

SOJOURNERS OR A NEW DIASPORA? ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT OF CHINESE MINERS TO THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC GOLDFIELDS

BY KEIR REEVES*
Monash University

Chinese gold seekers were the largest non-British group on the goldfields of Australasia and constituted the largest nationality on some diggings. In considering the movement of Chinese miners to and throughout the goldfields colonies of the southwest Pacific, this article argues there existed a more complex pattern of migration than that suggested by the sojourner model of arrival, brief stay and departure. It examines the links between migration patterns and economic activity, and argues that economic history perspectives complement the insights offered by recent social and cultural history in the field.

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INTRODUCTION

Mining, particularly gold mining, and the Chinese experience in colonial Australia are inextricably linked. From the formative stages of the Australian rushes, 'cycles of boom and bust have characterized the gold industry across Australia, involving wars, economics, mineral resource exhaustion/discoveries and new technologies'.¹ Recent trends in nineteenth-century Chinese-Australian

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1 Mudd, *Gold mining*, p. 629.

and Chinese-New Zealand history have re-inscribed the Chinese into the gold-seeking experience. Chinese Diaspora studies have emphasized the cultural transmission of ideas through the movement of Chinese gold seekers throughout Pacific Rim settler colonies in the second-half of the nineteenth century.² The purpose of this article is to challenge the oversimplified sojourning argument of arrival, brief stay, and departure. I argue that it is necessary to reconcile localized readings with the broader historical sweep of the southern hemisphere gold rushes. This approach reveals more complex economic and cultural experiences by focusing on Chinese migrants who remained in Australasia and whose association with their new homes spanned decades, and, in some cases, generations. The focus of this article is on gold mining, as gold was the mineral that drew men and women to leave their homes and seek their fortune, though Chinese miners diversified into other forms of extraction, such as tin in northern Tasmania. The trajectory and structural change in the Australian economy as a result of gold discovery, coupled with the process of capital formation and the accelerated settlement of the continent, are two recurrent themes in goldfields history. Warwick Frost investigated the transfer of farming technology between China and Australia during and following the formative 1850s rushes, and Barry McGowan examined the role of Chinese miners on the Australian diggings.³ Rod Maddock and Ian McLean argue that the supply-side shocks that occurred as a result of the Australian gold rushes are best understood as natural resource driven events largely determined by the massive movement of people.⁴ I further contend that there are links between the Australian and New Zealand rushes – particularly between Victoria and Otago – and that Maddock and McLean's thesis can thus be extended to include the south-west Pacific gold seeking regions.⁵ The political significance of the gold rushes in terms of the events surrounding the Eureka Stockade has been overstated while conversely, the economic implications of the rushes have been downplayed.⁶ Australian-based research into Chinese immigration has tended to concentrate on close readings of Chinese communities, often in regional locales.⁷ In the absence of archival records, others have further explored ways in which historical archaeology can recover seemingly lost historical markers in remnant mining landscapes.⁸ It is only through the work of Ann Curthoys, and, more recently, John Fitzgerald, that the Chinese experience in nineteenth-century Australia has been considered

2 Curthoys, *Does Australian history*; Curthoys, *Cultural history*; McKeown, *Introduction*; Mountford and Reeves, *Reworking the tailings*, p. 23.

3 Frost, *Migrants*, pp. 113–31; McGowan, *Economics and organization*, pp. 119–38.

4 Maddock and McLean, *Supply-side shocks*.

5 Mein Smith, *Concise history*, pp. 81–4; Maddock and McLean, *Supply-side shocks*; Denoon *et al. History of Australia*, pp. 141–3.

6 The Eureka Stockade was a rebellion at Ballarat, Victoria in 1854 against the imposition of mining fees that were seen as unreasonable. The rebellion later became a symbol of Australian nationalism.

7 Wilton, *Golden Threads*; Khoo, *Banana Bending*; Reeves, *A hidden history*; Couchman, *Tong Yun Gai*; Noonan, *Wild Cathay boys*.

8 Karskens, *Inside the Rocks*; Lydon, *Many Inventions*; Mayne, *Hill End*; McGowan, *The Chinese*, pp. 35–41; Rains, *Intersections*.

in a global historical context.⁹ Michael Williams's *Destination Qiaoxiang* remains the only extensive transnational exploration of Australia's Chinese communities.¹⁰ Others have considered the complexity of the Chinese experience in terms of British colonial enterprise.¹¹ This renewed focus on the practical implications of British Imperial history highlights the international nature of capital flows and movement of people throughout the Empire. Hong Kong, Dunedin in New Zealand, Victoria in Australia, and Vancouver in Canada's British Columbia were nodal points in the British Empire apparatus that underpinned much of the economic activity of the Pacific Rim settler colonies.

The economic impetus of these colonies was in part driven by patterns of migration that began with the Californian gold discoveries that fanned out across the Pacific West Coast of the United States, Canada, and Yukon, and crossed the Pacific Ocean to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji. There was also a cultural paradox at work in the colonial expansion of the nineteenth century. The interaction between Britain and its colonies was not simply a case of core and periphery, typified by Eurocentric racial conceit, but rather one mediated by mutual cultural exchange.¹² On the Australian goldfields, the Chinese were sometimes more integrated with their British and European counterparts than is commonly believed.¹³ Ambivalence and hostility, however, were never far from the surface. A simple model of nineteenth-century Chinese migration that has been dubbed the 'sojourner thesis' suggests that the Chinese overwhelmingly migrated straight from China to the goldfields, stayed a short while and then returned directly to China from the goldfields.¹⁴ This thesis masks a more complex and influential process of migration than has previously been acknowledged. In this article, I extend Bon-wai Chou's research that challenged simplified readings of the antipodean sojourning thesis.¹⁵ I contend that the Chinese experience was more ambiguous than Chou's uniformly bleak assessment of the lives of those who remained in Australia and whose material and cultural situation became increasingly difficult from the 1860s until the 1930s.¹⁶ While Chou is committed to the sojourner model and draws a different conclusion, his research shares many of the concerns of this article.

THE CHINESE GOLD SEEKERS OF THE SOUTH WEST

While the Australian gold rushes brought an influx of immigrants from all over the world, the Chinese were the most conspicuously different. Census tables reveal

9 Curthoys, *Does Australian history*, pp.149–51; Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, p. 216.

10 Williams, *Destination Qiaoxiang*.

11 Holst, *Equal before the law?*; Reeves and Mountford, *Court records*.

12 Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, pp. 500–1; Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*.

13 Standish, *Diary of Frederick Charles Standish*.

14 Gittins, *The Diggers from China*; Rolls, *Sojourners*, pp. 507–8.

15 Chou, *The sojourning attitude*.

16 Chou, *The sojourning attitude*, pp. 55–9.

that there were 25,424 Chinese working on the Victorian goldfields in 1857, equivalent to approximately one in 11 Victorians.¹⁷ At the Mount Alexander diggings, comprising Castlemaine and surrounding districts in central Victoria, over one in four diggers were from China. Official Victorian government records indicate that all but five of these Chinese were men, with most aged in their twenties or thirties and having travelled from the Pearl River delta region of Guangzhou province in southern China.¹⁸ Anti-Chinese sentiment developed quickly on the Australian goldfields. Episodes of racial hatred and violence occurred at Bendigo (Sandhurst), Ballarat, Dunolly, Ararat, Golden Point, Chewton, and Buckland River in Victoria.¹⁹ At Lambing Flat in New South Wales, a long series of clashes between European and Chinese diggers culminated in the June 1861 incident. Around 2,000 embittered miners, armed with spades and sticks, descended on the Chinese camp, assaulting Chinese miners and pillaging and burning their semi-permanent huts. A fortnight later, after police reinforcements had restored some order and three ringleaders had been arrested, rioting miners turned on the troopers, resulting in the death of at least one miner and causing the authorities to place the district under martial law.²⁰ A focus on such events has hijacked the historical discussion of Chinese–European relations in colonial Australia, though in fact it is misleading to portray violent clashes as typical. These conflicts took place alongside moments of cultural and economic cooperation. On many levels, European and Chinese miners cooperated and coexisted, and frictions and arguments between European and Chinese miners were not always built solely on racial antagonisms.²¹ A close examination of the spatial distribution of Moonlight and Pennyweight Flats mining claims and associated puddling machines and dams at the Mount Alexander diggings reveals the working and living arrangements of the times. Geological Survey maps of the 1860s reveal that Chinese and European miners often worked side-by-side and were mutually dependent for sufficient water to work their claims.²² What the cadastral data incontrovertibly reveals is that they relied on one another for water provision and claim security. During the 1850s and 1860s, the Chinese comprised between eight and 11 per cent of Victoria's total population and 20 per cent of its male population.²³ Far from quickly seeking their fortune and returning to China, this segment of the population provided an antipodean epicentre supporting subsequent migration to the Otago goldfields in New Zealand, to the Palmer River goldfields in far North Queensland, to the tin and gold prospects in north-east Tasmania, and to a host of subsidiary and fugitive gold settlements across Victoria, New South Wales, and the Northern Territory during the 1870s and

17 Victorian Government, *Census*.

18 Cronin, *Colonial Casualties*, p. 141.

19 Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*; Ogilvy Preshaw, Lambing Flat, p. 250; Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, pp. 75–78; Price, *The Great White Walls*, p. 163; Hornadge, *The Yellow Peril*, pp. 10–11.

20 Curthoys, *Men of all nations*, pp. 103–23.

21 Frost, *Migrants*, pp. 126–7; McGowan, *Economics and organization*, pp. 135–6.

22 Reeves, *A songster*, pp. 178–80.

23 Serle, *Golden Age*, p. 320; Cronin, *Colonial Casualties*, p. 136.

1880s.²⁴ These subsequent migrations also provided the conduit for Chinese entry into rural and agricultural pursuits in southeastern Australia and northern Australia. This redefined pattern of migration can be further developed by incorporating the pathways of a number of Chinese gold seekers from China to the west coast of North America and thence to the Australian and later New Zealand goldfields.²⁵ Chain migration patterns that drew so many to the Australian goldfields occurred because a familiar cultural and economic pathway was opened up by the discovery of large alluvial gold deposits in central Victoria.²⁶ In essence, gold was the catalyst for attracting the movement of people; it was a conduit and an enabler rather than a democratic mineral.²⁷ Migration patterns developed in response to the demands on the goldfields. In this respect, the dynamics of the pull factors that sustained emigration were essentially the same for the Chinese as they were for the Welsh or any other minority communities that ventured to the Mount Alexander diggings. The appeal of the Australian goldfields is that they not offered a financial lure but also personal autonomy that was not available to many in Great Britain or Southern China during the mid-nineteenth century. As Chan and Goodman have argued when discussing the migration experience in gold mining communities, it is unusual for people to leave for somewhere else.²⁸ It is the pathways and chain migratory patterns that facilitate such movements. For the Chinese who came to Australia, these migration patterns were based on regional associations, particularly in the localities of Toi Shan, Sze Yup, and Sam Yup of Guangdong in Southern China.²⁹ Regional associations were in turn reinforced by labour recruiting mechanisms (primarily the credit ticket system).

The idea of a sojourning Chinese community is a problematic concept when considering the Chinese Diaspora settlement in the southwest Pacific. Certainly the majority of Chinese who travelled to Australasia during the gold rushes of the second-half of the nineteenth century returned to China. Many of these people had a sojourning mentality. However, there were also small numbers who remained and often formed enduring ethnic communities in their adopted gold mining areas. Many of these Chinese communities continued to develop long after the gold rush, and in Bendigo, Ballarat, Melbourne, Vancouver, and San Francisco, they continue to thrive in the present day.³⁰ Thus, the Chinese experience in Australasia during the gold rushes can only be partially explained by the sojourning thesis.

24 PROV; Index to outward passengers to interstate, UK, NZ and foreign ports 1852–1901.

25 Reeves, *Tracking the dragon*, pp. 41–50. Otago, *The Argus*, 9 September 1861. May, *Gold rush: mining frontiers of the Pacific Borderlands, 1848–1868*; The Chinese exodus, *Mount Alexander Mail*, October 14 1863, p. 3; Kirkby, *Passenger Lists*.

26 Reeves, *A Hidden History*, pp. 5–7, 15–23, 236–43, 273–6.

27 Reeves, *Trade unionism*, p. 13.

28 Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, pp. 2–3, 25; Chan, *Gold Mountain*.

29 Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, p. 83; Pan, *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*; Chan, *Gold Mountain Chinese*; Yong, *The New Gold Mountain*, pp. 11–6.

30 McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks*, pp. 4–11; Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*.

EXAMINING AUSTRALASIAN GOLD SEEKING CONNECTIONS

The Chinese gold-seeking experience in New Zealand needs to be considered in conjunction with that of the Victorian rushes. The move of the Mount Alexander (Victoria, Australia) Chinese *en masse* to Otago (South Island, New Zealand) provides a useful case study of the Chinese movement throughout Australasia during the gold rushes. This has not yet been attempted by historians beyond brief government quantitative observations of shipping records.³¹ A transnational approach provides fresh understanding of Chinese settlement patterns throughout Australasia during the gold rushes. Should the movement of Chinese be considered within the broader patterns of migration that occurred during the gold rushes in the two countries? More broadly, should the Otago rush be considered a rush in its own right or – given the close social, economic, and cultural connections – as an integral part of the Australian rushes? The answers to these questions depend on the criteria used to assess the Chinese experience and the connections between Australia and New Zealand during the gold rushes of the 1860s. The similarities of experiences for the Chinese, coupled with broader historical connections between Victoria and Otago, means that both regions were connected in such a way that they comprised a key part of the broader phenomenon of gold seeking.

The settlement pattern determined by the gold rushes reinforced social, cultural, political, and economic connections, particularly between the Australian cities of Melbourne, Launceston, and Hobart, and in New Zealand between Dunedin, Westland, and Wellington.³² The architecture and built environments of cities such as Melbourne, Launceston, and Dunedin are similar. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Melbourne and Dunedin, or more broadly Victoria and Otago, had more in common in terms of their built environment and economic and social ties than Melbourne had with Sydney, or Dunedin had with towns in the North Island of New Zealand. Cities that came to prominence during the mid-nineteenth century gold rushes, such as Melbourne, Bendigo, Ballarat, and Dunedin can be understood as a subset of Frost's 'New Urban Frontier' – distinctive parts of what he 'termed a 'broad functional region of truly new cities'.³³ Gold discovery played a similar role in the development and trajectory of these cities to agricultural settlement in producing 'Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth as the capitals of the free settler colonies along the Indian Ocean edge of Australia, and Auckland in New Zealand'.³⁴

The remnant mining landscapes of Victoria and Otago are similar in physical appearance as they were the sites of successive gold rushes between 1851 and 1865. Company-operated deep quartz reef mining followed initial alluvial mining,

31 PROV, Index to unassisted inward passenger lists to Victoria 1852–1923; PROV; Index to outward passengers to Interstate, UK, NZ and foreign ports 1852–1901. Kirkby, *Passenger Lists*.

32 Reeves, *Tracking the dragon*, pp. 30–35.

33 Frost, *New Urban Frontier*, pp. 18–9.

34 Frost, *New Urban Frontier*, pp. 19–20.

with the mines of Bendigo probably the richest of these in Australasia until the gold discoveries at Kalgoorlie – the *El Dorado* of Australian mineral discovery – in 1893. Gold extraction at the end of the nineteenth century used sluices and chemical compounds, and managed forestry often took the place of mining fields in the twentieth century.³⁵ As a consequence of this massive excavation and then slow revegetation, the mine tailings, dam workings, and diggings have gradually lost their brutal destructive edge. Hepburn Lagoon near Creswick in central Victoria is a classic example of mine-related water storage that now, set among exotic windbreaks and green grazing paddocks, appears to twenty-first century tourists as a European pastoral idyll. The historic tourism precincts of St Bathans and Arrowtown in central Otago are similar New Zealand examples.

Gold rush era contemporaries regarded New Zealand and Australia as two areas that comprised a group of British colonies. Initial reports of the gold rushes in Otago spoke of ‘Victorians’ and ‘foreigners’ arriving, the underlying implication being that Otago and Victoria shared the same regional identity.³⁶ The Melbourne *Argus* reflected this viewpoint in its reportage of the Otago rushes.

We shall be the first to offer our congratulations to the people of that settlement on this new acquisition to their means of prosperity. Whatever directly enriches one number of the Australian group of colonies must indirectly enrich all.³⁷

The majority of Chinese diggers who ventured to Australia during the gold rushes of the 1850s were born in South China’s Guangdong (Kwangtung) province. During the early stages of the Australian gold rushes, northern Guangdong experienced the early stages of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), the Pearl River area suffered from a secret society uprising known as the Red Turban Rebellion (1854–56), ethnic rivalry took place between Poontei and Hakka, and the Second Opium War (1856–1860) took its toll on South China.³⁸ Economic depression and social and political upheaval compelled many to emigrate (or escape) due to political persecution. Notwithstanding the reasons why people travelled to the Pacific gold fields regions (funded through merchant-organized credit tickets often mortgaged again family or clan land), many were ‘pushed’ throughout Southeast Asia as others were ‘pulled’ to the gold rushes in neo-European societies. In the Chinese-speaking world, California was known as *Gold Mountain*, Victoria as *New Gold Mountain*, and New Zealand was known as *Thin Thi Lund* (the exact translation of which is unclear) and *Nam Doo Kum Hunm* (South island gold waterway) (see Fig. 1). Chinese miners, already a highly transient population as a result of the instability in Southern China, continued to be highly mobile during the gold rushes.³⁹ Many never returned to China, or did so only after a long

35 Dingle, *The Victorians*, pp. 50–2.

36 *Argus*, Otago, 9 September 1861.

37 *Argus*, Otago, 9 September 1861.

38 Ng, *The sojourner experience*, pp. 10–1.

39 *Mount Alexander Mail*, The Chinese exodus, 14 October 1863; *Mount Alexander Mail*, Chinese exodus home, 10 June 1867; *Mount Alexander Mail*, Chinese leaving by train, 10 August 1867.

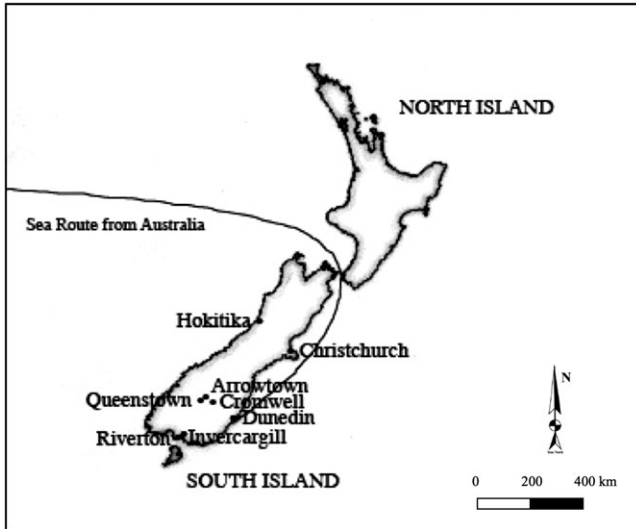


Figure 1. Map of the South Island, New Zealand emphasising key goldfields regions.

period, having spent the bulk of their lives in the European settler colonies on the Pacific Rim. While unusual, it was not unprecedented for a Chinese miner to make a journey from Guangzhou to San Francisco or Vancouver, to Australia and then to New Zealand⁴⁰ (Fig. 1).

Most people of all nationalities who migrated to the Australian goldfields initially had a sojourning mentality because they were looking for gold rather than a permanent home. Along with their European counterparts, the Chinese gold seekers were part of a highly transient population that moved between and throughout the gold rush countries of the Pacific Rim. But there were several who remained and formed enduring ethnic communities, such as those at San Francisco, Melbourne, Bendigo, and Vancouver.⁴¹ The history of the Chinese on the Australian goldfields and their eventual arrival in New Zealand is thus more complex than the sojourning thesis. It is necessary to use different layers of interpretation to understand fully why some miners stayed instead of returning to China. This approach incorporates aspects of the sojourning argument, but also considers the experiences of those who stayed in the host countries or moved throughout the various neo-European gold mining settlements. Intra- and inter-country migrations left people of all races scattered far from where they had begun.⁴² Despite the dominant theme of a return to China in histories of the

40 Reeves, *Golden legacy*, pp. 62–73.

41 Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*; Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*; McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks*, pp. 4–11.

42 Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, p. 1.

Chinese on the Victorian and New Zealand goldfields, the desire to go home was not the only wish of the Chinese. Some had personal or economic reasons (or both) to remain in the gold rush colonies. It has been suggested that in the 1870s, a person could live in southern China on an annual income of 15 shillings per annum. Five hundred English pounds was enough to buy a one-acre farmlet in the Panyu county of Guangdong at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁴³ Therefore, the indentured labour system, which was the means by which a part of the Chinese population arrived in Australia, and which allowed Chinese men to send home up to £50 per year, made staying in Victoria an attractive option compared with the living conditions and opportunities available in China.⁴⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, indentured labour recruitment in China had become a long-established system of overseas migration driven by high population and political uncertainty in certain regions of the country. It was a system of contracts made by men to go gold seeking to work off debts owed to Chinese businessmen who sponsored the journey and kept half of the proceeds.⁴⁵ As Serle observed, the Chinese gold seekers who ventured to California did so under a ‘“credit-ticket” system [drolly referred to as the pig trade], whereby they borrowed money for their fare from brokers, submitted themselves to organized supervision, and gave a lien on their services until their debt was cleared’.⁴⁶

Chinese people played an integral part in the formation of goldfields’ communities that defined much of the nineteenth-century experience of Victoria and Otago. This detail is often omitted from broader historical narratives of the gold rushes, with the Chinese typically rendered as marginal, ephemeral participants. Certainly many Chinese were sojourners, but some did not have the financial resources to return home, while others moved on to new fields as part of a fluid and mobile mining population.⁴⁷ Some chose to stay in the colonies, often for personal reasons, and as a result were drawn towards their adopted communities. This was certainly the case with prominent Victorian goldfields’ figures, such as Fook Sing, Lee Heng Jacjung, Ham Hoyling, and James Acroy, all of whom married European women and had extensive families and business connections.⁴⁸ Prominent wealthy men such as Sew Hoy in Otago and Louey Amoy of Melbourne frequently travelled back and forth from their adopted countries to China on personal and business-related matters.⁴⁹ These Chinese were involved in a wide range of commercial enterprises and work practices, including mining, agriculture, gambling, market gardening, merchant trade, dredging, and banking, as well as roles as government spies and court interpreters.⁵⁰

43 Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, pp. 97–8.

44 Cronin, *Colonial Casualties*, pp. 19–20.

45 Northrup, *Indentured Labor*, pp. 51–2.

46 Serle, *Golden Age*, p. 320.

47 Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended*, pp. 84–9.

48 Reeves, *Historical neglect*, p. 58; Mountford, *In Search of Fook Shing*, p. 7.

49 J. Ng, unpublished data, nd.

50 Reeves, *Gold fields settler*; Reeves and Mountford, *Court records*.

THE CHINESE ON THE DIGGINGS

An analysis of the historical significance of the Chinese on the diggings is difficult because Victoria's records of the 1850s – even gold yields – are at best incomplete. No reliable data exists of the value of gold extracted by the Chinese. Because Chinese miners comprised 8–10 per cent of the colonial goldfields' population, it may be assumed that they found and sold a similar percentage of total gold yields. This probably understates Chinese gold output, because alluvial Chinese miners were renowned for having extracted gold more methodically and in larger amounts than their European counterparts.⁵¹ The Chinese diggers, like their European counterparts, formed part of a fluid mining population. Notwithstanding its symbolic heroism in the construction of Australian identity,⁵² the concept of 'miner' is opaque, and consequently the term is an inadequate category for definition or analysis. A gold miner can refer to a digger in the first few years of the rushes seeking his fortune, a fossicker or alluvial miner, or a wage labourer in the deep leads or hard rock mines. Mining statistics reveal that for the final quarter of 1867, 49,000 alluvial miners worked in Victoria, in contrast to 14,000 quartz miners.⁵³ While Grimshaw and Fahey culturally mapped the importance of women and social life on the Mount Alexander diggings, they did not analyse the Castlemaine Chinese.⁵⁴ Of the alluvial miners reported on the field in 1867, almost 32 per cent were Chinese; yet Victoria-wide, only 47 out of 14,017 quartz miners were Chinese. The difference was even starker in the Loddon area at the south of the diggings, where it is doubted if any Chinese diggers were involved in quartz mining.

Many of the Chinese, who initially sought gold mining as a route to quick riches, moved into activities such as cultivation. This allowed them to make money and send money to their families, without having to return to China themselves. In 1864, the *Mount Alexander Mail* reported that 'John Chinamen in his character as a natural hawker of vegetables is quite an organized institution', and further commented 'that the Chinese horticulturalists fill a gap which could not be well occupied by Europeans'.⁵⁵ At the hamlet of Vaughan on the Mount Alexander diggings, Chinese market gardeners were an acknowledged part of social and economic life.⁵⁶ Jack, Kerr, and Holmes have demonstrated the importance of Chinese market gardeners to mining communities beyond Victoria in their analysis of Ah Toy's market garden on the Palmer River goldfields in Northern Queensland.⁵⁷ The Chinese level of market gardening activity occurred on a

51 Cronin, *Colonial Casualties*, pp. 42–3; Serle, *Golden Age*, p. 321.

52 Blainey, *Rush that Never Ended*, pp. 39–45, 58; Clark, *A History of Australia*; Phillips, *The Australian Tradition*, pp. 72–94.

53 Victorian Government, Reports Castlemaine Mining District, Castlemaine and Fryer's Divisions, 1867.

54 Grimshaw and Fahey, Family and community, pp. 88–125.

55 Mount Alexander Mail, John Chinaman as horticulturalist, 30 March, 1864.

56 Stanin, From Li Chun to Yong Kit, pp. 15–6, 33–4; Reeves, Historical neglect, p. 65.

57 Jack *et al.* Ah Toy's garden, p. 51.

larger scale and involved more sophisticated techniques than those used by Europeans.⁵⁸ An 1863 newspaper report described Lee Heng Jacjung's six-acre market garden along the Loddon River where he planted sugar cane, Chinese oranges, several kinds of fruit, and flowers.⁵⁹ Some sections of the European community regarded Chinese market gardeners as inferior, but more generally, they were seen as diligent, industrious members of society. These Chinese may have expected to only sojourn on the goldfields, but by staying longer they derived material benefits for themselves and their families in China.

CONCLUSION

Further examination of primary sources, including the Victorian and New South Wales outward passenger lists, *Mining Warden Reports*, and material culture located throughout the former gold colonies can advance research into the specific experiences of Chinese miners and those who stayed. These sources are more readily accessible than ever before. In Victoria, Australia, this has been successfully pursued through an empirical anthropometric investigation of prison records that reveals experiences of those who remained after the heyday of the rushes by Morgan and more localized analyses of a small volume of court and trial records by Holst and Reeves.⁶⁰ The lack of nineteenth-century gold rush region Chinese language sources is a key problem, as much research has been skewed towards analysis of colonial authorities' reports and fails (with the exception of the past 20 years) to also consider material culture and historical archaeology in Australian and New Chinese Australian history. Where Chinese-language source from the gold fields, Pacific Rim colonies, Hong Kong, and Southern China are available, they have seldom been used.⁶¹

The Australasian gold rushes, or more correctly the rushes of the southwest Pacific, are commonly regarded as a watershed or 'breakage line', particularly for Australia, that 'violently interrupted the gradual, steady growth of the Australian colonies'.⁶² The dramatic move away from the staples of wool and wheat created a new image of Australia, and the long-term social and economic transformation was more pronounced in its effect and longer in impact than a transient moment. It ushered in an era of major economic, social, and political growth; the movement of people from all over the world in the process shaping the profile of the

58 Reeves, *Historical neglect*, pp. 59–61.

59 *Portland Guardian*, Chinese Capitation Tax, 16 April 1863.

60 Morgan, *Stature and economic development*, pp. 53, 55–7; Holst, *Equal before the law*, pp. 120–32; Reeves, *Goldfields settler or frontier rogue?*

61 Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, p. 4.

62 Atkinson, *Time, place and paternalism*, p. 1; Hancock, *Australia*, p. 43.

community and structure of the Australian economy. The rushes also had implications for the development of New Zealand and the emergence of the trans-Tasman world.⁶³

Part of the historical narrative of the Australasian gold rushes is one of economic development and frontier encounter. The Chinese were a key group on the trans-Tasman gold rush era colonial enterprise whose role can be understood at local, regional, and international contexts. A similar motivation for coming to Victoria was shared by Chinese and European diggers. To regard the Chinese as a special case somehow removed from conventional history is to misrepresent their role in goldfields' society. While the Chinese-Australian gold-seeking experience during the second half of the nineteenth century is best understood through a broader lens, this approach has perhaps overwhelmed the more basic issue of money. Like their counterparts from Britain, Chile, or Germany, Chinese gold seekers were motivated by the desire to win gold, prosper materially, contribute to the community and gain greater personal autonomy than was possible in their country of birth.

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