7 Creating the threatening "others"

Environment, Chinese immigrants and racist discourse in colonial Australia

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Abstract

The migration of Chinese to Australia stimulated by the discovery of gold triggered a white racist discourse in the second half of the nineteenth century. The anti-Chinese propaganda was not only rooted in economic and cultural rationalities, but also used ecological factors to justify the view that Chinese immigrants constituted a harmful species for Australia. In the 1850s, "water grievances" of European miners towards Chinese caused violent racial conflicts and led to the earliest discriminatory legislation. The anti-Chinese discourse diminished over the next two decades because the growth of the Chinese population slowed and Chinese immigrants proved useful in the development of agricultural industries and making the Australian natural environment profitable. When a feeling of nationalism and imperialism quickly grew in the 1880s, Chinese bodies were again condemned as dirty, corrupted and disease-causing. The middle class, especially the politicians and media elites, preached the danger of Chinese emigration to Australia. By looking at the development of the white racist discourse from an environmental perspective, this chapter illustrates how environmental arguments were successfully used to support European domination in the developing Australian economy and society.

It has been widely proved that Chinese immigrants had a significant influence on modern Australian history. However, as late as the mid-1970s the Australian Chinese were still a group of "aliens" in the public mind. In this chapter, I will briefly discuss how this anti-Chinese discourse was developed by exploiting environmental and ecological anxieties, rather than simply an economic or cultural bias, against the specific activities of Chinese immigrants. The dispute in allocating natural resources, and the image of Chinese bodies as dirty, strengthened a racist ideology rooted in the view of Australia as a remote European colony surrounded by an Asian population.

Chinese immigrants in Australian Environmental History

Within the context of Australian history, the Anthropocene—that is, the age dominated by humans' agency—did not simply begin with European settlement

in 1789, but refers to a much longer time period when the first generation of Aboriginal people arrived in this southern continent at least 55,000 years ago (Garden 2005, 12). While it is widely recognized that both the Australian environment and society had been greatly transformed since the time when the First Fleet arrived, Australian environmental history is essentially the product of different groups of immigrants who interacted with each other and with the local environment.

As in many other settler societies, the complicated and extensive interactions between the European immigrants and the Aboriginal people were the most arresting stories. Consequently, disputes around Western colonialism, capitalism and conservationists' response to these trends contributed greatly to the studies of Australian environmental history. Beyond this popular and well-known narrative, one should not forget that Australia is a multicultural society. That means that not only have the British and Aboriginal heritage had an impact on Australian society, but other ethnic groups including Chinese immigrants also had agency in Australian history. Nonetheless, in Australian environmental history studies one can hardly find any works on immigrants other than the British. In fact, with limited exceptions such as Heather Goodall, who has worked on various immigrant groups and their relationships with the environment, few environmental historians pay attention to non-European immigrants' experiences (Goodall 2012 and 2010).

The absent role of Chinese immigrants in Australian environmental history should be addressed because Chinese immigrants and their descendants have constituted the largest non-European ethnic group since the 1850s. The earliest recorded Chinese settled in Sydney in 1818. There were four more significant waves of Chinese emigrations to Australia from the mid-nineteenth century when global migration movements to the antipodes developed. The first wave, and the largest and the most significant one in the colonial period, brought at least 42,000 Chinese immigrants to Australia as gold diggers, starting in 1853 when the gold rush reached its peak. Later, these people spread all around the continent and engaged widely in various industries, especially in agriculture.[1] With the birth of the Australian Commonwealth and the White Australia Policy, which strictly banned Chinese emigration to Australia, the Australian Chinese population quickly dwindled. Chinese emigration to Australia was not resumed until 1950 when the Colombo Plan[2] opened a door to the Chinese living in the British Commonwealth to become educated and trained in Australia. Most of these immigrants were not given citizenship until the 1970s. The third wave was the "Boat People" or refugees, including many Chinese, from Indo-China after the Vietnam War. The fourth wave rose after the abolishment of the White Australia Policy and the launch of the Reform and Open-door Policy in China in the late 1970s. Since then, the number of Chinese immigrants has skyrocketed.

Obviously, the trajectory of the Chinese emigrations to Australia was influenced by Australian migration policy. As a racist discourse, the White Australia Policy was the key reason that explains why Australian historians

practically ignored Chinese experiences. In the gold rush days, the anti-Chinese propaganda and violence, prevalent in the white miners' society, was largely based on the environmental influence of Chinese miners on the goldfields. This created a fear of Chinese immigrants as an environmental threat to Australia. As a basis for the future White Australia Policy, the racist propaganda drove the administration to impose a special poll-tax on Chinese immigrants. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the rise of Australian nationalism more frequently seized upon and used the stereotype of the Chinese as an environmentally threatening "other" to consolidate their ideal European society transplanted to the antipodes. The Chinese were considered both unclean and dangerous in their constructed environments and in their physical bodies. Since 1901 when the White Australia Policy forbade new Chinese emigration to Australia, Australian Chinese history was consequently neglected as Chinese immigrants never truly belonged to this land.

What do these Chinese experiences mean in Australian environmental history, especially during the foundational days of modern Australia? From an environmental perspective, this chapter aims to examine how the Australian anti-Chinese discourse was constructed and developed during the second half of the nineteenth century. Ann Curthoys, a leading historian of the Australian racial relations, writes, "people could get along, but only when the Chinese were seen as a declining force, only when the colonial Australians' sense of European and particularly British political, social and economic dominance was unthreatened" (Curthoys 2001, 118). In effect, no matter how the Chinese immigrants were assimilated into the Australian environment and society, the whites could use their cultural and political power to create a racist discourse.

"Water grievance" and the rise of anti-Chinese propaganda

From the time the New South Wales colony was established, Australia was divided into several penal colonies and did not receive massive waves of free migrants until the mid-nineteenth century. The decisive stimulus was newly-discovered gold in 1851. The Australian population tripled in the following ten years and Victoria, with the largest goldfield, absorbed most of these new immigrants (McCalman, Cook, and Reeves 2001, 19; Fahey 2010, 149). The Chinese were part of this huge migration, and they soon named Victoria the "New Gold Mountain," a reference to California—the "Old Gold Mountain". In some of the main goldfield areas, Chinese accounted for 25 percent and even up to 35 percent of the male population (Lovejoy 2007, 41). More significantly, "gold rush migration provided an unusual experience for Britons, many of whom had never mixed so freely with foreigners, especially the Chinese" (Fahey 2010, 149). As a consequence, conflicts quickly arose between Chinese and European immigrants around the distribution of major natural resources, in particular the use of water. Much evidence shows that the "water grievances" frequently gave rise to the bitterest confrontation between the Chinese and European miners.

Figure 7.1 Relic of alluvial field near a Chinese camp at Castlemaine, Australia
Source: Photograph by the author

In traditional Australian historical narrative, there has been a stereotype of Chinese miners as "fossickers" and "water wasters": they rarely opened new claims but simply focused on re-washing tailings on old claims. Compared to the European miners who worked as individuals or as a family, the Chinese always worked collectively, which meant they consumed additional water. These digging methods caused the water supply to deteriorate and led to the "water grievances" of white miners. Based on a miner's record of 1859, Geoffrey Serle, an authoritative Australian historian, wrote that

> Chinese quickly settled down [...] to work abandoned ground, reworking "tailings," and seeking and often finding pockets in creek-beds which had been overlooked [....] the Chinese had been causing widespread irritation through their mining methods and ignorance of the regulations and accepted conventions: waste of water, "muddying" water and ground, and use of and damage to carefully constructed water-holes were frequently mentioned.
> (Serle 1968, 321)

Another popular historical reader describes how "Chinese wash their dirt in one water hole and let the mud run into the next, thus spoiling two holes"

(Gittins 1981, 74). All these criticisms were proved by official records: after the Eureka Stockade Riot,[3] the only violent struggle between workers and the administration in Australian history, the Victorian legislative council installed a commission with the purpose of enquiring into the conditions of the gold fields in the state. In its report the commission stated that:

> The Chinese are content with very small earnings acquired under the rudest modes of mining. In rewashing the old grounds, which seems their chief mode, they use up and waste the water with a thoughtless profusion, disregarding often the reservoirs of drinking water, and they thus occasion many wrangling scenes by their inability or unwillingness to understand the representations of the authorities or the adjacent miners.[4]

This report was so historically influential that it promoted the earliest poll-tax imposed exclusively on Chinese in order to restrict Chinese influx.

Before this report was finalized, there was already evidence which illustrated clearly the general negative attitude regarding the Chinese's use of water. Questioned on the Chinese presence in the area, an American miner at Ballarat, Charles James Kenworthy, answered:

> They are the greatest nuisance on the diggings, and government ought to take some steps, if not for their removal, at all events to prevent their increase; they are [a] nuisance; they spoil all the water on the gold fields, and will merely work upon the surface.
>
> (McLaren 1985, 8)

For him, Chinese miners spoiled the water "by washing in it; they do nothing but surfacing" (McLaren 1985, 8). Henry Melville, a former storekeeper at Castlemaine, added: "they take the water out of one hole, and let their 'tailings' fall into another one, and so destroy the water of two holes" (McLaren 1985, 9). The key evidence was presented by Joseph Anderson Panton, Resident Commissioner at Sandhurst (Bendigo):

> At one time they were a nuisance in the back gullies; they destroyed the water, which the Europeans would not have done, from the fact of their washing whatever stuff they could lay hold of. They would not dig holes, and take the washing-stuff alone and wash it; but they went about the gullies, and scraped up whatever they thought would pay them. In that way they were perpetually washing while other men were digging.
>
> (McLaren 1985, 11)

From those three testimonies it would seem that the Chinese were undoubtedly destroying the water supply. However, the interview with Howqua, a Cantonese who could speak fluent English, offers, obviously, a different version of the story:

> The Chinamen take away the water at the diggings, and make the diggers angry?—Yes; that is what I have been speaking about. Do the Chinaman understand now the injury they are doing by taking such a large quantity of water?—Yes, they understand it. In the winter time you go and take plenty of water, in the summer time you cannot take a drop of water.
>
> (McLaren 1985, 12–13)

Among the people who were heard Howqua was the only Chinese witness and he proved that Chinese miners learned how to use water sustainably by respecting the change of seasons. Even though the Chinese miners constrained their activities, the fact of wasting water and jeopardizing European interests was not acceptable.

Other reasons may help us understand why Chinese were seen as water wasting fossickers. Firstly, the shortage of water existed widely in Australia and the water supply problem was a challenge to all immigrants whether they were miners or not. At the beginning of the gold rushes, some noticed that

> [...] the streams of Victoria, like those of Australia generally, bear no resemblance to the fine river[s] of Europe or America. They were few in number; and the Hume, or the upper Murray, and a portion of the Yarra Yarra excepted, all insignificant, and quite useless for purposes of inland navigation.
>
> (Lancelott 1852, 55)

Every new immigrant to Australia had to get used to the shortage of water.

Secondly, the arrival time of the Chinese immigrants also made them prone to work on second-hand claims. The earliest Chinese diggers came to Australia at the end of 1853 when the rush had lasted for two years and the average outcome of surface mining was declining, so a growing number of miners turned to shaft mining but abandoned surface claims. So it was not an accident that the Chinese chose to work on the surface claims, which required less investment and energy, and had been worked by the earlier miners.

Thirdly, the intelligence of Chinese was different from that of the Europeans. European miners usually lacked "steadiness"—they "repeatedly left payable claims, deceived by wild rumors of fabulous wealth at new fields. (...) Most lost heavily by rushing, but could not resist the gamble" (Curthoys and Markus 1978, 39–40). Chasing after gold nuggets but not grains, the European miners abandoned claims and tailings which sometimes contained enough gold for a lengthy washing. In turn, they scorned the Chinese who toiled for a meager income and "wasted" water, as they did not stop washing until the smallest grain was found. In fact, this process saved quantities of gold that might have been lost.

In fact, "water grievance" was largely a result rather than a cause of racist ideology against the Chinese. Using his archaeological research into main southern New South Wales goldfields, Barry McGowan established that the Chinese had

often worked on first-hand claims and did not just wash tailings (McGowan 2005). Chinese miners sometimes had to work on old claims (and used more water) because they could hardly keep the new ones under the threat and attack of the European miners. As early as 1854 there had been a court record showing that European miners violently expelled the Chinese from a claim. In 1854 and 1855, the most important newspapers including the *Argus* and *Ballarat Star,* frequently reported that the Chinese miners were sometimes beaten and expelled from new goldfields. The most notorious case was in 1857, when 700 Chinese miners were traveling overland from the Port of Robe, South Australia, to the Central Goldfields of Victoria. Replenishing their water supplies at a spring some 400 kilometers due east of Robe, they discovered by chance the Canton Lead, the world's richest shallow alluvial goldfield that stretched five kilometers in length. In the following three months they harvested rich gold and established Ararat, a small town which still survives today. However at the end of 1857, most Chinese miners were ousted from residence and expelled from the site by the British miners who heard the news and came in.

"Water grievance" was increasingly used as an excuse for the racist propaganda against Chinese after 1855. In 1860 to 1861, the goldfields reported six riots against Chinese miners. Ironically, the first three happened during the winter when there was lots of water. The latter three occurred in drought season when the goldfield administration had already segregated the races on fields with separate water supplies. After having investigating the goldfields, even the New South Wales premier, Charles Cowper, was convinced that the miners' appeal about "water grievance" was absurd. He told the European miners that:

> [...] the Chinese have not really injured you. True, the supply of water is inadequate to your wants, but this has not arisen from the use of it by the Chinamen [....] Your grievances are not as great as you would try to make out.
>
> (Curthoys and Markus 1978, 40)

The racist propaganda avoided the fact that the European immigrants should take greater responsibility for the decline of the Australian goldfield environment. As Geoffrey Bolton states, "the impact of Europeans on the Australian environment before 1850 would seem puny compared with what came after gold" (Bolton 1981, 68).There were four particular environmental impacts of gold rushes: population influx and the establishment of numerous urban centers; localized damage from digging and the spread of subsoil as mullock or tailings; the clearing and consumption of timber; and the degradation of water systems (Garden 2005, 83). All four of these impacts could cause the reduction of water, while European miners merely blamed the Chinese miners.

In the mid-nineteenth century, new European immigrants to Australia, mainly from Britain, combined imperialism with racism when they created an anti-Chinese discourse. In 1856, a reader of the *Argus*, the most popular contemporary newspaper in Victoria, wrote

> to draw the attention of our fellow-colonists to the curse that we are allowing to be entailed on this fine colony, and its future inhabitants, by permitting the introduction of hordes of Mongolian pagans, whose present object in coming here is for the purpose of gutting this country of its wealth and returning elsewhere to spend it.[5]

Not coincidentally, in 1857, the Legislative Council of Victoria promoted a new bill "to control the flood of Chinese immigration setting in to this Colony, and effectually prevent the Gold Fields of Australia Felix from becoming the property of the Emperor of China and of the Mongolian and Tartar hordes of Asia".[6]

It is not hard to understand why the European racists, from both private and official corners, were eagerly utilizing "water grievance" to restrict Chinese emigration to Australia.

Chinese contribution to agricultural industries and the decline of racist discourse

Gold rushes began to subside starting in 1861 and Chinese emigration to Australia also slowed. However, gold rushes stimulated many other natural resource extraction industries that supported mining and the growing communities. For example, in Victoria "the presence of agricultural, pastoral and timber resources helped to keep down mining costs, just as mining provided hinterland settlers with ready markets" (Bate 1988, 5). It offered Chinese immigrants an opportunity to work in various industries other than solely the goldfields. As skillful agricultural workers, many Chinese fulfilled the need for expanding Australian agricultural industries. The racist propaganda against the Chinese community also lessened somewhat.

In fact, Chinese were very successful in helping establish a profitable new agricultural ecosystem in Australia. In evidence in the 1855 report, the Parliament Commission asked Howqua: "Would they be able to grow wheat and vegetables?" He replied: "Yes, all Chinamen like farming."[7] Especially after 1865, Chinese turned to market gardens and took advantage of Section 42 of the Amending Land Act which allowed people to reside on and cultivate Crown Land in and around the goldfields under annual licenses.

Among all the Chinese agricultural activities, market gardening was the most significant contribution to Australian society (Yong 1977, 49–54). It developed in close ties with mining activities. When shallow digging was popular in Victoria in the early 1850s, miners had to shift claims frequently, so they could seldom stay in one place long enough to establish a vegetable garden or market system. By the early 1860s with the rise of quartz mining on large Victorian goldfields such as Bendigo, the more settled miners provided a stable market for vegetables. Many Chinese migrants found it difficult to gain opportunities in the quartz mining gangs, so the migrants who wanted to stay turned to agricultural work around the goldfields (Stanin 2004, 23). Northeastern Victoria

experienced a very similar process. In the 1860s, vegetables from the Chinese gardens quickly dominated the Beechworth market (Frost 2002, 116–117). In Queensland and New South Wales, although Chinese market gardening was not always developed by miners, the planting skills were connected with those in Victoria, mainly because the gardeners came from similar backgrounds.

The locations of vegetable gardens were varied, but cultivators generally preferred fertile soil and flat fields. For example, in the Loddon River district in Castlemaine, a planting site usually required "a rich alluvial soil, a nearby water source and a reasonably flat aspect" (Stanin 2004, 14). Chinese could also grow vegetables more successfully in poorer soils than European market gardeners. In Bendigo, an "editor particularly admired the facility with which the Chinese could take infertile land situated in the midst of old gold workings, all 'stiff clay' and 'quartz pebbles,' and make it fertile."[8] It is notable that many of the Chinese market gardens were scattered on abandoned alluvial diggings, showing that Chinese migrants did create wastelands as miners, but were also sometimes able to restore these wastelands and make them fruitful.

Traditional Chinese irrigation and planting skills were used to improve the condition of a field. Before the Chinese gardens were equipped with tap water, the water needed for planting was shouldered to gardens by laborers. Considering the low rainfall of the Australian goldfields, this work could be considerable, especially in the hot, dry summers. Chinese usually watered the fields before sunrise in order to avoid the burning sunshine and undue evaporation. A Chinese agricultural worker remembered that he and his fellows had to carry hundreds of barrels of water early every morning (Zheng 1992, 75). In a typical Chinese garden, all the crops were planted in straight, parallel rows and furrows, arranged to the very edge of the property. The fields demonstrated very painstaking farming customs.

Although the Chinese successfully developed market gardening by bringing their own traditional experience to the Australian environment, they also adapted to local conditions and borrowed European traditions at times. At first, Chinese miners grew favorite vegetables and fruits for their own use (Moore and Tully 2000). However, when market gardening boomed, they grew European products for the expanding market. The potato was not an important food in the Cantonese diet, but it was widely planted on the goldfields substituting for sweet potatoes. Lettuce and cabbage from Chinese gardens were very popular among European societies, although they were not traditional Chinese vegetables. In the Bendigo area, Chinese started the tomato industry that flourished in the nineteenth century before it moved north to better irrigated districts (Lovejoy 2007, 31). Moreover, Chinese learned from Europeans to inter-plant other crops between rows of maize so they would be protected by the faster growing maize (Frost 2002, 122). In 1877, J. Dundas Crawford, commenting on the impact of Chinese immigration to Australia, said that Chinese gardeners had "reduced vegetables from an expensive luxury [...] to a cheap and universal article of diet" (Lovejoy 2007, 31). All this evidence shows that Chinese

were capable of quickly learning to grow plants that had not been familiar to them before arriving in Australia.

Although market gardening was the most influential farming activity of Chinese migrants in the gold rushes, it was just one dimension of their broader participation in Australian agriculture. European farmers employed Chinese in a variety of jobs. William Young's report on Chinese miners showed they had also been employed as seasonal workers for harvesting (McLaren, 1985). A lot of Chinese miners were also active in vineyards, tobacco plantations, and were even precursors to the hop industry in Victoria. As early as 1855, the *Argus* praised the Chinese for their orchard skills:

> Chinese gardeners are not unskillful in this branch of gardening, as they often wrench or cut a strip of the bark off for some time previous to their detaching the cutting, in order to get it into a proper state for emitting roots when put into the soil.[9]

Some of their activities had an aesthetic aim. A noteworthy case was that Chinese miners widely transplanted plum trees into Victorian diggings in order to beautify the local landscape because there was no other flower blooming during the Spring Festival in the local goldfields (Stanin 2004, 39). In fact, many Chinese shifted their jobs between mining and agriculture. Farming was a convenient way for Chinese migrants to settle down as new Australians.

In Queensland, where heat, humidity and pests stopped the advance of the European colonists, many Chinese became tropical fruit growers, especially in banana plantations. Since the late 1870s, Queensland became the main supplier of bananas in Australia. Chinese immigrants introduced the first banana plant to Northern Queensland, where conditions were particularly suited to banana growing. Much of the land in these areas was cleared by Chinese banana growers under the practice of clearing new land to plant new crops rather than replanting areas that had been already cleared. The early prosperity and survival of the Cairns and Innisfail area has been directly attributed to the success of the Chinese in the banana industry. Both Chinese and non-Chinese businesses in these towns provided goods and services to Chinese banana growers. Chinese merchants in particular played an important role as commission agents and by assisting growers with finance.

In the wake of gold rushes, with the expansion of the capitalist market and accumulation of wealth, all Australian colonies, particularly the tropical Queensland and the hinterlands of Victoria and New South Wales, experienced an ecological transformation as a result of the exploitation of natural resources. Although a European-dominated agriculture and grazing system was established, the Chinese immigrants contributed their toil and moil. More significantly, the Chinese immigrants brought unique techniques and skills to Australia and supplemented the limited local labor market. When Australian were exploring and exploiting the tough hinterland before the early 1880s, anti-Chinese racism was rarely rampant.

The only dispute on Chinese agricultural activity was over the methods to fertilize poor land. There were two traditional ways. The first way was using so-called "green fertilizer" (*Lv Fei*) or herbaceous fertilizer. See Yap people had a long tradition of reaping fresh wild grass and burying it into the fields to prepare them for growing plants. When the grass decayed, it became an "essential fertilizer" (*Ji Fei*) that improved fields. The second method was to bury fermented manure, especially urine (mixed with water), in a field after planting. Although there was no direct evidence that "green fertilizer" was used on the Australian goldfields, the latter method was well known to locals. For example, Angus Mackay, an instructor of Agriculture for the Board of Technical Education in New South Wales, openly criticized the Chinese gardens for being smelly because of the use of "ammonia" from the manure.[10] In fact, Chinese immigrants strictly piled night soil and organic rubbish onto specific sites where gardeners could transfer and use them later for fertilizer (Cronin 1982, 92).

The Chinese were able to offer their contribution to the shaping of the Australian environments, adapting their skills and techniques to it and participating with the other European immigrants in the making of modern Australia. However, the situation changed again in the late nineteenth century.

Environmentally threatening "others" in urban areas

In the 1880s, with urbanization and the establishment of a mature economic system in Australia, Chinese immigrants gradually moved to large cities and suburban areas. Consequently, Chinese communities expanded steadily in downtown Sydney and Melbourne. Over time, as in California, Australian society also developed a connection between disease and environment, especially in urban areas where people lived more closely together and engaged in various social activities (Nash 2006; Mitman 2007). This gave anti-Chinese sectors the excuse for the second rise of anti-Chinese propaganda with the urgent assertion that urban diseases had a Chinese connection. Fundamentally, it finally shaped the White Australia Policy to protect the purity and dominance of whiteness.

This revival of racist discourse was based on a more scientific belief, Social Darwinism, which was widely accepted and cited by the European imperialists. Middle class elites took advantage of an anti-Chinese sentiment coming from the European working class in the 1850s who worried that the Chinese immigrants would bring down the cost of labor. Given that according to the colonial discourse Australia had already become one of the most civilized places, and was no longer an Aboriginal wild of the British Empire, the axiom "survival of the fittest" offered European immigrants a ready and simple defense of the status quo of conquest, a rationale of white expansion. However, Social Darwinism gave no guarantee that the white race would always win out when they faced Chinese immigrants.

In late 1870s and early 1880s, a concern about the expected growth of Chinese immigrants created new anti-Chinese propaganda. One of the reasons

was that the United States of America, especially California, which had been a popular destination for Chinese overseas emigrants, now became more unfriendly to Chinese immigrants. Therefore some Chinese turned to Australia to make new lives. For example in Victoria, during the five years between 1877 and 1881, annual Chinese immigration increased from 449 to 1348 (Cronin 1982, 125). Although the number declined quickly in the following years, these new Chinese immigrants, mainly competitive physical laborers, aroused an uneasy atmosphere in the Australian working class in large cities with a strong press market.

As early as in 1856, Edward Wilson, editor of the *Argus*, queried:

> We take the country from the blacks because we can put it to better uses than they would do. But [...] if a race were to present themselves who would take measures to apply the country to still better purposes, are we prepare to resign it to them?[11]

The renewed emigration of Chinese miners made this an important issue, for many workers witnessed that the Chinese succeeded in many industries, other than gold mining, particularly agriculture, and might prove "too numerous and sturdy to be extirpated" (Cronin 1982, 72).

However, the European publicists, scientists, and popular writers were too preoccupied with the idea of progress and evolution. As compared to the circumstances in 1850s and 1860s, European immigrants and their descendants were more responsive to Social Darwinism as it was not only a belief easily understood by the less educated white men but also a theoretical weapon for many elites to consolidate a white Australian identity. Many politicians and opinion leaders promoted an image of the arriving Chinese people as an invading species. Since they found the Chinese could not be repressed as the Aboriginal people were, they emphasized that the Chinese were polluting the Australian environment and spreading disease. In fact, the Chinese communities were accused of creating a dirty and dangerous environment as early as in 1857 when some European miners complained about the Chinese camps on the goldfields:

> The serious risks that the whole community run where these people are located, from the indiscriminate huddling together of their tents, so extremely small in size that their very construction prevents a free circulation of air, which is strongly impregnated all around with the effluvia arising from the various refuse scattered about, added to personal uncleanness, which should an epidemic attack the spot they have settled down upon, it is fearful to contemplate the results to the surrounding district.[12]

However, this unclean environment was not simply a result of the Chinese miners habit of neglecting public sanitation, but a consequence of racist discrimination. From September of 1855, to avoid a further conflict between Chinese and

European immigrants, all Chinese on the goldfields were compelled to live collectively in so-called protected areas separated from the European community by the goldfield administration. This order was not abolished until 1863 and during this period, all Chinese residents had to pay a special duty to the government for maintaining public sanitation. However, the Chinese immigrant population increased but the protected areas were not expanded. Moreover, the government only took a small portion of the duty to sustain sanitary affairs (Ngai 2010). Therefore it was very hard for a Chinese village to keep clean. When the Chinese residents could freely settle down again, the public sanitary problem quickly disappeared. Moreover, a report from 1867 showed how they initiated a law to self-administration in Ballarat:

> Europeans pay strict regard to cleanliness. No heaps of fetid filthy stuff must be allowed to accumulate by the sides of tents, nor must such places be used as water-closets. If any act of impropriety of this kind be witnessed by any individual, he is authorized to mention the name of the person so offending to the manager of the club-house, and the offender shall be punished with twenty stripes.
>
> (McLaren 1985, 30)

Even though the Chinese were aware that they should take care of the sanitation problem to reduce the potential criticism from the whites, the unclean image had already become a stereotype of the Chinese settlers.

In the 1880s, although the Chinese communities were not always dirty and unhealthy in the cities, the elites still asserted that Chinese were a species with terrible, corrupted customs and were threatening the Australian social ecology. They produced a figure called "Ah Sin" who was supposedly corrupt, opium smoking, whoring and "leprosy-sodden" in urban areas.[13] To a great extent, this was not fully calumniating, but the Chinese "dirty" activities had a complicated background.[14]

The opium smoking, gambling and whoring did not happen by accident. Most Chinese emigrants to Australia did not bring families when they first went abroad. As a consequence, the female Chinese population was too small to support a heterosexual-family-based Chinese immigrant society. For example, a statistic showed that in 1881 there were 11,871 male but only 261 female Chinese in Victoria (Cronin 1982, 136). After a tough, physical day's work, there were no other choices but opium smoking and gambling to fulfill the need for entertainment and to fight homesickness in a primarily male population (Booth 1999, 200). It was also not surprising that prostitution was popular in the Chinese communities. Ironically, anti-Chinese activists attacked those behaviors while the European merchants and local administration earned a large sum of money through selling opium to Chinese and levying tax on these entertainments: "The tax on the opium business was the highest in New South Wales. For every box you should paid for 48 pounds, and cigarette from Philippine had to pay 6 shillings for every 500 grams" (Xue 2001, 129).

The criticism was also ridiculous because the opium smoking problem existed widely in the white communities, too. In April 1891, the Victorian administration found there were 700 white people smoking opium in one detection (Booth 1999, 201). By deliberately neglecting the Europeans' problem, the anti-Chinese propaganda simply stressed that the Chinese were harmful bodies to a healthy modern Australian society.

The most arbitrary and horrible condemnation was that the Chinese immigrants would cause epidemics. Many middle class elites believed that certain races had aptitudes or immunities to particular diseases and that Chinese would infect Europeans with the "darker maladies" of cholera, typhoid, small-pox and leprosy (Cronin 1982, 69). This unfounded idea could also be traced back to Chinese communities on the goldfields. In 1857, three lepers were found residing in a Ballarat Chinese camp and the Ballarat and Catstlemaine protectors ordered all camps to be relocated and the old villages cleared and burnt. It warned that every precaution should be taken to prevent Chinese staying amongst the diggers. When another European person in Melbourne was found to have small-pox, all Chinese were ordered to be compulsorily vaccinated (Cronin 1982, 92).

The Chinese community was much larger in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1880s than those in the 1850s. Therefore when an unexpected epidemic came, the Chinese were at once blamed for causing it. From May, 1881 to February, 1882, Sydney experienced the most severe small-pox epidemic since the Europeans' arrival. However, when a large group of 450 Chinese immigrants, carried by the SS *Ocean*, a steamboat from Hong Kong, coincidentally arrived in Sydney harbor, they drew great attention and irritation from the white communities. Many press and political elites believed that the Chinese were introducing and spreading the plague, although they had only very ambiguous evidence: the first patient was a half-Chinese descendant living in a European community. The colonial government led by Sir Henry Parkes, a well-known anti-Chinese politician, ardently encouraged this belief to distract the public attention away from the truth of his government's lack of preparation for dealing with this epidemic. The Sydney small-pox epidemic in May most probably came from London, where they had already suffered from the same disease. In contrast, Hong Kong, the main port for transporting Chinese to Australia, was free of it. Medical officers checked at least 3500 Chinese entering Australia in 1880 and found no case of the disease at all. During the epidemic only three Chinese, including a child, were found infected amongst the 163 reported victims. However, Henry Parkes still forbade the landing of the SS *Ocean*. Parkes insisted that the boat should be quarantined indefinitely and was reluctant to supply any food, water and fuel. Therefore, the *Ocean* had to turn to Melbourne to disembark 222 Chinese there. When it transported the remaining passengers who were supposed to land in Sydney two weeks later, the boat was quarantined again for 21 days. When these Chinese passengers were finally allowed to enter Sydney they were required to burn all their belongings including clothes (Watters 2002, 333–335).

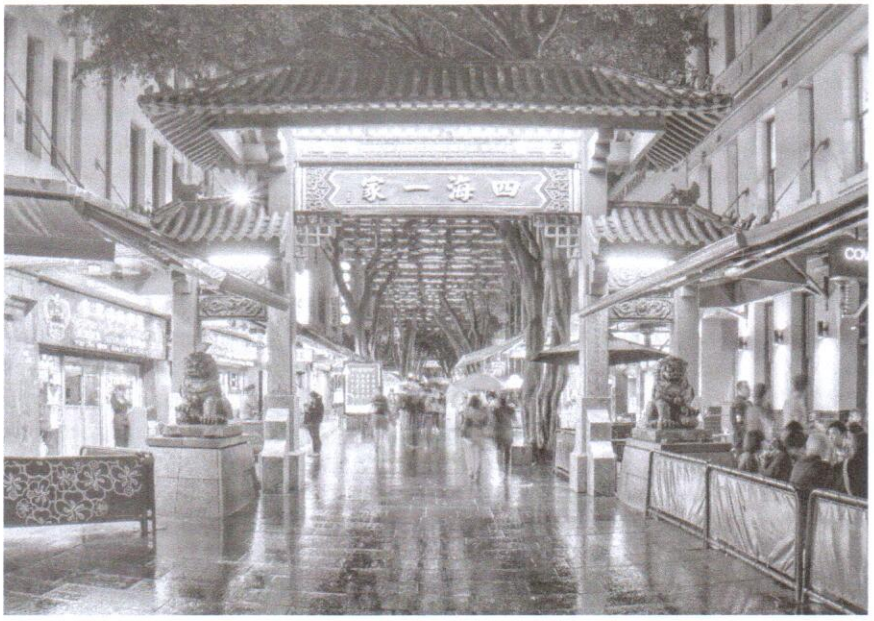

Figure 7.2 Sydney Chinatown. These days it is a famous tourist site, whereas in the 1890s it became a symbol of the dirt and disease of the Chinese community. The narrow street has retained its original width.

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This small-pox epidemic successfully incited hatred toward the Chinese immigrants and gave the finest excuse for influential politicians to promote stricter legislation against further Chinese immigration. During the peak of the epidemic, Parkes introduced an anti-Chinese bill, which applied a poll tax of ten pounds on Chinese immigrants and a limit of one Chinese immigrant for every 100 tons of a ship's registered capacity. In an earlier inter-colonial conference in January 1881 in which Chinese issues were also discussed, these measures had been generally agreed upon by the Australasian colonies. However, Parkes insisted on two special sections: the first denied key civil rights to Chinese migrating to New South Wales, and the second, also the most controversial section, required that any further Chinese arriving in Sydney would undergo the same quarantine measures that the passengers on the *Ocean* had suffered. It presumed the Chinese ports and Chinese immigrants were always infected.[15] The image of Chinese as an environmental hazard was thus institutionally established. The image was frequently quoted by politicians who endeavored to build a pure, white Australian society and environment, not limited to New South Wales. For example, Richard Vale, a parliamentarian in Victoria,

counseled: "not only was there a risk of leprosy from the presence of Chinese, but there was also danger of the spread of typhoid fever and germ diseases."[16] If the Chinese "were degraded and corrupt, carriers of leprosy and vice, what could we expect from such people but contamination?" (Palmer 1980, 67). At the end of nineteenth century, all Australian colonies agreed to forbid Chinese emigration to Australia and when the Australian Commonwealth was established, the White Australian Policy, which denied a Chinese immigrant the right to become an Australian, became a doctrine to strengthen a modern nationalist identity.

Conclusion

To every immigrant in the nineteenth century, including Europeans and Chinese, the Australian environment was strange and challenging. Wherever they came from, the immigrant competed for a better life through exploiting Australian natural resources and inevitably transformed the Aboriginal environment and ecosystem. As the white colonists treated the Aboriginal people and the environment of the antipodes terribly, they also condemned Chinese immigrants, a minority group, as environmentally harmful and threatening. Through a mixed sentiment of exclusionism, imperialism, and Social Darwinism, the European immigrants and their descendants finally established white hegemony in the Antipodes by obliterating the influence of Chinese immigrants.

As Ann Curthoys wrote:

> British colonists, by and large, firstly used racist criteria to judge which peoples could assimilate and which could not, secondly made assimilation possible, or at least easy only for those judged able to assimilate, and thirdly saw assimilation or lack of it as proof of the validity of those racist criteria.
>
> (Curthoys 1973, 595)

One should note that when the white immigrants created an anti-Chinese discourse, they did not only preach for an economic or cultural rationality, but also utilized environmental factors to justify their claim against Chinese.

The gold rushes initiated competition between the Chinese and European immigrants in Australia. Although there was also great cooperation between the whites and the Chinese, their relationship was exacerbated by conflicts revolving around many issues, including an environmental dispute. At the very beginning, the European workers criticized the Chinese for wasting water and destroying the soil. This created a stereotype that the Chinese could ruin the Australian land and steal its wealth. When the Chinese immigrants proved capable or even successful in agricultural industries, they were somewhat accepted and helped the white colonists conquer and transform the

tougher hinterland of Australia into a profitable setting. However, when the Chinese population became overly compatible and was expected to increase, they were blamed for causing diseases and threatening public health. By making the Chinese who lived in and contributed to Australia for decades into the threatening "others," middle class elites joined with the workers to create a more homogenous society through strict legislation to stop Chinese emigration to Australia at the end of nineteenth century. The ecological concern of Australian society was not only a direct reaction to the challenging physical environment, but was also rooted in a metaphor of the environmentally threatening "others."

Notes

1 "Legislative Council on the Subject of Chinese Immigration," *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, Victoria (hereafter *VPLC*), 1856–57, D.19.
2 The Colombo Plan is a regional organization that was sponsored by the U.S. and Britain to offer training programs to British Commonwealth citizens in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia accepted a few Chinese immigrants who lived in British Colonies.
3 The Eureka Riot of the year 1854 was a historically significant rebellion of Australian gold miners who revolted against the colonial authority. This riot has been considered the founding event on which the Australian democracy was built.
4 "Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Conditions of the Gold Fields of Victoria" (March, 1855), A.76, *VPLC*, 1854–55.
5 *Argus*, November 15, 1856
6 "The subject of Chinese Immigration (November 17, 1857)", *VPLC*, 1856–57, D.19.
7 "Evidence Presented to the Commission on the Chinese, including those of J. A. Panton and the Chinese Howqua," in *VPLC*, 1855, p. 336.
8 *Bendigo Advertiser*, July 22, 1862.
9 *Argus*, June 23, 1855.
10 *Bendigo Advertiser*, May 4, 1887.
11 *Argus*, March 17, 1856.
12 "Petition of Castlemaine Local Court Members" (July 17, 1857) E.18, *VPLC*, 1856–57.
13 "Ah Sin" was a popular nickname in Guang Dong Province in China from where most Australian Chinese originated who came to Australia before 1900.
14 "Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Select committee of the Victorian Legislative Council on Chinese Immigration," *Victorian Council Records*, 1856.
15 *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 9, 1881.
16 "Richard Vale Papers," *Parliament Documents of Victoria*, October 18, 1882, vol. 58, p. 1612.

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