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*Returning Home with Glory: Chinese Villagers around the Pacific, 1849 to 1949*

Michael Williams

# Locating Chinese Women

## Historical Mobility between China and Australia

Edited by Kate Bagnall and Julia T. Martínez

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Mrs Chan Harr, Marjorie Wong Yee, Annie Kwok, Norma Wong Yee, Ida Kwok, and Patty Wong Yee on their arrival in Sydney from Hong Kong, March 8, 1938

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# Introduction: Chinese Australian Women, Migration, and Mobility

Kate Bagnall and Julia T. Martínez

As the first edited collection on women's historical connections between China and Australia, *Locating Chinese Women* aims to convey a sense of the diverse experiences of Chinese Australian women over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We present studies of women living in, and between, Australia and China and consider how migration and mobility shaped their lives. The global literature on the Chinese diaspora has only recently become aware of Australia's importance as a site of historical Chinese migration, but Australia is now being considered in the context of entangled Asia Pacific histories, in which local experiences speak to broader regional, oceanic, and global themes.<sup>1</sup> As for the experiences of Chinese women in Australia, this history remains largely unknown. We have thus been inspired to compile this collection, which we hope will enrich histories of women in the trans-Pacific world.<sup>2</sup> The volume focuses on Chinese women whose lives were connected to Australia, but it moves beyond a national context to trace the movements of bodies, ideas, and cultural practices back and forth across the seas. In so doing, we aim to place Chinese Australian women squarely within, not just on the periphery of, the historical circulations of what Henry Yu terms the 'Cantonese Pacific'.

The title *Locating Chinese Women* can be read in more than one sense. 'Locating' suggests the uncovering or tracking down of women absent from existing histories, as well as the situating or placing of women within national and transnational historiographies. Chinese Australian women have been doubly erased in a gendered and racialized historiography. A masculinist whitewashing process has

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1. See, for example, Henry Yu, 'Intermittent Rhythms of the Cantonese Pacific', in *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s*, ed. Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 392–414, and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).
  2. A recent example is Catherine Ceniza Choy and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu (eds), *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2017).



long underplayed the role of both women and Chinese in Australian history. Yet even as scholars of the Chinese diaspora in Australia have sought to address this whitewashing, they have more often brought to the fore the histories of Chinese men rather than women. John Fitzgerald observed in his award-winning history *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* that in 1901, the year Australia became a nation, the Chinese population in Australia totalled 29,627, of whom just 474, or 1.6 percent, were women. Like other historians before him, Fitzgerald recognized the gendered nature of Chinese migration and the numerical dominance of men, and so gave this as his rationale for continuing to write ‘chiefly, albeit not exclusively’, about men.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as we argue in this book, that women were a numerical minority does not make their lives less worthy of scholarly attention.

The comparatively small number of Chinese women in Australia has made it easy to overlook their presence, and this, combined with the difficulties of locating relevant sources, has contributed to an apparently legitimized acceptance of male-centred history.<sup>4</sup> In this collection we seek to challenge that framing. How might tracing the lives of the 474 Chinese women in Australia at the moment of Federation disrupt accepted narratives of Chinese migration and settlement? Furthermore, how might the inclusion of the thousands of women in South China who were connected to those 29,627 Chinese men in Australia—as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters—reshape the telling of Chinese Australian history? This collection offers a place to begin such a reconfiguration.

## Writing Chinese Australian Women’s History

Chinese Australian history has long been written as a history of genderless men, and so an important aim of *Locating Chinese Women* is what women’s historians refer to as ‘recovery history’—that is, identifying and researching the lives of individual women with the aim of making their stories and experiences visible and part of the broader history. To emphasize Chinese Australian women as historical actors in their own right, we name their names and explore their unique lived experiences. The task of locating absent Chinese Australian women may seem to hark back to the methodologies of earlier women’s histories, that of ‘discovering women’, but it is an important first step.<sup>5</sup> Historian Alice Kessler-Harris has observed how, with the shift from women’s history to gender history in the 1990s, many researchers turned

3. John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), p. 14.

4. Mainstream Australian histories of women and gender have also largely overlooked the presence of Chinese Australian women. For an overview, see Marilyn Lake, ‘Women’s and Gender History in Australia: A Transformative Practice’, *Journal of Women’s History* 25, no. 4 (2013), pp. 190–211.

5. Shirley Hune has identified ‘discovering women’ as an early, and ultimately unsatisfactory, approach to the study of Asian/Pacific Islander American women. See Shirley Hune, ‘Introduction—Through “Our” Eyes: Asian/Pacific Islander American Women’s History’, in *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Shirley Hune and Gail M. Nomura (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), p. 5.

away from the history of women per se, leading to a diminished emphasis on the lives of individual women.<sup>6</sup> But in the case of Chinese Australian women, whose histories are only now being excavated, it is fundamental that we simply document their existence, even as we attempt to assert and understand their place in a wider historiography. With this collection we do not therefore aim to just paste women's experiences onto mainstream, male-centred histories of Chinese migration. Rather, we hope to shift the narrative from absence to presence, and question fundamental assumptions about family, mobility, gender relations, work, and education.

The first challenge in researching Chinese Australian women's history is the difficulty of locating and accessing historical sources. As practitioners of women's history have long found, there is a dearth of written evidence left by early Chinese Australian women; however, while letters, diaries, and journals written by them might be scarce, there *are* historical records that document their presence and tell us something of their lives. Chinese American historian Sucheng Chan has noted that we should not ignore the 'historical sediments' left by Chinese women and girls, even if they were not written by the women themselves.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the fragmentary records of Chinese Australian women's lives necessitate different approaches, as can be seen in the contributions to this volume, which use various kinds of sources, including newspapers, private and government archives, oral testimony, and photographs.<sup>8</sup> Historians of Chinese Australia have sometimes lamented the difficulties of finding a 'Chinese perspective' in Australian sources, yet the chapter by Mei-fen Kuo in this volume suggests possibilities for locating and using Chinese-language sources in Australia and China, whether they be published works like newspapers and *qiaokan*, or private letters and oral histories.<sup>9</sup>

The digital revolution has expanded the possibilities for research on Chinese Australian women, most significantly with the digitization of historical newspapers available through the National Library of Australia's Trove (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>). A search of newspapers in Trove for 'Chinese woman', for example, brings up some 7,000 Australian articles dated between 1850 and 1950, many of which document the activities of individual Chinese women in Australia. Chapters in this volume by Antonia Finnane and Paul Macgregor demonstrate the fruitfulness of using newspapers for recovering the ordinary and extraordinary lives of Chinese Australian women. Online indexes, digitized archives, and family histories,

6. Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Do We Still Need Women's History?', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 7, 2007.

7. Sucheng Chan, 'Against All Odds: Chinese Female Migration and Family Formation on American Soil During the Early Twentieth Century', in *Chinese American Transnationalism: The Flow of People, Resources, and Ideas Between China and America During the Exclusion Era*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), pp. 34–35.

8. On the innovative use of sources by women's historians, see Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz and Mary Elizabeth Perry (eds), *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

9. One interesting historical text that has recently emerged through the research of Mei-Fen Kuo, Ely Finch, and Michael Williams is Wong Shee Ping, *The Poison of Polygamy: A Social Novel*, trans. Ely Finch (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2019).

including those available through Ancestry.com, also enable us to trace mobile Chinese Australian women across colonial, state, and national borders in a way that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. As Australian women's historian Cath Bishop has noted, 'Women have been present, but buried in mountains of paper. With digitisation, their presence and, in particular, that of ordinary women has been rendered more visible.'<sup>10</sup>

In *Locating Chinese Women* we aim to complicate the category of 'Chinese Australian women' by suggesting a multiplicity of identities, voices, locations, movements, and mobilities. In so doing, we have allowed as broad a definition of 'Chinese Australian women' as possible—that is, women of Chinese or part-Chinese ethnicity, born in Australia, China, Hong Kong, or elsewhere, who lived in Australia for some or all of their lives. These women may have been British subjects, Australian citizens (after 1948), or Chinese nationals by birth or marriage. We use the term 'Chinese women in Australia' to refer to these women within Australia, while in an international context the term 'Chinese Australian women' differentiates them from Chinese women in China and Hong Kong, and from other 'overseas Chinese women', including those from New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.

The term 'Chinese' requires some comment. The women we discuss in this volume were mainly Cantonese by birth or heritage. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Australia's Chinese population was predominantly Cantonese, with most migrants arriving via Hong Kong from the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong Province. Notable exceptions were several thousand men from Amoy (Xiamen) who arrived as indentured labourers in New South Wales in the mid-nineteenth century, and the contracted labourers sent to Western Australia through Singapore in the late nineteenth century, who, along with Cantonese, included men from Hokkien, Hainanese, Teochew, and Hakka-speaking areas of coastal southern China.<sup>11</sup> After World War II the make-up of the Chinese Australian population began to diversify with the entry of Chinese students—women as well as men—from Singapore, Malaysia, and other parts of Southeast Asia, as shown in Alanna Kamp's chapter in this volume. Despite this, Cantonese remained the dominant Chinese language in Australia until after the turn of the twenty-first century.

The majority of women discussed in this volume were born in China or Australia to two Chinese parents, yet we also recognize the significance of women of mixed race in the wider history of Chinese Australia. Intimate relationships between non-Chinese women—of Indigenous, European, and other Asian heritage—and Chinese men were common in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia, a product

10. Catherine Bishop, 'The Serendipity of Connectivity: Piecing Together Women's Lives in the Digital Archive', *Women's History Review* 26, no. 5 (2017), p. 767.

11. Maxine Darnell, 'Life and Labour for Indentured Chinese Shepherds in New South Wales, 1847–55', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 6 (2004), pp. 137–58; Margaret Slocomb, *Among Australia's Pioneers, Chinese Indentured Pastoral Workers on the Northern Frontier 1848 to c. 1880* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2014); Jan Ryan, *Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia* (South Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995), pp. 22–23.

of the majority-male character of Chinese emigration at the time. The daughters and granddaughters of these unions formed the majority of the early female ‘Chinese’ population in Australia.<sup>12</sup> In the ‘polyethnic north’ of Australia, the historiography has recognized how Chinese, Japanese, and Malays widely mixed and intermarried with Indigenous Australians and each other.<sup>13</sup> We acknowledge the multiple ways mixed-race women identified themselves as ‘Chinese’, or not, particularly as they partnered and formed families of their own; many married back into the Chinese community, but others partnered men of the same ethnicity as their non-Chinese mothers or from another ethnic group. Less common was the marriage of the Australian-born daughters of two Chinese parents to non-Chinese men, and even more rare before World War II was marriage between migrant Chinese women and non-Chinese men. Our ability to gauge the number of Chinese Australian women who married non-Chinese men presents special difficulties; as sociologist C. Y. Choi noted in his 1968 study of Chinese migration to Australia, Chinese women who married and took the surname of their non-Chinese husband may be ‘no longer recognizable’ as Chinese, at least to those working from written sources.<sup>14</sup> One such woman was Dr Gwen Fong, discussed in Julia Martínez’s chapter, who was more difficult to trace after her marriage to Jack Mitchell.

Mobility, or rather a lack thereof, has come to be a defining characteristic of women in Chinese Australian histories. We are commonly led to understand that the migration of women and girls to Australia was rarely sanctioned by Cantonese families, a situation that was compounded by anti-Chinese immigration laws. Once in Australia, it is assumed that Chinese women were located mostly in the home, isolated and excluded, consumed by the duties of wife and mother and bound by traditional gender roles. Many of the chapters presented in this volume seek to challenge

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12. On Chinese European couples and families, see, for example, Kevin Rains, *Cedars of the West: The Ah Foo Family Story* (North Melbourne: Chinese Heritage in Northern Australia Inc., 2011); Kate Bagnall, ‘Golden Shadows on a White Land: An Exploration of the Lives of White Women Who Partnered Chinese Men and their Children in Southern Australia, 1855–1915’ (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2007); Pauline Rule, ‘The Chinese Camps in Colonial Victoria: Their Role as Contact Zones’, in *After the Rush: Regulation, Participation and Chinese Communities in Australia 1860–1940*, ed. Sophie Couchman, John Fitzgerald, and Paul Macgregor (Melbourne: Otherland Press, 2004), pp. 119–31, and ‘A Tale of Three Sisters: Australian-Chinese Marriages in Colonial Victoria’, in *Chinese in Oceania*, ed. Kee Pookong, Ho Chooi-hon, Paul Macgregor, and Gary Presland, pp. 65–76 (Melbourne: ASCADAPI, Chinese Museum and Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies, Victoria University of Technology, 2002); Dinah Hales, ‘Lost Histories: Chinese-European Families of Central Western New South Wales, 1850–80’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 6 (2004), pp. 93–112; Sandi Robb, ‘Myths Lies and Invisible Lives: European Women and Chinese Men in North Queensland 1870–1900’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* 12, pp. 95–109; Jan Ryan, ‘“She Lives with a Chinaman”: Orient-ing “White” Women in the Courts of Law’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 60 (1999), pp. 149–59, 215–17.
  13. Regina Ganter (with Julia Martínez and Gary Lee), *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia* (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2006); Shen Yuanfang and Penny Edwards (eds), *Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Asian Encounters in Australia, 1901–2001* (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, 2003); Guy Ramsay, ‘The Chinese Diaspora in Torres Strait’, in *Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait*, ed. A. Shnukal, G. Ramsay and Y. Nagata (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), pp. 53–79, and ‘Cherbourg’s Chinatown: Creating an Identity of Place on an Australian Aboriginal Settlement’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 29 (2003), pp. 109–122.
  14. C. Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975), p. 119.

these assumptions, showing Chinese Australian women to be far more mobile than previously imagined. These women show up in unexpected places—in schools and universities, in business, and in politics—taking advantage of the changing social and political worlds of Australia and China. The collection highlights mobility in all its forms—physical, social, cultural, and economic—something that is particularly apparent in the life stories of individual Chinese Australian women, such as those presented in the chapters by Natalie Fong, Sophie Loy-Wilson, and Julia Martínez.<sup>15</sup>

Stasis is also an important part of the story of mobility, and it was not just women ‘on the move’ who were affected by the forces of migration from South China to Australia. As Antonia Finnane’s chapter demonstrates, the lives of ‘stationary’ women were entangled with those of mobile men, men whose movements were supported and facilitated by their mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters staying put. Women’s lives were therefore shaped, although not necessarily defined, by the contingencies of circumstance, as the daughter of a migrant father, as a *gāmsāanpòh* (金山婆 M: *jīnshānpó*; ‘Gold Mountain wife’) or grass widow, as a wife who traveled to join her husband overseas, or as a *mui tsai* or servant girl (妹仔 C: *mùihjái*, M: *mèizǎi*) accompanying her mistress overseas. Women’s status and mobility could also change over the course of their lives, as shown in the story of Ham Hop in Kate Bagnall’s chapter. As Chinese American feminist historian Shirley Hune has noted, the lived realities of our subjects are everywhere: ‘private and public spheres; local, regional, national, and global arenas; and in between.’<sup>16</sup>

In this collection we have sought to consider different aspects of Chinese Australian women’s lives—both as individuals in their own right and as the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of men—and to position them as complex, active subjects in their own histories. Although traditionally thought of as hidden and silent, we show Chinese women whose life stories demonstrate the complexities of navigating female lives in the face of imposed categories of gender, race, culture, and class. Chinese Australian history to date has done much to document the discrimination and oppression that Chinese migrants faced in Australia, but, as Antonia Finnane’s chapter demonstrates, Chinese Australian women confronted further, or different, forms of oppression, including gender-based violence and domestic abuse. That said, the Chinese Australian women discussed in this volume were not just victims of the social, familial, and political structures that framed their lives; they used strategies of accommodation, negotiation, and resistance to challenge traditional patriarchal expectations. In examining both the constraints placed on women and the ways women negotiated them, this volume echoes the work of feminist historians of China and the Chinese diaspora over the past three decades.<sup>17</sup>

15. For more on Chinese Australian women’s mobility, see Angela Woollacott, *Race and the Modern Exotic, Three ‘Australian’ Women on Global Display* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2011).

16. Hune, ‘Introduction—Through “Our” Eyes’, p. 6.

17. See, for example, Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers (eds.), *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude, and Escape* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1994).

As Joan Judge has noted, Chinese women's history has challenged the dominant stereotype of the footbound, oppressed, and voiceless 'traditional Chinese woman,' and 'revealed the capaciousness of the "tradition" that allegedly held Chinese women hostage, women's resourceful deployment of that tradition to their own ends, and the heterogeneity of their historical experience.'<sup>18</sup>

### Chinese Australian Women and the Cantonese Pacific World

From an international perspective, the history of the Chinese in Australia, and consequently the history of Chinese women in Australia, has often been framed in the broader and better-known context of Chinese migration to the United States, even though the two nations have distinct immigration histories. Wang Gungwu, whose pioneering work helped to set the Australian research agenda, wrote that after the American and Australasian gold rushes of the mid-nineteenth century there was 'no alternative to sojourning' for the Chinese men who remained 'because exclusionary policies were introduced that kept women out.'<sup>19</sup> George Peffer, who has written on Chinese female immigration to the United States before Exclusion, has also suggested a similarity in the histories of the United States and Australia, particularly in comparison with Hawai'i and sites in Southeast Asia.<sup>20</sup>

Broadly speaking, the histories of Chinese migration and settlement in Australia and the United States, as well as those of Canada and New Zealand, are similar. Large-scale Cantonese migration began with gold rushes in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by economic diversification into trade and agriculture, and the establishment of communities that were shaped through laws and policies that restricted Chinese immigration and curtailed the rights of Chinese migrants and natural-born citizens of Chinese heritage. Chinese migrants mostly came from the Pearl River Delta counties in Guangdong, were overwhelmingly male, and faced the same set of migratory push and pull factors; as Henry Yu has suggested, Chinese in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada were part of the same historical circulations reaching out from South China across and around the Pacific.<sup>21</sup>

When we look more closely, however, it is clear that despite these shared characteristics each Pacific destination has its own distinct history, including that of Chinese women's migration and settlement. There is California, with its substantial mid-nineteenth-century trade in Chinese prostitutes; Hawai'i, with a greater number of settled family groups; Australia, with small numbers of migrant Chinese

18. Joan Judge, 'Chinese Women's History: Global Circuits, Local Meanings,' *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013), p. 227.

19. Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 63.

20. George Anthony Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 22–27.

21. Henry Yu, 'Mountains of Gold: Canada, North America, and the Cantonese Pacific,' in *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Tan Chee-Beng (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 108–21.



women but many locally born mixed-race daughters; and New Zealand, with tiny numbers of migrant women and families until World War II. Over the past two decades, the transnational turn has demonstrated the utility of looking beyond national borders to understand national stories of migration and settlement, but it has also reminded us of the value of comparative histories.<sup>22</sup> Adam McKeown's *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change*, for example, which considers Peru, Chicago and Hawai'i, compared the different patterns of female migration and family life within the individual contexts of these three locales.<sup>23</sup> In the study of overseas Chinese women's history, tracing both the individual/local/national and interconnected/global/transnational histories of Chinese women's migration and settlement can help us better understand our own histories, be they in Australia, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong, or Guangdong. Understanding the differences, as well as the similarities, leads to a better understanding overall of the lives of women within the Cantonese Pacific world. With this in mind, and to provide context for the women's lives discussed in this volume, we next sketch a brief outline of the characteristics and constraints of female Chinese migration to Australia between the 1850s and the 1950s.

An imbalance in the numbers of women and men was common to Chinese communities around the Pacific, including those in Australia, Hawai'i, and the United States, as well as those in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Penang, and Malacca. According to George Pepper, 'unattached men dominated the initial Chinese population for each of these destinations, and in every instance the female-to-male ratio remained unbalanced between 1861 and 1911'.<sup>24</sup> The settlement pattern in Australia and the United States was quite distinct from that in Southeast Asia and Hawai'i, however, with a consistently low female-to-male ratio. In the United States, by 1910 the female-to-male ratio was only 7:100, while in Australia in 1911 it was 4:100.<sup>25</sup> By comparison, in Hawai'i in 1910 the ratio was 26:100, while in Penang in 1911 it was 42:100.<sup>26</sup> When viewed proportionally in this way, Australia and the United States seem not dissimilar; however, the real numbers present a different picture.

The earliest, but very scant, records of Chinese women in the Australian colonies date from the mid-1850s. The New South Wales census for 1856, for example, recorded 6 Chinese females among a male population of 1,800, while the Victorian census for 1857 recorded 3 Chinese females among a male population of 25,421.<sup>27</sup>

22. For example, Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*; Laura Madokoro, *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Michael Williams, *Returning Home with Glory: Chinese Villagers around the Pacific, 1849 to 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018).

23. Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 26–60.

24. Pepper, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here*, p. 15.

25. Pepper, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here*, pp. 23–24.

26. Pepper, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here*, pp. 18–19.

27. *Census of the Colony of New South Wales* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1857), p. 4; Kathryn Cronin, *Colonial Casualties: Chinese in Early Victoria* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1982), p. 132 (Table 2).

In 1861, the first year in which the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland each conducted a population census, there were 11 Chinese females recorded in a male population of 38,247. By comparison, in the United States in 1860 there were 1,784 Chinese women and 33,149 Chinese men.<sup>28</sup> A decade later the number of Chinese females in Australia had grown to 51 (among 27,624 males), while the number in the United States had grown to 4,566 (among 58,633 males) (Table 1.1). Over the century to 1950, the number of Chinese women and girls in Australia, as recorded in decennial censuses, continued to increase, while the male Chinese population fluctuated and then decreased each decade from 1881 following the reintroduction of anti-Chinese immigration laws (Table 1.2, see p. 12). Despite this continual increase in female Chinese, however, by 1947 there were still only about 2,500 Chinese women and girls in Australia.

Census statistics such as these are useful for considering broad patterns of population change, and as Alanna Kamp has argued in this volume and elsewhere, they can also be read critically to revise gendered understandings of Australia's Chinese past.<sup>29</sup> The numbers of Chinese women and girls in Australia might have been small, but they were not 'absent' as previous historiography has suggested. Census statistics can also be used to better understand the make-up of the female Chinese Australian population, for example, by revealing the significant numbers of mixed-race women and girls (Table 1.2). These statistics should, however, be used with some caution. Historian Kathryn Cronin has noted how colonial statistics are not an accurate representation of the Chinese community, 'for colonial efforts to collect Chinese data were greatly hindered by communication problems, by the migratory nature of the Chinese population and by Chinese suspicion of colonial authorities.'<sup>30</sup> Chinese women—who, like their male counterparts, 'sojourned' in Australia—would also not have been recorded if they arrived and departed again between decennial censuses. The number of individual Chinese women who lived in Australia between the 1850s and 1940s is likely, therefore, to be greater than the census figures suggest.

The number of Chinese women and girls in Australia increased between the 1850s and the 1950s despite anti-Chinese laws and policies, a situation that was mirrored in the United States. In both these sites, as Adam McKeown has noted, 'the proportion of women actually grew as exclusionary measures took hold.'<sup>31</sup> Unlike the United States under the 1875 Page Act, however, anti-Chinese immigration laws in the Australian colonies never specifically targeted women, with some laws even

28. McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change*, p. 31 (Table 1).

29. Alanna Kamp, 'Chinese Australian Women in White Australia: Utilising Available Sources to Overcome the Challenge of "Invisibility"', *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 6 (2013), pp. 80–81, 84–89.

30. Cronin, *Colonial Casualties*, p. 134.

31. Adam McKeown, 'Chinese Emigration in Global Context, 1850–1940', in *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations: A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries*, ed. Dirk Hoerder and Marjit Kaur (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 288.



defining ‘Chinese’ as ‘male’, thereby allowing women free entry.<sup>32</sup> The colonies of Victoria, South Australia, and New South Wales were the first to introduce anti-Chinese legislation, between 1855 and 1861.<sup>33</sup> These laws were repealed by 1867 and, except in Queensland (1877), there were no new restrictions on Chinese immigration until 1881. It was in the 1880s that more consistent laws were introduced across the Australasian colonies that aimed to restrict large-scale immigration of Chinese workers. These and later colonial laws discouraged the migration of both male and female Chinese through poll taxes and tonnage restrictions, but some included exemptions that allowed certain Chinese residents, such as naturalized British subjects and merchants, to bring in their wives and minor children. For example, South Australia’s Coloured Immigration Restriction Act 1896 provided specific exemptions for merchants (among others) and their wives, children, and domestic servants.<sup>34</sup> The Immigration Restriction Act, the first national immigration law enacted after the Australian colonies federated in 1901, excluded prostitutes of any race or nationality, but in its first iteration allowed for the unlimited entry of wives and families of Chinese men domiciled in Australia.<sup>35</sup> The clause allowing the entry of Chinese wives and families was, however, soon suspended and then repealed with the first amendments to the Act in 1905.<sup>36</sup> Thereafter, under the Immigration Restriction Act, which remained in force (with amendments) until 1958, Chinese women and girls could only be granted temporary entry permits, as wives and daughters of resident Chinese or as students, but in some instances these women were eventually allowed to remain permanently.

Historians in the United States and Canada have long debated the complex reasons why comparatively few women migrated from South China, often focusing on the impact of anti-Chinese immigration laws.<sup>37</sup> In Australia, however, restrictive laws have less often been cited to explain the very small numbers of migrant Chinese women.<sup>38</sup> Chinese in Australia certainly named anti-Chinese laws and the colonial poll taxes among the reasons why Chinese women did not migrate in larger numbers, and evidence suggests that greater numbers of women would have

32. Chinese Immigrants Regulation and Restriction Act 1861 (NSW) and Chinese Immigration Act 1887 (Tasmania).

33. For an overview of Australian colonial anti-Chinese immigration laws, see Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, pp. 18–27.

34. Coloured Immigration Restriction Act 1896 (SA).

35. Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (Cth), ss. 3f and 3m.

36. Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1905 (Cth), s. 4c; A. T. Yarwood, ‘The “White Australia” Policy: Some Administrative Problems, 1901–1920’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 7, no. 2 (2009), pp. 245–60; A. C. Palfreman, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), pp. 13–16.

37. Instructive commentaries on these debates are found in Michael Williams, ‘Anglo-Saxonizing Machines: Exclusion America, White Australia’, *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* 17 (2003), pp. 23–46; McKeown, ‘Transnational Chinese Families and Chinese Exclusion’; Woon Yuen-fong, ‘The Voluntary Sojourner among the Overseas Chinese: Myth or Reality?’, *Pacific Affairs* 56, no. 4 (1983–1984), pp. 673–90.

38. Williams, ‘Anglo-Saxonizing Machines’, p. 29. Williams is one of the few Australian scholars who have ventured into this debate; another is Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, pp. 49–51.

migrated after the turn of the twentieth century if it were not for the Immigration Restriction Act. However, legislative discrimination was only one of the reasons named by Australian Chinese when they explained the situation to government committees, inquiries, and the newspapers. They also spoke of the importance of women's role in maintaining the ancestral home and caring for parents-in-law, of women's reluctance to travel to unfamiliar and uncivilized places, of violence and day-to-day discrimination against the Chinese, and of the cost and trouble in uprooting the family.<sup>39</sup> These reasons tally with those noted in the American literature, which include economic considerations such as the cost of passage and limited employment opportunities for women, patriarchal cultural and familial practices, white racism, the difficulties of the physical environment, the maturity of Chinese settlement, and women's agency in the migration process.

Perhaps the most notable difference between Australia and the United States is the absence of any sustained evidence of Chinese women working in prostitution in Australia. In his 1979 comparative history of Chinese in nineteenth-century California and Australia, Andrew Markus noted, 'The large number of Chinese prostitutes who became a feature of Californian life were absent from the Australian colonies.'<sup>40</sup> There were no strong taboos on sexual liaisons between Chinese men and white women in Australia, and so, Markus argued, 'there was a nearly total absence of Chinese women immigrants in the Australian colonies where European prostitutes catered to the Chinese community'. California was, however, a persistent point of comparison for the Australian colonies and reports on Chinese prostitution in San Francisco appeared in the Australian press. The Californian situation was used as a cautionary tale by white colonists opposed to Chinese immigration, but generally it was acknowledged that the two situations were different.<sup>41</sup> Many references to 'Chinese prostitutes' and 'Chinese brothels' appear in Australian court and police reports in newspapers from the 1860s to the 1930s, but almost all of these referred to white women who lived and worked among the Chinese, sometimes in Chinese-run brothels.<sup>42</sup> There is some evidence that one or two Chinese women worked as prostitutes in Melbourne in the early years of the twentieth century,<sup>43</sup> but

39. Bagnall, 'Golden Shadows on a White Land', pp. 41–44.

40. Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California, 1850–1901* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1979), p. 18.

41. See, for example, [No title], *Mount Alexander Mail*, September 24, 1880, p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article200270886>; 'The Mongolian Invasion', *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, May 11, 1881, p. 3, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article238299678>.

42. See, for example, 'The Evils of Chinese Encampments', *Bendigo Advertiser*, December 8, 1868, p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article87900291>; 'Moral Depravity', *Express and Telegraph* (Adelaide), April 15, 1893, p. 7, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article208385499>; 'A Cosmopolitan Pub', *Truth*, March 1, 1903, p. 7, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167896679>. See also Kate Bagnall, 'The Petition of Bah Fook of Sofala, 1866', *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 6 (2013), pp. 123–28, [http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/68741/20140404-0215/chl.anu.edu.au/publications/csds/csds2013/csds2013\\_12.pdf](http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/68741/20140404-0215/chl.anu.edu.au/publications/csds/csds2013/csds2013_12.pdf).

43. C. F. Yong notes that the *Chinese Times* newspaper reported a Chinese female servant working as a prostitute in Fitzroy in 1906, while 'Yokohama' (Tie Gum Ah Chong) was said to have worked in Casselden Place, Melbourne in the 1910s. *Chinese Times*, April 14, 1906, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article170092402>, cited

it is in 1880s Darwin that we find the greatest evidence of Chinese prostitution in Australia.<sup>44</sup>

Darwin, sometimes described as Australia's gateway to Asia, had a settlement history quite unlike the cities in southern Australia, being more akin to Southeast Asia in its immigration patterns.<sup>45</sup> In the 1870s Chinese men came to work in agriculture and to build the overland telegraph and then, in the late 1880s, the Palmerston and Pine Creek Railway. There were no legal barriers to their arrival at this time, and Darwin was the only Australian port 'where Chinese were free to land'.<sup>46</sup> Reports of the Chinese population in the Northern Territory fluctuated from 3,162 in 1879 to 2,132 in 1880, 4,358 in 1881, 3,237 in 1886, and 6,122 in 1888.<sup>47</sup> The 1881 Northern Territory census recorded four Chinese females, but the first known Chinese woman in Darwin was Shung Fong, whose work as a prostitute in 1883 apparently led her to being physically assaulted by some local Chinese men, for which she took them to court.<sup>48</sup> In 1888, Darwin, with its population of 1,300 Chinese men, was said to have seven Chinese brothels that employed thirty-four prostitutes; according to Police Inspector Paul Foelsche these were 'conducted quietly'.<sup>49</sup> Brothel keeping was tolerated in Darwin, but not legal.<sup>50</sup> Through local police records another three of these women can be identified by name, as Leen Hon, Wong Ang Fit, and Ah You.<sup>51</sup> Information about these women is scant, and details such as how and when they came to Australia are as yet unknown.

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in C. F. Yong, *The New Gold Mountain: The Chinese in Australia, 1901–1921* (Richmond, South Australia: Raphael Arts, 1977), p. 174; Justin McCarthy, *Archaeological Investigations: Commonwealth Offices and Telecom Corporate Building Sites, The Commonwealth Block, Melbourne, Victoria: Historical and Archaeological Report* (Melbourne: Austral Archaeology, 1989), p. 95.

44. See Julia Martínez, 'Chinese Women in Prostitution in the Courts of 1880s Darwin', *Northern Territory Historical Studies* 30 (April 2019), pp. 28–42.

45. Claire K. Lowrie, *Masters and Servants: Cultures of Empire in the Tropics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 13–28.

46. Timothy G. Jones, *The Chinese in the Northern Territory* (Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2005), p. 56. The Northern Territory was administered by South Australia until 1911. South Australia's 1881 Chinese Immigrants Regulation Act specifically excluded the Northern Territory, a situation that changed with the enactment of the Chinese Immigration Restriction Act 1888 (SA).

47. 'Government Resident's Reports on the Northern Territory' (Adelaide, South Australia: Government Printer, 1879, 1880), Northern Territory Library Special Collection; 'News and Notes', *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, January 1, 1881, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3150397>; Jones, *Chinese in the Northern Territory*, p. 56.

48. 'The Chinese in Australia', *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no. 18, 1925 (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1925), p. 955; 'Law Courts, Police Court Palmerston', *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, June 9 and 16, 1883, p. 3. Merchants' wives, daughters, and servants made up the balance of Chinese female population in the Northern Territory; see Natalie Fong's chapter in this volume (Chapter 4).

49. 'The Chinese in the Northern Territory', *South Australian Register*, September 17, 1888, p. 1, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article46874036>; Jones, *Chinese in the Northern Territory*, p. 68.

50. 'Police Court', *North Australian*, July 2, 1887, p. 3.

51. 'Police Court', *North Australian*, March 30, 1889, p. 3; 'News and Notes', *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, January 14, 1888, p. 2.

## Women, Gender, and the Family in Chinese Australian Histories

Scholars of the history of Chinese women and the family in Australia have gained much from the work of our international colleagues, particularly from the United States. There, academic and community historians have been documenting, researching, and writing about the lives of Chinese American women since the 1970s. In addition to major monographs by Judy Yung and Huping Ling, there is now a significant and increasingly diverse body of scholarship which has moved on from the early studies of Chinese prostitutes to encompass a more diverse range of Chinese American women's experiences.<sup>52</sup> More general histories of the Chinese in America have also become attendant to women's lives, the family, and questions of gender, including major works by Elizabeth Sinn, Wendy Rouse Jorae, Madeline Hsu, and Adam McKeown, as previously mentioned.<sup>53</sup> In Canada and New Zealand, too, we see a small number of focused histories on the lives of migrant and local-born Chinese women.<sup>54</sup>

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52. Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998). See also, for example, Lucie Cheng Hirata, 'Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America', *Signs* 5, no. 1 (1979), pp. 3–29; *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1984); Sucheng Chan, 'The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870–1943', in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882–1943*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 94–146; Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); Laura A. Lee, 'History Rewritten: The Story of Quock Mui Jeung', *UCLA Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 11 (2006), pp. 75–91; Shauna Lo, 'Chinese Women Entering New England: Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files, Boston, 1911–1925', *The New England Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (September 2008), pp. 383–409; Kathleen S. Yep, 'Playing Rough and Tough: Chinese American Women Basketball Players in the 1930s and 1940s', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 31, no. 1 (2010), pp. 123–41.
53. See Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013); Wendy Rouse Jorae, *The Children of Chinatown: Growing Up Chinese American in San Francisco, 1850–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change*; Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
54. On Canada, see, for example, Tamara Adilman, 'A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia, 1858–1950', in *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, ed. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), pp. 309–39; Grace Wong Sneddon, 'Who Are We—Suzie Wong? Chinese Canadian Women's Search For Identity' (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2015); Vivienne Poy, *Passage to Promise Land: Voices of Chinese Immigrant Women to Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013); Enakshi Dua, 'Exclusion or Inclusion: Female Asian Migration in the Making of Canada as a White Settler Nation', *Gender, Place and Culture* 14, no. 4 (August 2007), pp. 445–66; Yuen-Fong Woon, 'Between South China and British Columbia: Life Trajectories of Chinese Women', *BC Studies* 156 (Winter 2007–2008), pp. 83–107, and *The Excluded Wife* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998); Alison R. Marshall, *Cultivating Connections: The Making of Chinese Prairie Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014); Shelley Ikebuchi, *From Slave Girls to Salvation: Gender, Race, and Victoria's Chinese Rescue Home, 1886–1923* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015). On New Zealand, see Manying Ip, *Home Away from Home: Life Stories of Chinese Women in New Zealand* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1990); James Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, vols 1–3 (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1993–1999).

In contrast to the well-developed American literature, Chinese Australian women have only become historical subjects in their own right much more recently. In 1986 public historian and writer Morag Loh and her collaborator Christine Ramsay were the first to bring the history of Chinese Australian women to light with their exhibition and publication *Survival and Celebration*, while in the 1990s historian Henry Chan called for more scholarly attention to be directed towards the histories of Chinese Australian women and families.<sup>55</sup> Decades later, there is a small body of published research but still no monograph on the history of Chinese Australian women or the Chinese Australian family.<sup>56</sup> Most Chinese Australian history continues to be written as a history of genderless men, of men's mobility and men's activity, particularly histories that look at the colonial gold rushes, mining, business, labour, and politics. In surveying the current state of the field, it is clear that women and gender often remain outside the purview of historians of Chinese Australia, a situation that in turn affects the ways that Chinese Australian history is presented in general Australian histories and popular accounts. That said, over the past two decades the field has moved towards being more inclusive of histories of women and the family. In the discussion that follows we survey this scholarship, focusing on historical and biographical studies that examine the period up to the 1960s.

Biographical studies dominate the historical literature on Chinese Australian women. There are a handful of histories concerning the lives of Chinese women in nineteenth-century Australia. For example, Kate Bagnall has written on the life of Kim Linn, who came to the colonial goldfields of New South Wales in 1869 as the wife of storekeeper Ralph Ah How, and Sophie Couchman has written on Kin Foo, who toured Australia in the 1870s as the wife of Chang Woo Gow, 'the Chinese giant'.<sup>57</sup> Julia Martínez has investigated the lives of Chinese prostitutes in Darwin in the 1880s through court records.<sup>58</sup> More often it has been the better-documented lives of the modern Chinese woman of the early twentieth century that have caught the eye of historians. Angela Woollacott has written on actor and writer Rose Quong, exploring her expatriate life in London and New York after 1924. Rose Quong was the first Chinese Australian woman to be included in the *Australian Dictionary of*

55. Morag Loh and Christine Ramsay, *Survival and Celebration: An Insight into the Lives of Chinese Immigrant Women, European Women Married to Chinese and Their Female Children in Australia from 1856–1986* (Melbourne: self-published, 1986); Henry Chan, 'A Decade of Achievement and Future Directions in Research on the History of the Chinese in Australia', in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, ed. Paul Macgregor, pp. 421–22 (Melbourne: Chinese Museum, 1995).

56. Jan Ryan's monograph *Chinese Women and the Global Village* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2003) examines the lives of Chinese Australian women but focuses on the 1970s onwards, with only an overview of women's lives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

57. Kate Bagnall, "'To his Home at Jembaicumbene': Women's Cross-Cultural Encounters on a Colonial Goldfield", in *Migrant Cross-Cultural Encounters in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Jacqueline Leckie, Angela McCarthy and Angela Wanhalla (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 56–75; Sophie Couchman, 'Chang Woo Gow: The Man and the Giant', in *An Angel by the Water: Essays in Honour of Dennis Reginald O'Hoy*, ed. Mike Butcher (Kensington, Victoria: Holland House Publishing, 2015), pp. 85–101.

58. Martínez, 'Chinese Women in Prostitution in the Courts of 1880s Darwin'.

*Biography*; the only other is restaurateur and businesswoman Margaret Shen, who migrated to Australia in 1969.<sup>59</sup> US historian Shirley Jennifer Lim has discussed the interactions of Chinese American actress Anna May Wong with Chinese Australian women during her 1939 visit to Australia.<sup>60</sup> Julia Martínez's work on the Darwin Kuomintang highlighted the role women played in this organization in the 1920s, particularly Lena Lee during her brief time as leader.<sup>61</sup> Sophie Loy-Wilson's monograph *Australians in Shanghai* tells an expanded version of the story of Sydney-born Daisy Kwok, also the subject of her chapter in this volume.<sup>62</sup> Denise Austin, a historian of Australian Pentecostalism, has published on Mary Yeung, a Victorian-born missionary who ran a school in her father's home village in Xinhui, Guangdong, in the 1930s.<sup>63</sup> As well as single biographies, Sophie Couchman has taken a collective biography approach to her research on women in Melbourne's Chinatown in the early twentieth century, and Veronica Kooyman has written what might be seen as a dual biography of designer and dressmaker Ella Hing and her daughter Vivian Chan Shaw.<sup>64</sup>

Histories of women and the family in Australia's early Chinese communities have to date mainly focused on interracial intimacy and mixed-race families, particularly those of white women and Chinese men. Kate Bagnall's 2006 doctoral thesis, for example, examined Chinese-European families in southern Australia before 1915, and Pauline Rule, Sandi Robb, Dinah Hales, and Jan Ryan have published on interracial relationships in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia, respectively.<sup>65</sup> While these works do not discuss Chinese

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59. Angela Woollacott, 'Rose Quong Becomes Chinese: An Australian in London and New York', *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 129 (April 2007), pp. 16–31, and 'Quong, Rose Maud (1879–1972)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2005), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/quong-rose-maud-13162/text23821>; Michelle Cavanagh, 'Shen, Margaret (1942–1994)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2018), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/shen-margaret-20708/text31504>. Sydney-born Irene Moss is also included in Lily Lee's *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Twentieth Century, 1912–2000* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 404–406.
60. Shirley Jennifer Lim, 'Glamorising Racial Modernity', in *Australia's Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, ed. David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2012), pp. 145–69.
61. Julia Martínez, 'Patriotic Chinese Women: Followers of Sun Yat-sen in Darwin, Australia', in *Sun Yat-Sen, Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution*, ed. Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011) pp. 200–18, and 'Chinese Politics in Darwin: Interconnections between the Wah On Society and the Kuo Min Tang', in *Chinese Australians: Politics, Engagement and Resistance*, ed. Sophie Couchman and Kate Bagnall (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 240–66.
62. Sophie Loy-Wilson, *Australians in Shanghai: Race, Rights and Nation in Treaty Port China* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), part I.
63. Denise A. Austin, 'Mary Yeung: The Ordinary Life of an Extraordinary Australian Chinese Pentecostal – Part I and II', *Asian Journal Pentecostal Studies* 16, no. 2 (August 2013), pp. 99–137.
64. Sophie Couchman, "'Oh, I Would like to See Maggie Moore Again': Selected Women of Melbourne's Chinatown", in *After the Rush: Regulation, Participation and Chinese Communities in Australia 1860–1940*, ed. Sophie Couchman, John Fitzgerald and Paul Macgregor (Melbourne: Otherland Press, 2004), pp. 171–90; Veronica Kooyman, 'The Family Yarn', Sydney Living Museums website, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180314020031/https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/stories/family-yarn>.
65. Bagnall, 'Golden Shadows on a White Land'; Rule, 'The Chinese Camps in Colonial Victoria' and 'A Tale of Three Sisters'; Robb, 'Myths Lies and Invisible Lives'; Hales, 'Lost Histories'; Ryan, 'She Lives with a Chinaman'.



Australian women per se, they provide an important context for understanding the lives of the mixed-race Chinese Australian women who constituted the majority of the Australian-born female Chinese population. Bagnall has further demonstrated the ways that interracial couples and their children were part of what Adam McKeown has termed the 'transnational overseas Chinese family', while Michael Williams's work has provided a *qiaoxiang*-centred approach to the family life of Chinese in Australia.<sup>66</sup>

Chinese Australian women's voices emerge through oral histories and memoirs. The twentieth-century lives of migrant and Australian-born women have been documented through significant oral history projects undertaken from the 1990s by Diana Giese, Paul Macgregor, Sophie Couchman, and Janis Wilton.<sup>67</sup> Wilton's doctoral thesis and those by Alanna Kamp and Grace Gassin have also used oral histories and interviews to explore Chinese Australian women's experiences of cultural change, community participation, belonging, and exclusion over the course of the twentieth century.<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, Tseen Khoo and Rodney Noonan have discussed Chinese Australian women's increasingly visible role in public fundraising activities during World War I and II, albeit working from archival rather than oral sources.<sup>69</sup> A small number of Chinese Australian women have written memoirs and autobiographical accounts, including former ABC journalist Helene Chung and fashion designer Jenny Kee.<sup>70</sup> Community projects, particularly *From Great*

66. Kate Bagnall, 'A Journey of Love: Agnes Breuer's Sojourn in 1930s China', in *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, ed. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, pp. 115–34 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008), and Section 5: 'Connections' in 'Golden Shadows on a White Land'; Williams, *Returning Home with Glory*. On Chinese Australian families, see also Paul Macgregor, 'Dreams of Jade and Gold: Chinese Families in Australia's History', in *Australian Family: Images and Essays*, ed. Anna Epstein, pp. 25–36 (Melbourne: Scribe, 1998); and Kate Bagnall, 'Rewriting the History of Chinese Families in Nineteenth-Century Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011), pp. 62–77.

67. See Diana Giese (interviewer), *Post-war Chinese Australians Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, 1992, and *Chinese Australian Oral History Partnership*, National Library of Australia, 1999; and Paul Macgregor (interviewer), *Australia-China Council and Museum of Chinese Australian History Australia-China Oral History Project*, 1993. Oral histories by Sophie Couchman (and others) were commissioned by and are held at the Chinese Museum, Melbourne, while Janis Wilton's interviews are held in the University of New England Archives. See also Diana Giese, *Astronauts, Lost Souls & Dragons: Voices of Today's Chinese Australians in Conversation with Diana Giese* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997), and *Beyond Chinatown: Changing Perspectives on the Top End Chinese Experience* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1995).

68. Janis Wilton, 'Chinese Voices, Australian Lives: Oral History and the Chinese Contribution to Glen Innes, Inverell, Tenterfield and Surrounding Districts During the First Half of the Twentieth Century' (PhD diss., University of New England, 1997); Alanna Kamp, 'Invisible Australians: Chinese Australian Women's Experiences of Belonging and Exclusion in the White Australia Policy Era, 1901–1973' (PhD diss., Western Sydney University, 2014); Grace Gassin, 'I Was a Good-time Charlie: Social Dance and Chinese Community Life in Sydney and Melbourne, 1850s–1970s' (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2016). By Alanna Kamp, see also 'Chinese Australian Women's "Homemaking" and Contributions to the Family Economy in White Australia', *Australian Geographer* 49, no. 1 (2018), pp. 149–65, and 'Chinese Australian Women in White Australia: Utilising Available Sources to Overcome the Challenge of "Invisibility"', *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 6, 2003, pp. 75–101.

69. Tseen Khoo and Rodney Noonan, 'Wartime Fundraising by Chinese Australian Communities', *Australian Historical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011), pp. 92–110.

70. Helene Chung, *Ching Chong China Girl* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2008), and *Shouting from China* (Ringwood,

*Grandmothers to Great Granddaughters* and *Chinese Australian Women's Stories*, have also facilitated women's telling of their own life and family stories.<sup>71</sup>

Place-based studies of Chinese communities in Australia have been the most successful at including women's stories in broader histories. Janis Wilton's book *Golden Threads*, drawing on local museum collections from rural New South Wales, is a notable example. Having worked with family members and collection donors, women are seen throughout Wilton's thematic chapters on work, language, leisure, food, beliefs, and leaving and staying.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, individual women are discussed in Shirley Fitzgerald's history of the Chinese in Sydney; Barry McGowan's extensive local histories of the Chinese in the Riverina district of New South Wales; Sophie Couchman's histories of Melbourne's Chinatown; and Sandi Robb's heritage study of Cairns Chinatown.<sup>73</sup> Women and family formation are also central to Amanda Rasmussen's discussion of mobility in her doctoral thesis on the Chinese in Bendigo, where she considers the multigenerational O'Hoy family.<sup>74</sup>

Our knowledge of Chinese Australian women has been greatly enriched by the endeavours of community and family historians.<sup>75</sup> Among the many examples are Robyn Ansell, who has written about her great-grandmother, Mary Jane Ah Whay; Annette Shun Wah, whose family history research was inspired by a photograph of her grandmother Sam Moy; and Norma King Koi, whose use of oral history has

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Victoria: Penguin, 1989); Jenny Kee, *A Big Life* (Camberwell, Victoria: Lantern, 2006). See also Pamela Tan, *The Chinese Factor* (Dural, New South Wales: Rosenberg, 2008); Christine Wu Ramsay, *Days Gone By: Growing Up in Penang* (South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan, 2003), and *A Meeting of East and West: Days Gone By, Volume Two* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2013).

71. Nikki Loong (ed.), *From Great Grandmothers to Great Granddaughters: The Stories of Six Chinese Australian Women* (Katoomba, New South Wales: Echo Point Press, 2006); Sybil Jack et al. (eds), *Chinese Australian Women's Stories* (Sydney: Jessie Street National Women's Library and the Chinese Heritage Association of Australia Inc., 2012). See also Mavis Moo, 'I Just Bore It Quietly', in *Plantings in a New Land: Stories of Survival, Endurance and Emancipation*, ed. Chek Ling (Brisbane: Society of Chinese Australian Academics in Queensland, 2001), pp. 28–44; and Irene Moss, 'Chinese or Australian? Growing Up Chinese in a Bicultural Twilight Zone from the 1950s On', in *Survival and Celebration*, ed. Morag Loh and Christine Ramsay (Melbourne: self-published, 1986), pp. 11–20.
72. Janis Wilton, *Golden Threads: The Chinese in Regional New South Wales* (Armidale, New South Wales: New England Regional Art Museum in association with Powerhouse Publishers, Sydney, 2004).
73. Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors: The Story of Sydney's Chinese* (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales Press, 1996); Barry McGowan, 'Transnational Lives: Colonial Immigration Restrictions and the White Australia Policy in the Riverina District of New South Wales, 1860–1960', *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 6 (2013), pp. 45–63, and *Tracking the Dragon: A History of the Chinese in the Riverina* (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Museum of the Riverina, 2010); Sophie Couchman, 'From Mrs Lup Mun, Chinese Herbalist to Yee Joon, Respectable Scholar: A Social History of Melbourne's Chinatown, 1900–1920', in *The Overseas Chinese in Australasia: History, Settlement and Interactions*, ed. Henry Chan, Ann Curthoys and Nora Chiang (Taipei and Canberra: National Taiwan University and Australian National University, 2001), and 'Tong Yun Gai (Street of the Chinese): Investigating Patterns of Work and Social Life in Melbourne's Chinatown, 1900–1920' (MA diss., Monash University, 2000); Sandi Robb, *Cairns Chinatown: A Heritage Study* (Cairns, Queensland: Cairns and District Chinese Association, 2012).
74. Amanda Rasmussen, 'The Chinese in Nation and Community: Bendigo 1870s–1920s' (PhD diss., La Trobe University, 2009), especially Chapter 1, 'Mobility'.
75. The family histories cited below are those that are publicly available, and there are many further examples that have been compiled privately for distribution within families.



allowed her to write a more 'domestic' family history.<sup>76</sup> Claire Faulkner has documented the families of four Anglo-Chinese sisters, the daughters of John Mann and Ellen Lyons born in New South Wales in the 1840s, who each married migrant Chinese men, while Diann Talbot has written on the women in Chinese families of the Upper Ovens Goldfield in Victoria.<sup>77</sup> Much of this family and community history research is undertaken by women, but many histories still focus on the male line and document the activities of male family members, as these are most easy to track in the historical record. Within such androcentric family histories, we can, however, see glimpses of women's lives when they are mentioned as mothers, wives, and daughters, hinting at the possibilities for further research.<sup>78</sup> Grandmothers, mothers, and aunts also appear in the published memoirs of Chinese Australian men.<sup>79</sup>

### Breaking New Ground: This Volume and Beyond

The publication of this volume marks a significant point in Chinese Australian women's history, a beginning that we hope signals a shift in the historiography of Chinese Australia. But as well as reshaping Chinese Australian history through its focus on women and gender, we aim for this volume to further contribute to the broader project of overseas Chinese history by presenting Australia as a valuable case study for comparison with the international literature. The nine chapters that follow explore the history of Chinese Australian women from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, during the era of 'White Australia'. Anti-Chinese laws, policies, and sentiment therefore form a background throughout the chapters and are explicitly discussed in some. The contributors have, however, sought to move beyond simply recounting how White Australia discriminated

76. Robyn Ansell, 'The Wives of Hin Yung and Ah Why', in *Secrets, Silences and Sources: Five Chinese-Australian Family Histories*, ed. Sophie Couchman (Melbourne: Asian Studies Program, La Trobe University, 2005), pp. 31–40; Annette Shun Wah, 'Grandma's Chinese Whispers', in *Family Journeys: Stories in the National Archives of Australia* (Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 2008), pp. 19–28; Norma King Koi, 'Discovering My Heritage: An Oral History of My Maternal Family—The Ah Moons of Townsville', in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, ed. Paul Macgregor (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1993), pp. 287–95.

77. Claire Faulkner, *Conquest: An Inside Story—The Integration of a Colonial Chinese-Australian Family Cluster* (self-published, 2013); Diann Talbot, *Who Is She?: The Lives and Trials of the Women and Children who Shared their Lives with the Chinese Men Living and Working on the Upper Ovens Goldfields in North East Victoria* (Bright, Victoria: self-published, 2016).

78. For example, Veronica Kooyman, 'King Nam Jang: A Sydney Dynasty', Sydney Living Museums (website), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180314020320/https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/stories/king-nam-jang-sydney-dynasty>; Alison Choy Flannigan and Malcolm Oakes, *Chinese Whispers: In Search of Ivy* (Pymble, New South Wales: Black Quill Press, 2017).

79. See, for example, Tom Kwok, *Iron Rice Bowl* (Pottsville, New South Wales: Rainbow Works, 2017); Stanley Hunt, *From Shekki to Sydney: An Autobiography* (Broadway, New South Wales: Wild Peony Press, 2009); Thomas Vivian Tim, 'Surviving, Haphazardly', in Ling, *Plantings in a New Land*, pp. 45–52; and Darryl Low Choy, 'That's Not a Chinese Name', in Ling, *Plantings in a New Land*, pp. 62–78.

against Chinese Australian women, instead considering the complex ways in which they and their families negotiated both gendered and racialized exclusions.

The four chapters that make up the first section, 'Gendering Chinese Australian Histories', present thematic accounts and methodological approaches that pave new terrain in researching Chinese Australian history. Mei-fen Kuo, author of the groundbreaking monograph *Making Chinese Australia*, first examines gender in Australia's Chinese-language newspapers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>80</sup> Sophie Couchman uses photographs as both source and subject matter in her chapter on Chinese Australian brides, photography, and the phenomenon of the 'white wedding,' reminding us of the possibilities that come with moving beyond written sources. Natalie Fong presents a collective study of Chinese businesswomen in Darwin, following shifts in their individual lives and the Darwin Chinese community between the 1880s and World War II. Last, historical geographer Alanna Kamp combines statistics and oral testimony to provide an overview of Chinese Australian women's mobility across the course of the twentieth century.

The five chapters in the second section, 'Women's Lives in China and Australia,' approach Chinese Australian women's mobility through the lens of biography. The chapters also consider the familial, social, and political worlds that shaped women's individual experiences. Kate Bagnall re-examines the well-known Poon Gooley deportation case from the early years of White Australia, placing Ham Hop (Mrs Poon Gooley), a Gold Mountain wife, at the centre of her own story. Antonia Finnane uses microhistory as a means to investigate the life and untimely death of Perth woman Ruby Yen. Paul Macgregor presents the life of Alice Lim Kee, known as Mrs Fabian Chow, an Australian-born journalist and broadcaster in Shanghai and Peking in the 1920s and 1930s. Julia Martínez takes a comparative and international approach in researching the lives of two university-educated Chinese Australian women, Mary Chong and Gwen Fong. Last, Sophie Loy-Wilson follows Daisy Kwok from her childhood in Sydney to her young adult years as a wealthy Shanghai socialite and beyond.

The collection does not and cannot reflect every aspect of Chinese Australian women's history—indeed, there is much work still to be done. The chapters published here reflect the particular research interests of their authors and the biases of the source material we have used, by necessity privileging women whose lives were or can be substantially documented either in written or oral form. The collection also privileges histories of Chinese women within the world of white, British settler-colonial Australia. The relationship between Chinese Australian women and Indigenous Australians remains an important area of research that deserves greater attention, particularly in thinking about how women of mixed descent negotiated their 'in-between' place.

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80. Mei-fen Kuo, *Making Chinese Australia: Urban Elites, Newspapers and the Formation of Chinese-Australian Identity, 1892–1912* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2013).

Much of this collection emphasizes women's public lives, yet our research suggests that there is still more to be learned about Chinese Australian women's involvement in social, community, and political organizations, whether Chinese run or mainstream Australian. Chinese women in trade and business is another understudied theme, as highlighted by Natalie Fong's chapter. As a counterpoint to an emphasis on public lives, there is also a need for more research into the private worlds of women to understand Chinese Australian marriage and family formation in transnational contexts, including how the lives of women in China were affected.<sup>81</sup> This research might further investigate the domestic culture and everyday lives of Chinese Australian women, and women in China whose husbands migrated to Australia. Future studies might devote more thought to the gendered impact of restrictive policies regarding immigration, employment, social welfare, and citizenship. And, since readily available sources often lead us to write about adult women's experiences, Chinese Australian girlhood and the place of daughters within the family are other topics yet to be explored.

Exciting scholarship from a new generation of historians has begun even as this volume has been in preparation, and we are pleased to include here the work of both junior and senior scholars. Yet challenges in fostering the study of Chinese Australian women's history continue. Recently, a (male) elder in the Sydney Chinese community informed one young Chinese Australian woman—a migrant from Guangdong fluent in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin who was interested in pursuing postgraduate research in women's history—that there was no history to research and no story to tell. We hope that this collection will encourage Chinese Australian women in their efforts at documenting, recording, and writing their own histories, in the community and in academia, for without their stories and their perspectives, the history of the Chinese in Australia can never be complete.

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81. For a recent example, see Jin Liu, 'Sex Scandals, Gold Mountain Guests' Wives, and Female Roles in the Siyi Qiaoxiang: A Study of the Family Letters of Overseas Chinese in the Republican Era', in *The Qiaopi Trade and Transnational Networks in the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Gregor Benton, Hong Liu and Huimei Zhang (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 145–59.

## Exception or Example? Ham Hop's Challenge to White Australia

Kate Bagnall

In November 1910 Ham Hop arrived in Melbourne on the Japanese steamer *Nikko Maru*.<sup>1</sup> The only Chinese woman on board and in the early stages of pregnancy, she had travelled down from Hong Kong with her husband, Poon Gooley, a produce merchant from country Victoria.<sup>2</sup> Although the couple had married ten years before, in effect they were just beginning their life together as husband and wife. Poon Gooley had lived in Victoria for seven years before going home to China in 1900 to be married, returning alone to Victoria some months later. The couple then spent the intervening decade apart, with Ham Hop living the life of a *gāmsāanpòh* (金山婆 M: *jīnshānpó*), a Gold Mountain wife, one of many women who remained in South China while their husbands lived and worked overseas.

Ham Hop was unusual in coming to join her husband in Australia—one of fewer than 150 Chinese women to do so between 1902 and 1920<sup>3</sup>—and by the time she returned to China in 1913 she and her husband had become household names in Australia. Ham Hop had entered Australia on a temporary permit for six months, the most the Australian government would allow her under the Immigration Restriction Act, but once she arrived Poon Gooley mounted a determined and sustained campaign for her to be allowed to remain permanently. While ultimately

1. Australian records use various names for Ham Hop, including Mrs Poon Gooley, Mrs Hop Poon Gooley, Hope Poon Gooley, and Ham See. In his first request to bring his wife from China, Poon Gooley referred to her as 'Ham See' (譚氏), meaning 'married woman originally of the Ham clan'. On the birth registrations of her daughters, her name was given as 'Hop Poon Gooley formerly Ham', and it is based on this version of her name that I have chosen to refer to her as Ham Hop—Ham being her surname and Hop her given name.
2. Two versions of Poon Gooley's name in Chinese characters appear in the records: 潘魏 (C: *pān wēi*, M: *pān wēi*) and 潘如 (C: *pān rú*, M: *pān rú*). See *Tung Wah Times* (東華報 Donghua bao), August 17, 1912, and March 1, 1913, and list of exemptions under the Chinese Act 1890, February 8, 1900, NAA: MP56/12, 6.
3. Between 1902 and 1904, 103 Chinese wives of domiciled Chinese men were admitted to Australia under section 3(m) of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. See Barry York, *Exclusions and Admissions: The Chinese in Australia, 1901–1946* (Canberra: Centre for Immigration & Multicultural Studies, Australian National University, 1994), p. 7. This provision was first suspended in March 1903 and then repealed in December 1905, after which date Chinese wives could only be admitted by special authority of the minister. The figure of fewer than 150 Chinese wives admitted to Australia in the first two decades of the twentieth century is an estimate based on annual immigration returns and individual case files.

unsuccessful, Poon Gooley's campaign found widespread public support and was an ongoing embarrassment to the Fisher Labor government and especially to the Minister for External Affairs, E. L. Batchelor, and his successor, Josiah Thomas.

The Poon Gooley case, as it became known, was the first serious public challenge to the White Australia policy, and today it remains one of the best-known cases in twentieth-century Australian migration history. Historian A. T. Yarwood first directed scholarly attention to the case after half a century had passed, in an article published in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History* in 1961 and then in his groundbreaking monograph *Asian Migration to Australia* three years later.<sup>4</sup> His analysis of the case has formed the basis for subsequent tellings of the Poon Gooley story over the past five decades.<sup>5</sup> Only C. F. Yong's short 1977 discussion has provided something of an alternative perspective by considering the attitudes and actions of Chinese Australian community leaders during the case.<sup>6</sup>

Yarwood framed his 1961 article as a study of difficulties with the administration of the White Australia policy, particularly concerning the wives of domiciled Chinese residents. He stated that:

The Poon Gooley case provides an unrivalled opportunity for analysing public opinion on the question of Chinese wives, and of studying its impact on policy. The value of the case stems from the fact that it is typical and illuminates important problems.<sup>7</sup>

Yarwood's work on the case remains significant in three particular ways: in its use of individual case files to understand how the White Australia policy was administered on the ground; in its sensitive reading of the fraught dynamics between Poon Gooley and the government, and between the government and the Australian people; and in its understanding of the peculiar double standard of Australian public opinion. In Yarwood's words, '[White Australians] supported the principle of exclusion as applied to Chinese in general, [but] showed the greatest tenderness for the welfare of particular, favourably known Chinese residents.'<sup>8</sup>

Another half-century on, the story of Ham Hop and Poon Gooley needs revisiting. Yarwood based his study almost entirely on one source, the substantial 350-page Department of External Affairs file that contains the administrative paper

4. A. T. Yarwood, 'The "White Australia" Policy: Some Administrative Problems, 1901–1920', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 7, no. 2 (2009), pp. 245–60, and *Asian Migration to Australia: The Background to Exclusion 1896–1923* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1964).

5. See, for example, Eric Rolls, *Citizens: Flowers and the Wide Sea* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996), pp. 419–20; and Ian Welch, 'Alien Son: The Life and Times of Cheok Hong Cheong (Zhang Zhuoxiong) 1851–1928' (PhD diss., Australian National University, Canberra, 2009), <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/49261>, pp. 296–99.

6. C. F. Yong, *The New Gold Mountain: The Chinese in Australia 1901–1921* (Richmond, South Australia: Raphael Arts, 1977), pp. 26–28.

7. Yarwood, 'The "White Australia" Policy', p. 249.

8. Yarwood, 'The "White Australia" Policy', p. 249.

about her case that appeared in the Australian press, and in that 350-page government file, barely a word is her own. We see her life mediated through the words of her husband, of government officials, of journalists, and of an outraged public. In such a case it is easy to fall into the trap of writing about a woman as an adjunct to the lives of others, and as an object of the actions of others.

This chapter retells the story of Ham Hop and the Poon Gooley case, with two main aims: to correct Yarwood's factual mistakes and to present a personal and intimate history of the case in which Ham Hop is more central to the narrative.<sup>11</sup> Ideally, I would make it *her* story alone, not one about her husband, or the bureaucrats, or the law, or public opinion, although it is all those things, too. In reality, I can only tell Ham Hop's story using the records I have, and I can only understand what happened to her by following events in the life of her husband and by listening to his voice. Ham Hop's very presence in Australia depended on Poon Gooley, and through his actions her life became emblematic of a wider quest by the Chinese Australian community for equality and fair treatment in the face of the White Australia policy. Unfortunately, though, while Poon Gooley pushed for Ham Hop to be made an exception to this discriminatory policy, she was instead made an example.

### From Ham Hop to Mrs Poon Gooley

Ham Hop was born in China around 1883, most likely in a rural village in the Sze Yup (四邑 C: *seiyāp*, M: *siyi*) region in the west of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province. Details of her early life are unknown, but at some point arrangements were made for her betrothal and marriage to Poon Gooley. She was about seventeen years old when they married in 1900.

Ham Hop would likely have had little or no say in her choice of husband, and the couple probably never met before they married. Poon Gooley left China for Victoria in 1893 at age eighteen, when Ham Hop was only ten years old. But he offered good prospects—he was educated, literate in English, and making a decent living in Victoria, where he built on the successes of close family members and fellow clansmen who had arrived in Australia before him. The Poons (潘 C: *pān*, M: *pān*, also written in Australian records as Pon and Pong) were from a cluster of villages at Qiaotou (橋頭 C: *kiuhtàuh*) near the market town of Yueshan (月山 C: *yuhtsāan*) in Kaiping (開平 C: *hōipèhng*), one of the Sze Yup counties. Poon clansmen had settled in Melbourne, centred around the Leong Lee (兩利 C: *léuhngleih*, M: *liàngli*) store in Little Bourke Street; in western Victorian towns like Horsham, Hamilton, Warrnambool, and Warracknabeal; and in Tasmania, South Australia,

11. Research for this chapter was supported by an Early Career Summer Fellowship in the Centre for Historical Research at the National Museum of Australia in 2009 and an Australian Academy of the Humanities Travelling Fellowship in 2015. I would also like to thank Dr Amanda Rasmussen, Dr Sophie Couchman, and Dr Selia Tan for their assistance during my research.

and Western Australia.<sup>12</sup> The Poons were also associated with the Geraldton Fruit Company, wholesale and retail fruit and produce merchants, which operated in Geraldton (now Innisfail) in Queensland and in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, and Perth.

When Poon Gooley arrived in Australia in 1893 he went to live at Warrnambool, on Victoria's west coast, and then at Horsham, in western Victoria, where he worked as a gardener. Six years after arriving in the colony, he unsuccessfully applied to be naturalized, using the name John Poon Gooley.<sup>13</sup> Although Chinese migrants had earlier been able to be naturalized in Victoria—including Poon Gooley's uncle James Pon Hap in 1883<sup>14</sup>—in 1885 the Victorian government decided to no longer naturalize Chinese 'unless a sufficient reason was assigned'.<sup>15</sup> This decision came after an increase in the numbers of Chinese applying for naturalization in the mid-1880s. Thereafter, 173 naturalization certificates were issued to Chinese in 1886, then 16 in 1887, and after that none at all.<sup>16</sup>

When Poon Gooley lodged his naturalization application in July 1899, more than a decade had passed since the last Chinese naturalization had been granted in Victoria. It is not clear what Poon Gooley's reasoning was in applying for naturalization when he did. Was he simply unaware of the government's policy of not naturalizing Chinese? Or perhaps, because it was a matter of administrative practice rather than law, he thought it was worth a try since the advantages of being a naturalized British subject were very clear. Among other things, naturalized Chinese were able to travel back into the colony without penalty under Victoria's Chinese Act 1890, which restricted the entry of Chinese to one per 500 tons of tonnage for each vessel arriving in Victoria. The Act covered every person of 'Chinese race' other than those who had been exempted, and exemptions were automatically granted to Chinese officials, members of ships' crews, and those who had been naturalized.

After being refused naturalization, Poon Gooley took another course of action to fulfil his aim of returning to China to be married. He applied in January 1900 to the Victorian Commissioner of Trade and Customs for a special exemption from the Chinese Act so that he could go home to China and then return to Victoria without penalty.<sup>17</sup> From time to time the Governor of Victoria personally granted such exemptions, as stipulated in the Chinese Act 1890.

12. Sophie Couchman, 'Tong Yun Gai (Street of the Chinese): Investigating Patterns of Work and Social Life in Melbourne's Chinatown 1900–1920' (MA (Public History) diss., Monash University, Melbourne, 2000), pp. 116–20; Registers of Certificates Exempting from the Dictation Test (Departures), Melbourne (Collector of Customs, Melbourne, 1904–1959), NAA: B6003.

13. 'Gooley, John Poon – Naturalisation' (Chief Secretary's Office, Victoria, 1899), NAA: A712, 1899/J6454.

14. 'James Pon Hap – Naturalisation' (Chief Secretary's Office, Victoria, 1883), NAA: A712, 1883/Z7328; 'Letters of Naturalization – James Pon Hap' (Chief Secretary's Office, Victoria, 1883), NAA: A801, 2251.

15. James Jemison Fenton (Government Statist of Victoria), 'Naturalization of Chinese' (Paragraph 200), *Victorian Year-Book, 1895–8* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1901), p. 114.

16. Fenton, 'Naturalization of Chinese', p. 114.

17. 'Various Documents Relating to Late 1880 to Early 1900 Migrants' (Department of Home and Territories, Central Office (Records and Passports Branch), 1892–1921), NAA: MP56/12, 6.



## Mary Chong and Gwen Fong: University-Educated Chinese Australian Women

Julia T. Martínez

When twenty-two-year-old Mary Chong was interviewed by the *Brisbane Courier* in 1930, she was described as the embodiment of Chinese women's emancipation for speaking out publicly on behalf of Chinese immigrants to Australia. As the first known woman of Chinese heritage to graduate from an Australian university, she was one of a small group of Australian-born Chinese who, by virtue of their education, felt empowered to take on such leadership roles. From the time of Mary's graduation in 1929 until 1950, there were no more than a handful of such university-educated Chinese women in Australia. Their exceptional lives are all but untold, even though, as literate women with public lives, their archive is more tangible than most.<sup>1</sup> Harnessing sources such as the women's own writings and newspaper articles about them, as well as school, university, and official migration records, it is possible to gain a sense of these women's educational journeys and their political aspirations. Often when historians embark on the task of recovering previously neglected aspects of women's lives, such as women's education, their work builds on, or challenges, earlier androcentric histories. In the case of university education of Chinese in Australia before 1950, however, this history is all but untold. To begin to tell the history of university-educated Chinese women in Australia, it has therefore been necessary to also piece together, from primary sources, the story of their male counterparts in order to provide a broader context for these women's significant educational achievements.

The first half of the twentieth century saw a considerable expansion in women's higher education in both Australia and China. In Australia there were just 539 women studying at university in 1911, and this figure rose to 2,123 women in 1921,

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\* Author's note: Thanks to Kate Bagnall for helpful editing and advice on sources. Thanks to Peter Gibson for research assistance into Australian university records, and thanks also to Claire Lowrie, Jane Carey, and Simon Ville for comments on an early draft.

1. Shen Yuanfang has noted that illiterate women were unable to record their own life stories; see *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese-Australian Autobiographies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 48.



representing 29.3 percent of university students overall.<sup>2</sup> Mary Chong's decision to commence studying at university in 1926 was likely influenced by local campaigns promoting women's greater participation in education and the workplace. In 1925, for example, while Mary was in her fifth year at Dubbo High School, the school arranged a university extension lecture titled 'The Economic Position of Women' presented by economist F. C. Benham from the University of Sydney, who maintained that a woman should earn her own living.<sup>3</sup> It seems highly likely that Mary would have attended that lecture.

That Mary's parents accepted her decision to study at university may also have been influenced by social change relating to women in China. In early twentieth-century China, women's education not only revolutionized the role of women within the family but also encouraged women to emerge as public figures in their own right, engaging in the advancement of health, education, and politics.<sup>4</sup> This message spread to the diaspora in Australia, facilitated by the 1920s establishment of Australian branches of the Chinese Nationalist Party or Kuomintang (國民黨 *Guómíntǎng*; KMT) and a call in 1921 for women members. The uptake of Chinese women KMT members took time; a 1923 photograph of the organization's office bearers shows only one woman among thirty-seven men.<sup>5</sup> By the late 1930s a number of well-educated China-born women found their way to Australia, reinvigorating the China-Australia connection and providing new role models for young Australian Chinese women. Many of these new arrivals were connected to the Chinese consulate, being wives and daughters of Chinese diplomatic representatives. Also among wartime arrivals in the early 1940s were overseas-born women of Chinese ethnicity from Singapore and British Malaya.<sup>6</sup>

The 1950s ushered in a new era of Australia-Asia engagement with university scholarships offered under the Colombo Plan and a growing number of self-funded students. While this shift away from Australian isolationism has been acknowledged by scholars, the earlier instances of Chinese university attendance in Australia have been all but ignored.<sup>7</sup> Those Australian-born Chinese women and

2. Alison L. Booth and Hiau Joo Kee, 'A Long-Run View of the University Gender Gap in Australia', *Australian Economic History Review* 51, no. 3 (November 2011), p. 257.

3. 'University Extension Lectures', *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, September 11, 1925, p. 4, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article76100955>.

4. Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 8.

5. Mei-Fen Kuo and Judith Brett, *Unlocking the History of the Australasian Kuo Min Tang 1911–2013* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013), p. 23; C. F. Yong, *The New Gold Mountain: The Chinese in Australia, 1901–1921* (Richmond, South Australia: Raphael Arts, 1977), p. 155.

6. 'University Students Do Vacation Work at Shepparton', *Australasian*, January 23, 1943, p. 17, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article142146050>. Wang Gungwu refers to the well-educated cosmopolitan migrants who travelled from Southeast Asia to Australasia as part of the *huayi* pattern of migration in 'Patterns of Chinese Migration in Historical Perspective', *Observing Change in Asia: Essays in Honours of J. A. C. Mackie*, ed. R. J. May and William J. O'Malley (Bathurst, New South Wales: Crawford House Press), p. 38.

7. Daniel Oakman, *Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2010), p. 179; Julia Horne and Geoffrey Sherington, *Sydney: The Making of a Public University* (Carlton, Victoria: Miegunyah Press, 2012), p. 51.

men who completed their university education before 1950 did so with very little public acknowledgement of their achievements.

This chapter seeks to highlight the remarkable lives of two women graduates, Mary Chong of Sydney University and Gwen Fong of Melbourne University. It explores their very different lives within the context of their Australian contemporaries and situates the education of Chinese women in Australia within the broader context of education of Chinese overseas, acknowledging that Australia was not a leader in this respect. Australia may have been slow to produce Chinese women graduates, particularly in comparison with the United States, but there is every indication that these few women were able to successfully navigate their education without overt challenge from an ostensibly pro-White Australia government and society.

The existing historical literature on the education of Chinese girls and women in Australia, and biographies of university-educated Chinese Australian women, remains sparse. One exception is my work on Lena Lee or Chong Shue Hing (鍾少卿 C: *jūng shúhīng*, M: *zhōng shǎoqīng*).<sup>8</sup> Lena was born in Darwin in north Australia on April 8, 1902, the daughter of Ah Ngoi and her prominent merchant husband, Chin Yam Yan.<sup>9</sup> Lena travelled to China in 1906 with her family and was educated to university level before returning to Darwin in 1924. Lena's experiences reveal the challenges of political engagement for educated women in Australia. Lena worked both as a teacher of Chinese language and culture at the Darwin Chinese school, and later as a member of the Kuomintang (KMT). She made her first public appearance on behalf of the KMT in 1927 when the Thai Royal Prince visited Darwin. The *Northern Territory Times* noted that 'two ladies' represented 'the New China' at this event, speculating that this was the first instance 'in which Chinese ladies have officially participated in an Australian public function'.<sup>10</sup>

Lena Lee became Secretary of the Darwin KMT in 1929 and attended their conference in Sydney along with seven male committee members.<sup>11</sup> Even though she was warmly welcomed by the Chinese Consul General, it was to be her last conference; she committed suicide a few months later, despairing that members no longer followed the teachings of Sun Yat-sen. Historian Wang Gungwu, in describing the nationalist inflection of the term *huaqiao* for overseas Chinese, highlighted the important role that educated nationalists such as Lena Lee played in promoting

8. Julia Martínez, 'Patriotic Chinese Women: Followers of Sun Yat-Sen in Darwin, Australia', in *Sun Yat-Sen, Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution*, ed. Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), pp. 200–18; Julia Martínez, 'Chinese Politics in Darwin: Interconnections Between the Wah On Society and the Kuo Min Tang', in *Chinese Australians, Politics, Engagement and Resistance*, ed. Sophie Couchman and Kate Bagnall (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 240–66. Barbara James brought the story of Lena Lee to public attention in *No Man's Land: Women of the Northern Territory* (Sydney: Collins Publishers, 1989), pp. 121–22.

9. 'Leena Pack Fong Chin', *Australia, Birth Index, 1788–1922*, in Ancestry.com [online database] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010).

10. 'Darwin Kuo Min Tang's Welcome to Prince of Siam', *Northern Territory Times*, July 12, 1927, p. 1, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article4551386>.

11. 'The Kuo Min Tang', *Northern Standard*, October 11, 1929, p. 7, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article48024748>.

continued loyalty to China.<sup>12</sup> Lena Lee's passion for politics has prompted historian Jan Ryan, in her study of post-war Chinese women, to describe her as 'the epitome of the modern global woman that was to come'.<sup>13</sup>

As for the history of education of Chinese in Australia, historian Mei-fen Kuo has explored the importance of secondary school education for Chinese girls in twentieth-century Australia. The Sydney Chinese School, established in 1910, included five female students aged approximately eight to fourteen, who were likely the children of Chinese merchants. A photograph of the students shows well-dressed children in typical Australian school uniforms of the time, the girls in white lacy dresses.<sup>14</sup> Subsequent work with John Fitzgerald on China-born students in Australia shows 1920s Chinese in Australia advocating for women's education for 'gainful employment' and that a small number of girls were among the Chinese students admitted to study in Australia.<sup>15</sup> From 1912 to 1920 students from China were allowed to apply for exemption from immigration restrictions to enter Australia, but with strict regulations no more than thirty students were admitted. Between 1920 and 1925, however, there were some 400 school students from China studying in Australia under a more liberal exemption arranged by the Chinese Consul General, T. K. Quei.<sup>16</sup> Chinese students aged between eleven and seventeen enrolled in both government-run and private schools, and most of those who came joined fathers or other family members living in Australia.

While the student exemption was most often used by secondary students, at least two male students from China used this exemption to study at university. One was M. Y. Hsia (Shan Min You), a graduate of Wesley College, Wuchang, who in 1923 did teacher training at Sydney University. During his stay he resided at the Presbyterian St Andrew's College.<sup>17</sup> The second was Arthur Chun Wah, who graduated in 1931 from Sydney University in Engineering.<sup>18</sup> His uncle, Henry Fine, a naturalized Chinese, had arranged for him to come from China on a student exemption in 1911, aged 10. Arthur first attended Forest Lodge Public School and

12. Wang, 'Patterns of Chinese Migration', pp. 36–37.

13. Jan Ryan, *Chinese Women and the Global Village: An Australian Site* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2003), p. 140.

14. *Tung Wah Times*, February 4, 1911, cited in Mei-fen Kuo, 'Confucian Heritage, Public Narratives and Community Politics of Chinese Australians at the Beginning of the 20th Century', in *Chinese Australians*, ed. Couchman and Bagnall, p. 163.

15. Mei-fen Kuo and John Fitzgerald, 'Chinese Students in White Australia: State, Community, and Individual Responses to the Student Visa Program, 1920–1925', *Australian Historical Studies* 47, no. 2 (2016), p. 264. See also Mei-fen Kuo and John Fitzgerald, 'Colonial Pathways to International Education: Chinese Students in White Australia in the 1920s', in *Colonialism, China and the Chinese: Amidst Empires*, ed. Matthew P. Fitzpatrick and Peter Monteath (Routledge: Abingdon, 2019).

16. Kuo and Fitzgerald, 'Chinese Students in White Australia', p. 260.

17. 'Chapman B. B. – Admission of Chinese student' (Department of Home and Territories, 1920–1923), National Archives of Australia (NAA): A1, 1923/29220.

18. 'Mr. A. C. Wah', *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 2, 1931, p. 14, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article16774359>; *Calendar of the University of Sydney for the Year 1932* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1932), p. 703, <http://calendararchive.usyd.edu.au/Calendar/1932/PDF/1932%20-%2000755.pdf>.

# Contributors

**Kate Bagnall** is Senior Lecturer in Humanities and Coordinator of the Diploma of Family History at the University of Tasmania. Much of her research focuses on the history of women, children, and families in Australia's early Chinese communities. Before joining the University of Tasmania in 2019, Kate was an ARC DECRA Research Fellow at the University of Wollongong.

**Sophie Couchman** is a curator and historian with a particular interest in migration history and the role that photographs play in how we tell history. She has worked as a curator at the Chinese Museum in Melbourne and at Museums Victoria. With Kate Bagnall, she has edited *Chinese Australians: Politics, Engagement and Resistance* (Brill, 2015).

**Antonia Finnane** is an Honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne and a historian of China. She is the author of *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Harvard Asia Center, 2004) and *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (Columbia University Press, 2008). She is currently writing a book about making clothes in Mao's China, a project funded by the Australian Research Council.

**Natalie Fong** is a PhD student at Griffith University. Her thesis focuses on Chinese merchants in the Northern Territory, 1880–1950. She is descended from Northern Territory matriarchs Fong Young See and Lowe Lie See. Natalie teaches English and History at Citipointe Christian College and is a sessional lecturer at Christian Heritage College.

**Alanna Kamp** is Lecturer in Geography and Urban Studies at Western Sydney University. Her research focuses on feminist and postcolonial understandings of migrant experiences and attitudes to immigration in Australia. Central to this research is the examination of links between historical geographies of migrant experience and current community experiences and identities.

**Mei-fen Kuo** is Lecturer of Contemporary Chinese Culture and History at Macquarie University. Her books include *Making Chinese Australia: Urban Elites, Newspapers, and the Formation of Chinese Australian Identity, 1892–1912* (Monash University Press, 2013) and *Unlocking the History of the Australasian Kuo Min Tang 1911–2013* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013) with Judith Brett.

**Sophie Loy-Wilson** is Lecturer in Australian History at the University of Sydney. She specializes in Chinese Australian history, immigration history, and the new history of capitalism. Her first book, *Australians in Shanghai: Race, Rights and Nation in Treaty Port China* (Routledge) was published in 2017.

**Paul Macgregor**, historian and heritage consultant, is Secretary of the Dragon Tails Association, which organizes biennial conferences on Chinese diaspora history and heritage. He is also President of The Uncovered Past Institute, which undertakes archaeological excavations with public participation. Curator of Melbourne's Chinese Museum from 1990 to 2005, Paul has published widely, organized conferences and exhibitions, and worked on several major research projects, all on Chinese Australian history.

**Julia T. Martínez** is Associate Professor in History at the University of Wollongong, researching Asia-Pacific migration. Her books are *Pearl Frontier* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015) with Adrian Vickers (winner of the 2016 Northern Territory History Award and the Queensland History Literary Award) and *Colonialism and Male Domestic Service* (Bloomsbury, 2019) with Claire Lowrie, Frances Steel, and Victoria Haskins.

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