Section 5

CONNECTIONS

Anglo-Chinese families in China

In September 1890, Scottish-born Mary Yue née Ferguson set out from her home in Roxburgh, New Zealand for China. She was travelling with her five Anglo-Chinese children, two boys and three girls, ‘returning’ to the ancestral village of her late husband Yue Ah Hee in Taishan. Mary and Yue Ah Hee, a merchant, had married in New Zealand in 1877 and shared only eight years together before Yue Ah Hee’s death in 1885. It had always been his wish for his children to be educated in Chinese and Mary bravely decided to grant his desire by taking their children ‘home’ to China. Living there, supported by her husband’s family, would also be a way to extend the family finances.

The family’s journey from Roxburgh to the ancestral village of Li Yuan, together with their experiences in China over the next thirty years, was recorded in a manuscript entitled My Reminiscences, written by second son, Yue Henry Jackson. Yue Jackson was nine when he left New Zealand and he did not return to his birthplace until he was twenty-five. The intervening years were spent growing up as a Chinese boy in a Taishanese village, far removed from the life he had once known in New Zealand. His mother Mary died a year after the family arrived in China, and he and his siblings were educated in Chinese and their Chinese relatives expected them to adhere to Chinese religious, cultural and familial customs. His sisters were expected to have their feet bound.

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Yue Jackson’s forty-six page manuscript provides a detailed and descriptive picture of the experiences of an Anglo-Chinese family in China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It tells of life in a south China village through the eyes of one who both belonged and didn’t belong, who was Chinese but not Chinese, and it describes not only the Yue family’s adjustment to life in China, but also the differences in the way each of the five siblings and their white mother reacted to their changed life. Yue Jackson’s manuscript is exceptional for the insight it provides into the events of his and his siblings’ young lives, but these events—the family’s return to China and the children’s Chinese education, for instance—were more typical than might be expected.

Commentators have long assumed that Anglo-Chinese marriages in Australia and New Zealand—such as that between Yue Jackson’s parents—were one stage in a linear process of integration or assimilation into white society by the Chinese husband. It was thought that intermarriage almost certainly meant that the Anglo-Chinese family would remain in the Australasian colonies for life. An early example of such commentary is by Carl Feilburg, who wrote in 1880:

We can not only endure without harm the presence of a few Chinese scattered among our population, but these isolated individuals generally show a tendency to settle down. They cut off their pigtails, abandon the comfortable dress for the shirt and trousers of the Australian bushman, and occasionally seek to marry a wife.\(^2\)

For Feilburg, taking an Australian wife—together with the shedding of outwards signs of Chineseness such as the queue (pigtail) and Chinese dress—was indicative that such men were removing themselves from their Chinese pasts and beginning a new life settled in Australia. The degree to which this idea was accepted by white colonists is suggested by the inclusion of Chinese men in the general marriage statistics for the NSW census of 1871 and 1881. The reasoning behind this was that ‘as numbers of marriages have taken place and are continually occurring between them [Chinese men] and European women, it is absolutely necessary that they should be

considered as a part of our settled population’. These ideas have endured and emerged in more recent writings by those interested in the process of Chinese migration to Australasia and particularly by those concerned in the processes of migrant assimilation and integration. Such scholars have viewed intermarriage as an indicator of assimilation. CY Choi, for instance, wrote in his classic work on the migration and settlement of the Chinese in Australia that:


4 See, for example, Choi, Chinese Migration and Settlement and Fong, The Chinese in New Zealand, in particular Chapter 10.
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For the Chinese who have a long tradition of being family lineage oriented, intermarriage represents an important step away from their own primary group and away from his [sic] ordinary social and cultural network.⁵

Even as recently as 2003, Sandi Robb stated that intermarriage for Chinese men ‘meant remaining overseas and not returning to China’ and that ‘upon marrying a European woman, the ancestral lineage [sic] would be broken’.⁶ Anglo-Chinese intermarriage has thus primarily been discussed within the context of settling down, of assimilation. The fact that a Chinese man had a white wife was apparently indicative of an unproblematic and natural process through which he became a settler. (How much his new country wanted him to settle was another question). A white wife was seemingly an indication that her husband was making a new home in a new land, with his mind turned away from China and towards his new country overseas.

It is easy to illustrate the link between intermarriage and assimilation using the example of men such as Quong Tart. Having arrived at the NSW goldfields as a child, he learnt English, became a Christian, established prosperous businesses in Sydney, married an English-born white woman and established a comfortable middle-class household and family in Sydney’s Ashfield. In the words of Robert Travers, for instance:

Quong’s wish to take a ‘barbarian’ wife was another indication of his determination to lead a truly westernized life in a distant country. Unlike so many of his fellow Cantonese, who sought gold in order to return to China and a comfortable retirement, Quong Tart meant to make his way in Australia.⁷

But examples such as Quong Tart do not necessarily prove what they illustrate. He may seem to fit the assimilationist mould but Quong Tart remained, in his own heart and mind as much as in the minds of those around him, Chinese as well as

⁵ Choi, Chinese Migration and Settlement, p. 104.
⁶ Robb, Lilith, p. 102.
⁷ Travers, Australian Mandarin, p. 49.
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Australian. His businesses were built and maintained by the connections he kept with his Chinese relations and he worked as a leader of the Chinese community in Sydney. He remained tied to his ancestral home and his extended family there. Despite putting down roots and acquiring the language, culture, customs and religion of his new country, he self-consciously remained ‘Chinese’. And he, too, took his Australian family back to visit China.8 (See Image 43.)

As discussed in previous chapters of this thesis, there were many reasons why Chinese men who married in Australia remained there all their lives, and why their Anglo-Chinese children were absorbed into the cultures of their white mothers and of the wider white society rather than that of their fathers. A similar situation developed in New Zealand.9 Legal, social and economic factors meant that Chinese men had

8 Quong Tart’s connections with his Chinese family and home were discussed in Mei, Mei Guangda’s (Quong Tart) family and his Chinese sensibility.

9 James Ng’s work provides the clearest picture of the lives of Anglo-Chinese families in New Zealand. See Ng, Windows on a Chinese Past, particularly volume 2, chapter 5. Ng gives numerous examples of the situations discussed in this chapter, many of which come from accounts by missionaries to the Chinese in New Zealand. I would like to thank Dr Ng for his generous assistance in providing copies of these accounts and also for sharing his numerous unpublished manuscripts with me.
difficulties in returning to China. Some lived separated from other Chinese in rural areas and with the passing of time their habits, customs and outlook changed. Likewise, it may not have been possible for children to be sent to China due to financial constraints or even for them to have contact with any other Chinese in Australia due to geographical distances. But these factors didn’t necessarily eliminate ideas of China as home.

Anglo-Chinese intermarriage was not simply part of a process of cultural assimilation from a Chinese to a European way of life, religion, culture, customs and ideas of family. As Adam McKeown has suggested, intermarriage among the Chinese overseas was part of a system in which Chinese families became transnational and multi-locational. It was one strategy through which Chinese men continued their family line where other factors did not allow a Chinese marriage.\textsuperscript{10} It was an innovation which drew on traditional Chinese family patterns rather than necessarily being in conflict with them. Intermarriage was a complex process of cultural mediation: a melding and mixing of different cultures, languages, pasts and presents rather than a linear process of assimilation or integration. By focusing on the connections Anglo-Chinese families in colonial Australia and New Zealand had with China, this chapter seeks to contribute to the recent historical scholarship on the transnational Chinese family and to broaden the ways in which Anglo-Chinese families are considered. While marrying and having an Australian family often indicated long-term settlement in Australia for a Chinese man, exploring the possibility that this was not necessarily the case extends our understanding of the dynamics of such cross-cultural families and can provide answers about parts of their lives which might otherwise seem contradictory.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} See McKeown, \textit{Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change}, pp. 70-74 and \textit{Journal of American Ethnic History}. Romanzo Adams’ work on interracial marriage in Hawaii supports this thesis. He stated that before 1900, a proportion of Chinese who married Hawaiians ‘were not intending to abandon Chinese custom’, but rather that ‘the marriage was merely a temporary adjustment to the situation in a foreign country’. See Adams, \textit{Interracial Marriage in Hawaii}, p. 147.

\textsuperscript{11} Pauline Rule has suggested, too, that exploring the possibility of a return to China can be helpful in explaining the apparent disappearance of Anglo-Chinese families from Australian records. Rule, ‘Chun Yut’.
White wives in China

The wishes of most Chinese families were that unmarried sons overseas would return to China to marry. In general, marriage to or relationships with foreign women were objected to for fear that the son would not return to China or would no longer send remittances back to his family. In south China, marriage was an arrangement between families, not between the prospective bride and groom, and there was little room for free choice of marriage partner for men or women. In choosing to marry a woman overseas, without the sanction of his family, a Chinese man was often directly opposing the wider interests of that family. Overseas sons were encouraged to marry local Chinese women. Quong Tart’s mother, for instance, attempted to have him marry a local woman on his visit home to Duanfen, Taishan in 1881.12 and Yue Jackson (himself the product of a mixed marriage) was urged by his village relatives to get married in the village:

for they thought that that was the only way of keeping me interested in and connected with the village and my father’s people. They feared that if I married abroad, I would never return to the village, and my father’s good name and our family tree would suffer in consequence.13

Overseas wives were viewed with suspicion and it was feared that they would distract men from their obligations to their family and lineage in China. It was common knowledge in the ancestral villages that foreign women had terrible ways of keeping their Chinese husbands away from their homes in China. It was believed, for instance, that foreign wives would give their husbands a kind of drug before they returned to visit China. A later antidote was needed to prevent illness and death so if the men didn’t return to their overseas homes to receive this from their foreign wives, they would die.14

12 Tart, The Life of Quong Tart, p. 6.
13 Yue Jackson, My reminiscences, p. 40.
14 Tung Wah News (Donghua xinbao), 26 August 1899. I was also told about this alleged practice in an interview with Tan Runsen, in Xiaodan village, Taishan, in April 2003. Tan Runsen said that this was what was said to have caused the premature death of his uncle, who had worked as a laundryman in Cuba in the 1920s and was known to have had a Cuban wife.
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Despite objections, fears and superstitions, there was a certain level of acceptance that non-Chinese women, and especially their children, were legitimate parts of their Chinese families. This is demonstrated by the fact that Chinese men took their foreign wives and children to China to visit or live. Women from England, America, Canada, Hawaii, New Zealand, South America and Australia, together with their children, travelled to China to visit their husbands’ families during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.15 Most of these families went either to Hong Kong or to the ancestral towns and villages in counties of the Pearl River Delta, including Taishan, Dongguan, Zengcheng, Kaiping, Xinhui, Panyu and Zhongshan.16 (See Map 2.) Others went to south Chinese cities like Canton, Amoy and Swatow, or re-migrated to other overseas Chinese destinations such as southeast Asia. Some white wives and their children only made short stays, long enough to visit with family and perhaps for their husbands and fathers to deal with business matters. For others, the trip to China meant the long-term relocation of the family. In many other instances, it was only Anglo-Chinese children who spent time in China, while either one or both of their parents remained overseas.

**Hong Kong**

Hong Kong was the destination for many Anglo-Chinese families from Australia and New Zealand. It was both Chinese and close to the ancestral homelands, as well as being a British outpost. Hong Kong was already home to a significant Eurasian population which had developed primarily from relationships between foreign men and Chinese women in the colony. Vicky Lee has argued that both the British and Chinese were opposed to such liaisons and preferred to keep the two races separate, but Hong Kong had no anti-miscegenation laws, and other regulations which displayed the objections of the colonial rulers to interracial relationships were often ineffective at preventing interracial relationships. Employees in government service who were married to Chinese or Eurasians, for instance, could not live in government service.

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15 Among the Australian children of Chinese men who travelled to China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were those with Aboriginal mothers. Their particular experiences in Hong Kong and the ancestral villages have not been studied but are not considered in this thesis.

16 Michael Williams’s work has reported the presence of foreign wives and their children in the Zhongshan region of Guangdong province. See Williams, Destination *qiaoxiang*, pp. 77-8.
quarters but many relationships were never formalised by marriage.¹⁷ British objections to Chinese-European relationships in Hong Kong echoed those expressed in the Australian colonies during the late nineteenth century as discussed in Section 1 of this thesis.

Map 2. The Pearl River Delta region, Guangdong province, China
Modified from Adam McKeown, Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change

The Hong Kong Eurasian community was composed of differing groups, as described by CG Alabaster in 1920. He stated that prior to 1911 there were three groups of Eurasians in Hong Kong—the Portuguese, with strong Roman Catholic ties and Portuguese names; Chinese Eurasians and British Eurasians. Chinese Eurasians wore Chinese clothes and the men had queues, they used a Chinese surname and married according to Chinese customs, including concubinage. A British Eurasian ‘dressed as a European and lived as such’.¹⁸ Henry Lethbridge has suggested that the majority of the Eurasian population ‘disappeared’ back into the Chinese community in Hong

¹⁷ Vicky Lee, Hong Kong Eurasian memoirs. For a description of the Hong Kong Eurasian community see, also, Irene Cheng, Clara Ho Tung: A Hong Kong Lady, Her Family and Her Times, The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1989 (first published 1976), pp. xv-xvii.

Kong but that ‘a portion … could be properly designated as a distinct community’, as symbolised by the establishment in 1890 of a special Eurasian cemetery. There were also neighbourhoods in the colony with high numbers of Eurasian families, and churches and schools—such as the Diocesan Girls’ and Diocesan Boys’ School (attended by Yue Jackson among others)—which catered primarily to the Eurasian community. Eurasian families—first-, second- or third-generation—knew each other, socialised together and married into each others’ families.

Socio-economic factors played a part in the identity of Hong Kong Eurasians and affected which group they fitted in to. Despite its small European population, Hong Kong society was divided by class and wealth, and both Chinese and Eurasians with wealth and education were accepted by the British elite more than lower-class Europeans. Among wealthy Eurasian families children received the best of both worlds, being educated in both English and Chinese, and wealthy Eurasians such as Sir Robert Ho Tung had tremendous influence with the British rulers. For those Eurasians of a lower social and economic status, often the offspring of British fathers and Chinese mothers who found themselves abandoned when their European protector returned to his homeland, it was most usual to re-enter Chinese society and for the children to be raised as Chinese. Despite the significant numbers of interracial unions and the obvious Eurasian population, the place of ‘Chinese’ family members in Eurasian families was problematic for colonial Hong Kong.

In spite of the divisions and tensions between the Chinese, Eurasian and British worlds of Hong Kong, there were clearly some positive aspects of life in the mixed community for Anglo-Chinese families from Australia and New Zealand. Families arrived in Hong Kong with connections to China and their home country and may have also had other family members resident in the colony. These connections assisted in pursuing business interests, finding work and establishing households. Fluency in English and Chinese meant that Anglo-Chinese families could function in

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both the British and Chinese communities, in both their business and personal lives. Hong Kong provided a more familiar and comfortable life for Australasian families than the China inland.\textsuperscript{21}

Maggie Ah Chee, née Crothers, her husband and three children set up home in Hong Kong during the late years of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{22} The family had been long resident in the small town of Tumut in the mountains of southern NSW, where Dang Ah Chee worked his way up from a teamster and carrier to that of a wealthy businessman with property in both NSW and Hong Kong. Maggie and he had met while he was running a small store in Upper Adelong. They were married in 1876 and raised three children together, a son and two daughters. Dang Ah Chee’s wealth had come from a successful trade in tobacco and maize, allowing him to return to Hong Kong to launch into an extended import and export business. In adulthood, their son, Yong Tang, followed his father into business as a produce dealer and import and export merchant in Hong Kong. Daughter Lan Oi left Hong Kong for England, where she lived in London with her husband, CE Merrell.

In Hong Kong, the family lived in premises on Carnarvon Road in Kowloon and, at the time of Dang Ah Chee’s death in 1905, this was one of about half a dozen properties he owned, including several business premises and houses in Tumut and Gulgong. Dang Ah Chee’s death prompted an obituary in the \textit{Tumut and Adelong Times} which commented on his and Maggie’s life in Hong Kong. Maggie had died not long before her husband. Her health had not been robust and the obituary concluded that it was ‘contrary to her desire to leave [Tumut] and take up her abode in Hong Kong’. Dang Ah Chee had made a final visit to Australia before his death, without Maggie:

\textsuperscript{21} In 1868, Reverend William Young stated that the few Chinese men who had returned to China with their white wives left them ‘at Macao or Hong Kong for greater security of residence’. Young, \textit{Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population in Victoria}, in McLaren (ed.), \textit{The Chinese in Victoria}, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{22} Information on the family of Maggie and Dang Ah Chee family is held by the Tumut Family History Group. Other information on the family has been taken from NSW Probate Dang Chee 36666; NSW BDM; and correspondence with Josephine Oh, Wooloowin QLD, October 2004.
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When asked why he did not bring his wife back with him when he returned to Tumut, Mr Chee replied that if he had done so he would never have been able to prevail upon her to go back to the home she was then in.  

Western wives like Maggie Ah Chee who took up residence in Hong Kong with their Chinese husbands were in an ambiguous position regarding the British world of Hong Kong. The Ah Chees, although in a comfortable financial situation, lived in Kowloon, the Chinese part of Hong Kong. The Peak on Hong Kong Island was home to many of the wealthy British in the colony, but the Peak was forbidden as a place of residence for Chinese or Eurasians. Kowloon, where the Ah Chees lived, and the eastern suburb of Wan Chai were home to lower-class Europeans and of course, the Chinese. Eurasians in Hong Kong were not excluded from social contacts with the British, as demonstrated by the fact that the Ah Chees’ daughter Lan Oi married an Englishman and returned with him to live in England. Anglo-Chinese families also socialised and maintained relationships formed in Australia and New Zealand while in Hong Kong.

The ancestral villages

While Hong Kong became home to some Anglo-Chinese families, for other Western women and their children it was merely a port of call on a journey that was to continue inland to the ancestral villages of the Pearl River Delta. From Hong Kong they proceeded by boat or overland into China. Yue Jackson described the journey he, his mother and siblings took in 1890. They left Hong Kong on a Canton River steamer one evening, and arrived in Canton the next morning. Later in the morning they took a large Chinese junk from Canton to Dihai, a journey that lasted another day and night. At Dihai, they changed to a sampan for more than three hours before they

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23 Tumut and Adelong Times, 20 October 1905.

24 The Eurasian family of Sir Robert Ho Tung was granted special permission to live there but still faced racial prejudice. His daughters, instead of attending the local school with other Peak children, attended the Diocesan Girls School in Kowloon, a school which catered for Eurasian girls. See Lee, Hong Kong Eurasian memoirs.

25 Lethbridge, Hong Kong: Stability and Change, p. 172.

26 For instance, Mrs Yee On, the wife of a Chinese man from Tamworth NSW, frequently saw the two Anglo-Chinese sons of her Tamworth neighbour, Mrs Chung, when she visited China. NAA: A1, 1913/5769.
arrived at Li Yuan. There they were met by a large crowd of villagers, who shouted with excitement at the arrival of the first foreigner they had ever seen, Mary Yue. Yue Jackson wrote that ‘their eagerness to see my mother was intense. They battled for vantage points in order to catch a glimpse of us.’  

The arrival of a white wife and her foreign-born children was a spectacle that caused great excitement, as Yue Jackson described. But it was not only their arrival that piqued the villagers’ interest. As rarely-seen foreigners, every day they would be under the scrutiny of close and extended family and other villagers—here there was no Western community into which a white wife could immerse herself; at best there might be another Western wife living in a nearby village with whom she could sometimes visit. A woman’s appearance, language and behaviour, and those of her children, would be subjects of great interest to local gossips and, unfamiliar with the local language and customs, their every blunder in adjusting to local life would be known throughout the whole village.

Madeline Hsu has described the dynamics of life in south China villages for women, where ‘social and material conditions reinforced Confucian norms’ of female chastity and fidelity. Village life, particularly for women, was insular and self-contained:

Upon marriage, women moved to the villages of their husbands, where they lived with their in-laws surrounded by their husbands’ fellow villagers and clansmen. There was not much need to venture far beyond the village, for the surrounding fields and nearest market town provided most of the necessities of everyday life.

The physical layout, too, of villages enhanced the feeling of insularity. Houses faced towards the centre of the village, with their doors opening into common laneways. (See Image 44.) The only time doors were shut and locked was when the family was away, meaning that there was a constant flow of villagers back and forth who could see the goings on in their neighbours’ houses. Women were closely watched by their fellow villagers, particularly other women, and were the subject of gossip for any

27 Yue Jackson, My reminiscences, pp. 3-5.

28 Hsu, Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home, pp. 104-5.
form of aberrant behaviour. One target, Hsu notes, was a woman who left the village too often, even if only to pay a visit to her own mother in a neighbouring village. While Hsu was specifically describing life in rural Taishan county, insularity and self-containment were characteristic of other areas within the Canton area.

The roles and duties of a Chinese daughter-in-law were particular and strict. While these varied between districts and with wealth and social position, to truly become part of the family white wives had certain roles within the family and village they were expected to perform. It was women who managed family rituals, such as

Image 44. Quong Tart’s ancestral village of Longteng li in Duanfen, Taishan, April 2003

In Taishanese villages houses are typically clustered close together, facing inwards along narrow alleys.

Photograph by the author

prayers at the local temple or family altar and the preparation of special foods on festival days. They were responsible for the spiritual well-being of the family. Mothers-in-law expected to teach their daughters-in-law how to perform rituals according to family traditions, so that they could be maintained and passed on to the next generation. Learning and perfecting the performance of the aspects of family and village culture expected of her were difficult enough for a local woman marrying in to
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a family, let alone a foreign woman whose understanding of Chinese culture was probably basic at best. As one long-time China-resident missionary woman explained:

A Chinese woman on her wedding day … is not taken to a home of her own, but to her mother-in-law’s house, and there be given [sic] an apartment according to the quality of the home.

The Chinese customs would cause a Western woman unhappiness … A foreign daughter-in-law not speaking their language and not trained in Chinese home etiquette would be a great trial to her mother-in-law and her sisters-in-law.²⁹

Despite these obstacles, there were white women who were able to adjust to their lives in South China villages. When FT Loie—a Chinese evangelist who had worked with Reverend Alexander Don in New Zealand—travelled to China in 1904, he noted both American and Australian women married to Chinese and living in their husbands’ native villages. One, an Australian named Mrs Ng, had gone to live at a place called Tile-kiln Mart in Zengcheng in the early 1880s and twenty years later she claimed to have ‘forgotten everything English and remembered only Chinese things’.³⁰ In contrast, in the early 1940s, American writer Emily Hahn wrote of meeting a Cockney English woman, Mrs Lee, and her Anglo-Chinese family in Hong Kong. With her children Mrs Lee spoke fluent Cantonese, but with Hahn she spoke English—‘She was British from top to toe. She dressed like a cockney and she talked like a cockney’, despite her years of separation from Western society.³¹ Annie Lee had married a Chinese man in Australia and had gone to live with him in his ancestral village at around the turn of the twentieth century. She had lived with him and his farming family, bearing and raising her children in the countryside, for over twenty years until ill-health brought her to Hong Kong.³² Such women adapted their lives,

²⁹ Townsville Evening Star, 11 October 1932.
³⁰ Outlook, 30 January 1904, p. 14. See also Ng, Windows on a Chinese Past, vol. 2, p. 287, 97(a)n.
³² Annie Lee went to Hong Kong in the 1920s suffering from poor health, and after recovering decided not to return to China. She stayed instead at the Matilda Hospital in Hong Kong where she became a maternity nurse. Annie Lee was interned at the Stanley Camp in Hong Kong by the Japanese during World War II. Joyce Stevens Smith with Joyce Savidge, Matilda: Her Life and Legacy, Matilda & War Hospital, Hong Kong, 1988, pp. 127-8.
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their way of thinking and their habits—including their dress and domestic routines—in order to fit into their Chinese surroundings. Describing an Irish-American woman in her home in Hillside village, Taishan, FT Loie noted that she was ‘clad in Chinese dress and speaking a mixture of English and Chinese’ and she served tea and tobacco to her guests according to Chinese custom.33

Occupations

In China, white wives occupied themselves in various ways. Mary Yue’s year in China before her death was taken up with the care of her own six-year-old daughter Lizzie as well as the baby of her children’s ‘third aunt’.34 At Hillside village in Taishan county, the Irish-American wife met by FT Loie taught English at the ‘English School’, receiving 12 Mexican dollars annually from each of her twelve students.35 Another Australian wife living at Shilong in Dongguan was reputed to be involved in the trafficking rings which sold Australian birth and naturalisation certificates and smuggled Chinese people illegally into Australia.36

In the countryside, white wives became part of their husbands’ farming families. Mary Chung had met her husband Chung Pinsheng in Victoria in the 1880s.37 He had arrived in Victoria from Dongguan with his elder brother Chung Pinyuan in around 1880 and, after having worked off their indentured contracts, the brothers went into gold mining. They managed to make a good living for themselves and Pinsheng met and married Mary. Family circumstances meant that the brothers needed to return to China and Mary followed her husband, joining his farming family in the village. Pinsheng and Mary grew vegetables on their own land and, not having to pay rent to a landlord, their lives were quite comfortable. They did not have any children of their own but Mary grew very attached to her nephew Guanlin. Her great-nephew, Chung Yoon-Ngan, has written that life was very hard for Mary in the village, as she had to

34 Yue Jackson, My reminiscences, p. 10K.
36 NAA: A1, 1913/4976.
adapt to the Chinese way of life and learn the family’s Hakka language. She became an accepted member of the family and it was when the family decided to move to Malaya in 1910 that her real difficulties began. Pinsheng and Mary were unable to find employment in the British-owned mines, a fact which Chung Yoon-Ngan attributes to the prejudices of the minority British administrators who viewed her marriage to a Chinese as a disgrace. Mary stayed with her Chinese family until her husband’s death, after which she was sent home to her family in Australia.

Motivations
Whatever the differences between their experiences—and indeed between the women themselves—family lay at the base of women’s motivations for travelling to China. Their relationships with Chinese men caught them up in lives which crossed between two very different countries. Some women, like the young Gertrude Bullock, knew that the trip would be a short but exciting one—Gertrude went to China for her honeymoon in 1912 with her new husband William Ah Ket, visiting Beijing where William, an Australian-born and educated lawyer, was to represent Australian Chinese at the first parliamentary session of Sun Yat-sen’s Republican government in 1913. Other young women set out with an adventurous spirit and a faith in their own ability to adjust to life in China. James Ng has noted, for example, the case of Louie Frame, a Dunedin prostitute who was a great supporter of the Chinese and who made national news in New Zealand by demonstrating this loyalty in going to China with her Chinese partner in 1907. Perhaps other women went with the belief that they knew and understood the Chinese and that they could easily make the cultural adjustment to life in China. They may have carried with them romanticised

39 Truth (NZ), 29 June 1907, p. 6, cited in James Ng, ‘Early mixed-blood families’, unpublished manuscript in possession of the author.
40 Missionaries, both men and women, studied the Chinese language before they left their home countries and were emboldened by a sense of their own understanding of the Chinese. At times, however, the dialect they learnt was inappropriate for their destination. See Margaret Egerton’s ‘My Chinese’ for a description of how missionary women studied Chinese language with Chinese men in Australia before going to China. Egerton, Cosmos Magazine.
notions of life in China as an exotic and mysterious destination, exciting because of its
difference from Australasia.

Women travelled with their husbands and/or their children, whether the stay was to
be extended or only brief. Usually the decision to go to China was at the instigation of
their husbands. The reasons these men wished to return to China were many,
including a desire to see relatives again; to educate their children in Chinese; to
establish transnational business ventures or just simply because they wanted to return
to their native country, to go home. Some, such as Quong Tart, were beckoned to
come home to present their overseas family to their Chinese one. Confronted with
their husbands’ desire to return to China, for whatever reason and for however long,
white wives faced a choice of whether to go with them, possibly to start a new life in a
foreign country and culture, or to face life alone at home, a choice which may well
have included separation from their children. For a small number of women, like
Mary Yue, loyalty and love for their husbands meant that they returned alone to
China with their children after their husbands’ deaths. Religion may also have been
a motivating factor in some couples’ decisions to return to China. In 1867, a Mrs
Nelson accompanied her husband to China and established a home at Whampoa.
Born in Ireland, she had married her husband in Australia and had two children with
him. Her death was reported in the Hong Kong China Mail newspaper and while the
report did not state why Mrs Nelson had ventured to China, it did mention that her
husband was a converted Christian. It is quite likely that they had returned to China
so that Mr Nelson could act as a missionary to his own people as others later did.

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42 During her time in China, Mae Franking met what she called ‘half-households’ which comprised a
husband in China and a wife who had remained in America. She noted that many such relationships
ended in divorce because of the distance between husband and wife. Katherine Anne Porter, Mae

43 Another New Zealand widow, the wife of a Dunedin merchant named Sun Ting, went to China with
and Rev. Alexander Don, Diary 1897-98, items 856, 857 & 1212, photocopy provided by James Ng in
possession of the author.

44 China Mail, 31 August 1867.
Anglo-Chinese children in China
The Chinese overseas retained a strong sense of their own racial and national identity and most desired for this identity to be fostered in their children. While some have argued that Chinese fathers of mixed-race offspring rarely expected their children to be ‘Chinese’, I would suggest that many Chinese fathers, including those of mixed-race children, self-consciously acted to ensure that their children grew up with some understanding of their paternal culture, language and customs. The most obvious way in which they did this was by taking or sending their children home to China. Hundreds of Chinese and part-Chinese children, including both Anglo-Chinese and Aboriginal-Chinese children, were sent to China to live and be educated from the 1860s until the 1930s when social and political upheavals in China made the practice too difficult.

Few sources remain which document the travel of Anglo-Chinese children to China from Australia before the turn of the twentieth century, but after 1901 the new Commonwealth government’s stricter control over the entry and exit of Chinese in Australia meant that there was close scrutiny of Anglo-Chinese Australians both leaving and arriving into the country. Travel documents and Customs case files for NSW alone show that there were nearly one hundred Anglo-Chinese who left that state for China between 1890 and 1920 and many made repeat trips. (See Image 45.) Appendix 2 lists their names and details of their travel. The time they spent in China lasted between three months and several decades, with most visits lasting between about three and six years—a period which allowed time for the education of children and was the usual period for which return travel documents remained valid. It was most common for Chinese fathers to travel with their children to China, but in some instances Australian mothers were involved in taking their infant children overseas.

45 Fong, The Chinese in New Zealand, pp. 125-6. Fong states that Chinese fathers ‘seem to take it for granted that their mixed-blood children would become assimilated into the New Zealand group rather than go back to their own racial group’ because of the non-Chinese education and home life they received growing up with European or Maori mothers.

46 Still more may have travelled without applying for a CEDT, particularly those who were taken to China by their parents as infants or small children. Others arrived back using their Australian birth certificates, of which records may no longer exist. The figures for Anglo-Chinese who travelled are based on those of people who were described as ‘half-caste Chinese’ by Customs officials in Sydney.
Other children were entrusted to uncles, cousins or employees of their fathers. In cases where children were to remain in China without their natural mothers, typically they were taken to live with their fathers’ families in the ancestral villages. There they may have been raised by their father (if he remained in China), their father’s Chinese wife, their paternal grandparents or uncles.

Motivations

There were two primary reasons for sending Anglo-Chinese children to China — to provide a home and family environment which was not available in Australia or to give the children a Chinese education.

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47 See, for example, NAA: SP42/1, C1903/7816 (Albert Yin Poon travelled with his Australian mother); SP42/1, [Box 17], SP115/1, Taiyuan 13 Oct 1917; and SP726/2 (Willie Cecil Chun Quan travelled with an uncle).
The death of a child’s mother could mean that there was no one fully able to care for the child in Australia while the father worked, but sending a child to be cared for by a wife or extended family in China solved this dilemma. The early life of Arthur Lowe exemplifies this situation. Born in Enfield, NSW in 1903, Arthur left Australia at the age of eight months for China. His Chinese father, Willie Bow Seuw, had been in Australia since the 1880s and had married his mother Rosetta McDonald at St Andrews Cathedral in Sydney. Together they ran a drapery business on Georges River Road at Croydon Park in Sydney’s western suburbs. Rosetta died soon after Arthur’s birth, so his father sent him back to his home in Shekki to be raised by his first Chinese wife. Arthur grew up to call this woman ‘mother’, recalling ‘Well, you can imagine eight months old that’s the only mother you know, step mother, father’s first wife.’ His stepmother died when he was seven and he was then cared for by his sister-in-law (the wife of his elder Chinese brother), then his father’s third wife and later his fourth. During the time he was in China, Arthur’s father visited at least three times before they together returned to Australia when Arthur was thirteen.

Older children were also sent to China when their mothers died. In 1906, Henry Ah Chee and his two sisters, Ruby and Olive, travelled to Hong Kong to live with their father, who was resident there. Henry was seven, Ruby ten and Olive nearly twelve. The children had previously visited Hong Kong in 1901 with both their parents and their father had stayed on while they returned with their mother, who was probably suffering ill-health, in July 1905. The reason given for the children’s return to Hong Kong in 1906 was that their mother had recently passed away. Henry returned to Australia as an adult in 1920, his sister Olive returning in 1924.

Even if the mother did not die, her illness or incapacity to care for her children might motivate a Chinese father to send his children to China. In 1913, Willoughby market gardener Yum Sume applied to take his thirteen-year old daughter, Nellie, to China with him, leaving his Australian wife Rose (described as ‘an imbecile’) in the care of

48 See also Ng, Windows on a Chinese Past, vol. 2, p. 258.
50 NAA: A1, 1924/1499.
the Sisters of the Good Samaritan Refuge in Buckingham Street, Sydney.\textsuperscript{51} Similarly, when brothers William and Charles Liu were sent to China by their father in 1900, their mother had been placed in the Parramatta Insane Asylum and their younger sister was in the care of welfare authorities.\textsuperscript{52}

The other primary reason children were sent to China was to educate them in Chinese language and customs. As early as 1868 it was noted in Australia that the Chinese were sending their Australian-born sons to China for education.\textsuperscript{53} In many cases it was sons—particularly eldest sons—who were sent to China, so that as they grew up they would be able to help in the family business and also so they would understand their filial duties to their Chinese ancestors. Some daughters were also sent, either on their own or as part of the family group. Two and a half year old Eric Wer Lee and his eldest sister Alice were Melbourne-born children sent to China in 1906. Amid allegations in the Australian press that the children had been sold as slaves, their father explained his reasoning for sending his children to China. The Melbourne \textit{Argus} recounted:

Eric … is destined to be the head of the cabinet-making establishment, where he will have to control and deal with Chinese workmen. In order to do this effectively, Wer Lee thinks it essential that Eric should speak Chinese fluently. He cannot be taught the language properly in Melbourne, owing to Mrs Wer Lee’s ignorance of Chinese. English is always spoken in the home. Therefore Wer Lee decided to send the boy, while he was still almost a baby, to China so that he might get a thorough knowledge of the Chinese language and the Chinese method of thought.

As for why his sister Alice was accompanying Eric, the \textit{Argus} continued:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item NAA: SP42/1, C13/2896; NSW BDM, Birth 1900/7141.
\item Record of Pauline Ah Lum, SRNSW: CGS 13358, Dependent children registers, 1883 — 1923. In later public statements made by William Liu, it was stated that his mother Florence was either ill or dead at the time he was sent to China. See, for example, Liu, \textit{5th Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations}, p. 19; Wang Gungwu, \textit{Community and Nation}, p. 317; and Walker and Ingleson, ‘The impact of Asia’, in Meaney (ed.), \textit{Under New Heavens}, p. 293.
\item \textit{Illustrated Australian News}, 2 October 1868.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Mrs Wer Lee acquiesced in this arrangement, but, fearing that the little boy would be lonely by himself, persuaded Wer Lee to also send the eldest girl, Alice, aged five years.54

Learning to be Chinese

Living with their Chinese families, children quickly learnt to speak their local dialect—Yue Jackson stated that it took him about six months to be able to speak Chinese freely; William Liu said that ‘it was some months, maybe a year, before I could speak my father’s language and make my own friends’.55 But their education went beyond merely learning to speak the language. Children were educated in village schools, either traditional shishu (private schools) or modern schools based on more Western educational methods. As children grew older they could also attend larger schools in regional towns or in Canton, some of which catered specifically for the children of overseas Chinese. In these schools they learnt to read and write Chinese and were taught about Chinese literature, culture and society. There was frequently a difference in the education received by boys and girls. Yue Jackson and his elder brother were sent to school, first in their home village and then to a nearby high school, where they were taught to read and write and to understand the Chinese classics. In his memoirs, after thirteen pages describing the education he and his brother received, all Yue Jackson wrote about the education of his sisters was:

As there were no school for girls, my sisters were not taught to learn the Chinese characters and literature. The two elder ones (Mary and Hannah) were taught to weave, and Lizzie, being only 6 years of age, followed our mother closely about.56

Some Anglo-Chinese hoped that this Chinese education would prove useful to them on their return to Australia. James Minahan, who had lived with his schoolteacher father in China from the age of five, hoped that after gaining qualifications he could return to Australia to educate children in Chinese there.57 For others, their fluency in

54 Argus, 21 March 1906.
55 Liu, 5th Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations, p. 20.
56 Yue Jackson, My reminiscences, p. 10K.
57 NAA: A10074, 1908/31.
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Chinese and understanding of Chinese ways, as well as Western ones, meant that they acted as ‘go-betweens’ on their return to Australia.

Bill King was about eight years old when he was sent to China in the early 1880s. After living there for about six years, he returned to Australia to live and work on his father’s market garden in Willoughby in Sydney’s north. His fluency in Chinese meant that he could assist other Chinese gardeners whose English was not very good with their business dealings. Bill King was not, in fact, Chinese—it was his step-father not his natural father who sent him to China. Bill’s English-born mother, Catherine Evans, had arrived in Rockhampton from England single and pregnant. There she had met William Ah King, and several months before Bill’s birth they married. Fair-haired and blue-eyed, Bill in time became the eldest brother to ten Anglo-Chinese brothers and sisters. It was he alone, however, who was sent to China.58

While in China some Anglo-Chinese children, particularly those who went when they were very young, forgot how to speak English and became culturally very Chinese. Reverend Alexander Don commented in 1889 that it was likely that such children would return from China ‘almost as fully Chinese in belief as their fathers’.59 After spending their childhood in China, numbers of Anglo-Chinese who later returned to Australia felt that they were Chinese, not Australian, and some only learned of their non-Chinese blood after they returned to the country of their birth. This early life spent in China connected them to their paternal homeland and many maintained the connection into their adult lives. Some who spent their childhood there remained long-term,60 while those who returned to Australia made trips to Hong Kong and China as adults for business or to visit family, dividing their lives between the two places.

58 See Rannard, Market garden days.
59 New Zealand Presbyterian, 1 November 1889, p. 85, quoted in Ng, Windows on a Chinese Past, vol. 2, p. 281, 52(c)n.
60 For example, the Ablong family. Chinese-born John Ablong, his NSW-born Anglo-Chinese wife Emma née Ah Kin and their six children left their home in Sydney for Hong Kong in 1902. The children were educated, married and remained in the colony until adulthood. They variously married partners of English, Chinese and Anglo-Chinese backgrounds and some family members came back to live in Australia after World War II. See Moore, Eurasian Roots; NAA: SP42/1, C1912/4019.
The lives of Sydney-born Arthur Lowe (whose white mother died when he was an infant, as mentioned above) and John Louie Hoon are two examples of the dual loyalty and dual lives experienced by many Anglo-Chinese Australians who returned to Australia after growing up in China.61 Both Arthur and John were taken by their fathers to China, to Shekki, as children—Arthur after his mother had died and John after his mother had ‘deserted’ him. They both spent many years there, returning to Australia as young men, finding jobs and re-establishing lives in Sydney. However, they also both returned to China to marry and their wives remained in China, with children fathered on visits home by the men. For Arthur Lowe and John Louie Hoon, their Chinese upbringing in China and their lives over subsequent decades mirrored the lives of many Chinese-born migrant men whose family and business lives were similarly divided between the two countries.

In China as adults

Other Anglo-Chinese found themselves travelling to China as adults for the first time. Those not involved in business or travelling for pleasure were often Anglo-Chinese women who had married Chinese-born men in Australia and who, like the white wives of Chinese men, found themselves facing life in a new and different land with their Chinese husbands. The way the lives of such women changed because of their marriage to a migrant Chinese man, and because of his continuing ties to his ancestral home, can be seen in the experiences of Emma Duck and Ellen Hoyune.

Emma Duck went to live in her husband’s village in Zhongshan with him and their four children in 1899. (See Image 46.) Born Emma Young, the daughter of Ann and Tar Young of Brewarrina NSW, she married gardener Chee Duc (aka Joe Duck) in 1892 in Mungindi, Queensland. Emma and Joe had four children, three sons and a daughter, and while the children were still small the family travelled to China. Joe Duck returned to Australia soon after to maintain his garden business, but Emma and the children remained in China for the next ten years or so, until the eldest son was about sixteen years old. In 1909, the children journeyed back to Australia alone to

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rejoin their father. Emma, however, remained in her husband’s village fulfilling her duties as a daughter-in-law by caring for her ailing elderly mother-in-law. The children stated that Emma planned to return to Australia when their grandmother was better. 62

Another Anglo-Chinese woman who returned to China with her Chinese husband and children was Ellen Hoyune née Lipp. In 1906, at the age of twenty-one, Ellen married market gardener William Hoyune. Nine years later they took their five children to Taishan to live because William Hoyune wished his children to learn the Chinese language. After a year William returned to Australia alone, dying there three years later. Ellen and the children remained in Taishan for three further years, living with her husband’s family and supported by money William had left them. When

62 NAA: A1, 1917/5576; ST84/1, Book 45, No. 23. Emma’s only daughter, Nellie, travelled again to China in July 1910 and returned to Sydney on 20 October 1911 on the SS Eastern.
that money ran out, Ellen took the children to Hong Kong so she could find employment. Ellen’s sons all returned to Australia as teenagers and her daughter, having married a Chinese man, remained in Taishan. In Hong Kong, Ellen formed a relationship with a British man and they had two children together before this relationship fell apart and Ellen and her two youngest children returned to Australia in 1935.  

_Negotiating difference_

Many Chinese men who established families in Australia maintained ideas of China as home. Marrying non-Chinese women meant that their primary place of residence had shifted and that their children would be born and primarily raised outside of China but it did not mean, for this first generation of migrant Chinese, a complete shift of the emotional or spiritual home. This was to remain in China and links to this home continued to remain strong for many men. It was bringing a Chinese wife to the Australasian colonies more than intermarriage that was indicative of a Chinese man’s decision to remain long-term overseas and to loosen his ties with his native village. By moving a Chinese wife overseas and relocating the patriline, he severed direct contact and ties with his home and his ancestral village. His focus was no longer squarely fixed on earning money to send home, or on returning home to father children and visit his immediate family.

Interramarriage has previously been seen as an integral part of the process of assimilation, as part of a linear progression of minority into dominant society. By examining the connections between Anglo-Chinese families overseas and their families in China, it is clear, however, that that this process was much more complicated than previous studies have implied. The connections maintained by Chinese men who married white women overseas suggest that Anglo-Chinese intermarriage should be seen as part of a multidirectional flow, of comings and

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63 NAA: B13, 1935/18476.
64 Shirley Fitzgerald has commented that Presbyterian minister John Young Wai’s decision to bring his Chinese wife Sarah to Australia after their marriage in China was ‘the clearest statement a Chinese could make of an intention to stay’. Fitzgerald, _Red Tape, Gold Scissors_, p. 100.
Section 5: Connections

goings, within a family and across national boundaries. It was a circular process whereby both the minority and majority were altered by the presence of the other.

For white women and their Australasian-born children, living between two cultures and two countries demanded adjustment and negotiation, particularly during the times they were in China. Visiting Whitestone Mart in Zengcheng in 1902, Reverend George McNeur wrote of meeting the family of a Chinese man who owned several gold mines in Bendigo, Victoria. The man had brought his Australian wife and three children to China but, said McNeur, ‘the wife and children are anxious to get back to Australia, and I don’t wonder’.  

For white wives and their children, adjusting to life in China, whether it was Hong Kong or inland, could be challenging. The following discussion will examine in closer detail some of the difficulties faced by Western women and their children and why they might be quite so ‘anxious to get back to Australia’.

Cultural differences

The China Mail’s report of the death of an Irish-Australian woman, Mrs Nelson, in 1867 emphasised the loneliness and isolation she had felt living as a Chinese wife. Mrs Nelson had married her Chinese husband in Australia and had been in China for only a year before her death. The report on her death conceded that she had spoken very kindly of her husband and said that ‘he did “all he could” for her comfort’ but, it said:

… there is the ‘rub’, for a Chinaman’s ideas of comfort are excessively meagre, and although everything was indubitably meant for the best, I am afraid poor Mrs Nelson has many a time and often yearned to be among those who understood her, and those she understood better.

Such social isolation was a reality for white women living in China. Transportation and communication were such that most Chinese villagers spent most of their lives in a small geographic area and had little contact with outsiders. The two Western doctors who attended Mary Yue on her deathbed were the last foreigners Yue Jackson and her other children saw for the next six or seven years, apart from an American

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66 Outlook, 6 December 1902, p. 33. See also Ng, Windows on a Chinese Past, vol. 2, p. 287, 97(b)n.  
67 China Mail, 31 August 1867.
wife who lived in a nearby village. While Western missionaries established missions throughout the Canton River Delta and travelled throughout the region, none came near to Li Yuan where the Yue children lived.68 Agnes Lum Mow—forty years later and living in the bustling town of Shekki rather than an isolated village—only saw a few other Westerners from a distance and none to talk to during the several months she spent living with her Chinese husband in his ancestral home. Her main contact outside her husband’s family seems to have been with an English-speaking, Australian-born Chinese woman.69

As discussed previously, the social and kinship networks in rural China were strong and well-developed. Adjusting to life in the village meant putting aside all things Western and becoming, for all intents and purposes, Chinese—in language, dress, habits and so on. Some wives who went to China could speak some Chinese but many more could not. Agnes Lum Mow, for instance, said of her time in Shekki that ‘One of the most unpleasant features was I could not talk Chinese, and I did not know what was going on’—her husband only sometimes translated for her.70 For women who were devout Christians, participation in the expected ancestral worship and other religious practices was problematic. Mary Yue caused great consternation among her female in-laws by attacking the most precious of Chinese religious artefacts, the family’s ancestral shrine. Finding the ancestral tablets and family shrine in the house she was to live in, Mary ‘immediately set to work to pull it down’. Her female relatives had to enlist the help of a man returned from America who could speak English to convince her to stop and allow them to quickly undo the damage by putting them back in their places.71 Some Chinese husbands may have converted to Christianity while in Australia, but the difficulties of maintaining Christian beliefs and practices while living in the villages were great.

68 Yue Jackson, My reminiscences, p. 21.
69 NAA: A433, 1942/2/3297.
71 Yue Jackson, My reminiscences, p. 6.
Health and climate

The change in climate, diet and environment took a toll on the white women and their children in China. Some couples anticipated that life in southern China may not agree physically with those who were accustomed to more temperate climes. Annie and Samuel Leong Bong, for instance, considered carefully before they made the decision to move to Hong Kong for good. Samuel was a catechist for the Church Missionary Society in NSW when he and Annie Baker married in 1899. In 1903, they decided to visit Samuel’s relatives in Hong Kong and to use the opportunity to decide whether Annie would be happy living there, or as it was put in Samuel’s application for a Certificate of Domicile, ‘to test whether [the] climate will suit his wife’s health, she being English born’.72

As well as the physical drain, Western wives could face the emotional drain of seeing their infant children succumb to prevalent diseases such as malaria, plague, smallpox, cholera, typhoid and tuberculosis. Evidence suggests that the death of children was a contributing factor in the decision of some Western women to leave China. Isabel Hun Gip, whose story will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, lost her youngest child, a mere baby when they had arrived in China. It seems likely too that the death of a child contributed to Lily Ah Gin’s desire to return home to Australia. In correspondence with the Department of External Affairs in 1903, Lucy Ah Gin née Clarke described some of the difficulties faced by her Australian-born Anglo-Chinese daughter Lily. ‘Reared as European’ and unable to speak Chinese, Lily’s troubles were similar to those of other white wives in China. She had travelled to Hong Kong in 1900, aged twenty, with her Chinese husband Jong Gutt and their two children. Jong Gutt found work as a clerk with a firm called Sun Sing Loong & Co. Evidence suggests in the three years after they went to Hong Kong, Lily both gave birth to another son and lost her infant daughter through illness. In Lucy Ah Gin’s first letter to the Collector of Customs in Sydney in April 1903, she suggested that Lily’s desire to come back to Australia was because ‘the climate does not agree with her children’.

72 NAA: A1, 1903/7472; SP42/1, C1904/5926; SP726/1; NSW BDM, Marriage 1899/6242.
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Further notes by Customs Inspector Donohoe state that it was ‘on account of the climate and not being able to understand the people’ that she wanted to return.\(^3\)

It was not only children who succumbed to illness—white women themselves became ill. Annie Lee left her home of twenty years, her husband’s inland village, to seek medical care in Hong Kong in 1920. Others were not able to reach adequate medical care in time. In 1867, Mrs Nelson of Whampoa died of the effects of diarrhoea a year after her arrival in China, and in around 1891 Mary Yue died, also about a year after her arrival in China. When she became ill two English doctors were brought from Canton to attend her, there being no trained doctors in the countryside.\(^4\)

The medical situation for these women and their children was probably worsened by a general distrust of Westerners and Western medicine in rural villages. Foreign missionaries who were trained as doctors were scattered throughout the Pearl River Delta\(^5\) as well being in Hong Kong and Canton, but many Chinese families would have had neither knowledge nor faith in their power to aid in a time of crisis.

**Family relationships**

Western women travelling to China with their husbands and foreign-born children faced more than an unfamiliar physical, cultural and linguistic environment. Family culture, one of the central defining elements of their lives as wives and mothers, was also unknown and in many cases unforgiving. Chinese and Western families differed in their traditions and their aims—Chinese families were patrilineal, based on Confucian principles and allowed for the taking of second wives or concubines, while Western families were matrilineal as well as patrilineal, they were based on Christian ideals and second wives were unheard of. In Chinese families, too, women faced restrictions on their behaviour to an extent that few Western women faced by the second half of the nineteenth century—restrictions on their education, their physical

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\(^3\) NAA: A1, 264; SP42/1, C1903/9633. There is no evidence on the file that Lily returned to Australia at this time despite her mother’s efforts on her behalf. Permission had been denied to exempt Jong Gutt from the Dictation Test.

\(^4\) Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, vol. 2, pp. 258 and 280, 52(b)n; and Yue Jackson, *My reminiscences*.

\(^5\) See, for example, *Tung Wah News* (Donghua xinbao), 26 August 1899, which tells of a Chinese man seeking medical treatment from a female missionary doctor who lived at a place called Zheng Guo Shu.
movement outside the home and social contacts outside the family. Descendants of Isabel Hun Gip know little about her experiences living with her Chinese husband and his family in the 1880s, but they have been told that she said living in her husband’s family home felt like being in a prison.\textsuperscript{76} Even if familial control was undertaken out of concern—such as never allowing a white wife to leave the house unaccompanied for fear of misadventure or because of social unrest—such actions could be particularly difficult for women accustomed to greater personal autonomy and freedom of movement.

The ideas and experiences of family and the differences between Chinese families and Western families played a significant part in how white women adjusted to their new roles as Chinese daughters-in-law in China. Adam McKeown has noted the apparent difference with which Peruvian and Hawaiian wives of Chinese men faced life in China, particularly as second wives. Scandalous stories of the poor treatment received by Peruvian wives in China were told in early-twentieth-century Lima—stories of women who had been treated well by their husbands in Peru, but then found themselves ‘suddenly at the bottom of a spousal pecking order with no sympathy from their husbands’ once they were in China. In contrast, McKeown writes:

\begin{quote}
Hawaiian women, coming from a stronger tradition of multiple-partner alliances, seemed to be more open to the Chinese family situations, occasionally becoming close friends with the primary wife after moving to China.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

While marrying overseas could be accepted in principle by a Chinese family and a Chinese wife, the idea of accepting a non-Chinese woman as part of the family turned into a more difficult reality when physically confronted with a foreign daughter-in-law. The arrival of a white wife and foreign-born children could upset the balance of the household which had been functioning without the physical presence of the overseas son. The relationship between Chinese husband and white wife and the familial habits they had developed in the time they spent together in Australasia

\textsuperscript{76} Correspondence with Chris Kee, Melbourne VIC, and Jon Kehrer, Canberra ACT, February 2004.

somehow needed to be made to fit with those of the Chinese family. The integration into her husband’s Chinese family of white American woman Mae Franking, who in 1914 went to China to live with her Chinese husband and his family in Amoy, could be considered one of the ‘successful’ ones, something Mae Franking herself attributed to the efforts made for the arrangement to work:

Had my husband been less considerate, less sincere and loyal, had his family been less kindly and broad-minded, had I myself been capricious and wilful or unable to adapt myself to my surroundings, I might every day have plumbed the depths of misery.\(^78\)

Adjustments needed to be made on both sides if all the family members were to get along, but perhaps the greatest and most sudden adjustment needed to be made by the foreign wife. On her arrival at the familial home she was expected to become a part of her husband’s family and behave according to the roles and duties the family gave to her.

Some women, like Australian-born Agnes Lum Mow née Breuer, had little chance to adjust to life as Chinese daughters-in-law because of the adverse reactions of their husbands’ Chinese families on their arriving in China. Agnes had married William Lum Mow (aka Lum Wie) in Townsville in late 1931 and six months later accompanied him for a holiday in Shekki to visit his family. William’s father, Lum Mow, had built a successful business in Townsville and William had first come to Australia in 1921, to manage his father’s interests after the old man retired to China. On her arrival in China, Agnes discovered that five years earlier William had married a Chinese woman, and furthermore that his family absolutely disapproved of her own marriage to him. Lum Mow cast his son out of his house, disinheriting him, and William was forced to move with both his wives into a two-roomed apartment in Shekki, not far from the family home. Agnes was pregnant and gave birth to a son in August 1932. (See Image 47.) She had hoped for a family reconciliation but soon realised that it would be impossible. She wished to return to Australia but was blocked by her father-in-law and the Chinese wife, who both wanted to retain

custody of the baby—the eldest son of an eldest son. The Chinese wife had no children of her own. Lum Mow offered to pay Agnes’ passage back to Australia if she left her son. She refused and sought help from her parents in Townsville, who contacted the Salvation Army. Communication between Australia and the Salvation Army in Hong Kong greatly exaggerated Agnes’ plight and she was eventually ‘rescued’ by two Salvation Army officers and six ‘Anzacs’, a number of whom were newspaper reporters. Much was made of her situation by the Australian press at the time of her return to Australia—with her son but without her husband—but Agnes denied most of the scandalous accusations of ill-treatment the press made. In a matter-of-fact statement made to Customs officials on her return she stated that ‘had it not been for the fact my husband was in perpetual fear of personal violence at the instigation of his father my stay in Shekki would have been very enjoyable’.  

Second wives

Many foreign wives, whether legally married overseas or not, were considered by their husbands’ families to be second wives or concubines. Some Australasian women knew of their husbands’ Chinese wives, while others only discovered their existence on arriving in China. Most, although in name a second wife, never had to live as such because the family was split between two countries. For instance, Yue Ah Hee, husband of Mary Yue and father of Yue Henry Jackson, had married before he went to New Zealand but his first wife had died in China without children. The family adopted a son for him, despite his marriage and family in New Zealand. Other white wives were spared meeting their Chinese counterparts by remaining in Hong Kong while their husbands travelled inland. Reverend Alexander Don wrote in 1898 of two such cases he had encountered, one of whom was a young Australian woman, aged about 23, who was staying in a family shop in Hong Kong while her husband went home to visit family and his first wife. Don understood she ‘felt her position

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very keenly’, a fact which he attributed to her knowing she was a second wife and being embarrassed by her circumstances.82

Image 47. Agnes Lum Mow with her husband William and their seventeen-day old son, Shekki, August 1932
Courtesy Liz McNamee

Valerie Lee has described a similar situation faced by her English-born great-great grandmother, Sarah Bowman, who had married Taishanese Lee Hang Gong in Victoria in 1869. In the mid-1870s, Sarah accompanied her husband to Hong Kong. Lee writes:

While she [Sarah] waited there (for about three to four years) Hang Gong returned to Tai Shan where he married the Chinese woman he had been promised to almost forty years previously. His Chinese wife was about forty-one years of age when she gave birth to their daughter and, a year later, to a son…

Meanwhile Sarah waited in Hong Kong and gave birth to their seventh and last child, Ernest Howard, in about 1878. Lee Hang Gong and Sarah eventually returned to the Northern Territory with Ernest.83

Where Western and Chinese wives did meet, and were expected to socialise or even live together, difficulties were likely to arise.84 For example, after Agnes and William Lum Mow had been sent away from the familial home by his father, they lived together with her husband’s Chinese wife in a small apartment in Shekki. Agnes found the situation intolerable, particularly since the Chinese wife had no children and she, Agnes, had an infant son. According to Chinese custom, the boy should have ‘belonged’ to the first wife and she was very jealous of Agnes’ possession of the child. While it was not unusual for children of second wives or concubines to be raised primarily by their father’s first wife, and to call her mother, for white mothers such practices were particularly difficult to deal with as they contradicted their own ideas of mothering and family, as well as their own maternal love for their children. As Reverend Alexander Don commented in his diary in 1901:

I thought of an Englishman leaving his wife at home and going to Africa, whence he in due time send to her care his half-caste Kaffir children. Verily East is east and West is west.85

Even without the particularities of Agnes Lum Mow’s situation, relationships between Chinese families and white wives could be strained. Some women went to Hong Kong or China alone with their children while their husbands remained in

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83 Lee, *Journal of Chinese Australia*.

84 Although not known for certain, it is possible that it was meeting the Chinese wife of Quong Tart that displeased Margaret Tart on her visit to China in 1894. Robert Travers has noted that Margaret Tart never wrote of her experiences in China and it was generally acknowledged by her descendants that she had not particularly enjoyed her time there. Travers, *Australian Mandarin*, p. 146; Mei, Mei Guangda’s (Quong Tart) family and his Chinese sensibility.

85 Rev. Alexander Don, ‘Half-castes to China’, 16 January 1901 (item 315), Diary 1901, photocopy provided by James Ng in possession of the author.
Section 5: Connections

Australia to attend to business concerns, or because it was difficult for them to get the appropriate papers to return to Australia again. These women were particularly vulnerable to mistreatment by their Chinese families. In late 1899, Annie Loung found herself stranded in Hong Kong due to the interference of her husband’s family. She had travelled to Hong Kong at the beginning of the year with her five children and had planned to remain there for six months. When her husband George, a farmer in Tamworth, sent the money for their return fares, it was taken by one of his uncles who refused to let Annie and the children leave. George had to travel to Hong Kong himself in order to get his family home to Australia.\(^{86}\)

The relocation of an Anglo-Chinese family to the ancestral home in China required cross-cultural family mediation and accommodation. In some situations, however, this broke down and it was children, in particular, who became the centre of wider struggles between the two ideas of family. There was a clash between differing perceptions of the family and of the children’s identities—to the Chinese family children were the precious next generation in an ongoing Chinese lineage, while to white mothers they were Australian children and British subjects, whatever their ‘race’. Different cultural and familial practices caused disharmony, as white mothers objected to the ways their children were raised or Chinese families insisted upon certain behaviour from their daughters-in-law and grandchildren (such as foot-binding for girls).

Some Chinese men, accustomed to being in Australia and content with their family life, also found the expectations of their extended family in China against their own personal wishes. Morag Loh has recounted the story of George Sam, who took his two sons to China in the early twentieth century. When they arrived in his ancestral village, George discovered that his family was planning to arrange marriages for himself and his sons. Despite his protests that he was already married—to a white Australian women, Annie Bennett—the Chinese family were determined, saying that

\(^{86}\) NAA: SP42/1, C1899/1901.
Section 5: Connections

his marriage to Annie didn’t count because she was not Chinese. George and his sons ‘fled’ after only three weeks in China.87

Childhood adjustments

Anglo-Chinese children who were taken to China to live with their Chinese families also faced difficulties in adjusting to their new lives. Like their white mothers, they faced a foreign environment and language and homesickness as well as separation from one or both parents and siblings. William Liu described the years he spent in China as a child, from age seven to fifteen, as ‘a case of living between two cultures, two worlds’. He remembered his Australian upbringing and said his Christian prayers as well as those to Guan Yin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy as he was taught by his aunt. In Liu’s words, it was this woman—his elderly aunt—who ‘taught me how to live in the community and play my part from dawn to dusk in the work of the people’.88 This is an important point—Anglo-Chinese children in China had to learn to live as part of their families and communities, just as white wives did. Their Australian upbringings had little prepared them for the linguistic and cultural differences they would encounter.

How children adjusted to life in China depended on many factors, including how old they were when they arrived there. James Minahan, who returned to China with his father when he was five, as an adult recalled that he remembered nothing of his life in Australia or of his white mother.89 Statements made by the Wer Lee children, who went to China at age five and two to live with their father’s first wife, suggested that within the space of seven years they had also grown accustomed to life in China. Both children told Hong Kong police that they were ‘quite happy and well cared for’ and that they were attending Chinese school.90 In contrast, however, Charles Allen—who was taken to China by his father at age twelve and left in the care of relatives to be educated—never adjusted to life there after having grown up in inner-city Sydney.

87 Loh, Survival and Celebration, p 6.
88 Liu, 5th Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations, p. 20.
89 NAA: A10074, 1908/31.
Letters to his mother in Australia expressed his unhappiness and desire to return to Australia.\textsuperscript{91}

Yue Jackson’s memoir provides a more detailed description of the difficulties he and his brother and sisters encountered in adjusting to their new life in China. What is particularly telling from Yue Jackson’s account is the impact gender had on the experiences of Anglo-Chinese children in China. While Yue Jackson’s interpretation of his own childhood in China was positive, he felt his sister Hannah suffered the most from the changes being in China brought to their lives.

Hannah was the middle child and five years old when the family went to China. She had started school in New Zealand but after arriving in China her education stopped. At the age of eleven she was engaged to a boy in the neighbouring district of Kaiping, whose mother was an American woman. Yue Jackson’s other sister, Mary, also had a marriage arranged for her. Yue Jackson wrote that the families of his sisters’ prospective husbands, being of the upper classes, wanted the girls’ feet to be bound. The girls were already twelve and fourteen years old but girls’ feet were usually bound at around five or six years. Mary resisted the binding of her feet, undoing the bandages every night but, wrote Yue Jackson, Hannah:

\begin{quote}
was of a loving, gentle and sweet nature. She loved to obey, and her spirit was too weak to oppose the combined will of our aunts and sister-in-law. She preferred to suffer.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

Yue Jackson and his elder brother went to work in Hong Kong and their sister Mary expressed a desire to join them there as she found life in the village stifling and the prospect of marrying a man she had never met unbearable. The future families-in-law of the two eldest girls were reluctant to let them leave, but after a deal of wrangling, Mary and their youngest sister Lizzie went to Hong Kong to live. Hannah, with much regret and sadness, remained in the village—a cripple because of her bound feet. Yue

\textsuperscript{91} NAA: A1, 1911/13854.

\textsuperscript{92} Yue Jackson, My reminiscences p. 14. The sister-in-law referred to was the wife of the adopted son of Yue Ah Hee’s Chinese wife whom he married before he went to New Zealand. The adopted son was living in Singapore at that time but as was usual, his wife remained in his father’s village.
Jackson returned when he could from Hong Kong to visit his sister, but this was no more than twice a year. Hannah married and in due course had a daughter who died in childhood, followed by her mother a year later.

Yue Jackson’s own interpretation of the effect her life in China had on his sister is worth repeating:

Hannah’s nature was too fine to stand the strain of her surroundings for long. The villagers (not the people of my father’s village, for Hannah was married years ago, and from the date of her marriage, she lived in her husband’s village) although they loved and esteemed her, there was still the feeling that Hannah was after all a ‘Fan Kwai Nui’ (foreign devil girl). There was a certain amount of prejudice. Hannah, moreover, had no sons … She had no one to turn to for sympathy. Before she was married, she had one girl friend after her own heart, but this friend was married, and lived a great many miles from Hannah’s village. Hannah now very seldom saw her. Kim Choon (Hannah’s friend’s name) [sic] also had bound feet, and it was difficult for either of them to cover the distance separating them. Hannah’s husband and his parents were in America, and they seldom wrote to Hannah. Poor girl! How very lonely and sad she must have felt during her last week of illness—her husband and her own brother and sisters all so far away, all she loved out of sight and hearing.93

Anglo-Chinese boys in China had greater independence and an ability to make decisions about their futures, including whether they would return to the countries of their birth. Many chose to do so although this was not always easy. Anglo-Chinese girls who had grown up in China were often married at a young age to local Chinese men, meaning that their lives, like Hannah Yue’s, became tied to his family and his ancestral home village. Some were able to return to the land of their birth as the wives of overseas-living Chinese men.

Family breakdown
Most accounts of white wives in China—found in newspapers, in missionary writings and in records created by charitable organisations and governments—focus on the unhappy, the unfortunate and the outright unsuccessful aspects of these ventures. They tell moralistic tales of marital unhappiness, ill-treatment, bigamy, ill-health and

93 Yue Jackson, My reminiscences, p. 44.
maladjustment, underscored by a belief that white women could never be truly happy or satisfied as the wives of Chinese men, particularly in China. Time and again they repeated warnings against travelling to China as wives of Chinese. ‘There are … many known cases of hardships being suffered by Australian women, who are beguiled by Chinese men in to marrying them, and into going north to China as their wives’, commented a Reverend Watkins in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.94 ‘Australian women who marry Chinese should heed the perils attached to such, and should on no account accompany their husbands to China’, commented the *World* newspaper.95 Crossing the racial line in choosing a husband was bad enough, but living with him in China was considered particularly foolish and doomed to failure. It was thought that the chances of a successful marriage between a Chinese man and a white woman were very slim in a Western country and virtually nonexistent in China.

English-born Anglo-Chinese Esther Cheo Ying certainly felt that her parents’ relationship was doomed from the beginning. Her father, the son and heir of a wealthy Chinese magistrate, was in England attending the London School of Economics when he met her mother, a seventeen-year old Cockney chambermaid who worked at the hotel where he lived. In 1931, they married and returned to Shanghai. Of the reasons why her parents’ marriage failed, Esther Cheo Ying wrote:

> It could not have been easy for my working-class mother to understand what marrying a Chinese Mandarin’s son entailed. She was too young to understand and too ignorant of the different cultures of East and West to try to conform even a little to the customs of Chinese life. My father’s family ostracized him for marrying a ‘foreign devil’. The odds were too great for either of these two young people to try to make the marriage work.96

But were these relationships in China so different from those of Chinese-European couples who lived in Australia, or for that matter from those of non-mixed couples? In

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94 *SMH*, 22 October 1932.

95 *World*, 21 September 1932.

his discussion of Agnes Lum Mow’s unhappy case, John Sleeman made just such a suggestion, saying:

> It is the sort of thing that is happening every day, everywhere. It is the story of a family dispute. The least said, the soonest mended. The girl had a very unhappy experience, the sort of experience that thousands of Australian girls have at home without taking a trip to China to find.\(^{97}\)

Agnes Lum Mow’s predicament in China was the story of a family dispute as Sleeman said, but of a particular kind not experienced by women in Australia. The combination of difficulties white wives in China faced meant that some preferred to return home to Australia. In some cases families returned to Australia intact, but in others the family breakdown was particularly clear because of the ensuing geographical separation when the wife returned to her homeland. Some women not only left their husbands when they left China; they also left behind their children.

Isabel Hun Gip faced such a dilemma after she and her husband Yuen Hun Gip had taken their four children to China in the mid-1880s. Hun Gip was reputedly an educated and wealthy man, working as a chemist or doctor in Melbourne before their departure. Hun Gip descendants tell of the family living on a large family property in China. There Isabel was not permitted to leave the grounds of the property due to civil unrest and she grew to feel both homesick and ‘like a prisoner’. The youngest Hun Gip child, Daisy, had been an infant at the time of the family’s journey to China and it is understood that she died there as a small child. Soon afterwards, Isabel decided to return to Melbourne with her two remaining daughters, although what part the baby’s death had in this decision is unknown. Hun Gip and their son, Bertie, remained in China, where Hun Gip later died. Bertie returned to Australia in 1902 as a young man in his early twenties.\(^{98}\)

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\(^{97}\) Sleeman, *White China*, p. 131.

\(^{98}\) Communication with Chris Kee, Melbourne VIC, and Jon Kehrer, Canberra ACT, February 2004. For another example of a split family where father and son remained in China see Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, vol. 2, p. 286, n^75(b).
Section 5: Connections

Where such families did break up, children could become the centre of the arguments. White mothers who wished to return to Australia with their children, particularly sons, could face strong opposition from their Chinese families and coercion by financial or other means for them to leave their children behind. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Agnes Lum Mow’s father-in-law volunteered to pay for her ticket to return to Australia, as long as she left her son with his father and first wife in Shekki. Agnes’ husband, William, also objected to his son being taken back to Australia, but as he was not home when Agnes decided to leave, he could not stop her.

Responses to family difficulties

The incidence of such conflict in Anglo-Chinese families came to the attention of churches, missionaries and charities. As early as 1868, Reverend William Young reported cases of ‘Chinese deserting their European wives and leaving them to shift for themselves’ in Macao and Hong Kong. It also came to the attention of the Hong Kong and Australian governments. In 1904 a report of such cases was compiled by the Hong Kong Benevolent Society, an organisation which provided assistance to those who were not Chinese or Portuguese in cases of sickness, poverty or distress. Founded in 1899, the Benevolent Society was run by a committee of a dozen or so British women and relied upon charitable donations and subscriptions from the upper echelons of British Hong Kong society. The Society’s 1904 report to the government outlined ‘cases of unhappy mixed marriages between women of English race and Chinese’ which had come under their attention in previous years. There is no extant copy of the report, but their aim was to convince the Australian government to warn women against such marriages ‘as the husband has too often already contracted ties in his own country’.

It is in the annual reports of the Benevolent Society for the early years of the century that we find brief details of the ‘unhappy mixed marriages’ they dealt with. In 1903, three of the seventeen people assisted were Western women married to Chinese men.

100 NAA: A6661, 1266.
101 Report for 1904, Hong Kong Benevolent Society, Hong Kong, 1905, p. 7.
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Case 619 was ‘very well known’ to the Society. An Australian woman with a large family, she had been deserted by her Chinese husband and earned a small amount of money by nursing. She was granted a monthly allowance by the Society ‘until she should be in better circumstances’. The other two women asked for assistance with passages back to Australia.\(^{102}\) In 1904, two of the fourteen cases concerned unhappy Anglo-Chinese families. Case 619 again appealed for help, but because of ‘undesirable reports’ about her the Society refused to give her anything more. The other case was a young Australian woman who had arrived in Hong Kong with her Chinese husband, two small children and her mother. The report about her stated:

> She had found life in a small Chinese village in the interior impossible. For a time she obtained work and kept herself and boarded the children at the Convent but her husband being dissatisfied tried to take back one of the children, though he was unwilling to support her anywhere except in his own village.\(^{103}\)

The Society gave her small amounts to help with her short term needs, eventually paying for her mother’s passage home, while some Chinese benefactors paid the passage for the woman and her children.

In 1905, an Australian woman with three children was granted help with her passage to Sydney. She had been ‘taken into the interior and badly treated’ by her Chinese husband, and as no work could be found for her in Hong Kong she wished to return to friends in Sydney. Two other foreign wives also received assistance in 1905. One, an American woman with two children (also ‘taken into the interior and badly treated’), was given $50 towards her passage to New York. The other, a Mauritian woman, had been deserted by her Chinese husband.\(^{104}\) In 1906 the Phillipina wife of a Chinese man applied for part passage to return to Manila, a request which was refused.\(^{105}\)

\(^{102}\) Report for 1903, Hong Kong Benevolent Society, Hong Kong, 1904, pp. 12-14.
\(^{103}\) Report for 1904, Hong Kong Benevolent Society, p. 10.
\(^{104}\) Report for 1905, Hong Kong Benevolent Society, Hong Kong, 1906, pp. 11-13.
\(^{105}\) Report for 1906, Hong Kong Benevolent Society, Hong Kong, 1907, p. 12.
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The ideas of the ladies of the Benevolent Society probably echoed sentiments such as those expressed by the Committee of the Shanghai Branch of the China Association, that while marriages between Chinese men and English women were not illegal and ‘from some points of view possibly not improper’, the ‘chances of a happy result to such a marriage [was] almost nil’. The Committee commented that as long as the couple resided outside of China, they had a chance of a ‘tolerable’ life:

but almost every Chinaman returns sooner or later to China, and there, whatever the husband may do, the position of the foreign wife is, in the present state of Chinese society, absolutely intolerable.\(^{106}\)

Australian officials in China, too, brought cases to the attention of the government at home. A 1923 memo from Australian Trade Commissioner in China, Edward S Little, to the Prime Minister told of a white Australian woman and her three children who were stranded in her late husband’s village in China. They had travelled to China with her husband, who had died during their visit. The woman wished to return to Australia with her children, but was apparently not allowed by her husband’s family to leave. Little felt that it would be quite easy for the woman herself to leave, as she was white and not Chinese-born, but the children were another matter:

The Chinese refuse to let them leave their father’s village and the British authorities are powerless against the Chinese Government because of the undoubted Chinese character of the children.\(^{107}\)

Little’s report prompted the Secretary of the Department of Home and Territories to issue a circular to state customs officials which requested them, if they heard of any cases of white wives of Chinese men going to China, to caution them:

as to the disadvantages and disabilities they may experience, and the inability of the British authorities to give them any assistance should they need it for themselves or their children.\(^{108}\)

\(^{106}\) James William Norton-Kyshe, *History of the Laws and Courts of Hong Kong from the Earliest Period to 1898*, vol 2, Vetch & Lee Limited, Hong Kong, 1971 (first published 1898), pp. 520-1. In early 1898, the Hong Kong press reported the mistreatment and desertion of young English wives of Chinese men in Shanghai. See *Overland China Mail* [Hong Kong], 12 February 1868 and *Hong Kong Telegraph*, 18 January 1898. My thanks to Pauline Rule for these two references.

\(^{107}\) NAA: A1, 1924/31745.
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A remarkably similar warning was given in November 1932 after Agnes Lum Mow’s case made the headlines. Secretary of the Department of the Interior, AR Peters, requested that if customs officials were approached by white wives of Chinese for passports or documents for travel to China, his department should be informed and a report provided ‘as to the husband’s status (i.e. whether domiciled here or merely under exemption), his occupation, the object of the intended visit and proposed length of stay in China’.109 In a statement provided to Australian officials on her return to Australia, Agnes Lum Mow had said:

I was warned by the Customs in Townsville of the difference in life in China to that of Australia but did not expect the treatment meted out by my father in law and his attitude upset all our calculations and arrangements.110

While charitable organisations such as the Hong Kong Ladies Benevolent Society and the Australian government were willing to assist in the repatriation of white women and their children in unhappy circumstances, other families which remained intact had greater difficulty in returning to Australia after 1901. Unless families were well known to Customs officials or had maintained particularly strong ties to family or business in Australia during their time overseas, after their original return travel documents (such as CEDTs) had expired there was no guarantee that they would be permitted to return.

Such a situation faced the family of Annie Gan née Harris and her husband Edward (Teddy) Chung Ah Gan when they wanted to return to Australia after sixteen years in Hong Kong. (See Image 48.) Teddy had been naturalised in Tasmania in 1891 and owned and operated three stores in Melbourne before the family, including their four children, went to Hong Kong in 1917. There Teddy found work on the Kowloon docks and Annie’s time was occupied with her growing brood—they had another three children after the family settled in Hong Kong. Annie first made inquiries about returning to Australia in 1925, but when the family inquired again in 1933 through the

108 NAA: C4203/1, WOB2.
109 NAA: B13, 1932/17435.
110 NAA: A433, 1942/2/3297.
Colonial Secretary in Hong Kong, the Department of the Interior replied that due to the length of Teddy Gan’s absence from Australia, the ‘Minister regrets that he is unable to see his way to grant authority for his re-admission’. While Annie did not apply to do so, it is probable that if she and her children had desired to return to Australia without Teddy that they would have faced little opposition from the authorities.

Image 48. Annie and Teddy Gan with their four eldest children, Melbourne, 1917
NAA: B13, 1933/22224

111 NAA: B13, 1933/22224.
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**Concern for children**

Although the practice of sending Anglo-Chinese children to live in China had existed for decades, it was similarly with the turn of the century that we see evidence of increasing concern by authorities over the practice. In 1906, a scandal broke in the Melbourne newspapers about the alleged ‘sale’ of two Anglo-Chinese children, Alice and Eric Wer Lee to China, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. According to the *Age* newspaper, they had been ‘sold to be sent to China, where the purchaser will resell them into captivity, and reap a handsome profit on the transaction’.\(^{112}\) The *Age*’s informant from the Protection of Children Society claimed that there was a regular traffic in white women and children between San Francisco and China and that the Wer Lee children were evidence of a similar practice happening in Australia. Part of the practice, she claimed, was the binding of feet of ‘Australian offspring’ of Chinese men, ‘done solely for the purpose of enhancing the prospective market value of the girls in China’. Mr and Mrs Wer Lee denied the allegations and the children were eventually permitted to leave Australia, but only after a police investigation and the initial cancellation of their children’s CEDTs by the Department of External Affairs. The Chief Commissioner of Police in Victoria concluded his statement to the press after the investigation saying, ‘A Chinese parent had as much right to send his children to China to be educated as an Englishman had to send his children to Oxford’, but this reasoning was not easily accepted by white Australians.\(^{113}\) The practice of sending children to China provoked ignorant and fearful comments in the press. ‘Why should a Chinese father in Australia, belonging to the ranks of the labouring classes, want to send his two-and-a-half year old son to China, among strangers, to be educated?’ asked one journalist.\(^{114}\)

In 1910, the Commonwealth government enacted new emigration legislation which impacted on some parents of Anglo-Chinese children desirous of sending them overseas. The *Emigration Act 1910* had been introduced after concerns were raised about white Australian girls being taken by ‘Asiatics’ to Asia, in particular India. The

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\(^{112}\) *Age*, 20 March 1906.

\(^{113}\) *Argus*, 21 March 1906.

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children were either acting in theatrical performances or, in the words of Minister for External Affairs, EL Batchelor, ‘being brought up in India under conditions, which, I think, we all regret’. Racial, religious and cultural concerns were at the basis for the legislation. It required an emigration permit to be applied for in any case where a child of ‘European race or extraction’ was to be taken out of the country by someone who was not similarly of ‘European race or extraction’. In the words of EL Batchelor again, it:

… means that no adult Asiatic shall be permitted to take a child of European race or extraction from Australia without obtaining a permit. I do not think we should be justified in saying that under no conceivable circumstances shall an Asiatic take a European child out of the Commonwealth. That would be absurd, but we do say that an Asiatic shall not take a European child out of the Commonwealth without first obtaining a permit and satisfying the Government that the child will be properly treated.

Only some parents of Anglo-Chinese children applied for emigration permits after 1910 and there seems to have been no particular concern by authorities that they should do so on top of other formalities, perhaps because the children were primarily considered to be of ‘Chinese extraction’ rather than ‘European extraction’. However, in a number of cases, permits were applied for with supporting statements from white mothers which gave their approval for the children to travel. When fourteen-year old Percy Flood Sam of West Wyalong in NSW travelled to China with his father in 1915, his mother Jane Sam wrote a simple note saying ‘I Jane Sam has [sic] agreed to give my consent to let my Son Percy Sam visit China with his father Wm. Sam’. This— together with a letter from his father, a character reference for his father from a Mr. Flannery from the West Wyalong Council, Percy’s birth certificate and photographs— was enough to get Percy an emigration permit within four days of application. Perhaps the fact that authorities were informed that four of Percy’s brothers were in

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the Australian armed forces—‘now at the front or on the way fighting for this country’—played a part in the hassle-free granting of the permit.\textsuperscript{117}

For other parents wishing to send their Anglo-Chinese children to China the process was not so easy. There were particular gender implications in the \textit{Emigration Act}, conceived as it was from particular fears about white girls in Asia. These can be seen in the case of Kathleen Spence Ah Lum. (See Image 49.) Daughter of Alice Spence and an unnamed Chinese father, Kathleen had been adopted as an infant by Sydney businessman James Ah Lum and his wife. In October 1911, James Lum applied for eleven-year old Kathleen to be allowed to travel to China with his brother to be educated in the Chinese language. This initial request was denied, but in June the following year James Lum tried again. After questions by Customs officials as to how Kathleen would be looked after and where she would live in China were answered to their satisfaction, Kathleen was permitted to travel. She went in the care of her ‘foster aunt’, an Anglo-Chinese woman named Mrs Hop War who was a stewardess on the \textit{SS Prinz Sigismund}. After arriving in Hong Kong, Kathleen was to be placed in the care of James Lum’s mother with whom she would live in China. Kathleen sailed about twelve months after her father initially applied for a permit for her to travel.\textsuperscript{118}

For the majority of children leaving Australia, the authorities did not intervene nor after 1910 did they require emigration permits for Anglo-Chinese children before they left the country. The belief existed within the Chinese communities, however, that Australian authorities could and would object to children being sent to China. William Liu and his brother Charles, for example, were ‘smuggled out’ of Australia at the ages of seven and five by their father. William Liu recalled:

\begin{quote}
It might sound odd today when people are smuggling themselves into Australia, but we were smuggled out in case the Child Welfare Board disapproved of our being sent to China. Subsequently, my father paid our fares and put our papers in order.\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{117} NAA: SP42/1, C15/4032; SP115/1, Box 16 [St Albans 23 October 1915 Part 3].  
\textsuperscript{118} NAA: SP42/1, C18/1150; A1, 1918/2070.  
\textsuperscript{119} Liu, 5th \textit{Annual Lalor Address on Community Relations}, p. 19.
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William and Charles’ infant sister Pauline had shortly before been placed in institutional care under the NSW State Children’s Relief Board, when their mother was committed to the Parramatta Insane Asylum. Their father, described in one report as ‘Barber Liu’, was known to the police and it seems likely that he feared similar official interference with his sons.\(^{120}\)

![Image 49. Kathleen Ah Lum, 1911](image)

NAA: SP42/1, C18/1150

It was only rarely that white Australians appreciated that Anglo-Chinese children could gain any advantage from spending their childhood in China. One such case was that of nine-year old Frederick Wong Young whose adopted father – long-term NSW resident and businessman, Yau Kong – planned to take Frederick to China to live in 1905. Frederick had been living at the Chinese Freemason’s Hall in Sydney with Yau Kong and a statement by the local police in support of their application stated that:

\(^{120}\) NAA: SP726/2; SP42/1, C1934/4604; A2, 1919/852
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owing to him [Frederick] having no mother here to care for him here, the Sergeant is of the opinion that it would be a charity to let this boy go to China where he would have his relatives to look after him, as there is no women or children to associate with him here, and on his return to this State, he will then be old enough to work and look after himself.\textsuperscript{121}

In most instances, the racial and religious biases of white commentators precluded them from appreciating that the stability of living with their Chinese family in China could be better than their prospective life in Australia where they might have had inadequate care due to poverty or family breakdown. For example, Reverend W Mawson, who worked with the New Zealand-based Canton Villages Mission, commented in 1907 that:

On the part of the child, the advantages of the change from life in New Zealand to life in China is very questionable. Some are too young to know what the change means. Others, who have had school education and have become accustomed to the habits of Western civilization must find the process of acclimatisation a hard one, not to speak of the ridicule they will be subject to because of their foreign relationships. Doubtless it is not as hard as it would be in the case of a purely European child, but one cannot but feel much pity for them.\textsuperscript{122}

That children were often going to join large extended families in close-knit village communities was generally overlooked by white commentators because of racial and cultural prejudices. Mawson and others like him believed that because children were being taken away from ‘Western civilization’, and with it the influences of the Christian church, Anglo-Chinese children would be actively disadvantaged by the time they spent in China.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the connections to China maintained by Chinese men and their Australian and New Zealand Anglo-Chinese families. The experiences of these Anglo-Chinese families, and the difficulties they encountered, show the tensions, negotiations and mediation necessary in cross-cultural families. They demonstrate the

\textsuperscript{121} NAA: SP42/1, B1905/1996 and B1905/1997.\textsuperscript{122} Outlook, 15 June 1907, p. 12.
push and pull of cultures and histories and families. While many accounts of the experiences of Western wives and their Anglo-Chinese children in China negate any positive aspects of their time there, they do provide a window into the challenges they faced. In an environment physically, linguistically and culturally foreign to them, Western wives and their children encountered challenges which sometimes resulted in family conflicts. In particular, Anglo-Chinese children could and did become contested objects, suggesting the struggles Chinese-European couples themselves had in establishing their own identities within and between two larger families and two differing cultures.
Conclusion

REFLECTIONS

This thesis was inspired by the numerous references to relationships between white women and Chinese men that I found in nineteenth-century sources on the Chinese in Australia's southern colonies. Published commentaries gave hints of the presence of 'a few' Chinese-European couples in the colonies. Articles in journals and newspapers provided either factual details about individuals or created colourful, imagined representations of their lives. Government reports and inquiries revealed the broad picture of their place in colonial society as well as intimate detail on the way certain couples and their children lived. As my research progressed, there appeared a contradiction between the image these sources painted of Chinese-European couples and that found in the other body of sources I considered, genealogical records such as birth and marriage registrations, personal reminiscences and family lore, which suggested that many such couples lived more or less 'ordinary' lives.

This thesis has considered nineteenth-century discourses on interracial couples and mixed race children alongside this detailed genealogical material to explore the contradictory and contrasting images of Chinese-European couples and their children in both contemporary nineteenth-century accounts and in histories written since. This thesis has shown that much of the historical writings on Chinese-European couples from the previous forty years is little more than repetition of stereotypical images first formulated in the middle decades of the nineteenth-century. The meaning and significance of Chinese-European couples and their families to Australia's colonial past had therefore been overlooked, as the motives and actions of real women and men were collapsed into shallow sketches of anonymous characters. A primary task of this thesis became to draw out the difference between the lived reality of Chinese-European couples and their children and the many superficial representations of their lives found in nineteenth-century writings and in others since.
Conclusion: Reflections

Throughout this thesis I have discussed the varying perspectives and frameworks from and through which intimate relationships between white women and Chinese men in colonial Australia and their families have been viewed and discussed over the past century and a half. These range from disapproving and sensationalist rhetoric based around fears of racial mixing, to impersonal investigations of intermarriage and assimilation, to surprised and curious discoveries and familial revelations, to proud narratives of Chinese ‘founding fathers’ and their brave wives whose marriages defied racist ideas and were the beginnings of Australia’s ‘tolerant’ and ‘multicultural’ present. This study has been influenced by all of these approaches but it has adhered to none of them, instead negotiating a way through and between what are often discordant and contradictory presentations of the lives and experiences of one particular part of the Australian population. It has sought ways to challenge stereotypical portrayals of Chinese-European couples and their children, and to remove them from a focus solely on immorality, prostitution, poverty and crime, to assert the ‘ordinariness’ or ‘normality’ of the lives they lived.

At the same time I have tried to avoid an overemphasis on the positive side—seeking to demonstrate the worthiness of the Chinese as migrants by their intermarriage and integration, or using stories of ‘successful’ Chinese-European couples to reclaim the place of non-white settlers in narratives of nation-building, for instance. Doing so would place us at risk of forgetting the tensions and conflicts, the dangers and dramas, that also went along with the formation and continuation of interracial relationships. The nineteenth-century Australian community was a diverse one, made up of native-born and migrant populations from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, but it could be hard, dangerous, cruel and unforgiving in racial encounters. It was a community that showed toleration, rather than tolerance, to interracial couples. While Chinese-European couples and their children lived and worked and built lives for themselves among their white neighbours and, in many instances, were welcomed and accepted by the communities in which they lived, the responses of those communities were complex and at times contradictory. Similarly, as Anglo-Chinese families ventured beyond the bounds of white Australia, they faced a parallel set of preconceptions and prejudices in Chinese communities at home and overseas.
Conclusion: Reflections

Ways of remembering
This thesis began with Margaret Clarke’s reminiscences, and my disappointment at discovering that in them she did not discuss her life as the wife of a Chinese man nor as the mother of Anglo-Chinese children. There are only a handful of published reminiscences or autobiographies from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries known to be written by white wives of Chinese men, most of which come from north America. There, as in Australia, white women faced prejudice and curiosity at their choice of partner and some women chose to explain, and perhaps justify, their decision by writing about it.

Emma Fong’s autobiography was published as a series of articles in the San Francisco Bulletin in 1922 and was entitled ‘My Oriental Husbands – The story of a San Francisco girl, who married a Chinese graduate of Stanford University, and a year after his death became the wife of his lifelong friend, a Japanese instructor of the University of California, by Emma Fong Kuno’. In it she ‘detailed what it had been like to live with her two “Oriental” husbands: what the differences were between Chinese men and Japanese men, how they treated her, and how different they were, both from each other and from “white” Americans’.1

Mae Franking’s story, shadow-written by Katherine Anne Porter, was similarly published in serial form in the magazine Asia in 1921, before being re-published in book form.2 Mae’s narrative was based on her marriage to Tiam Hock Franking, whom she met as a teenager at high school in Michigan in 1907. It described their lives from the time of their first meeting, to the birth of their three children, to the time they spent in Shanghai and with Tiam’s family at Amoy, to their return to America and Tiam’s premature death from influenza. The story is infused with Mae’s joy at learning to be a ‘real Chinese wife’ for her husband, whose personal fascination she described as being ‘definitely founded on the oriental quality in him’.3

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2 See Porter, Mae Franking’s My Chinese Marriage.
3 Porter, Mae Franking’s My Chinese Marriage, p. 23.
Conclusion: Reflections

Both these women chose to remember and record their lives by foregrounding their relationships with their Chinese husbands and describing in detail their experiences as part of a mixed race couple. In contrast, Margaret Tart chose to compile a biographical portrait of her husband, *The Life of Quong Tart*, which marked his achievements and accomplishments as a ‘foreigner’ in a British community. It was an idea that had originally come from Quong Tart himself, after he had seen Margaret Tart’s carefully assembled collection of newspaper cuttings about him—‘some day I shall have them put into book form to hand down to the children and let them see, although their father was a Chinese, he could be creditably compared with thousands of European fathers’, he had said. Margaret Tart’s biography covered their wedding and honeymoon tour in some detail and, while on the intimacies of their marriage and friendship it remained quiet, the portrait clearly showed the love and esteem in which Margaret Tart held the man she described as a ‘true husband and a loving father’.

Henry Yu has suggested that individual examples of intermarriage between white women and Chinese men, such as those mentioned above and, by inference, the many examples found in this thesis, ‘show little pattern except for a stubborn peculiarity unique to each case’. Mae Franking may well have agreed with him—when asked for advice by another young white American woman contemplating marriage to a Chinese man, she realised that ‘no rules could be made about intermarriage. It was an individual problem, as indeed all marriage should be’. Each interracial relationship may have been idiosyncratic in the reason for its beginning, the personalities of its participants, and the way it progressed and finally ended, but when viewed together the relationships and families discussed in this thesis reveal significant things about the functioning of race, gender and class in nineteenth-century Australian society.

By examining the multiple facets of individual histories of mixed race couples and their children, this thesis has been able to explore the variety and complexity of their

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4 Tart, *The Life of Quong Tart*, author’s note.
5 Tart, *The Life of Quong Tart*, p. 10.
lived experience. It has demonstrated that at every moment families could face contradictory reactions—discrimination, acceptance, forbearance. It has also shown how they made widely varying decisions about the lives they would lead, the people they would associate with, and the identity they would chose for themselves and their descendants. Their lives were complex negotiations across race, culture and geography which challenged strict racial and social categorisation. They show how intermarriage was part of a multidirectional migratory and cultural flow, of comings and goings within families and across generations, rather than necessarily a sign of settlement or assimilation. The story of Chinese-European couples and their Anglo-Chinese children deserves a more solid place within both the history of the Australian Chinese community and in the broader history of migration and race relations in nineteenth-century Australia. I hope that this thesis is one further step towards that happening.