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Early Chinese migrants to Australia: a critique of the sojourner narrative on nineteenth-century Chinese migration to British colonies

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Sojourners or Settlers: A Critique of the Cultural Perspective on 19th Century Chinese Migrants to the British Colonies *

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Introduction

This paper sets to discuss a number of issues related to the 19th century Chinese migration to British colonies in general and to Australia in particular. One issue is the politics involved in the English naming of the 19th Century Chinese migrants to the British colonies as sojourners and the Chinese naming of all those of Chinese descent living outside of China as *huaqiao* (overseas Chinese). This is then related to the second issue, the issue that not only Chinese migration in the 19th Century but also the very sojourner discourse had much to do with Western colonization of both Hong Kong and the newly “discovered” continents. Thirdly, the paper also examines whether the 19th Century Chinese migrants did return to China and if they did what happened to them and their descendants in China. In general the paper has two broad aims: 1) a critique of the cultural perspective on Chinese migrants’ behaviour by highlighting socio-economic factors and 2) developing an argument of how the referents “sojourner” and *huaqiao* were political.

These issues led to my research on the 19th Century Chinese migrants to Australia, particularly to Tasmania, in which I found a connection between the White Australian policy and what I call the sojourner discourse. In discussing the issues surrounding the term “sojourners” I will develop the arguments that the Chinese migrant patterns and migrant behaviour, sojourning or not, were dictated more by socio-economic circumstances at both the place of origin and place of destination than the “Chineseness”. This will be then followed by a discussion of how the sojourner discourse was constructed. By discussing how what was happening in China was closely related to what was happening in Australia the paper then argues that “home” is an elusive term and that the early Chinese were no more “sojourners” than other migrants to Australia. In fact, once the Chinese had the opportunity to settle in their migration destination they would settle even though they might travel between the place of origin and place of destination. While secondary sources is analysed to deconstruct the sojourner, primary source research has been carried out on original Chinese documents and newspapers, sources in Chinese language located both in Australia and China. Field work research has also been carried out including four visits to Guangdong, several visits to grave yards in Melbourne and Tasmania, interviews with descendants of early Chinese migrants to Tasmania and interviews with villagers at the home villages of the early Chinese migrants to Australia.

The Chinese Question

During the colonial period in Australia, like other colonies of the British empire, what to do with migrants to the new colonies from China was considered a serious issue, as serious as the refugee issues

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today, so much so that even the self-claimed Chinese Senator Thomas Bakhap in Tasmania, where racial discrimination against Chinese was mild compared with what was happening elsewhere, such as New South Wales, Victoria, or California for that matter, penned a pamphlet entitled “the Chinese question”.[†] The overwhelming view of both the popular and the elite in Australia in the late 19th Century was that the Chinese should be excluded from a country that was supposed to be white. How to justify such a racially discriminatory exclusion in a society that purported to be fair and equal, as in the expressions of *fair dinkum*? There is therefore a moral issue of how to justify racial discrimination in Australia at that time when both liberal and union activists were trying to build a fair and equal society. Hence the question was how to appear fair dinkum without the dinkum bit

One important conceptual support for this exclusion was that the Chinese could not be treated equally because they were slave labourers who would accept lower pay and hence would undermine the labour movement that was striving for better pay and conditions as part of an equal and fair society. The construction of such narrative was based prima facie evidence that at least some if not all the Chinese migrants were much readier to accept lower pay and sometimes Chinese labourers were used by employers to break worker’s labour strike.

Another important narrative that supported the exclusion of the Chinese was that the Chinese were sojourners who did not want to contribute to Australia. They did not spend in Australia but instead saved and sent money back to China; they left their families behind and returned home frequently; they even wanted to bury their bones back home in China. Much of this narrative was also supported by prima facie evidence. For instance, between 1875 and 1939 there were over 1,500 exhumations from Rockwood Cemetery alone (Williams 1999b). Our field work research at graveyards both in Tasmania and Melbourne seem to confirm the practice of exhumations. In other words they were born Chinese and would die Chinese, therefore should not be allowed to be Australian citizens.

I will leave aside the debate of whether Australian liberal democracy of equality was built on racial exclusion and racial inequality (Cronin 1982, Price 1974, Yarwood and Knoling 1982, Curthoys 1973, Markus 1979 and 1994, Curthoys and Markus 1978 and Windshuttle 2004), not only because it is too large an issue for this paper but also, and mainly, because Australian liberal democracy involve more the discrimination against and exclusion of the aboriginal people, which is not the concern of this paper. Instead, I will focus on discussing the issues surrounding the terms “sojourners” and “*huaqiao*”, specifically used to refer to the Chinese.

Sojourners or Settlers? The Politics of Living and Naming.

Wang Gungwu, considered doyen of overseas Chinese studies, categorizes Chinese migrants into four patterns: *huashang*—merchants, *huagong*—coolies, *huaqiao*—sojourner Chinese and *huayi*—descendants of ethnic Chinese growing up and living outside of China (Wang 1991). Actually Wang’s four patterns can be rather confusing. To start with the coolie pattern fails to make a difference between indentured labourers and gold diggers to both the USA and Australia. Secondly, all the migrants referred to by the other three patterns can and very often are referred to as *huaqiao* (Chinese residing overseas), even though it has to be pointed out that Wang means this pattern to refer to the 19th Century peasantry migration. Finally, merchants could and did settle, as did the same by coolies. Some of them sojourned and some of them settled depending on personal and socio-economic circumstances. Wang admits that the term *huaqiao* is the most ideological controversial (Wang 1991: 8-9); but why the term is controversial is precisely because the sojourning characteristics is attributed to it. Wang not only agrees with this kind of characterization but also has a cultural perspective on the sojourning behaviour by referring to *qiao* (sojourner), or *qiaoju* (sojourning) as a product of “Confucian rhetoric” (Wang 2003: 8). Wang, and Ang, another prominent scholar, have even played into the racial politics, without,

[†] “The Chinese Question” was a controversial and significant issue in the United States at that time as well. See Hoexter (1976)

perhaps, realizing it. Wang summarizes the issue of *huaqiao* this way: “It [the term *huaqiao*] was openly used to bring about ethnic if not nationalist or racist biding of all Chinese at home and abroad. In the countries which have large Chinese minorities, the term had become a major source of the suspicion that the Chinese minorities could never feel loyalty towards their host nations” (Wang 1999). Ang deals with the same issue by suggesting that “This ideological China-centeredness and obsession with Chineseness helped fuel anti-Chinese suspicion and discrimination in foreign lands, whether in South-East Asia or in European immigrant societies such as Australia and the United States” (Ang 2001:82). As will be extended later in this paper, the Chineseness and China-centredness attributed to *huaqiao* have been played up by both the Western colonial politics and Chinese nationalism the 19th Century, and by the Cold War politics, to which both Wang and Ang implicitly refers to.

Wang and Ang’s explanatory suggestions have an implicit assumption that the Chinese themselves were to blame for the discrimination against them. The Chineseness and China-centeredness argument is based on evidence that the Chinese tended to stick together and wanted to maintain Chinese way of life. In fact the first generation of migrants of any group of people of the same background, ethnically or culturally, tend to stick together, as the first generation of Italian and Greek migrants did the same in Australia, and there was nothing unique Chinese about it. What made the Chinese more inclined to stick together was that, as a case of the Chung family in Tasmania (Wu and Gao 2005) shows, economic circumstances (family and lineage sponsorship) were such that a group of Chinese in one particular location were always of the same extended family or lineage. As migrants from China they certainly wish that China was strong and respected. If China were strong and well-respected their racial value and social statues would have been higher. By the time large number of Chinese migrated to countries like the United States of America and Australia, China was weak and “A stronger China was expected to enhance the status of ethnic Chinese communities abroad, and could be expected to support their interests in confrontations with the colonial states...” (Douw 1999: 29). Therefore, migrants of Chinese background would have pro-China sentiments and would tend to stick together. This was nothing culturally or racially specific. If the European migrants acted differently in those respects that was because their socio-economic circumstances were different and their migration pattern and sponsorship were different. The fact that the European migrants did not appear to be defensive of their countries (if that was the case) had nothing to do with their racial characters but more to do with the fact they were the masters of the newly “discovered” worlds.

The Chinese tended to stick together because they had emotional and cultural identity that were different from the whites of whom they had to live with and therefore hoped that the togetherness could support each other financially and emotionally. Williams (1999b) is right in arguing that the Chinese traditional ideas and practice of family, extended families and clans are important factors in making the Chinese a well-organized and close community of hard working men. But these were only enabling factors that had more to do with their sense of self-protection rather than Chineseness or China-centeredness. For the ordinary migrants Chineseness or China-centeredness or Confucian rhetoric was the last thing in their mind when they moved to another country. Having the wish for China to be united and strong, they might even donate money for Chinese nationalism. But they also wanted to get on with their life in a different environment and one important way of getting on was to be a member of the local community. As Hsu, by examining Taishanese migration history, argues well that “overseas Taishanese depended less on the appeal of their rhetoric and the strength of native place ties than on the changing balance of economic opportunities at home and abroad as well as social and political acceptance of Chinese settlement overseas” (Hsu, 2000:309). Even ‘the single men phenomenon’ was forced by circumstances rather than ‘Chineseness’. “The war time alliance between China and the United States led to the repeal of the oppressive Exclusion Laws, and for the first time in almost sixty years Chinese could gain citizenship by naturalization.” As a result droves of single Taishanese American men returned to get married, but “most choose to bring their wives and children to the United States...For the first time more women than men left Taishan” (Hsu 2000:326).

The colonial project as history and a Peasantry Migration

One of the important historical factors that defined Chinese migration since the late 19th century was the establishment of the British colony in Hong Kong as a result of China's defeat in the Opium Wars from 1840 to 1860, and to a less extent the creation of other treaty ports like Xiamen (formerly referred to as Amoy in the West because that is how Xiamen is pronounced in the local dialect) and Shanghai. The first migrants to Australia actually came via Xiamen (Williams 1999b) and Shantou (Swatow).

Western Colonialism led not only to a demand for Chinese migrants in the new colonies but also to the development of the sojourner discourse. Chinese emigration did not start in the 19th Century but the sojourner discourse did. Before the onset of European colonialism of Asia Chinese migration to Southeast Asia had been quite prolific for centuries (Skinner 1959, Willmott 1966, Fitzgerald 1962, Chen 1923, Coppel 1982, 2002, Reid 1996, Kuhn 2008, Wang 1959, 1991, and Yow 2013). In fact the majority of the so-called overseas Chinese still reside in these areas. The Chinese not only played "a role in bringing Islam to Indonesia" but also "developed ports and city life and supply networks that attracted Muslim traders" (Taylor 2005:160). The Chinese migrants either settled down in Southeast Asia, or they might have returned to China after a while, but nothing was considered remarkable about them. There was very little written about them. However, when the Europeans began to colonize history "began" and that history included the discourse of the so-called sojourning overseas Chinese.

The first record of Chinese labourers from China to the colony of Australia goes back as early as 1818 (Williams 1999b:3). The European penetration of Southeast Asia and China, together with the new technology of transport, led to not only a large number of Chinese migrants but also new patterns of Chinese migration. The colonial development demanded cheap labour (Douw 1999), especially after the abolition of slave trade. Indentured labour came to Australia in large numbers after the first Opium War, and there were 3,000 between 1848 and 1853 (Williams 1999b). "Due to the scarcity of labour in the north [of Australia], Chinese and Asians continued to be recruited to assist northern colonisation even after anti-Chinese sentiments had been well formulated in the south and legislative measures taken in response"(Ganter 2005: 2).

"Some of the earliest attempts at labour recruitment in the 1850s by planters from Peru, Cuba and Hawaii had been in Xiamen, but recruiters quickly turned towards Hong Kong as a much better base for such projects" (McKeown 1999: 315). Therefore, from the very start the Chinese question was the result of a colonial project and the colony of Hong Kong became the migration processing centre. Hong Kong not only became the transit centre for the Chinese remittances from overseas countries to south China but also acted as the financial centre and organization hub for Chinese (and European) opportunistic entrepreneurs to make money out of human cargo (Williams 1999b). The business was so profitable that "In the villages of South China, Chinese 'crimps', paid by the head for each labourer they could recruit, used a variety of means to entice potential migrants, including kinship networks, material advance, promises of fortunes for the taking, payment of gambling debts, deceit, the purchase of prisoners taken in feuds and kidnapping" (McKewon 1999: 316). One Chinese migrant Wam Sing could not even recall how he got to Tasmania. One of Sing's descendants David said to us during an interview that "Sing knew nothing of his background. He only remembered he had come from China when he was nine years old". He could not trace any family or relatives connection with China though he had travelled to China several times to find out and even asked *Qiaoban* (Office for Overseas Chinese Affairs) to help by examining their archives. "He told us that was kidnapped from the street" said David (Poulson 2005).

While Williams (1999b), as does Wang Gungwu, invokes Chinese cultural in south China villages to explain migration patterns I suggest that the fact that migrants in the 19th Century were poor peasants recruited as labourers was more important in explaining Chinese migration pattern and migrants behaviour. In the north of Australia where tropical weather was considered harsh by the whites, Chinese labour was crucial for its development (Reynolds 2003). There were more Chinese than Europeans in

North Australia until 1911. “In the Northern Territory, the European population was consistently dwarfed by the Asian and Aboriginal populations until World War II. The Chinese in the Northern Territory peaked in 1888 at more than 6000...” (Ganter 2005:2). Ganter further argues that “the three engines of northern colonisation—pastoralism, pearling and transport—all depended on Asian labour: Chinese shepherds in North Queensland; Chinese railway workers in the Northern Territory...” (Ganter 2005:2). The Gold Rush both in the USA and Australia also attracted Chinese who did not migrate as cheap labourers. But even in this case the majority of the Chinese migrants were peasants largely from Guangdong via the processing centre of Hong Kong.

Migration, Sponsorship and Male Beasts of Burden

Why did the Chinese peasants want to migrate? Let us first examine the socio-economic factors at the origin of Chinese migrants. The rich and powerful Chinese did not want to migrate because there had not been socio-economic push and pull factors for them whereas the desperate poor peasants wanted to. However, hardly anyone of the poor could afford to pay for the journey. The most rational course of action to take, as it happened, was for the Chinese to pool family and even lineage resources together, or to borrow from human cargo organizers. So Chinese migration from South China was family orientated, clan sponsored and was also part of a big business (Williams 1999b). This pattern has far reaching moral and practical consequences in that the migrant perpetually had the family “on his back” (Chan 1997). As a result, the pattern of migration was rarely an individual adventure or an individual decision to settle in another country. This migration pattern dictates that the migrants were closely tied to their family circumstances at home even after departure on the one hand and on the other had to be dependent on the overseas network for a long time. For some who could not make enough money those burden and dependence were with them for the rest of their lives. In addition, these Chinese migrants encountered cultural, political and sociological difficulties and discriminations at their destinations. The family and the extended family therefore acted as agent of continuity and network of help for the migrant’s cultural identity under those circumstances. For these reasons this kind of ties of burden and dependence was seen and felt as a liability, but also as a strength and enablement.

That the Chinese did not have their families with them in Australia was often something that was suspicious of. In fact it was not their choice whether they left their wives and children in China. It is true that cultural values and customs of south China village that males were expected to earn outside the home and wives were expected to stay at home to look after parents-in-law. But in traditional Western societies women were expected to stay at home as well. That Chinese women did not accompany their husbands was not culturally essential, but dictated by economic and migration circumstances. The poor peasant could not afford even the price of his own journey let alone that of a family. Indeed, it would be absolutely irrational to take one’s wife and children to an un-known land of precarious future to say the least. A Chinese male would work and reside in Australia for years in order to save either to get married or to help their families in China. Thus, these males either had to live a sexless life or engage in unacceptable sexual activities such as visiting prostitutes. “...the Chinese male was either sexless or oversexed, and he was viewed as abnormal or pathological” (Chan 1997: 198).

It is clear from the above discussion that Chinese migrant behaviour was very much dictated by the sponsorship pattern and the family ties as well as how they were received at migration destinations. The prima facie evidence of Chinese migrant behaviour does not support the narrative that the Chinese migrants did not want to settle. Yet it is often argued or assumed that the Chinese were sojourners and therefore they did not belong to Australia on their own accord. The high profile Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey (1963), for instance, argues that role of the Chinese in the colonial gold rush was transitory and ephemeral. “They are generally birds of passage having no intention of settling permanently in the country they visited” (Oddie 1961:65).

The Politics of *Huaqiao* and Sojourning

Blainey's input to the sojourner discourse may serve well the purpose of justifying Australian exclusion of the Chinese, but the Chinese government also contributed to the sojourner discourse by constructing the term *huaqiao* (literally "Chinese residing elsewhere other than home"). The term "*huaqiao*" is puzzling on the one hand and irritating to some on the other. One might get irritated that second, third and even future generations of Chinese emigrants who might have nothing to do whatsoever with China or Chinese, except perhaps the skin colour, are called "*huaqiao*". It is puzzling because emigrants of European countries are not called "*ouqiao*" (Europeans residing elsewhere other than home), or "*yingqinao*" and "*deqiao*" (British or Germans residing overseas). The European migrants do not call themselves overseas persons, nor do the Chinese call European migrants overseas people. But why? The reason behind this puzzle has to be found in European and especially British imperialism and colonialism. The British, and to a lesser extent the Europeans, and later Japan the best student of the West though deeply influenced by Confucianism, would march into a territorial space to claim ownership, to settle as home. Therefore they do not consider themselves overseas. On the other hand, the Chinese, upon the Western impact of imperialism and colonialism, wanted to call up forces for a nation state, and therefore developed the narrative of *huaqiao*, the politics of which is that even if you are overseas you are still Chinese.

So the story of *huaqiao* was constructed when the ideology of nation-building became urgent under the Western colonialism. In fact, before the urgency of nationalism the Chinese government forbade Chinese migration overseas and did not stop condemning emigrants as "traitors" until the 1870s (Hoexter 1976). The Qing government at one point went as far as issuing an edict that to leave China was an offence punishable by death. From the 1890s the Chinese government started to tap overseas Chinese as a fruitful source of financial contributions and loyalty (McKewon 1999). In 1909 the Chinese state of the rapidly dying Qing Empire even claimed *ius sanguinis* for all migrants from China and their descendants in its Nationality Law (Douw 1999). "This [the beginning of the *huaqiao* discourse] created a situation in which every Chinese living abroad could, in principle, be mobilized on the basis of his Chinese descent" (Douw 1999: 33). The *huaqiao* categorization led to "the establishment of Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Southeast Asia during the 1900s, on the initiative of the Chinese government and all formally falling under the Chinese law of 1904" (Douw 1999:33, Yen 1985). The *huaqiao* narrative, which, according to Douw reached its apogee between the 1910s and 1930s (Douw 1999: 34), was to generate economic support and political loyalty.

The irony is that while the dying Qing government was trying to tap the overseas Chinese source, the republic activist Sun Yat-sen, a *huaqiao* himself, played the ethnic Han Chinese (almost all the migrants from South China are supposedly Han Chinese) card to arouse nationalism against the supposedly ethnic Manchu Qing government. Sun therefore played a very important role in constructing the *huaqiao* category when travelling to collect donations from overseas Chinese communities for a republic revolution in order to overthrow the Manchu rulers whom he did not consider Chinese.

The *huaqiao* narrative was therefore an elite call of nationalism in response to Western/Japanese colonialism. It was not an ideology of Chinese-centeredness and certainly not an ideology possessed and consumed by the majority of the migrants of the southern Chinese peasantry. According to *qiaokan* (overseas magazines) in Taishan, even as late as 1909, overseas Taishanese were simply referred to as *chu yang zhi ren* (persons who have gone overseas). The authoritative dictionary *ci yuan* (Origin of Words) published in 1908 did not even include *huaqiao* as a word (Hsu 2000:314). It was only when the Western powers started to carve up China and when the Chinese nationalists started China's nation-building did the term *huaqiao* begin to be widely used.

The term *huaqiao* is believed to be first used casually by the diplomat Huang Zunxian in 1883, and was followed by the official use in the Sino-French Treaty of 1885, referring to all Chinese ethnic descendants living in Vietnam (Wang 1981a and Zhuang 1989). Then in the Treaty of Shimomoseki,[‡] “which signalled the rise of Japan as a regional colonial power,” the protection of Japanese citizens in China was to be stipulated. In return the Chinese needed a similar term to refer to Chinese citizens in Japan and therefore the term *huaqiao* was became official (Douw 1999).

The construction of the term had another twist. Liang Qichao, the well-known republican revolutionary turned journalist and essay writer, who travelled overseas extensively including Australia, publicised the term *huaqiao* not only with the intention of protecting Chinese nationals abroad but also of advocating its colonist’s qualities, as counterparts to European colonists (Wang 1981a, b). That is, Liang the idealist wanted to say that Chinese settlers were also colonists, like the whites.

The *huaqiao* narrative had still another twist after the Communist Party of China defeated the Nationalist government that fled to Taiwan in 1949. This twist is clearly seen in how the term *huaqiao* is defined in *ci hai* (Sea of words), another authoritative dictionary, that was published in 1979. The definition of the term in *ci hai* specifically states that *huaqiao* refers to Chinese citizens residing overseas and the referent does not include citizens of other countries who are of Chinese ethnic origin.[§] This twist reflects the fact that PRC decided on a policy of encouraging overseas Chinese to adopt local citizenship, as explicitly expressed at the 1955 Bandung Conference.^{**} This is consistent with the PRC policy of not accepting dual citizenship, a policy designed to alleviate the anti-Communist fear flared up by the Cold War propaganda outside of China, the propaganda underlined by the sojourner discourse was used to justify, for instance, the killing of many Indonesians of supposedly Chinese ethnic background following the 1965 coup.

Chinese nationalism and the exploitation of the term *huaqiao* have contributed to the sojourner discourse in that the *huaqiao* narrative was aimed at launching resources for building up the Chinese nation, at the time of China’ turbulent modern history. The socio-economic circumstances and migration pattern at the Chinese origin of migration, unlike those of the British, dictated certain behaviour which was rational but perceived and interpreted to be sojourner characteristics While it is true that the early Chinese migrants came to Australia leaving families behind it is certainly not true that all of them did not want to settle in or would not like to have their families in Australia. That they were sojourners was imposed on them initially by the family circumstances and later by the Australian authorities. **The 1901 Immigration Restriction Act and the Pacific Islands Labourers Act**, the first act of the Federal Government of Australia, “enshrined the idea that even a [Chinese] person who had established domicile would not be treated as a migrant if he sojourned in his homeland and subsequently returned to Australia” (Grassby 1985: 97). After 1903, restriction on Chinese was even harsher: wives and minor children were not allowed to “accompany non-prohibited husbands to Australia. Successive governments maintained this policy, seeing the absence of Chinese females as a means of ensuring the withering away of an undesirable minority” (Grassby 1985: 97). Apart from aboriginals the Chinese were the most target-discriminated ethnic group. For example, Factory Acts of 1898 and 1813 “brought harsher regulations to bear on any workshop employing Chinese while Crown Land Consolidation Act 1912 prevented Chinese from acquiring such land” (Williams 1999b: 34). Clearly, discrimination against the Chinese had made them feel like sojourners and thus behaved like sojourners.

Traditional Peasantry Families and Elusive Migrant Homes

[‡] The treaty was signed in 1895 between Japan and China as a result of China’s defeat in its way with Japan in 1894-1895. The Treaty forced China to give up its protection of Korea and hence Korea became a Japanese colony. One of other humiliating conditions forced on China was that China had to cede Taiwan to Japan.

[§] *Ci hai*, Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1979:123.

^{**} I very much appreciate an anonymous reviewer’s reminder of this important historical fact.

As discussed earlier the 19th Century Chinese peasantry migration was rarely an individual initiative but a family venture that required the pooling together the resources of extended family or even a lineage. As a result what often happened was that the same lineage villagers would arrive at the same destinations of migration. This fact explains why they tended to stick together and to hold on to clan loyalty. Sometimes clan feuds could arise among the Chinese migrants and would have grave implications even back in China, as pointed out by Williams (1998). There was a report that severe fighting broke out between the Siyi and Sanyi people in Guangdong in 1898. The connection between this fighting and overseas feuds was so close that it was felt necessary by the Chinese government to send an official to the US to talk to the Chinese migrants that they needed to live peacefully (TWN1889:4) so that there would be peace back in China.

The families at home longed for the migrants to return, and of course with money. If they could not afford a return journey home they were expected to make enough money to pay for the debt as quickly as possible. For those who had left wives and children behind they were then expected to send money to maintain the family and for those who were single they were then expected to return to get married. Some were constantly told that their brides were chosen and lucky date was selected by the family and lineage for the wedding.

During the gold rush some Chinese did strike luck. According one report there was once when a Chinese returnee was carrying as much as 13,000 pounds of gold on a ship home (TWN 7/9/1898:4). Such stories of becoming instantly rich and wealthy, real or rumours, inflamed two vicious circles. The first vicious circle was that the more the poor peasants wanted to leave and the higher the migration price, hence heavier the burden on the migrants and therefore the more the family and clan reliance. The second vicious circle was that the higher expectations of remittance the heavier burden on the migrant and therefore the more reliance on family and clan. This emotional and financial chain was maintained not only by those who returned home, very often bringing news, letters, messages and money from village lineage members, but also largely maintained by the agents and entrepreneurs in Hong Kong who had connections with the headmen in Australia, such as our research on Ma Mon Chin in Tasmania shows.

Publications of newspapers and magazines in Chinese language both at migrants' homes and migrants' settled places such as Melbourne and Sydney also managed to maintain this chain. Our research on magazines published in China during at that time indicate that the materials were written by people in China always had overseas Chinese as audience in mind and were distributed through Hong Kong to America, and Australia, the content of which ranged from news of their home towns, to the affairs of China, to advice on matters such as how to post international mail, the price of rice, the latest changes in immigration laws and policies. As the Chinese at home were struggling to come to terms with nationalism all these publications called the overseas Chinese to love their country and to donate to worthy, (or not so worthy causes), to the extent that some of the appeals are clearly some kind of extortions.

The combined circumstances of both home connection and discrimination abroad meant that for most of the peasantry Chinese migrants the realization and demonstration of honour, dignity and status could only happen back in China. Therefore they worked hard and saved hard to send money back. The remittances sent back to China was not only to support their wives, children and extended families and to build new houses but also to contribute to the welfare of their home villages and towns. The money might be used to build clan temples, schools, even lecture halls. Orphanages, charitable hospitals, lavatories, roads were built and clan lands (Hsu 2000) were bought with remittance money. "From the turn of the century until 1937, yearly remittances exceeded Taishan's agricultural output" (Hsu 2000: 311). According to the well-respected scholar Chen Ta, overseas support more than doubled the family income in comparison to those of neighbours without such contacts and money sent from overseas

constituted between 75 and 80 percent of those families' incomes (Chen 1940). A local scholar Pan Zhiqiu noticed the impact of remittance on the life of local villages

Ever since the beginning of the Tongzhi reign (1862-74), more and more people have been going overseas, making money, returning to China, and building houses. In a flash, clothing and food tend towards Chinese American, the business of marriage becomes especially contentious, wasteful, and excessively extravagant. The tremendous change in environment, the price rise of food and implements, as well as the multitude of bandits also arise from this [emigration]...(Pan 1898:66a).

In Taishan, education was greatly boosted by the overseas money. In 1932, for instance, school attendance rates reached 75 percent for both girls and boys (Hsu 2000: 321). That was even higher than some of the rural areas in contemporary China.^{††} Rural families, with overseas wealth, would move to towns and county centres. Taishan for instance expanded greatly as a result and hundreds of businesses such as banks, receiving agencies, doctors, herbalists, stores, restaurants and hotels were set up.

There is evidence that the emotional and financial burden were so much to some who could not achieved what they had been expected that they eventually cut of the chain altogether. They could not afford to go home and they could not make enough to send home either. They therefore stopped writing, and stopped sending messages home. They could not face it so they just simply quit. Thus we witness many a lonely Chinese man in Australia who simply disappeared from this earth without any trace. According to Williams those disappeared males in NSW was estimated to be between four to five percent of the Chinese population (Williams 1999b). Many Chinese migrants might spend 10 to 20 years, and in some cases 30 to 40 years, working, remitting and living a “bachelor” life in Australia before seeing their families and villages again. The reasons for delaying a home-bound trip include failure to make enough money to launch a trip, the necessity of paying off the debts owed to buying passage in the “credit ticket” system (Choi 1975, Huck 1967), and the necessity of saving sufficient money to support parents and provide a “bride price”. Their decision to marry a village woman back home was again not a Chineseness decision made from many choices, as there were few Chinese women outside of China and intermarriage was difficult. In fact, Chinese men in Australia were at some stage forbidden to live or marry aboriginal women. The Queensland *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* had made it illegal for Chinese men to cohabit with Aboriginal women and forbade Chinese employment of Indigenous people (Ganter 1998 and 2005, May 1984, Evans et al 1993 and Ramsay 2001). After an initial trip to marry in China, subsequent trips might be made more frequently, every two or three years and lasting an average of 12 to 18 months (Williams 1998), subject to immigration restrictions and so on.

The fear of the yellow peril and manifestation of the ideology of white race supremacy coincided with turmoils and upheavals in China. The second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century saw one of the most dramatic political, social and cultural changes in Chinese history. The Western imperial and colonial impact on China was so fatal that the Qing Empire collapsed more or less on its own accord. Subsequent changes led to civil wars and social and economic chaos. Starvation, famine, violence and robbery were routine affairs in China. This was one of the important reasons why the Chinese were desperate to leave the country.

When I did an extensive search on *Tung Wah News* (TWN, East Chinese Times, a paper in Chinese published in Melbourne) the term “village” renders 222 entries from 1898 to 1936 (each entry contains news items of a day selected by the people who have done the index. Therefore it might only have one

^{††} According to Chen Yuzheng, President of the Guangdong Overseas Chinese Association, in 2003 Guangdong attracted US\$15.8 billion and of which US\$12 billion were from overseas Chinese. Since 1978 overseas Chinese including those from Hong Kong and Macao donation to Guangdong reached 30 billion RMB, that built more 18,000 schools and half dozen universities and colleges, 3361 bridges and roads of 18,537 kilometres Xinhua Guangzhou News 21st June 2004.

piece of news on that day or as many as ten). Of the 222 entries there are 127 that contain news of either robbery, being robbed, bandits, loot, looting. There are a couple of looting by foreign troops, the Russian and the Portugals, also a couple of looting by the Chinese imperial soldiers reported, and half a dozen of looting by the Chinese Nationalist army soldiers.

Villages that had migrants overseas attracted bandits especially. It was either real or perceived that the families with overseas connections had jewelleries, expensive furniture and even cash to grab. In some villages the situation got so bad that the villagers built up blockhouse and watchtowers (*diaolou*). We made a couple trips to these monstrous buildings that were built in the late 19th century to protect the families who had overseas connections. These houses are now listed as heritage buildings but mostly unoccupied. Who built them? Who were the descendants of those wealthy *huaqiao*? With some preliminary information from some Tasmanians who claim to have Chinese heritage, some of them do not look even remotely Chinese, our field work in the area and search of local documents and interviews found only few significant connections. Most of the villagers interviewees just said “mei ren” (no people), “zou le” (gone), and “bu zhidao” (don’t know). Serena, a woman from Melbourne, took the advantage of our project and connections with *qiaoban* (Office for Overseas Chinese affairs),^{‡‡} went with us in one of our research trips, hoping to find out her family connections. The local *qiaoban* in both Xinhui and Kaiping Counties of Guangdong (Serena had the idea that her ancestors came from one of the two counties) was very hospitable and helpful by providing us with a free minivan, free meals and opened every relevant archive possible. But Serena failed to find any trace. The most likely explanation is that once those Chinese were allowed to settle in the white colonies they not only did settle but also left their Chinese connection behind. In other words, unless they had to the Chinese did not just sojourn: they settled in their migration destinations with abandoned homes in China.

As it happened, many Chinese migrants remained bachelors until they could get back to China to marry. Some married locally, either with ‘white’ women, or with indigenous women, despite the odds against them. According to the 1911 Commonwealth Census, of the 21,032 recorded male Chinese, 801 had wives in Australia and 6,724 had wives in China. Of those who had wives in Australia, 181 of the women were recorded as China born, 63 UK born, 16 born Scots and 22 Irish. The other 483 were either Australian born Chinese or of mixed ancestry (Commonwealth Census 1911). Interracial marriage between Chinese men and indigenous Australians in north Australia were more than usual in spite of restrictions of one kind or another from time to time (Ramay 2001). What is worth pointing out is that even in some of these interracial marriages there could be some home connection in that “[m]any of the local women married by Chinese, as well as wives brought in from China, were actually second wives, a practice engaged in by Chinese men born outside of China as well” (McKeown 1999: 318). The first marriage was usually the primary wife who was expected to stay with the clan to keep the family together and many primary wives would actually encourage their husbands to marry second wives abroad so that they would be less inclined to gamble, visit prostitutions, or disperse their earnings in the recreations common to men without families (Chen 1940 and Pei 1994).^{§§}

Conclusion

There is a plenty of evidence that the Chinese migrants did seem to have a strong emotional ties to their homeland. They wanted to be buried in China when they died; they remitted money back home and they might have wanted to visit their home towns every few years. It is also true that many Chinese did return to China. However, this kind of *primi facie* evidence does not in itself prove that the Chinese did not intend to settle and make a life in Australia or any other British colonies that they had migrated to in the

^{‡‡} Guangdong has the most extensive and well-resourced *qiaoban* because the province, until recently, has the most overseas Chinese connections. There is a prestigious *qiaoban* at every level of government administration from township to country and to the provincial government.

^{§§} “The most significant problem in Hawaii, at least according to Hawaiian missionaries, was the abandonment of wives and children in Hawaii by men returning to China.” (Adams 1937).

19th Century. It is argued in this paper that kind of behaviour that is often attributed as sojourning is not necessarily convincing evidence supporting the Chinese sojourner discourse. Many migrants from other countries who came to Australia during the Gold Rush later returned home. “It was also typical of the nineteenth-century New Zealand gold rushes where 1.4 million people migrated from the British Isles, yet a million of those were Scots who returned home” (Reeves 2003: 57 and Davine 1999).

Indeed much of the Chinese homebound behaviour was forced by circumstances beyond their own control. These circumstances include the necessity of paying back the debt that was incurred for the trip to migrate (such as the credit ticket system), the unlikely prospect of getting married outside of China (The fact that until 1911 the emigration of women was illegal according to Chinese law did not help Chinese men (Young 1995)) and above all the racist attitudes and violence against them. In other words, in many cases the sojourning feature of the Chinese was a forced behaviour, “dictated by a hostile social climate and harsh anti-Chinese laws, rather than a matter of free choice” (Ip 2003:228 and Kuhn 1997). That this was the case for many can be demonstrated by the fact that in contrast to the white dominated countries such as US Canada, Australia where white racism against the ‘coloured’ was practiced, there were more interracial marriages between Chinese men and indigenous people in countries such as the Kingdom of Hawaii, Samoa, and various Polynesian Islands. There was significant intermarriage between the Chinese and local women in these areas, and the Chinese settled as an accepted, integrated community (Ip 2003:228). According to Ip, between 1200 and 1500 Chinese established Chinese-Hawaiian families before 1900. The same seems to be true in New Zealand where the Chinese were integrating well with the Maoris and there was an “affinity in adversity”^{***} until the *Pakeha* (whites referred to by the Maoris) politicians and academics began to stir up trouble by denouncing that the so-called “miscegenation” and propagating that the Maoris were the victims of the yellow curse. Even in Australia, by the end of the 1890s when there was no “gold to rush”, there were 5,000 market gardeners in NSW and 2,000 in Sydney (TWN 19/7/1899:2). The Chinese contribution to the development of Australia, apart from what has been mentioned about North Australia also include their work in winery (Lancashire 2000) and farming (Frost 2002), and business in rural Australia.

With this kind of evidence one cannot help but asking: Where was their home and where was it for the Chinese migrants to sojourn? We may even ask which home we are talking about. A sojourner discourse not only justified the exclusion of Chinese but also made their “white” wives and descendants of interracial marriage feel homeless.^{†††} The Chinese identification with their cultural past may have contributed to the construction of the sojourner discourse. However, migrants’ identification with their immediate cultural past is not unique to the Chinese, nor should it be considered China-centred.

Therefore I will conclude the paper by reiterating that the narrative of both the sojourning Chinese and *huaqiao* in the 19th Century is political and does not have much to do with the cultural essentialist “Chineseness”. It is political for both terms. The politics has had much to do with British imperialism and colonialism which made the British abroad non-overseas people (not sojourners) but master owners of the new territories, at the expense of even the indigenous people, let alone the Chinese. The other side

^{***} The Maoris were treated better than were the Chinese as a social and racial group and were included as part of nation building, partly because of the Waitangi Treaty, partly because of the guilt the whites felt for reducing the Maori population by more than a half in a matter of a little longer than a decade. “In 1840, when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed, Maori far outnumbered British immigrants, with a population of 115,000. By the 1850s the Maori population had fallen to 50,000, the result of ravages of wars and disease.” Ip, *ibid*, p.230.

^{†††} A woman from London was disowned by her family when she married a Chinaman. After the woman passed away the husband Lum Liu smuggled their sons Bill and Charlie to China. They were first treated by the villagers as foreign devils. Only after Bill put his hand up first in his class of Chinese boys when the teacher asked who would sacrifice his life for the sake of China was he accepted as a Chinese (Grassby 1985:97). There was an English woman who married a Chinese market gardener for 12 years. But after giving birth to her seventh daughter she kissed all her children goodbye before shooting herself (TWN 31/7/1901:3), presumably because she could not cope with the circumstances anymore. Tragic stories like this are only footnotes to the construction of the sojourner discourse that had disregarded ordinary Chinese settlers who wanted and tried hard to make a life in white colonies.

of the politics is that upon the European and Japanese imperialism the Chinese developed the *huaqiao* narrative to call up the overseas Chinese for the cause of nationalism.

Finally, for the Chinese migrants, home was in China, but home was also in the colony. For the early Chinese migrants, home was ambiguous and was a space covering different continents. They might feel both continents as home or they might feel neither as home. The direction of feeling depends on the particular political/socio-economic and individual circumstances at any given time. It was often difficult for a migrant to decide where home was. In this sense early Chinese migrants to British colonies in the 19th Century were already transnational: those uneducated Chinese peasants were actually post-modern because they anticipated transnationalism a century ahead of time (Li Minghuan 2013). But this itself is too complex topic involving the context of modernity and post-modernism and therefore is beyond the scope of this paper.

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