

THE METHODIST CHINESE MISSION

Ian Welch

Department of Pacific and Asian History
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

The Victoria Chinese Mission at Castlemaine had always been supported, if only marginally, by the local Wesleyan Methodist Church. When the mission collapsed, and it appeared that the work in Castlemaine might be abandoned, members of the congregation asked their minister, the Reverend Thomas Raston, to seek the help of the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society.

This new-found local enthusiasm drew a wry comment from the Reverend John Poore:

The Methodists now carry on the Castlemaine Branch with nearly as great efficiency as of old, tho' under the original plan they rendered very little aid.¹

Poore's remark was not quite true, as the Methodists had been the only denomination to make a formal grant to the Victoria Chinese Mission, and his comment failed to take sufficient account of the strong denominational preferences of most ministers and laypeople. His own involvement, as discussed in the chapter on the Victoria Chinese Mission, had not been all that enthusiastic.

The Methodists were no more interested in the Chinese as fellow citizens than the rest of the colonists. But there was a quite fundamental symbolic value in demonstrating through the Chinese the power of the redeemed and transformed life through a personal experience with Christ that formed a basic part of Methodist life. If the Chinese could be 'saved' it was apparent that any European could also be born again, and St Paul's words, made a new creation.

In order to convince the members at large of the worth of the enterprise, a baptismal service was held on 12 January 1859 when several men who had been under instruction in the first mission were received.² The three men were Leong Pong Seen, Hong Ah Kay and Lum Khen Yang, whose reasons for coming to Australia are discussed in the chapter on "The Chinese". Leong Pong Seen was an associate of Chu A Luk and had been one of the speakers at the Chinese meeting to protest the 1857 anti-Chinese immigration legislation.

One of Lum's closest friends was Fan A Wye, who was later to work as a catechist with the Anglican Mission and who had quite a reputation as a skilled herbalist. Lum and Fan both went to Beechworth with Lo Sam-yuen after the collapse of the Ballarat joint mission and would have known Cheong Peng-nam and Lui Fun-sing, who was converted and baptised at about the time that Lo Sam-yuen was working in Beechworth. Peng-nam subsequently went to Ballarat as the Presbyterian catechist and Lui later worked with the Smythesdale independent mission and after that as an Anglican catechist.

¹ **London Missionary Society, Australian Correspondence, ,**
Poore to Tidman, 6 June 1859.

² **London Missionary Society, Australian Correspondence, Mss,** Young to Tidman, 13 August 1858.

The service was a major boost for those anxious to see a strong Wesleyan presence in the Chinese missions and it was seen as a particularly good sign that the Chinese contributed £150 towards the cost of a permanent chapel. By a fortunate coincidence, it took place just before the Annual Wesleyan Methodist Conference at which the future of the mission as a Wesleyan venture was to be discussed. The President of the Conference, the Reverend Daniel Draper was present at the service and wrote glowingly of it.³

As a result of Draper's enthusiastic support, the Victorian Conference accepted the responsibility of the Castlemaine mission and delegated the task of supervision to the Foreign Missions Committee which worked very closely with the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and the parent Society in London.

Within a few months, the Methodists were claiming all the credit for the work at Castlemaine and it was as if the Victoria Chinese Mission had never existed. Raston wrote to the Missionary Society authorities in London:

I am truly happy to inform you of the favourable progress of the Chinese Mission in this Circuit.* We have just held one of the most delightful meetings ever held in this country, at which Three Chinese Converts were publicly baptized. We were favoured with the Chairman of the District, the Rev D J Draper, who administered the Sacrament in the presence of a very large audience. One of the converts is likely to be valuable; he is thoroughly versed in Chinese literature, has a strong memory, is eloquent, and best of all, soundly converted. Seven persons have now been baptized, four others would have thus publicly testified their faith in Jesus Christ, had they not removed to other Colonies prior to our present arrangement. ... Although we do not witness all that we could desire, yet there is an account of success which warrants vigorous effort and I am more than ever convinced that the Chinese are more accessible here than in their own country. Our Missry Committee have kindly granted £100 , towards building a Chapel. The Chinese of Castlemaine have contributed £140 and I hope to see the Building in progress before I leave the circuit.⁴

The chapel, which stood in Mostyn Street, was opened by Raston's successor, the Reverend John Harcourt. It took three months to erect and cost £395. It has been demolished.

Despite all the apparent forward movement and enthusiasm, Leong A Toe was homesick for his family and decided to leave Castlemaine. Raston and A Toe called on William Young to tell him about the decision which, as Young pointed out, would leave Castlemaine without a Chinese catechist, especially as a number of the men who had been baptised had decided to return home with A Toe.⁵

A Toe thought that a young European Christian should be given the opportunity of returning to China with the Chinese Christians to learn the language and then return to superintend the Wesleyan Mission.⁶ There was general agreement that a Chinese-

³ **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1859:45.

* Methodist churches were organised in circuits, where several congregations shared a single or team ministry. Ministers usually had three years in each circuit before moving on. Preaching was undertaken by a roster of local preachers and the minister(s). It was from this model that the Anglican church modelled its lay preachers who served many outlying congregations. The circuits formed districts, which were generally similar to a Presbytery or a Diocese and the whole church met in Conference each year.

⁴ **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 599**, Raston to General Secretaries, 16 March 1859.

⁵ **The Australian Messenger and Presbyterian Record** November 1860:292.

⁶ **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1860:xxxvii-xxxviii; 1862:10-11. The full text of Leong's suggestions are in **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Notices**, January 1860:176.

speaking European was needed.⁷ His suggestion for training in China took firm grip on the Wesleyan authorities and remained a fundamental objective, leading to the despatch of two ministers to China and in the longer term, to an acceptance of Chinese leadership in the Wesleyan mission that was to be denied in the other missions.

Upon his return to China, Leong A Toe took letters of introduction to the Reverend George Piercy. Piercy had made his own way to China as a lay missionary in 1851. His first work was with a Methodist group of non-commissioned officers and men of the 59th Regiment. He moved to Canton, where he stayed, at his own expense, for two years. He then received probationary status with the Society and was subsequently ordained. He was joined by the Reverend William Beach and the Reverend Josiah Cox, who later visited Australia. Piercy wrote to Draper:

Your letters per Leong A Toe, of September last, were duly handed to me by him. I was glad to receive such high striking testimonials of his usefulness in your great country. After his return here, he resolved to rejoin his old friends in the London Mission, to which course we could have no reasonable objection; in fact, we expected him to do so. He is now most usefully employed in their mission at Canton. I see him often...⁸

When every attempt to find another missionary failed, John Harcourt wrote to Leong A Toe and invited him to return. He did so, bringing with him large collection of literature.⁹ In order to persuade him to come back, the committee offered him the same stipend as it would have paid a European, i.e., £300, together with rent-free accommodation. It was the rate appropriate to a government interpreter. He resumed his ministry in Castlemaine in early 1861.¹⁰ His return was consistent with the behaviour of quite a number of Chinese who came and went from Victoria during the third quarter of the century.

He quickly got back into the swing of things, if that adequately describes the endless round of visits and conversations that marked the work of the missionaries. He engaged in regular discussions and his contacts were written up in the form of a daily journal which was discussed weekly with the superintending minister of the circuit.

Some of these discussions were obviously a waste of time for both the catechist and the hearer, although they could bear fruit, as they did in the case of Leong a Ping.

Although I had heard leong A Toe preach the gospel once or twice, I did not retain it in my mind, because I heard that he taught men not to worship idols or tombs, and I felt displeased at that and told him I was a Chinese, and why should I follow a foreign religion... I began to argue with him. He said what he spoke was true. I said it was untrue. And again, when he said a thing was untrue, I said it was true.¹¹

His journals and those of his successor, Leong On Tong, are quoted extensively throughout this book. They show the kind of problems the catechists experienced and the quality of their English. This report is typical and shows both the philosophical and ethnic objections that were commonly raised with the catechists.

7 **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss Draper to Osborne**, 25 July 1860.

The Wesleyan Chronicle January 1861:10.

8 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 26 July 1861:107.

9 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1862:10-11.

10 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 5 November 1861:163; 24 June 1862:75. **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 368**, Eggleston to Joint Secretaries, 21 March 1861.

11 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 Decemeber 1865:184

Journal of Leong A Toe from Saturday April 11th to Friday April 17th 1863

On Saturday five men came to my house and I explained the Catechism to them. One or two were pleased and I gave books to them.

Sunday forenoon. I went to Campbell's Flat. In one tent there were seven men, and I preached to them how God created Heaven and Earth and all things and men in six days, so that all people ought to worship God and not worship images and sin against his law. One answered and said, 'You say All things come from God', He said, you say many.' Some people are black some are white they live in different countries and not speak same language, they do not worship the same God. They do not come from one pair.' I say to him, Who was the God of China and who were the first parents of Chinamen. He say, So long a time from then to now, he not know the first parents, but the Chinese are different from all other people. I said, you are not a wise thought. You do not know the true God and do not know the climate of the world. If anybody live in the torrid zone, they are of black skin and complexion, if they live in the temperate zone they are white or light skinned and intelligent. If any people live in the frigid zone they are dwarfed and of little knowledge.

You see the Europeans are white and so intelligent, they are living in the temperate zone, as Chinamen. How is it that the Chinese are not so intelligent as the Europeans. Because the Europeans have the truth of God and they believe in Christ the Saviour therefore their wisdom and intelligence comes from the true God. If you country people cast away 'devil worship' and images and worship the living God then they will have intelligence like those who live in other countries.¹²

It is a pity that A Toe did not record the response of his listeners to this lesson in geography, anthropology and theology.

Despite his commitment to the mission, A Toe was finding the separation from his wife very difficult to cope with and decided that he would go home and try to persuade her to come to Victoria. If she would not agree then he would stay in China.¹³ As A Toe had feared, his wife refused to return to Australia and he remained in China.

This caused a flurry within the mission committee and letters were sent to Piercy in China and to the Missionary Society in London seeking help to find a minister and to send him to China for training. The proposal originated with Leong A Toe and was raised by Piercy who suggested that two years of language and culture training in China would prepare a minister for the mission in Australia better than any local training could do.¹⁴

The lack of real personal contact between the mission committees and the Chinese has already been mentioned and is a constant theme in all the missions. The Methodists were right that recruiting a European with experience in China would help bridge the gap between themselves and the Chinese but as the Presbyterians were to find, a great deal also depended on the relationship between the Chinese and the European Superintendent. It also depended a good deal on the absence of any sustained challenge to the authority of the Superintendent by the Chinese. And finally, it also depended on the quality of the relationships between the superintendent and the committee and between the committee and the mass of church members who in turn had to balance their commitments as Christians with their perceptions as colonists.

While the Chinese Christians at Castlemaine continued to meet without a teacher, the committee had no obvious replacement for A Toe. The unofficial leader of the group at Castlemaine was Leong On Tong.¹⁵ He was credited with having

12 **Leong A Toe, Journal, MSS.**

13 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1863:12-13.

14 **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 297**, Eggleston to London. See also **Mss 631**, Butters.

15 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1865:9-10

persuaded six other men to become Christians but the committee felt that he had not been a Christian long enough to be considered, at least in the first stages of their search for a paid catechist.¹⁶ The committee may have been more realistic in its concern that, like A Toe, On Tong's knowledge of English was not good enough.

The search seemed to have reached an impasse when the minister at Daylesford, the Rev William Hill, recommended James Moy Ling for the job at Castlemaine. Hill was an enthusiastic member of the mission committee and gained wide respect among the Chinese community for his sincerity in his relationships with them.

Moy Ling or Ah Ling as he is initially named, came to Australia as a miner in 1856. He was among the many men who were improperly dumped at Guichen Bay (Robe) in South Australia and forced to walk overland in a tactic that shipowners used to avoid paying the Victorian landing tax on Chinese immigrants. Cronin reports that twenty ship-loads at least had this experience. Following the landing on the beach, they had to walk for three weeks to reach the Victorian diggings under exploitative circumstances and with considerable suffering.¹⁷ Fortunately, the South Australian government imposed its own tax and this means of exploiting the Chinese was stopped in 1857.

Moy Ling made his way to Daylesford where he made friends with an English family who took him to the Methodist church. This suggests that he already spoke English and this is confirmed by his appointment as Interpreter. In turn this suggests that he was in good standing with the local directors of the ethnic association which is demonstrated later in his ministry when he seems to have enjoyed open access to association meeting rooms in two tours of northeastern Victoria and in Melbourne, at least for a time.¹⁸ Taken overall, it seems likely that he had some contact with missionaries in China before coming to Australia and possibly was a product of one of the mission schools in Hong Kong. Despite this background, his church attendance was initially spasmodic.

He was later to give a dramatic account of his conversion:

In a prayer meeting held in Daylesford chapel, after a sermon by Rev John Newton, I wept for my sins. Again and again they prayed for me. At last, while kneeling at the communion rail, I received power to believe, and my heart changed. Before, I could only cry for grief; now my heart was filled with peace and joy. So I passed from darkness to light and, like the pilgrim, I lost my heavy burden.¹⁹

Hill's advocacy of Moy Ling in the committee resulted in a decision to appoint him to Castlemaine but this met with such hostility from the local Chinese Christians that the committee decided that On Tong should take on the job and Moy Ling should follow Hill to his new appointment at Sandhurst (Bendigo).²⁰ The decision was warmly received by the Castlemaine congregation and in due course was applauded

16 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 December 1865:183

17 **Cronin** 1982:49.

18 **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London**, July 1872:21-22.

19 **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London**, September 1873:195. A later superintendent of the mission, Edward Youngman, was more prosaic and said that Moy Ling's conversion resulted from his close association with William Hill. **Youngman** 1914:202-213.

20 Although Castlemaine and Bendigo are quite close together and there was a constant flow to men to and from both towns, the Castlemaine men never seem to have transferred to Moy Ling's church and this may be a further indication of the different associations to which the two men adhered. **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 June 1866:93-94. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Notices**, July 1867:32.

by Leong A Toe who was in regular communication with his old friends in Castlemaine.

I have learned from Leong On Tong a few months ago and he said he was engaged by the Wesleyan Ministers to carry on the Chinese Mission at Castlemaine; and preach the Gospel to my countrymen there... I expected to get to China and ask the Wesleyan Ministers here to send someone to go over, if I could not return; but Mr Piercy could not get anyone to go over and take care of the Church, and lately I have heard that the Wesleyan Committee had appointed Leong On Tong to carry on the great work under the care of the Rev Mr King, so I am glad to give thanks to Almighty God. I pray that he may take care of him, and make him useful to save many souls. I believe him to be a faithful servant of Christ and a good Chinese scholar. Now I think that I shall have no time to go to Castlemaine again, for I preach at Canton in the Mission Hospital, and under the Rev W Chalmers and Rev F Turner of the London Missionary Society...²¹

In addition to A Toe's approval, On Tong was also given an endorsement by the Rev Josiah Cox, when he visited Castlemaine.

He was favoured with a good Chinese education, which extended over seventeen years. When about twenty years of age he came to the colonies, and resided, with various success, at Ballarat and Castlemaine for four years before he heard the Gospel. At about this time, Lean Ato, the former catechist, invited him to the chapel, and happily this led to his finding the knowledge of Christ. The sincerity, consistency and ability of Leong On Tong marked him out as successor to Lean Ato when the latter removed to China...²²

While the choice of On Tong was clearly not as neat a decision as Mr Cox wanted his readers to believe²³, it is apparent that On Tong was a highly qualified person and might have expected a good government job in Guangdong Province had it not been for the unrest of the times.

His subsequent success as a catechist more than justified his appointment. In December 1865, six men were baptised as a result of his efforts. Interestingly, the interpreter at this service was the Presbyterian catechist from Ballarat, Cheong Peng-nam, and his presence in Castlemaine is a further example of the far-reaching influence of the Cheong family throughout the Chinese Christian community in Victoria.

Friendship between Christians was given by all the men, through the words of Peng-nam, as their reason for becoming Christians.²⁴ All six testimonies show the common theme of poverty, loneliness, gambling and despair that permeates nearly all the accounts of the Chinese who decided to become Christians, no matter which mission reports the events.

Personal contact was the key to attracting the men to Christianity. Ham Yeng Tang said in his testimony.

Last year, I met with a European Christian, Mr Philip Bennett, of Campbell's Creek, who was very friendly with me, and invited me to go to the Wesleyan Church, in Campbell's Creek, to hear the Gospel. After the service, many of the Christian friends came and spoke to me and appeared very glad to see me at Church. This I was surprised at. I thought there must be something in this religion to induce these persons, who were strangers to me, to be so kind to me, who could neither speak nor understand English.²⁵

21 **The Wesleyan Chronicle**, 20 December 1870:192. Leong A Toe to the Rev Edward King

22 **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London**, July 1872:21-22.

23 The concept of 'pious fraud' in reporting the overwhelming success of missionary enterprises was common. **Gunson** (1974:185) reports a similar tendency in mission reports from the South Pacific.

24 **The Wesleyan Chronicle**, 20 December 1865:183-186. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1866:10.

25 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 December 1865:184

A similar story, involving a Chinese Christian, was given by Chung Ah Shaw of Maldon.

Not long ago, I became a gardener. A good many English friends invited me to go to Church, but I would not go. A Christian Chinaman, James Ham King Yong, a gardener, was very kind, and asked me to go with him and hear the truth, but I did not understand much English and could gain much information. I only knew that church did the people good, therefore I went every Sunday until now, about four years. Some English friends loved me like a brother, therefore I thought this truth is good.²⁶

Perhaps the most direct, and simplest of all was the testimony of Tse Tak.

When we went to Church, all Christian friends loved us very much, but this blacksmith most of all. Every Sunday he taught me English, and the Truth in his house, and his wife was to me as a mother.²⁷

Although the mission committee was pleased with this evidence of success, there was still a good deal of suspicion around about the integrity of the Chinese catechists and the accuracy of what was being said on their behalf. While the Methodists may have wanted some further confirmation about Leong On Tong, there was also a good deal of doubt in the Presbyterian Mission about Cheong Peng-nam. As a result, some of On-Tong's written Chinese versions of testimonies were sent to George Piercy for a check. Piercy reported very favourably, noting the value of On Tong and the 'freshness and clearness' of the testimonies.²⁸ Piercy's comments put any doubts to rest and there is no further example, in any of the missions, where special efforts were taken to confirm the validity of the translated versions of the Chinese originals of the testimonies. Of course, Leong On Tong had the Chinese literary skills to present the testimonies in the very best form and perhaps the 'clearness' of the reports is a good indication of On Tong's 'pious fraud'.

Such concerns were not limited to the Methodists. In 1884, the Bishop of Melbourne, giving his presidential address to the Anglican Synod, said:

At present no one can thoroughly understand the reports of the Chinese missionaries, and, worse still, no one can test the real character of their labours by direct communication with those who profess to be converts.²⁹

While the mission at Castlemaine was regarded as being very successful, Moy Ling was making rather heavier going at Bendigo, where only one man had asked for baptism.³⁰ At Beechworth, where formal mission work had ended when Lo Sam-yuen and his friends left to return to China in 1862 or thereabouts, the Rev Andrew Inglis, the local Methodist minister, reported that a man, a 'leading figure in the Chinese community' had been baptised and a large congregation had turned out to see the event.³¹

The combination of these events, while not exactly the mass turning to Christ that the Methodists were hoping for, helped to sustain a greater enthusiasm for the Chinese missions among Methodists than was felt in the other missions. The idea of recruiting a European minister was still foremost in people's thinking and the committee was excited when a newly arrived probationary minister, the Rev James

26 **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London**, October 1868:101.

27 **Wesleyan Missionary Notices**, London, October 1870:218.

28 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 June 1867:90. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Notices**, July 1867:32.

29 **The Church of England Messenger** 8 October 1874:11.

30 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 June 1866:93-94. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Notices**, July 1867:32.

31 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** November 1865:157; 16 September 1866:156.

Caldwell, offered for the Chinese mission.³² Caldwell had offered for missionary service in China while still a ministerial student in England.

His journey from England to Sydney in the missionary vessel 'John Wesley' was a scene from the theatre of the absurd. The captain turned out to be no seaman and an alcoholic. The first mate set out, successfully, to seduce the fiancée of a minister in Sydney. Caldwell tried, obviously unsuccessfully, to maintain Methodist sanctity and sobriety on the journey. When the ship called at Adelaide, Caldwell succeeded in having a church enquiry look into the ship's affairs, and the captain and first mate were both dismissed. The young woman went on to an unreported meeting with her husband-to-be.³³

When news of Caldwell's commitment reached the Rev George Piercy in Canton, he offered to provide him with training in China. Piercy wrote to Caldwell:

You cannot, except under very, very great disadvantage, get the language in Australia, nor understand the influences under which these poor creatures have been educated before they saw your country, unless you visit China. I say that this is the right course the committee ought to take, and nothing but this will fit you, or any man, to do what might be done in Australia. For some time I have thought of attempting to show the committee what work ought to be done in Australia for the Chinese, and the valuable assistance, nay, invaluable help Australia can contribute towards the evangelisation of this great empire. Native agents could be trained in Australia, who could be very effective agents here. In a word, I believe Australia, by converted Chinese there, had to give this country very, very important (because well qualified) agents for the spread of the Gospel.³⁴

It must have been heady stuff for a young probationary minister to receive, from a highly respected elder missionary statesman, the idea that he might be responsible for training men for the conversion of all of China.

The dream of converting the overseas Chinese and thereby converting China itself was not limited to Piercy and the various Victorian mission committees. Californian Christians were fed exactly the same line about the Chinese missions in that part of America. During the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular, a view was widespread among evangelical Protestants, as will be discussed in the chapter on the Anglican Mission, that the Biblical promise of the physical return of Jesus Christ would be fulfilled when all the world had heard the Gospel of Christ. The various missions to the Chinese were part of a grand vision and Caldwell was doubtless very excited to be identified as a leading figure in that dream.

The committee felt that he ought to leave for Canton without delay. He left Melbourne on the ship 'Avoca' arriving in Canton on 5 June 1868 after a journey of just under six weeks. He immediately set about learning Chinese, and spent six hours a day in studying the spoken language, accepting the sensible advice of the more experienced missionaries that he would have plenty of time later in Australia to polish up his reading skills. He also learned a good deal about the strength of family and village ties in China and the problems that Chinese Christians faced when they arrived home. Not only did they risk expulsion from their family but they could easily run foul of an officialdom that was generally unfriendly to Europeans and particularly to the Chinese friends of Europeans. He came to understand just how wide a gap existed between European and Chinese Christians.

32 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Notices**, January 1869:114. **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 964**, Chapman to Perks 27 October 1876.

33 **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 483**, Rabone to Boyce, 1 May 1868.

34 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 October 1868.

There is so little in common between the European and Chinese mind, that in the majority of cases the Europeans feel painfully the separation which this causes. It keeps them at a distance from their Chinese colleagues, and it is a difference which Christianity does little to bridge over, for the fault is not in the spiritual state, but in the education, in the modes of thought, and the formation of the character, rather than in the piety of the heart.³⁵

With this kind of insight, derived from being the foreigner in a Chinese world, Caldwell was gaining skills and insights that all the previous Chinese missionary work in Australia had lacked.

On 4 September, just four months after his arrival in Canton, Caldwell went on a field journey with Piercy in which he was putting his early language skills to the test. He slipped, fell into a river, and drowned.³⁶

It is always a bold step to suggest that the death of any individual is of a scale that does irreparable damage. It may be that had Caldwell lived and returned to Australia, he would have fulfilled all the hopes that the Methodists were placing in him. The subsequent history of Chinese missions might have been materially different. The truth is that even when two exceptionally skilled people, such as Cheok Hong Cheong or the Rev Daniel Vrooman* were available with the relevant insights into both European and Chinese cultures, the end result was as acrimonious and difficult as at any other time. The problems of the Chinese missions were never to rest with individuals but with the overall lack of empathy that is portrayed again and again in the attitude of the European colonists in Victoria.

Nonetheless, Caldwell's untimely death did produce a setback for the committee already visited with a similar calamity at home. The death of the Rev William Hill, murdered by a prisoner he was visiting at Pentridge Gaol in Melbourne, had a devastating impact. Hill had moved to Melbourne only a short time before and James Moy Ling had received approval to move with him and open a mission in Melbourne. Hill was one of the key figures in the mission committee, and his dreadful fate not only removed his contribution but also took away one of the few Europeans with a real liking for and respect from the Chinese. His funeral cortege was followed by some 5000 people including a large number of Chinese from Melbourne and Bendigo.³⁷

While the committee members were seeking to resolve the gaps left by Caldwell and Hill, the two catechists were engaged in the endless round of visits, discussions and arguments that constituted the daily work of the mission.

There were occasional moments of drama. In other chapters, there is mention of the odd occasion when the catechists fell foul of members of the Chinese community for one reason or another. It happened that a former Chinese private temple operator, Hoa Pang, decided to become a Christian. However, he wanted to rent his temple to another man so that he could keep at least some of his income. His attitude is understandable. He had earned more than £2000 over the ten years he had been in

³⁵ **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 October 1868. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Notices**, January 1869:114-116.

³⁶ **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 994**, 6 November 1868, Rabone to Boyce. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Reports**, 1868:9.
Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Notices, January 1869:116-117. **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 February 1869:29.

* See chapters on the Presbyterian and Anglican Missions.

³⁷ **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 October 1868:149; 20 January 1869:11. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Notices**, April 1869:142-144; October 1869:175-176.

business at Campbell's Creek. When Leong On Tong pointed out the difficulty of seeking Christian baptism while still owning a 'heathen' temple, Hoa Pang decided to give the premises to the mission for use as a chapel. News of his action spread throughout the Chinese community in Castlemaine, no doubt fuelled by the man who had lost his chance to make a few pounds as the lessee of the temple.

On the 20th July, 1868, the Rev Edward King, the Rev C Dubourg and a policeman, together with On Tong, Hoa Pang and some of the Chinese Christians, set to work to demolish the structure and move it to Moonlight Flat. A crowd of Chinese gathered to dispute the work and their fury was unleashed when Dubourg took one of the wooden images and tucked it under his arm like an umbrella.

The leading figures in the Chinese community took the matter to court, complaining about desecration, theft and sacrilege. The defendants were Hoa Pang and Leong On Tong and, perhaps needless to say, they were acquitted. Having proved his sincerity, Hoa Pang was baptised.³⁸ The whole affair was treated as a major spiritual victory by the Europeans, and of course, the Chinese Christians demonstrated to their fellow countrymen that they were protected by the Europeans and that the traditional Chinese could expect nothing from European courts. While the Europeans regarded it as a victory the overall effect was probably to drive more Chinese away from the church.

Before leaving Bendigo, James Moy Ling had worked almost unnoticed, although his efforts were marked by an occasional baptism. One of his converts was Paul Ah Chin, who was to give exceptionally long service to the Presbyterian Chinese Mission after first working as a catechist in Otago, New Zealand.

Moy Ling's move to Melbourne with Hill and the opening of a new mission was marked by the active involvement of a businessman, Mr S G King, of North Melbourne, who underwrote the costs of the new mission. It was the beginning of another long financial association by a lay member of the Christian church similar to that of James Oddie at Ballarat and James Murdoch in the Presbyterian mission.

The Anglican Bishop in his address to Synod in 1874 bewailed the absence of such support for the Anglican mission and the work of the church generally.

Were wealthy men more generous, more heartily Christian... our difficulties here, as elsewhere, might vanish in a day.³⁹

Moy Ling had argued that the Bendigo mission was not likely to grow as most of the local Chinese population were moving to Melbourne and taking up market gardening. The Anglican mission would more than meet the needs of the Chinese left in Bendigo. His advice was supported by William Hill and accepted by the mission committee.

Moy Ling's first services were held in Little Bourke Street, possibly in the Kong Chew Hall, until he was asked to move somewhere else. A Bible study was established in the city and on Friday's another was held in Richmond, in the house of Peter Li Wan. One of the most regular men at the Richmond group was Hoa Pang, who had found it wiser to leave Castlemaine after all the troubles.⁴⁰ During this period, Moy Ling continued the links within the Chinese Christian sub-culture already mentioned. He worked with the Rev William Mathew, the Rev William Young, Paul Ah Chin and others on the production of a Chinese hymn book.⁴¹

38 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 October 1868:149

39 **The Church of England Messenger** 8 October 1884.

40 **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London**, July 1872:22; September 1871:157-158.

41 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 December 1870:192-193. See chapter on the Presbyterian Mission.

With nothing of any excitement to offer either the Chinese members or the few European supporters, the committee decided to ask the Society in London to send a noted China missionary to Victoria on deputation to whip up some enthusiasm. The Rev Josiah Cox and his wife, who were returning to Canton after leave in England, arrived in Melbourne on 12 October 1871 for an eight week visit, which included three weeks in Melbourne, two weeks in Geelong and Ballarat, and two weeks in Castlemaine. During their stay in Melbourne, they were the guests of Mr and Mrs S C King.

A good deal of the time in Melbourne was spent in consultation with the mission committee. During this time, Cox examined Leong On Tong who had been nominated for appointment as a probationary minister. On Tong did not speak English well enough to be examined by the usual committees and Cox was deputed to speak to him in Cantonese. The other major issue Cox discussed with the catechists and the committee was Moy Ling's suggestion that a mission hall should be established in Little Bourke Street, which was firmly established as the centre of Melbourne Chinese life.⁴²

Not surprisingly, the discussions with the committee constantly returned to the question of the appointment of a European superintendent. Cox mentioned how impressed he has been with a man named Roberts, a schoolteacher and Wesleyan local preacher, who was actively leading an interdenominational mission at Smythesdale. Cox said:

I was surprised at his knowledge of their homes, haunts and habits, and especially his ability to converse with the Chinese.⁴³

The Smythesdale mission had originally been established as an independent Anglican work by the minister, the Rev Mr Walker assisted by the local banker, a Mr Richardson. The original Chinese teacher was Lui Fun Sing who had been among a group of men to be baptised in the Beechworth mission established briefly by Lo Sam-yuen after his abrupt departure from the Ballarat joint mission. Lui went to Smythesdale as an established Anglican, having been appointed to succeed Lo Sam-yuen when he, together with Fan A Wye and Leong Pong Seen, had returned to China in 1861..

Roberts seems to have had a remarkable facility with language. He had obtained some basic books from Hong Kong and then had used what might today be termed a 'situational or functional approach' to learning Cantonese. Over three or four years he was able to speak quite freely. It is not clear whether Roberts was ever formally approached or whether the Methodists concluded, like the Presbyterians, that he was not their man. He had certainly taken the effective control of the mission out of the hands of Mr Walker and was later to become a freelance evangelist. His ability to learn sufficient Cantonese to talk freely with the Chinese around Smythesdale suggests that other Europeans could have made a similar effort had they had sufficient motivation.

Josiah Cox was also the delegate of the British Conference to the Australasian Conference of 1872 and in his address emphasised the importance of building personal friendships with the Chinese if they were ever to be persuaded, in any

42 **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 1196**, Cox to General Secretaries, 3 November 1871. **Mss 252**, Symons to General Secretaries, 21 November 1871. **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London**, September 1871:160; July 1872:18-22.

43 **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London**, July 1872:19.

numbers, to accept Christianity. He placed a good deal of weight on the comments of the Chinese Christians that most of them had become Christians, not because of any theological or philosophical thinking but because someone had offered them friendship and invited them to church.⁴⁴

The other notable event of the Cox visit was an invitation from the committee to Mr Cox to accept the position of superintendent. All the missions seem to have offered the job to their China missionary colleagues at one time or another. Like all the others, Cox had seen enough to convince him that he would be better off in China.⁴⁵

The most visible outcome of the visit was the decision to build a chapel in Little Bourke Street. This was really an extension of the idea of the separate Chinese church such as already existed in Castlemaine where Leong On Tong was the defacto minister. The most important, in human terms, was the regularisation of the appointment of the Reverend Leong On Tong and the Reverend James Moy Ling as probationary ministers, the first Australian Chinese Christians to achieve this distinction.

Depending upon one's point of view, the decision to build a Chinese church, served by a Chinese minister, strengthened the mission and the Christian sub-culture. On the other hand, it can be seen as a form of apartheid which perpetuated the gap between the Chinese and European Christians. At no time in the discussions about On Tong or A Toe was it considered that a Chinese minister might minister to a European congregation. A site in Little Bourke Street was purchased in 1872 at a cost £525 and the present two storey building was completed at a cost of £900 and formally opened on 10 July 1872.

It was a great day!

Methodists had a tradition of long sermons and equally long prayers and this event lived up to all expectations. It went on for over three hours. Three services were held on the following Sunday, attended by large crowds and Moy Ling acted as the interpreter. Almost every Methodist minister in the colony took some part, either in praying or preaching. Another service was held on the Monday evening and on the Tuesday some three hundred people crowded a tea meeting in the Independent Church Hall in Russell Street.⁴⁶ The press reports were a splendid example of the 'pious fraud' in full gallop.

During most of these great and stirring events, Leong On Tong was on leave in China where he married a Christian woman from Singapore, who spoke fluent English. He returned to Castlemaine in 1872 where his first child was born and baptised William Edward Leong in honour of the late Rev William Hill and the Rev Edward King. Before leaving, Leong On Tong and James Moy Ling called on the Reverend James Bickford, minister of the Wesley Church, Lonsdale Street, whose responsibilities included the Chinese chapel. Moy Ling had asked On Tong to look for a suitable girl for him.⁴⁷ Bickford noted in his diary:

July 30 (1871) Today James Ah Ling and Leong On Tong called about a matrimonial errand to China. I gave Leong On Tong a letter to the Rev George Piercy, our missionary in Canton,

44 **The Wesleyan Chronicle**, 20 March 1872:42.

45 **The Wesleyan Chronicle**, 20 March 1873.

46 **The Wesleyan Chronicle**, 20 November 1871 :161. **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 1148**, Bickford to Hoole, 16 October 1871.

47 **The Wesleyan Chronicle**, 20 November 1872:173.

including three bills for £20, £10, £10 to be used in the interests of James Ah Ling in the event of Leong succeeding in his mission for him.⁴⁸

Their new status and Bickford's provision of the travelling costs for Moy Ling's new wife suggests that the church had advised both men that their new ministerial status would be enhanced by entering into marriage. In 1873, Moy Ling also took leave and then returned to Melbourne with his wife. The Moy Lings became parents within a year of their return.⁴⁹ Both On Tong and Moy Ling were confirmed as full ministers upon completion of their probationary period.

They were not the first ordained Chinese. That honour belongs to Father Joseph Lee⁵⁰, who served for several years in Ballarat, Castlemaine and Melbourne, but Leong On Tong and James Moy Ling were the first Chinese to be ordained in Australia.

The Methodist Mission was the shining success of all the missions, at least on the surface. With two ministers serving two congregations it was far in advance of the other denominations. In addition, Jacob Wha Fat and David Jing Geng were catechists lacking only formal appointment. By 1873, there were sixteen baptised men and another twenty or thirty who were regular adherents. As with all the missions, the numbers varied greatly with people constantly on the move within the colony and returning to China. Far from feeling a sense of achievement, however, the committee of the Methodist Mission was quite dissatisfied. The mission had no natural growth factor, as churches usually do, through the birth and baptism of the children of adherents. It relied almost entirely on new converts and these were few and far between.⁵¹ There was always a concern within the Methodist Missionary Society in Victoria, within which the Chinese missions were placed, that the costs of maintaining the staff was disproportionate to the number of Chinese members.

Despite their ordained status, the responsibility for the disappointing state of affairs was, predictably, placed on the Chinese ministers. Doubts about the 'vigor' of their work renewed the old call for a European superintendent, either from England or from China.⁵² The committee was actually interested in a man aged 22 years, with no theological education or knowledge of the Chinese who had been accepted as a missionary candidate and sent to Wesley College to matriculate. Their hopes were misplaced as the man did not complete his studies.⁵³

Goodness knows what On Tong and Moy Ling thought about this proposition. They had done everything the committee required, including getting married, and looking after their congregations but, no matter, their work was under almost continual question. Although they had proved their commitment and sincere Christian beliefs they were dealing with a group of managers who, with the best intentions in the world, were caught in the gap of understanding to which Caldwell had referred.

Now locked into a sense of desperation in their desire to have a European superintendent, the committee appointed a missionary on leave from Fiji, the

48 **Bickford** 1890:241

49 **The Wesleyan Chronicle** 20 June 1873:92; 20 August 1874:130.

50 **Ebsworth**, 1973.

51 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1874: xiii

52 **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 171**, Chapman to Boyce, 31 December 1873 and 17 April 1874.

53 **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 606**, Chapman to Boyce, 11 June 1874, see also **Mss 804**.

Reverend Jesse Carey, as superintendent. They did not bother to get permission from the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in London which acted promptly to disallow the appointment. Carey remained in Victoria and in due course finished up as secretary of the committee.⁵⁴ The Carey idea having not succeeded, and hearing that Josiah Cox was having to leave China because of ill-health, the committee decided to offer him the job but once again, Cox declined. Then it was suggested that another missionary, the Reverend Edward Sinzinney might be available but that did not work out either. While the committee spent its time condemning their Chinese ministers by constantly looking for a European to supervise them, the two men just got on with the job.⁵⁵ But there can be no doubt that, like the Christians associated with the Presbyterian and Anglican missions, they kept their own counsel on most aspects of Chinese community life.

During the time the committee was talking about their performance, On Tong and Moy Ling had three catechists in training and the total membership had increased to seventy-three baptised men and a further ten on trial. There were new preaching places at Dunolly, Talbot, Creswick and Haddon. Over two hundred Chinese were now regularly attending services and another four hundred were recorded as adherents. It is hard to comprehend why the committee thought they needed more supervision.

In March 1876, Moy Ling made a tour of the northeast and preached in the Chinese camps at Beechworth, Stanley, Woolshed and Yackandandah. He had previously visited the same area two years earlier. Interestingly, he reported that a number of his meetings were held in 'club-houses and temples'. With the steady decline in numbers, the old role of the associations had given way and the buildings were really little more than community halls.⁵⁶ As a respected leader, Moy Ling was entitled to the courtesy of using Chinese facilities. It also indicates a steady closing of the ranks between Christians and non-Christians in the Chinese community who shared a common distrust of their future at the hands of a European community increasingly using racist language and imposing ever more restrictive immigration policies.

It was a good thing that the man to whom the Missionary Society members in Australia were sending their letters was the Reverend W B Boyce. Boyce had been President of the Australasian Conference in 1855 and 1856 and Australasian Secretary of the Society before accepting the call to return to England. He knew the men and the general situation well and more importantly, knew at first hand the attitude of the colonists to the Chinese. Their complaints about the Chinese mission were actually only a very trivial part of the constant stream of requests, complaints and bright ideas that flowed into the Society from Australasia and the Pacific. Boyce and his successors displayed great courtesy and tact and above all, the most extraordinary patience, with their Australasian colleagues.

In the midst of the search for a European, the Reverend Edward Youngman, the minister at Goulburn, New South Wales, offered to serve with the mission. It took several letters before they actually came to terms with the fact that they had actually

⁵⁴ **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 177**, Chapman to Boyce, 22 January 1876.

⁵⁵ **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 964**, Chapman to Boyce, 27 October 1876, and **Mss 950**, 10 January 1877.

⁵⁶ **The Spectator** 25 March 1876:560; 8 April 1876:585.

found a genuine offer.⁵⁷ After that, however, they acted with commendable speed. Youngman was sent off to Canton for two years without being first given the chance to survey the situation he was entering.⁵⁸ The Chinese ministers learned of this impending appointment and Leong On Tong asked permission to return home and to be transferred to the British Conference so that his ministerial status would be recognised when he arrived in China.⁵⁹ His action was a characteristic signal from the Chinese about their concern at the way things were going and was regularly used in the Presbyterian mission. It was also characteristic of the lack of mutual understanding that the mission committees rarely recognised these resignations as genuine expressions of concern.

On Tong had other reasons to be aggrieved. His church at Castlemaine, a wooden building opened over twenty years earlier, had not been maintained and leaked every time it rained. It was so bad that people put up umbrellas while attending worship. His house was as bad, or even worse. He had actually had to build his own kitchen chimney, without assistance, because no one in the circuit would give him any help. Lack of interest by the Europeans in Castlemaine, presumably including the ministers, and a lack of confidence and support from the mission committee make it all the more remarkable that he put up with it all as long as he did.⁶⁰ The evidence is clear that the committee of the Wesleyan mission received far more loyalty from Leong On Tong and James Moy Ling than it ever gave in return.

In 1879, shortly before Youngman returned from China, the secretary of the Anglican mission committee, the Rev J F Horsley observed that the Wesleyans had a 'vigorous' mission with the two ministers and three catechists at Talbot, Creswick and Haddon and had three other catechists in training. All this was achieved by Leong On Tong and, James Moy Ling, without a European superintendent and obviously without the confidence or support of the committee.⁶¹ The entire credit was given to God and his approval of the Wesleyan Methodist Church rather than to the two men who were doing most of the actual work.⁶²

The attention of the committee, of course, was preoccupied with the new golden age that would accompany the return of Edward Youngman. His return in 1880 produced a number of administrative changes. The catechists were switched and the two ministers exchanged churches. There is no mention if the sub-standard buildings at Castlemaine were repaired before Moy Ling arrived.

Having 'reorganised' the mission and put it on a 'sound' footing, another characteristic behaviour of all the mission committees, Youngman set out on a major deputational tour of Victoria and southern New South Wales. He was a natural public relations man. When he arrived to preach, he wore full Chinese ceremonial dress and was a blaze of colour in the drab Methodist chapels. He made a considerable effort to have the committee meet all their Chinese workers and to visit the various places where they were working. He personally visited every Chinese camp in Victoria and southern New South Wales. His tour in 1881 was the first and only time that any

57 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1877:x. Youngman's ministerial career is outlined in **Methodist Church of Australia**, (1927).

58 **Blamires and Smith**, 1888:298. **Colwell** 1914:209.

59 **Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, Australian Correspondence, Mss 676**, Chapman to Perks, 7 June 1877.

60 **The Spectator**, 4 March 1876:525.

61 **Horsley** 1879:247

62 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1878:xvii and 1879:xii.

European associated with the Chinese missions visited all the mission stations or the Chinese camps.

In 1882, he persuaded the Reverend Spencer Williams, the Victorian Secretary of the Foreign Missions Committee of the Victorian Conference, to whom he was immediately responsible, to accompany him on a further tour of all the mission stations. This was another first and a very successful venture which went some way towards persuading the Chinese that perhaps a new day had dawned.

Their first call was at Haddon, where the catechist was James Lee Chung. A tea meeting was held, attended by one hundred Chinese and some Europeans. It was undoubtedly the biggest event ever held by the Chinese Christians of the district. Next stop was Talbot, where Joseph Lee Ah Tack had recently been appointed a probationary minister. He was later to serve in New South Wales as Joseph Lee Tear Tack.

At Dunolly the catechist was David Chin Chan, a friend of James Moy Ling. Chin Chan had been in Victoria for over twenty years, and following this visit, he decided to return home, being replaced by Peter Li Wan, the market gardener from Richmond in whose home Moy Ling had established a Bible class.⁶³

The Dunolly meeting was held in the home of a Mr Oldmeadow, who was one of the few who took more than a passing interest in the local Chinese church. They then went on to meet the Rev James Moy Ling in Castlemaine and finished their tour with a stop in Bendigo. The people of Bendigo, and their catechist, Thomas Mak Quong, turned on a grand feast to to farewell Youngman and Williams.

Prior to leaving, the deputation was entertained at a real Chinese dinner provided by our catechist, Thomas Mak Kuong. One part of the deputation - I shall not say which part - looked completely awed as the various dishes appeared, and, either for fear of the consequences, or because he had dined not very long previously, his attempt at doing justice proved abortive.⁶⁴

One useful outcome of the tour was the approval of the mission committee to held a staff meeting, the first time that all the ministers and catechists has formally met although they all knew each other well. The meeting was attended by the Reverend Edward Youngman (Superintendent), the Reverend James Moy Ling (Castlemaine), the Reverend Leong On Tong (Melbourne), the Reverend Joseph Lee Tear Tack (Creswick), James Lee Chung (Haddon), Thomas Mak Quong (Bendigo) and Peter Li Wan (Dunolly). Youngman was the chairman and Lee Chung kept the minutes.

The most interesting question, apart from predictable discussions about operational matters, was a question from Leong On Tong, who asked what could be done to prevent the See Yap Association from demanding an exit fee from Christians returning to China. Ostensibly charged so that the Association would meet claims for any unpaid debts after men left Victoria, the charge was regarded by the Christians, correctly, as an unjust levy which simply put money into the pockets of the directors of the Association. The meeting resolved that, rather than seeming to be claiming some special exemption, all Christians should pay ten shillings to the church with which they were associated.⁶⁵

The Foreign Missions Committee was now faced with finding the salaries for seven men, who were collectively ministering to only a few hundred people who in comparative terms, constituted a membership less than one normal self-supporting

63 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1883:xiv.

64 **The Spectator** 2 June 1882:53.

65 **The Spectator** 13 April 1883.

European church. At about the same time, the London office had asked the Australasian branch of the Missionary Society to take over full responsibility for finance and staffing of the South Pacific mission and as part of an overall review of its commitments, the staffing and funding of the Victorian mission came under examination. The impending departure of Leong On Tong for China was a hidden blessing and the Society agreed not only to pay his family's fares home but to continue his salary until he found employment. The committee had still not recognised that his threatened resignation was a protest, rather than a reflection of his real intentions.

It was quite a different story when Edward Youngman announced his intention to resign and return to pastoral work in New South Wales. The basic reason for his decision was his firm belief that the Chinese ministers simply did not need European supervision and it was a decision that was to set the Wesleyan mission on a totally different path to the Presbyterians and Anglicans. The financial cost of sustaining the superintendency was an unnecessary drain on the Society and he decided to resolve it by presenting the committee with a *fait accompli*.

Even with the forthcoming departures of Youngman and A Toe, the Foreign Missions Committee still thought that the staffing of the mission was excessive to the size of the congregations and efforts were made to persuade James Moy Ling to accept a request from the New South Wales Conference for one of the missionaries to move to Tingha, in northern New South Wales, where a large number of Chinese had gathered on new alluvial tin sluicing grounds.

Moy Ling would not countenance such a move and finally Joseph Lee Tear Tack was persuaded to take the appointment with the grandiose title of Superintendent of the New South Wales Chinese Mission.⁶⁶ Tear Tack moved initially to Sydney, where he made the rounds of the Chinese community and in particular tried to involve the leading Chinese in the colony, Mei Quong Tart, in his work.⁶⁷

With the staff now about to be reduced by three ministers, the Victorian committee looked afresh at the situation at the beginning of 1884. As usual, the committee had little practical idea about the state of affairs in the various congregations. All that happened was that two of the catechists were moved - Mak Quong from Bendigo to Dunolly, and Li Wan moved to Bendigo. Lee Chung had married and was allowed to stay at Haddon. One interesting development was that Mak Quong was allowed to minister to a combined Chinese-European congregation at Dunolly and did so quite successfully. The local people accepted him fully and that in turn drew more Chinese to the congregation.⁶⁸ It did not go unnoticed by Youngman and helped to confirm his view that the best interests of the Chinese in the longer term lay in their integration with normal circuit life.

Over the years, with the constant movement of the Chinese, the congregation at Castlemaine had declined to the point where the committee accepted Moy Ling's suggestion that he would be better used in Melbourne.⁶⁹ For the time being, until he returned to New South Wales, Youngman established himself at Creswick, near Ballarat.

Although he had yet to set a firm date for his departure, a big farewell party was held to formally farewell Leong On Tong. It was now fairly clear to many people that he was procrastinating, probably hoping to be offered the position of superintendent.

66 **The Spectator** 1 February 1884.

67 **Lea-Scarlett** 1969:88.

68 **The Spectator** 28 March 1884.

69 **The Spectator** 22 August 1884.

His excuse was that Guangdong Province was in too unsettled a state for him to put his family at risk.⁷⁰ His farewell was attended by over one hundred Europeans and hundreds of Chinese. Eleven speeches were made, a baptism was celebrated and Youngman took the opportunity to formally announce his own departure.⁷¹ It was a high point in the history of the mission and also a turning point when, for the first time, the mission committee seems to have accepted the virtual autonomy of the Chinese ministry and to have abandoned the incessant search for a European superintendent. On Tong finally left Melbourne on 6 June and was appointed to a church in Hong Kong which had a considerable number of Australian converts among its members.

Despite the moves and resignations, the Wesleyan mission finished up with more staff than when the review first began in the previous year. It retained Moy Ling as the minister in Melbourne and had seven paid catechists and a fourteen lay preachers, an active membership of 127 and was, with the exception of its finances, well able to manage its own pastoral responsibilities.⁷² Among the new catechists was John Young Wai, who subsequently entered the Presbyterian mission, was later ordained and after moving to Sydney, founded the largest Chinese church in Australia.⁷³

Youngman accepted appointment to the Glen Innes circuit, which included Tear Tack's mission at Tingha. He maintained his position that there was no longer any need for a specific provision for the Chinese and argued that their interests would be better served by becoming integrated into the mainstream life of the Methodist Church. He consequently gave little support to Tear Tack's work. Peter Li Wan was moved to Creswick with responsibility for Haddon and Talbot. He was supported by European friends, a Mr and Mrs Collocoat of Haddon and a Mrs and Mrs Penter of Talbot. Both these families welcomed the Chinese Christians into their homes and encouraged them to attend Bible studies and to attend Sunday services. James Lee Chung was given responsibility for Bendigo and Castlemaine while Thomas Mak Quong looked after Dunolly and St Arnaud, where a small group of men from other Chinese mission congregations had gathered.

The numbers of Chinese in Australia was continuing to decline through the combined effects of men finally deciding to return home and the increasing difficulty for Chinese to enter the Australian colonies as a result of restrictive immigration. As well as the men returning to China, there was also a steady movement out of the country centres as men moved into the major cities in search of steady employment. Many of the goldfields centres had worked out all their alluvial gold and the trend into skilled underground reef mining meant a steady reduction in the goldfields population. Market gardens in the declining country towns provided little opportunity for most of the Chinese who could not understand many of the spoken or written English instructions required in hardrock mining. Similarly, the lack of opportunity in the country lead most Europeans to join the steady movement to the cities where they formed part of an urban working class and contributed to the steady growth of the Australian labour movement beyond its original rural beginnings.

With the total number of men left in the country centres so small the committee decided that it should do something about the waste of manpower and it was decided

70 **The Spectator** 15 January 1886.

71 **The Spectator** 12 September 1884.

72 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports**, 1884:xiv-xv.

73 **The Spectator** 5 February 1886. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 186:xiv-xv and 1889:xix.

that John Tong Wai should move to Melbourne to assist the Rev Moy Ling. It was during this period that he left the Methodists to join in the Presbyterian Seminary opened in Fitzroy by the Reverend Robert Hamilton and Cheong Peng-nam. It was more an act of kindness that the Wesleyans still retained so many catechists in the country area. Most of the men remaining were too old to compete for work in Melbourne or Geelong and most had put down roots in the local areas. Many were regular worshippers but understood only parts of the English language services and were not able to communicate fully with their European neighbours. The catechists provided an important social welfare service in meeting with them and trying to assist them with their everyday problems or to advise the circuit ministers of their needs.

From the mid 1880's to the end of the century the Methodist mission is one of slow decline in country centres, the removal of catechists as numbers changed and men, including the catechists, returned to China. The main centre became Melbourne and the church in Little Bourke Street where Moy Ling was now the defacto superintendent. The Report for 1900 indicated that apart from the steady, if unspectacular work in Melbourne, there were six permanent buildings - Dunolly, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Creswick, Haddon and Talbot and six other preaching places where services for the Chinese were occasionally conducted. There were two ministers and two catechists, supported by ten local preachers who ministered to 150 communicant members and perhaps two hundred adherents.⁷⁴

Other Methodist Missions in Australia

New England, northern New South Wales.

The work in Victoria gave rise to missions in other parts of Australia. The Rev Joseph Lee Tear Tack had accepted the post of Superintendent of the Chinese Mission in New South Wales and had established himself at Tingha, in the Glen Innes circuit to which Edward Youngman had been appointed as minister. Youngman took little interest in the work and his attitude was accepted by the other ministers in the area.⁷⁵

The pattern was similar to that of Victoria with an early curiosity tapering off into disinterest. While four hundred had attended in the early stages, it was not long before it dropped to about twenty or so regular adherents. A church building was opened at Tingha in 1887 but the congregation continued to fall with less than ten men attending each Sunday and eventually attendance at worship was down to an average of three. The major reason was the constant movement of men in search of new tin workings. The movement of Chinese to the New England district was stimulated by the finding of alluvial tin, for which the gold-sluicing techniques worked just as well.

His main means of outreach was to conduct English language classes at Tingha on four evenings a week. These were well attended with about thirty men coming each night and through the contacts made in the classes, he succeeded in convincing thirteen men over the years to accept baptism.⁷⁶

His greatest success came after he managed to borrow a horse from a Chinese merchant and could move more freely. He started preaching at the main Chinese

⁷⁴ **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports 1900.**

⁷⁵ **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports 1889:xvi and 1891:xix.**

⁷⁶ **Wesleyan Missionary Notices, London 1888:10**

centre at Emmaville where his congregation attracted about a hundred men every Sunday. He travelled regularly to Tenterfield, Inverell and Glen Innes. He was still tied physically to the property at Tingha but spent two full months at Emmaville and returned every month. He supplemented his own income through his English classes.⁷⁷

In 1895, the Society decided to close the New England mission, and asked Tear Tack to open a new church in Darwin, in the Northern Territory, where a considerable Chinese population had developed.

Darwin, Northern Territory

Methodist work in Darwin was initiated by the South Australian Conference. In 1886, the minister in Darwin, the Reverend Tom Ward, had started a night school to teach English to the Chinese but attracted so much hostility from the European community that he found it wiser to close up.

In 1888, the Reverend Edward Youngman found new interest in things Chinese and accepted a request from the Missionary Society that he go to Darwin and start a mission. He accepted and took Timothy Loi Foy, one of the Melbourne catechists, with him. The tropical climate proved too much for Youngman and he returned to New South Wales in 1890, leaving Loi Foy to carry on alone. He experienced strong opposition from the Chinese and left in 1893.⁷⁸

He was succeeded by the Rev Joseph Lee Tear Tack. Tear Tack, who held a British passport, was nonetheless impeded in moving to the Territory by colonial legislation resulting from the Inter-Colonial Conference of 1881. The various enactments not virtually halted all Chinese immigration into Australia but also intentionally made it very difficult for the Chinese to move from one colony to another.⁷⁹

Tear Tack arrived in Darwin in early 1896 only to have his house and chapel destroyed by a cyclone.⁸⁰ Despite the conventional 'pious fraud' in the church press he was not well received by the local Chinese, who numbered about three thousand. He persuaded only five men to accept baptism and was moved to Cairns in Northern Queensland, where he died in 1901, aged 53 or 54 years.

Cairns, North Queensland

The discovery of gold on the Palmer River in North Queensland had resulted in a dramatic influx of Chinese, and there was a strong European belief that, despite the bars imposed in 1881, the Chinese were still creeping in without legal authority. Colonial magazines were full of mysterious landings on the Gulf of Carpentaria, and midnight landings all along the coast, sometimes hundreds of miles from the goldfields. The Methodists decided to respond to the heathen invasion by sending Tear Tack to Cairns with the sad results already mentioned.⁸¹ After his death, Willie Lin Foy, a Christian from Brisbane, looked after the mission.

77 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1893:xxi; 1894:xxi; 1895:xxviii.

78 **Rendell** 1952:107. **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1890:xvii; 1891:xviii; 1892:viii; 1893:xii; 1894:xiii.

79 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1895:xxviii.

80 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1897:xxviii; 1898:xxxi.

81 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1900:xxxviii; 1901:xxxvii.

The Society looked for a successor and found successors in the Reverend and Mrs E S Piper, who had been Bible Christian Church missionaries in China. The Bible Christians were one of the Methodist groups which came into union with the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists to form the Methodist Church of Australia. The Pipers were on leave in Adelaide when the Boxer Rebellion made it impossible for them to return to their station in China.⁸²

Tasmania

A Chinese church in northern Tasmania began when a group of Victorian Christians moved to the Weldborough district about 1880.⁸³ They erected a small church but little else is recorded about this initial effort.

Not long afterwards, a Methodist Home Missionary in Launceston, a Mr Marshall, met with a group of Chinese Christians lead by James Chin Kit, to discuss establishing a Chinese mission church. A subsequent public meeting held in the Princes Square Congregational Church agreed to establish an inter-denominational mission with a committee representing all the Protestant churches.⁸⁴ There is no further reference to a Chinese Church until 1902 when a catechist from Melbourne, James Yee Keet, was reported to have established a Wesleyan mission in Launceston with associated congregations in Burnie and Devonport.⁸⁵

Perth, Western Australia

In 1896, the Reverend James Moy Ling was invited to Perth by the Reverend George Rowe, the minister of Wesley Church. Moy Ling addressed the inaugural meeting of the Western Australian Chinese Mission held in Wesley Church on 8 July 1896.

On his return to Melbourne, Moy Ling nominated Paul Soong Quong as catechist. In 1897 a chapel was built. After several years as a catechist, Soong Quong became a probationary minister. It became a characteristic story. Once the first flush of enthusiasm faded, the congregation was left to its own devices, interest waxed and waned and finally Soong Quong resigned and went into private business, although remaining the effective leader of the small group of Chinese Christians.⁸⁶

Finally, a catechist, Daniel Lem Sheok Kee, accepted an appointment to serve with the New Zealand church in a mission in the South Island, probably in Otago.⁸⁷

82 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1902:xxii and xxxiii; 1904:xxx.

83 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1881:xii.

84 **The Launceston Examiner** 4: 8: 25 July 1884.

85 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1903:xxxii.

86 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1897:xxvii. Wesley Church, Perth, **Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting**, 1896-98. **Minute Book of the Wesleyan Chinese Mission**, 1900-1918.

87 **Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Reports** 1897:xxvii.

The Methodist mission to the Chinese suffered from all the difficulties that were common to each of the denominations that attempted the conversion of the Chinese. The basic problem was the conflict between the Christian belief in the potential of every human to respond to the Christian message and the equally strongly-held belief that the Chinese had no place in Australian society.

This fundamental question of Chinese participation was settled legislatively by rigid exclusive legislation and the White Australia Policy. The conversion of the Chinese did not attract any more general support from Methodists than it did from other Christians.

The linking of the Chinese Methodist Mission to the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, within its overall management of 'foreign' missions, did free the Methodist mission from the constant financial worries that beset the Presbyterians and Anglicans.

The willingness of the Methodists to ordain Chinese ministers inevitably led to the recognition that the Chinese could handle their own affairs and ultimately to a measure of autonomy that only Cheok Hong Cheong was to enjoy when he formed his own effectively independent Anglican Chinese Mission.

The outcome of the separation of the Chinese ministry from the mainstream church was not as serious as might be expected. The vast majority of Chinese Christians who stayed in Australia after 1881 and 1901 either had no children because they never married and were able to maintain some kind of personal identity through their membership of what became, effectively, their ethnic association as well as a body which gave them some minor degree of acceptance. Their position was very akin to the many ethnic groups which maintain their identity around a religious affiliation in contemporary Australia.

For the men who married, it was mostly to Europeans who were either already established members of a church and maintained their old affiliations, or had no church connection at all, in which case there was no need to exercise a choice between the Chinese or European congregations.

The church in Little Bourke Street survives as the last tangible asset in this part of the history of the Methodist church, or as it is now, the Uniting Church of Australia.