Getting Chinese Gold off the Victorian Goldfields

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Abstract: The discovery of gold in Victoria, Australia, in 1851 drew prospective miners from throughout the world to try their luck at the new diggings. One group were Chinese who came mostly from the villages of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong. The Chinese in Victoria were both a transient and resident population. For the Chinese miners, the gold they won was either returned by them to their villages in China, for them by others to the same destinations, or used to pay for goods on the goldfields. Much of these goods were imported from China via Hong Kong, so payment for them was another way in which Chinese-won gold in Victoria was remitted to China. This article investigates the mechanisms for the flow of gold by and for the Chinese in Australia. From the Chinese diggings to Melbourne and thence to China, the transmission of gold involved a complex process that included numerous individuals and firms, both Chinese and European. The article interprets a combination of banking and government records, shipping and commercial intelligence in newspapers, and archives relating to various Chinese and European merchants, to map this movement of gold found by the Chinese on the goldfields.

Keywords: gold, Australian banking, Chinese merchants, trade, transport

Introduction

Barry McGowan devoted much of his Chinese-Australian historical research to investigating Chinese gold-mining activity in the nineteenth century, particularly in New South Wales. He pioneered a focus on identifying the location of fields that Chinese worked on and the material culture that survived on these fields, tracing their stories in local newspapers and records. Barry built this research into an overview of Chinese gold mining not just as an economic activity but also as a social environment.[1] The purpose of this article is to supplement Barry's work and extend the understanding of the Chinese gold miner as part of a complex economic system which extended from the Australian gold fields through to southern China and beyond. This article deals with the colony of Victoria, providing a study of Chinese gold miners that is both complementary as well as comparative to Barry's work. It places the Chinese miner as someone who not only extracted gold to remit it to their village in China, but also as someone who sold their gold for goods that were either imported from China or other countries, or were created or grown in Victoria. This article thus extends the Chinese miner's gold to its connection with Chinese and European storekeepers and banks at the diggings, the merchants and shipping agents in Melbourne, and the shipping companies.

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[1] Barry McGowan, "The Economics and Organisation of Chinese Mining in Colonial Australia," *Australian Economic History Review*, 45:2 (July 2005): 119–138; Barry McGowan, "Reconsidering Race: The Chinese Experience on the Goldfields of Southern New South Wales," *Australian Historical Studies*, 36:124 (2008): 312–331; Barry McGowan, "Kongsis, Huis and Clans: The Economics and Organisation of Chinese Alluvial Mining, With Particular Reference to the Braidwood, Kiandra and Adelong Goldfields of Southern NSW and the Tin Fields of Northern NSW," paper presented at 19th annual conference of the Australasian Mining History Association, 29 September to 4 October 2013, Beechworth, Victoria.

Historians and economists recognise that most of the gold extracted from the gold diggings of Victoria was exported to Britain.[2] What has received less attention is the significant portion of the gold that was also sent to the ports of Asia. As an example, statistical records show that in 1861, 63 per cent of Victoria's gold (£5,730,459) was exported to the United Kingdom, while 31 per cent (£2,865,113) went to Asia.[3] The most prominent Asian port that received gold from Australia was Hong Kong, from where it was then sent on to destinations in Guangdong and Fujian provinces. This gold circulated in the Victorian economy either as gold dust or was converted to coins (specie) or notes (paper currency). Our article demonstrates how the portion of the gold destined for China was delivered from Victorian goldfields to Hong Kong, the principal port of entry for gold into China, and how that movement of funds was transacted.

This article drills into a variety of sources to understand more about how Chinese moved their gold from the Victorian goldfields in the 1850s and 1860s into the Australian economy and to Hong Kong. Moreover, the article argues that a large portion of the gold exported from Australia to China was actually used as payment for provisions imported from China through the port of Hong Kong. The article traces the trade in provisions to, and gold from, the Victorian goldfields, uncovering those involved at both the diggings and at the port of Melbourne, and it shows how these individuals and firms were connected, by the sale of goods and receipt of income, within a complex network of Chinese and Europeans throughout Victoria and beyond.

The historiography of commercial transactions and gold flows arising from Chinese mining on the colonial gold fields of Australia has been scarce. The paucity of primary-source evidence has meant only a few historians have attempted to investigate the finances of the Chinese economy at the diggings, including how Chinese gold progressed from the diggings to China.[4] This article investigates a set of recently uncovered sources to create a more concrete pattern of the gold movement. Banking records, although limited to a mere handful of relevant documents, demonstrate the existence of a Chinese connection with bank branches on the diggings. Evidence arising from official colonial government enquiries into various events, in particular the witness statements provided by Chinese and Europeans, provide another window into financial transactions. Two of significance are the Buckland riots in Victoria of 1857 and the seizure of gold from the *Mary Nicholson* and

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[2] For discussion of the economic context of the gold rushes: see Keir Reeves, Lionel Frost and Charles Fahey, '"Integrating the Historiography of the Nineteenth-century Gold Rushes," *Australian Economic History Review*, 50:2 (July 2010) and Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell (eds.), *A Global History of Gold Rushes* (University of California Press, 2018).

[3] *Statistics of the Colony of Victoria 1861*, Public Records Office of Victoria, VPRS 943/P0000, Unit 13, p. 78, P1040667.

[4] Mei-fen Kuo has emphasised the problems of obtaining nineteenth-century evidence in her recent work on *yinxin* and that extends to the current study. Mei-fen Kuo, "*Jinxin*: The Remittance Trade and Enterprising Chinese Australians, 1850–1916," in *The Qiaopi Trade and Transnational Networks in Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Gregor Benton, Hong Liu and Huimei Zhang (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), pp. 160–78. Recent work specific to the Chinese at the gold fields includes: David Benyon, "Beyond Big Gold Mountain: Chinese-Australian Settlement and Industry as Integral to Colonial Australia," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, 29:2 (2019): 184–206; and Keir Reeves, "Sojourners or a New Diaspora: Economic Implications of the movement of Chinese Miners to the South-West Pacific Goldfields," *Australian Economic History Review*, 50:2 (2010): 178–192.

Ethereal in Sydney Harbour the same year.[5] The testimonies of Chinese witnesses in these cases, which are contained in government reports, reveal the connections that existed between the Chinese miners or shopkeepers of the gold fields with others located in the ports of Sydney and Melbourne. This evidence establishes one part of the connection between Chinese miners on the gold fields and European and Chinese merchants, both at the diggings and in Melbourne.

The paucity of evidence from the diggings contrasts with an abundance of information available relating to the final leg of the gold journey, from Melbourne to China. It is here that a plethora of intelligence presents itself through newspapers of the time. Shipping records, and through them in some cases cargo manifests, can be enhanced with information from commercial reports on shipping, trade and the general movement of gold in Victoria.[6] The period of time over which this rich source of information extends is too long for a complete analysis of all the data available. The authors have thus chosen, where appropriate, to sample various years of data to aid with drawing their conclusions. Despite the complexities of working with government statistical records, due to their inconsistency in format, enough can be gleaned from them to provide a broad picture of the movement of gold from Victoria to Hong Kong and China.[7]

The archives of two prominent firms based in Hong Kong – Jardine Matheson & Co. and Augustine Heard & Co. – have also divulged important elements of the story of how the Chinese in Australia moved their gold to Hong Kong. The circulars and correspondence of these companies, in particular, is a key source of information.

Gold, the Chinese and Australia

The gold diggings of Victoria entertained two major groups of diasporic miners. On the one hand were "Europeans", white people from Britain, Europe and America together with Australian-born whites. On the other were the "Chinese", made up primarily of Chinese from Guangdong and Fujian provinces together with a handful of Malay Chinese.

Chinese miners came mainly from villages and towns in the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong province. Some historians, including Mei-fen Kuo, Henry Yu and Michael

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[5] "Buckland Riots: Report of the Board Appointed to Consider the Claims of Certain Chinese in the Buckland District to Compensation, Together with the Evidence Taken Before the Board," Public Records of Victoria (hereafter PROV), VPRS 3253/P0, Unit 58, Item 293; "Report from the Select Committee on the Seizure of Gold on Board the Ethereal and Mary Nicholson; Together with The Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix," in *New South Wales Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly during the Session of 1858*, vol. 3 of 3 vols (Sydney: William Hanson, Government Printer, 1858), pp. 431–93*.* For a discussion on the gold seizure, see: Sophie Loy-Wilson, "Coolie Alibis: Siezing Gold from Chinese Miners in New South Wales," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 91 (Spring 2017): 28–45.

[6] Cargo manifests were only occasionally provided. When a captain declared to Customs that his vessel was departing the port "in ballast", it meant that the vessel was carrying no cargo but only weights to assist in balancing the vessel on its trip. However, on occasions, the vessel in fact carried gold and this information was only recorded in newspaper commercial reports.

[7] Prior to 1860 the Victorian statistics considered China to include Hong Kong.

Williams, have argued for the significance of native-place networks for overseas Chinese.[8] Paul Macgregor, however, has found this did not always apply. For example, prominent Melbourne merchant Lowe Kong Meng was a leader of the Sam Yap community in Melbourne, but this did not limit his trading to only dealing with Sam Yap people. Lowe Kong Meng also worked with individuals and firms from various other districts.[9] Sources used for this article suggest that the trade of gold from the gold fields through to China followed a similar pattern regardless of the district origins of the individuals and firms involved.

Several historians have considered various aspects of the role that Chinese merchants and storekeepers have played in nineteenth-century Chinese-Australian history. Geoffrey Oddie and Kathryn Cronin considered the social prominence and political role of Melbourne Chinese merchants in representing the Chinese community in nineteenth-century Victoria.[10] Margaret Tart's and Robert Travers' biographies of Sydney merchant Mei Quong Tart consider his life as a whole with mention of his commercial activities.[11] Kevin Rains' thesis on the Chinese of Cooktown includes detailed documentation of the Chinese storekeepers and importers of that port hub for the Palmer River gold rush in far north Queensland, including demonstrating some of the goods they imported.[12] Jane Lydon and Sophie Loy-Wilson have explored the social relations – particularly their role as intermediaries between Chinese and Europeans – of two individual storekeepers, Hong On Jang in Sydney's The Rocks, and Taam Szu Pui on the Atherton Tablelands in north Queensland.[13] Barry McGowan recorded community histories of storekeepers in the Riverina and Central West of New South Wales, and Rutherglen in northeast Victoria.[14]

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[8] Kuo, "*Jinxin*: The Remittance Trade and Enterprising Chinese Australians"; Henry Yu, "Unbound Space: Migration, Aspiration and the Making of Time in the Cantonese Pacific," in *Pacific Futures: Past and Present*, ed. Warwick Anderson, Miranda Johnson and Barbara Brooks (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), pp. 178–204; Michael Williams, *Returning Home with Glory: Chinese Villagers around the Pacific, 1849 to 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018).

[9] Paul Macgregor, "Chinese Political Values in Colonial Victoria: Lowe Kong Meng and the Legacy of the July 1880 Election", in *Chinese Australians: Politics, Engagement and Resistance*, ed. Sophie Couchman and Kate Bagnall (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[10] Geoffrey Oddie, "The Lower Class Chinese and the Merchant Elite in Victoria, 1870–1890," *Historical Studies*, 10:37 (1961): 65–70; Kathryn Cronin, *Colonial Casualties: Chinese in Early Victoria* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1982).

[11] Mrs Quong Tart [Margaret Tart], *The Life of Quong Tart: or, How a Foreigner Succeeded in a British Community* (Sydney: W.M. Maclardy, 1911), facsimile reprint (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales, 2003); Robert Travers, *Australian Mandarin: The Life and Times of Quong Tart,* (Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo Press, 1981).

[12] Kevin Rains, "Intersections: The Overseas Chinese Social Landscape of Cooktown, 1873–1935", PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2005, pp. 95–99.

[13] Jane Lydon, *Many Inventions: The Chinese in the Rocks, 1890–1930* (Melbourne: Monash Publications in History, 1999); Sophie Loy-Wilson, "A Chinese Shopkeeper on the Atherton Tablelands: Tracing Connections between Regional Queensland and Regional China in Taam Szu Pui's *My Life and Work*," *Queensland Review* 21, Special Issue 02 (December 2014): 160–176.

[14] Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: A History of the Chinese in the Riverina* (Wagga Wagga: Museum of the Riverina, 2010); Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Tumut and Adelong Districts of New South Wales* (Wagga Wagga: Museum of the Riverina, 2016),

Paul Macgregor has examined in detail the commercial activity of pre-eminent Melbourne merchant Lowe Kong Meng, including both his import of provisions from China (to both Victoria and Otago and the export of gold to China).[15] Further, Alister Bowen's work on the Chinese enterprises relating to the fishing industry, and his wider analysis of merchant involvement in systematic provisioning for mining populations, investigates the Chinese within the agricultural and marine economies of Victoria.[16]

The trade between Australia and Asia, including reference to China, is a growing field of research. James Broadbent, Suzanne Rickard and Margaret Steven, for example, have examined the trade between China and Australia for the pre-1850 period, as too has Benjamin Mountford who views such trade through a political lens.[17] For the period following the commencement of the gold rushes, Sandra Tweedie has explored the overall trade between Australia and Asia with some focus on China, while Nicholas Guoth's doctoral thesis analyses the trade relationships between China and Australia for the period from 1860 to 1880.[18]

Our article builds upon this earlier work by considering the economic role of the gold exported by Chinese miners and merchants from Victoria within the broader story of Chinese-Australian commercial activity. The trade of gold from Australia into Asia during the nineteenth-century has received very sparse attention. This has primarily been due to

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http://www.museumriverina.com.au/exhibitions/tracking-the-dragon#.WYvP7FUjFpg; Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Temora District of New South Wales* (Wagga Wagga: Museum of the Riverina, 2016); http://www.museumriverina.com.au/exhibitions/tracking-the-dragon#.WYvP7FUjFpg; Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Wagga Wagga District of New South Wales* (Wagga Wagga: Museum of the Riverina, 2016); http://www.museumriverina.com.au/exhibitions/tracking-the-dragon#.WYvP7FUjFpg; Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Hay, Deniliquin and Hillston Districts of New South Wales* (Wagga Wagga: Museum of the Riverina, 2016), http://www.museumriverina.com.au/exhibitions/tracking-the-dragon#.WYvP7FUjFpg; Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Narrandera District of New South Wales* (Wagga Wagga: Museum of the Riverina, 2016), http://www.museumriverina.com.au/exhibitions/tracking-the-dragon#.WYvP7FUjFpg; Barry McGowan and Genevieve Mott, *True Australians and Pioneers: Chinese Migration to the Orange Region of NSW: A Thematic Study of the Chinese People in the Orange, Blayney and Cabonne Shires, and the Town of Wellington* (Orange: Orange City Council, August 2017); Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: Thematic History of the Chinese people in the Rutherglen/Wahgunyah Region of the Indigo Shire, Victoria: A Report to the Rutherglen Historical Society and the Wahgunyah History Group* (self published, 2015).

[15] Paul Macgregor, "Lowe Kong Meng and Chinese Engagement in the International Trade of Colonial Victoria," *Provenance*, 11 (2012), http://prov.vic.gov.au/publications/provenance/lowe-kong-meng; Paul Macgregor, "A Trade in Chinese Men and Supplies: Lowe Kong Meng and the Organisation of the Chinese Gold Rush in Otago," in *Rushing for Gold: Life and Commerce on the Goldfields of New Zealand and Australia*, ed. Lloyd Carpenter and Lyndon Fraser (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2016).

[16] Alister Bowen, "The Merchants: Chinese Social Organisation in Colonial Australia," *Australian Historical Studies*, 42:1 (2011): 25–44; Alister Bowen, *Archaeology of the Chinese Fishing Industry in Colonial Victoria* (Sydney: Sydney University Press in association with the Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology, 2012).

[17] James Broadbent, Suzanne Rickard and Margaret Steven, *India, China, Australia: Trade and Society 1788–1850* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 2003); Benjamin Mountford, "Britain, China, and Colonial Australia", *Britain and the World*, 11:2 (September 2018): 256–258; Benjamin Mountford, *Britain, China and Colonial Australia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[18] Sandra Tweedie, *Trading Partners: Australia and Asia 1790–1993* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 1994). Nicholas Guoth, "Beyond a Cup of Tea: Trade Relationships Between Colonial Australia and China, 1860–1880", PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2017.

the overall complexity of such a topic. One who has attempted such a task is Andrew Pope, who has written extensively on the movement of gold from Western Australia to India, but without reference to Chinese-Australian involvement in this trade.[19] Our article adds to the overall discussion on the gold trade from Australia into Asia by locating Victoria's Chinese-won gold and the Chinese merchants who shipped it within the wider story of gold movement from Australia to Asia.

One further element of the movement of gold is where that transition is placed with the history of Hong Kong and the neighbouring provinces. From the perspective of the Californian Chinese, Elizabeth Sinn has written extensively on the respective trade and the connections with the Chinese in Hong Kong, particularly for the period from the 1850s to the 1870s.[20] Michael Williams takes Sinn's work a step further, discerning the position of Hong Kong from the perspective of the Pearl River Delta *qiaoxiang*.[21] Williams argues that many businesses in Hong Kong were involved in the importation and exportation of goods for Chinese communities established overseas. He states that the "flow of goods into and out of Hong Kong required mechanisms for communication and the transfer of money as well as business networks with many countries and with the *qiaoxiang*".[22] This article discusses those links from Australia's point of view with relation to the "monies", that is gold. In particular, our article focuses on the mechanisms by which that gold was shipped to Hong Kong, a crucial step in the movement of that gold into China's economy.

Gold at the Diggings

The Chinese at the diggings were highly successful in obtaining gold. Shipping records from newspapers as early as 1855 show significant amounts of gold being transported on numerous vessels on their way to Hong Kong by the Chinese.[23] Not all of the gold obtained from the ground, however, made its way to Melbourne and thus to China. A portion entered the Victorian economy, both at the diggings and elsewhere in the colony. This section focuses on both the gold that remained as dust for its intended journey to Melbourne and the gold that was exchanged at banks and stores for currency, made up of notes.

There is considerable evidence of a substantial commercial network of Chinese stores across the Victorian goldfields. Much of the goods that they sold were imported from China via Hong Kong.[24] In turn, much of the gold retrieved from the ground by Chinese miners was used to pay for these goods. The Board of Enquiry into the anti-Chinese Buckland riot

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[19] Andrew Pope, "The View West: The Indian Ocean Trading World and Western Australia to 1914," *Studies in Western Australian History*, 16 (1995): 147–162; Andrew Pope, "The P&O and the Asian Specie Network, 1850–1920," *Modern Asian Studies*, 30:1 (February 1996): 145–172.

[20] Elizabeth Sinn, *Power and Charity: A Chinese Merchant Elite in Colonial Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003); Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

[21] Michael Williams, "Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta Qiaoxiang," *Modern Asian Studies*, 38:2 (May, 2004): 257–82.

[22] Williams, "Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta Qiaoxiang," pp. 263–64.

[23] This will be discussed in more depth later in this article. In 1857, for example, eighteen vessels departed Melbourne for Hong Kong with a load of gold dust amounting to approximately 120,000 ounces.

[24] Macgregor, "Lowe Kong Meng and Chinese Engagement in the International Trade of Colonial Victoria,"

of 1857 gives a list of seventeen shops, whether as storekeepers or as cooks.[25] Similarly, an 1861 petition jointly signed by Chinese and European residents of Ararat, presented in both Chinese and English, declared that the businesses of the Chinese consisted of five storekeepers, three cookshops or restaurants, and one chemist.[26] Further, in the town of Harrietville, in northeast Victoria, where The Uncovered Past Institute is investigating the archaeology of a Chinese mining settlement, historical evidence brought to light by the Institute has indicated the existence of at least seven Chinese stores that operated there during the 1860s and 1870s, with the last one closing in 1902.[27]

More broadly, Rev. William Young's report to the Victorian Parliament in 1868 on the Chinese in Victoria listed the numbers and types of businesses in the various "Chinese camps" around Victoria. Out of a total of 452 businesses, there were eighty-two stores, eighty-five opium shops, twenty-five cookshops and fifty-one Chinese herbalists ("doctors" or "chemists"), all of which were importing substantial supplies from China.[28] Table 1 shows a breakdown of the Chinese businesses in rural Victoria for 1867–68. Young's report remains the most comprehensive overview of Chinese commercial enterprise in Victoria during the gold-mining era. Further, it is a record that was created at the time when many Chinese had chosen to remain in Victoria and the overall Chinese population of the colony had stabilised at 19,000.[29]

The anti-Chinese riot in the Buckland Valley on 4 July 1857 created much material loss and destruction for that community of Chinese miners. Seventeen of the Chinese storekeepers in the Buckland Valley petitioned the colonial government for compensation for losses of stock, cash and gold. A Board of Enquiry considered their claims, which were backed up by invoices and witnesses such as police officers and European storekeepers. The members of the Board of Enquiry concluded that the claims were genuine. Each Chinese storekeeper gave a listing of the value of the goods that were taken from them together with the amount of currency and gold dust. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the seventeen claims. The data in the table presents a picture of these stores as not only providing significant amounts of goods but also of holding considerable stores of British-Australian

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[25] Buckland Riots: Report of the Board Appointed to Consider the Claims of Certain Chinese in the Buckland District to Compensation, Together with the Evidence Taken before the Board, PROV, VPRS 3253/P0, Unit 58, Item 293.

[26] Members of Council Bankers, Merchants, Traders and Other European and Chinese Inhabitants of Ararat and its Vicinity, Petition to the Governor in Council, 18 June 1861, PROV, VPRS 1189/P0, Unit 523, no. 61/4997.

[27] Register of Mining Claims, Buckland Division [includes Harrietville and Morses Creek], 1865–1880, Burke Museum, Beechworth. The ceramic fragments unearthed include large quantities of Chinese stoneware storage vessels for the shipping and selling of oil, vinegar, soy sauce, preserved vegetables, and *ng ka py* liquor. There is also a range of Chinese wintergreen tablewares (cups, bowls). However, also found were plenty of European liquor bottles, some European condiment bottles, and European plates, bowls and cups. See https://www.uncoveredpast.org.au/harrietville-chinese-mining-village-season-1-update-oct-2017/; Paul Macgregor, Melissa Dunk and Andrew Swift, "Harrietville Chinese Mining Village, Archaeological Site Recording and Excavation, Bon Accord Track, Harrietville, Season One, October 2017: Report to Heritage Victoria: Interim Report 5.9.19", unpublished report prepared for Heritage Victoria by The Uncovered Past Institute, 2019.

[28] William Young, "Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population in Victoria, Presented to Both Houses of Parliament", in *The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports and Documents*, ed. Ian F. McLaren (Melbourne: Red Rooster Press, 1985): pp. 33–58. Originally published 1868.

[29] Young, "Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population in Victoria", p. 58

currency. The total cash claimed to have been lost, being £708/15/–, was more than four times the value of the gold dust on hand in the stores at the time of the riots. The value of that gold, which summed to 47 oz 6 dwt, was approximately £150.[30] This shows that Chinese customers were predominantly paying for the shops' goods with cash, not gold, and this demonstrates that a large portion of the gold excavated by Chinese miners was exchanged for British-Australian currency. This propensity to pay in cash would likely have been replicated across the Victorian Chinese retail economy.

Table 1. Chinese Businesses in Victoria, 1867–68

Town or district	Ballarat	Smythesdale	Avoca	Ararat	Maryborough	Castlemaine	Daylesford & Hepburn District	Blackwood	Beechworth & Ovens district	Sandhurst (Bendigo)	TOTAL
Chinese population	800	1500	250	1893	1400	1000	1021	450	7000	3500	18814
Stores	7	7	4	4	6	10	6	4	20	14	82
Tea shops						2					2
Cookshops	3	2	1	1	1	3	2	2	8	2	25
Butchers' shops	5	3	2	10	3	3	2	1	8	6	43
Barbers' shops	6			4	2	4	2	1	6	4	29
Tailors' shops	4	2	1	4	2		1		5	3	22
Carpenters' shops	3		5	6	4	2	1		32	8	61
Gambling shops	4	5	2	2	3	6	3	6	10	7	48
Lottery shops	2	2									4
Doctors' shops	7	4	1	2	2						16
Chemists, druggists			0	3	4	5	3		15	5	35
Opium shops	15	18	2		5	11	6	2	15	11	85
TOTAL	56	43	18	36	32	46	26	16	119	60	452

Source: William Young, "Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population in Victoria, Presented to Both Houses of Parliament", in The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports and Documents*, ed. Ian F. McLaren (Melbourne: Red Rooster Press, 1985), pp. 33–58. Originally published 1868*

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[30] The value has been calculated using the gold exchange rate in June, 1858, of 78s. per ounce. "Commercial Intelligence" *Argus*, 21 June 1858, p. 4, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/191078.

The majority of Chinese miners thus chose to convert a significant proportion of their gold dust to British currency, made up primarily of notes, occasionally termed "promissory notes".[31] Throughout the period of the gold rush in Victoria, and also in New South Wales, Chinese miners were trading with banks and storekeepers, exchanging their gold. In 1858, the Director of the Sydney Mint stated that the Chinese disposed of their gold to middlemen, English storekeepers, and the banking establishment.[32] The Director proposed that a portion of the gold was being converted by Chinese at the diggings into currency and a portion was reaching Sydney as dust.

The exchange of gold to currency at the diggings in New South Wales, as described above, was replicated in Victoria. The exchange was either completed by individual Chinese or by Chinese firms. Some Chinese held accounts with the various European banks that had agencies or branches on the diggings. Viewing the Signature Books of the banks divulge that at Castlemaine the Bank of Australasia had a dozen Chinese as depositors to the bank over the latter period of the nineteenth century. They included miners, storekeepers and a hotelkeeper.[33] From 1877 to 1882, the Smythesdale Branch of the Bank of Australasia held sixteen accounts for Chinese including storekeepers, miners and a pig dealer.[34] Other examples can be found at the bank's branches at Beechworth, Walhalla, Barrier's Reef, Blackwood and Bendigo.[35] Table 2 below shows that the Buckland Chinese storekeepers were receiving notes from the miners in exchange for gold or converting the stores of dust obtained from other Chinese miners into notes at the banks.

The banks were also an exchange point for Chinese. While most of these sales of gold may have been small amounts, in other cases considerable parcels of gold were exchanged on a regular basis. In the last quarter of 1877 at the town of Clunes, the Union Bank of Australia accepted gold from the Chinese. Table 3 shows the twenty-seven entries of gold by seven different Chinese customers. The value of the gold per transaction varied between the depositors, from as low as eighty shillings per ounce to eighty-one shillings and six-pence per ounce. Those who exchanged larger amounts received a better rate. Table 3 thus both demonstrates that varying amounts of gold were delivered by Chinese to the bank and also that the bank tended to favour those Chinese who provided the larger amounts of gold dust.

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[31] Promissory notes were ostensibly substitutes for various forms of money, whether as part of the currency or as a medium of exchange that possess the same circulable character as money. J.S. Waterman, "The Promissory Note as a Substitute for Money," *Minnesota Law Review*, 14:4 (March 1930): 313–41.

[32] "Report from the Select Committee on the Seizure of Gold on Board the Ethereal and Mary Nicholson", p. 471, paragraphs 5–6. The only Royal Mint in Australia at the time was in Sydney.

[33] Castlemaine Signature Book, A/13/5, ANZ Archives, Melbourne (hereafter ANZA).

[34] Smythesdale Signature Book, A/194/1, ANZA.

[35] Barrier's Reef and Blackwood Signature Book, A/24/2, ANZA; Walhalla Signature Book, A/62/3, ANZA; Bendigo Signature Book, A/191/1, ANZA. Beechworth Signature Book, 81/80/3268, Westpac Archives, Sydney.

Table 2. Losses by Chinese Stores at Buckland

Name of claimant		Goods destroyed			Money lost			Gold lost	
		£	s	d	£	s	d	oz	dwt
A Fuk (A Fook)	Store	400							
A Fat (A Futt) (Ah Foot)	Store	694	1	6	210			10	
A Chip or Lip Tip	Cookshop	523	17	6	100	15			
Kong See	Store	109							
Foo Fee & Co.	Cookshop	620	15	0	8				
A Lee & Yee Foo (Alick Ne Fon)	Store	400			100			15	
John See	Store	1000							
Si Tang (Sing Tang) (Si Fang) (See Thang) (See Tie)	Store	304	4	0	200				
As Sing (A Sing)	Store	599	18	8	50			5	
A Sin	Store	314	5						
A Tub	Store/ Cookshop	578	19	8					
A See	Store	700	2		20			1	6
A Sue	Store	1000			20				
Thomas A Young (A Yung)	Store	484	16					16	
A Pong (or Quang Ho = name of store)	Store	300							
A Joss	Store	194	12						
Quin Wall		550							
TOTAL		8769	109	28	708	15	0	47	6

Source: Buckland Riots: Report of the Board Appointed to Consider the Claims of Certain Chinese in the Buckland District to Compensation, Together with the Evidence Taken Before the Board, PROV, VPRS 3253/P0, Unit 58, Item 293

The exchange of gold dust by the Chinese at the diggings was not limited to the banks. European storekeepers also provided the service. In 1862, various Harrietville storekeepers of European origin reported that they had purchased a sum of up to 180 ounces of gold "each exclusively from Chinamen" over the period of approximately ten days.[36] The Chinese in Harrietville were limited in regard to what venues were available for the exchange of their gold dust. The earliest known mention of a Chinese store in Harrietville was in 1867 when Sun Wing On applied for a business licence, and this was seven years after the Chinese settlement commenced there.[37] That left the Chinese with only the European shopkeepers to exchange their gold, if they chose to do this.

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[36] "Morse's Creek", *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 6 March 1862, p. 3, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article112900130. The European merchants were stated to be Messrs. Osborne, McLean and Dumpty.

[37] Register of Claims, Buckland Division [includes Harrietville and Morses Creek], Acc. No. 1998.00141, Burke Museum, Beechworth.

Table 3. Chinese exchanges at the Union Bank of Australia,
Clunes Branch, Fourth Quarter, 1877

Date	Chinese customer	Amount of gold oz-dwts-gr	Exchange rate	Total currency £/s/.d.
24 September	Ah Ka	0-19-6	81s.	3/17/11
1 October	Ah Hing	4-4-12	81s. 6d.	17/4/3
1 October	Ah Ka	0-16-0	81s.	3/4/9
8 October	Ah Ka	0-16-18	81s.	3/7/9
16 October	Ah Ka	1-2-0	81s.	4/9/0
17 October	Ah Deng	0-5-12	80s.	1/2/0
22 October	Li Lin	3-15-12	81s.	15/5/9
22 October	Ah Deng	7-6-12	81s. 6d.	29/16/11
22 October	Ah Ka	1-4-12	81s.	4/19/2
29 October	Juong They	1-0-15	81s.	4/3/6
29 October	Ah Cou	1-4-12	81s.	4/19/2
5 November	Ah Hing	6-13-3	81s. 6d.	27/2/11
12 November	Ah Ka	2-8-18	81s.	9/17/5
19 November	Li Lin	4-9-18	81s.	18/3/5
19 November	Ah Cou	0-13-12	81s.	5/14/6
19 November	Ah Hing	8-5-12	81s. 6d.	33/14/4
26 November	Ah Ka	1-9-0	81s.	5/17/5
3 December	Ah Koon	0-2-18	80s.	0/11/0
3 December	Ah Ka	0-17-18	81s.	3/11/10
6 December	Ah Hing	0-12-0	81s. 6d.	2/8/10
10 December	Ah Hing	5-6-6	81s. 6d.	21/12/11
11 December	Ah Ka	0-15-18	81s.	3/3/9
15 December	Ah Hing	8-12-0	81s. 6d.	35/0/10
19 December	Ah Ka	1-4-6	81s.	4/18/2
24 December	Li Lin	5-1-12	81s.	20/11/0
24 December	Ah Ka	1-0-18	81s.	4/4/0
28 December	Ah Hing	8-6-6	81s. 6d.	33/17/5

Source: Statement of gold purchases at the Union Bank Clunes, for quarter ended December 1877,
Union Bank of Australia, U/15/1, ANZ Archives

The evidence thus points to a substantial part of the Chinese miners' income being converted to cash, then either held as savings or used to buy goods. The invoices tendered as evidence in the Buckland Enquiry report show that the goods sold by the storekeepers had been purchased by them, in cash, from Chinese importing firms in Melbourne. So the proportion of Chinese-won gold of Victoria that made its way to China would have been both direct remittances from the miners, and the income the shopkeepers received from the miners, which in turn was used to pay for imports from China.

From the Diggings to Melbourne

For that portion of the gold that remained as gold dust in their hands, Chinese miners, storekeepers and others chose two primary methods of delivering the gold to Melbourne. The first was through the use of the government or private gold escort. The second was either to travel the distance themselves or have a representative carry the gold to Melbourne on their behalf. Each had their advantages for the Chinese. The escorts provided security and very few were robbed. The escort service also followed a regular timetable, arriving in Melbourne on a certain day of the week and departing the gold fields, similarly, at a certain time each week or fortnight.[38] Thus, gold was delivered to the escort service at the diggings on that date to minimise the storage of large quantities of gold and currency. That escort service came with a cost, however, which varied depending on the distance travelled. For example, in 1861, the fare for transporting gold from the Ovens, Buckland and Harrietville fields by government escort was one shilling per ounce, while the cost was only nine pence from all other fields. Further, for all escort services, a single penny was added per ounce as a custody fee.[39]

To the Chinese, the costs associated with the escort were seen as an impediment to extracting the most value from the gold obtained on the field. Almost exclusively then, they chose not to pay these fees and charges when they had the option of transferring the gold themselves. The movement was not haphazard, but organised in a systematic way.

Evidence from the incident with the *Mary Nicholson* and *Ethereal* in Sydney in 1857 sheds light on the methods used by the Chinese to move their gold from the fields to the ports. This incident related to gold seized from a group of Chinese as they were about depart from Sydney. The Chinese were attempting to export a quantity of gold without having paid the appropriate export duties and, as part of the duties of the Customs officials, the untaxed gold was confiscated from the Chinese on board the vessels. The government report that followed noted that forty-two Chinese were aboard the two vessels. These Chinese were carrying with them parcels for themselves as well as for another 417 Chinese. As part of the evidence, a book was presented showing the weight of gold in each parcel and its destination in China.[40] It is reasonable to conclude that the remaining Chinese were on the fields and thus the forty-two not only were trusted with the gold but also had transported the gold from the fields to Sydney on behalf of the other Chinese miners.

This method of transporting gold from the fields by the Chinese is supported by much later evidence where, from the Ovens gold field, a report in the local newspaper in 1882 stated that:

> a number of Chinese, 16 or 17, are preparing for their yearly migration to
> their native country. The cash taken away with them varies from £50 to

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[38] L.J. Blake, *Gold Escorts in Australia* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978), pp. 10, 17.

[39] *Statistics of the Colony of Victoria 1861,* Public Records Office of Victoria, VPRS 943/P0000, Unit 13, p. 236.

[40] "Report from the Select Committee on the Seizure of Gold on board the Ethereal and Mary Nicholson," pp. 484–93, paragraph 54 and Appendix A.

> £150 each for the majority of them–; but I hear that two scraped together
> £300 a piece, and one of them about £800.[41]

What is of note here is that the journalist states that the Chinese were transporting currency and not gold dust, given the round figures. That is, the Chinese had converted their gold from dust to notes prior to departure. This also corroborates evidence presented earlier relating to the banks, as well as the holding of notes by the Chinese at Buckland. Further, the fact that the Commercial Bank of Australia was issuing notes labelled with the denomination of the note in both the English and Chinese language meant that those Chinese with little or no knowledge of the English numerical system were able to use these same notes.[42]

The use of notes, in exchange for gold dust, was of importance to Chinese merchants in Victoria. Advertisements in *The English and Chinese Advertiser* from Ballarat in the 1850s, placed by European shopkeepers wishing to sell their wares to Chinese customers, lists prices in pounds, shillings and pence.[43] The report of the Buckland riots provides evidence that Chinese firms were dealing with both Chinese and European wholesalers in Melbourne. Those firms are listed in Table 4. Chinese storekeepers on the Buckland fields exchanged currency for goods. However, unlike the movement of gold or notes by the Chinese miners from the gold fields to the ports, the use of banks and other financial intermediaries by Chinese merchants was necessary. Merchants in Melbourne, including Chinese merchants, used the banking system. Further, Lowe Kong Meng and Louis Ah Mouy, two significant merchants in Melbourne, both had strong connections with the establishment of the Commercial Bank of Australia.[44]

The goods summarised in Table 4 were either imported from another colony or overseas, or they were grown or manufactured in Victoria. Taking the year of the Buckland riots, 1857, in isolation, the statistics of the colony of Victoria reveal that of twenty-three vessels arriving from Hong Kong during the year, only one was chartered or owned by a Chinese firm, Kong Meng & Co., the proprietor being Lowe Kong Meng.

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[41] "Bright District Notes," *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 18 November 1882, p. 8, http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article207179173.

[42] "In Days of Old; Victoria's First Chinaman; Story of the Gold Fever," *The Sun* (Melbourne), 12 May 1918, p. 5; M.P. Vort-Ronald, *Banks of Issue in Australia* (self-published, 1982), p. 135.

[43] Ely Finch, "A Transcription and Translation of *The Chinese Advertiser*, and *The English And Chinese Advertiser*, Including Editions 7, 8, & 20 of *The Chinese Advertiser,* and Editions 3, 7, 23, 58, 60, 87, & 95 of *The English And Chinese Advertiser*, which represent all known extant editions" (Unpublished paper, Melbourne, 2015).

[44] Minutes of the Provisional Committee, Commercial Bank of Australia, from 22 March 1866 to 19 July 1866, A1/1 Minute Book 1, Westpac Archives. Ah Mouy was at eight meetings and Kong Meng at two of these initial meetings to set up the new bank.

Table 4. Melbourne firms supplying to Chinese stores on the Buckland

Name of Melbourne wholesaler	Goods sold	Value of goods supplied (if specified)
Chinese firms		
John Sum (also called John Sam)	Not described	£400 + £109
Kwong Fat (Kwang Fat or Kwun Fat)	Not described	£400 + £1,000 + £1,000
84 and 65 Little Bourke Street	Not described	£314
John San Que	Not described	£40
Sam Fat	Opium	£250
European firms		
Not mentioned	Wholesale General Outfitters and Hosiers, Boot & Shoe Importers	£194
McEwan & Co.	Wholesale Wine Merchants & Grocers	£174
P. Langwill & Co.	Wholesale & Retail Ironmongers	£5
F. Evans	Tent & Tarpaulin Maker, Wholesale & Retail	£3
The "Etna" Glass, China and Earthenware Store	Importer of English and American Glass and China	£2

Source: Buckland Riots: Report of the Board Appointed to Consider the Claims of Certain Chinese in the Buckland District to Compensation, Together with the Evidence taken before the Board, PROV, VPRS 3253/P0, Unit 58, Item 293

Kong Meng & Co. were heavy importers of Chinese goods at the time of the Buckland riots. Two years later, Lowe Kong Meng, a number of Chinese merchants, and a similar number of European merchants from Melbourne fronted the Victorian Colonial Secretary, John O'Shanassy. The merchants were putting forward to the government that Chinese merchants were adding significantly to the colonial economy and that the discriminatory Victorian Chinese residence tax was hindering this relationship. As part of the evidence, one of the European merchants, Mark Last King stated:

> shipments of gold to China were not to be regarded as profits, … but that the greater portion of the money so transmitted was in payment for goods … for instance, Kong Meng had a cargo of goods just now arrived in Port Phillip Harbour worth £10,000 pounds.[45]

Mark Last King was emphasising the importance of Chinese merchants such as Lowe Kong Meng in providing a service for both the European and Chinese communities as well as contributing to the Victorian economy. O'Shanassy argued that the Chinese were attaining an advantage derived from their residence in the colony "alluding particularly to the quantity of gold which they had exported on their own account".[46]

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[45] "Chinese Residence Tax," *Argus*, 31 May 1859, p. 7, cited in Macgregor, "Lowe Kong Meng and Chinese Engagement in the International Trade of Colonial Victoria".

[46] "The Chinese Difficulty," *Age*, 31 May 1851, p. 5, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/154839034.

O'Shanassy's understanding was that Chinese miners, particularly, were in Victoria only to win gold at the diggings and then take it home with them. What Mark Last King countered, although eventually unsuccessfully, was that the Chinese were adding to the Victorian economy through purchasing their requirements, both in Melbourne and at the gold fields. As with Bowen's exposition of the Chinese-run fish-drying industry in colonial Victoria, the £10,000 of imports were not only providing finance to the government through the customs duties, but also by employing members of the Chinese and European communities and thus enhancing the Victorian economy. The complexity of how the gold was used in such transactions created for O'Shanassy an uncertainty that this was indeed the case, and he was unswayed in his conviction that the gold going from Victoria to China was purely an export of currency, and not also a payment for imports.

Taking Gold to the Seas

During the early years of the gold rush of Victoria (1851–c.1854), the export of gold was almost exclusively to Great Britain. Shipping records show that the first vessel to travel to Hong Kong with a parcel of gold was not until the end of 1854. Over the next twenty-five years, new options became available for gold transport and through these an understanding can be obtained of the connection between the gold obtained by the miners and its final transport to the villages in China.

The options for the movement of gold to China were based upon the availability of the type of transport. Square-rigged vessels provided the only method of international trade for the port of Melbourne prior to the early 1850s. These vessels arrived from either Britain or from Asian ports. Melbourne was the initial port of arrival for the majority of shipping, for those vessels arriving from Europe and Britain. Owing to the Roaring Forties, winds blowing from west to east around the Southern Ocean, Melbourne was the first port of arrival for all vessels travelling from Britain and Europe as they passed around the Cape of Good Hope for Australia. Those vessels then either returned to Britain or continued their journey to Asian ports, including those in India and China.[47] China was an important destination for these vessels as it provided the source of tea cargoes for Britain. Thus, during the 1850s, numerous sailing ships departed Melbourne for China's ports in ballast. Many were to take gold with them.

Steamers were common in and around Melbourne, but they were limited to travel to other colonial ports or, occasionally, to New Zealand. However, steamers were already plying the waters of the Indian Ocean, with companies such as P&O providing the transport of mail and some high-value goods, including gold, between Britain, Aden, India and East Asia.[48] An extension to Australia was not long in the making.

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[47] From as early as the late eighteenth century, vessels travelled from Sydney to India either involved in trade or to allow pardoned convicts to return home. Other vessels, including three from the original First Fleet to Australia, were destined for Canton, China, to collect goods under the orders of the British East India Company. George Barrington, *The History of New South Wales, including Botany Bay, Port Jackson, Parramatta, Sydney and All its Dependencies* (London: Jones, Sherwood, Neely & Jones, 1802), pp. 89, 141, 143–44.

[48] Freda Harcourt, "British Oceanic Mail Contracts in the Age of Steam, 1838–1914," *Journal of Transport History*, 9:1 (1998): 2.

The P&O mail steam transport had significant advantages for those wishing to transport goods like gold. As a mail service, the steamers were required to conform to a timetable which meant that merchants knew almost exactly when a vessel would be at a certain port and thus when the goods, including gold, would arrive in China.[49] The fact that the vessels could travel at good speed meant that, when approached by pirates, the steamers could out-run the chasing sail vessels. Further, by the early 1850s, the freight rate to transport gold by P&O was as low as two per cent of the total value of the gold, an amount that encouraged merchants to use the service over the sail option where expensive charters were involved.[50]

The newly formed colonial governments in Australia worked with their counterpart in Britain and, in 1852, a steam mail contract was tendered and awarded to P&O for the transfer of mail between Singapore, Melbourne and Sydney.[51] The contract lasted barely two years, as P&O felt that the costs outweighed the value of the mail contract.[52] While the P&O vessels carried both gold dust and sovereigns, none was for the Chinese.[53] In its place a new mail contract, using fast clippers, was created through the firm Australian Royal Mail Steam Navigation Company.[54] That firm was unable to maintain the timetable they promised and, in 1859, P&O resumed their service to Australia.[55] The new P&O service initially connected Aden to Melbourne via Mauritius. After only a year, P&O altered the connection point to the Britain–India route from Aden to Point de Galle (Galle), Ceylon. The first vessel that departed Australian shores on this new route was the S.S. *Northam*, leaving Sydney on 14 March 1860.[56] Thus, by 1860, Melbourne merchants had the opportunity to move gold to China either directly through sail or via the intermediary port, Galle, using the steam vessels of P&O.

The Chinese took advantage of both methods for the transport of gold. In the 1850s they primarily chose sail. However, in Table 5 we can see that the number of sail vessels radically diminished as soon as P&O's steamers commenced their service by 1860.

Two other methods of transport became available to the Chinese miners and merchants in Melbourne, although there is little evidence that either were used to any extent. An emerging coal export industry in the early 1860s redirected the interests of shippers of vessels in Melbourne. Instead of departing for China direct from Melbourne, sailing vessels

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[49] P&O serviced numerous ports in China, including Shanghai as well as Hong Kong.

[50] Harcourt, "British Oceanic Mail Contracts," p. 4.

[51] Freda Harcourt, *Flagships of Imperialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 135.

[52] Harcourt, *Flagships of Imperialism,* p. 138.

[53] The shipping records for the vessels used, primarily the *Chusan*, show that although gold dust was included in the manifest, no Chinese were aboard the vessel on the journeys to Singapore nor to Galle. The data from the "Cleared Outward" section of the shipping records provided the list of passengers for each vessel. No Chinese were included and the Chinese would not have exported their gold on the vessels without a Chinese escort.

[54] Frank Broeze, "Distance Tamed: Steam Navigation to Australia and New Zealand from its Beginnings to the Outbreak of the Great War," *Journal of Transport History*, 10:1 (1989): 5–6.

[55] Reginald Kirk, *Australian Mails via Suez, 1852–1926* (Beckenham, Postal History Society, 1989), p. 147.

[56] Kirk, *Australian Mails*, p. 158.

headed to Sydney or Newcastle in ballast to attain a load of coal.[57] The second was the introduction of a new steam route north along the east coast of Australia and to China, via the Torres Strait by the Eastern and Australian Mail Steam Company (E&A).[58] The route commenced in 1873 linking Sydney and Brisbane to Singapore and was expanded the following year to both Melbourne at the Australian end and Hong Kong at the Asian end. By this time, the export of gold to China by Chinese had diminished to £20,000 per year, less than ten per cent of the peak gold-rush period outflows of over £300,000 in the late 1850s to early 1860s.[59] Mostly the Chinese chose not to avail themselves of these options but, where appropriate, used the P&O instead.

Table 5. Number of vessels departing Melbourne with gold direct for Hong Kong by sail and for Galle by steamers

Year	To Hong Kong	To Galle
1854	1	–
1855	13	–
1856	17	–
1857	18	–
1858	13	–
1859	18	–
1860	13	6
1861	7	7
1862	8	12
1863	8	12
1864	7	12
1865	4	12
1866	2	12
1867	3	12

Source: Shipping records, Argus *and* Age *newspapers, Melbourne, from 1854 to 1867*

Two main options were thus chosen by miners and merchants for the transport of gold from Melbourne to China from the 1850s through to the end of the 1870s. The gold shipped to Hong Kong by the sail vessels was almost exclusively as parcels of dust contained in

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[57] By 1866, for example, only five vessels departed for Hong Kong with one in ballast. *Statistics for the Colony of Victoria for the Year 1866* (Melbourne: John Ferris, Government Printer, 1867). Shipping records from the Sydney and Newcastle newspapers show that a high portion of these coal-laden vessels made their way to China, owing to that country's needs of the emerging river and coastal steam trade.

[58] Nicholas Guoth, "Advancing Trade with China: The Eastern and Australian Mail Steam Company and the 1873–1880 Mail Contract," *International Journal of Maritime History*, 31:2 (2019): 263–84.

[59] "Gold Exported to China, 1851–79 [1880] VPP 40", Unpublished Report by Assistant Commissioner of Trade and Customs, dated 3 June 1880, reproduced in *The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports and Documents*, ed. Ian F. McLaren (Melbourne: Red Rooster Press, 1985), pp. 33–58. Originally published 1868, p. 66.

boxes.[60] The shipping records do not divulge the owners of the gold, yet a small amount of gold dust was sent by European merchants for trade on the Canton markets in the mid-1850s as payment for tea purchases.[61] By the late 1850s, that trade was diverted to the Calcutta markets instead, and as gold bars as opposed to dust.[62] Thus, almost all of the gold submitted for transport on sailing vessels direct from Melbourne to Hong Kong was completed by the Chinese.

The opening of the Sydney Royal Mint in 1855 was a key development in the choice of how gold would be transported to Hong Kong and China. Immediately, local steam vessels commenced taking gold dust from Melbourne to the Mint in Sydney for processing into either specie or bullion.[63] The refined version was returned to Melbourne prior to its export to Great Britain or elsewhere. By the early 1860s, Chinese merchants in Melbourne, together with a few in Sydney, chose to take advantage of this method of transfer of gold to China. Kong Meng & Co. and Ah Mouy & Co. were the primary submitters of gold to the P&O steam vessels for transport to Galle and thence to Hong Kong. As an example, Table 6 shows, for the year 1868, the gold that was exported from Melbourne by the P&O steamers. This example can be found replicated throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s.

The gold that was exported by the Chinese merchants to Galle on the P&O steamers can be matched against that imported to Hong Kong also on the P&O steamers. Sparse records exist and only for the years 1865 to 1868, each providing the amount of specie imported into Hong Kong from Australia on the various P&O steamers.[64] As there were no P&O steamers travelling direct from the Australian ports to Hong Kong, the records are for the transhipment of the gold at Galle. The amounts do not match exactly with the export of gold by the Chinese merchants. A small amount was also being forwarded by banks to Hong Kong via Galle as well.[65]

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[60] All gold that was in combined holdings was placed in boxes, whether for London, Galle or Hong Kong. For example, the *Belle of the West* departed Melbourne on 5 January 1860. The export details state that her only cargo was "3 boxes, containing 552 ounces of gold." "Shipping," *Age*, 6 January 1860, p. 4, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/18200098.

[61] Gold was sent from Australia to Hong Kong to be "forwarded to Canton for realization". See: Letter from Thacker & Co. to Jardine Matheson & Co., 24 November 1853, Correspondence: Business Letters: Australasia, Jardine Matheson Archives, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, UK (hereafter JMA) B6/3; Letter from Jardine Matheson & Co. to Thacker & Co., 25 January 1854, Letters to Europe, JMA C11/18.

[62] In 1855, Jardine Matheson & Co. informed their agents in Australia that "owing to the low prices of gold now ruling in Canton we have not thought fit to dispose of the bullion in China, and have accordingly sent it to Calcutta". That led to the eventual request that all gold from Australia should travel to Calcutta instead of Canton. The choice was also of bullion. Letter from Jardine Matheson & Co. to Thacker & Co., 7 March 1855, Letters to Europe, JMA C11/20.

[63] H.C. Bolton and N.H. Williams, "Weighing and Assay in the Early Days of the Melbourne Branch of the Royal Mint," *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 14 (2002–03): 47.

[64] *Prices Current*, P945 Cartons 31–33, Augustine Heard Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University, Boston, MA. The records only show amount of specie.

[65] Using Kirk, *Australian Mails*, the P&O vessels that travelled from Sydney and Melbourne to Galle and the connecting vessels that took goods, including gold, from Galle to Hong Kong can be obtained. Thus, data from the Australian newspapers of gold exports by Chinese merchants is readily matched against the amounts imported on the vessels arriving in Hong Kong.

By the late 1860s, two factors affected the transfer of gold from Melbourne to China. The first was that the number of vessels travelling direct to Hong Kong had significantly diminished. The second was that the exportation of gold from Melbourne via Galle was by specie and not dust. Gold dust was exported on the P&O steamers for Galle, but it was not being transhipped and then imported into Hong Kong. Thus, for the Chinese merchants in Melbourne to trade with those in Hong Kong, they required specie as their method of exchange. The rare vessel that did travel direct to Hong Kong carried both specie and dust with the latter assumed to be carried by the Chinese returning to China.[66] To simplify matters and reduce costs, many of the Melbourne Chinese merchants chose to work with the two primary Chinese mercantile firms, Kong Meng & Co. and Ah Mouy & Co.

Table 6. Gold exported on P&O steamers to Galle in 1868

Merchant name	Gold exported (£)
Kong Meng & Co.	77,335
Ah Mouy & Co.	34,592
Hi Cheung	2,573
Fong Fat	3,705
Total Chinese	118,205
Non-Chinese	47,032
Banks	143795
Total of all exports	309,032

Source: Age *and* Argus *newspapers, Melbourne, 1868*

Gold for Goods

Kong Meng & Co. was the most prominent Chinese merchant in Melbourne. The firm either owned or chartered vessels to bring goods from Hong Kong to Melbourne from 1857 to 1880. By the 1860s, Kong Meng & Co. was also a leading importer of Chinese goods to Melbourne. Table 7 shows that Kong Meng & Co. were the shipping agent for more than half of the arriving vessels from Hong Kong for the years from 1863 to 1865, from 1868 to 1873, in 1876 and from 1878 until 1880.

Macgregor argues that Lowe Kong Meng's rise to prominence in the Chinese provisioning trade in Victoria was due to his having been born in Penang, educated at the English school there, and set up as an Indian Ocean trader based in Mauritius from the age of 16. His fluency in spoken Cantonese and English, his confident hand in written English, his strong connections in Calcutta, his understanding of the British–Asian trade and shipping systems, and his trade connections across Asia and the Indian Ocean world gave him an advantage no other Chinese or European importer in Melbourne had.[67]

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[66] Even when a vessel travelled directly to Hong Kong, it commonly carried specie. In mid-1869, the Kong Meng & Co. vessel *Joshua Bates* had among its cargo 18,000 sovereigns and 2,060 ounces of gold dust. The vessel also carried a number of Chinese back to China. There is a strong assumption that the 2,060 ounces was carried by the Chinese themselves. "Shipping Intelligence," *Argus*, 7 June 1868, p. 4, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5823620/224149.

[67] Macgregor, "Lowe Kong Meng and Chinese Engagement in the International Trade of Colonial Victoria".

Kong Meng & Co. was already well known as a leading Chinese firm in Melbourne by the late 1850s. Prominent European firm James Henty & Co. assisted Lowe Kong Meng to organise shipments of both prepared opium and Chinese tobacco from Hong Kong through the firm Jardine Matheson & Co.[68] In the initial discussions, Henty stated that Lowe Kong Meng was a "well to do man," thus recognising his stature in the Melbourne mercantile community. Lowe Kong Meng paid for these transactions through drafts on the Oriental Bank and not gold. At the time, Jardine Matheson was accepting gold from James Henty to purchase tea for the Melbourne market, but the trust of Lowe Kong Meng was insufficient to allow this option for the Chinese firm.[69]

James Henty & Co., along with a number of other European merchant houses, chartered the remaining vessels not under Kong Meng & Co.'s control. Their primary intention was to import tea shipments into Melbourne. That is, Kong Meng & Co. held a significant position with regard to the importation of Chinese goods for the Chinese markets of Victoria, whether they be in Melbourne or at the gold fields. The gold exported as specie was exported either by Kong Meng & Co. (through the few vessels that did depart Melbourne for Hong Kong direct) or by both Kong Meng & Co. and Ah Mouy & Co. (via the P&O vessels through Galle), but the imports were undertaken by various merchants, mostly wholesalers.[70] As has been shown above through the evidence from the Buckland riots, Chinese wholesalers in Melbourne sold goods to Chinese storekeepers in the Buckland Valley, as they did for the other gold fields and small towns that provided for the nearby diggings.

The movement of gold, or its substitute in currency, was thus complete. The Chinese miner went to the bank, to the European storekeeper, or to the Chinese storekeeper and exchanged his gold dust for goods or for currency. The miners purchased Chinese goods from the Chinese storekeepers. The Chinese storekeepers used that currency to buy goods from Chinese and European wholesalers in Melbourne. The Chinese wholesalers either bought their Chinese goods from Kong Meng & Co. or imported the goods themselves. The notes used to purchase the goods were then converted to specie by the wholesalers, and through Kong Meng & Co. or Ah Mouy & Co. that specie was exported to Hong Kong. The specie travelled via Galle to Hong Kong on P&O vessels in nearly all cases, with the rare direct trip to Hong Kong. The specie was used to purchase goods in Hong Kong which were exported from Hong Kong to Melbourne on a vessel chartered by Kong Meng & Co. From there, the goods entered the existing overall system of purchase and sale and of gold dust, notes and specie, to be repeated again and again.

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[68] There were numerous letters discussing the opium and tobacco purchases of the late 1850s. See, for example: Letter from Jardine Matheson & Co. to James Henty, 12 November 1858, *Letter to Europe*, JM C11/25 JMA.

[69] Jardine Matheson was involved in transactions that saw remittances paid in gold bars sent to ports in India. These were complex transactions and only existed with the Hong Kong firm's most trusted agents in Australia. See Guoth, "More Than a Cup of Tea," Chapter 6 for further discussion on this.

[70] For example, the import manifests located among shipping information in the newspapers showed that "sundry Chinese" imported large amounts of goods. See, for example "Shipping Intelligence," *Argus*, 7 June 1864, p. 4, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5749460.

Table 7. Number of vessels arriving in Melbourne from Hong Kong and the portion that Kong Meng & Co. were the agents for

Year	Kong Meng & Co. as agent	Total ships arriving from Hong Kong[71]
1854		6
1855		29
1856		14
1857	1	22
1858	3	19
1859	3	13
1860	3	10
1861	5	14
1862	5	14
1863	4	8
1864	6	7
1865	5	8
1866	3	7
1867	2	6
1868	8	13
1869	8	12
1870	7	9
1871	8	11
1872	9	11
1873	11	20
1874	3	12
1875	5	11
1876	8	15
1877	4	9
1878	6	11
1879	2	3
1880	1	1
TOTAL	120	315

Source: Inwards Shipping Report 1854–1880, Public Record Office of Victoria, VPRS 38/P0

Conclusion

Barry McGowan provided a significant addition to our understanding of the Chinese in Australia. Much of his work was devoted to the gold-mining activities of the Chinese in the nineteenth century, particularly those in New South Wales. This article extends Barry's work not only to Victoria but also by considering the movement of the gold Chinese miners

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[71] The figures shown here are for those vessels that arrived direct from Hong Kong to the Victorian ports and does not include the E&A vessels that first visited ports in Queensland and Sydney prior to arriving in Melbourne from 1875 to 1880.

obtained from the various gold fields. The story is one of a complex set of narratives, each taking its place within the overall transformation and transfer of gold. From dust to notes, from notes to specie, and from specie to goods that the gold and notes were then used to buy, this article has shown that the movement of gold in the late nineteenth century involved numerous individuals and firms in Melbourne and in the various mining districts and their nearby towns.

Gold obtained by Chinese miners on the diggings of colonial Victoria was exported to Hong Kong and China, both as personal remittances and as payment for goods imported back to Australia for their consumption. The sending of remittances was primarily undertaken by individuals, either by themselves or coordinated with others, while payment for goods involved specie exports sent by specific firms for the purpose of importing goods into Australia. This article contends that for trade, specie was exported by Chinese merchants, having been converted from notes, while for remittances, dust was transported in the care of individual Chinese or their representatives. From the depositing of gold in a bank, to the exchange of gold for either sovereigns or bank notes, to the redeeming of these notes for sovereigns in Melbourne, the method of moving gold to Melbourne also defined how it was exported. This article has shown that, from the mining districts to China, the movement of gold was complex and extensive.

The documents that the authors have uncovered reveal some of the commercial practices of Chinese merchants, shopkeepers and others on the diggings, in the towns of country Victoria, and also in Melbourne. Through a combination of shipping and commercial data from Victorian newspapers, banking and government documents together with archival material, these sources have helped created a stronger picture of how gold was used by both the Chinese community and the European community in colonial Australia. What is witnessed here, and hopefully will lead to further discoveries, is a network of communities that offer a more detailed socio-economic perspective on Chinese commercial transactions on the gold fields compared with existing studies. In continuing on from the work of Barry McGowan, this article has followed the gold taken out of the ground and given it a life, one that facilitated commerce and provisioning on the gold fields, and one that saw much of that gold eventually reaching China.