

Section 1

IMAGININGS

The Chinese, women and fears of crossing boundaries

As Chinese migration to the south-eastern colonies of Australia increased after the discovery of gold in the early 1850s, white policy makers and social commentators realised that this growing non-white population was most likely to consist primarily of men. Mining was men's work and the colonies were already experiencing disruption caused by an influx of white men from Britain, Europe and North America eager to make their fortunes, as well as social dislocation caused by white men already living in the colonies deserting their jobs and families to join in the rush for gold.

The Australian colonies had long been communities where the majority of the white population was male. The numbers of women and girls among the convicts transported to NSW had been small in comparison with the numbers of men, meaning that by 1841 men still outnumbered women by two to one.¹ In outback areas the number of men for each woman was even greater. This gender imbalance had worried politicians and social critics as it contradicted the ideal of a society based on the Christian nuclear family, where both men and women had specific roles to play in ensuring that society remained ordered and controlled. Many white men in the colonies had been unable to marry and certain 'vices', such as drunkenness, gambling, prostitution and the most abhorred of all, homosexuality, were thought to have been a direct result of what was termed the 'shortage of women'.² The Victorian *Argus*

¹ Keith Willey, 'Australia's population', in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (eds), *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class*, Hale & Ironmonger, Neutral Bay, 1978, pp. 1-2.

² See Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 88-90 and Clive Moore, 'Colonial manhood and masculinities', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 56, March 1998, pp. 35-50.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

argued in 1855 that such vices 'must be expected to flourish among a population composed wholly of males':

The history of some of the Australian colonies, cursed with convictism, in which not the least evil was the disproportion of the sexes, has pages eloquent of the social and moral plagues which such a state of things brings upon a community.³

Steps had been taken to increase the number of white women in the Australian colonies and to improve the lot of those already living there; however it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the gender ratio in the white population finally evened out.⁴

With the arrival of large numbers of Chinese men, white colonists faced a new challenge. Only a handful of Chinese had come to the colonies before the arrival in NSW of the first substantial group of 121 Chinese labourers in 1848, their numbers growing to several thousand over the following years.⁵ This small population growth was soon outpaced by the numbers arriving a decade later. Between January and August 1858, more than 12 000 Chinese men arrived in the colony of NSW and by the time of the NSW census of 1861, the Chinese population was given as 12 968, only two of them women.⁶ Victoria reported even higher numbers of Chinese men, 24 724 in 1861, and among them only eight Chinese women (see Figure 1).

³ *Argus*, 23 May 1855.

⁴ By 1900, the southern and eastern colonies had a closer balance in numbers of white men and women than those in the north. NSW in 1900 had 111.14 men to every 100 women; Victoria had 101.23. Beverley Kingston, *The Oxford History of Australia – Volume 3, 1860 – 1900*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 114.

⁵ Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, pp. 17-22. On the Chinese indentured labourers, see Maxine Darnell, 'Master and servant, squatter and shepherd: The regulation of indentured Chinese labourers, New South Wales, 1847 – 1853', in Chan et al. (eds), *The Overseas Chinese in Australasia: History, Settlement and Interactions*.

⁶ 'Chinese Immigration Bill (Arrivals of Chinese Since 1 January 1856)', *Journal of the NSW Legislative Council*, 1858, vol. III, p. 313; *Census of NSW 1861*.

	NSW			Victoria			Australia (total)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1861	12986	2	12988	24724	8	24732	38947	11	38958
1871	7208	12	7220	17795	31	17826	29407	44	29451
1881	10141	61	10205	11795	164	11959	38274	259	38533
1891	13048	109	13156	8355	134	8489	35523	298	35821
1901	10063	159	10222	6236	111	6347	29153	474	29627

Figure 1. Estimated number of male and female Chinese in NSW, Victoria and Australia, 1861 – 1901

Source: Lindsay M Smith, *The Chinese of Kiandra, New South Wales*, pp. 17 and 43

Some white politicians and commentators were alarmed at the numbers of Chinese arriving in the colonies, prompting calls for legislative control of their immigration, while others believed that the colonies needed access to a cheap labour force in order to progress and that the Chinese could fulfil this need. Both groups, however, were concerned by the masculine nature of the emerging Chinese population and its influence on morality in the colonies. An article on the Chinese Question in the newspaper *Bell's Life in Sydney* in March 1858 noted that 'a great outcry was raised in the Legislature, and throughout the country' regarding the 'evil consequence' which came from the unequal numbers of British men and women immigrating to the colony of NSW; regarding the Chinese in the colonies, it continued, 'Who will assert that less danger to the morals of the people will accrue from the indiscriminate irruption into our midst, of thousands of heathen wretches, composed ENTIRELY of males'.⁷

The early debates in parliament and the press which resulted from the alarm over Chinese immigration were focused on social and moral questions as well as questions of labour or economics. Ann Curthoys has noted that these discussions concentrated on four main problems. First, whether the Chinese would be able to assimilate into colonial society; second, whether the Chinese threatened British nationality; third, whether the purity of the 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'European' race could be maintained; and fourth, what was to be done about the problem of immorality and threat of moral as

⁷ *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 6 March 1858.

well as racial degradation.⁸ These questions, particularly the final two, were directly influenced by the gender imbalance of Chinese immigration to the colonies.

This section will explore anti-Chinese discourses in the second half of the nineteenth century to examine how the gender imbalance affected white reactions to Chinese immigration in the Australian colonies. In a society already facing social challenges resulting from an imbalance in the numbers of white men and women, white politicians and social commentators conceded that there was no ideal 'solution' to the social problems arising from the masculine nature of Chinese immigration. These problems – homosexuality, opium use, gambling and 'immorality' (such as prostitution and the 'seduction' of white women and girls) – could be overcome, it was believed, by encouraging Chinese men to bring their wives and daughters with them. This created another difficulty for those who wished to maintain the British character of the colonies, however – the possibility of a Chinese population which would grow even faster due to procreation.

The first part of this section argues that because white colonists did not act in any significant way to create a balance in the numbers of Chinese men and women in the colonies in the early years of Chinese immigration, the male Chinese population continued to be seen as a moral threat throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century. The second part of the section traces the persistence of the discourse against interracial relationships between Chinese men and white women which arose from fears of the male Chinese. In particular, it examines how Chinese men were seen as a threat to white women and girls who it was imagined could not or would not maintain social, moral and sexual boundaries between themselves and Chinese men.

A migration of men

The presence of Chinese men in the Australian colonies without their wives and families was one of the most frequent complaints made by white politicians and social commentators against the Chinese. Along with the apparent degradation of their living conditions, the disruptions they caused on the goldfields, the threat they posed

⁸ Curthoys, *Race and ethnicity*, pp. 304-9.

to white labour and their 'heathen' ways in general, the fact that they had few Chinese women with them indicated to white colonists base immorality and perversion. In 1862, a despatch from the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Newcastle, to NSW Governor Sir John Young stated:

Her Majesty's Government cannot shut their eyes to the exceptional nature of Chinese Immigration, and the vast moral evil which accompanies it. The entire absence of women among the immigrants, their addiction to the peculiar vices thence arising, their paganism and idolatrous habits must make them, where they bear any considerable proportion to the general population, a misfortune to any Colony situated as are the Australian Colonies.⁹

White colonists presumed terrible consequences would occur if suitable female companionship and a sexual outlet – other than white women – were not available to Chinese men. The Chinese were, in the words of P Just in 1859, 'a horde of men ... given to idolatry, infanticide, and the practice of the most hideous immorality'.¹⁰ They were accused of widespread gambling, opium addiction, murder, rape, homosexuality, seduction, debauchery and paedophilia. The value of Chinese men as new immigrants and as potential colonists was also questioned because they came alone; Penny Russell has stated that 'marriage was central to colonisation, because colonisation was about making families'.¹¹ Because they had no wives and families with them, their immigration could not prove 'of real advantage to society'.¹²

The presence of women was considered to be so important by white colonists because women were thought to be a civilising force on men who, left alone without female influence, would become degraded and at the mercy of their most basic urges. The early goldfields communities had apparently demonstrated this. The Victorian *Argus*,

⁹ 'Chinese Immigration Act (Despatch)', *Journal of the NSW Legislative Council*, 1862, vol. IX, part I, p. 423.

¹⁰ 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. 207.

¹¹ Penny Russell (ed.), *For Richer, For Poorer: Early Colonial Marriages*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1994, p. 2.

¹² Hugh Anderson (intro. and ed.), *Report from the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Condition of the Goldfields to His Excellency, Sir Charles Hotham, K.C.B., Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Victoria*, Red Rooster Press, Melbourne, 1978 (first published Melbourne, 1855), p. 103 (item 163).

Section 1: *Imaginings*

commenting in May 1855, stated that vice had been rife among the population of white men on the Victorian goldfields until the introduction of 'respectable families, and the creation of those social and domestic employments which none know how to prize more highly than the diggers'. A 'rapid amelioration' was taking place, as 'before these virtuous and hallowing influences, such vices are fast retreating, like malignant fiends before the bright holiness of angels'.¹³ Likewise, it was only through the presence and influence of wives, and a stable domestic life, that the vices of the Chinese would disappear from colonial life. The possibility of intermarriage with white women as a solution was mostly discounted, not only from an abhorrence of the idea of racial mixing, but because it was thought that those white women who 'would consent to degrade themselves by such a connection'¹⁴ would themselves be depraved and immoral and therefore incapable of raising the morals of their Chinese husbands.

By the end of the 1850s reports about the occurrence of relationships between Chinese men and white women began appearing in the colonial press. The *Empire* reported news from Bathurst in May 1858 that told of several marriages between Chinese men and European women taking place there, with one or two more 'on the tapis', that is, under consideration. 'Whether desirable or not, we are, as a community, becoming partially Chinese, and the dreaded amalgamation of the races, which we have frequently foreshadowed, has already commenced', it stated.¹⁵ The appearance of white prostitutes working among the Chinese was also noted and it became clear that early fears of widespread Chinese homosexuality were unfounded. Witnesses and 'experts' asked to comment on the prevalence of homosexuality denied its existence in all but rare instances,¹⁶ and concern shifted from this 'Chinese vice' to those such as

¹³ *Argus*, 23 May 1855.

¹⁴ *SMH*, 3 October 1860.

¹⁵ *Empire*, 26 May 1858. For other examples, see *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 29 May and 28 August 1858 and *Border Post*, 9 April 1859.

¹⁶ See *SMH*, 27 March 1852; 'Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Chinese Immigration Bill, 1858', *NSW Journal of the Legislative Council*, 1858, vol. III; and 'Chinese immigration to Australia', *Aborigines' Friend and the Colonial Intelligencer*, vol. 1, no. 10, October–December 1858, p. 496. Homosexuality was rarely raised as a complaint against the Chinese after the 1850s.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

prostitution and 'seduction' which directly involved, and therefore threatened, white women.

It was understood by white colonists that there was 'an insurmountable objection to the immigration of females' in China¹⁷ and that these 'native obstacles'¹⁸ prevented women from accompanying their husbands overseas. Some white commentators mentioned the illegality of women leaving China; for example, the English religious magazine, the *Sunday at Home*, wrote of a Chinese Christian missionary named Lo Sam who was working among the Chinese on the colonial goldfields. Lo Sam, it wrote, 'had left a wife and child in his native country, the Chinese law not allowing them to accompany him'.¹⁹ More usual were discussions of familial, social and economic reasons which meant that Chinese women would seldom leave their homes to venture overseas.²⁰ Chinese in the colonies used these reasons to explain their situation to government committees, inquiries and newspapers and to defend a migratory system viewed by white Australians as unnatural and unhealthy. Chinese sought to explain their position to white colonists because it was clear that the imbalanced gender ratio had wide implications for the acceptance, or not, of the Chinese population.

The primary reason given by Chinese in the colonies was the importance of the Chinese family and of a wife's role in living with and caring for her husband's parents, as well as her husband's children, in his ancestral village. One letter, said to

¹⁷ *SMH*, 3 October 1860.

¹⁸ JA Patterson, *The Gold Fields of Victoria in 1862*, Wilson & Mackinnon, Melbourne, 1862, p. 146.

¹⁹ *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading*, vol. X, 1863, p. 11. This reason was also mentioned by George Ingelow, 'Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Chinese Immigration Bill, 1858', *NSW Journal of the Legislative Council*, 1858, vol. III, p. 352.

²⁰ Debate remains within current scholarship as to whether it was primarily cultural practice, economics or discriminatory legislation which resulted in the small numbers of Chinese women migrating overseas, particularly to the United States. See McKeown, *Journal of American Ethnic History*; George Anthony Pepper, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1999; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995; Sucheng Chan, 'The exclusion of Chinese women, 1870–1943', in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882–1943*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1991.

be written by a Chinese man living in the colonies, gave a clear expression of this reasoning:

... one great law of the Chinese nation is, duty to parents: and our greatest sage and philosopher, Confucius, says, 'As a son, be dutiful to your parents; as a brother, be brotherly to your elder brothers; and as a minister be faithful to your prince.' Now, shall we keep such laws and maxims if we neglect to return to our parents, who sorrowfully part from us? And did we not leave our wives to comfort them and serve them, who we seek to find in a rich land the means to make their closing years happy.²¹

The family was a fundamental element of Chinese social structure. It was an economic unit (producing and consuming in common), a religious unit (which performed rites to care for living and deceased family members) and a social-security organisation (that provided care for aged or needy relatives).²² Composed of more than just the nuclear family, it was typically patriarchal, multigenerational and focused around the family home and altar in the ancestral village. Adam McKeown has argued that the continuation of the patriline – the family line from grandfather to father to son – was of greater importance than the cohabitation of husband and wife, meaning that men were able to act in the interests of their family even if living separated from wife and children.²³ A wife's role in the family and in the maintenance of the patriline was to bear and raise her husband's children and to care for his parents in their old age, rather than to live together with him in a nuclear family unit.

A further reason given for Chinese women remaining at home in China was the potential for degradation of Chinese women in the 'uncivilised' colonies. In a place where Chinese men were abused, isolated and disempowered, Chinese women, it was argued, would have suffered even more greatly from such humiliation. In 1878, Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, Victoria's three

²¹ Ming A Ching, 'Letter from a Chinaman', *Colonial Intelligencer and Aborigines' Friend*, vol. II, January-December 1860, p. 167.

²² Lloyd E Eastman, *Family, Fields, and Ancestors: Constancy and Change in China's Social and Economic History, 1550 – 1949*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, p. 16.

²³ McKeown, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, p. 97.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

wealthiest and most influential Chinese residents, wrote a treatise on the Chinese Question which included this answer to the question of why Chinese men came to the colonies without their wives:

Can it be wondered at? We have shown what scandalous treatment they [the Chinese] received on the Buckland; and is it to be imagined that, when news of this atrocity went home to China, any woman of average self-respect would expose herself to be chased through the country by a band of infuriated ruffians, and to see her children burnt to death, perhaps, in her husband's flaming tent? Treated as pariahs and outcasts by the people of this great 'free' country, the Chinamen in Victoria have hitherto had but scanty encouragement to invite their wives to accompany or follow them. Subject to be insulted and assaulted by the 'larrikins' of Australia, what Chinaman could be so destitute of consideration for the weaker sex as to render them liable to the same ignominious and contumelious treatment? Do unto us as you would we should do unto you under precisely similar circumstances.²⁴

Another Chinese man questioned the treatment of all women in the Australian colonies, observing 'the existence of so many hardships by the softer sex' which meant that the Chinese 'shrank from exposing their wives and daughters to so much misery'.²⁵ White commentators also acknowledged Chinese feelings on this matter – Carl Feilburg stated in 1880 that the Chinese man 'would never dream of contaminating a respectable woman by bringing her among us'. 'It is a well-known social maxim that a gentleman may go into any society without losing caste, but not a lady', he continued. 'The Chinese applies this rule strictly to us.'²⁶ Conditions for women in the colonies could be harsh, particularly in the remote rural and mining areas inhabited by most Chinese during the 1850s and 1860s. The lives of white

²⁴ L Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, *The Chinese Question in Australia 1878 – 79*, FF Bailliere, Melbourne, 1879, p. 19.

²⁵ *SMH*, 12 August 1857.

²⁶ Carl Feilburg, 'Can the Chinaman be made a good colonist?', *The Victorian Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1 January 1880, pp. 370-1.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

women in such areas were often lonely and isolated, and those of Chinese women would have been even more so.²⁷

When questioned, Chinese also spoke of the economic considerations which went into deciding if a wife and family should stay in China or migrate overseas. As early as 1858, Henry Leau Appa, in giving evidence to the NSW Select Committee into Chinese Immigration, said that even if Chinese women wanted to come, it would be too expensive.²⁸ During the NSW Royal Commission into Alleged Chinese Gambling and Immorality in 1891, Chinese men also gave economic reasons as the answer to why they had not brought their wives and families to Australia, despite the fact that some of them were naturalised and had property and businesses in the colony.²⁹ Although the witnesses at the Royal Commission were using the situation as an opportunity to petition against discriminatory anti-Chinese measures such as the poll tax, the reality for many Chinese men would have been that, had they desired it, the costs of relocating wife and family would have been prohibitive. As well as paying the poll tax, there was the cost of passage and the necessity of general living expenses. In 1868, Reverend William Young had suggested that before Chinese men would bring their wives to the Australian colonies, they needed to feel sure of obtaining steady and remunerative work. 'So long as they are doubtful on this point, they will never go to the expense and trouble of transporting them hither', he argued.³⁰

Colonial responses

Fearful of the possibility of a large population of Chinese men and determined that relationships between white women and Chinese men were unacceptable, white

²⁷ For an insight into the difficulties faced by women in rural Australia, see Lucy Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*, revised edition, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1995.

²⁸ 'Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Chinese Immigration Bill, 1858', *NSW Journal of the Legislative Council*, vol. III, 1858, p. 347.

²⁹ *Report of the Royal Commission into Chinese Gambling and Immorality* (hereafter RCACG), NSW LA V&P, 1891 – 92. See the statements of Way Kee (p. 57), Lay Jong (p. 393), Cow Kum (p. 395), War Hop (p. 417) and Quin Young (p. 419).

³⁰ Rev. William Young, *Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population in Victoria*, 1868, reprinted in Ian F McLaren (ed.), *The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports and Documents*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, 1985, p. 50.

politicians and social commentators looked for ways to ensure that Chinese men were able to form sexual relationships or family groups with other 'suitable' women. After concluding that Chinese men were not likely to form relationships with Aboriginal women – 'the difference between a Chinaman and an aboriginal of our colony, is perhaps as great as between the former and an Englishman'³¹ – the introduction of another non-white female population to the colonies was offered as a possible solution. In an 1852 article on Chinese immigration, Paul Pax suggested Malay women could be brought to the colonies as wives for Chinese men, as 'they have for centuries consorted well together'.³²

The idea which gained most currency, however, was that of balancing the numbers of Chinese men and women who came to live in the colonies through legislative means. In NSW, these ideas were first discussed in detail in the various parliamentary debates surrounding the four anti-Chinese bills introduced to parliament between 1857 and the passing of the *Chinese Immigrants Regulation and Restriction Act* in 1861.³³ The first bill debated in November 1857 was based on that enacted in Victoria in 1855 and included the provision of a £10 poll tax. Introduced by RT Jamieson, the bill proposed that if a Chinese man was accompanied by his wife, the poll tax would not be imposed. Jamieson's bill, and a subsequent one introduced by Charles Cowper in 1858, were not successful as the numbers of Chinese in the colony were thought insufficient to warrant such measures. A third bill put forward by John Lucas in 1860, which aimed to 'prevent male adult Chinese from coming here at all',³⁴ included a measure to encourage female Chinese immigration – the exclusion of female Chinese from a poll tax, as well as husbands or fathers under whose protection they came – but this bill, too, was never made law.

³¹ *SMH*, 3 April 1852.

³² *SMH*, 3 April 1852.

³³ For a detailed discussion of the progression of anti-Chinese legislation in NSW and the other Australian colonies, see Curthoys, *Race and ethnicity*; Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built*; and Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, second edition, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967.

³⁴ *SMH*, 3 October 1860.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

The fourth and finally successful anti-Chinese bill was introduced by Charles Cowper in September 1861. Its restrictions were that only one Chinese person was allowed per ten tons of shipping and that each Chinese arriving by land or sea must pay a £10 poll tax. The bill was passed through both houses of parliament by the end of October 1861. Significantly, however, the NSW Act of 1861 included no measures to encourage the immigration of Chinese women. Its only concession was to define 'Chinese' as any male native of China or any male born of Chinese parents, meaning that women were, by definition, excluded from the prohibitions of the Act.³⁵

The dropping of measures to encourage female Chinese immigration disappointed some. In 1862, after receiving a copy of the Act, Lord Newcastle, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote to NSW Governor Sir John Young that it would be beneficial to the colonies for Chinese women to immigrate, and that they could be encouraged to do so by the relaxation of the new Act in favour of Chinese men bringing their wives with them:

It might, for instance, be provided that in such a case the numbers to be allowed in any ship might be increased, or that the women should be admitted over and above the complement that the law allows, or the tax on men accompanied by their wives might be reduced, and no tax be required for the wife, and men so accompanied, if they desired to remain in the Colony, might, on certain conditions, obtain letters of naturalization.³⁶

Such measures were never introduced.

The idea of encouraging Chinese women to the Australian colonies had created two further problems for white colonists – what 'type' of women would arrive on their shores, and the prospect of a significant increase in the Chinese population through

³⁵ The Victorian anti-Chinese legislation enacted between 1855 and 1881 also specifically excluded female Chinese from its provisions, as did the Tasmanian anti-Chinese legislation of 1887 which specified the sex of the Chinese immigrants it was targeting. However, the NSW Act of 1881 and similar legislation from Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and New Zealand enacted during the 1880s did not, defining 'Chinese' as any person of the Chinese race. See *Correspondence Relating to Chinese Immigration into the Australasian Colonies, July 1888*, Great Britain Colonial Office, London, 1888.

³⁶ 'Chinese Immigration Act (Despatch)', *Journal of the NSW Legislative Council*, 1862, vol. IX, part I, p. 2.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

procreation. Concern was expressed that while it might be beneficial for Chinese women as well as men to come to the colonies, it might not be wives but ‘unfortunate females’ who came,³⁷ or worse still, that the Chinese might impersonate wives by dressing sons or brothers in women’s clothing to circumvent the restrictions.³⁸ Reverend John Dunmore Lang was among those who feared a dramatic increase in the Chinese population in the colonies if women were encouraged to migrate. In 1860, he argued that ‘if these colonies were once made available, and the Chinese were permitted to settle here with their adult females ... the European residents would soon be in a minority, they would be speedily swamped altogether’.³⁹ Lang was not sorry that Chinese women had not shown an inclination to accompany their husbands, because:

The fact is, we don’t want them. We don’t want the flat faces, the pug noses, the yellow complexions, the small feet, and the long tails multiplied a thousand-fold amongst us, as they would very soon be if the Chinese ladies came to us as well as the gentlemen.⁴⁰

Similarly arguing against provisions to encourage female Chinese immigration, Henry Parkes stated in 1861:

Seeing that their country contained 360,000,000 of people, if a premium were given for bringing their females, they would soon overwhelm us altogether. Such an immigration seemed to be in a tenfold degree more objectionable than that to which we had hitherto been subjected.⁴¹

The Australian colonies were not dealing with these questions in isolation. British colonists around the world – in Singapore, the Philippines, Cuba, the West Indies, as well as Canada and the United States – were facing similar anxieties about the masculine nature of Chinese migration and its alleged consequences. There was a

³⁷ *SMH*, 3 October 1860.

³⁸ *SMH*, 11 November 1857.

³⁹ *SMH*, 3 October 1860.

⁴⁰ John Dunmore Lang, *Queensland, Australia; A Highly Eligible Field for Emigration and the Future Cotton-Field of Great Britain*, Edward Stanford, London, 1864, pp. 233-4.

⁴¹ *SMH*, 9 March 1861.

transnational exchange in knowledge of the Chinese, their habits and customs, which came through correspondence between colonial governments, through migration and through the press. California was a persistent site of comparison, particularly concerning the possibility of a traffic in Chinese women for prostitution,⁴² but the British West Indies were also used as an example of what early measures could be taken by the government to ameliorate the situation. In the West Indies, the Chinese population had grown as a result of recruitment by the British government, who directly regulated a system of Chinese contract labour to provide workers for plantations formerly worked by slaves. The government and plantation owners objected to an absence of female Chinese migrants on moral grounds, for reasons similar to those expressed in the Australian colonies, and so devised a scheme whereby labourers were encouraged to bring their wives and children through financial inducements. Between 1859 and 1862, 1350 women along with 6772 men travelled from China to British Guiana.⁴³ In 1862, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Newcastle, held up the West Indies as an example for the Australian colonies to follow, saying that obstacles to female Chinese emigration had been 'overcome by the energy and good management' of British migration agents and suggesting similar administrative measures should be undertaken in Australia.⁴⁴ Not all were so enthusiastic about the West Indian system. The previous year the *Empire* had used the West Indies as an example of why *not* to legislate to encourage female Chinese immigration, saying that what had arisen was effectively a trade in women who were forced into marriages, deceived about their destinations and cheated of any financial gain they could have made. 'It would require a diabolical imagination to

⁴² See for example, 'The Mongolian Invasion', *Newspaper Cuttings*, vol. 57, Mitchell Library, no date, p. 141 and Anon., *Yellow Agony: Widespreading Branches of a Dangerous Tree, lopped off [by A Tomohawk, Esq.]*, no publication details or date, p. 15. On the emergence of Chinese prostitution in the United States, see Yung, *Unbound Feet*; Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, 1994; and Lucie Cheng, 'Free, indentured, enslaved: Chinese prostitutes in nineteenth-century America', in Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984.

⁴³ Laura Hall, 'The arrival and settlement of the Chinese in 19th century British Guiana', in Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays Volume II*, Times Academic Press, Singapore, 1998.

⁴⁴ 'Chinese Immigration Act (Despatch)', *Journal of the NSW Legislative Council*, 1862, vol. IX, part I, p. 2.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

realise the future character of a population springing from such disgusting unions', it concluded.⁴⁵

The enactment of anti-Chinese legislation in NSW in 1861 brought about a reduction in the population of Chinese men in the colony, and consequently hostile commentary on the threat of Chinese immorality and interracial relationships lulled, as did other objections to the Chinese presence. This discourse re-emerged in the mid-1870s, however, after anti-Chinese laws were repealed in the mid-1860s and the Chinese population began to grow again.⁴⁶ Chinese migration continued to be almost exclusively male in character and in the 1870s suggestions to increase the numbers of Chinese women in the colonies re-emerged. In 1878, a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that every migrant ship should bring equal numbers of women and men, regardless of race, thereby removing the 'cardinal objection' to Chinese immigration and placing the colony 'in harmony with the Divine provision, based upon the assertion that 'it is not good for the man to be alone'.⁴⁷ A year later, Reverend John Horsley remarked that the Australian authorities, together with those in Hong Kong and the Chinese 'guilds' active in Australia, should act to stop any Chinese man coming without bringing his wife with him, or making arrangements for her to come within a specified time.⁴⁸

It was during the 1870s that complaints against Chinese 'immorality' became increasingly emotional and melodramatic, when the spectre of the opium den, the seduction and drugging of innocents, the corruption of young white girls and their fall into prostitution, and the squalor of urban Chinese quarters and rural Chinese camps found much sensational expression in both the press and government inquiries throughout the late 1870s and into the 1880s. At this time, concerns about Chinese

⁴⁵ *Empire*, 23 July 1861.

⁴⁶ For an outline of reactions to the Chinese in NSW from the 1840s to the 1870s, see Curthoys, ' "Men of all nations, except Chinamen" ' in McCalman et al. (eds), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*.

⁴⁷ *SMH*, 23 November 1878.

⁴⁸ Rev. John F Horsley, 'The Chinese in Victoria', *Melbourne Review*, vol. IV, June-October 1879, p. 426.

immorality became part of the labour movement's anti-Chinese stance⁴⁹ and were intermingled with fears of economic competition from the Chinese. The *Echo* suggested that the Chinese caused two main problems, immorality and low wages, which could be solved by the Chinese man 'living like a European in New South Wales' in a healthy house with his (Chinese) wife and family – 'if he lived like a European here, he would need full wages for his work, and then unfair competition which is so bitterly complained of now would disappear'.⁵⁰ Fears of interracial sex were played up by journals such as William Lane's *Boomerang* in Queensland and Sydney's *Bulletin*.⁵¹ Unlike their objections to the Chinese on economic grounds, most commentators did not try to rationalise their rhetoric on the sexual threat the Chinese allegedly posed.

Anti-Chinese legislation was re-introduced around Australia in the 1880s, this time on a more forceful and comprehensive scale. The new legislation concentrated on keeping the Chinese out, rather than creating a more tolerable population of Chinese migrants that included family units. Consequently, none of the legislation included measures to increase numbers of Chinese women in the colonies. The colonies cooperated in their implementation of anti-Chinese measures, creating the foundation for the introduction of legislation prohibiting the migration of all non-Europeans, which was introduced after Federation in 1901 in the form of the Immigration Restriction Act. Discussions of the Chinese Question in the later decades of the century continued to include mention of the fact that there were few Chinese women in the colonies and to blame particular social ills of the colony upon the male character of the Chinese population. Henry Parkes, in the debate on the new anti-Chinese bill put forward in NSW in 1888, questioned whether it was 'a safe, a wise, or a tolerable thing' for there to be 60 000 Chinese men 'with no natural companions' in

⁴⁹ The San Francisco labour movement similarly used white working women in their anti-Chinese rhetoric. See Martha Mabie Gardner, 'Working on white womanhood: white working women in the San Francisco Anti-Chinese Movement, 1877 – 1890', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 73-95.

⁵⁰ *Echo*, 27 November 1878.

⁵¹ On the writings of William Lane, the *Bulletin* and other similar publications, see Markus, *Fear and Hatred*; Walker, *Anxious Nation*; and Neville Meaney, '“The Yellow Peril”, invasion scare novels and Australian political culture', in Ken Stewart (ed.), *The 1890s: Australian Literature and Literary Culture*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1996.

the colonies. 'Must not that be a thing to be deprecated, to be lamented, to be resisted by every man who wished well to the social fabric of this new country?' he continued.⁵² The *Bulletin* in 1894, in response to efforts by Quong Tart to eliminate the importation and use of opium in the colonies, stated that 'When the astute Quong Tart says that on opium rests all vice, immorality and corruption with the Chinese, he talks deplorable nonsense'. The blame lay instead with the gender imbalance, the *Bulletin* claimed – 'If with every thousand male Chinese landed in Australia comes but one Chinese woman, the demoralisation of European women follows as a matter of course'.⁵³

In the early debates on Chinese immigration and discussions which followed in the subsequent decades, white politicians and social commentators were scathing about the 'immorality' related to white prostitution, interracial cohabitation and intermarriage which resulted from a population of Chinese men living in their midst with few Chinese women among their numbers. However, on a legislative level there was a measure of toleration of such events. None of the Australian colonies brought in measures to ensure that a more balanced number of Chinese women and men arrived in the colonies, or that the Chinese migrated in nuclear family groups. Nor did any of the Australian colonies implement anti-miscegenation legislation in response to the increasing numbers of interracial marriages, unlike the United States.⁵⁴ Marriages between Chinese men and white women were legal and the children of such marriages were legitimate. The only colony, or state, to consider such measures was Western Australia – in 1910, a bill to prohibit marriages between 'Europeans' and

⁵² Henry Parkes, *The Chinese in Australia: Speech by Henry Parkes on Moving the Second Reading of the Chinese Restriction and Regulation Bill in the Legislative Assembly on 16 May 1888*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1888, p. 6.

⁵³ *Bulletin*, 14 April 1894.

⁵⁴ By the 1920s, six states of the United States had enacted anti-miscegenation laws forbidding marriages between 'Orientals' and 'whites'. See Henry Yu, 'Mixing bodies and cultures: The meaning of America's fascination with sex between "Orientals" and "whites"', in Martha Hodes (ed.), *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*, New York University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 444-5. Andrew Markus has also noted the differences between the Australian colonies and the United States, see *Fear and Hatred*, pp. 18 and 258-9.

'Asiatics' was proposed, but found little support and was dropped.⁵⁵ Other forms of legislation designed to limit contact between white women and Chinese, such as the Canadian law stipulating that white women could not be employed by Chinese businesses,⁵⁶ were also not considered.

Legislative means were not, therefore, the route taken by white colonists to protect their community against the threat of a large male Chinese population and the racial mixing which resulted, despite the fact that sex and morality had formed a central part of objections to the Chinese presence. The situation just never reached such a point of crisis as to motivate legislators to act. What emerged instead were strong discursive prohibitions against sex across racial boundaries, with the figure of the white woman firmly fixed at the centre as both victim and collaborator in this 'pollution of the white race'.

Crossing into Chinatown

As white male colonists imagined the Chinese race as separate and distinct from their own, so they imagined the areas inhabited by concentrated populations of Chinese – the colonial Chinatowns of the Rocks and Haymarket in Sydney, Melbourne's Little Bourke Street and numbers of rural Chinese camps – as bounded spaces which were different and distant in culture and morality from the white neighbourhoods around them. The Chinese occupied an isolated position in every community they lived in, according to Victorian Governor Sir HB Loch, and the 'Chinese Quarters' they inhabited were 'proverbial', 'always distinct, and often notorious'.⁵⁷ Colonial Chinatowns were 'loathsome to the senses and faculties of civilised nations' and were filled with 'disease, defilement, depravity, misery and crime' according to the

⁵⁵ Arthur Berriedale Keith, *Responsible Government in the Dominions*, vol. 2, second edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1928, p. 817; *Tung Wah Times* (Donghua bao), 24 September 1910.

⁵⁶ For a discussion of this legislation, the Act to Prevent the Employment of Female Labour in Certain Capacities, enacted in Saskatchewan in 1912, see Constance Backhouse, 'The white women's labor law: Anti-Chinese racism in early twentieth-century Canada', *Law and History Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, Fall 1996, pp. 315-68.

⁵⁷ Sir HB Loch to Lord Knutsford, 13 April 1888, *Correspondence Relating to Chinese Immigration into the Australasian Colonies, July 1888*, Great Britain Colonial Office, London, 1888, p. 24.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

Bulletin.⁵⁸ Chinatowns were thought of as foreign and exotic places; they were ‘China in Sydney’ or a ‘Little Canton’.

These Chinese spaces were the subject of investigations by white colonists.⁵⁹ Often, investigations took place at night when the Chinese had returned home from work and were engaging in their ‘immoral’ pastimes of gambling and opium smoking. Some investigations into Chinatown immorality were undertaken at the behest of parliaments and government bodies, such as the tours of inspection taken during the 1875 inquiry by the Sydney City and Suburban Sewage and Health Board and the 1891 Royal Commission into Alleged Chinese Gambling and Immorality.⁶⁰ The results of these investigations were found in parliamentary debates and publications. Other reports on the ‘secret life’ of colonial Chinatowns were prepared by journalists and social commentators and appeared in the colonial and British press, as well as a wide range of publications on colonial life such as *Cassell’s Picturesque Australasia*.⁶¹ Many of these reports were illustrated with cartoons and drawings or, in rarer instances, with photographs (see Image 3.) These illustrations complemented the often graphic word pictures painted in Chinatown exposés.

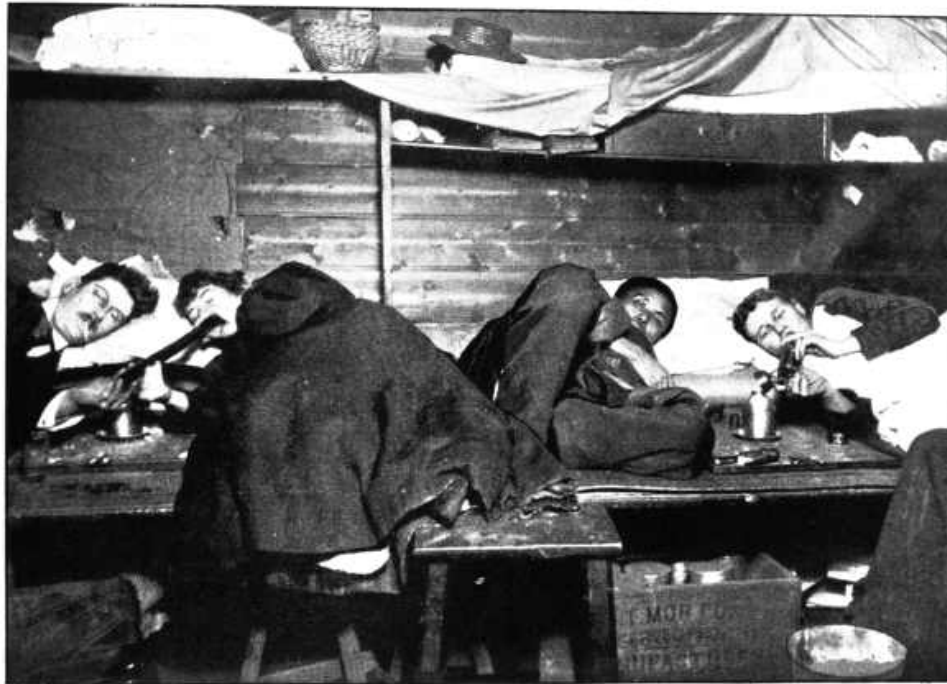
Later sections of this thesis will use such Chinatown investigations as a source for numbers of mixed race couples in NSW and of the conditions under which they lived. Government-initiated reports, in particular, provide detail unavailable elsewhere and are generally more straightforward accounts uncoloured by the flourish of journalistic prose. The remainder of this section, however, will interrogate the picture of interactions between white women and Chinese men so graphically painted in the press.

⁵⁸ *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886.

⁵⁹ Chinatown exposés formed a part of wider journalistic investigations of the slums. See Alan Mayne, *Representing the Slum: Popular Journalism in a Late Nineteenth Century City*, History Department – University of Melbourne, Parkville, 1990.

⁶⁰ See *Eleventh Progress Report of the Sydney City and Suburban Sewage and Health Board*, NSW LA V&P, 1875–76 and RCACG.

⁶¹ See Hume Nisbet, ‘Little Bourke Street’, in EE Morris (ed.), *Cassell’s Picturesque Australasia*, vol. 1, Cassell & Co., London, 1887. On Nisbet’s writings about Melbourne’s Chinatown, see Tony Hughes-



IN A CHINESE OPIUM DEN.—FROM A FLASHLIGHT PHOTO, BY E. T. LUKE.

Image 3. 'In a Chinese opium den — from a flashlight photo by ET Luke'
Illustrated Australian News, 1 July 1896

The press discussions reflected the intensity of concern about racial purity felt by colonists throughout the British Empire. As described in the Introduction, British colonists were attempting to define their communities and newly-founded nations as racially pure, continually drawing and defining boundaries between themselves and the 'Other'. In Australia, debate about race and whiteness permeated discussions of every kind, from the settlement of the tropical north to the future of Australia's indigenous people. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the expression of colonial fears of racial mixing were not restricted to just the press, nor were they just about the Chinese, nor were they restricted to one discrete point in time.⁶² The press,

d'Aeth, 'Legibility and Little Bourke Street in *Cassell's Picturesque Australasia*', *Beyond the Divide*, vol. 2, no. 1, Winter 1999, pp. 26-37.

⁶² See, for example, Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880 – 1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1997; Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2005 (first published 2003); and Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004.

or more particularly certain parts of it such as the *Bulletin*, played upon this base level of fear and fed the intensity of the race debate.

The *Bulletin* had much to say on colonial Chinatowns and the Chinese presence and many of the examples used in this section are taken from its pages. It took the interactions it observed between white women and Chinese men as demonstrative of the wider danger of the Chinese presence to the Australian colonies and later to the newly-formed Australian nation. It provides a particularly rich source for examining concerns over interactions between Chinese men and white women for several reasons. It commented on domestic issues (male-female relations and the servant question, for example) in ways that other journals did not, bringing them into the political realm; it was overtly racist and often addressed the question of the Chinese in the colonies; and it used literary forms such as poetry, cartoons and short fictions to remark on current political and social situations.⁶³

While these elements combined leave a rich reflection of the threat imagined in the interactions of white wives, sisters and daughters with Chinese men, the stories told in the *Bulletin* (or any of its contemporary counterparts) cannot be stated as being representative of what was universally *thought* by white colonists, male or female, urban or rural.⁶⁴ Reading the *Bulletin* pieces alongside others from smaller or regional newspapers, however, there is a common shading and tone to many pieces of writing and cartoons which suggests that the *Bulletin's* influence in creating a shorthand characterisation of the Chinese and their relations with white women echoed further than just the minds of its specific readership.

A common claim in Chinatown investigations was that they revealed a hidden population and its secret ways. A *Bulletin* article from 1886, titled 'The Chinese in Australia: Their vices and victims', for example, claimed to ascertain the 'truth' about

⁶³ For an interesting re-evaluation of the *Bulletin's* value to the contemporary historian, see Sylvia Lawson, 'Print circus: The *Bulletin* from 1880 to Federation', in Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz (eds), *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1999.

⁶⁴ Keith Windschuttle has recently laboured this point in his critique of the use of the *Bulletin* as evidence of nineteenth-century racist thought. See Keith Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, Macleay Press, Sydney, 2004, pp. 76-82.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

colonial Chinatowns from visiting their 'most secret, and therefore their most loathsome dens'.⁶⁵ Other investigations claimed to reveal what others had not. The *Truth*, for example, headed one 1893 article:

Sydney Slum Society – Wexford-street Workers – In the Depths of Degradation – Deep in the Publicly Unexplored Parts of the Chinamen's Quarters – The Home of Crime, Iniquity and Misery – Of Which Much is Heard – But Little Actually Known.⁶⁶

Another common feature of Chinatown reports was discussion of how white women were to be found living, working or relaxing there, interacting and mingling with Chinese men. Much less often were white men to be found and recorded in similar situations.

Colonial Chinatowns came to represent the most immoral and degraded of places in the colonies. They grew up in communities already viewed as problematic, among the poor and the marginal. The Chinese both became tied to discourses already surrounding these elements of colonial society as well as reinforcing negative ideas of these marginal populations and their morals and manners. The degradation of these areas was turned to spectacle in lurid tales and graphic representations of gambling dens and the exotic-sounding games of fan tan and pak ah pu, of brothels with cruel procuresses and unscrupulous Chinese bosses, of opium dens filled with the addicted and enslaved. (See Image 4.) No good was to be found there.

⁶⁵ *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886. Sylvia Lawson has discussed 'The Chinese in Australia: Their vices and their victims' in some detail. She notes that the style was cruder than much other writing found in the *Bulletin*, and states that it was one of the *Bulletin's* 'most dishonourable and destructive moments'. 'Its malevolent hysteria was uncharacteristic', she states, but the message was one that pursued 'energetically and relentlessly' in other *Bulletin* writings. See, Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1987 (first published 1983), pp. 140-3.

⁶⁶ *Truth*, 9 April 1893.



Image 4. 'The Chow and his charmers' by Phil May – drawing accompanying 'The Chinese in Australia: their vices and victims'
Bulletin, 21 August 1886

Wexford Street, the Chinese quarter in the south of Sydney city, was described by the *Daily Telegraph* as the home to 'Chinese, thieves, fallen women (the very lowest), and vicious characters', a place where 'squalor and vice' prevailed.⁶⁷ The *Truth* described it as a place:

⁶⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, undated article, Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 96, Mitchell Library.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

where celestial opium smokers and fan-tan players abound, where fallen women pursue their nefarious nightly traffic, where masculine depravity influences infantile innocences inculcating the worst ways of the world, and where are found the haunts of vice and ignorance.⁶⁸

The Chinese camp at Albury in southern NSW was described by the *Border Post* as ‘a den of infamy’ and it was held responsible for ‘spreading immorality and disease among the youth of the town’.⁶⁹ The camp in Deniliquin had rooms where ‘the foulest language, the most lewd and disgusting proceedings, and the most libidinous characteristics are a rampant rule – unchecked, exempt from supervision, and “unwhipt of justice”’.⁷⁰ Melbourne’s Little Bourke Street was described by Hume Nisbet as ‘what I would fancy hell may be’.⁷¹

One of the main elements affecting perceptions of the colonial Chinatowns was the large number of men seen living in crowded lodging houses and the apparent scarcity of women, particularly Chinese women, and family homes. ‘In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the Chinaman is not accompanied by a wife or female relative,’ one commentator noted in 1881, ‘and the necessary consequence of this unnatural state of things is that his “camps” on the gold-fields and his “quarters” in the cities are notorious for the immorality prevalent in them.’⁷² Colonial Chinatowns were thought of as masculine spaces where very few women lived. An illustration titled ‘Chinese sketches in the slums’ from the *Illustrated Australian News* in 1893, for example, shows Chinese men working in a laundry, a furniture factory and hawking, gambling, smoking opium, eating in a cookshop and conversing with white women, ‘their victims’ (see Image 5). Nowhere to be seen were images of domestic life. In Chinatowns, however, there were in reality mixed communities of both whites and

⁶⁸ *Truth*, 9 April 1893.

⁶⁹ *Border Post*, 24 October 1883.

⁷⁰ *Pastoral Times*, 27 May 1882, reproduced in *Stories of Early Deniliquin*, Deniliquin Family History Group Inc., Deniliquin, 1999, p. 25.

⁷¹ Hume Nisbet, *A Colonial Tramp: Travels, and Adventures Through Australia and New Guinea*, Ward & Downey, London, 1891, p. 102.

⁷² ‘The Chinese in the colonies’, *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science, & Art*, vol. V, no. 238, 21 July 1881, p. 449.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

Chinese, where family homes as well as businesses, restaurants and lodging houses could be found. Respectable households, and the women and children who lived in them, were relatively invisible to white commentators as they turned their minds primarily to the sights, sounds and smells which reinforced Chinatown stereotypes.



Image 5. 'Chinese sketches in the slums' – images such as this one portrayed colonial Chinatowns as masculine spaces

Illustrated Australian News, 1 September 1893

As well as making their homes there, white women crossed the imagined divide into Chinatowns for work, shopping, charitable works and recreation. White women worked as domestic staff in both Chinese and non-Chinese homes and as shop girls and hotel servants; they shopped at the markets and in both Chinese and non-Chinese

Section 1: *Imaginings*

owned businesses (see Image 6); they attended the Chinese missions and other local churches, teaching English classes and Sunday school; they also frequented public houses and gambling 'dens' and visited friends in their Chinatown homes.



Image 6. 'Chinese fancy hawker'
Australasian Sketcher, 10 June 1876

Despite the frequency of such actions, white male commentators saw that even casual crossing into Chinese spaces could be threatening to white women. In 1889 it was claimed that 'respectable women' on their way to the markets were subjected to insults and abuse by the Chinese men as they passed on Wexford Street which was near to Sydney's Haymarket. These men gathered on the footpaths and loitered on the streets and, it was claimed, did 'their level best, unchecked, to decoy wretched

women to the slavery of the opium pipe, a slavery ending only in the grave'.⁷³ Similarly, in testimony to the 1891 Royal Commission on Alleged Chinese Gambling, several white men who had businesses in Lower George Street at the Rocks complained that respectable white women were accosted by the Chinese there. Alfred Chambers, ironmonger, said that his wife and sister would no longer visit his shop because of the Chinese presence. Richard Vallancy, owner of a grocery business, complained of white women, mostly servant girls, being accosted by Chinese men who grabbed hold of their arms as they passed. Thomas Nock, of Felton and Nock ironmongers, claimed that respectable ladies had fallen down in the street due to the awful smell of opium there and named two 'respectable females', Mrs Chambers and Mrs Kelly, who had been insulted. Robert Nolan, who worked for Nock, said he could point out the Chinese who had committed such offences.⁷⁴

The average Chinaman, fallen women and the innocent

Interactions between Chinese men and white women were presented as dangerous because of ideas about the character and nature of Chinese men, who were thought of as sensuous and physical, rather than reasoned and controlled. 'The average Chinaman, under present social conditions, is necessarily a sensual brute,' wrote the *Bulletin* in 1888. 'The Australian may be immoral, and very often is, but the typical Chinaman *must* be. He has no alternative, for the utter lack of ennobling purpose and elevating ideal confines his every thought to the pleasure of his body.'⁷⁵ Physical proximity between Chinese men and white women was dangerous because Chinese men were thought to be unable to control their physical urges and it was believed that they would use any opportunity to seduce and entrap white women.

The Chinese man was also threatening to white women because it was thought that he desired to 'use' women, rather than to form sincere relationships with them. The *Bulletin* wrote that not only did the Chinese 'decoy white women to their dens in

⁷³ *Sunday Times*, 17 November 1889.

⁷⁴ RCACG, see statements of Alfred Chambers (p. 26), Richard Vallancy (p. 28), Thomas Nock (p. 9) and Robert Nolan (p. 35).

⁷⁵ *Bulletin*, 4 September 1888.

order that they themselves may have consorts in crime', but that they also used white women as a source of revenue – 'the captivate [sic] European woman is a mere chattel to such; there is no sentiment in the relationship, it is strictly commercial'.⁷⁶ Such ideas resonated with beliefs that men in China viewed their wives and children as their property, to do with as they wished. In particular, female infanticide and the buying and selling of servant girls and wives were used as examples of the barbarity of Chinese men. For instance, in arguing against the repeal of the NSW anti-Chinese legislation in 1867, MLA for East Macquarie William Cummings stated that 'hundreds of thousands of the children of these people were put to death every year in China, and the Chinese females were left to die by the misguided rules of their tyrant husbands.' He continued, 'Women were articles of commerce in China, and the only grief that a Chinaman felt when he lost his wife was that he must go into the market and buy another.'⁷⁷ For white commentators, this mistreatment and disrespect for women was a further indication of the barbarity of the Chinese race.

Particular understandings of the nature and character of white women also lay behind discussions of interracial interactions. Broadly, the white women and girls who formed intimate relationships with Chinese men were divided into those who were considered collaborators in the crossing of racial and moral boundaries and those who were victims, innocent characters who unintentionally found themselves falling outside the bounds of white respectability. Behind these characterisations was the understanding that mixing with Chinese men was dangerous to the reputation of a white woman or girl. Jan Ryan has noted how working-class women were subject to a process of Orientalisation through forming relationships with Chinese men, whereby their respectability and 'whiteness' were eroded.⁷⁸ This meant that some women were particularly careful to guard themselves against such characterisation by avoiding even the possibility of being tainted by association with the Chinese. Arthur Buchanan, one of the witnesses before the 1891 Royal Commission into Alleged

⁷⁶ *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886.

⁷⁷ *SMH*, 15 August 1866. On the sale of women by Chinese men, see also *Illustrated Sydney News*, 14 May 1881, *Belfast Gazette*, 7 June 1881 and *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886.

⁷⁸ See Ryan, *Journal of Australian Studies*.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

Chinese Gambling and a hotelkeeper in Lower George Street, stated that his wife had attempted to hire a female servant for the hotel, but that she had been told by one girl that she 'did not mind going to a respectable hotel, but she drew the line at "China Town"'.⁷⁹

Except in a few circumstances, such as teaching English at a Chinese mission or undertaking charity work, white women were expected to shun contact with Chinese men, and to fail to do so could indicate lax morality.⁸⁰ Women who formed intimate relationships with Chinese men therefore were those most vilified for their apparent crossing of boundaries of morality and respectability. They were generally poor and uneducated; they had earlier been seduced by white men, were working as prostitutes, had illegitimate children, or came from abusive or broken marriages with white men. These women were known to have come to the Chinese willingly, for comfort and protection, to avoid prosecution under laws such as the Vagrancy Act, to find companionship and community among those who would not judge them for earlier transgressions, or to find husbands among the Chinese when they could not find one among white men. 'It is difficult to arouse much compassion for those who have deliberately chosen – even though the choice was made in a moment of indignation and anger – the habitations of the Mongol', wrote the *Bulletin* in 1886.⁸¹

Some commentators suggested more sympathy was due to these 'fallen women' than the *Bulletin*, shifting the responsibility from the white women to the white men who caused their initial downfalls or earlier misfortunes and tying their experiences to contemporary concerns with seduction and abandonment.⁸² Women like one 'Mrs F',

⁷⁹ RCACG, p. 82.

⁸⁰ For example, in Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, on a public coach ride the young white heroine Sybylla was seated next to a Chinese man. The white man seated on her other side offered to trade seats so that she would not be so offended by the Chinese man's smell. Sybylla was reluctant, fearful of hurting the Chinese man's feelings by such an obvious display of racial prejudice, but the other man only laughed at her suggestion that a Chinese man had feelings. He and the other (white male) passengers expected Sybylla, a 'good' white girl, to feel uncomfortable from being in such close proximity with a Chinese man. Miles Franklin, *My Brilliant Career*, Eden Paperbacks, North Ryde, 1988 (first published 1901), pp. 166-7.

⁸¹ *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886.

⁸² For a discussion of discourses of seduction in the late nineteenth century, see Lynette Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, chapter 5.

the wife of a Sydney grocer named Chong Kee, were occasionally given a public voice to explain why they had chosen a Chinese man. 'Mrs F' had been the 'unhappy wife, slave, and punching-bag of one of the biggest ruffians in the North' and after his death chose a man who would treat her 'like a queen'. How could she not be better off with Chong Lee, even though he was a 'heathen', than with a white man who beat her, she reasoned.⁸³ Women like 'Mrs F' articulated a belief that Chinese men made good husbands because they were kinder, more thoughtful and more responsible than white men. The unkind response of white male commentators to these statements was that Chinese men spoil their wives and provided for them a 'sheltered and lazy life'.⁸⁴ Why white women chose Chinese husbands was explained thus:

The explanation is supposed to lie in the entire abandonment and freedom of their life. These girls find Chinese husbands indulgent and not at all exacting. Their household duties and responsibilities are merely nominal, and they soon acquire a liking for the lazy luxury of the mat and the frequent pipe of opium.⁸⁵

The other response of white men to claims of the 'superiority' of Chinese husbands was to undermine the validity of their relationships with white women by questioning their masculinity and suggesting they did not, and could not, behave as husbands should. They questioned Chinese husbands' abilities to control their wives or to behave in appropriately masculine ways towards them. The story 'Pin Lung's Missus', published in the *Bulletin* in 1900, is one tale with just such a conclusion.⁸⁶ Pin Lung, a vegetable seller, had found himself a white wife after fourteen lonely years in the colonies. At first she was industrious and cleanly and thrived in her new home but then, one day, she returned to old habits and started drinking again. When drunk, she yelled and cursed and beat Pin Lung until he was bleeding and black-

⁸³ HF Wickham, 'China in Sydney', *Red Funnel*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1 August 1906, p. 55.

⁸⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, undated article, Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 96, Mitchell Library.

⁸⁵ 'The Chinese Quarter, Melbourne', Newspaper Cuttings (Melbourne), Mitchell Library, p. 39.

⁸⁶ *Bulletin*, 27 January 1900.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

eyed. After a year of her drunken fits, Pin Lung decided on a solution – unable to control her himself, he paid a layabout white neighbour to beat his wife for him.

In most instances, white women in intimate relationships with Chinese men were seen as immoral, abandoned, the ‘lowest of their kind’, the ‘most degraded portion of their sex’, as ugly and undesirable.⁸⁷ Living with or among the Chinese was seen as the final stage in their degradation or desperation. For example, the *Pastoral Times* stated that the typical woman living in the Chinese camp at Deniliquin went from being a ‘partly reformed wanton’ before living among the Chinese, to a ‘licentious bawd and procuress whose nastiness is evident in her dress, her face, her manners, her speech and in her general *tout ensemble*’ afterwards.⁸⁸ In willingly associating with Chinese men, white women were seen to be casting off the last vestiges of civilisation and abandoning any right to a place within respectable white society. The wearing of Chinese dress was seen as one obvious external marker of this moral and social abandonment. An 1881 article noted that some of the ‘unfortunate European girls’ in the Chinese camps wore the ‘fantastic costume of the Mongolian female’, but that:

The majority of these hapless waifs naturally shrink, even in this deepest degradation, from an act that would seem to imply a total severance of the connection with the world of civilisation without.⁸⁹

White women in colonial Chinatowns were presented as the antithesis of respectable white womanhood and the lives they lived as the opposite of respectable domesticity.

Interesting parallels can be drawn between these white discourses on white women and Chinese men and those found in the colonial Chinese press.⁹⁰ Yulan Poon has

⁸⁷ See for example, Carl Feilburg, ‘Can the Chinaman be made a good colonist?’, *Victorian Review*, vol. 1, 1880, p. 370 and *Bulletin*, 27 August 1898.

⁸⁸ *Pastoral Times*, 27 May 1882, reproduced in *Stories of Early Deniliquin*, Deniliquin Family History Group Inc, Deniliquin, 1999, p. 25.

⁸⁹ ‘The Chinese in the colonies’, *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art*, vol. V, no. 238, 21 July 1881, p. 451.

⁹⁰ For an outline of the publication of the Chinese language newspapers in Australia from the 1890s, see Liu Weiping, ‘Chinese newspapers in Australia from the turn of the century’, Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation website, URL: www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/chinese_newspapers, accessed 24 May 2002.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

noted how the Chinese language press featured regular articles on western women, often commenting on their criminality, promiscuity and other lapses of morality.⁹¹ The *Chinese Australian Herald* and the *Tung Wah Times* were as misogynous and racist as white newspapers and they painted a picture of white womanhood as licentious, immoral, degraded and dishonest. They were disapproving of interracial relationships and featured stories which illustrated its perils. In 1899, the *Tung Wah Times* told the moralistic tale of a Chinese man named Gu Chaoqin whose white Australian wife poisoned him because he was leaving her and returning to China.⁹² Later that year, it told the story of a Chinese man in New Zealand who fell prey to the tricks of a white 'prostitute' (as it commonly called lower-class white women) – lonely and with a poor grasp of English, he believed that the woman wished to marry him and so gave her his hard-earned savings, only to find that she soon ran away, taking the money with her.⁹³ In 1907, it published a two-part article which provided advice to Chinese men considering marrying western women, admonishing them to think about the consequences of such an action. Of particular concern were how they would lose authority within their families, how their western wives and foreign-born children would not be obedient and how their children would not look after them in their old age.⁹⁴ Such stories and the images they painted of white women were aimed at discouraging Chinese men from forming relationships with Australian women.

A further way in which white women in colonial Chinatowns were represented in the white press was based on the idea that the Chinese had the power to lure 'innocents' into their camps and quarters, where they would trap them through opium addiction and shame. (See Image 7.) The nature of white women was given as the reason why they were apparently so easily seduced into an 'immoral life' with the Chinese.

⁹¹ See Yulan Poon, 'The two-way mirror: contemporary issues as seen through the eyes of the Chinese language press, 1901 – 1911', in Shirley Fitzgerald and Garry Wotherspoon (eds), *Minorities: Cultural Diversity in Sydney*, State Library of NSW Press, Sydney, 1995 and Yuk Lan Poon, *Through the eyes of the dragon: The Chinese press in Australia 1901 – 1911*, BA (Hons) thesis, Department of History, University of Sydney, 1986.

⁹² *Tung Wah News* (Donghua xinbao), 26 August 1899.

⁹³ *Tung Wah News* (Donghua xinbao), 29 November 1899.

⁹⁴ *Tung Wah Times* (Donghua bao), 14 and 21 September 1907.



Image 7. 'The yellow conqueror'
Illustrated Sydney News, 16 September 1876

First, women's selfishness and love of finery made them susceptible to the advances of Chinese men and second, their thoughtlessness and innocence were played upon by Chinese men who were deliberate and calculating in their interactions with white women and girls. The *Bulletin* outlined such cunning plots in 'The Chinese in Australia: Their vices and their victims'. 'Miss Vanity', a factory girl in want of some finery or money for an upcoming holiday, comes to the knowledge of 'an obliging Celestial', who provides her with what she desires. Now in debt to him and unable to repay him with money, she is forced to accompany him to his 'den'. 'If she is pliant to the wishes of the debtor, and willing to minister to his pleasure, her down-hill course

Section 1: *Imaginings*

is certain and rapid, but if virtue, or even disinclination, bars the way', the *Bulletin* claimed, she is introduced to opium which then seals her fate.

The same article continued with the tale of 'mere school-children' who were lured to Chinatown through their curiosity to view new and strange toys and knickknacks. Once there, they were then given presents by Chinese men which encouraged them to return again, visits which led 'to the only possible result when a lustful and unscrupulous Chinaman is one of the parties, and an unsuspecting ... girl, the other'.⁹⁵ The possibilities of this kind of interaction are suggested in Tom Roberts' etching of a Chinese cookshop. Here, in the shop's dark and crowded space, we see a young girl, dressed in white and the picture of innocence, conversing with a much older Chinese man. Other Chinese men go about their business in the shadows. Nothing bad has yet happened, but it is clear that the girl is out of place and threatened by being in such a masculine and foreign space. (See Image 8.)

White male commentators failed to see that white women participating in relationships with Chinese men in colonial Chinatowns could have harmless motivations and reasonable thoughts behind their actions. They removed women's agency from their discussions because it was incomprehensible to them why good, decent, respectable white women would be with the Chinese. As FRC Hopkins quipped:

A black or yellow-skinned male specimen of the inhabitants of this globe, may love a pale-faced daughter of the same; but however the *vice versâ* come to happen, is a conundrum virtually insoluble.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886. Less frequently, the Chinese were accused of kidnapping rather than seduction. The parents of sixteen-year old Annie Higgins, found in a Chinese 'disorderly house' in inner Sydney in January 1890 and arrested by the police, claimed that she had been on her way to the hospital when three Chinese men caught hold of her and dragged her to their 'den'. *Evening News*, 22 January 1890.

⁹⁶ FRC Hopkins, *Confessions of a Cynic: Social, Moral and Philosophical*, Mackay & Drought, Echuca, 1882, p. 62.



Image 8. 'Chinese cook-shop' – etching by Tom Roberts
National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an8870578

In cases of seduction and the luring of 'innocents' into the dangerous space of colonial Chinatowns, it was either the foolishness or the naivety of white women and girls which was given as the reason behind their crossing of racial boundaries. In cases of women living 'voluntarily' with the Chinese, it was because they had no other choice due to their already flawed characters and unhappy pasts. In each of these discourses, colonial Chinatowns were the setting for the destruction of white womanhood. However, these dangerous Chinese spaces were not the only places in which it was imagined that Chinese men had the opportunity to meet, interact with and corrupt white women. The white home, too, could be the site of danger and destruction, through the participation of Chinese men in domestic work and in hawking.

A threat within the home

White women and the white home held important symbolic meaning for white male colonists. Political writings and cartoons from the colonial press used images of white women to represent the colonies and their white populations in anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese statements.⁹⁷ The *Boomerang* in February 1888 published a cartoon titled 'Wake, Australia, wake!', which showed a Chinese man with a knife between his teeth entering the bedroom window (labelled South Australia) of a virginal maiden, 'Australia', who is asleep (see Image 9).⁹⁸ Later the same year, the *Melbourne Punch* contained a cartoon in which a group of white women – the Australian colonies – were shown using a lever called 'Federation' to push away the 'Chinese pest' (see Image 10).⁹⁹



Image 9. 'Wake, Australia, wake!'
Boomerang, 11 February 1888

⁹⁷ See David Walker, 'Shooting Mabel: Warrior masculinity and Asian invasion', *History Australia*, vol. 2, no. 3, December 2005, pp. 89.1-89.11.

⁹⁸ *Boomerang*, 11 February 1888.

⁹⁹ *Melbourne Punch*, 10 May 1888.



Image 10. 'The only way'
Melbourne Punch, 10 May 1888

The white home held meaning because it was there that white children were born and raised by their white mothers – work through which women contributed to the continuation of their race and the population of their nation. Within the family unit headed by white men, women were nurturers and carers, but in the absence of white men they also took on the role of guardians and protectors of their homes and families. This role was also depicted in colonial cartoons. One, from the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1881 which was part of a larger cartoon about the smallpox scare in Sydney, showed a woman using a long forked stick to push a Chinese vegetable seller out her gate saying 'Out you go John, you and your Small Pox'¹⁰⁰ (see Image 11). A second, from the *Bulletin* in 1898, illustrated a fable about the problems of coloured immigration with the image of a white woman, baby in arms, standing in the doorway of her bark hut, shooing away a group of non-white men, including an Indian and a Chinese (see Image 12).¹⁰¹ These cartoons used the white woman and home as symbols for the white community and nation, but the threat was not only an

¹⁰⁰ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 9 July 1881.

¹⁰¹ *Bulletin*, 20 August 1898.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

abstract or symbolic one; the threat could be a real one which appeared on the doorstep of a white home in the form of the Chinese hawker or within it in the form of the Chinese domestic worker.



Image 11. 'Out you go John, you and your Small Pox'
Illustrated Sydney News, 9 July 1881



Image 12. 'An Australian fable'
Bulletin, 20 August 1898

Hawking was one of the primary occupations of Chinese men in the colonies and took them out of the Chinese spaces of colonial Chinatowns into white suburbs and neighbourhoods. Hawkers sold vegetables or other transportable items such as

sewing supplies, ribbons and other fancy goods.¹⁰² Smaller numbers of Chinese men worked within white households as cooks or kitchen gardeners on large properties. These contacts took place within white domestic space, generally in the absence of the white male protector. One of the central fears of contact between hawkers or domestic workers and white women was a belief that while holding the role of protector and guardian of their homes and families, white women lacked the ability to separate themselves from their emotions and their sympathetic natures in dealing with Chinese men, leaving them open to the cunning and wiles of Chinese men.

One *Bulletin* story from 1881, 'A Celestial Lothario', told of what could happen if a Chinese man and white woman were allowed to interact in white domestic space without the supervision of a white man.¹⁰³ It was the story of a nameless Chinese man, the 'Lothario' of the title, a vegetable seller who plied his trade with a little tilt cart. He spoke English which was comprehensible and embellished with gallant phrases which had 'effect upon various slaves of the broom whom John matutinally encountered'. His sights were set higher though, upon a white girl named Evangeline, pure and respectable, whom he had met at her father's house at Glebe Point in Sydney when he went to sell his vegetables. Evangeline had started conversing with him, and he presented gifts, and so it went on day after day until Evangeline was 'gone' on him. Evangeline's brother worked as chief officer on a large steamer, and on returning home from a time away noticed a change in his sister. It was then that he discovered the truth about the relationship between Evangeline and the hawker. The brother took to the Chinese hawker, giving him a 'cracked skull' and ruining his cart and therefore his livelihood.

The *Bulletin* cast Evangeline as typical of her sex, overly romantic and sentimental – she enjoyed reading romantic journals, was taken in by the hawker's gifts and declared her love for him in the most florid of language. 'A Celestial Lothario' suggested that a white woman could not be trusted on her own in interactions with

¹⁰² For discussion of Chinese hawkers and market gardeners, see Yong, *The New Gold Mountain*, pp. 35-9 and Rolls, *Citizens*, pp. 71-5.

¹⁰³ *Bulletin*, 29 January 1881.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

Chinese men because, caught up in her own fancies, she could easily fall prey to the spell of romance he cast. Another *Bulletin* piece told of how one Chinese vegetable seller had won the custom, and perhaps the affections, of a white domestic servant by being kind to her cat, and another stated that the Chinese man had cleverly learnt how to make impressions and agitate the sympathies of 'compassionate housekeepers' and 'susceptible kitchen females'.¹⁰⁴ Because women could not be trusted to maintain the racial, moral and sexual boundaries between themselves and Chinese men, it needed the control and interference of white men, such as Evangeline's brother, to set the situation straight and return order to their domestic space.

The possibility of such events reinforced the idea that women needed to be controlled and guarded by father, husband, brother or employer and that physical aggression towards Chinese men was a justified reaction to the threat they posed. One example of such aggression graced the cover of the Melbourne newspaper the *Police News* in 1877 (see Image 13). There a Chinese man named Ah Ping is shown being physically thrown out of a white home by the home owner, Mr Bramwell and his friend Mr Greenham. Bramwell is cutting off Ah Ping's pigtail. The reason for this aggression? Ah Ping had attempted an assault on Mrs Bramwell, and she is seen cowering in the background, perhaps more fearful of her husband's rage than of the Chinese offender.¹⁰⁵

Because of beliefs about women's nature and Chinese desires, the physical proximity of white women and Chinese men needed to be controlled. If they were kept separate nothing untoward would take place, but once the physical boundaries between them were breached, such as through the work of Chinese men as hawkers or domestic workers, problems would emerge.

¹⁰⁴ *Bulletin*, 27 August 1898 and 21 December 1889.

¹⁰⁵ *Police News*, 17 February 1877. The lower portion of the cover shows a white woman being carried away or 'rescued' by her brother after she had left home.

Section 1: Imaginings

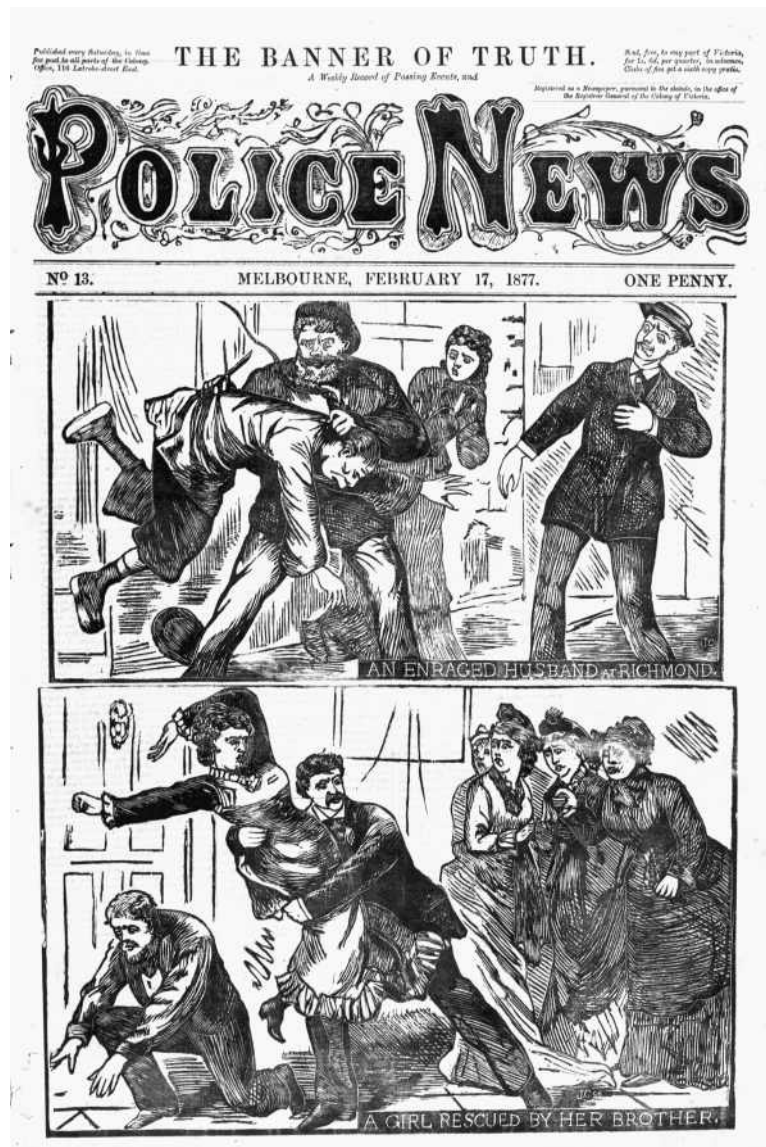


Image 13. 'An enraged husband at Richmond'
Police News, 17 February 1877

As well as commenting on relations between Chinese men and white women in the Australian colonies, the *Bulletin* turned its attention to the presence of 'lady missionaries' and other white women in China, particularly at the time of the Boxer Rebellion when there were many attacks upon foreigners. The *Bulletin* saw that the physical proximity of the Chinese man to the white woman in the home in China caused trouble:

Section 1: *Imaginings*

Women must have association of some kind with males of her species from time to time. In the larger ports in China the ordinary run of white girl is fairly all right, because she had plenty of men of her own rank and color [sic] to flirt with. But the poor governess in the big ports and the girl in the ports where whites are few and far between have but a slack time. Then the quiet, cat-like, purring houseboy, who is always about and who recognises the right moment, had his innings. From one large port in China four governesses have been hurriedly packed off home within the last six months.¹⁰⁶

The article concluded saying, 'Why *don't* we encourage the Chows to come to Australia? They *do* make such splendid house-servants'. This article hints at one further and somewhat contradictory characterisation of the Chinese man. The 'quiet, cat-like purring houseboy' is not so much a threat because of his overt masculinity, but because his sexuality is feminised and therefore perverse. Chinese men, as domestic workers, cooks and kitchen gardeners performed women's work within domestic and therefore feminine spaces.¹⁰⁷ Friendly interaction between white women and Chinese men within the home posed a threat to the authority of the white man through the collaboration of the feminine and the feminised.

White male commentators suggested that women, in their naivety, did not understand the true threat of the Chinese. They saw women as being incapable of considering the political or social ramifications of the Chinese presence and the 'fondness' women had for the Chinese as another example of the folly of womanhood. One letter to the *Bulletin*, from a man named Bill Sikes, stated that it was within women's nature to treat the Chinese in a kindly way:

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin*, 27 August 1898.

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of feminisation of Asian men in the West, see Chiung Hwang Chen, 'Feminization of Asian (American) men in the US mass media: An analysis of *The Ballad of Little Jo*', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 2, Fall 1996, pp. 57-71.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

She hears JOHN, her husband, violently abusing Chinamen and charging them with all sorts of faults and vices. She looks at JOHN, her hawker, and she has a dim (or strong) perception of the truth. She knows that her husband is a man, she loves him and reveres his very failings – but, in her illogical woman’s way, she is kind to the victim of her man’s injustice and race-prejudices ... the woman sees the *human being*, and (let us thank God for it) her womanliness overpowers other considerations.¹⁰⁸

The use of the name ‘John’ for both husband and hawker draws closer the thread of common humanity which Sikes stated white women saw linking these two groups of men. Sikes concluded by saying that it was necessary to limit the immigration of Chinese to Australia, but he did concede that the Chinese hawker was honest, patient, remembered the tastes and likes of his customers, was reliable and punctual, sober, clean-mouthed, and usually also clean of body.

It was these personal characteristics and habits which drew white women to seek the services of Chinese men as providores and domestic workers. The *Truth* in 1893 published an article by one white woman in which she praised the Chinese hawker in comparison with his Indian counterpart. For women living on isolated farms, frequently alone without their men folk, the Chinese hawker was ‘a comparative blessing, for he is as a rule quiet and inoffensive,’ she wrote. The Indian hawker, in comparison, was bullying and threatening.¹⁰⁹ In a similar vein, Polly, the heroine of Henry Handel Richardson’s *Australia Felix*, tells Ah Sing the vegetable hawker ‘Me wait for white man’, while wishing her husband would let her buy her produce from him. Polly expresses no real fondness for Ah Sing, and her young niece shows marked fear of the ‘fearsome bogies’, but she would rather do business with him as he was cheaper and more punctual than the white ‘vegetable man’.¹¹⁰

While white male commentators were generally critical of women for their kindly interaction with Chinese hawkers, there was also some acknowledgment, even in the

¹⁰⁸ *Bulletin*, 28 April 1894.

¹⁰⁹ *Truth*, 12 March 1893.

¹¹⁰ Henry Handel Richardson, *Australia Felix*, Heinemann, London, 1962 (first published 1917), p. 171.

Bulletin, that white women were using their heads as well as their hearts in these interactions. They were often just trying to make their limited resources go further, for 'without the ubiquitous vegetable "John" the housewife would find her purse sorely taxed to make both ends meet.'¹¹¹ J Ewing Ritchie wrote in his *An Australian Ramble* in 1890 that women approached the 'Chinese Question' from a purely practical angle:

A lady fellow-passenger in a steamer said to me, with a sigh, 'Ah, if women had votes there would be no restrictions on the immigration of Chinese.' She valued them as faithful and dutiful domestic servants, as polite, obliging, and honest hawkers of vegetables and other small household requirements.¹¹²

The reliance of Australian women on Chinese hawkers was also stressed in an 1888 letter in the *Bulletin* from 'A Workman's Wife', the wife of a member of the Anti-Chinese League. The piece put forward the case of white women and the 'problem' of buying non-Chinese vegetables. Although being asked to boycott the Chinese hawker, she continued to buy from him, not, she argued, because of her ignorance of political issues – she had thought about it and did 'desire to see the white man hold his own against the heathen'. She had tried, in the spirit of patriotism, to buy only from white hawkers, but discovered that she not only paid three times what she would normally have paid, but that white hawkers bought most of their produce from the Chinese anyway.¹¹³

Gendered responses?

White women experienced colonial life and interacted with non-white colonial subjects in different ways from white men. They reacted differently to the presence of Chinese men in the communities, their neighbourhoods and their homes from white men, yet racism was not necessarily gendered so that men, viewing the world through business and politics (the public sphere), objected to the Chinese presence and that women, whose work revolved around the home and family (the private

¹¹¹ HF Wickham, 'China in Sydney', *Red Funnel*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1 August 1906, p. 58.

¹¹² J Ewing Ritchie, *An Australian Ramble or A Summer in Australia*, T Fisher Unwin, London, 1890, p. 181.

¹¹³ *Bulletin*, 16 June 1888.

sphere), welcomed it. White women were implicated in the subordination of the non-white Other and participated in anti-Chinese activities.¹¹⁴ Many white women preferred not to deal with Chinese hawkers, shop in Chinatown or come into contact with the Chinese in other ways and they could be as strong in their hatred of the Chinese as their husbands and fathers.¹¹⁵ Humphrey McQueen has used the writings of Henry Handel Richardson, for example, to demonstrate the degree to which racist anti-Chinese sentiments 'became an unquestioned part of the outlook of Australians'. *Australia Felix*, set on the Victorian goldfields, presented all the most common complaints levelled against the Chinese, from overuse of water to the creation of 'dens of infamy' and McQueen has written that few Australians have been offended by Richardson's portrayal of Australia's racist attitude towards the Chinese because such sentiments 'were just naturally white Australian'.¹¹⁶

It was not common to find white women articulating their perceptions of the Chinese presence or describing their own relationships with Chinese men, so most of their thoughts and actions appear mediated through the writings of white men. Stories of interactions between white women and Chinese men told by white men in the press and revealed in government reports were often recounted in the first person, and in these first-hand accounts the presence of the white male author was crucial to the telling of the narrative. They expressed a personal horror and shock at the 'immoralities' they saw, but their reactions were very much from the perspective of

¹¹⁴ The role of white women in the Australian anti-Chinese movements has not been researched, however it is known that in June 1892 over four hundred white women took to the streets of Melbourne protesting against the Chinese who were taking female jobs in the laundry industry. See Charlie Fox and Bruce Scates, 'The beat of weary feet', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia Since 1788*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, Fitzroy, 1998, pp. 136-7; and Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism*, revised edition, Penguin Books, 1986 (first published 1976), p. 35. In the USA it has been shown that white women were quite active in anti-Chinese activities. See Martha Mabie Gardner, 'Working on white womanhood: White working women in the San Francisco anti-Chinese movement, 1877 – 1890', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 33, no. 1, Fall 1999, pp. 73-95; and Margaret K Holden, 'Gender and protest ideology: Sue Ross Keenan and the Oregon anti-Chinese movement', *Western Legal History*, vol. 7, no. 2, Summer/Fall 1994, pp. 223-43.

¹¹⁵ For example, in 1881, during a visit of inspection by municipal authorities to the neighbourhoods of the Rocks a throng of white women clustered around asking if the Chinese were to be removed from their midst. 'Expressions of satisfaction' could be heard when the news was spread that this was to be the case. *Evening News*, 17 May 1881.

¹¹⁶ McQueen, *A New Britannia*, pp. 41-2.

an outsider looking in. Their subjects functioned more as symbols than as real people. The anonymity of the characters in stories of interactions between Chinese men and white women fit with what Victoria Haskins and John Maynard have noted concerning the depiction of relationships between white women and Aboriginal men in colonial Australia. Such anonymity, they argue:

... implies an unwillingness to recognise or admit such intermarriage and is related to the colonialist concept of 'the white woman' as primarily a signifier of racial boundaries rather than as an individual person with understandable motivations and desires.¹¹⁷

The male narrators did not know or understand their subjects, be they Chinese men or white women, personally or as individuals. Nor did they choose to seek to understand them, instead falling back on images drawn from discourse of threat and contagion, of danger and disruption.

The individual contact some white women had with Chinese men – as saviours with money to pay bail, as providers of shelter, as honest salesmen and as faithful workers – led to a chance of understanding and friendship, as it did between white and Chinese men who dealt with each other on a one-to-one basis. A more sympathetic understanding of the Chinese presence came to those who dealt with Chinese men as individuals – 'the Chinese' were not just an anonymous mass of foreign humanity but were people they had the opportunity to interact with in everyday situations. Such interactions were in sharp contrast to the anonymity of 'the Chinese' in political and journalistic discourse and they led to a personalisation of the stereotype of the Chinese.¹¹⁸ Where glimpses of white women's own responses to the

¹¹⁷ Victoria Haskins and John Maynard, 'Blood, sex and tears: Aboriginal men and white women in Australian history', unpublished paper presented at the Australian Historical Association Conference, Brisbane, July 2002. See also, Victoria Haskins and John Maynard, 'Sex, race and power: Aboriginal men and white women in Australian history', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 37, no. 126, October 2005, pp. 191-216.

¹¹⁸ The *Bulletin's* representation of interracial relationships also changed with the injection of real, identified characters. In 1897 it presented, in a remarkably matter-of-fact manner, the news that Presbyterian missionary, James Fong Kem Yee, had married English-born Annie Fuller. *Bulletin*, 18 September 1897.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

Chinese and their personal interactions with them are found within colonial discourses they tell different stories from the politicised accounts of male journalists.

Ellen

One woman whose story was told was Ellen, a witness before the Royal Commission into Alleged Chinese Gambling held in Sydney in 1891.¹¹⁹ She was one of nine women interviewed by the Commission, all of whom were living with Chinese men in Sydney's inner city.¹²⁰ The Commissioners, all men and all members of the NSW colonial elite,¹²¹ wished to speak to white women living with Chinese men to establish whether the claims of seduction and immorality levelled against the Chinese were correct. The questions they asked, and expected the women to answer, were at times very personal and intrusive but were not motivated, the Commissioners claimed, by the desire to 'gratify idle curiosity'.¹²² Several of the women, including Ellen, had not told their own mothers or families of their 'current situation', but yet they were expected to reveal the intimacies of their personal lives and habits to the Commission. In the interests of privacy, only the first names of most of the women were given, however in their own neighbourhoods it was well known who had been called to testify and why.¹²³

Twenty-three year old Ellen lived with her unnamed Chinese partner in Exeter Place, a laneway off Lower George Street in the Rocks, and they had been together for two and a half years. Originally from Melbourne, Ellen had fallen pregnant out of wedlock and, leaving her child in the care of her sister, came to Sydney to find work. She

¹¹⁹ RCACG, pp. 398-401.

¹²⁰ RCACG. Among them were Hannah (pp. 382-3), Adelaide (pp. 384-5), two Ellens (pp. 385-8 and 398-404), Margaret (pp. 404-8), Minnie (pp. 408-12), Pauline (pp. 412-15), Maud Lamb (pp. 450-3) and Nora Ah Toy (pp. 462-4).

¹²¹ The Commissioners were WP Manning (President), Francis Abigail (Vice-President), Ramsay McKillop, J Stuart Hawthorne and Quong Tart.

¹²² RCACG, p. 382.

¹²³ From the women's statements, it is clear that the Royal Commission itself and the questions being asked of the female witnesses were discussed in and around their neighbourhoods. One of the women called by the Commission, Maud Ah Poy aka Maud Lamb, initially refused to attend because she had heard about the intimate and personal nature of the Commission's questions through a mutual acquaintance of one of the other female witnesses who had already appeared before the Royal Commission. See RCACG, pp. 450-3.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

worked as a cook, laundress, barmaid and housemaid, and it was while she was in service in Woollahra that she met the man she was now living with. They met through a woman she had come to know while in the Church Home for Women where she had gone for help when she first arrived in Sydney. Her unnamed Chinese partner was 38 years old and was a vegetable seller with a business in Campbell Street. He had been a gardener at Cook's River, southwest of Sydney, but had given up this work due to ill-health. His current work involved buying vegetables at the market, loading them into his horse-drawn cart and selling them door-to-door.

Ellen's testimony was mediated through the questions of the Commissioners, which focussed to a large extent on her use of opium – how much opium did she use, where did she buy it, how did she take it, how did it affect her daily life and how did it influence the sexual desire of both women and Chinese men? The Commissioners' questions also delved into her personal life and daily habits – had she been seduced, was she faithful to her Chinese man, had he ever asked her to prostitute herself, did she work as a prostitute before she met him, what did she do each day, did she use chopsticks, did she live like an ordinary white woman?

In spite of the Commissioners' focus on the more unsavoury aspects of Ellen's life and domestic arrangements, through her answers she gave the clear impression that she was contented in her life and in her choice of partner. She stated that women like herself always had plenty to eat and drink and had houses that were clean and comfortable. Of her Chinese partner, Ellen said, 'He has always been a very good man to me. I could not want for a better man.' Speaking in matter-of-fact and unsentimental terms, Ellen and the other women interviewed by the Royal Commission described the choices they made in coming to live as the wives of Chinese men. Hannah, who had previously been married to a white man, said that 'the Chinese have been better to me than my own husband' and that she 'thought it was better to have one man than to be knocking about the streets with everybody.'¹²⁴ Minnie stated that 'fully half of them [white women living with Chinese men] come to

¹²⁴ RCACG, p. 383.

the Chinese when they have nowhere else to go' because the Chinese were kind to them and 'for the sake of a home'.¹²⁵ Through their responses, it is clear that Ellen and the other women spoke what Judith Walkowitz has described as 'the unsensational language of sexual bartering, not the melodramatic language of seduction'.¹²⁶

The women felt the precariousness of their own positions in front of the Commission, and they strove to assert the legitimacy of their relationships and to reclaim their own respectability as much as they could. The women also asserted the conventional domesticity of many aspects of their lives with their Chinese partners, whom they called their husbands even when they were not legally married. They gave examples of the minutiae of their day-to-day lives as evidence of their normality. Ellen asserted that she lived as an ordinary white woman, as did her man. 'He would just as soon live European fashion as Chinese,' she stated. At home together they ate like Europeans (no chopsticks), even though when he was out her husband ate 'like his own countrymen in the cookshops'.¹²⁷ Pauline stated that her Chinese man was 'very clean' and 'always washing himself'. 'He washes every night before he gets into bed', she said, adding that Chinese men insisted that their women were also clean. 'If you are dirty they will quickly tell you so; if you have dirty clothes on, for instance'.¹²⁸ Similar assertions of conventional domesticity can be found in other accounts of 'respectable' white wives of Chinese men. The *Sydney Mail* visited one home where the white wife stated 'with some appearance of pride' that her Chinese husband was a 'very particular man', who would not 'sit down to his meals without a tablecloth, and the knives and forks as bright as silver'.¹²⁹ Aware of the stigma attached to their current positions, Ellen and the other women projected an image of their lives as similar to those of other women of their class and education. They had husbands,

¹²⁵ RCACG, p. 412.

¹²⁶ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 114.

¹²⁷ RCACG, pp. 400 and 403.

¹²⁸ RCACG, p. 415.

¹²⁹ *Sydney Mail*, 1 February 1879.

homes and children and they made lives for themselves and their unconventional families as best they could.

The statements given by Ellen and the other women led the Commissioners to conclude that the Chinese could no longer be accused of ‘the seduction of European girls of tender ages’, and that those white women who did live with Chinese men were ‘fallen women’ who ‘found shelter from lives of shame’ in their Chinese homes. Those who worked as prostitutes, ‘for the lack of better prospects, ... sought the Chinamen, who at least pay them well and treat them kindly’.¹³⁰ The women’s statements suggested that the interracial relationships so feared by white commentators were generally much more benign than they imagined, and for the Commissioners it was the use of opium, rather than ‘crossing the racial line’, that was of greatest concern. Importantly for the Commissioners, as for most white male commentators, the women they found living with Chinese men in colonial Chinatowns were far from the idealised image of white womanhood they had imagined was being sullied by Chinese men.

Annie

A second account of interactions between a white woman and Chinese man comes from *Cosmos Magazine* and was published in 1896. Written as fiction by a woman named Margaret Egerton, it tells of the experiences of a middle-class doctor’s wife of being both a student of Chinese and teacher of English at her local Chinese mission. Told in the first person, the nature of detail and insight into the position of the Chinese in NSW at the time suggests that the three-part account was semi-autobiographical.¹³¹

¹³⁰ RCACG, p. 21.

¹³¹ Margaret Egerton, ‘My Chinese’, *Cosmos Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 3, 19 September 1896, pp. 124-8; vol. 3, no. 4, 19 October 1896, pp. 138-41; vol. 3, no. 5, 19 November 1896, pp. 192-6. Egerton’s portrayal of the Chinese is both detailed and sympathetic, and although the nature of her own interaction with the community is not known, hints within the text suggest she may have been closely involved. In the story, for example, the fictional Chinese minister, Reverend Hezekiah Ah Sing, is married with five children (named Gabriel, Joshua, David, Kezia and Kerenhappuch). NSW birth records show that the real minister of the Sydney Chinese Presbyterian Church, Reverend John Young Wai, by 1896 when ‘My Chinese’ was written, also had five children – Joshua, Samuel, David, Kezia and Kerenhappuch.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

Annie Leigh, the heroine of the story, lived with her doctor husband Frank in a country town in NSW. An intelligent woman with an interest in languages, Annie decided to attend Chinese classes at the local Chinese mission church with a friend who was soon to set off for China as a 'lady missionary'. As well as studying Chinese, the women were to teach English to a group of Chinese men. When Annie told her husband of her desire to study Chinese at the Chinese parsonage, he was unsympathetic. He had supported her through numerous other studies – of 'scientific cookery, Hebrew and dressmaking' – but her desire to learn Chinese he could not fathom. His objections initially centred on the fact that 'Chinese was a ridiculous language' and 'had no literature worth reading', but eventually they turned to objections to the Chinese themselves – 'they were such a dirty race!' He 'proceeded to paint pictures of horror, beginning with fever and ending with small-pox and leprosy'. Only after she had promised 'to observe all sorts of sanitary precautions' was he content to let Annie go.

Among Annie's little class of five Chinese men was sixty-year old Ah Yoo Sin. He had been selling vegetables to Annie for around eight years and she had been a loyal customer of his, only buying from him despite entreaties by other hawkers that he was 'no good'. Her friendship with Ah Yoo Sin began about two years after she had started buying her vegetables from him. One morning she had read in the newspaper of an anti-Chinese rally that had been held the previous day in Sydney. She did not fully understand the arguments put forward for the anti-Chinese poll tax, and felt that the protest was somewhat unjustified and unfair. To make up for it, when Ah Yoo Sin came that day she gave him some of the cakes she had made and he returned soon after with ginger, tea and two feather dusters for her baby. An unusual present, perhaps, but the baby liked them and Ah Yoo Sin was pleased:

From that hour a strong friendship sprang up between us, and it was my custom each week to present him with some of my choicest flowers, cakes and preserves, while he, on his side, quite embarrassed me with the royal munificence of his gifts.

Despite his poor English and her poor Chinese, they managed to understand each other and Ah Yoo Sin told her of his troubles with larrikins – they stole his vegetables

Section 1: *Imaginings*

and pelted him with stones – and other abuse he suffered from white men. Over the years they had known each other Annie had ‘comforted and advised Ah Yoo Sin, had been his lawyer, doctor, and general referee’.

Annie took pride in the progress her students made in class and they in turn appreciated her efforts in teaching them. When she became ill for several weeks with debilitating neuralgia, her students regularly came to ask how she was progressing, and in the end it was one of her students who provided a cure. One day, in the absence of both her maid Eliza and her husband Frank, Paul Lee Fee, a trained Chinese doctor turned market gardener, visited and produced a medicine made from something which smelt like ‘the concentrated essence of Sydney’s Lower George Street’. Annie felt obliged to take it in spite of its smell, and she soon recovered. Her cure managed to ‘appease the wrath’ her doctor husband felt after he heard of the incident and, in fact, the efficacy of Paul Lee Fee’s Chinese medicine intrigued him so much that he took the bottles into his surgery to study and remarked to his wife that ‘he should like to understand Chinese that he might talk with Paul on the subject of his remedies’.

The account of Annie’s friendship with Ah Yoo Sin, her cure by Paul Lee Fee and her dealings with the other students in her class suggests that, contrary to fears expressed by the *Bulletin* and other white male commentators, white women’s interactions with Chinese men were not necessarily sexualised nor were they necessarily dangerous. There could be common understanding and goodwill which grew from spending time together. ‘My Chinese’ also suggests that through getting to know the Chinese as individuals, as Annie and eventually Frank did, initial prejudices against them would be overcome. The articles were not illustrated, but had they been, it may have been with an image like that published in London’s *Graphic* in 1887, which showed a Chinese hawker at Christmas, giving gifts to his customer, a white woman and her baby (see Image 14). It shows a picture of friendship and communication across the front fence, and across the boundaries of race, culture and language.

Conclusion

Interactions between Chinese men and white women were one of the dominant features of writings and illustrations of the Chinese presence in the southern colonies throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century. Some of these accounts were based on first-hand investigations of colonial Chinatowns, but many others reported and repeated commonly held beliefs about the nature of Chinese men and their



Image 14. 'Christmas in Melbourne: A Chinese trader making presents to his customers'
Graphic, 24 December 1887

activities in the colonies. One good example of the way these different beliefs about the Chinese were mixed together is found in *John Chinaman and a Few Others* by EH Parker, a former British consul in the Far East, published in London in 1902. Parker's thoughts on the Chinese in Australia extend to not quite three pages, around a page of which concerns the dealings of Chinese men with white women. Parker 'quotes' from an English miner employed by a Chinese firm at Ballarat to give the general attitude of white men towards the 'Yellow Race':

Oh! they're not bad fellows, them Chinese; the only thing is they're so dirty in their ways, and won't spend nothin', and they plays old 'Arry with our women. But they doesn't do us no 'arm; only we want none o' their blood a-mixin' with ourn. We can put up with them as we've got, but we won't have no more o' them. If they'd only bring their wives and settle down, we could stand it well enough; but they goes a-selling' o' handkerchiefs and sich to them Irish girls so – soft-spoken like, that the girls gets kind o' fond o' them; and the Chinaman he makes a very nice husband too, for he gets up early to make the fire, washes the togs, and lets 'em dress up just as they like; and they are always a frightenin' of him – don't ye see? – and if he didn't fork out, he'd think they'd be after some other chap.¹³²

Here we see the complaint that the Chinese didn't bring their wives, that they didn't make good colonists, that they were dirty, that they charmed white women, that they were not manly men, that they spoilt their white wives by doing housework, and that they were at the mercy of their perhaps undeserving wives. Parker's English miner sums up in one paragraph sentiments that had been forming and reforming over the previous five decades. His words show the central place that concerns over interactions between white women and Chinese men had in discourses on the Chinese presence in the Australian colonies.

The masculine nature of Chinese immigration from the 1850s had created particular fears of the Chinese and the supposed threat they posed to white womanhood, the white family and colonial society. Because authorities in the Australian colonies had not acted to redress the gender imbalance – which was an intrinsic part of the Chinese migratory process – the early fears developed and continued in subsequent decades. The presence of Chinese men without Chinese women was seen as threatening because of the possibility of their forming intimate relationships with white women. Such relationships across racial boundaries were identified as disruptive to the white family and as a danger to the white race and nation because if white women became involved with Chinese men they would no longer be able to fulfil their roles as wives to white men and mothers to white children. White women were implicated in this possible racial destruction and degradation by their very natures and their alleged

¹³² EH Parker, *John Chinaman and a Few Others*, second edition, John Murray, London, 1902, p. 45.

Section 1: *Imaginings*

inability to uphold the social, moral and sexual boundaries by which they were defined and defined themselves.

This section has explored the ways in which white male colonists imagined interactions between white women and Chinese men. It has described how the masculine nature of Chinese immigration was seen as particularly threatening, and consequently how Chinese sites in the colonies – the colonial Chinatowns – were held to be dangerous, masculine spaces in which white women and girls could not be safe. It has further suggested how white men perceived differences between their reactions to the Chinese presence and those of white women. These differences were held to be part of the reason why it was not safe for white women to be allowed to interact with Chinese men outside the gaze of a white, male protector. White women were not able to be so vocal or to present such a clear picture of how they perceived their own interactions with Chinese men, but their thoughts, actions and reactions when related in nineteenth-century writings suggest that the individual and personal contact white women had with Chinese men enabled them to form relationships very different from those imagined and expressed by white men in the colonial press. This first section, in looking at public discourse, sets the background for the following discussion of the lives of Chinese-European couples and their children; lives that were sites of complex exchange and interchange, set between public discourse and private and public sentiment.

Section 2

TRACES

Discovering Chinese-European couples

Intimate relationships between white women and Chinese men in Australia have been underplayed and not well understood in the historiography of the Chinese in Australia. In part this is because it has been assumed that racial prejudices precluded such relationships or resulted in them occurring only under particular unsavoury circumstances. It is also in part because these relationships have subsequently been deliberately forgotten or hidden within families. Previous generations have suppressed information about Chinese ancestry, refused to discuss non-European appearance and lied about the names and backgrounds of parents and grandparents. With the growing interest in genealogy and family history research in Australia over the past two decades, however, increasing numbers of 'white' Australians have uncovered a part-Chinese heritage. Painstaking genealogical research has unearthed facts about Chinese-European ancestors, but often what has been revealed are still little more than skeletal renderings of the lives of mixed couples with little flesh to show how they lived, how they negotiated their relationships within a racist society or how they negotiated cultural differences. What remains today in the records, both archival and anecdotal, are the traces of Chinese-European couples, glimpses of their experiences scattered here and there.

This chapter seeks to begin to fill the gap in the historiography and in our knowledge of Chinese-European relationships by putting together these fragments to examine the lived experience of white women and their Chinese men. The previous chapter looked at the ways in which white Australians imagined relationships between white women and Chinese men in the southern colonies, and the emergence of the reputation surrounding both the nature of the relationships and the characters of those involved. This chapter aims at a new understanding of the people who appear

as two-dimensional characters in the stereotypical portrayals, by thinking about the lives they lived and the communities they inhabited. Who were they? What were their backgrounds? How did they meet? Where did they make their homes? How did they live? And what of the reputation they had for immorality, addiction and poverty? This chapter aims to show some of the ways they experienced life as individuals and as members of mixed race couples, and to explore the ways they interacted with each other in the context of community and society around them. Through this I hope that they will start to emerge as real people who lived, loved and worked as part of the Australian community rather than just anonymous characters in racist or moralistic discourses.

This chapter argues that in spite of racial and social proscription there was a growing number of Chinese-European relationships throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, spread widely in both urban and rural NSW. The chapter focuses primarily on 'first-generation' relationships, that is those involving a China-born Chinese man and a British, European, American or Australian-born white woman. As a basis, the first part of the chapter uses nineteenth-century marriage records from NSW to build a general picture of marriages between white women and Chinese men in the colony, how many such marriages there were, and where they took place. These marriage records, however, only provide evidence of a proportion of Chinese-European relationships, for many more were not legally sanctioned. Other information used in this chapter, much of which concerns *de facto* couples, has been gained with the assistance of descendants of Chinese-European couples whose personal involvement with the subjects of their research gave them the impetus and interest to dig deep into the records about individual families. Furthermore, their research has brought to light stories of relationships that may not be evident from archival sources.

The nature of Chinese-European relationships

In 1883, Police Sub-Inspector Martin Brennan, together with Quong Tart, undertook an inquiry into the Chinese camps of the Riverina district in south-western NSW on

behalf of the colonial government.¹ Part of their brief was to report on the number of European women who were married to Chinese men and how many were 'living in a state of common prostitution'. Brennan found that there were two kinds of white women living on the camps – those who were married and those who were 'prostitutes'. He further divided the married group into those who were 'respectable' and those who were 'the bad characters'. To the 'respectable married' women, he ascribed characteristics and behaviour representative of respectable domesticity – care for their children and husbands, clean and comfortable houses and the avoidance of the 'bad characters' living around them. To those 'bad characters' and to the 'prostitutes', irrespective of whether they were married or not, Brennan ascribed the opposite. These women had poor morals, were often before the courts for disturbances, robberies and crimes, and had 'transformed the Chinese camps into dens of immorality'.²

Brennan's characterisation of the white women living with Chinese men in the Riverina camps is typical of the way in which white commentators imagined their characters and their relationships. There were seemingly two opposites – good or bad, respectable or immoral, law-abiding or criminal, prostitutes or wives and mothers. Kay Daniels, in her discussion of female convicts and prostitution in Australia, has argued that historians have been caught in the trap of categorising women based on such testimony, of following the prejudices of men who saw women as either 'whores' or 'family women'.³ Recent scholarship on both convict and other women in the nineteenth-century Australian colonies, however, suggests that the lives, experiences and choices made were much more complex than such a simple dichotomy allows. Grace Karskens has shown in her work on Sydney's Rocks, for instance, that for lower-class Australians and British and Irish immigrants the definitions and delineations of relationships were fluid and shifting. The strictures of Christian morality and a belief in legal marriage were not necessarily part of lower-class life in the way they were for the middle class. Some couples never married, some

¹ Martin Brennan and Quong Tart, *Reports Upon Chinese Camps*, NSW LA V&P, 1883–84, p. 1.

² Brennan and Tart, *Reports Upon Chinese Camps*, p. 2.

³ Daniels, *Convict Women*, p. 184.

married only after years (and numerous children) together, while others who were legally married did not let their marriage bonds tie them too closely, having sexual relationships with people other than their spouses. Karskens states that there was a variety of sexual behaviour and relationships 'ranging over professional prostitution, casual prostitution, promiscuity, casual cohabitation, serial monogamy, monogamous cohabitation, and legal marriage'.⁴ A similar range of sexual behaviour and relationships can be seen in intimate relationships between white women and Chinese men.

Three Chinese witnesses before the 1891 Royal Commission into Alleged Chinese Gambling and Immorality provided their perspective on their relationships with white women in NSW. Thirty-four year old Robert Lee Kum stated that he was married in China but had been living in Sydney with a white woman for the past three months and that he planned to marry her as well. This unnamed woman was the first he had lived with in Australia but Lee Kum stated that he had slept with other women, always 'clearing out' afterwards.⁵ An unnamed Chinese vegetable hawker visited by the Commissioners stated that he had previously lived with a white woman but that after two years she had stopped living with him and now paid him weekly visits instead.⁶ A third witness, William Pow Chee, told how after marrying and then separating from his white wife, he had formed a new relationship with another unnamed white woman. They were living together despite the fact that he had not divorced his first wife.⁷ The familial life of Commissioner Quong Tart, of course, provides an example at the other end of the scale of relationships – a long-term, monogamous marriage, the first and only for himself and his wife, which lasted until his death.

⁴ Grace Karskens, *The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1997, p. 78.

⁵ RCACG, pp. 138-40. It is likely that Lee Kum's protestations that he was going to marry his lover were mostly for the benefit of the moralistic Commissioners, because there is no record of a marriage of Robert Lee Kum after 1891. Curiously, however, there is a marriage registered between a Robert Lee Kum and a Caroline Bowman in Narrandera in 1887. It is not clear whether this is the same Robert Lee Kum, but if so raises some questions about his testimony before the Commission. NSW BDM, Marriage 1887/6087.

⁶ RCACG, p. 476.

⁷ RCACG, pp. 153-60.

The lives of Margaret Fulham and Catherine McKenna provide examples from a female perspective. Margaret Fulham lived with a Chinese man named Billy Ah Pan at Singleton during the 1860s. Margaret had been born en route to Australia to Irish parents and, before meeting Ah Pan at age thirty-five, she had had three white husbands by whom she had nine children. She married the first of these husbands at age thirteen. While married to her third husband she had an affair which resulted in another child. Together Margaret and Ah Pan, a goldminer-turned-gardener, had three more children – bringing the total of Margaret’s children to thirteen. Margaret and Ah Pan never married, presumably because Margaret was still married to her third husband. In similar circumstances, Irish-born Catherine McKenna made a home with her Chinese partner after having previously married and had children with an Irish man. Catherine bore her first two children out of wedlock before marrying their father in 1852. Around 1856 the marriage disintegrated and Catherine formed a relationship with Chinese Sam Hyson. Soon after Catherine gave birth to her third baby, a child fathered by her Irish husband. Catherine and Sam raised these three children, together with four of their own born between 1859 and 1868. Catherine was still legally married to her Irish husband until his death in 1869, some years after which she and Sam formalised their own union.⁸

These examples suggest that Chinese-European relationships varied in their nature, their longevity, the reasons and motivations behind them and in the characters of those involved. They cannot be simply divided into three distinct categories – respectable marriages, marriages involving a ‘bad’ woman, and prostitution – as Brennan did in 1883. Chinese-European relationships included those that were short-lived, those that lasted lifetimes, those based on convenient arrangements, those of enduring love and affection, those based on pragmatic choices, and those motivated by sexual desire.

⁸ Interview with Marlene Peters, Lane Cove NSW, 4 August 1999 (Margaret Fulham) and correspondence with Helen de Zubicaray, Everton Park QLD, April-May 1999 (Catherine McKenna). On Catherine McKenna, see also, Florance, *The Chinese in Shoalhaven*, p. 7.

Numbers

It is difficult to state with certainty the numbers of relationships between white women and Chinese men in nineteenth-century NSW, but what is certain is that as the century progressed these relationships increased in number. The earliest known Chinese-European marriage in the colony, and probably in Australia, was that of Cantonese John Shying and English-born Sarah Thompson in 1823. Shying had arrived in NSW in 1818, a free settler, and had acquired land. After Sarah died, John married another white woman, Irish-born Bridget Gillorley.⁹ Only a handful of known marriages occurred in the subsequent three decades. It was from the mid-1850s that the numbers of relationships began to increase in number, as contracted labourers from Amoy, who had arrived during the late 1840s and early 1850s finished their contracts and as more 'free' Chinese men arrived with the gold rushes. It was at this point that the relationships became noticeable to white commentators and their frequency was deemed worthy of comment as part of investigations into the Chinese population in the colony.

An early comment on intermarriage came from Reverend William Young, who reported in 1855 that he had met 'two or three' Chinese in Sydney married to European women.¹⁰ Incidental references like this appeared throughout the next decade, until an estimate for the number of marriages in the whole of Australia was published in 1867. The Hong Kong newspaper, the *China Mail*, put the figure of Chinese-European marriages in Australia at '50 or 60', a figure which closely resembled that given in another report by Reverend William Young the following year. Young reported that there were between 50 and 60 European women married to

⁹ Winsome Doyle, Research papers—John Shying, 1815–1992, ML MSS 5857; Valerie Blomer, 'An alien in the antipodes: The story of John Shying', URL: www.multiline.com.au/~bvl/stories/shying, accessed 10 December 2005; Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Rev. William Young, 'Preaching to the Chinese in Sydney', *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*, no. 226, March 1855, p. 49.

Chinese in Victoria alone.¹¹ In the following decade it was said that there had been 217 further marriages in Victoria.¹²



Image 15. Annie Asgill and John Peters who married in Wellington in 1860, one of the earlier Chinese-European couples in NSW, c. 1870

Reproduced in Marion Dormer, *Dubbo: City on the Plains 1901 – 1988*

The first statistics for NSW appeared in 1878. In that year, Inspector-General of Police, Edmund Fosbery, reported that there were 352 European women living with Chinese men in the colony, with a total male Chinese population of 9616. Of these women, 171

¹¹ Young, *Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population in Victoria*, in McLaren (ed.), *The Chinese in Victoria*, p. 50.

¹² Rev. John F Horsley, 'The Chinese in Victoria', *Melbourne Review*, vol. 4, June-October 1879, p. 422.

were married and 181 unmarried.¹³ Six years later, Martin Brennan and Quong Tart's investigation found that in the Chinese camps of the Riverina district, there were 36 white wives and 37 white 'prostitutes' living with Chinese men in a total male Chinese population of 800.¹⁴ Both Fosbery and Brennan and Tart found almost equal numbers of married and unmarried white women living with Chinese men.

The reports by Fosbery and Brennan and Tart provide snapshots of two specific times and locations, but marriage records for the colony provide much fuller evidence of the existence of Chinese-European relationships in nineteenth-century NSW. With the aim of estimating more certainly the numbers of relationships and some changes over time, a search of NSW marriage records was undertaken to identify marriages between Chinese men and white women. Appendix 1 gives details of the sample of 398 marriages located. This search of the records, and the tabulation of the figures that resulted, was not without difficulty.

It was not possible to view the original marriage registers, so the study relied on the composite indexes compiled by the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, in microfiche, database and online form. The indexes do not provide the birthplace of the bride or groom, so it was necessary to judge the individual's ethnicity from name alone. Chinese names were notoriously poorly recorded by white officials, while others were purposely anglicised and are therefore indistinguishable from European surnames. Others such as Lee or Hoy could be Chinese or English. In such cases, where given names or other sources could not confirm that the individual was of Chinese ancestry, the marriage was excluded from the sample. For a similar reason the sample was stopped at 1888, as from the 1880s the children of first-generation Chinese-European relationships born in the 1850s and 1860s were old enough to be marrying, and it was increasingly difficult to differentiate Australian-born half-Chinese grooms from Chinese-born full-Chinese grooms by name alone.

¹³ Edmund Fosbery, *Information Respecting Chinese Resident in the Colony*, NSW LA V&P, 1878; *SMH*, 20 November 1878.

¹⁴ Brennan and Tart, *Reports Upon Chinese Camps*, p. 3.

The data taken from the indexes is also reliant on their accuracy and reliability, but it is clear that in many instances the indexes are incomplete or otherwise unreliable. Dinah Hales' history of her husband's grandmother, Sophie Walford, demonstrates the potential problem with relying on the indexes as an absolute indicator of numbers of married couples and families. Sophia, the daughter of convicts, was born in Bathurst in 1834. In 1859, she had a child with Chinese-born William Cohen (Qwan). No registration for the birth can be found in the indexes, nor of any marriage. Sophia and William went on to have seven children, five who survived to adulthood, and none of whom appear in the birth registrations.¹⁵

Despite these limitations, the sample taken from the marriage indexes clearly demonstrates that Chinese-European marriages were regularly occurring in NSW from the late 1850s. From Figure 2 below, it can be seen that while the numbers of marriages for each five-year period are not large, between about 30 and 100, the number of marriages increased steadily over the progressing decades, peaking in the period 1880–1884. The larger number of marriages in this period was due mostly to 28 marriages taking place in 1883, as opposed to an average of around 17 per year for the 1880s as a whole. The total number over the whole period was nearly four hundred. A similar analysis of Victorian marriage records has not been undertaken, but Pauline Rule has stated that between 1855 and 1901 there were at least 700 marriages between Chinese men and European or Australian-born women (including Australian-born women of Chinese descent) in the colony of Victoria, and that there was an increase in Chinese-European marriages from the early 1880s.¹⁶

Returning to the estimates provided in Edmund Fosbery's report of 1878, his figure of 171 married women living with Chinese men in the colony is reasonably close to the number of marriages found in the sample—234 between 1855 and 1879—if mobility between the colonies and China, deaths of spouses and relationship breakdowns are considered. If we can assume the validity of the assertion by both Fosbery and

¹⁵ Hales, *Between two cultures*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ Rule, 'The Chinese camps in colonial Victoria', in Couchman et al. (eds), *After the Rush*, p. 125. The higher figures in Rule's sample of marriages in Victoria can be explained by three factors: the inclusion

	Total	Sydney	Sydney suburbs*	Sydney & suburbs as % of total	Rural	Rural as % of total
Pre-1855	6	2	2	67	2	33
1855-1859	31	11	1	39	19	61
1860-1864	45	7	4	24	34	76
1865-1869	32	9	2	34	21	66
1870-1874	55	23	3	47	29	53
1875-1879	70	20	3	32	47	68
1880-1884	91	19	5	26	67	74
1885-1888	67	9	5	21	53	79
Total	397	100	23	31	274	69

Figure 2. Marriages between white women and Chinese men in NSW to 1888, showing location¹⁷

* Included in Sydney suburbs are: Balmain, Burwood, Camperdown, Chippendale, Glebe, Granville, Leichhardt, Manly, Newtown, Paddington, Parramatta, Redfern, Richmond, St George, St Leonards, Waterloo, Windsor

Brennan that there were similar numbers of white women living with Chinese men as were married to them, then over the period from the late 1850s to 1888 there were likely to have been over eight hundred Chinese-European couples living in the colony of NSW. These figures – when compared with the many thousands of men who made up most of the population of Chinese in NSW during the second half of the nineteenth century – are not large, nor are they sufficient to suggest that intermarriage with white women was prevalent. They do, however, confirm that intermarriage was not as rare and unusual as many have assumed. They also confirm that relationships with white women were more likely as a way for Chinese men to form families in Australia than relationships with Chinese women in the colonies.

Locations

The locations of Chinese-European marriages in NSW can be divided into four main categories: Sydney (including the Rocks and the Haymarket), Sydney suburbs, rural areas (farms, mining camps) and regional centres (often where there were ‘Chinese

of marriages of Australian-born women of Chinese descent to Chinese-born men, the higher population of Chinese in Victoria than NSW, and the extended date range.

¹⁷ See Appendix 1 for the data on which these figures are based.

camps'). A large number of such marriages took place in Sydney and its suburbs,¹⁸ but the majority occurred in rural areas and regional centres, as can be seen from Figure 2 above. After 1855 more than two-thirds of marriages took place outside of Sydney and its suburbs. This figure reflects the fact that during the nineteenth-century most Chinese in NSW were rurally-based,¹⁹ the majority of men working as miners, rural labourers, gardeners, storekeepers or running other kinds of businesses in rural areas. The rural marriages were spread out across the colony, in almost one hundred different locations: from Cooma and Bombala in the south, to Grafton and Tenterfield in the north and Bourke and Cobar in the far west (see Map 1).²⁰ Only two locations other than Sydney had more than fifteen marriages each in the period to 1888, suggesting that marriages were occurring across a broad spectrum of communities, both with and without significant Chinese populations and that Chinese-European couples were not necessarily segregated from the wider white community.

These marriage locations reflect the findings of Edmund Fosbery's 1878 inquiry on the numbers and locations of white women living with Chinese in NSW. His report divided the colony into ten districts, a Sydney Metropolitan district and nine rural ones. According to Fosbery's findings, Sydney had 49 white women living among 960 Chinese men; the remaining rural districts had 303 white women living among 8656

¹⁸ Marriages between Chinese men and white women in the period to 1888 were located in the following areas around Sydney: Burwood, Camperdown, Chippendale, Concord, Glebe, Granville, Leichhardt, Manly, Newtown, Paddington, Parramatta, Redfern, Richmond, St George, St Leonards, Waterloo, Windsor.

¹⁹ CY Choi notes that in 1861, only 1.46% of the Chinese population in NSW lived in Sydney. This percentage grew over the following decades – 1871, 4.65%; 1881, 12.94%; 1891, 26.43%; 1901, 33.98%. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement*, p. 28.

²⁰ Marriages between Chinese men and white women in the period to 1888 were located in the following areas in rural NSW: Adelong, Albury, Araluen, Armidale, Balranald, Barraba, Bathurst, Bega, Binalong, Bombala, Bourke, Braidwood, Brewarrina, Bundarra, Broulee, Carcoar, Cassilis, Clarence Town, Cobar, Coolah, Cooma, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Cootamundra, Cowra, Crookwell, Dapto, Deniliquin, Drayton, Dubbo, Dungog, Forbes, Glen Innes, Goulburn, Grafton, Greta, Gulgong, Gunnedah, Gunning, Hartley, Hay, Hill End, Hillston, Inverell, Jerilderie, Kiama, Kiandra, Lambton, Maclean, Macleay River, Maitland, Manning River, Milton, Moama, Molong, Moulamein, Mudgee, Murrumburrah, Murrurundi, Muswellbrook, Narrandera, Newcastle, Nundle, Orange, Paterson, Patrick's Plain, Queanbeyan, Richmond, Rylstone, St George, Scone, Shoalhaven, Silverton, Sofala, Stroud, Tambaroora, Tamworth, Taree, Tenterfield, Tumut, Tweed River, Urana, Vegetable Creek, Wagga Wagga, Wellingrove, Wellington, Wentworth, Windsor, Wollombi, Wollongong, Yass, Young.



Map 1. Location of marriages between white women and Chinese men in NSW to 1888
Each dot represents the location of one or more marriages. Major towns are named.

Chinese men. Each rural district was broken down into smaller sub-districts or towns and Chinese-European couples could be found in 59 such locales, most with only one or two couples in each. Only nine locations had more than ten Chinese-European couples – ranging from Wagga Wagga North and Urana, where it would appear that every Chinese man in each town was living with a white woman (16 in Wagga Wagga North and 11 in Urana, only one of whom was married), to the larger sub-district of Inverell (including Tingha, Glen Innes and Vegetable Creek), where thirteen married and five unmarried couples lived among a Chinese population of more than 1550.²¹

²¹ Fosbery, *Information Respecting Chinese Resident in the Colony*.

Sydney and suburbs

According to Fosbery, the Chinese-European couples in Sydney were made up of 31 married couples and 18 couples who were not married, living among a total Chinese population of 960 Chinese men. 'A large number' of these men were said to be inveterate gamblers and 'in other respects very immoral'. Thirteen of the women living with Chinese men were reputed to be opium smokers.²² Once again gambling, immorality, prostitution and opium use were seen to be characteristic of the communities in which Chinese-European couples lived in the city – primarily the inner-city areas of the Rocks in Sydney's north, particularly around Lower George Street, and to the city's south, in the Haymarket around Wexford Street.

The community at the Rocks was a diverse one. It was here that large numbers of sailors, new immigrants, prostitutes and criminals lived among respectable businesses and homes, both Chinese and white. The area was described during the 1891 Royal Commission by long-term Rocks resident Thomas Playfair, a successful butcher and alderman, as 'a kind of village'²³ where the variegated population mixed and mingled on the streets and in the cook-shops, gambling houses, stores and hotels. What brought many Rocks residents together was their poverty, but in their midst were wealthy Chinese merchants whose businesses such as On Yik & Lee and On Chong & Co provided support and sponsorship for many in the Chinese community around them.²⁴

Similarly, the Haymarket area around Wexford Street was home to a diverse community of both whites and Chinese. It was the centre of Chinese residence and social life in the southern part of the city and in Shirley Fitzgerald's words, it was a 'tough neighbourhood'.²⁵ Cook-shops, gambling houses, opium shops, and Chinese stores were mingled in with private homes and lodging houses and whites and Chinese lived and worked closely together there. Charlie Wong Kow, for example,

²² Fosbery, *Information Respecting Chinese Resident in the Colony*, p. 2.

²³ RCACG, p. 617.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of the Chinese presence in the Rocks, see Lydon, *Many Inventions*.

²⁵ For more on the Chinese in the Haymarket, see Wood, Chinese residency in the Haymarket and Surry Hills; and Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, p. 92.

ran refreshment rooms on Elizabeth Street during the 1890s, also living there with his European wife and their seven children. His wife's brother kept his horses and carts in stables nearby.²⁶ The clientele of many businesses like Charlie's was both Chinese and white.

Chinese-European couples living at the Rocks and Haymarket had a variety of domestic arrangements. Some white women lived in temporary arrangements with Chinese men or worked as prostitutes under their care. Some ran brothels. Others lived in more stable relationships, both unmarried and married, with children and some or all of the accoutrements of respectable working-class homes. Some could afford to rent their own homes from landlords, while others shared accommodation both for financial and personal reasons.

Ellen, one of the female witnesses at the 1891 Royal Commission, explained her domestic situation.²⁷ She and another white woman lived together with two Chinese men in a house at 19 Foster Street in the Haymarket. They kept the house and, in the words of Commissioner WP Manning, performed 'the ordinary duties of a wife, except that [they] are not married'. Wong Sin, Ellen's partner, was a carpenter at Pymont and he supplied Ellen with all his wages. George Mon How, who shared their house, was a cook at Riverstone and similarly provided a large proportion of his income to his partner, Ruby. Combined, the women had £3 a week to live on. Both men only spent Saturday night and Sunday in their Foster Street home; their weeks were spent where they worked. The Royal Commission report noted that both couples had been together continuously for more than five years and that the house was 'fairly clean'.²⁸

Another part of her life Ellen spoke about at the Royal Commission was her use of opium. The smoking of opium took place in Chinese communities in the colony in the way that the drinking of alcohol did in European ones. The opium habit was prevalent among the Chinese of the lower classes and consequently it was one of the

²⁶ Wood, Chinese residency in the Haymarket and Surry Hills, caption to Map 21.

²⁷ This is not the same Ellen whose story is told in Section 1.

²⁸ RCACG, pp. 388 and 475.

primary objections levelled against the Chinese in general by Europeans.²⁹ Reformers such as Quong Tart and Victoria's Cheok Hong Cheong spoke openly against its use, but opium smoking was not in fact made illegal until after the turn of the century, and other forms of its use were prevalent among Europeans.³⁰ While the Chinese partners of some women – including those of several of the female Royal Commission witnesses – objected to their use of opium, for other couples it was part of their way of life. For example, Ah Loon of Queen's Place rented a three roomed stone cottage in which he and his white partner, JE, sold opium and provided a place for it to be consumed.³¹ (See Image 16.)

Other locations close to the centre of Sydney with a noticeable Chinese population were Alexandria, Waterloo and Botany, where many men worked on market gardens.³² According to some Royal Commission witnesses, white women lived with Chinese on these gardens and other women who lived elsewhere made visits there.³³ In contrast, however, Adelaide, who lived with a Chinese man in Exeter Street, denied this, stating that the Chinese gardeners kept their women 'in town' as 'they could not take them on to the garden to live with other men'.³⁴

²⁹ See Yong, *The New Gold Mountain*, pp. 179-88.

³⁰ For an interesting account of the role of race in the prohibition of opium use in Australia, see Desmond Manderson, 'Substance as symbols: Race rhetoric and the tropes of Australian drug history', *Social and Legal Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 383-400.

³¹ *Eleventh Progress Report of the Sydney City and Suburban Sewage and Health Board*, NSW LA V&P, 1875–76, p. 18.

³² See Melita Rogowsky, 'Exodus and Retreat: Chinese of Alexandria and Waterloo', in Grace Karskens and Melita Rogowsky (eds), *Histories of Green Square: Waterloo, Alexandria, Zetland, Beaconsfield, Rosebery*, School of History – University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2004.

³³ See the testimony of the Mayor of North Botany, Alfred Sparks; the Inspector of Nuisances for Alexandria, William Setchell; and Retreat Street carpenter, Sun Sing Loong. RCACG, pp. 360, 366 and 389.

³⁴ RCACG, p. 385.



Image 16. The residence of Ah Loon in Queen's Place off Pitt Street, 1875
One of the woman pictured is probably JE, the white woman who lived there with Ah Loon.
Sydney City and Suburban Sewage and Health Board photographs, Mitchell Library, PXA
984/4

Chinese-European couples could be found in other parts of the city, such as on Castlereagh Street and in the suburbs. In 1878 the *Port Denison Times* described Chinese-European households on Castlereagh Street thus:

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.³⁵

For those who made their homes in the suburbs, their residences could be located near to business interests such as market gardens. Wealthy businessman Chen Ateak lived at North Willoughby with his white wife and children, on the northern side of the harbour and not too far from his market garden leases at Pennant Hills and Gordon;³⁶ the King family lived at Willoughby/Northbridge on the gardens that they

³⁵ *Port Denison Times*, 6 April 1878.

³⁶ RCACG, p. 15.

Section 2: *Traces*

ran as a family enterprise between the 1880s and 1950s;³⁷ and market gardeners Kee Lewis and Sam Williams both lived with their white wives in North Sydney, where they also ran their businesses.³⁸ For others, the desire to live in the suburbs was in order to separate their family life from that of their businesses. Sam Tin, the manager of Sun Sam Kee's store in Lower George Street, lived with his white wife at Enmore³⁹ and most famously, Quong Tart built his growing family a mansion – 'Gallop House' – at Ashfield, which was gloriously decorated in a mix of western and Chinese styles (see Image 17.) Quong Tart's businesses were in the city.

Country NSW

The locations and situations in which Chinese-European couples lived in rural NSW were even more varied than their city counterparts – in Chinese camps, mining camps, farms and towns large and small scattered around the colony. The most commented on of these locations were the Chinese camps. They were found on the edges of villages and towns and, like Sydney's 'Chinatowns', were home to concentrations of Chinese.⁴⁰ As discussed earlier in this thesis, many of these camps had bad reputations because of their poor sanitation and the criminal activities and 'immorality' which went on within their bounds. Martin Brennan described the large Chinese camp at Narrandera in south-western NSW in 1884:

The most important camp is that situated at Narrandera, on the banks of the Murrumbidgee, and nearly a mile from the township; it has streets and lanes, and contains stores, joss-house, a very large cookshop, two lottery-houses, and several fan-tan rooms.

He continued:

³⁷ Rannard, Market garden days; and correspondence with Ian Rannard, Northbridge NSW, June 2003.

³⁸ NAA: SP42/1, C1903/2609 and C13/2696.

³⁹ RCACG, p. 611.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of Chinese-European relationships on the Victorian Chinese camps, see Rule, 'The Chinese camps in colonial Victoria', in Couchman et al (eds), *After the Rush*, pp. 119-31.

This camp has a total population of 340 – that is, 303 Chinese, nine married women, ten children and seventeen prostitutes. At some periods the population is much larger, when the Chinese employed by the squatters and surrounding land proprietors return after having performed some ringbarking or other contract. The Chinese gave their occupations as fourteen storekeepers' assistants, twenty in opium shops, ten in cook-shops, twelve gardeners, twenty in gaming-houses, 124 labourers, and fifty-eight to whom no occupation was assigned.⁴¹

Brennan's 1883 report on the Chinese camps of the Riverina, including Narrandera, suggested that such camps provided an important community base for the Chinese, but unlike Victoria, the NSW camps were not the result of regulations to control the Chinese population and segregate them from the European population. The camps also drew in whites who were attracted to the prostitution, gambling and 'sly-grog' selling that took place there. A second, less neutral description of the Narrandera camp by Charles Hardy Hunt in a letter to Sir Henry Parkes in 1888 reflects some of the problems these activities caused:

There are about 9 or 10 Brothels containing almost 20 prostitutes and in every one of them you can purchase Beer or Spirits and the quality sold is of the vilest description, in fact, if men get two or three drinks of it they become howling maniacs for hours, and when they come to their senses they find that they have been robbed of all their money. It is also the resort of a great number of Young men of the worst Larrikin type.⁴²

White women living on the camps were frequently the target – either rightly or wrongly – of police attention,⁴³ but as in Sydney, Chinese-European couples living on the camps formed relationships of various kinds, from prostitution to long-term monogamous relationships.

⁴¹ Brennan and Tart, *Reports Upon Chinese Camps*, p. 1.

⁴² Charles Hardy Hunt to Sir Henry Parkes, 4 June 1888, *Parkes Correspondence*, Mitchell Library, A918, vol. 48, pp. 269-71.

⁴³ See, for example, *Albury Banner*, 27 April 1883 and 31 August 1883; *Border Post*, 24 October 1883. Brennan noted that in the two years ending 31 October 1883, there had been a total of 321 offences committed by persons living on or frequenting the five Riverina Chinese camps. Of these offences, 198 had been committed by white women, 74 by Chinese men and 49 by white men. Brennan and Tart, *Reports Upon Chinese Camps*, Appendix C, p. 7.



Image 17. The Tart family home, 'Gallop House', at Ashfield, 1892
Kerry & Co, Mitchell Library, SV1A/Ashf/2

Other towns and camps without such unfortunate reputations were home to white women and their Chinese men. Craigie, south-east of Cooma and close to the Victorian border, was one such place. The nearby Delegate Diggings gained in popularity with Chinese diggers as the mountainous gold rush at Kiandra waned and, by 1863, there were around 400 Chinese and a few whites living there.⁴⁴ Craigie eventually grew to include Chinese-owned businesses and a temple. An 1872 town directory lists fifteen Chinese businesses in Craigie – seven of them stores, two blacksmiths, two boot makers, an interpreter, a gardener, and a carrier.⁴⁵

The carrier was George Ah Kin (also known as Jo Ah Kin). George had arrived in Australia sometime in the late 1850s and in 1865 he appears in the Craigie area as the

⁴⁴ SMH, 7 July 1863.

⁴⁵ Greville's *Official Post Office Directory of New South Wales, 1872*, Greville & Company Publishers, Sydney, 1872.

father of Emma, daughter of Mary Higgins. A further five children were born to George and Mary before they were married in November 1873 in the Church of England. Soon after the family moved to Bombala where George established himself as a carrier, was naturalised in 1875 and purchased land. Mary had another four children while the family lived at Bombala before they once again moved, to Nimmitabel in 1881. Here George established a store and butchery and again purchased land. Mary's time continued to be consumed with pregnancy and infant children – her final four children were born between 1882 and 1890. By the mid-1890s when Australia was suffering from a depression and when their youngest child was still small, George's business began to fail and he filed for bankruptcy in 1897. It appears that at this time the family split up, with George heading to Alexandria in Sydney – while Mary struggled alone, or perhaps with the help of her older children – to care for the younger ones in Nimmitabel until she too moved to Sydney. George died in the George Street Asylum in Parramatta in 1905 and Mary in the home where she lived with her youngest daughter in Balmain in 1910.⁴⁶

The lives of George and Mary Ah Kin suggest the mobility of many couples as they made a life for themselves and their children in the colony. The population in NSW and the other Australian colonies was mobile during the gold rush period, as men and women followed the gold and the possibilities it brought not only in mining, but in other pursuits such as labouring and storekeeping. George and Mary Ah Kin's first move from Craigie to Bombala was probably because the town's population and prosperity were dwindling as the mining boom passed in the early 1870s. As mining dwindled, the Chinese population scattered, with many moving to Sydney and others returning to China. Those who stayed on in rural NSW found other occupations – from land-clearers, farm labourers and carriers through to storekeepers and farmers. Chinese-European couples were among them.

Some couples moved several times before settling down. Kong Sing and his wife Ellen Mann moved from Nundle, to Armidale, to Tamworth – having children in each of

⁴⁶ Information about the Ah Kin family has been taken from Moore, *Eurasian Roots*.

those places before finally making their long-term home in Inverell in around 1883.⁴⁷ Other couples started their married lives together in Sydney before settling elsewhere, as George and Julia Keong did – they moved to Warwick in Queensland and had their first child there in the same year they had been married by John Dunmore Lang in Sydney.⁴⁸ Others did the reverse and moved from rural areas to Sydney as the century progressed. Thomas Check and his wife Annie Wilson started their married life in Tarago in 1884 and spent time in Cootamundra, Narrandera and Parkes before moving to inner-city Sydney after the turn of the century.⁴⁹ Some couples, however, remained settled in the place they married. Susan Wells and her husband Ah Tuck married in Bathurst in 1866 and had 16 children whose births were all registered there over the next 22 years.⁵⁰

Many families based in rural areas established businesses which became central to their small and often remote communities. In particular, many Chinese-European couples ran general stores which provided both goods and services to their local white and Chinese populations. One such couple was Wong Sat and his wife Amelia Hackney. After marrying in 1864, they ran a store at the gold-mining town of Tuena for ten years before moving to the Crookwell area. At Crookwell, they first rented property and a store, and then after Wong Sat was naturalised in 1897, they bought their own land on which they established a new store and ran sheep. In the words of Ian Hoskins, the store sold 'all manner of goods from ginger to coffin ornaments to the local farming families until Sat's death in 1916'.⁵¹ The fact that the Wong family store was not located 'in town', but rather that it was in one of a collection of slab farm buildings near to the family home miles from the nearest main road (see Image 18), suggests that the store was well-known in the district and that the family had established relationships with their customers, both Chinese and white.

⁴⁷ NSW BDM.

⁴⁸ Correspondence with Howard Le Couteur, Tabulam NSW, August-December 2002; NSW BDM.

⁴⁹ Correspondence with Alice Tierney, Caringbah NSW, June-August 1999.

⁵⁰ NSW BDM.

⁵¹ Hoskins, *Locality*, p. 12.



Image 18. The Wong family store at Crookwell, c. 1909.
The circled building is the store and the family's home is the building to its left.
Photograph by Henry Wong, Powerhouse Museum Collection

While the Wong family combined their business with farming, for others working the land was their main occupation. Some of the earliest Chinese-European relationships were formed between indentured Amoy labourers and young women also employed on the properties where they worked. Later couples established their own farming ventures around the colony. The Loung family, for example – described in an 1899 police report as ‘a quiet, respectable, Industrious Family’ – lived in the Tamworth district where husband and father of five, George Loung, worked as a farmer, renting a number of properties from the early 1880s.⁵² Those who chose to work the land could face an isolated life, not only because their properties were isolated geographically but because they were the only Chinese family in a district.

Small or remote settlements around the colony were home to the occasional Chinese-European couple or a white woman who was known to associate with the Chinese there; often these were remnant Chinese populations who remained after mining had dwindled. In the late 1890s, Matilda Murrillis lived in ‘the big house’ at the Chinese gardens near the town of Milparinka in the semi-arid far north-west of NSW,

⁵² NAA: SP42/1, C1899/1901.

formerly part of the Albert goldfield. In a statement to the Milparinka Police Court an acquaintance, Samuel Thomas, stated that she was 'supposed to be living by herself, but the premises are occupied by Chinese ... I will not swear that the woman is not a prostitute'.⁵³ Likewise at Ophir in central-western NSW, a white woman lived with a man named Ah Gum, who had done well on the diggings and built himself a stone house. She was reputed to be the best-dressed woman at Ophir and was famous in the district as a wonderful singer, enthusiastically going to church whenever it was held just so she could sing.⁵⁴

The white wives

The background and personal histories of white women involved in intimate relationships with Chinese men were of particular interest to white commentators. During the 1850s and 1860s it was often stated that they were mostly lower-class Irish women. Later discussions looked less to their ethnic backgrounds than to their personal ones – whether they had come from respectable families and what the particular circumstances were that had brought them to find a Chinese partner. Frequently, as discussed in the previous section of this thesis, it was concluded that it was only the most dissolute of women or those who had been seduced and abandoned by a white man who chose Chinese partners. While nineteenth-century commentators cast their observations within moralistic and racist discourses and divided women into categories of good and bad based on their backgrounds, evidence suggests that there was some basis in fact for the observations they made of the personal and ethnic backgrounds of the white partners of Chinese men.

During the 1850s and 1860s, many of the women who formed relationships with Chinese men were Irish. Several reasons can be suggested for why they found companions in Chinese men. From the late 1840s government assistance schemes, including the British government's Irish orphans scheme, brought large numbers of Irish women and girls to the colonies, and typically these women were single, of

⁵³ *Sturt Recorder*, 16 July 1897, quoted in Geoffrey V Svenson, *Marginal people: The archaeology and history of the Chinese at Milparinka*, MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1994, p. 82.

⁵⁴ Leslie Manton Oakes, 'Digging for gold, Ophir 1851 – 1909', in *Papers re goldmining at Ophir, 1851 – 1948*, ML MSS 58.

marriageable age and working-class (mostly domestic servants or farm servants). For such women, finding a husband in the Australian colonies may not have been as easy as the disparity of sexes might suggest, particularly in places such as Sydney and Melbourne where Irish women probably outnumbered Irish men. Beverley Kingston has suggested that if 'unable to marry within her own national or religious group because there were too few men, rejected as too lowly by the rest of the male population, the Irish girl may have been driven to prostitution or, if lucky, into the arms of a successful Chinese businessman'.⁵⁵ Pauline Rule's work on Irish women in Victoria confirms this suggestion.⁵⁶

Margaret McNalty, the wife of Amoy-born John Jui Dan, was one such Irish woman. Roman Catholic Margaret was born in County Donegal, Ireland, in around 1842, the daughter of Edward and Sally McNalty. At the time she left Ireland for Australia, seventeen-year old Margaret's father was already dead and she was working as a house servant. She could not read or write. County Donegal was one of the poorest regions in Ireland, and with her father dead it was likely that Margaret's family was struggling to survive. Margaret's opportunity to break from that struggle came with a fare to Sydney provided by the Donegal Relief Fund. She arrived in Sydney on the *Lady Elma Bruce* on 14 July 1859. There were two other young single McNalty females on the *Lady Elma Bruce*, perhaps Margaret's cousins, but it seems that on arrival in the colony she no longer had any contact with these women, nor had she any other family in NSW. Margaret found employment with Henry Osborne on his property 'Marshall Mount' at Dapto, south of Sydney, and it was here that she met and married John Jui Dan, a labourer in Osborne's employ, in 1861.⁵⁷

Statistics from the 1870s show that any dominance of Irish women as partners of Chinese men was limited to the 1850s and 1860s. In later decades wives also came from England, Scotland, New Zealand, the USA, France and Germany and, as the century progressed, concurrent with a rising native-born population, data for both

⁵⁵ Kingston, *The Oxford History of Australia*, p. 115.

⁵⁶ See Rule, *Irish Women in Colonial Australia*.

⁵⁷ Email correspondence with Rosalyn McDonald, July 2002.

NSW and Victoria suggests that an increasing number of Australian-born women were marrying Chinese men. The 1881 NSW census found that 61% of white women married to Chinese men were born in the colonies.⁵⁸ Ten years later, the census for 1891 found there were 226 ‘full-blooded’ Chinese men in NSW married to non-China born women (see Figure 3). One hundred and twenty-nine of these were married to women born in NSW, 29 to Victorian-born, 16 to women born in other Australian colonies and one to a New Zealander. A proportion of these women would have been

Birthplace		Birthplace	
NSW	129	Scotland	3
China	60	South Australia	1
Victoria	29	New Zealand	1
England	28	Germany	1
Ireland	16	France	1
Queensland	7	Not stated	2
Tasmania	4		
Australia (unidentified)	4		
		Total	286

Figure 3. ‘Birthplace of partners of married Chinese males of full-blood’, 1891

Source: TA Coghlan, *General Report on the Eleventh Census of NSW*

either Australian-born Chinese or half-Chinese women.⁵⁹ The remainder of wives were English (28), Irish (16), Scottish (3) or continental European (2).⁶⁰ Similar figures were noted for Victoria. Of 217 marriages between Chinese men and white women in Victoria between about 1868 and 1879, more than half of the brides were born in Australia and over a third were Victorian-born.⁶¹

⁵⁸ TA Coghlan, *General Report on the Eleventh Census of New South Wales 1891*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1894, pp. 184-5.

⁵⁹ Given that there were only 104 married Chinese or half-Chinese women in NSW in 1891 and that 60 of these were married to Chinese-born men, 44 could have been part of the number of Australian-born wives of Chinese men.

⁶⁰ The birthplaces of two were not stated. Coghlan, *General Report on the Eleventh Census of NSW 1891*, p. 169. A similar spread of women’s birthplace can be seen in the compilation of numbers of children born to Chinese-born men from the NSW vital statistics reports in the 1890s. The non-China born mothers of these children were born in (in descending order): NSW, Victoria, England, Queensland, British Possessions, USA, Tasmania, New Zealand, Ireland, German Empire, At sea. *NSW Vital Statistics, 1893–1901*.

⁶¹ Horsley, *Melbourne Review*, p. 422.

Studies by Sandi Robb in north Queensland and Dinah Hales in central-western NSW similarly suggest that Irish women or those of Irish descent were not necessarily dominant as the wives and partners of Chinese men. Concentrating on the period 1860 to 1880, Hales found that in central western NSW around Bathurst, Sofala, Tambaroora and Hill End, the majority of white wives of Chinese men were NSW-born, or born in England or other Australian colonies. A proportion of these were the daughters of Irish immigrants, however.⁶² Similarly, Sandi Robb's research on north Queensland in the later decades of the nineteenth-century has noted that white wives of Chinese men were generally English or Scottish rather than Irish.⁶³

Evidence indicates that it was often women whose origins and backgrounds marginalised them in some way from mainstream white society who found Chinese partners which, as Beverley Kingston suggests, is why many early relationships involved Irish women. In the United States, too, Irish women could be found among the non-Chinese wives of Chinese men, while others were black or mulatto women or white women whose ethnic backgrounds were French or Polish.⁶⁴ In the southern colonies of Australia, the partners of Chinese men similarly included women of other ethnic backgrounds, including Aboriginal women⁶⁵ – the 1891 Royal Commission, for example, noted Chinese men living with a half-Indian woman, a 'coloured' woman and a half-Maori woman.

⁶² Hales, *Between two cultures*, p. 12.

⁶³ Robb, *Lilith*, pp. 96-7.

⁶⁴ Research on Chinese intermarriage in the USA is scattered. See, for example, Huping Ling, 'Family and marriage of late 19th and early 20th century Chinese immigrant women', in Teresita Ang See (ed.), *Intercultural Relations, Cultural Transformation, and Identity – The Ethnic Chinese*, Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran Inc., Manila, 2000; Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History*, Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco and University of Washington, Seattle and London, 1986; Ruthanne Lum McCunn, 'Arlee Hen and Black Chinese', in *Chinese American Portraits: Personal Histories 1828 – 1988*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1988; Victor Jew, '“Chinese demons”: The violent articulation of Chinese Otherness and interracial sexuality in the US Midwest, 1885 – 1889', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2003, pp. 389-410; Luke Tsai, 'Providence's Black Chinese: A love story', *Prospect: An Anthology of Creative Nonfiction*, Spring 2001, URL: www.stg.brown.edu/projects/creativenonfiction/spring01/tsai, accessed 18 May 2004.

⁶⁵ Relationships between Chinese men and Aboriginal women have attracted most scholarly attention from historians of northern Australia; however, Aboriginal-Chinese families were also formed in the south. See for example, Read, *Lost in the Whitewash*; Morgan, *The Calling of the Spirits*, Zagar, *Goodbye Riverbank*.

The white partners of Chinese men included many who could be classed as 'unprotected' women, those who had no male breadwinner.⁶⁶ There were orphans or girls without family ties, those facing dire poverty, those with alcohol and opium addictions, and those whose previous marriages or relationships had broken down or dissolved due to death, desertion or separation. Without a male breadwinner, women in nineteenth-century Australia faced limited options in order to survive. They could take work into their home, such as sewing; they could take help from charities; or they could find full-time employment in factories or as domestics – all of which were complicated by the presence of children.⁶⁷ The social and economic difficulties of life without a husband, especially with children, meant that white women who may otherwise not have chosen a Chinese partner did so to ameliorate their own situations.

Young women who were orphaned, abused or abandoned by their parents were among those who found Chinese partners. Lucy Barber was one such case. Born in around 1856 at the Bogan near Bathurst, Lucy and her brother were orphaned at a very young age. Lucy was taken in by the Gilmour family who owned a nearby property. What became of her brother is unknown, but in 1878 eighteen-year old Lucy married James Con Sue at Carcoar. James was more than thirty years her senior, a butcher and a widower. James and Lucy subsequently raised nine children together.⁶⁸ Pauline Rule has told the story of three sisters (of seven siblings) who married Chinese men in Victoria between 1858 and 1871. Their father, a convict from northern England, was often drunk and abusive towards his children.⁶⁹ The *Tasmanian Examiner* reported the story of a girl abandoned by her parents who found support and assistance from a Chinese man she later married – the daughter of 'a couple of tramps', she had been left in the charge of a group of local Chinese while they went

⁶⁶ Anne O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison: The Poor in New South Wales 1880 – 1918*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1988, pp. 89-92.

⁶⁷ See Christina Twomey, 'Without natural protectors: Responses to wife desertion in gold-rush Victoria', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 108, 1997, pp. 22-46.

⁶⁸ Correspondence with Craig McIntosh, Grays Point NSW, April 1999. Some of her descendants believe that Lucy may have been of Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal descent. They have, however, been unable to verify this.

⁶⁹ Rule, 'A tale of three sisters' in Kee et al. (eds), *Chinese in Oceania*.

off for a couple of weeks. After weeks and weeks of waiting, the girl's parents did not return and one particular Chinese man took responsibility for her care. He sent her to boarding school for two years and when she came of age offered to marry her.⁷⁰

Many nineteenth-century accounts of the backgrounds of white wives of Chinese men highlighted the fact that these were women who had left or been left by white men – they had been seduced and then abandoned, they had been the victims of domestic abuse and mistreatment, or their husbands had died. Witnesses before the 1891 Royal Commission (Hannah, Adelaide, Ellen, Margaret, Minnie, Maud) recounted their experiences of being either seduced by or married to a white man who subsequently either abandoned or neglected them. 'Mrs F' of Sydney told HF Wickham in 1906 that she had been a near slave to her abusive white husband before he died and she remarried to Chong Lee, a grocer.⁷¹ Family lore reveals similar stories. Descendants recall that Victoria Palmer (née Neve, later Young) began her relationship with a Chinese man, Jimmy Young, after she had been married to a white man – a heavy drinker who had ill-treated her and their two children.⁷²

The ethnic and personal backgrounds discussed above suggest that many women who formed relationships with Chinese men were marginalised or limited in some way in their choice of marriage partner. However, among the white wives of Chinese men were also women for whom no such reason for crossing the racial line could be attributed – women commonly described as 'respectable' and from good families. The 1891 Royal Commission report mentioned one woman belonging 'to a very good family, ... well-educated and accomplished' who was living with a Chinese man on Pitt Street South, as well as a girl from a 'respectable Colonial family' and 'an accomplished young lady' who were living with Chinese men.⁷³ These were women

⁷⁰ *Examiner*, 5 May 1883, quoted in Joan Scott, *Celestial Sojourn: The Chinese on the Tinfields of North East Tasmania*, St Helen's History Room Association Inc., Tasmania, 1997, pp. 42-3.

⁷¹ Wickham, *Red Funnel*, p. 55.

⁷² Victoria and Jimmy Young had six children and remained together until Jimmy's death. Email correspondence with Marie, February-April 2002.

⁷³ RCACG, pp. 480 and 317.

like Margaret Tart and Amelia Hackney Wong who were from middle class families, were educated and had good social standing.⁷⁴

This range of personal backgrounds meant that the ages at which women became involved with their Chinese partners ranged from the very young to those well into middle age.⁷⁵ For example, Armidale-born Florence Smith was fifteen when she married 29-year old storekeeper James Quing Lee in 1899, and Ellen Brown was seventeen when she married 28-year old George Yin Poon in Sydney in 1875.⁷⁶ At the other end of the age range, Ellen Maxwell was aged about sixty-two when she married 63-year old Thomas Ah See Young at Adelong in 1896.⁷⁷ The majority of white women with Chinese partners, however, married or began their relationships in their late teens or twenties.

The Chinese husbands

Less detail on the backgrounds of the Chinese men who found white partners can be found in the surviving sources. White commentators were far less interested in their histories and backgrounds, or why they would choose to live with a white woman, than with knowing the details of their white partners' pasts. White women's attraction to Chinese men was puzzling for white men to understand, not the other way around. The naturalisation application of one early Chinese arrival, John Booshang, provides some insight into one man's history, however, both before and after he married in Australia.

John Booshang married an Australian-born woman of Welsh parentage, Anastasia Thomas, in Cooma in 1881. In 1923, Booshang – who was about ninety years old and on his deathbed – applied for naturalisation in order that his wife would be able to

⁷⁴ On the family background of Margaret Tart, see Travers, *Australian Mandarin*, pp. 62-7; and on Amelia Hackney Wong, see Hoskins, *Locality*, pp. 12-16.

⁷⁵ Dinah Hales found that the white women married to Chinese men in her central western NSW sample married earlier than the average age of marriage. Average ages of women she found were 15-21 years. Hales, *Between two cultures*, p. 20.

⁷⁶ NAA: SP42/1, C09/1908; C1903/7816.

⁷⁷ On the marriage certificate, however, Ellen Maxwell's age is given as fifty. The marriage to Thomas Ah See Young was her second – her first was at age seventeen to Samuel Maxwell with whom she had six children who lived to adulthood and three who died in childhood. NSW BDM, Marriage 1896/575; Death 1907/13763; and correspondence with Mary Brocklehurst, Greystanes NSW, February 2001.

obtain the old age pension. While his application was not successful, it provides the following details of his life. Booshang was born in Hong Kong in 1833 while his Cantonese parents were passing through the colony. His father's name was Du Boo Shang. John Booshang arrived into Sydney from Hong Kong in 1852, at age nineteen, and he stayed there for two years before moving on to Melbourne and then to the goldfields of Ballarat. After three years in Ballarat, in about 1858 he moved onto the Kiandra goldfields, where he stayed for eight years. From there he went to Cooma, where he met and married Anastasia in 1881, before they settled in Adaminaby, running a successful store there until old age.⁷⁸ A number of elements of John Booshang's story might be considered typical of Chinese men who established relationships with white women in the colony. He arrived as a young man from Canton and spent his youth following the gold until it either ran out or he made enough money to move on to a different enterprise. Then, when he reached a level of financial security, was able to speak English and perhaps had decided his future was in Australia rather than back in China, he married and established a family.

The fact that John Booshang was Cantonese in origin was typical of most Chinese partners of white women. They predominantly came from the counties around the city of Canton in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province – Zhongshan, Dongguan, Taishan, Kaiping and Zengcheng – yet records usually describe them as being from 'Canton' rather than from a specific district or town. Some among the pre-gold rush arrivals from Amoy in Fujian province also found white wives. Elizabeth Wiedemann has stated that in Tingha in northern NSW the Chinese men who intermarried were from Amoy and 'that they were looked down on by the Cantonese, because they had married Australian girls. Those from Canton always wanted to return to China to find a wife'.⁷⁹ It is unlikely, however, that there were any clear-cut or significant difference between dialect groups or clans in their attitudes to or proclivity for intermarriage because it was a general wish among Chinese to return to China to marry if possible. Other Chinese men with white partners came from Hong Kong, Singapore, Penang or Shanghai, and it is likely that among these men were

⁷⁸ NAA: A1, 1923/6086.

⁷⁹ Wiedemann, *Holding Its Own*, p. 217.

those from districts in eastern Guangdong, such as Chaozhou and Shantou, and Fujian province as well as from the Pearl River Delta area.

The Chinese communities in NSW were made up of members of different social groupings or 'classes', divided along lines of wealth, education and social status according to both Chinese and western paradigms. Among them were merchants, storekeepers, cabinet-makers, miners, market-gardeners, farmers, labourers and hawkers. The social and economic position of Chinese men with white partners in NSW similarly ranged from those of the wealthy merchant class, through those who had gained wealth through luck on the goldfields or by hard work labouring or in business, to those who remained poor and lived on the brink of poverty. While some were educated and backed by well-to-do families in China, many others had left lives as peasant farmers to come to Australia. The age and personal background of the Chinese husbands also varied. Like John Booshang, some men did not marry or establish relationships in the colony until they were in their forties or fifties, after they had attained some measure of financial security. Others were younger men, in their twenties and thirties. For many, their relationship or marriage in Australia was not their first – they had married in China before they came to Australia and continued to maintain connections with their Chinese families. Others had numbers of relationships with white women in Australia.

Meeting and mixing

Nineteenth-century commentators imagined that the Chinese lived a separate, bounded existence in the colony, separate from white Australians, and therefore the idea of Chinese men and white women meeting and forming relationships seemed almost impossible. Recent studies have demonstrated, however, that Chinese and white Australians – both men and women – did mix, communicate, interact with each other and form relationships of all kinds.⁸⁰ On the goldfields, for example, despite the well-documented rivalry between white and Chinese miners, other more personal forms of interaction certainly developed. Joe Byrne, for instance, who grew up on the goldfields of Victoria and later joined Ned Kelly's infamous gang, was well known for

⁸⁰ See, for example, McGowan, *Australian Historical Studies*.

his ability to speak Cantonese and for his friendly association with the Chinese. His family had lived close to Chinese miners and Joe and his siblings had spent much time with them as children.⁸¹ If a childhood among the Chinese on the goldfields could provide Byrne with such an affinity with the Chinese around him, it is conceivable that this could also be the case for white girls who grew up during the gold rushes, or women who worked and lived near Chinese settlements throughout the colony. Hazel Tong, the white wife of one Chinese man, described such feelings in a letter to the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, in 1948:

I am Australian by birth. My father and mother are also Australians ... I was brought up by Chinese people all my life and my mother had many Chinese friends. I have been with Chinese people more than Australian people ... so it is just as if I was one of them.⁸²

This example might date from a later era than is the subject of this study, but it is not difficult to imagine that such sympathies could similarly have developed in a young woman growing up in the late nineteenth century.

The reality was that despite discursive proscription and the racial, social and cultural boundaries discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese men and white women met and formed relationships because their lives took place within the same geographic, social or religious communities. Kate Hunter has suggested that during the late nineteenth century, women in rural Australia usually married within their own small communities, often to neighbours, because they were joined by kinship ties or because their proximity. They lived close together, worked together or spent their leisure time together.⁸³ Similarly for Chinese-European couples, the communities they inhabited – be they rural properties, Chinese camps or inner-city suburbs – provided the opportunities to meet and develop relationships of various kinds, through chance meetings or arranged introductions, in business, religious or social situations.

⁸¹ Ian Jones, *The Fatal Friendship: Ned Kelly, Aaron Sherritt and Joe Byrne*, revised edition, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, pp. 7 and 24-5.

⁸² Hazel Tong to Arthur Calwell, 19 February 1948, in NAA: A435, 1948/4/971.

⁸³ Kate Hunter, 'Anything but a roll in the hay: Romance in rural communities in Federation Australia', in Barbara Brooks and Dorothy Page (eds), *Communities of Women: Historical Perspectives*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2002.

On the street and at the wharf

The Chinese quarters of Sydney and rural Chinese camps were the sites of many meetings – on the streets, in cook-shops and gambling houses or at the wharf in Sydney. One 1891 Royal Commission witness, Hannah, met her Chinese partner in Wexford Street. She lived in nearby Belmore Street and had seen him often as she passed up and down Wexford Street, resulting in an acquaintance springing up between them.⁸⁴ Other relationships began at Sydney's wharves when women arrived in the city alone, unprotected and destitute. The *Sydney Mail* reported the story of one white woman living in Sydney with a Chinese hawker in 1879 who gave this explanation of how their relationship started:

I picked up with him when I came here by the steamer. He's very kind to me; never beats me. I've been living with him twelve months. He met me at the wharf, and he asked me to come up with him; and I came up and stopped ever since . . .

I am married, and I lived at the Rocky River. My husband beat me, and when I came here and picked up with this man, I didn't go back.⁸⁵

The casual way in which such Chinese-European relationships began was noted by white commentators and was, at times, ridiculed. In one presumably apocryphal account from 1883, the writer told of a Chinese man, unable to speak a word of English, who met his bride-to-be on a bus on which they were both travelling:

John made the signs, the replies to which indicated that all was well. An interpreter was subsequently engaged, and by this means the 'engagement' was entered into.⁸⁶

More usual perhaps were relationships which began as the result of an introduction through mutual friends or acquaintances. Such introductions were described in graphic terms by the press. The *Daily Telegraph* wrote of how a girl, having 'fallen', would descend to the 'deepest depths of degradation', 'eventually glad to accept a

⁸⁴ RCACG, p. 383.

⁸⁵ *Sydney Mail*, 1 February 1879.

⁸⁶ *Albury Banner*, 13 April 1883.

Chinaman's sheltered and lazy life'. She then, in turn, would introduce 'girls who have not sunk so low, and for whom there might be some slight hope of reformation' to the easy life of opium and leisure she herself had found as a Chinese man's woman.⁸⁷

The first-hand accounts of witnesses to the 1891 Royal Commission suggest that despite the sensational and moralistic tone taken by the *Daily Telegraph*, there were elements of the story which reflected the way some white women did, in fact, form relationships with Chinese men. Adelaide had been working in boot factories in inner-city Sydney for several years when a girl she knew, herself involved with a Chinese man, took her down to the Chinese quarter on Lower George Street. There Adelaide was introduced to Ah Bow, the son of Chinese merchant Way Kee, who 'took a fancy' to her and she to him.⁸⁸ Ellen was in service in Woollahra when a friend introduced her to the Chinese in Wexford Street, promising her that if she went to the Chinese she would get plenty of money.⁸⁹ Margaret, a dressmaker, found herself bailed out of gaol by the Chinese partner of a girl she knew and once released she went with them to Lower George Street and her association with the Chinese started from there.⁹⁰ After Maud – the mother of an illegitimate 'English' child – was abandoned by the child's father, she went to a friend who was the wife of a Chinese man in Goulburn. She stated that 'a Chinaman who was stopping there offered to keep me if I liked, but as I did not like to live with him in Goulburn [where her family lived] he took me up country'.⁹¹

Much was made of the fact that the 'Chinaman's women' were spoilt, well-dressed and had jewellery and other material things most lower-class women could not afford, but for women such as the Royal Commission witnesses, for whom survival was a struggle, presents of food, clothing, a pair of earrings or the offer of a home and financial support for themselves and their children meant a great deal. Chinese men

⁸⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, undated article, Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 96, Mitchell Library.

⁸⁸ RCACG, pp. 384-5.

⁸⁹ RCACG, p. 399.

⁹⁰ RCACG, pp. 401-8.

⁹¹ RCACG, pp. 450-3.

had reputations as kind and generous husbands, and often these recommendations came from other white women who themselves had found comfort and satisfaction with their Chinese partners.

Family

White families could be instrumental in a girl meeting and marrying a Chinese man, at times through the arrangement of a marriage. Arrangements which were discussed publicly were primarily framed as the 'sale' of girls by their parents. In 1858, *Bell's Life in Sydney* reported a white father 'selling' his two daughters to the Chinese;⁹² the Victorian journal the *Touchstone* published a cartoon in 1870 showing the auction of white girls by their own 'Christian mothers' (see Image 19);⁹³ and Emily Skinner wrote of a 'wicked old couple who had actually sold their daughter to a Chinaman' living in Spring Creek, Victoria in the late 1850s.⁹⁴ Another story reported in more detail in the Albury press was that of Margaret Hipworth, the seventeen-year old daughter of a Mrs Quon Noey, who was married off against her wishes by her mother and Chinese stepfather. Margaret was taken to a boarding house in Wodonga where she was to be married to a man named Ah Hin by Reverend James Henry; when asked if she would take Ah Hin as her husband she said no, but the ceremony continued nevertheless. Allegedly the girl's older sister had already been married in the same manner, for which her stepfather received £100. For Margaret's marriage he was to receive £40. Margaret's case was brought to the attention of the authorities, who removed her and placed her in the care of a local schoolteacher.⁹⁵

⁹² *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 10 April 1858.

⁹³ *Touchstone*, 9 July 1870.

⁹⁴ Edward Duyker (ed.), *A Woman on the Goldfields: Recollections of Emily Skinner 1954 – 1878*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995, p. 82.

⁹⁵ *Border Post*, 11 April 1885. I have not been able to verify the validity of this account. Two years earlier, a young woman named Margaret Myers was married at Albury to a Thomas Ah Hin, however details of the two marriages appear to be different. NSW BDM, Marriage 1883/3309.



Image 19. 'The slave trade in Victoria – A right proper field for the champions of morality – Christian mothers selling their daughters to the Chinese'
Touchstone, 9 July 1870

While it is highly unlikely that large 'auctions' of girls took place as shown in the *Touchstone* cartoon, the tone of these reports reflects concerns over prostitution and the white slave trade which, as Rae Frances has suggested, were 'intimately bound up with racial attitudes'.⁹⁶ Anecdotal evidence suggests that some parents did receive financial remuneration from Chinese men when they married their daughters, as was reported in the press. It has been stated that in the northern NSW town of Tingha 'successful Chinese miners paid a bride price for shepherds' daughters', the parents receiving 20 sovereigns and a 200 pound bag of flour,⁹⁷ and family lore tells that the marriage of Mary-Ann Vincent and Suey Lum in Wentworth in 1885 was contracted by Mary-Ann's elder sister, Maria Ellen, in settlement of her own gambling debts.⁹⁸ The payment of a brideprice was an established part of southern Chinese marriage

⁹⁶ Raelene Frances, 'Australian prostitution in international context', *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 106, p. 137.

⁹⁷ Wiedemann, *Holding Its Own*, p. 217. See also, Darnell, *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, p. 156.

⁹⁸ Correspondence with David Weston, Wanganui New Zealand, May-July 2000; NSW BDM, Marriage 1885/7399.

arrangements,⁹⁹ and its practice in Australia suggests two things: that this was one part of Chinese marriage customs which was practised in Australia, and that the economics of a situation was of importance when a woman or her parents chose her a marriage partner. The payment of a brideprice may have been a powerful motivator that overcame prejudices within families against interracial relationships.

Commerce and church

Other couples met through business or commercial contacts – such as hawking, shopping, domestic work or factory work – where white women and Chinese men encountered each other. As discussed in the previous chapter, visits from vegetable sellers and hawkers or trips to the Chinese-owned grocery to stock their larders were ways in which white women regularly interacted with Chinese men. Chinese witnesses to the 1891 Royal Commission mentioned such interactions. Sun Sing Loong noted that white girls were sent by their parents to the Chinese gardens in Alexandria to collect vegetable purchases, and Lay Jong, the proprietor of a furniture shop in Elizabeth Street, stated that a European woman came to take away their washing each week.¹⁰⁰

While neither of these men implied that this led to relationships forming with these particular women, an American example demonstrates this possibility. In Lisa See's novelised history of her Anglo-Chinese family, she describes how her grandmother, Letticie Pruett, an orphan, began working in 1894 for a Chinese storekeeper named Fong See. He ran an underwear shop in Sacramento California, and Letticie sought work there after she had run away from her brother's home at age eighteen. Lisa See suggested that Letticie had few other options for survival – other than this or prostitution – but that in time she proved invaluable in assisting Fong See to improve his business, in book-keeping and in dealing with English-speaking customers. In

⁹⁹ For a discussion of dowry and bride price in the Pearl River Delta region, see Helen F Siu, 'Reconstituting dowry and brideprice in South China', in Deborah Davis and Steven Harrell (eds), *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, pp. 165-88.

¹⁰⁰ RCACG, pp. 392-3.

1897 Fong See and Letticie were married by private contract due to California's anti-miscegenation laws.¹⁰¹

For other Chinese, Christian churches provided the means through which they met and socialised with white women. Many churches, large and small, urban and rural, organised English classes which were predominantly taught by women.¹⁰² (See Image 20.) This close regular contact provided a chance for the Chinese men and white teachers to get to know each other.¹⁰³ Relationships also developed between Chinese men attending church and their female fellow parishioners. Liu Hee-Lum and Florence Thomas, the parents of William Liu whose story will be told in more detail in Section 4, are said to have met through a connection to the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney where Florence was an assistant organist.¹⁰⁴ In some cases these friendships might have been encouraged or watched over by Christian ministers interested in the conversion to Christianity of Chinese attending English schools and mission services. In Reverend William Young's report on mission work among the Chinese in Sydney in 1855, he wrote of his own fervent interest in the 'progress' of a Chinese domestic worker who had been regularly attending a Wesleyan service. It is not difficult to envisage that in such minds as Young's, a further step in the 'civilising' of this unnamed Chinese man would be to find him a good Christian wife to ensure his adherence to his new faith.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Lisa See, *On Gold Mountain: The One Hundred Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family*, Arrow Books, London, 1999.

¹⁰² For an example of one white woman's personal involvement in Chinese mission work in Australia, see, RC Peterson, 'A school for Chinese in Adelaide, 1882–1924', *History of Education Review*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2002, pp. 60-75.

¹⁰³ See for example, Margaret Egerton, 'My Chinese', *Cosmos Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 3, 19 September 1896. In America, white 'co-eds' provided English lessons to Chinese students attending American colleges during the early twentieth century and some relationships developed through these contacts. See Aimee Liu, *Cloud Mountain*, Headline, London, 1997, for a fictionalised account of one such relationship based on the lives of Liu's grandparents.

¹⁰⁴ William Liu, 'Australia's Chinese connection', *125th Anniversary of the Battle of the Eureka Stockade: 5th Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations*, Commissioner for Community Relations, Canberra, 1979, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Rev. William Young, 'Preaching to the Chinese in Sydney', *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*, no. 226, March 1855, p. 49. In the New Zealand context, Reverend Alexander Don noted the difficulties that the sexual dynamics of English classes for Chinese men given by white women could cause – after one white teacher married a Chinese student at Blenheim, 'other pupils wanted wives too and the class



Image 20. Chinese class with their white teachers, Tumut Plains
Reproduced in *Memories of Tumut Plains*

Meetings between Chinese Christian ministers or catechists and female parishioners or fellow church workers could also develop into relationships. One example is Presbyterian mission worker James Fong Kem Yee and English-born Annie Fuller who were married in 1897 (see Image 21).¹⁰⁶ Both the *Bulletin* and the Chinese newspaper, the *Chinese Australian Herald*, featured their photographs and a short article announcing their marriage. At the time of their marriage, James Fong Kem Yee had been in Australia for eighteen years and a missionary with the Presbyterian Church for around nine. His bride, Annie Fuller, had also worked for the church through the Central Methodist Sisterhood. The couple made their home in Newcastle where James was in charge of the Newcastle Chinese Mission for the following thirty-two years. They had at least three children, all boys, born between 1899 and 1907.¹⁰⁷

broke up'. Rev. Alexander Don, *Diary, 1899 – 1907*, items 708 and 709, quoted in Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, vol. 1, p. 119, 115n.

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin*, 18 September 1897; *Chinese Australian Herald* (Guangyi huabao), 17 September 1897; Mar, *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses*, pp. 3, 7, 10-11; NAA: A712, 1885/C8191; SP42/1, C1900/2945; SP11/26, J14; ST84/1, 03/11; NSW BDM, Births 1899/14256, 1902/14757, 1907/24751.

¹⁰⁷ Another NSW example is Anglican catechist Samuel Leong Bong and his wife Annie, NAA: SP42/1, C1904/5926; NAA: A1, 1903/7472; *Anglican Church of St Thomas, Narrandera, 1880 – 1980*, Anglican

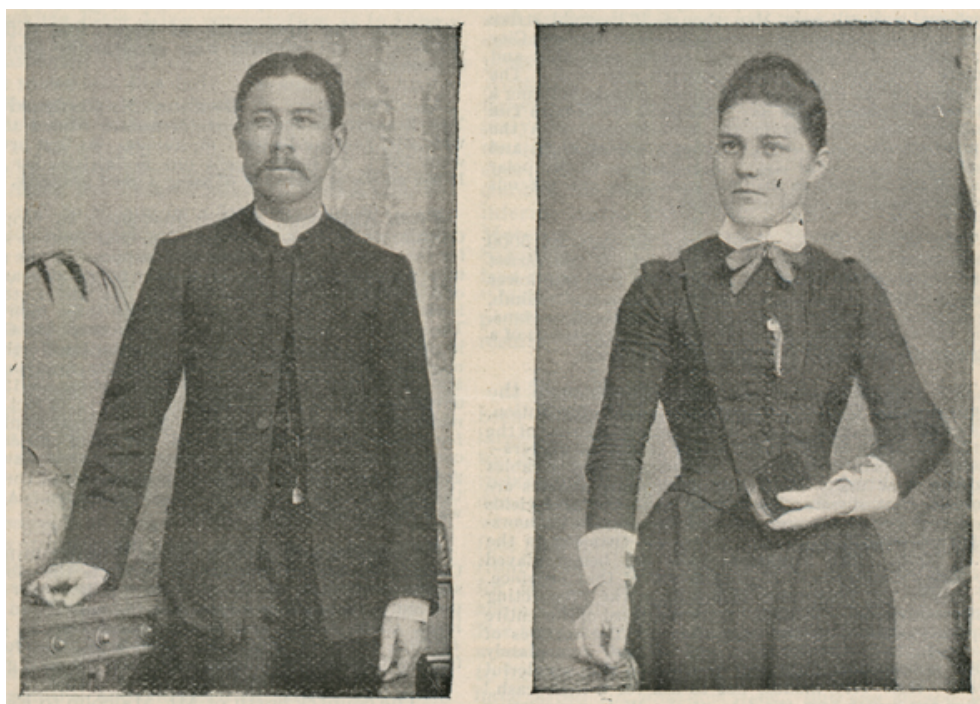


Image 21. Presbyterian minister James Fong Kem Yee and his bride Annie Fuller at the time of their wedding in 1897
Bulletin, 18 September 1897

These examples demonstrate the range of situations in which white women and Chinese men met, mixed and formed intimate relationships. However, there were many, many Chinese men in the colonies who may never have mixed or interacted with white women in these ways or for whom the possibility or desire to form a relationship did not exist. The demographics also worked against such a possibility – as suggested by the photograph of the Chinese class at Tumut Plains (see Image 20), which shows three white female teachers with their nine Chinese male students, the numbers of Chinese men outweighed the ‘available’ numbers of white women.

Reactions

Having met and made the decision to enter a relationship with a Chinese man, whether it was a casual arrangement or marriage, what reactions did white women face from their families and communities? Some families, as discussed, were well aware of and encouraging of the relationship. Women under twenty-one needed

Church of St Thomas, Narrandera, 1980, pp. 12-13. For a Victorian example see Lee, ‘James Lee Wah, 1832–1909’, in Roy (ed.), *Proceedings of the 10th Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry*.

parental permission to marry, and the granting of such permission and the presence of parents as witnesses at marriages demonstrates the acceptance, at least formal, that some Chinese men found in their new white families. Consent was granted, for example, by the parents of Johanna Nutter, age 16, at her marriage to James Ah Lin in 1870,¹⁰⁸ and the mother and sister of the bride witnessed the marriage of Frances Cogger to James Sun Johnson, proprietor of the *Chinese Australian Herald*, in January 1899. Frances' mother Annie Buchan Cogger also gave permission for her daughter's marriage as Frances was only seventeen.¹⁰⁹



Image 22. Emma Ann Lowe, Guoc Ah Poo and their children, June 1896
Reproduced in Robyn Florance, *The Chinese in Shoalhaven*

In other families, sisters married Chinese men. In one family of Irish background in Tingha, four sisters between the ages of fifteen and seventeen were married to Chinese shepherds (for which their father reputedly received payments of between £10 and £40) and another sister later also married a Chinese man.¹¹⁰ More common

¹⁰⁸ NSW BDM, Marriage 1870/1734.

¹⁰⁹ NSW BDM, Marriage 1899/164. This marriage ended in divorce in 1910.

¹¹⁰ Wiedemann, *Holding Its Own*, p. 217; Correspondence with Jocelyn Griffey, Inverell NSW, May 1999.

were pairs of sisters who both found Chinese husbands. For example, Emma Ann Lowe married Guoc Ah Poo at the Wesleyan Church at Terara in January 1876 (see Image 22), eleven years after her sister Louisa Amelia had married John Utick in the same church; and Mary Nutter married carpenter Ah Kee in the parsonage of the Anglican church at Bathurst in 1879, nine years after her sister Johanna had married James Ah Lin, a farmer, also in Bathurst but in the Catholic cathedral there.¹¹¹

The lives of sisters who married Chinese men demonstrate the close ties many of these families maintained. Twin sisters Anastasia and Jane Thomas married John Booshang and Charles Chun Yin, later known as Yen, within a few years of each other at Cooma in the early 1880s. Anastasia and Jane, born in 1864, were the daughters of Cooma residents Thomas Thomas and Johanna Shanahan who had married in the town in 1858. Anastasia and John, who married in 1881, had three children and Jane and Charles had two, before both families moved to Adaminaby in around 1888. Here they settled themselves, opening a store (see Image 23) and Jane and Anastasia having four and five more children respectively. Both families became established members of the Adaminaby community. John Booshang lived there until his death in 1923, at which point Anastasia moved to Sydney to be with her children, dying there in 1934. The Yen family maintained their businesses in the town and were compulsorily moved in the early 1950s when the old Adaminaby township was flooded as part of the Snowy Mountains Scheme.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Florance, *The Chinese in Shoalhaven*, pp. 13 and 24; NSW BDM, Marriages 1870/1734, 1879/2491.

¹¹² Information on the Booshang (or Booshand) and Yen (or Yan) families can be found in: NSW BDM; NAA: A1, 1923/6086 and 1912/14734; B883, NX166098 and NX153606; B2455, BOOSHANG W H; A5628, 1966/722 PART 1; A5638, EQ204 PART 1; and John Booshand Adaminaby 1860, Monaro Pioneers website, URL: www.cooma.nsw.gov.au/monaropioneers/nimmitabel/pioneers/booshandj, accessed 24 December 2005.



Image 23. The Booshang family store in Adaminaby, c. 1898

From 'Monaro 1823–1973', supplement to the *Cooma-Monaro Express*, 4 October 1973

As well as sisters, different generations of white women within families formed intimate relationships with Chinese men. One example is Margaret Fulham (later Bourke, later Ah Pan), who was mentioned earlier in this chapter, and her daughter Harriet Sparkes (née Bourke, later Ah Cue). Born in 1853, Harriet was Margaret's sixth child, the daughter of Margaret's third husband James Bourke. By the time Harriet was ten, her father was dead and her mother was living with Billy Ah Pan, a Chinese goldminer-turned-gardener, at Stuart Town. At age twenty-one, Harriet married the son of a local farming family, Edgar Sparkes, and they had a number of children together before Edgar was killed in an accident at the railway brickworks where he worked. At age twenty-seven, Harriet remarried to Chinese-born Thomas Ah Cue, a man who was around twenty years her senior and about the same age as her step-father Billy Ah Pan. Harriet and Thomas had five children, one of whom died in infancy.¹¹³ Generations of white women within the one family also lived among the Chinese in inner Sydney. Edward Maxted, manager of the Benevolent Asylum, told the *Daily Telegraph* of one girl who had been admitted to the Asylum with 'a nameless disease' after being removed from a Chinese dwelling. The girl's mother was dead. Her aunt had taken the mother's place 'in the Chinaman's house',

¹¹³ Interview with Marlene Peters, Lane Cove NSW, August 1999.

later dying as the mother had done from 'opium smoking and general debauchery'. The mother of these two women, and grandmother to the girl, had also lived with a Chinese man in the same lane and had apparently been killed in a drunken brawl.¹¹⁴

Although some marriages were arranged or approved by family members, many other white women faced familial and social ostracism for their choice of Chinese partner or husband. Family reactions to the discovery of interracial relationships could be hostile and violent, leading to ruptures between parents and children. Women were thrown out of their families or disowned for crossing racial boundaries, and contact between family members was severed.¹¹⁵ Most well-known is the situation the young Margaret Scarlett faced when she announced to her middle-class family that she wished to marry Quong Tart. Despite the fact that Margaret's father, George Scarlett, knew and even liked Quong Tart, he refused to accept him as a son-in-law and Margaret and Quong Tart had to wait until the day after her twenty-first birthday to be married. George Scarlett then scratched his daughter's name from the family Bible, only to be reconciled several years later after the appearance of several grandchildren.¹¹⁶ Other women lost all contact with their families or kept their relationships from them, either running away from home or ceasing contact with them. Such actions demonstrated an acknowledgment of the disapproval they could face if the truth was known. Ellen and Maud, witnesses before the 1891 Royal Commission, were two such women. Ellen stated that since she had been with the Chinese, she had had nothing to do with her family, all of whom were 'respectable'. They knew nothing of her current life and had not heard from her for six years. 'They must think I am dead,' she said.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Maud had not told her mother that she was living with a Chinese man. Instead, her family were told that she was living with the white father of her illegitimate child – he had, in fact, abandoned her several years

¹¹⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, undated article, Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 96, Mitchell Library.

¹¹⁵ Interview 30/1985 (Maude), in Rosetta Sung, *Australian Chinese: A collection of personal histories and family photographs from descendants of earlier Chinese settlers to Australia*, ML MSS 5617, 1989, p. 37; and interview with Christopher, *Australian Chinese: A Pictorial History*, Australian Chinese Community Association of New South Wales, Sydney, 1987.

¹¹⁶ Travers, *Australian Mandarin*, pp. 63-8, 144; Errol Lea-Scarlett, 'The discipline of humanity' – Quong Tart's quest for a family, unpublished paper given at the International Conference on Quong Tart and His Times, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 1-4 July 2004.

¹¹⁷ RCACG, p. 402.

earlier. Maud had objected to being called before the Royal Commission, in part, she stated, because she feared that her family might discover her secret.¹¹⁸

Chinese-European couples wishing to be legally married could face the prejudices of the community and of the church. The procedure for marriage between a Chinese man and a white woman was, in the early days, somewhat unclear and the authorities could work towards disallowing such a marriage. In 1857, the trials of one couple in attempting to be legally married – during which they were ‘bandied to and from between Deputy Registrars, Chinese protectors, and ministers of religion’ – were reported in the Victorian press. It was stated that difficulties had been ‘unnecessarily thrown in the way’ of the couple’s marriage. The end result was that the Chinese groom, A’ Sam, believed that he had been married by a minister of the church, but the marriage registration in fact was not complete. The article concluded that:

... if it is the wish of adults to intermarry, no good purpose can be served by refusing legal sanction. Any such restrictive attempt will only have the effect of acting as a direct incentive to vice.¹¹⁹

Some ministers such as Reverend John Dunmore Lang agreed with this rationale and were happy to perform mixed marriages.¹²⁰ In a speech in the NSW parliament in 1866 he stated that ‘many young Chinese have come to me to celebrate marriages between them and English and Irish young women, whom I afterward found quite content with their lot’.¹²¹ Between 1855 and 1867, Lang performed nine such marriages, with the brides being evenly split between English, Irish and Australian-born. One of these Irish women was Julia Hoolahan from County Cork, who was married by Lang to Amoy-born George Keong on 5 February 1856 at the Scots Church in Sydney. George Keong was twenty-three and Julia twenty-one, and it seems likely

¹¹⁸ RCACG, p. 452.

¹¹⁹ *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 12 October 1857.

¹²⁰ Ian Welch has similarly noted that ‘Christian ministers in the colonies ignored their [Chinese men’s] ethnic origins and perhaps their personal prejudices when conducting inter-ethnic marriages’ because they believed that marrying a mixed race couple was better than them living together unmarried. Ian Welch, *Alien son: The life and times of Cheok Hong Cheong (Zhang Zhuoxiong) 1851 – 1928*, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2003.

¹²¹ Quoted in Archibald Gilchrist (ed.), *John Dunmore Lang: Chiefly Autobiographical 1799 – 1878*, vol. 2, Jedgarm Publications, Melbourne, 1951, p. 653.

that Julia was already pregnant at the time of their marriage. Their first child, Mary, was born in September of the same year.¹²²

Other ministers objected to intermarriage and refused to perform ceremonies. Reverend John Morison, the first Presbyterian minister to settle in the New England region, wrote in 1867 that he 'would never have anything to do in marrying Chinamen at the goldfields'.¹²³ Clergy objected to intermarriage because they viewed it as immoral for white women to marry Chinese men, or because the Chinese man was not baptised in their particular religion. One couple, George Ah Kin and Mary Higgins, were married on the same day as George was baptised into the Church of England, and it is likely that other men were baptised in order that they could be married.¹²⁴

Other couples, however, chose to circumvent the problem in other ways. They could be married by ministers not of their own faith, as William Sen Chai and his Irish-Catholic bride did after they were turned away from the Catholic church because William was Chinese; they were married in the Church of England.¹²⁵ Or they could marry in a civil ceremony as Elizabeth Sellick and Charley Ah Foo of Deniliquin chose to do in 1872.¹²⁶ Researcher Dinah Hales has also noted that in 1870 Johanna Nutter and James Ah Lin were married in the Church of England parsonage at Bathurst rather than the church, perhaps indicating a hesitance on the minister's behalf to give them a full church wedding.¹²⁷ It is also possible that some couples chose to marry in a Chinese ceremony which, while not legally recognised in Australia, would have provided a demonstration of their commitment to the community in which they

¹²² NSW BDM, Marriage V18561599 73B/1856. Other material, including details of the Keong children, was kindly provided by Howard Le Couteur, Tabulam NSW.

¹²³ Rev. John Morison, *Australia As It Is or Facts and Features, Sketches and Incidents of Australia and Australian Life*, Charles E Tuttle Co., Rutland, 1967 (originally published by Paul Flesch & Company, Melbourne, 1867), p. 240.

¹²⁴ George Ah Kin was baptised in the Church of England at Craigie on the day of his marriage to Mary Higgins. Moore, *Eurasian Roots*, p. 28.

¹²⁵ Interview 30/1985 (Maude) in Sung, *Australian Chinese*.

¹²⁶ NSW BDM, Marriage 1872/2007.

¹²⁷ NSW BDM, Marriage 1870/1734; Hales, *Between two cultures*, p. 12, 52n.

lived.¹²⁸ It is of course impossible to ascertain how many couples in NSW did *not* marry because of difficulties presented by authorities, but it is likely that the difficulties attached to legal marriage contributed to the high incidence of extramarital unions.¹²⁹

Objections by families and members of the clergy suggest that white women and Chinese men involved in intimate relationships were marginalised and ostracised from the wider white community, as well in some cases from the Chinese community, because of their choice of marriage or sexual partner. But to what extent was this the case? Did Chinese-European couples experience frequent or violent discrimination? Were they cut off from their communities and families? Was their coming together the result of social isolation?

Discrimination

In the southern colonies of Australia, Chinese-European couples were considered unusual and, by their very nature, they attracted people's attention. Reactions varied, from the benign to violent and threatening action, but what was common to many encounters was a curiosity or intrusion into couples' personal lives. Chinese-European couples were the subject of government and police interest, as well as that of the people they met in their daily lives. The Royal Commission testimony of Maud Lamb, also known as Mrs George Ah Poy, shows the frustration that could develop as a result of this curiosity. Maud was called to appear before the Royal Commission but chose not to appear until she was issued with a Police Court summons for neglecting to appear as a witness. When she did appear, Maud soon refused to answer the Commissioners' questions and was threatened with further legal action if she continued to refuse to answer. Maud had several objections to both appearing and to answering questions. She resented being called when other 'Chinamen's women'

¹²⁸ While no examples have been located of Chinese-European couples marrying by Chinese ceremony in NSW, Sophie Couchman discusses one such example from Melbourne in 1906. See, Couchman, ' "Oh, I would like to see Maggie Moore again!" ' in Couchman et al. (eds), *After the Rush*, p. 184.

¹²⁹ In 1929, for example, a white woman living with and planning to marry a Chinese man was arrested and charged with vagrancy. When the case went to court, her lawyer requested that she be released and that the couple should be allowed to marry. The request was denied and she was sentenced to four months imprisonment, the judge saying that he hoped no such thing would happen in white Australia. *Tung Wah Times* (Donghua bao), 2 March 1929. For similar cases, see Ryan, *Journal of Australian Studies*.

were not and she had heard that the Commissioners were asking 'disgusting' questions, such as:

... who was the first man she went with, whether it was in doors or out of doors, whether he was a black man or a white man, whether when she went to bed the Chinamen made her wash herself or not, whether they insisted upon her wearing clean linen, and so on.¹³⁰

Maud's husband, George Ah Poy, had concurred with her decision not to appear. Their objection to being called before the Royal Commission arose from the public intrusion into what they regarded as their own personal affairs.

Chinese-European couples faced discrimination, ranging from staring and pointing, gossip and innuendo, to verbal and physical abuse. A report from the *Empire* in August 1857 about the wedding of a Chinese man and white woman noted, for instance, that during the ceremony 'a large crowd collected outside ... and greeted the wedded pair with inharmonious noises, jeers, and laughter'. A police presence was necessary to prevent the crowd getting out of hand.¹³¹ Such behaviour could also result among those who knew couples on more intimate terms. Mrs Ellen Ti Ho, the wife of a Chinese cook of Castlereagh Street in Sydney was subjected to insults and insinuations by her landlady Bedelia McDermot. The insults related to her relationship with her Chinese husband. One day a fight broke out between the two women in which Bedelia hit Ellen over the face and head with a shoe until Bedelia's husband stopped her.¹³²

White partners of Chinese men were caught up in situations of violent protest by whites against the Chinese presence. Reports by interpreter James McCulloch Henry on the most extreme of these, which occurred at Lambing Flat in 1861, told of how one white woman and her baby were threatened:

¹³⁰ RCACG, p. 451.

¹³¹ *Empire*, 19 August 1857.

¹³² *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 28 August 1858.

An European woman with three small children, who is the wife of a Chinaman, was sitting in her tent rocking her baby in the cradle. The lawless mob burned down her tent, and the cradle wherein the infant was sleeping. Her own and children's clothes were torn to pieces by a lot of vagabonds, who counselled together for the violation of the woman and murder of the children, but were prevented by the timely interference of some of their number less hardened than the others.¹³³

Four months earlier, in March 1861, the NSW government had received the petition of a Chinese miner on Lambing Flat, Su San Sing Doh, which discussed the aggression of white miners against himself. In it he noted that his brother, Simon San Sing, a married man with wife and three children, was living at Lambing Flat and that they were 'totally unprovided for'.¹³⁴ Whether or not this was the same family as were later attacked is unclear. It is difficult to distinguish if any of the violence against Chinese men in the colonies, such as at Lambing Flat and on the Buckland in Victoria, were the direct result of interactions of the Chinese with white women. It is very likely, however, that this was among the list of grievances felt by those white men and women who took out their feelings in violent action against the Chinese.¹³⁵

The questioning of respectability of white partners of Chinese men was a more insidious form of discrimination than outright violence, but one which affected both their social and economic lives. Sarah Moysam, the wife of a storekeeper living in the Nithsdale Street locality of the Haymarket, was refused a milk vendor's licence while others in her area were granted them. It was only after a letter of appeal and a note from the local doctor, stating she was a 'respectable and deserving woman', were provided to authorities that she finally managed to get her licence approved.¹³⁶

¹³³ *SMH*, 9 July 1861. This story was repeated in George Ogilvy Preshaw's account of the Australian goldfields, *Banking Under Difficulties; or Life on the Goldfields of Victoria, New South Wales and New Zealand*, Edwards Dunlop & Co., Melbourne, 1888.

¹³⁴ *Petition of Su San Sing Doh*, NSW LA V&P, 1861, vol. VII, p. 535.

¹³⁵ For discussion of anti-Chinese violence in the colonies, see, for example, Markus, *Fear and Hatred*; and CN Connolly, 'Miners' rights: Explaining the "Lambing Flat" riots of 1860–61', in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (eds), *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Working Class in Australia*, Hale & Ironmonger, Neutral Bay, 1978.

¹³⁶ Wood, Chinese residency in the Haymarket and Surry Hills, caption to Plate 60.

In other instances, the white partners of Chinese men were ignored or avoided by other white women who questioned their social position and respectability because of their choice of partner. Emily Skinner, a young English woman on the Victorian goldfields in the late 1850s, stated that she 'thought it very dreadful to see European women married to them [Chinese]'. She recalled the first time she encountered a European wife of a Chinese man. It was at a public performance, where the woman had walked in to take a seat, but then hesitated and turned and walked out again. After she had left 'the whisper went around that she was a Chinaman's wife, newly come into that part'. Skinner continued:

I heard afterwards that she was the daughter of a clergyman and had quitted her home in disgrace. I could well believe it, too, for notwithstanding a certain painful look in her face, her manner and appearance had every appearance of culture and refinement – poor girl. I could not get her out of my thoughts for long after.¹³⁷

Skinner suggests that the woman herself felt pained and embarrassed by the situation, and that she suffered under the knowledge that those around her were judging her. She felt that the young woman would have made a suitable acquaintance, with her education and manners, but for the fact that she had a Chinese husband.

Respectability and acceptance by the white community around them were important for many white partners of Chinese men. Sandi Robb has noted that in north Queensland, women were subjected to gossip and innuendo from other white women, and faced snide comments about the paternity of their children.¹³⁸ Such reactions from other women led the white partners of Chinese men to assert the respectability of their own lives and families through legal marriage, the adoption of the Chinese partner's name and the title 'Mrs', or by the invention of a marriage that had never actually taken place. Dinah Hales states, for example, that on the birth registrations of the children of Chinese shepherd James Dong and his partner Mary Ann Ellen (née Holland, formerly Moore), 'a different imaginary date and place of the

¹³⁷ Duyker (ed.), *A Woman on the Goldfields*, p. 57.

¹³⁸ Robb, *Lilith*, p. 103.

parents' marriage was provided' for each one.¹³⁹ The women who appeared before the 1891 Royal Commission, too, asserted their own domestic respectability and the normality of their lives with their Chinese partners.

Networks and communities

Chinese reactions to interracial relationships could be negative. The Chinese press, as discussed in the previous chapter, was disapproving of relationships with white women and reflected attitudes of some more traditional and conservative elements of the Chinese community. Familial disapproval was also evident. The relationship between Ah Bow and Adelaide, one of the Royal Commission witnesses, had ended because of pressures from Ah Bow's father, Sydney-based merchant Way Kee. Adelaide had been introduced to Ah Bow through a friend and, as she told the Royal Commission, they were to have been married when he left her to return to China to be married. The reason he did this was because 'his father did not care about English women, and, through his [Way Kee's] influence, he [Ah Bow] left for China. He had to go, because if he had not done so, his father would not have left him any money.'¹⁴⁰

James Ng, in the New Zealand context, has suggested that intermarriage with white women occurred where Chinese men were isolated geographically from other Chinese, rather than among men whose connections to the Chinese community overseas and in China remained strong. He wrote:

The Chinese husband, who had adventurously travelled well away from his group and who probably had a better-than-usual command of English, was isolated from Chinese peer attitudes. He therefore entered into a mixed marriage more readily. Once married, that same isolation led to the tendency to stay in the European world.¹⁴¹

In NSW, relationships with white women did occur among Chinese men who were physically isolated from other Chinese. If a man were living and working at a distance from established Chinese populations – for example, as a shepherd or rural labourer,

¹³⁹ Hales, *Between two cultures*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ RCACG, p. 384.

¹⁴¹ Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, vol. 2, p. 249.

and he was not earning enough money to return to China or to bring a Chinese wife to the colony – there were strong incentives to find an Australian wife.¹⁴² In a small rural community he may also have had more chance to interact with white women. It is likely that this is one reason for the steady numbers of Chinese-European marriages in rural areas over the decades of the late nineteenth century, despite the shift of the Chinese population to Sydney.

Following Ng's argument, one would expect to see fewer interracial relationships among men who were active and part of the Chinese community in Australia, because the proclivity for intermarriage would be less due to community and perhaps familial pressures. However, in the southern colonies of Australia intimate relationships between white women and Chinese men formed whether they lived as part of the Chinese community or not. There does not seem to have been significant difference between the proportional number of marriages in areas where there were larger Chinese populations or only a few Chinese because particular conditions in each meant that intermarriage could and did occur. While Chinese men could appear to be isolated individuals removed from contact with China and with other Chinese in Australia, in many instances networks existed within NSW and throughout the Australian colonies and New Zealand which ensured they retained links to their countrymen and to their homes in China.

Chinese men who intermarried in rural areas were among those who maintained strong community and family connections. Dang Ah Chee, the husband of Margaret Crothers, built up successful businesses in Tumut and other towns including Gundagai using family resources and relying on male relatives, including his brother and cousins, to manage parts of his business outside his home of Tumut.¹⁴³ Sheong Foon Nomchong, the husband of Ellen Lupton, brought his brother Chee Doc out from California and was in business together with him in Braidwood until Sheong

¹⁴² Adam McKeown has noted how in nineteenth-century Peru, Chinese indentured labourers who had finished their contracts but had no way to return to China, intermarried and adopted Spanish names. It was only with the recommencement of a steamship line between Peru and China in 1905 that they renewed their links with their homeland and began to reconstruct a Chinese identity. Adam McKeown, 'Conceptualizing Chinese diasporas, 1842 to 1949', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 58, 1999, p. 316.

¹⁴³ Correspondence with Josephine Oh, Woolloowin QLD, October 2004.

Foon's death in 1889.¹⁴⁴ (See Image 24.) Those who established businesses and stores – as Dang Ah Chee and Wong Sat of Crookwell did – acted as intermediaries for those Chinese who were more removed from white society, often due to language barriers. A common pattern in country towns was to have family-run stores within the town itself, which serviced the white community as well as the Chinese market gardeners and workers who lived more isolated existences on the town outskirts. Dorothy Moriarty née Shang, the daughter of Charles Louey Shang and his white wife Beatrice of Echuca, recalled how she and her mother would assist her father and other local Chinese in business dealings, particularly in sending money back to China. 'Her father would communicate in Chinese with the person sending the money and she or her mother would translate this into English for the officials of the bank handing the transaction', wrote Echuca historian Helen Coulson.¹⁴⁵

The larger Chinese population in Sydney was also a site of relationships between Chinese men and white women. The high proportion of marriage there can in part be explained by the fact that a couple may have ventured to Sydney, particularly in the earlier years, to be married or because they met there and later moved out of the city. As the century progressed, however, Sydney was home to wealthier, merchant-class Chinese as well as educated Chinese who lived as part of well-formed and close-knit communities. Jane Lydon has argued that class difference determined the possible form of relationships for Chinese men in Australia, with only the wealthy being able to afford to bring their wives out to Australia.¹⁴⁶ It does not necessarily follow, though, that wealthier men would not form relationships with white women. Although these men travelled back and forth to China and had greater chances to bring wives and families out to Australia, numbers of them chose not to take this

¹⁴⁴ Sheong Foon Nomchong (also known as Ah Foon) arrived in Sydney in 1867 and went to Little River (Mongarlowe) near Braidwood. He married Ellen Lupton in 1881. Ellen was sixteen at the time and was the youngest of eleven children of parents of Yorkshire and Irish backgrounds. She is said to have been working in Nomchong's store when they married. They had four children before Nomchong died in 1889. Ellen remarried to James Augustus Mitchell in 1896, the children took their stepfather's name and the family relocated to Western Australia. Information provided by the Braidwood and District Historical Society, Braidwood NSW; NSW BDM.

¹⁴⁵ Coulson, *Echuca-Moama*, p. 118.

¹⁴⁶ Lydon, *Many Inventions*, p. 137.



Image 24. Ellen Lupton with her husband Sheong Foon Nomchong and three of their children, Braidwood
Braidwood Historical Society, Ng Nomchong family P97/28/341a

option, forming relationships with white Australian women instead. Their choice in not bringing a wife from China can be attributed to reasons such as the fact that these men were more Westernised, spoke better English or were converted Christians.

Quong Tart, Dr George On Lee and Chen Ateak in Sydney were wealthy and influential men who married white women. They were not isolated from their Chinese communities, instead acting as spokesmen and interpreters on their behalf. Naturalised in 1874, George On Lee worked as a medical practitioner in Sydney during the 1890s. With his white wife, Louisa, he had six children. On Lee was an active proponent of the need for a Chinese Consul-General in Australia, and like Quong Tart was a Mandarin of the fourth rank.¹⁴⁷ (See Image 25.) Men such as these

¹⁴⁷ Teffer, *No Ordinary Man: Sydney's Quong Tart*.

also had connections in ways which have not yet been thoroughly explored, through their religious beliefs, clan connections or membership of societies and community organisations. Both Quong Tart and John Peters, a well-respected storekeeper and interpreter from Dubbo, were, for example, Masons.¹⁴⁸



Image 25. Quong Tart (centre left), Dr George On Lee (centre right), their daughters and well-wishers on the deck of the *Australian*, 1898

Tart McEvoy papers, Society of Australian Genealogists, 6/25, no. 1

Tensions surrounded the place of Chinese-European couples both in the wider white community and in the Chinese community. In reaction to the social pressures placed upon them, couples relied on their own networks and found places in communities in which they would be accepted. They limited their participation in those parts of the community where they expected no welcome, rather seeking out those who would not judge them – those involved in interracial relationships like themselves or others

¹⁴⁸ On John Peters see Dormer, *Dubbo: City on the Plains*, p. 244.

whose values and attitudes overcame racial biases. In colonial Chinatowns, relationships between neighbours and acquaintances could be antagonistic, but Chinese-European couples there also developed close bonds. They assisted each other in legal and police matters, cared for each others' children, worked and socialised together. Drawn together by common circumstance, white women and their Chinese partners were friends and confidantes to others like themselves, providing support, assistance and companionship. They were, for example, witnesses at each others' weddings – An Gooey and Amelia Brehaut were married on 22 February 1886 and Ah Choon and Mary Morton were married two days later. Mary was witness to An Gooey and Amelia's wedding and then both Amelia and An Gooey were witnesses at Mary and Ah Choon's.¹⁴⁹

Outside of the established Chinatowns, too, couples formed strong connections to each other which continued into the next generation. One example can be found in the lives of four Amoy Chinese who had arrived in Australia in 1852 to work on rural properties owned by Henry Osborne in the Dapto area south of Sydney. Osborne was a prominent local landholder and member of the Legislative Assembly for East Camden where he lived. He had paid £54 for the four men through Robert Towns & Co. Between 1854 and 1861 all four men married white women – John Chi Chin to Lena Leslie in 1854; John Chi to Margaret Miller and Thomas Chu Chin to Ellen Dally in 1859; and John Jui Dan to Margaret McNalty in 1861. These four men, their wives and children formed a small network among themselves, working and living together in the rural community that centred on the Osborne family properties of 'Marshall Mount', 'Daisy Bank' and 'Avondale'. Two of the sons of John Chi and Margaret Miller, George and James Chi, were witnesses at the burial of John Jui Dan (by then known as Huey Dann) in 1888.¹⁵⁰ Similar connections existed between the Chinese

¹⁴⁹ NSW BDM, Marriages 1886/6204 and 1886/6205. Also, for example, see the marriages of James Ah Wee and Amy Laphorne, 11 February 1882 at Narrandera and that of Ah Pew and Mary Ann Anderson, 10 February 1882 at Narrandera. NSW BDM, Marriages 1882/5687 and 1882/5686.

¹⁵⁰ Email correspondence with Rosalyn McDonald, July 2002.

men and their white wives who lived on and around the Berry Estates in the Shoalhaven area of coastal NSW from the 1850s.¹⁵¹

Motivations and emotions

Chinese-European couples occupied an ambiguous place in both the white and Chinese communities of colonial NSW. At times they were accepted and welcomed and were able to actively participate in society around them, while at other times they were abused, rejected and harassed because they went against accepted boundaries of interracial interaction. In the face of these ambiguities and the tensions that surrounded their place with their communities, these relationships had to be mutually beneficial, offering both material and emotional benefits to the women and men involved.

Chinese-European relationships fulfilled social and personal expectations of marriage and family, providing companionship and progeny. White women provided homes, domestic comforts and sexual partnership for Chinese men – whether the men were away from a Chinese wife, whether they were waiting for a chance to return home to China or whether they were establishing new lives overseas.¹⁵² For women, relationships with Chinese men could offer the protection and stability of a husband who could provide a home, shelter and protection from aggression, harassment, abuse or the dangers of life on the streets. Relationships between white women and Chinese men could have legal and financial benefits. Women acted as business partners and go-betweens in the Chinese and white communities and dealt with white authorities on behalf of their Chinese partners. Some spoke Chinese and were familiar with Chinese customs and traditions – meaning that, in Jane Lydon’s words, they acted as cultural intermediaries between whites and Chinese, ‘explaining Chinese motives and correcting European misapprehensions regarding their way of

¹⁵¹ James Sum Yar and William Gosang, who arrived together from China in 1853, were among the Chinese contracted labourers who married white women in the Shoalhaven. Sum Yar was witness at Gosang’s wedding in 1859, three years after his own. Florance, *The Chinese in Shoalhaven*, pp. 7-9, 13-14, 16.

¹⁵² Ta Chen has suggested that overseas intermarriage was used as a temporary measure by Chinese men awaiting a return to China. See, Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities in South China*, English version edited by Bruno Lasker, Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1940, pp. 140-3.

life'.¹⁵³ For some Chinese men, a white wife contributed to their appearance of belonging to the Australian community – along with business interests and property, white wives and children were listed on applications for naturalisation in NSW as evidence of the sincerity of the Chinese applicants' desire to settle in the colony.¹⁵⁴

More oblique in the sources is the role that personal emotions played in Chinese-European relationships. Generally the reasons discussed in the surviving accounts revolve around practical decisions based on the economic and social realities of life in the colonies, for both white women and Chinese men. There are glimpses, however, of the ways sentiment and emotion played a role in the formation and continuation of Chinese-European relationships. Stories passed down through families suggest the tender side to encounters between Chinese men and white women. It is told, for instance, that John Egge used to swim to Hindmarsh Island in the Murray River to court English-born Mary Perring, the white woman who would later become his wife and mother of his eight children:

Not having a boat, he courted [Mary] by swimming in the evening across the Goolwa Arm from the mainland, his clothes piled high on his head. Once on the island he would dress, visit Mary and her family and, when it was late, return to Goolwa in the same way that he had come.¹⁵⁵

Some descendants take this further by describing how their ancestors were swept up in throes of love and passion, blinded to racial differences and unaffected by pragmatic decision making. One descendant chose to represent her ancestors'

¹⁵³ Lydon, *Many Inventions*, p. 140. Cathie May in north Queensland also noted the Chinese language skills of white wives and their role as intermediaries between the Chinese and white communities. See Cathie May, *Topsawyers: The Chinese in Cairns, 1870 – 1920*, James Cook University History Department, Townsville, 1984, pp. 66-7, 89.

¹⁵⁴ In the nearly 300 applications for naturalisation in NSW before 1888 (when Chinese were not longer able to become naturalised British subjects in the colony) about four percent of applicants stated that marriage and family in Australia were among the reasons they wished to be naturalised. More naturalised Chinese men were married and had families here without stating it on their applications. NSW differed from Queensland, where marriage in the colony was a prerequisite to naturalisation – there was no such stipulation in NSW. Data taken from Terri McCormack (comp.), *Chinese Naturalisation Database, NSW 1857 – 1887*, self-published, Sydney, 1997, available online at URL: www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/naturalisation.

¹⁵⁵ Morag Loh, 'John Egge: A champion of the rivers', *Hemisphere: An Asian-Australian Magazine*, vol. 28, no. 1, July-August 1983, p. 36.

relationship this way – ‘I believe my great grandmother was a beautiful red haired Irish lady and I think, she fell in love with my [Chinese] great grandfather’.¹⁵⁶

While it is difficult to generalise about Chinese-European relationships – because they were as varied, individual and idiosyncratic as relationships today – it is possible to conclude that many relationships were based on affection and deep emotional bonds, even if they were never expressed or recorded in the language of romantic love as we know it.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps this affection is easiest to see in the lives of couples whose relationships lasted most of their adult lives. After many years together, Quong Tart publicly expressed his contentedness with his marriage, stating that Margaret was a ‘good wife’ who had ‘materially helped him to succeed in life’.¹⁵⁸ Image 26, a relaxed portrait of Margaret and Quong Tart, hints at the warmth and companionship of their relationship. After his death, Margaret stated that Quong Tart had been ‘very happy in his married life’.¹⁵⁹ As other long lives together came to their ends, accounts similarly recalled the affection shown by white wives and their Chinese husbands. The 1905 obituary of Dang Ah Chee of Tumut spoke of the strong love he and his wife Maggie had for each other – they were ‘fondly devoted’ to each other, it said¹⁶⁰ – and Presbyterian minister Alexander Adam wrote in touching terms of the careful and dutiful nursing Janet Buchanan gave her husband, Loo Tan, as he grew increasingly ill and progressed towards death.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Interview 30/1985 (Maude), in Sung, *Australian Chinese*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁷ Hsu-ming Teo has discussed the challenges in deciphering romantic love in historical sources. See Hsu-ming Teo, ‘Love writes: Gender and romantic love in Australian love letters, 1860–1960’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 20, no. 48, November 2005, pp. 343-61.

¹⁵⁸ *Leichhardt and Petersham Standard*, 2 July 1898.

¹⁵⁹ Tart, *Life of Quong Tart*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ *Tumut and Adelong Times*, 20 October 1905.

¹⁶¹ Alexander Adam, *Autobiography* [manuscript], MS 8630, Australian Manuscript Collection, State Library of Victoria, 1907, p. 7; and email correspondence with Bethel Barton, February 2002.

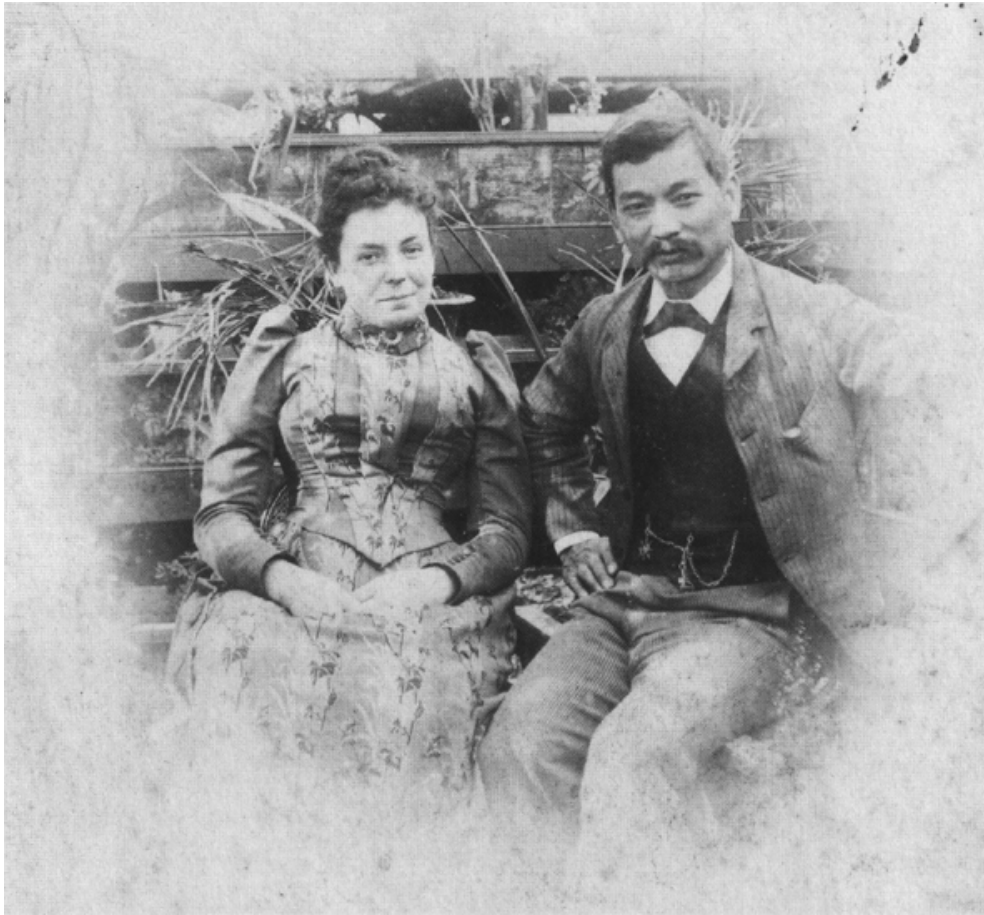


Image 26. Margaret and Quong Tart, c. 1895
Tart McEvoy papers, Society of Australian Genealogists, 5/199, no. 3

Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of the nature of relationships between Chinese men and white women in colonial NSW. It has considered the many forms they took – from short-lived liaisons of mutual convenience to lifetime commitments which founded extensive families – and the various locations they took place in – rural camps, farms, towns, inner-city ‘slums’, wealthy suburbs. The chapter has questioned and challenged some of the stereotypical statements about Chinese European relationships and the men and women who participated in them, asserting that interracial relationships were not as uncommon as some have claimed nor were they necessarily confined to particular ethnic and social groups. The overall numbers of relationships between Chinese men and white women are not great when considered against the large number of Chinese men present in the colonies or when taken as a proportion of total marriages and families, but the presence of even eight

hundred Chinese-European couples over the course of the late nineteenth century suggests that the racial and social dynamics of colonial Australia allowed for toleration of intimate relationships across racial boundaries.

Chinese-European couples were a part of the population of the southern colonies of Australia and their lives form a small but significant part of the history of personal relationships and family life. Couples could face harsh treatment and discrimination from both whites and Chinese, but the fact that their businesses thrived, that they participated in church and community activities and that they formed and maintained connections with friends and family suggests that earlier studies which overlooked their existence have failed to consider the complexities of the racial and social make-up of colonies. The following chapter will discuss further the ways in which Chinese-European couples and their children interacted with the white community around them. It will explore the tensions and negotiations necessitated by belonging to an interracial family in a society which viewed relationships across racial boundaries as problematic.