.
77 Details of Walter’s adoption, including the copy of the memorandum of adoption, are taken from NAA: SP42/1, C12/1298.
memorandum of agreement was signed by Yet Chong and Walter’s sister, Florence. (See Image 38.) In the memorandum Florence stated that she was no longer able to maintain and educate her youngest brother, not surprising considering she had four other younger siblings to care for. Yet Chong agreed to care for and educate Walter as if he was his own child. Two years after his adoption Walter Way left with his adopted father for China.

While adopting a child solved the problem of a lack of descendants, it also created the question of how to care for the child. The Chinese men who adopted children generally had sufficient money for their care and education, so the problem for those without wives in Australia was how they were to meet the everyday needs of the child, maintain a household and rear and educate the child, tasks which usually fell to a wife and mother. Yau Kong, the adopted father of a Frederick Wong Young (born in 1897) initially took his son to live with him in the Chinese Freemason’s Hall in Sydney but, finding this arrangement unsuitable, he sent Frederick back to family in China to be cared for.78 Other children were cared for by friends of their adoptive fathers. Sidney Ellis Johnson, born in 1888, was adopted by Chy Wong but given into the care of Fanny Cumines at the age of fifteen months. Sidney remained with Fanny and the rest of the Cumines family at their home in the Rocks until he was taken back to China by his adopted father at age eight.79

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79 NAA: SP42/1, C21/1102.
MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made this, eighth day of December in the year one thousand nine hundred and two BETWEEN FLORENCE WAY of Sydney in the State of New South Wales of the one part and YET CHONG of Sydney aforesaid of the other part WHERE A S the brother of the said Florence Way called Walter Francis Way now of the age of four and one-half years has by reason of the death of the mother been left in the charge of the said Florence Way who is not able to maintain and educate him AND WHERE A S the said YET CHONG has agreed to wholly adopt the said Walter Francis Way as his own child and to maintain rear and educate him NOW THIS AGREEMENT WITNESSETH that the said Florence Way doth put and place the said Walter Francis Way in the care and custody and control of the said Yet Chong in consideration of the said Yet Chong entering into the agreement hereinafter contained AND the said Florence Way hereby agrees with the said Yet Chong that she will not at any time hereafter attempt to interfere with or remove the said Walter Francis Way out of the custody and control of the said Yet Chong or assist any other person so to do AND the said Yet Chong hereby agrees with the said Florence Way that he will rear maintain and educate the said Walter Francis Way in the same manner as if he were his own child PROVIDED that if the said Florence Way should at any time claim the said child the said Yet Chong shall be entitled before delivering up the said child to claim all moneys expended by him in bringing up the said child. AS WITNESSE the hands of the said parties Armour.

Signed in my presence

Geo. Wallace.
SOLR.

Sydney.

Florence Way
Yet Chong.
In Australia, girls were also adopted by Chinese men. It was unusual in southern China, for girls to be adopted, as the usual practice was to find boys to take the place of natural sons in the paternal lineage. Exceptions to this did exist, for example in some regions where girls were adopted as a way of ‘calling in’ a son-in-law when they grew up, or as future daughters-in-law who would marry a natural son.\(^{80}\) Alice Maud Lett, for example, born in 1906 in Newtown, became the adopted daughter of Yee On and sailed with him to China in 1908.\(^{81}\) Pauline Ah Hee, born in Dubbo in 1894, was adopted by James Choy Hing and his wife in spite of their having two young children of their own; it is possible that young Pauline’s role in the family was something between daughter and servant, as she described her occupation as ‘housework with my adopted parents’ when she was twelve years old.\(^{82}\) Kathleen Mary Cecilia Spence, born in 1900, was legally adopted by Jim Ah Lum at the age of three months and was raised by his wife in Sydney until Kathleen went to China to live with Ah Lum’s mother and be educated in Chinese at the age of twelve. She returned to Australia a married woman in 1918.\(^{83}\) Pauline Ah Lum, William Liu’s little sister, was placed with the family of Wong Chee in Glen Innes after their mother became unable to care for her in 1900. She took the name Ruby Wong Chee, was raised as a member of the Wong Chee family and was taken back to China where her adopted father eventually arranged her marriage to Harry Fay. Pauline/Ruby returned with Harry to live in Inverell where he managed the Hong Yuen store.\(^{84}\)

Chan Kwok Bun has argued that the Chinese idea of childrearing was to train children in accordance with the traditions of the past because children were most important in a lineage sense. They were to ensure the continuity of one’s own life and that of one’s ancestors after death. They had a duty to commemorate dead family


\(^{81}\) NAA: SP726/2.

\(^{82}\) NAA: SP244/2, N1950/2/4918.

\(^{83}\) See NAA: SP42/1, C18/1150; A1, 1918/2070; SP115/1, Nikko Maru 5 Feb 1918; SP726/2.

\(^{84}\) SRNSW: CGS 13358, Dependent children registers, 1883—1923 (Pauline Ah Lum); *Golden Threads* database entry on Ruby Fay, URL: amol.org.au/goldenthreads/collections; Liu, Conversation with William Liu.
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members and to cater to their needs in the afterlife. It was important, therefore, that children were raised to internalise all the desirable and positive traits of the culture of the family. The question in the case of Anglo-Chinese families in Australia, however, was what ‘culture of the family’ meant. Considering the important, perhaps dominant role white mothers played in raising their children within their own Western culture, did Anglo-Chinese children gain any knowledge of their paternal culture and language, and develop any feeling of themselves being ‘Chinese’?

In a time when being different in Australia was difficult, and many Chinese migrants themselves were struggling to ‘fit in’ with the Anglo-Australian way of life, some Chinese fathers found that teaching their children Chinese language and culture was not worth the trouble. Perhaps these were men who had left China because they had been unhappy there, because they desired to live a different kind of life from the one they had had, or because they retained no close family ties in China. Such situations gave them little reason to pass on a sense of belonging to a culture that they too were abandoning or saw as irrelevant to their current and future life in Australia.

Other Chinese fathers, however, desired for their Anglo-Chinese children to grow up with knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture and language, and in particular, their rights and duties as part of their Chinese family (even if that family and the ancestral home were far distant). They wished their children to be raised and educated to know the Chinese language and to understand the ways in which the Chinese family and kinship system operated and their own filial obligations within that system. Chinese fathers, however, knew that growing up in Australia removed their children from their Chinese heritage and reduced their opportunities to gain a thorough and meaningful understanding of Chinese language, culture and religion. It was noted around the turn of the century that:

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Many [Chinese] have married white women, and their offspring are carefully educated, and reared as believers in the truths of Christianity. The father may celebrate the advent of the New Year with fireworks, beating of gongs, and the like, but the children regard these much in the same spirit as their white brothers and sisters regard the pagan holly and mistletoe at Christmastide. 87

This suggests that elements of Chinese cultural practice lost their deeper meaning to Anglo-Chinese offspring of Chinese men. Fireworks and clanging gongs could be fun to watch, but the Chinese believed that they also had a more significant role to play in protecting homes and families from misfortune by scaring away malevolent ghosts.

The understanding Anglo-Chinese Australians had of the Chinese language could be similarly patchy. Samuel Sarsin, one of the witnesses called before the 1891 Royal Commission into Alleged Chinese Gambling, sometimes worked as a Chinese interpreter, yet stated that he spoke Chinese only ‘a little’, ‘not fluently’, and that he usually associated with Europeans. 88 Sarsin was not unique in using his knowledge of Chinese to work as interpreters—Phillip and Nola Bramble have identified some other Anglo-Chinese interpreters in NSW as brothers William and Thomas Law, Horace Numm and Alfred Archie. 89 Other Anglo-Chinese found Chinese language skills useful in developing business or work opportunities in China. However, in such instances some found that their Chinese skills were not sufficiently good. For instance, Ohho Kong Sing, who had attended public school in Tingha, travelled to Hong Kong in 1905 to assist his brother in his legal practice until his brother’s Chinese was sufficiently fluent. 90 This suggests that language capabilities also differed between siblings raised in the one family. Kong Sing was later described as being ‘a successful barrister in Hong Kong’ by the Tingha Advocate. 91

88 RCACG, pp. 167-8.
90 NAA: SP42/1, C1905/1616.
91 Tingha Advocate, 1919, quoted in Wiedemann, Holding Its Own, pp. 216-7.
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In most Anglo-Chinese families, particularly those which did not retain close ties to the Chinese communities, Chinese language skills were rarely maintained after the second generation. Evidence suggests that numbers of children grew up with some knowledge of their father’s native tongue, particularly the ability to understand spoken Chinese, but they had little opportunity to speak or saw no use in maintaining such knowledge.\(^92\) A number of different Chinese dialects were spoken by the Chinese living in NSW, reflecting the different areas of southern China from which they came, including Zhongshan, Gaoyao, Dongguan, Taishan and Xinhui, as well as those who spoke Hakka and Hokkien or other dialects from other parts of China.\(^93\) On top of everything else, there may have been few other people who spoke their father’s dialect close to home and consequently only a limited need or occasion to speak Chinese.

Whether Anglo-Chinese Australians developed the cultural knowledge to ‘be Chinese’ was dependent on the maintenance of Chinese cultural practice by fathers themselves and on the attention they paid to educating their children in cultural and linguistic knowledge. As stated, childrearing was primarily the domain of women, but fathers could take an active part in ensuring that their children were taught to be Chinese and maintained elements of Chinese culture. Some fathers, for instance, kept their sons’ hair in a queue, presumably as they themselves did. Photographs on CEDTs and other identity documents from the early years of the twentieth century show boys and men with queues in various stages of growth, suggesting that they may have been grown when a return to China was planned. (See Image 39.)

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\(^{92}\) This situation was similarly faced by full-Chinese families. King Fong, born in Fiji in 1938, has lived in Australia since 1946. His Chinese-born wife, Kathy, proved invaluable to the family business because, in his words, “She can write Chinese and English which is a big help. My father could, but I’m not good on the script and uncle in Hong Kong can’t speak English.” Quoted in Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, p. 175.

\(^{93}\) See Wilton, *Golden Threads*, pp. 45-53 for a discussion of language and the Chinese in NSW.
The realisation that the cultural environment in Australia provided little chance for Anglo-Chinese children to be educated in the Chinese way or to learn to read and write Chinese fluently prompted Chinese fathers to send their Australian-born children back to China for education.94 There, children like William Liu lived among their Chinese relatives learning to speak Chinese and attended school where they were taught to read and write in the traditional Chinese manner. Chinese fathers in Australia were among those who sent remittances home to China to provide tutors and schools in their home districts, realising the centrality of language and education to belonging to the Chinese community both in China and in Australia. 95 On return to Australia, Anglo-Chinese children may have needed to return to English schooling and some had lost their English language skills. William Liu recalled that when he

94 For more on the experiences of Anglo-Chinese Australians in China, see Section 5: Connections.
returned to Australia from China as a teenager, he enrolled as a boarder at Wahroonga Boys College in northern Sydney:

... as I felt it was necessary to be living the Australian way of life with the fellow pupils, in order to become re-acclimatised, you see, to Australia.  

The way this education in both China and Australia facilitated passing between the cultures and countries can be seen in the life of Charles Chy Wong. Born in Sydney in 1887, Charles lived in China between the ages of five and nine, before returning to Australia where he attended the Christ Church Day School in Sydney for another four years. He then travelled to Hong Kong in 1903 at age sixteen to join his parents who were both resident there. He came back again to Sydney in 1907, remaining there until 1915 when he once more returned to China. His Customs file contains no record that he returned to Australia again. Letters in this file show that Charles was literate in English (see Image 38), and the time he spent in China suggests that he was also fluent in Chinese.

96 Liu, Conversation with William Liu, transcript p. 14,899.

97 Charles Reginald Chy Wong was in fact ‘three-quarter’ Chinese. His mother, Maria Looching, was born in Melbourne to a Chinese father and white mother, and his father Charles Chy Wong was a Hong Kong-born merchant in Sydney. His parents had married in Sydney in 1882. NAA: SP42/1, C15/5371.
Belonging where?

Shirley Fitzgerald’s history of the Chinese in Sydney, Red Tape, Gold Scissors, tells the story of Beryl Yow, the daughter of a Chinese father and Irish-Australian mother who was born in country NSW in 1913. A section titled ‘Neither one nor the other’, begins with these words of Yow’s:

I can remember walking down Sydney streets and the Chinese would say ‘Oh she’s a half-caste’, and then you’d hear the Australian people saying ‘Oh, she’s a half-caste’. 98

Yow’s words imply that neither the white nor the Chinese communities in NSW fully accepted or acknowledged that Anglo-Chinese belonged with them, that they were caught between the two groups without a place that really welcomed them. Being labelled ‘half-caste’, as Yow describes, suggests that they were allowed only an ambiguous and tenuous place within either community – that because they were not

belonging really Chinese, but they were also not really white, they were forever to be caught between two cultures, two communities and two identities. As discussed earlier in this thesis, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia was dominated by imagined racial and cultural boundaries. Anglo-Chinese Australians, by their very conception, were bound to both sides of these imagined boundaries, and both the white and Chinese communities were perplexed by the presence of people of mixed race. Yet in the face of these prejudices and difficulties, Anglo-Chinese Australians lived, worked, played, married and raised families as part of Australian communities. Which of these communities they identified with was dependent in part on the way in which they were raised. White mothers and Chinese fathers brought up their children with particular combinations of linguistic and cultural knowledge, which varied between families and even between siblings, and it was this knowledge—operating in combination with other markers of identity such as names and appearance—which contributed to their participation in and acceptance by one or both communities.

Familial and social contacts were important in the development of the identity of Anglo-Chinese children. The amount of contact which a family had with other Chinese families or a larger Chinese community affected the way in which children viewed the ‘Chinese’ as a group, and themselves as part (or not) of that group. Growing up away from contact with other Chinese meant that some, while being told by white Australia that they were ‘Chinese’, had no personal feeling of being Chinese or did not know what ‘being Chinese’ meant. To use an American example, Anglo-Chinese Canadian writer Edith Eaton, sister of Winnifred Eaton quoted above, described her first encounter at age six with a Chinese person other than her mother—two men with long queues sitting in a Chinese store. When Edith saw them, she recoiled in shock and asked her elder brother:

“Oh, Charlie,” I cry “Are we like that?”

“Well, we’re Chinese, and they’re Chinese, too, so we must be!”

Growing up with an ‘assimilated’ Presbyterian-educated Chinese mother and an English father, not knowing other ‘Chinese’ families, it was only with adulthood that
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Edith Eaton developed her ‘Chinese instincts’. In part, this Chinese identity developed because of the way others identified her as Chinese from her physical appearance.  

A number of Edith Eaton’s works of fiction dealt with the question and problem of identity and belonging for Anglo-Chinese Americans. In ‘Its Wavering Image’, the central character Pan, daughter of a Chinese father and now deceased white mother, lived unproblematically in San Francisco’s Chinatown with her father ‘until the white reporter Mark Carsner, with whom Pan falls in love, sets the woman into conflict with her identity and community by insisting that she must choose between being Chinese or white’. For many Anglo-Chinese Australians, as for the fictional Pan, the choice of ‘who to be’, Chinese or white, came with the choice of marriage partner. Sociologist Romanzo Adams noted that in Hawaii in the early decades of the twentieth century, the which way mixed Chinese-Hawaiians ‘leaned’ as adults was greatly dependent on their choice of marriage partner. If a Chinese-Hawaiian married a Hawaiian then the children would grow up in the Hawaiian culture, but if they married a Chinese the reverse would happen.  

Due to the small numbers of Chinese women in Australia, young Anglo-Chinese women were sought after as marriage partners by both migrant and Australian-born Chinese men. Some women married prominent men in the Chinese community and their children likewise found themselves part of that community. The wife of Sydney businessman Gilbert Yet Ting Quoy was Anglo-Chinese Edith Ah Gin who married him in 1896. Gilbert Quoy was, according to CF Yong, ‘a well-to-do produce merchant and a prominent figure in the New South Wales Chinese Chamber of Commerce’. Their daughter Mabel married William Liu. William Liu’s sister, known as Ruby Wong Chee by the time of her wedding, married store owner Harry

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99 Sui Sin Far [Edith Eaton], ‘Leaves from the mental portfolio of an Eurasian,’ Chinese America: History and Perspectives 1987, pp. 170 and 179.


101 Adams, Interracial Marriage in Hawaii, pp. 92-93.

102 NAA: SP42/1, C1903/10361; A1, 1903/7344; BP342/1, 950/623/1900.

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Fay of the Hong Yuen store in Inverell (see Image 41). The Fays were closely involved with the NSW Chinese community throughout their lives, running successful businesses which employed many Chinese, and sponsoring family, clan and village members to migrate to Australia.104

Image 41. Two photographs of Ruby Wong Chee and Harry Fay taken at the time of their wedding in China in 1916
Reproduced in Janis Wilton, Golden Threads

Other Anglo-Chinese women who returned to China as children, married there. Some came back to Australia with their husbands but others settled permanently in China. For an Anglo-Chinese woman, living in China or Hong Kong with a Chinese husband could be fraught with a different questioning of identity and belonging. In around 1900, Lillian Ah Gin (sister to Edith Ah Gin mentioned above), her Chinese husband, Jong Gutt, and their children left Sydney for Hong Kong where Jong Gutt had found work as a clerk. Three years later, the family wished to return to Australia because Lillian had found life in China too difficult. Donohoe, the Collector of Customs in Sydney wrote:

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The Ah Gin family are old residents of Sydney and are respectable people. They have been reared as Europeans and are unable to speak Chinese. The mother has explained to me that her daughter is very ill and unable to live in China with her Husband, on account of the Climate and not being able to understand the people.105

While being identified as ‘Chinese’ in Australia (as exemplified by the fact that Lillian had to apply for permission to return under the Immigration Restriction Act), Lillian Ah Gin herself was not accustomed to living as ‘Chinese’. When she went to Hong Kong, she perhaps did not possess the necessary cultural knowledge to feel comfortable living as a Chinese in a Chinese environment. The difficulty arose because in a Chinese environment she was not Chinese enough — she did not have the language or cultural skills to be ‘Chinese’ or perhaps the desire to be.106

The choice of marriage partner had both social and legal consequences for Anglo-Chinese women marrying Chinese men. Beryl Yow, for example, said of her marriage to Chinese-born Harry Yip in Surry Hills in 1935 that, ‘I got to realise that I was going back into the Chinese. I had English [white Australian] boys, but, yes, I was going back to the Chinese’.107 Australian-born women who married Chinese nationals lost their status as British subjects,108 and while white women marrying Chinese men had a certain security in their own white identity, for Anglo-Chinese women marriage to Chinese men ‘brought out’, as it were, their Chinese identity in precedence to their white one. The way this occurred is demonstrated by the different treatment received by Hong Kong-born sisters Florence and Grace (née Ho Tung) when they arrived into Australia in 1946 with their husbands — one Chinese, one white. Vicky Lee has stated that ‘Grace had apparently been perceived as white and had no problem. Florence

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105 NAA: SP42/1, C1903/9633.
106 For more on the challenges faced by Anglo-Chinese in China, see Section 5: Connections.
108 From the late 1930s, Australian-born wives of Chinese nationals could reclaim the right of British nationality, something that numbers did at the outbreak of World War II. Their applications are held by the National Archives of Australia. See NAA: A659.
with a Chinese husband, was perceived as Chinese… The presence of a Chinese husband quickly eliminated her Europeanness’.  

Identification and categorisation based on name and appearance, language, education, and family group could reinforce racial boundaries for Anglo-Chinese Australians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The small and scattered numbers of Anglo-Chinese Australians meant that the establishment of an identity as something separate, different again from both parents, was unlikely and difficult. Mostly Anglo-Chinese Australians had to choose, or have chosen for them, an identity as one or the other, as ‘Chinese’ or ‘Australian’. For the reasons discussed in this chapter, many Anglo-Chinese found little opportunity or incentive to retain a strong sense of Chinese identity and so took on an identity as white. In an article about the Chinese in Australia written in around 1916, Walter Hanming Chen wrote that:

> the half-castes (i.e. Those born of white mothers & Chinese fathers) … are practically Australians and do not as a general rule admit their Chinese nationality.  

While some pragmatically took the attitude that ‘you can’t change your face’, overwhelmingly the social pressure was to conform to white Australian values and culture. The combination of Australian education, Christian religion, and loosening of ties with China resulted in the ‘loss’ of ‘Chineseness’. This was particularly the case as generations moved on and there was further intermarriage with the white community; the ability to pass as white became more feasible and attractive in a time when there was strong anti-Asian sentiment in Australia. This ability to be ‘white’ was granted primarily in rejection of identifying as Chinese, living as Chinese, worshipping and speaking and thinking as Chinese. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Australia was a place increasingly divided along racial lines and as the idea

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109 Vicky Lee, Hong Kong Eurasian memoir, p. 200, 20n.

110 Romanzo Adams has noted that this was also the case for Chinese-Hawaiians whose small numbers meant that there was no development of what Adams calls a ‘group consciousness’. Adams, *Interracial Marriage in Hawaii*, pp. 85-92.

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of an Australian identity developed with the new nation, it was increasingly clear that this identity excluded those who were not white, such as Aborigines and the Chinese. The Chinese had similarly strict definitions of who was Chinese and who was not. There was little chance offered to ‘half-caste’ Chinese to adopt the kind of identity that has been taken up since the policy of multiculturalism of the last thirty years, that of a ‘Chinese Australian’. Shen Yuanfang has written that:

A Chinese identity became only possible in a multicultural Australia. Before that, Chinese in Australia and their descendants were only “sojourners”, “Chinks” or “heathens”.112

Anglo-Chinese could be caught between the two cultures, or in the words of Chinese-Australian artist Greg Leong, they were ‘a victim of a double cultural displacement, of a historical white Australian racism, and of the no less prejudicial, rigid structures of Chinese ritual and familial relations’.113

It was only unique individuals like William Liu who felt that they could embrace both their white and Chinese heritage and use their unique perspective on the world to create a greater understanding between the white and Chinese communities.114

William described his own background as chop suey, and was proud in doing so. Chop suey was one of the typical dishes served by early Chinese restaurants in Australia, a recipe imported from the United States where it had evolved in Chinese cookshops during the late nineteenth-century.115 While white Australians and Americans considered it ‘authentic’ Chinese cuisine, the mixed-up dish of chopped meat, vegetables and bean sprouts was in fact an overseas concoction described in Cantonese as jaāhp seui, meaning ‘little pieces’. Adapted and westernised, it was part of a hybrid cuisine that was recognised by whites as Chinese food, but was actually

112 Shen, Dragon Seed in the Antipodes, p. 152.


114 On William Liu’s work towards these aims, see Wang Gungwu, Community and Nation.

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quite different from the style of cooking from which it had derived. Liu’s analogy therefore has two possible meanings—that he was like chop suey because he was a combination of different things mixed together. It could also suggest that he was an Australian version of a Chinese, recognisable as having Chinese origins but being somewhat different in character and form.

Conclusion

In nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia, the identity of Anglo-Chinese Australians could be fraught with tensions, problems and questions, of belonging simultaneously to two cultures and to neither. Their mixed blood placed them on the edges of both of their parents’ communities, a place from where they could be labelled ‘half-caste’, ‘Other’, by either group or both. Recognition of identity by neighbours, extended family, government and social group played a significant role in where Anglo-Chinese felt they belonged, and appearance and names were two ways in which Anglo-Chinese were immediately identified by those around them; they were ways in which they could be marked as ‘Other’.

The majority of Anglo-Chinese Australians grew up speaking English, and they went to school, played sport and attended church as part of the white community. While as children their whiteness and their place in that community was linked to their mothers, in adulthood it often depended on whom they chose as marriage partner. It was also tied to their ability or willingness to deny their Chineseness and the willingness of the white community to grant them that status, to accept that they were ‘Australian’. By demonstrating that they possessed certain linguistic and cultural knowledge, Anglo-Chinese were able to assert that they did belong to the Australian community and that they were not just Chinese. Community belonging was based on more than just a notion of biological race, and through the way that they looked, how they communicated, how they behaved and what they called themselves, Anglo-Chinese negotiated the prejudices of those in the white community around them.

Anglo-Chinese faced similar challenges within the Chinese communities in Australia. Belonging there also depended on family and social connections and the demonstration of a certain amount of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Being raised
by white mothers in a white community, many Anglo-Chinese did not possess such connections and knowledge and so chose to assume a place within the white community. Some Chinese fathers, realising that their children would probably not grow up to be ‘Chinese’ if they spent their childhoods in Australia, made the decision to send their children, or take the whole family, to China where the children could receive a Chinese education. The next chapter of this thesis will further explore the experiences of Anglo-Chinese families in China and consider the challenges they faced in shifting between cultures, countries and families.