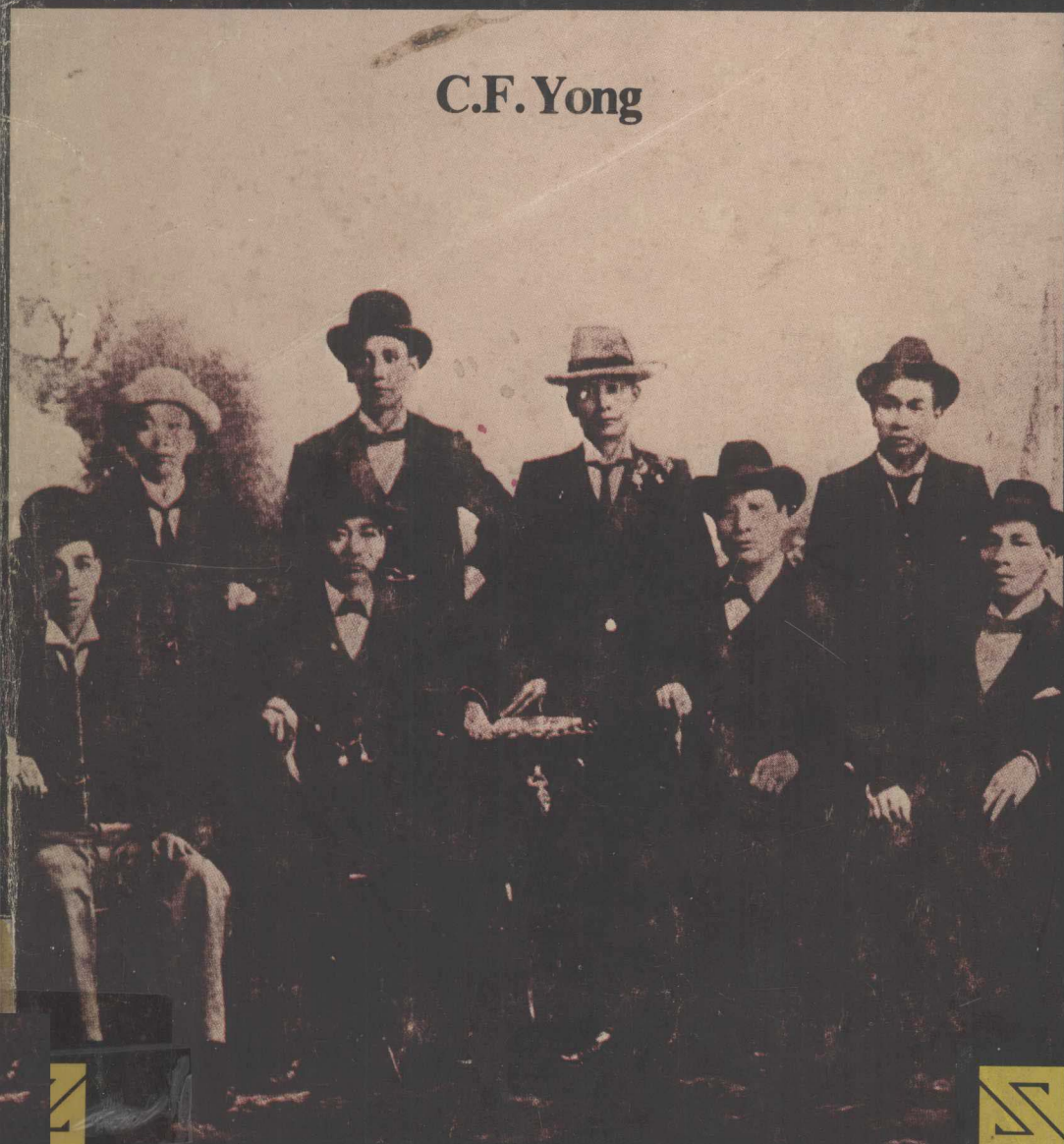


THE NEW GOLD MOUNTAIN

THE CHINESE IN AUSTRALIA 1901-1921

C.F. Yong



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The Flinders University of South Australia



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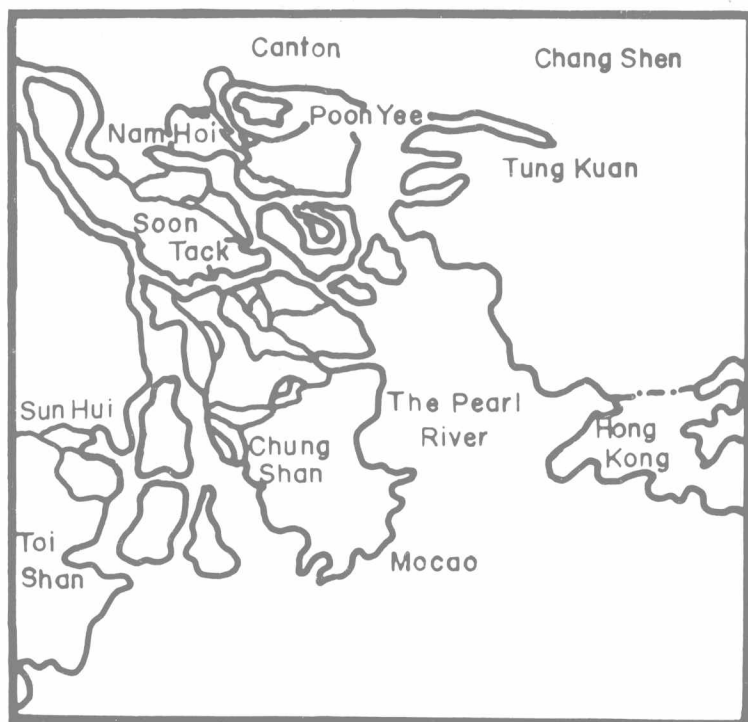
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**MAP 1: THE THIRTEEN COUNTIES AROUND CANTON,
KWANGTUNG PROVINCE**



MAP 11: COUNTIES AROUND CANTON

THE NEW GOLD MOUNTAIN

To Sino-Australian
Friendship and Understanding.

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5. The Public Library, Sydney, New South Wales.
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INTRODUCTION

"The Golden Age" in Australian history lured thousands of Chinese gold-seekers from the thirteen counties¹ around Canton, the capital of Kwangtung province, to the Australian goldfields, which the Chinese named "Tsin Chin Shan", meaning "The New Goldfields", where many Chinese settlements were made and communities established. "Tsin Chin Shan" was called after "Chiu Chin Shan", or "The Old Goldfields", which referred to California where gold had been discovered earlier and had encouraged the migration of thousands of Chinese from the See Yap (the "Four Counties"). In the years 1840-1860, the tin-mining industry in Perak and Selangor, Malaya, also drew a large number of immigrants from the See Yap and its surrounding counties.² The fact that the early Chinese miners in California and in Malaya largely came from the same migrating areas may explain why the See Yap people were among the earliest Chinese immigrants on the Victorian goldfields.

Most of the thirteen counties were located on the fertile delta of the Pearl River, flowing eastward hundreds of miles from inland through Canton towards the South China Sea. The area embodying the thirteen counties was favourable for agriculture and fishing.

In the history of Kwangtung province, the Sam Yap and the Tung Kuan people were described as more refined and cultivated.³ Some historical writings even suggested that these four counties produced more scholars and writers than other counties in Kwangtung province.⁴ Also, because of frequent overseas trade with foreigners, the Nam Hoi and Poon Yee people became keen and wealthy merchants travelling and selling their goods in most parts of Southeast Asia and Japan.⁵ People from the See Yap and Chung Shan were less cultivated partly because of their rural economy and partly also because of their geographical location further away from Canton, the cultural centre of the whole Pearl River. The Toi Shan and Chang Shen people were described as religious folk. They established many temples for worship.⁶

During the gold rushes, many Chinese immigrants came under a credit-ticket system.⁷ This system also enabled the large emigration of southern Chinese to the U.S.A., Canada and Malaysia.⁸ During the hearings of the Victorian Legislative Council on Chinese Immigration in 1857, it was stated that one-third of the Chinese immigrants to Victoria were free and independent, paying their own passages.⁹ These people consisted of artisans, shopkeepers and merchants.¹⁰ The other two-thirds were said to be farmers who borrowed money for their passages from rich bankers, village elders or wealthy money lenders and

left their land as security.¹¹ Those who came under the credit-ticket system had to repay their debts as soon as sufficient money was amassed in the Australian colonies.

Immigrant Chinese from the thirteen counties were in many ways a homogeneous people. They all spoke the same dialect, Cantonese, and could communicate with one another; whereas in the contemporary Southeast Asian Chinese communities, differences in dialect presented a complex problem to the various immigrant groups. Each dialect tended to hold the loyalty of immigrants from the specific region; for example, the Fukien dialect held the loyalty of immigrants from Fukien province, Cantonese held the loyalty of those from Canton and its surrounding counties. Dialectal differences divided the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia as conspicuously as county or provincial differences.

Immigrants from the thirteen counties to Victoria and New South Wales during and after the gold rushes had similar physical appearances, ideals and temperaments. They were generally described by many contemporary Europeans as sober, peace-loving, kindly, industrious and frugal people. A considerable portion of them acquired some unenviable habits and taste, such as opium smoking and gambling, and many practised idol and ancestor worship. They brought with them a complex blend of beliefs selected from Confucianism and some religious practices identified with Buddhism and Taoism. As a result, many joss-houses, or temples, were established by immigrant Chinese on the goldfields and in Melbourne during the gold rushes.

Most early Chinese immigrants had a common ideal and desire — the return to the Flowery Land where their ancestors were buried. The desire may have been prompted by the thought of fulfilling filial obligations towards their elders including parents and grandparents. Some returned for a family reunion. However, there are two traditional and ethnic concepts which had a deep-rooted effect upon the temperament of Overseas Chinese immigrants. The first concept, “to return home with honour and wealth”, had certainly appeared as early as the Han dynasty (206 B.C.—220 A.D.) when its first Emperor, Liu Pang, was reported to have expressed this ideal during a battle against his fierce opponent, Hsiang Yu. Since that occasion the ideal had been treasured with pride and honour and cherished by Chinese as a laudable virtue. Towards this end immigrant Chinese laboured diligently in many economic fields. Having made their fortunes, returning migrants were welcomed and were often honoured lavishly with such titles as “uncle from Nanyang”, if returning from Southeast Asia, or “eligible man from the goldfields” if from the U.S.A. or

Australia. The wealth which they made and brought back gave pride and satisfaction not only to them, but also to their families, their relatives and their villages in China generally.

The second concept "upon the roots of the tree rest falling leaves" was as old as the first concept. It expresses a love for the native land, a feeling for returning to where one belongs. This concept usually applied to many old first generation Chinese who sought not romance, adventure and wealth, but home and comfort in their old age. If the immigrants happened to die in this continent, their relatives or friends or county societies would manage to collect their bones for a re-burial in China.¹² There can be little doubt that various Chinese traditional concepts and obligations had resulted in many returning home; but it must also be noted that various colonial immigration policies were, to a large extent, responsible for the rapid decline of the Chinese population. Entry taxes and the tonnage system on Chinese immigrants effectively checked the inflow of Chinese to Australia.

Though immigrant Chinese had many things in common, they were not always united and harmonious. Disunity and friction in the Chinese communities in Australia were often caused by their consciousness of differences in county origin. Because of their tenacious allegiance to their own county or counties, immigrant Chinese at times became intolerably narrow-minded and clannish. The clannish outlook was prevalent in the Chinese communities in Australia in the nineteenth century and also during the first twenty years of the century under study. In economic life, trade among Chinese immigrants was often conducted on a county basis. For example, a Chung Shan or a See Yap customer would be most likely to purchase goods from storekeepers of the Chung Shan or the See Yap county. Similarly, a Chang Shen or a Tung Kuan shopkeeper would be most unlikely to give credit to people other than from his own county. In social life, immigrants established societies which catered exclusively for immigrants of their own county. County societies aimed at uniting and protecting the interests of immigrant Chinese from the same migrating areas. They protected the special occupational interests of members; they helped new immigrants to find jobs and become established; they provided opportunities for social gatherings of immigrants. County societies were often meeting places and lodging houses for new immigrants as well as members. Among the many functions of the county societies, the most significant one was their service as a link with their home villages in China. Members came to county societies to obtain information on families, relatives and other affairs in their homeland either from the new arrivals or from the newly returned immigrants.

County societies encouraged immigrants to be loyal to their county of origin. They enhanced county feeling, the effect of which was to divide rather than to unite the Chinese communities in Australia. During the first twenty years of the century, when Chinese participated in common activities which cut across county ties, county societies became weaker.

义兴
Among the early immigrants to Victoria and New South Wales, there were anti-Manchu elements¹³ who established branches of the Yee Hing, a secret society, which aimed at overthrowing the Manchu regime and restoring the Ming dynasty. Though it is doubtful whether the anti-Manchu elements had launched any anti-Manchu campaigns on a grand scale, it is certain that the anti-Manchu feelings existed latently throughout the second half of the last century. The anti-Manchu elements in Australia did not become vocal until well into the twilight of the Manchu rule.

In the early days of Chinese settlement in New South Wales and Victoria, the centres of the Chinese communities were neither in Sydney nor in Melbourne, but on the goldfields which included Avoca, Creswick, Castlemaine, Ballarat, Maryborough and Sandhurst in Victoria, and Braidwood, Tumut, Young, Wellington and Bathurst in New South Wales. It was not until the 1870s that Sydney and Melbourne became important centres with a gradual concentration of Chinese population resulting partly from the drifting of Chinese miners to cities for industrial and commercial pursuits when the alluvial gold-mining petered out. By 1881, there were 1,057 Chinese in Melbourne and 1,321 in Sydney. A decade later, the Chinese population in both Sydney and Melbourne had more than doubled with 2,143 persons in Melbourne and 3,499 in Sydney. When the Commonwealth of Australia came into being in 1901, Chinese communities in New South Wales and Victoria, with their undisputed centres in Sydney and Melbourne, were already well entrenched in a larger Australian community.

By 1901, most Chinese communities on the goldfields had disintegrated, but the Sydney and Melbourne Chinese continued to thrive mainly in tight communities — known as a Chinatown — in buildings which served for both living and business activities. In Melbourne and its suburbs, the Chinese population numbered 2,200 out of the 7,349 in the State, with a Chinatown centred in Little Bourke Street and its precincts. By contrast, Sydney and suburbs absorbed some 3,800 Chinese out of the 11,263 in the whole State; its Chinatown was located in an area bounded by Campbell, Goulburn and Wexford Streets. In these Chinatowns, there were import and export firms, fruit shops, cabinet-making factories, laundry shops, grocery and