From Fraternities to Families: The Evolution of Chinese Life in the Braidwood District of New South Wales (NSW), 1850s-1890s

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Abstract: This article builds upon a recent study of Chinese heritage in southern NSW and on insights by historians like John Fitzgerald, Cai Shaoqing and Kok Hu Jin on the role of fraternal organisations in Chinese life in Australia. It focuses on Braidwood town and district in southern NSW. The paper locates the Braidwood Chinese goldminers in the context of the literature on Chinese fraternal organisations in China, Southeast Asia and Australia before focusing on the life of the Chinese between 1858 and 1870, when their presence was at its peak. The last section considers the years between 1870 and 1900, a time of social and economic transition as several Chinese families settled in Braidwood, endowing the town with a flourishing if little known Chinese–Australian past.

Introduction

The Chinese diaspora in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was closely linked to mining, for instance, to tin in Kalimantan (Borneo) and the Malayan Peninsula and to gold in California, and later in Australia. In Australia the first Chinese people to arrive in any number came as indentured labourers in 1847, to work primarily on pastoral properties. Significant numbers of Chinese came with the gold rushes, which began in Victoria and NSW in 1851. Their first destination was Victoria. Many historians see the advent of the gold rushes in 1851 as one of the most important events in Australian history, an event which reshaped the demographic, political and economic contours of the country. Chinese miners were integral to this story. Over 18,000 Chinese people arrived in Victoria between 1851 and 1855, with a further 24,000 over the next five years. The significance of this immigration flow can be measured against the population of Victoria, which on the eve of the gold rushes was only 77,000; three years later in 1854 it was 236,000. There were also many Chinese departures, of course, but from 1858 to 1860 most of these went to NSW. The Braidwood goldfields in south-eastern NSW were an important destination, and the arrival of the Chinese miners corresponded very closely to the re-commencement of sustained mining activity in the district in the late 1850s. By 1859 Chinese miners were well established on the major alluvial fields in the Braidwood district, in particular at Araluen, Majors Creek, Bells Creek, Jembaicumbene and Mongarlowe. (See Figure 1 over page)

Although I have already written at length on the history of the Chinese miners in the Braidwood district, two factors have now caused me to reconsider the

1 I would like to thank Li Tana and Benjamin Penny for their comments on an early draft, Nola Cooke for her editorial assistance with the various revisions, and the two anonymous referees for their valuable assistance.
earlier materials. First, my recent involvement in a comprehensive heritage study of the Chinese in southern NSW and the Riverina, as part of the ‘Tracking the Dragon’ project launched in 2001 by the NSW Heritage Office under the NSW Heritage Incentives Program. This study, following an earlier one by Barbara Hickson and Heather Nicholls for central and western NSW, reported on market gardens, cemeteries, shops, homes, goldfields, and artefact materials relating to the organisation of Chinese people in rural NSW. Both projects owed much to the energy and advocacy of the late Henry Chan, and their successful conclusion is a tribute to him. Of particular importance for my purpose here was a fortuitous artefact find that pointed directly to the presence of Chinese fraternities in rural NSW. Second was the publication of John Fitzgerald’s 2007 book _Big White Lie. Chinese Australians in White Australia_. A central theme of this study, which has extended the work of a handful of other scholars such as C.F. Yong, Cai Shaoqing, Kok Hu

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Dr Lindsay Smith was my colleague in this study.

Jin and Jane Lydon, is the importance of organisations such as native place associations, secret societies and Masonic lodges in the life of the Chinese people in Australia.

My present article represents a first attempt to integrate these new perspectives into my earlier studies of Chinese on the Australian goldfields. It shows that when a socio-cultural analysis is added to the existing economic data, a fuller picture emerges of the Chinese experience on the Australian goldfields, and in the Braidwood district in particular. This picture reveals a transition at work in the later nineteenth century, from one dominant mode of Chinese social and economic organisation to another, in effect, from fraternities to families. Because of their successful adaptation to changing conditions in the later nineteenth century, certain Chinese settlers in Braidwood maintained a prominent presence in the town until long into the twentieth century. Their existence gives Braidwood a hidden Chinese history that I also want to reveal in this article.

The ensuing discussion is in three parts. In the first I discuss the Braidwood goldfields in the context of the wider literature on Chinese fraternal organisations in China, Southeast Asia and Australia. The second section focuses on the Chinese miners on the Braidwood goldfields between 1858 and 1870, when their presence was at its peak. Themes include labour and organisation, habitat and economy, and race and conflict. In the third section I consider the years between 1870 and 1900. This was the time of transition, when Chinese people who moved from goldfield camps into European villages and towns—and Braidwood in particular—set up increasingly important relationships with Europeans. These links, as mediated through their acceptance into the local Christian community, helped them to settle into a different form of traditional Chinese social organisation here, one based on family and personal networks rather than on fraternal associations.

The Goldfields Setting: Associations, Secret Societies (hui), Kongsis and Temples

In 1857 a sustained mining boom commenced on the Braidwood goldfields. Although the exceptionally high yields of the early 1850s were not to be repeated, the boom was long and substantial, for the Braidwood goldfields were to be the premier goldfields in NSW in five of the thirteen years between 1858 and 1870. This boom followed closely the reduction of the NSW licence fee to one-twelfth of its previous amount, and a downturn of the business cycle in Victoria. But possibly the most important factor was the arrival of large numbers of Chinese miners, starting in 1858. Their migration into NSW was largely a consequence of the punitive taxes and immigration restrictions introduced in Victoria and South Australia, and the reduction of the licence fee in NSW. By 1859 the Chinese miners were well established on the major alluvial fields in the Braidwood and

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9 NSW Statistical Register, Sydney, 1859-60, 1864-66 and 1869.


11 Serle, Golden Age, pp. 324-31. The opening of the Clyde road between Braidwood and the port of Nelligen on the Clyde River also eased access. Sydney Empire, 27 January 1858.
Shoalhaven district, in particular Araluen, Majors Creek, Jembaicumbene and Mongarlowe. There were at least 1500 Chinese miners in any one year between 1858 and 1862 on the Jembaicumbene and Mongarlowe fields combined, and at least 500 on other fields. But the numbers may have been considerably higher, for proportionately they were a very significant part of the mining population. These proportions were sustained at least until the early 1870s, and beyond on some fields. Braidwood itself was not a mining town like Ballarat or Bendigo, but more of an administrative centre like Bathurst in NSW. Prior to the gold rushes it had hotels, churches, a police station and court, retail establishments and some industry such as flour mills and a boiling down works. But the population in 1851, on the eve of the gold rushes, was a mere 212.

Almost all Chinese miners in the Australian colonies were from Guangdong Province in China, in the area surrounding the Pearl River delta, and predominantly from the See Yap district (counties of Kaiping, Xinhui, Taishan and Enping), although the Sam Yap district (counties of Nanhai, Panyu and Shunde) and Zhongshan, Gaoyao and Gaoming districts also contributed emigrants. Kathryn Cronin has found that up to 80 percent of the See Yap people in Victoria came from only two of its counties (Xinhui and Taishan), with only nine extended family groups accounting for half of Victoria’s Chinese population. The NSW situation was different, however. According to Michael Williams here there was a far wider representation of Guangdong districts, although this did narrow over time. Lydon’s work also supports the view that the Chinese in NSW may have been more heterogeneous than elsewhere in Australia. Even so, as Shaoqing has emphasised, diasporic Chinese were far more homogeneous in nineteenth-century Australia compared to other countries, where many more provinces were represented and the scope for fragmentation and division was much greater.

Most Chinese miners entering the Australian colonies were willing immigrants. Although some Chinese paid their own way, most of those who ended up as miners came on what is called the credit-ticket system. Merchants in Hong Kong and Australia would sponsor miners who were indebted to them for their passage. After their arrival, they were monitored by headmen or bosses, in association with fraternal organisations such as native place associations or secret societies, until their debt was paid off. An extensive social network surrounded these men, securing their employment and taking care of their needs as well as ensuring their financial obligations were met. Fitzgerald has argued that these civic associations and their headmen largely determined the experience of these miners by enmeshing them in trust-based networks reinforced by an elaborate system of oaths, rituals and punishments overseen by secret society networks. Even where
formal contracts were concerned, native place associations or secret societies undertook the arrangements. In every respect, from transport to labour supply to living conditions, the role played by these organisations was crucial.

Native place associations were formed by men from the same district or county of origin. They thus differed from the organisations that Westerners understood as secret societies (or hui), which were based on sworn brotherhood and could include men from different districts or counties. The associations were primarily benevolent institutions promoting mutual interest among members and doing charitable work. C. Y. Yong and Lydon have stressed the importance of district associations in NSW in protecting the interests of new immigrants and helping them become established. The associations were also often meeting places and lodging houses. Lydon has also referred to the role of associations in the transshipment of the dead. Williams attributes a similar role to the associations. He states that one of the first in NSW was the Quong Sing Tong, and that by the 1890s there were at least ten such societies in Sydney with memberships that spread to regional areas.

In China the secret societies or hui were very much akin to mutual aid organisations. But they were also associated with rebellions and sometimes crime, so many hui were outlawed and their members, particularly the leaders, subject to severe punishments, including execution. Secrecy was, therefore, an imperative. In Australia, and through much of southeast China and Southeast Asia, the best known hui was the Heaven and Earth Society (Tiandihui, Yee Hing Company or the Hung Men or Hung League), whose activities were centred on the Pearl River delta, the place noted above as the source of the vast majority of Chinese emigrants to Australia. Shaoqing comments that in the gold rush years from 1851 to 1875 Hung membership was widespread amongst the Chinese in Australia, and that probably at least half of the Chinese population was affiliated. In Australia as in China at the time, the Hung League’s mutual support activities included arranging jobs, mediating disputes, assisting with everyday difficulties, arranging funerals, and making representations to government, if necessary. Shaoqing has likened the League to an unofficial Chinese consulate.

But Chinese organisations were not confined to district associations and hui. Also important was the kongs, which was an economic organisation of shareholding partners, and very prevalent in the Chinese mining industry of the diaspora. According to Mary Somers Heidhues, the kongsis on Bangka Island (located off the east coast of Sumatra) were characterised "on the one hand by rotating leadership and on the other by the sanctions of mutual trust and of indebtedness, especially in the case of new labourers". Newcomers who paid off their debts were thereafter eligible to become shareholders and to divide profits.

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18 The next section considers labour issues in more detail.
19 Yong, *New Gold Mountain*, pp. 3-4, 189-95; Lydon, *Many Inventions*, p. 89; Williams, *Chinese Settlement in NSW*, pp. 15-18. There appears to be some ambiguity in Lydon’s work between the role of secret societies and associations. The section that discusses the latter is headed ‘Societies’, and she refers to ritual brotherhood in the associations; this practice was more a feature of the hui. Secret societies such as the Hung Men are not mentioned. The kongsis will be discussed later in this section.
between themselves. These kongsis involved no more than several dozen members, usually working a single site; but in Kalimantan there were associations or federations of mining kongsis which controlled hundreds or even thousands of people. Fitzgerald has noted the parallels between what Heidhues described for Bangka and Kalimantan (formerly Borneo) and the organisation of labour among Chinese miners in nineteenth-century Australia, characterising these miners as “heirs to the legacy of egalitarian secret society networks stretching from Borneo to California”. There is an understandable confusion about the relationship between hui and kongsis. Sometimes as a cover for their activities hui called themselves kongsis. Wang Tai Peng has argued that mining unions in the late eighteenth century could be simultaneously called hui and kongsis. To the men involved it was all a matter of emphasis. When the emphasis was on the meaning of brotherhood they used the term hui. When they tried to distinguish their mining organisations from the hui brotherhood in China they used the term kongsi. Unlike most hui brotherhoods in China their organisations were both extended mining partnerships and brotherhoods. The two structures had much in common: apart from economic and mutual assistance roles they shared elements of ritual brotherhood, initiation ceremonies, and religious functions, including the provision and upkeep of temples. The hui were a sort of umbrella organisation and members of the same hui could belong to different kongsis. For Australia, further light on the relationship between the two organisations has been shed by Kok Hu Jin, who has argued that here the same kongsi plan was adopted by substituting the Hung Men Lodge, or hui, for the kongsi. He attributes a major role to the Lodge in sponsoring recruits to Australia and arranging all expenses such as their sea passage, entry poll taxes, food and lodging and, once mining had commenced, the distribution of profits to members.

On the Braidwood goldfields, and probably most other Australian goldfields, the relationship between the miners, the headmen and fraternities such as the native place associations and the hui, with their kongsi characteristics, is still not clear. The only Chinese institutions to which direct reference was made in published sources were the temples. Indeed it is not even clear which Guangdong districts were represented in Braidwood, although the famed Mei Quong Tart, who arrived there in 1859, was a native of the See Yap county of Taishan. This lack of clarity is understandable, for the proclivity of contemporary European observers to depict the Chinese people on the goldfields as a homogenous collection of celestials, barbarians, Mongolians or whatever, has obscured much. Few contemporaneous sources understood Chinese culture or acknowledged cultural differences. However, regardless of this dearth of information, the behaviour of the Chinese miners implied a strong commitment to traditional Chinese values and fraternal institutions.

The temples and cemeteries were two of the most visible signs of traditional Chinese life on the goldfields; the former in particular were often noted by European observers. Yong comments in rather disparaging terms on the temples, which he believed insignificant in the social life of the Chinese people beyond simple places of devotion. This view can be questioned, however, for temples had pride of place in

21 Fitzgerald, Big White Lie, p. 46.
23 Kok, Chinese Lodges in Australia, pp. 12-20.
24 Fitzgerald, Big White Lie, pp. 64-69; McGowan, “Quong Tart on the Braidwood Goldfields”: 81.
the goldfields and many rural settlements, despite the allegiance of many Chinese to the Christian religion. They were more than just places of devotion. Both Smith and Wilton have suggested that a duality between other traditional institutions and the temples may have existed. Evidence from the ‘Tracking the Dragon’ study strongly supports this view and suggests an enhanced role for the hui, a finding which is strongly supported by the work of Kok Hu Jin. In the Riverina town of Narrandera, for instance, the survey team found a subscription board from the temple which, when translated, reads: “The subscription for the believers of Narrandera town entering Hung Men as listed below”. (See figure 2 below) The annual subscription was one guinea (21 shillings). Clearly the Narrandera temple was also a Hung Men office.

As further evidence of this connection, a signboard which reads ‘Chinese Masonic Society’ and temple doors with panels inscribed with Chinese characters are located in the Albury Museum. One of the panels reads: “In the peach garden the foundation is laid for the establishment of the Imperial Kingdom”. Here, the peach garden is a metaphor for the Hung Men brotherhood, meaning the sign was understood by temple members as “the brotherhood is the foundation of the Empire”. Kok Hu Jin gives the name of the temple as Wu Di Miao, and says the name would have been inscribed on a wooden tablet above the temple doors. The Hung Men had its office within the temple, and when it evolved into the Chinese

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26 Yong, New Gold Mountain, p. 201. For instance at Narrandera, in the Riverina, the Chinese temple and Anglican church of St Thomas were both located in the Chinese camp. McGowan and Smith, ‘Tracking the dragon through Southern NSW’, 2008.
27 Lindsay Smith, ‘Hidden dragons’, pp. 37-49. Wilton, Golden Threads, pp. 85-95. Comparisons between the built environments of the goldfields and their urban equivalents are not very helpful as the greater wealth and stability of the latter communities allowed for more physical differentiation between the temples and the Hung Men or Masonic Society offices.
28 My thanks to Benjamin Penny and Li Tana for their assistance with this point.
Masonic Society the tablet was replaced with the signboard which is now in the museum. What is striking, however, is the complete absence of any relics related to district associations, indicating to me that the pre-eminence of the Hung Men, as suggested by Kok Hu Jin and Cai Shaoqing, is accurate, at least for the Riverina; and if there why not in the not-so-distant Braidwood goldfields as well?

Whatever the respective allegiances of the Chinese miners to district associations and hui, many Chinese in regional NSW clearly lived and worked under a strong paternal framework. The Chinese cemeteries, as opposed to solitary scattered tombs, are important evidence of this paternal framework, for they required communal agreement and organisation to set up. In China and among diasporic Chinese in Southeast Asia, funerals, and sometimes weddings, were undertaken by the hui, kongsis or district associations. The establishment of the cemeteries could only be done after negotiations with, and purchase or lease from, European landowners. The existence of exhumed graves also warrants comment in this regard. In NSW exhumations were elaborate and painstaking undertakings, and involved transport to Sydney and, after due ceremony, transhipment to China. These tasks could only have been carried out through the hui (in the absence of a formal kongsi organisation) or district associations. Along with the temple evidence described above, the presence of exhumed graves points directly to the existence of fraternal organisations on the Braidwood goldfields, although admittedly without shedding much light on the type of organisation.

The Braidwood Goldfields, 1858-1870

Labour and organisation
Once on the Australian goldfields the miners worked in large groups with a defined chain of command under the control of a ‘boss’, who would organise the purchase of claims and the supply of provisions and payments. Common as these arrangements were, few accounts exist of how they worked in practice. However, a contemporaneous account of Chinese miners on the Kiandra goldfields in the Snowy Mountains, south of Braidwood, is helpful. It attributed the bosses’ standing to their greater education and better facility with English, and to their possession of capital to purchase claims. One boss at Kiandra had 150 men under him, organised into gangs of between ten and thirty on each claim. The bosses took a fifth or fourth share, charging the men 23 to 30 shillings a week for board. According to this account they usually erected the best house on the field and installed an idol under the supervision of a guardian priest, whom the rank and file paid for his devotions. This comment suggests that other buildings on the goldfields, such as the bosses’ houses, may have been multi-functional, and used also as meeting and worship places.

The Chinese miners were highly organised and well equipped, the result of careful planning and co-ordination. One example of this comes from Braidwood in July 1858, where the Yass Courier reported that:

parties of from forty to eighty [are] to be met with on the road going and coming. The burthens the fellows carry and jog on with are surprising. They have saws, axes, spades, frying pans, tins, and buckets. They seem to be well provided with necessaries and well clothed; a great many of them wear long water tight boots; all their turn out shows that they are not destitute of considerable means.

29 Kok Ju Hin, Chinese Lodges in Australia, pp. 28-45; Chinese Temples in Australia, pp. 2 -7.
31 Sydney Morning Herald, 11 May 1861.
32 Yass Courier, 10 July 1858.
As mentioned earlier, the Chinese miners were indentured until their debts were paid, after which they were legally free to work with whomever they wished, or to return to China. In some instances miners came together in small groups of like-minded people from the same district or clan, sometimes under a self-appointed or elected boss who was akin to a manager or contractor, an arrangement reminiscent of the Bangka mining kongsis. Evidence for these new arrangements appeared when many Chinese miners left Majors Creek for Lambing Flat in September 1861. On the morning of their departure the miners crammed into the stores in groups of six or more, “in no way short of money” to purchase luxury items, including umbrellas and bellows. While they were still well organised, they had obviously dispensed with their former obligations to the headmen and appeared more akin to syndicates and other groupings of working miners in White Australia.

Otherwise, Chinese miners chose to remain within the existing labour arrangements as shareholders who paid the headman for continuing to tend to their needs. This alternative was attractive, particularly if the claims were high yielding, and if the arrangement failed to suit the members could always leave. An example of the latter process occurred on the Brooks Creek goldfield, near Gundaroo, in the Southern Tablelands, in April 1862. On this occasion the boss, Jo Sang Qua, who had a trading monopoly with the Chinese miners, had supplied them with inferior goods, paying for their gold with damaged rations and his own cheques. As a result, he was left alone at the diggings as a “monument of avarice rewarded”.

In both arrangements the organisation of the miners had strong similarities to kongsis, and the social or class status of the miners in both instances was very much akin to the contemporary description in Australia of a ‘working miner’. The ‘working miner’ encompassed those who worked on their own account or more commonly in small cooperative groups. I have argued elsewhere that this category of miner did not fit easily into the traditional three-tiered class system and was better placed in the ranks of the middling class first described and elaborated upon by historians Ron Neale, Chris Connolly and John Ferry. The middling class was positioned in-between the lower and middle classes. Ferry described it as a “susceptible” or “nervous” class, the members of which were only too well aware that failure on their part meant joining the ranks of the working class or an underclass. The Chinese miners certainly met the description of susceptible or nervous, for failure as miners meant that they may not be in a position to return to China and marry. However, their susceptibility was to a large degree offset by the benefits of belonging to organisations akin to the kongsi, and their membership to fraternal organisations such as the hui or district associations.

Their high degree of organisation gave the Chinese miners a distinct competitive edge over European miners. The sources record many instances of their resulting success. For instance, in July 1858 the Chinese miners at Mongarlowe were held up as a lesson for the White unemployed, for working together in co-operative and communicative bands. In February 1860 “hordes of Chinamen” were reported to be arriving, with “mobs of them” coming daily from Tuena on their way to the diggings. By September there were about 500 Chinese miners on the field, which was by this time predominantly Chinese, and they were making very good wages. At Jembaicumbene forty Chinese miners were reported...
to be “extensively and systematically” working a claim in June 1859. The Chinese miners were reportedly doing very well, and the bosses had accumulated the labour intensive technology of treadmills, used to drain or raise and regulate water flows to the claims. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3. Treadmill on Jembaicumbe goldfield (courtesy of the Mitchell Library, Sydney)

Many observers’ comments were double-edged, however; on the one hand praising the Chinese miners and, on the other, condemning the European miners for their comparative lack of success due to an assumed greater degree of sloth and their inferior organisation. Thus in June 1859 the Chinese miners at Jembaicumbe were reported to be doing well, showing that “combinations and careful working go nearly the whole length to success on the goldfields”. A similar comment was made in 1860, when the Chinese miners were again reported to be doing extremely well at Jembaicumbe, the correspondent stating that

the comparative nonsuccess [of the Europeans] ... is to a great extent entirely owing to the want of perseverance and energy on their part, for the Chinese let them set in where they will are sure to find gold in payable quantities, and not only in fresh ground, but in the prosecution of claims which have been abandoned, or dirt which has been condemned as not worth the labour by Europeans.

Further comments along these lines were made in subsequent years. For instance, in February 1861 one source reported that the effect of rain inundating the claims on the Jembaicumbe gold field was “particularly marked on the European portion of the population who did not work on the same co-operative principle as the Chinese”. By 1862 some European miners had obviously heeded the above advice, for the success of the claims at Jembaicumbe was attributed to the amalgamation of Chinese and European labour; reference to claim amalgamation was also made in 1866.

38 Sydney Empire, 14 June 1859
39 Richard Kennedy, “The Braidwood gold fields in the 50’s and 60’s”, Braidwood Dispatch, 31 August 1907. The treadmills were worked by up to eight men.
40 Sydney Empire, 18 June 1859
41 BOMA, 20 June 1860.
42 BOMA, 6 Feb 1861. In April it reported that works of a considerable magnitude had been carried out and, according to the ‘bosses’, good yields obtained. BOMA, 13 April 1861. Similar comments appeared in 1862, when the Chinese were reported to be “doing particularly well, in distinct contrast to the European miners” who, it was said, “gave up easily before they had given the claim a fair trial”. BOMA, 29 July 1862. Physical evidence for this co-operative method of working exists in the many remnant diggings along the waterways on the Braidwood goldfields. The Chinese claims sit in close proximity to each other, and show all the hallmarks of intensive and meticulous working, in distinct contrast to remnant European claims. Barry McGowan, “The Archaeology of Chinese Alluvial Mining in Australia”, Australasian Historical Archaeology, 21 (2003): 11-17.
43 BOMA, 31 May 1862; Bailliere’s New South Wales Gazetteer and Road Guide, Sydney, 1866.
Thanks to their successful organisation and work habits, Chinese miners could often purchase claims from European miners. This practice was one reason for the relatively benign state of race relations between the two groups—a matter for later discussion—since Chinese miners were, in effect, the European miners' market. By purchasing claims at a good price they allowed many Europeans to exit the diggings profitably and much sooner than may have otherwise been the case. Thus in 1859 A Hung and John Young Sam bought a claim from Gilligan and party at Jembaicumbene, adjacent to the claim owned by John Hyland, who in turn sold water rights and tailings to other Chinese miners. Hyland's claim was later purchased by Chinese miners in May 1861. The practice continued here until at least 1870, when a report referred to the Chinese buying claims from the European miners, and “departing for China on the money derived from what the others supposedly worked out and selling their claim to other Chinese before their departure”.44

A similar pattern emerged at Majors Creek, where the buying of claims and equipment was very prevalent. In 1859 Chinese miners were reported to be buying up puddling machines and erecting new ones, and in 1863 there was a great influx of Chinese miners who were allegedly buying up claims wherever they could for high prices.45 Claim buying also occurred at Araluen and Bells Creek. In 1860 European miners were reported to be “fast selling” their claims to the Chinese miners, a process which was repeated in 1873, when Chinese miners were reported moving up the Araluen valley, buying up and working abandoned ground.46 The prevalence of this practice is perhaps best illustrated by the 1860 comment that:

To some extent the diggers are to blame for the overspreading of these Mongolians amongst us. They encourage them to come on some diggings where they never were, and might never have been, at least for a while longer, by selling to them their worked out claims. About eighteen months ago there was not one Chinaman at Bells Creek; at present the spot is covered by them, and they paid heavily for every inch of their ground. The same is to be said of Shepard and Alger's land at Majors Creek, and now they have nearly entire possession of Majors Creek and Long Flat.47

Chinese habitat and economy

The Chinese people lived and worked close to European villages and towns, although usually in separate areas on the outskirts, called ‘camps’ at the time. Chinese settlements were important commercial and community centres, and because of this Chinese people were welcome in the main urban areas nearby. On the diggings, spatial arrangements were dictated more by geography. At Jembaicumbene, Araluen and Majors Creek it would have been topographically impossible for either group of miners to avoid each other. On fields like Mongarlowe, on the other hand, with its many creeks, gullies, ridges and points, racially separate enclaves or camps did exist, but this separateness reflected geography and opportunity rather than deliberate exclusion. As in several other

44 Sydney Empire, 14 June 1859; BOMA, 1 June 1861; John Hyland's account books, 1857 to 1861, in the possession of Murray Hyland, Braidwood; Town and Country Journal, 22 Jan 1870.
45 BOMA, in the Sydney Empire, 23 July 1859; Braidwood Dispatch in the Goulburn Herald, 24 June 1863. Other comments along these lines appeared in June 1860 when large numbers of Chinese were reportedly working “in all directions”, causing one Braidwood newspaper “much fear that the hordes of Chinese ... coming to this locality will eventually overrun the whole place”. Later that month more ‘hordes’ of Chinese were sighted on and down the creek, with the amount of labour used suggesting they were all doing “exceedingly well”. In November, nearby Long Flat was described as “becoming more and more Celestial every day”. BOMA, in the Sydney Empire, 5 June 1860; BOMA, 20 June, 10 Nov 1860.
46 BOMA, in the Sydney Empire, 14 July 1860; Goulburn Herald, 4 June 1873. In 1859 a European party sold its claim to a group of Chinese miners, who also purchased water rights from an adjoining party. BOMA, in the Sydney Empire, 18 June 1859.
47 Sydney Morning Herald, 21 June 1860.
diggings investigated by historians, it seems likely that this close spatial relationship in the Braidwood goldfields between the two groups may have helped contribute to the absence of strong anti-Chinese feelings.\textsuperscript{48}

It was a mixed sort of separateness. In the gold rush years the Chinese people were never entirely separate from European communities through their economic interaction. But social interaction was much more limited, for the Chinese communities were very self-contained, with their institutional focus on the temple. Mongarlowe provides an interesting example of the social proximity of Chinese miners to European settlers, despite the existence of racially separate mining camps along the Mongarlowe River and its tributaries. The main Chinese camp, with its temple, was highly visible and only a few minutes walk across the river from the main European village, as was clearly shown in a drawing published in the \textit{Illustrated Sydney News} in 1870. (See Figure 4 below) This temple must have been built before 1862, for in December that year a funeral ceremony was held at Mongarlowe for two Chinese miners, killed in a mining accident at Flanagan’s Point. The ceremony attracted over 200 Chinese people from “miles around”. This temple and the community it served persisted into the twentieth century. Photos of it exist from the early 1900s, and it was only finally destroyed by a bushfire in 1919.\textsuperscript{49}

There were also several Chinese stores across the river, in the main village itself. One belonged to Shong Foon Nomchong, who had migrated to Australia in the early 1860s and was naturalised in 1867. We will meet again later.

\textbf{Figure 4. Mongarlowe Village with Chinese Huts (courtesy of National Library of Australia)}

At Jembaicumbene Chinese miners were spread along the whole creek but, as at Mongarlowe, their main settlement was in close proximity to the European village. By 1859 they had “formed quite a village” and appeared “to be happy and contented”. In June 1860 they were described as making a good living, with stores and butchers’ stalls scattered all around.\textsuperscript{50} A makeshift temple was early erected at Strike-a-Light Flat, several kilometres out of town. In October 1859 it was described as being built of calico attached to poles, in a similar fashion to miners’ tents, with a very neat veranda in front and a semicircular shaped roof.\textsuperscript{51} Its specific location is


\textsuperscript{49} BOMA, 10 October 1860, 10 December 1862; \textit{Illustrated Sydney News}, 20 January 1870; McGowan, \textit{Bungonia to Braidwood} (Canberra: Barry McGowan, 1996), p. 179; Braidwood Dispatch, 14, 17 January 1919; Lindsay Smith, ‘Chinese temple (Joss House) and cemetery at Mongarlowe, NSW’, report to the NSW Heritage Commission, August 2001.

\textsuperscript{50} Sydney Empire, 14 June 1859; BOMA, 20 June 1860.

\textsuperscript{51} Kennedy, “The Braidwood gold fields in the 50s and 60s”, \textit{Braidwood Dispatch}, 31 August 1907; Smith, ‘Hidden dragons’, p. 80. On entering the temple the reporter observed numerous pieces of red calico with
unknown: it may have been destroyed in a fracas in 1860 or always been intended only as a temporary structure. A second temple, whose location in the main village appeared on a later undated map, was opened in February 1861. A lavish ceremony celebrated the occasion, with great expenditure on poultry and young pigs for a “monster feast to which the European community was invited”. The remains of the pig oven used in the ceremony can still be seen.

As for the other goldfields, evidence of Chinese occupancy is scanty. No visible traces are left of the Chinese camp at Majors Creek, though one certainly existed as late as 1868 when the Braidwood surgeon, William Bunn, remarked he was “tired all day from want of sleep and smoking opium at the Chinese camp” there. Only a few vestiges are left of the main camp at Mudmelong and the temple site in the Araluen Valley. Two sizeable Chinese camps were located on the Bombay diggings on the Shoalhaven River, separate from, but in close proximity to, European mining claims. At Bells Creek only scattered evidence of Chinese hut sites and diggings remain.

Economic co-existence and interdependence between the Europeans and Chinese was an important feature of the Braidwood goldfields. It had several facets: the buying and selling of gold claims has already been mentioned. Commerce was a second factor, for the Chinese were customers of European and Chinese merchants. Third, and of particular importance, was the Chinese role as market gardeners. As several historians have noted, Chinese gardens were the main suppliers of vegetables and fruits in the colonial Australian diet. There were many market gardens in the Braidwood district. The *Illustrated Sydney News* of 1870, mentioned above, also shows several Chinese men crossing the Mongarlowe River from the Chinese village on their way to the European village carrying merchandise, most likely garden produce, on their shoulders. Mining lease maps and field surveys have also enabled the identification of several other small market gardens on the Mongarlowe field.

In the case of Jembaicumbene, two undated maps show Chinese market gardens on Jembaicumbene Creek several hundred metres from the village. The gardens had a creek frontage of about 200 metres. Chinese gardens were also located at nearby ‘Durham Hall’ (formerly Exeter Farm) and ‘Glendaruel’, but both may have been of later vintage and will be discussed in the next part of the paper. At Araluen in 1870 Chinese people were reported growing corn in some fine gardens. The remains of a Chinese market garden have also been located at Majors Creek though it too, like the ‘Glendaruel’ garden, may be of later vintage. At Araluen and Jembaicumbene the remains of creek-front gardens were eradicated by gold dredges in the early 1900s. One of the largest gardens was at ‘Mona’ to the north of Braidwood. It will be discussed later.

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54 *Illustrated Sydney News*, 20 Jan 1870.
Race and conflict

Serious incidents of racial violence were rare on the Braidwood goldfields largely because, as the foregoing suggests, both Chinese and European miners could get high yields—despite the latter’s less effective mining techniques and organisation—and as a consequence of their economic co-dependence and spatial familiarity. An additional factor was the overarching control of the fraternal organisations, but more on that later. The only significant racial incident to my knowledge occurred at Jembaicumbene in 1860, where the Chinese at Bells Paddock were reportedly at logger heads with the agent for the Seymour Estate, causing many of them to move to Mongarlowe and Majors Creek where they expected to be better treated. Tents were destroyed, tools taken away and the Chinese miners hunted off the grounds. The incident may possibly have spread to nearby Strike-a-Light Flat and led to the destruction of its canvas temple. However, this isolated incident did not impact on the Chinese village or on other diggings, and Chinese miners continued to form a large part of Jembaicumbene’s mining population for many years. Following serious riots at Lambing Flat in 1861 several large public meetings were held to petition the Government not to allow Chinese miners to work goldfields on Crown lands. Nevertheless, the meetings were orderly and denounced any recourse to violence, as had happened at Lambing Flat. Indeed, the difference in attitude between the two areas saw Chinese miners on the Braidwood goldfields sometimes referred to as refugees from Lambing Flat.

An absence of violent incidents did not mean that miners or townsfolk always welcomed Chinese miners, and racial prejudices and ill-feelings still often surfaced. The local press, for instance, sometimes referred to Chinese people in disparaging terms. In 1859 they were described as a “barbarous race”, and it was claimed that they were in the habit of committing petty larcenies. In 1863, Chinese shanties or rooming houses were described as no more “than gambling houses and brothels of the lowest description.” An even more strident comment in 1864 denounced their co-habitation with unmarried European women of doubtful repute. According to a report many years later, Chinese miners were also subject to the usual array of taunts, pranks and other petty annoyances by callow youths and other thoughtless individuals. Considerable resentment was also expressed, particularly by officialdom, at the Chinese proclivity for not taking out miner’s licences. At the Gold Fields Royal Commission of Inquiry in 1871, the Commissioners commented that this evasion arose because of “the great physical resemblance of one Chinamen to another, combined with imperfect acquaintance possessed by officials with the distinctive peculiarities of Chinese nomenclature, enabling this class of miners to make one miner’s right do duty for several individuals.” In 1875 the Mining Warden stated that there was “no scheme or trick that they will not resort to, if by so doing they can escape payment”. It was a view shared by many miners.

56 Sydney Empire, 20 April 1860.
57 BOMA, 3, 10, 21 August 1861.
58 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 July 1861.
59 They were accused of wandering from one diggings to another, “aware that the singular resemblance one has to the other, oftentimes shields them from detection”. Sydney Empire, 16 July 1859.
60 Goulburn Herald, 2 May 1863.
61 The Chinese were accused of lavishing money upon them only to find that it went in drink, and rows and fights ensued “in which the most dreadful language [was] used”. Braidwood News and General Advertiser, 25 June 1864.
62 E. Deane, “Memories of Majors Creek”, Braidwood Dispatch, 19 March 1926.
64 AR, 1875, pp. 44-45.
Perceived increases in petty larceny and the practice of selling spurious metal as gold led to serious community ill-feeling at Majors Creek in 1860. By September, residents were asking for increased police protection and the erection of a suitable lock up. Chinese miners were accused of engaging in shoplifting and of passing false gold to storekeepers along with “every description of petty marauding which can be imagined”, including the pillaging of hen roosts. With no evidence from the Chinese side, it is impossible to say what truth there was in such claims, or whether the Chinese were made convenient scapegoats for the actions of others; but, whatever the case, 236 persons signed a petition in October 1860 asking that Chinese people be prohibited from entering the colony and for their withdrawal from the gold fields.

Instances of European violence against Chinese ranged from robbery and assault through to the occasional murder. But the mid-1860s was a time of increased lawlessness generally on the Braidwood goldfields, and increased prosperity, particularly at Araluen, saw a rise in serious crime. The Clarke gang of bushrangers, for instance, visited its depredations with equal ruthlessness upon European and Chinese people alike, and there was even an occasional incursion by the Ben Hall gang. In such cases, the Chinese had the full protection of the law and, using the services of interpreters, often pursued matters through the police and courts. Perpetrators of crimes against them, if detected, were arrested and subject to formal charges. So important were interpreters in police work on the Braidwood goldfields that the police considered it “utterly impossible” to proceed without them.

Of more interest in the context of my article is Chinese participation in acts of violence, for it suggests a degree of both unity and differentiation which further illuminates their shadowy organisational strategies and suggests even more about the hidden role of district associations and hui. The Chinese were very well served by their mode of organisation to resist most incursions by Europeans, unless it was relatively larger scale violence along the lines of the fracas at Jembaicumbene discussed above. For the same reason they were also well placed to force the issue with the European miners. Many examples of the latter can be found. For instance, in 1861 a number of Chinese miners jumped a claim at Jembaicumbene, attacking the Europeans with shovels and other implements. Some Europeans proposed to drive the Chinese miners forcibly from the field, but it never happened, although a similar event occurred in the following year. In 1866 there was an affray between Chinese and European miners at Majors Creek following a decision by a private commissioner in favour of the Europeans. After the commissioner had left, thirty Chinese miners tried to drive the European miners off, attacking them with long handled shovels. In 1868 there was a serious riot between Chinese and European

65 It was claimed that recent acquittals of those charged with selling spurious gold tempted them to persevere in their attempts to defraud. BOMA, 11 July 1860.
66 BOMA, 29 Sept and 10 Oct 1860; Goulburn Herald, 13 March 1867; Ellis, Braidwood Dear Braidwood, pp. 86-87. The petition was unsuccessful. The selling of spurious gold also occurred at Araluen and Mongarlowe.
67 BOMA, 2 Nov 1861 and 16 August 1862; Sydney Morning Herald, 22 August 1862.
68 In 1866 the Clarke gang robbed eleven Chinese men on the Jembaicumbene road and, in a separate incident, they held up Ah How's store at Jembaicumbene and another Chinese store at Majors Creek, where a gunfight ensued between the gang and a party of police. They pillaged and plundered at will in 1866. McGowan, ‘Dust and dreams’, pp. 186-88; Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into crime in the Braidwood district, NSW Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings, 1867, pp. 7-8; Goulburn Herald, 28 Nov 1866.
miners at Majors Creek, when sixteen Chinese attacked three Europeans with long handled shovels after the latter had turned water onto their claim.\textsuperscript{70}

Such incidents are revealing. They show the Chinese miners acting quite boldly as a group, perhaps bolstered by membership of the hui which may have sanctioned and helped organise the action and shielded the miners from arrest by maintaining a wall of silence and anonymity. It underscores the point made earlier about their similarity to the European ‘working miner’ category and by implication their status as members of a middling class determined not to fall into the ranks of the working class or an underclass. Such resolve demanded a certain degree of assertiveness. The incidents described above also reveal an understandable degree of Chinese reluctance to use the formal mining dispute mechanisms applicable under British law, which would have required the payment of interpreters during possibly lengthy proceedings, with the potential to disrupt mining activities for the duration. That there were only limited incidents of this nature can possibly be attributed to the overarching control of the district associations and hui. It was not in the long term interest of the Chinese miners to maintain a confrontational strategy.

Even more intriguing were incidents between different groups of Chinese miners. Some of these events, especially those involving larceny or even murder, can be categorised as men behaving badly; but the seriousness and scale of several episodes suggests something more institutional was involved. If the degree of authority exercised by fraternal associations, either district associations or hui, kept disputes between members to a minimum, there was much less control of disputes between members of different fraternal associations. There are three examples of such conflict in the Braidwood area. The first happened in 1861 when the local press reported with some glee upon the “battle of Strike-a-Light Flat”. On this occasion a dispute arose between two of the Chinese bosses, who, “instead of applying for redress through the Gold Commissioner”, set about to settle the matter by fighting. Each boss had a group of thirty-five men, armed with cudgels and arrayed on either side of the main road. The signal given, the battle commenced and after some time one of the groups broke and fled, pursued by the victors who pummelled them with stones and clods. The wounded were left to return the best way they could. No one was seriously injured.\textsuperscript{71}

The second example occurred in the following year when a state of “civil war” was reported amongst the “Mongolians of Jembaicumbene”, following a dispute and a pitched battle, in which some Chinese miners were “very severely handled”. On this occasion, however, the “more peaceably inclined” in the Chinese community used the courts, and provided information on those involved. As a result five men were arrested, but the incident was dismissed by the court on the basis that it was a faction fight.\textsuperscript{72} This remark is very interesting, suggesting the dispute may have been between members of different hui. On the final occasion a mob of “celestial malcontents” tried to find out the whereabouts of a well known Chinese interpreter, with the object of shooting him for having offended them as an interpreter. He escaped and following a complaint before a Justice of the Peace one of the men was arrested, making a total of nine Chinese men in the lock up.\textsuperscript{73} This incident may

\textsuperscript{70} BOMA, 28 Sept 1861; Sydney Morning Herald, 19 April 1862; Goulburn Herald, 21 Oct 1865, 11 April 1866, and 29 April 1868. In the 1866 incident the six European miners resisted, with two seriously injured. Shots were fired in their defence by a European miner who gave himself up to the police and was held in custody pending trial.

\textsuperscript{71} Braidwood Dispatch in the Sydney Morning Herald, 10 April 1861.

\textsuperscript{72} Yass Courier, 12 Nov 1862.

\textsuperscript{73} Yass Courier, 1 Nov 1862; BOMA, 8 Nov 1862; Goulburn Herald, 24 Dec 1864, 21 Oct 1865, and 17 Jan 1866.
perhaps also be attributed to a conflict between members of different hui, although it is also possible that the interpreter was a Christian and thus considered fair game.\textsuperscript{74}

**Bridging the racial divide: the role of families and networks, 1870–1900**

*The goldfields and Mei Quong Tart*

One of the difficulties in assessing the role of fraternal associations and the state of European–Chinese relations during this period is the almost entire absence of local press reports until the late 1880s. With the exception of the annual government mining reports and occasional journal articles we need to rely on other, more irregular, sources. Enough is known, however, to confirm that, after 1875, the mining population—and the Chinese population along with it—was in serious decline on almost every field, with the possible exception of Mongarlowe. The cause was falling yields and low rainfall.\textsuperscript{75} At Jembaicumbe there was still a sizeable Chinese population on the field as late as 1871, but numbers were much reduced by the mid-to-late 1870s, with the creek drying up in 1877. The remnant Chinese miners were described as making a “hard living by small workings in the creek” and housed in “miserable huts.”\textsuperscript{76} This dour scene changed little until the advent of a mini boom in the late 1880s, in which one of the key participants was Mei Quong Tart, by then a wealthy Sydney merchant.

Quong Tart is one of the most famous Chinese people in late-nineteenth-century NSW, and in that regard I have written about him before.\textsuperscript{77} I return to his story here not simply because of his mining activities—although the 1870s–early 1890s fortunes of at least two fields in the Braidwood district were directly dependent upon his efforts—but because Quong Tart is a fine example of a Chinese immigrant who successfully bridged the racial divide and in so doing helped pave the way for many others to follow suit. In 1859, as a nine year old, he arrived from Sydney with his uncle and a large group of Chinese labourers who were to be employed by Percy Simpson on the Jembaicumbe goldfield. Simpson, a very wealthy Scot, owned gold leases at Jembaicumbe and Bells Creek, where he employed large numbers of European and Chinese miners. Fitzgerald has speculated that the uncle was a headman, selected from the sponsoring merchants’ secret society or local lineage networks. His uncle sent Quong Tart to live and work with Thomas Forsyth, another Scot who lived on the nearby Bells Creek goldfield, where he was both a storekeeper and private gold commissioner.\textsuperscript{78} Quong Tart learned English quickly, albeit with a Scottish accent. Some time later a major turning point occurred in his life when he was befriended by Mrs Alice Simpson and accepted into the Simpson family. There he converted and became a lifelong Christian. Through the Simpsons, Quong Tart would later be introduced into the highest social circles, both in the district and in Sydney. The young man rode to the diggings with Percy Simpson, who almost certainly used him as an interpreter on the mining claims.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{74} A similar remark about fraternal loyalties was made by the defence counsel in the murder trial of Ing Chee in Goulburn in April 1878. *Goulburn Herald*, 13 April 1878.

\textsuperscript{75} Mongarlowe was less affected as the river's catchment area in the eastern ranges is better supplied with water than the other fields. According to a survey map of 1877, Chinese in the Jembaicumbe village occupied an area including a store and three huts, with five other Chinese dwellings nearby. Smith’s excavations have located other hut sites not included on the map, but a number of them may not have been in use at that time. Smith, ‘Hidden dragons’, pp. 80-94; *Sydney Empire*, 14 June 1859; McGowan, ‘Dust and dreams’, p. 126.

\textsuperscript{76} *AR*, 1877, p. 1 27; *Braidwood Dispatch*, 29 March 1890.

\textsuperscript{77} McGowan, ‘Quong Tart on the Braidwood Goldfields’: 69-98.


\textsuperscript{79} Lea-Scarlett, ‘Quong Tart”: 83; *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1894, Mrs Quong Tart, *Life of Quong Tart*, pp. 5-6.
Quong Tart's initial mining successes were unusual, not achieved, like almost all other Chinese miners, in alluvial mining but in reef (or hard rock) mining. A reefing boom commenced at Bells Creek in early 1870, where several claims were owned by Chinese miners, one of whom was almost certainly Quong Tart.80 Bells Creek was not a rich field and few made fortunes, but Quong Tart was an exception. A canny investor, he became successful very quickly.81 In 1877 he began work on an extensive sluicing claim at Bells Creek and by the following year employed fifteen men and boys, some of whom would have been his own countrymen.82 He left the district in 1881, but did not entirely abandon gold mining, entering into a profitable mining partnership in the late 1880s with well-to-do Braidwood-based Chinese entrepreneurs, Nam You and the Nomchong brothers (Shong Foon and Chee Dock). Between twenty and fifty Chinese miners were employed on each claim: Nam You was in partnership with several Europeans on his claim. The boom was short-lived, however, and in early 1891 the claims were abandoned.83

Quong Tart's life in the Braidwood district revealed him as someone able to integrate easily into colonial society and who could thus form a bridge between Chinese and Europeans there. He was naturalised on 11 July 1871 while still a miner at Bells Creek and two months later, in September, was admitted into the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows as a member of the Loyal Miners' Refuge Lodge, Araluen. In that year he also joined the Loyal Miners' Refuge Lodge at Majors Creek. According to his wife, he was the first Chinese to be elected to an Oddfellows Lodge in NSW.84 Like many of his countrymen, he was a horse racing enthusiast (see Figure 5 over the page) and helped, in conjunction with both the Chinese and European communities, to organise Chinese participation in local race meetings.85 Quong Tart was also an active member of the Church of England congregation in Braidwood, and was not above personally taking around the collection plate. He was also involved in organising athletics at Araluen and founded a football club at Braidwood. In September 1877 Quong Tart had combined with other prominent citizens to petition the Government to establish a school at Bells Creek, to whose Board he was subsequently appointed. He also helped build a church in the village. In both ventures he was joined by his old mentor, Thomas Forsyth. All these activities were an important bridge between the two cultures, the race meetings in particular forming a meeting place and point of transition for other Chinese people.86

Although he left for Sydney in 1881, Quong Tart's association with the Braidwood district continued until his untimely death in 1903. He made many return visits for social or philanthropic purposes. On one of those visits he met his future wife, Margaret Scarlett (the niece of a local miner, John Hyland). His marriage to a

80 Town and Country Journal, 22 Jan 1870; Robert Travers, Australian Mandarin (Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1981), pp. 27-47; Braidwood Dispatch, 26 August 1903, 8 March 1905; Braidwood and Araluen Express, 15 March, 8 Nov 1904.
81 Lea-Scarlett, “Quong Tart”: 85; Mrs Quong Tart, Life of Quong Tart, pp. 5-6, 18-19. Town and Country Journal, 30 July 1870; Goulburn Herald, 24 August 1872; Braidwood Dispatch, 19 Oct 1917; McGowan, ‘Dust and dreams’, pp. 51-54.
82 Goulburn Herald, 18 Dec 1872, 4 June 1873; AR, 1877, p. 85; AR, 1878, p. 80.
83 AR, 1889, p. 83; Braidwood Dispatch, 26 Sept, 27 Oct, 7 Nov 1888, 13, 16 March, 27 July 1889, 10 Dec 1890; Goulburn Evening Penny Post, 15 and 29 Sept 1888.
84 Goulburn Herald, 8 Feb 1873; McGowan, Dust and dreams’, p. 191; Goulburn Herald, 9 Sept 1871; Mrs Quong Tart, Life of Quong Tart, pp. 67-68; Fitzgerald, Big White Lie, pp. 84-97.
85 Lea-Scarlett, “Quong Tart”: 86; extract from the Braidwood Dispatch, 14 August 1917.
86 Braidwood Dispatch, 5 and 8 Feb 1873; Daily Telegraph, 6 April 1894; Application for the Establishment of a Public School, 7 Sept 1875, 5/14862.2, Department of Public Instruction, SRNSW, Sydney.
European woman from a well known local family further facilitated his acceptance into European society. In 1890 Quong Tart was one of a number of prominent citizens who subscribed to the tombstone placed over the grave of James Aldcorn, a local European identity. He was also a close friend of Nam You, a Braidwood storekeeper to whom he payed a lightning visit in November 1890 to help with his affairs only a few days before Nam You’s death. In Sydney in 1898 he organised a 50th birthday party for a former Braidwood resident, and the following year he arranged a concert and dramatic entertainment in his Elite Hall in aid of the Braidwood Hospital fever ward, with the audience including many dignitaries and former Braidwood residents living in and around Sydney.\textsuperscript{87}

During this period the reduced number of Chinese people in the district meant a lesser role for the hui and district associations, if there was any left at all; and although Chinese people were sometimes still cast as the alien ‘Other’, there was an growing tendency to regard them as individuals.\textsuperscript{88} An increasing proportion of Chinese people were now living in the European villages and Braidwood, where some had their own businesses, or worked in businesses owned by Europeans and Chinese such as Quong Tart and the Nomchong family. Proportionately fewer were living in the Chinese villages and camps. A striking illustration of the latter was in 1890 when several Chinese people were reported to be living in rented accommodation in the European village at Jembaicumbene. More striking still, some of them were living in the same rented accommodation as Europeans. There also seemed to be a greater willingness for Chinese people to bring their grievances before the courts, and the proceedings in some cases suggested that the courts were even-handed in their approach to cases involving Chinese. For instance, in

\textsuperscript{87} Braidwood Dispatch, 10 Sept, 26 and 29 Nov 1890, 30 April 1898, 4, 7 and 22 July, 9 August, 14 Oct and 4 Nov 1899.

\textsuperscript{88} Braidwood Dispatch, 8 Nov 1890.
1888 the Mining Warden found in favour of Ah Ping and party who were accused of depriving some Europeans of water from their water race at Araluen. Another incident involved damage to the above-mentioned rented house, in which four European men were prosecuted and fined.\textsuperscript{89}

Finally, we can detect the absence of active fraternal organisations during this period, as well as the dwindling number of Chinese people on the goldfields, in the fate of some of the remaining Chinese goldfield residents. When they died, almost all were over fifty, and some considerably older. Many died alone and several committed suicide, both ends suggesting the absence of fraternal assistance or families in their lives. A few were befriended by people such as the Nomchong family.\textsuperscript{90} And marriage was not always the answer. A report in 1888 referred to the death of a Chinese man at Jembaicumbene in the previous year and the fate of his wife, a seventeen year old who had already borne him a child and was claimed to be of impaired intellect. Some time later she was charged with malicious property damage and vagrancy. Equally troubled was the marriage between Ellen Ah Hi, a part Aboriginal woman, and her Chinese husband. In 1890 she was arraigned before the court on a charge of assaulting a police tracker; she was fined and admonished to be more obedient to her husband. Several years later her son, William, was charged with assault with intent to rape.\textsuperscript{91}

Chinese men engaged in activities such as market gardening at least had the consolation of undertaking profitable and relatively secure occupations, for their enterprise was much appreciated by the European population. A Chinese garden was located near ‘Mona’, just outside Braidwood.\textsuperscript{92} A rare mention of this garden resulted from the heavy rains and floods of 1898. The local correspondent reported that along the banks of Monkittee Creek and off the Pound Creek Bridge children were capturing water melons and pumpkins from Ah Chew's market garden. He lost his entire crop for the season. Ah Chew employed two men in his garden and had supplied fresh vegetables for some years to a ready market in the town; the garden continued to exist until the 1930s.\textsuperscript{93} (See Figure 6 over page) Market gardening also continued at Araluen. In 1896 it was reported that some Chinese men had “cultivated little patches of ground on which they grow potatoes and other vegetables” on the outskirts of the town, providing the “only pleasant colouring in the whole landscape”.\textsuperscript{94}

Another example comes from the ‘Glendaruel’ property at Jembaicumbene, where the garden site, water race and dam are still visible today. The farm account books show that the gardens were worked in 1893, and then almost continually between 1899 and 1913, by several Chinese men, among them Ah Hing, Ah Yin, Sam Gow, Ah Moon, Ah Kit and James Ahoi and his son (a daughter worked in the homestead). Although largely outside the time frame of this article, the period from 1899 on coincides with the gold dredging boom at Jembaicumbene, and suggests that the gardeners were not only supplying the farm but also many of the miners. The gardeners and other Chinese employees received regular wages and rations from the station owners. James Ahoi married a French woman, Helen Demestre, and one of his daughters, Gwendoline Linno Mary Ahoi, married an Aboriginal

\textsuperscript{89} Braidwood Dispatch, 15, 29 March, 7 June 1890, 17, 28 Sept 1892.
\textsuperscript{90} Braidwood Dispatch, 21 Sept 1889 and 1 Feb 1899; Bunn, Lonely Pioneer, pp. 541, 605, 628, 657, 689, 731, 743, 757. According to the late Ted Richardson, in the late 1920s an elderly Mongarlowe miner called Ah Hack was befriended by the Nomchong family.
\textsuperscript{91} Braidwood Dispatch, 20 October 1888, 15 March 1890, 8 and 15 Feb 1893. William was charged with attempted rape of an elderly European woman. He was sentenced to five years gaol, rather than the usual fourteen, the judge citing the mitigating circumstances of excessive drunkenness, and at the same time railing against those who had supplied the already inebriated youth with further alcohol.
\textsuperscript{92} Information provided by Roslyn Maddrell of Braidwood.
\textsuperscript{93} Bunn, Lonely Pioneer, p. 735.
\textsuperscript{94} Jonathon Edward Hodgkin, ‘JE Hodgkin in Australia, 1896’, Book 8, Braidwood and District Historical Society, n. d.
elder, William Iberia Thomas, who also worked as a mailman. The family later moved to Braidwood. A descendant, the late Guboo Ted Thomas, lived in Braidwood until very recently.45 Ah Kit lived in Jembaicumbene village; the garden on the nearby ‘Durham Hall’ property was worked by Ah Kun. At Majors Creek the market garden allegedly supplied produce to the distant mining community of Captains Flat, suggesting a date in the 1890s, though it may have been in existence earlier.46

Figure 6. Unknown Chinese Market Gardener at ‘Mona’ (by courtesy of Ms Roslyn Maddrell)

Braidwood Town: Families and Networks
Braidwood town was a different world to the surrounding goldfields. More of an administrative and commercial centre, many of its buildings were large and grand, stone built and durable. For Chinese people the differences were even more

46 Author’s discussions with Bonnie O’Brien, 1995; Pauline Aherne, 2000; and Olive Royds, 2003.
profound. Indeed, the 1871 Census says it all: from a grand total of 650 ‘Pagans’ (or non-Christians) in the Braidwood district, almost all of whom would have been Chinese, only seven lived in the town. There was no Chinese camp, precinct or Chinatown, and no scope for the hui. But with the gradual decline of the surrounding goldfields some Chinese people sought refuge there, and many of the business buildings occupied by them prior to 1900 are still extant. According to the birth, death and marriage register and local rates data, the Chinese presence in Braidwood increased sharply in the first half of the twentieth century. This is a remarkable phenomenon, for over the same period of time almost every other regional town in NSW was losing its Chinese population.\textsuperscript{97} Braidwood’s Chinese heritage as reflected in its buildings is impressive, although, as Peter Read has observed for the case of Inverell in northern NSW, Braidwood’s physical debt to its earlier Chinese inhabitants has been neglected in official pronouncements on the history and heritage of the town.\textsuperscript{98} All these sources provide ample evidence of the post-goldfield transition in the period prior to 1900 and the increasing importance of personal networks and families during this time. It is to this phenomenon that I now turn.

Several historians have commented upon the phenomenon of Chinese–European and Chinese–Aboriginal relationships. In her study of Chinese–European families in central-western New South Wales, Dinah Hales noted the “ubiquitous derogatory description of the women in these relationships”. She observed that “Chinese–European relationships and marriages were more common than previously perceived and that, contrary to contemporary views, many relationship were stable and successful”. The majority of women in her study successfully raised families, large or small, thus demonstrating stability and competence.\textsuperscript{99} Kate Bagnall has extensively researched the subject of Anglo–Chinese families and in so doing has provided a useful template to help assess the degree of adaptation and assimilation of these families into mainstream European society. She noted that “appearance, education, language and naming were four markers of identity through which mixed Chinese Australians were able to negotiate exclusionary boundaries and their identity as the Other”.\textsuperscript{100}

According to Ann McGrath’s research, Chinese–Aboriginal relationships were not uncommon in the Federation era. However, it is unlikely that they were as prevalent in the Braidwood district as some other parts of Australia. Here Chinese–European relationships were more common.\textsuperscript{101} Of the four Chinese families in Braidwood for whom we have comprehensive genealogical data, three resulted from Chinese–European marriages and only one was wholly Chinese. Most prominent were the families of Shong Foon Nomchong (Ng Nam Cheong) and his brother Chee Dock Nomchong. The patriarch, Shong Foon, arrived in Australia in the 1860s and was naturalised in 1867. He was a storekeeper on the Mongarlowe goldfields, where he learned to read and write before later setting up a store in Braidwood (it is not clear when). He was a storekeeper on the Mongarlowe goldfields, where he learned to read and write before later setting up a store in Braidwood (it is not clear when). According to historian Ann Toy, local residents had difficulty pronouncing the name ‘Ng’ and called the family by the name of their shop, ‘Nomchong’, which meant ‘southern prosperity’. The family was known thereafter by that name. In 1881 Shong Foon married Ellen Lupton, a European woman; they

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{100}] Kate Bagnall, “He Would be a Chinese Still”; Negotiating Boundaries of Race, Culture and Identity in Late Nineteenth Century Australia”, in \textit{After the Rush}: 153-70, esp. p. 158.
\end{itemize}
had four children, all of whom were given Christian names (Fredrick, William James, Walter and Kathleen Elsie Rebecca). Ellen was an adherent of the Roman Catholic faith, but not so her husband who was buried in 1889 in the Chinese cemetery at Mongarlowe, thus indicating he had retained some of his traditional Chinese customs and practices. Yet in other respects the family appears to have successfully straddled the racial divide, wearing Western-style clothing and adopting Western fashions and haircuts. The children would have almost certainly attended the local convent school at St Bede’s.  

In 1877 Shong Foon sent for his brother Chee Dock, who was living in California. The two men became business partners and in 1882 Chee Dock was naturalised. After Shong Foon’s death in 1889, the Mongarlowe business was sold and Chee Dock concentrated his commercial activities in Braidwood.

In 1889 Chee Dock became the patriarch of the extended family, with responsibility for Shong Foon’s family as well as his own. Previously he had been

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103 Death certificates for Shong Foon and Ellen, and birth certificate for Kathleen Elsie Rebecca, NSW Births, Deaths and Marriage Register.
married to a Chinese woman, who had died in China, possibly in 1886. He remarried, but unlike the majority of his local compatriots, did not marry a European but a Chinese woman, Mary Boo Jung Gew. The newly-weds arrived in Australia in 1887, and the arrival of the Chinese bride caused quite a sensation in the town. A banquet was held for them and Mary was presented with a purse of 200 gold sovereigns. She settled into town life well and worked with her husband in his businesses, which she managed while he was away buying skins and produce. She quickly learnt English, and it was as well that she did for in 1894 Chee Dock suffered serious losses in the Oriental Bank crash, with drought and huge book debts also contributing. He was declared bankrupt, and many of his properties and businesses were then registered in her name.

Chee Dock’s financial setback does not appear to have diminished his local standing; he was well respected in the town and district, and clearly felt very much at ease in the community. He was certainly not shy in advertising his wares in these early years: in February 1889 a large advertisement proclaimed he would not be undersold, and in December another declared that his stock was “cheaper than any other house in Braidwood”. (See Figure 9 over page) Such notices become commonplace thereafter. His charitable activities were probably interrupted by his bankruptcy, but as an example of the former he donated prizes for the sports program accompanying the opening of the Mongarlowe Bridge in 1894.

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104 Nomchong family, ‘Nomchong family re-union’, 18 November 1995, unpublished brochure, p. 6. There was one child from this marriage, George, who remained in China for some time and later migrated to Australia with his wife, Wong Ho. He lived in Boorowa and later with his father’s family in Braidwood, where he was a market gardener. A son, Robert, and grandson Eddie, still run an electrical and white goods business in Braidwood.

105 Braidwood Dispatch, 27 October, 8, 22 December 1894; Ron Knowles, “Chinese Down Under: From Victims to Winners”, Weekend Magazine of Eastern Express, 10 August 1894, pp. 25-8; ‘Nomchong family re-union’, pp. 4-5.

106 Braidwood Dispatch, 23 Feb and 4 Dec 1889, 11 July 1894.
Some time around the turn of the century Chee Dock transferred his business activities to premises on the corner of Lascelles and Wallace Streets (see Figure 10 over the page), where he continued his skin buying, later adding fruit and confectionery and, later still, developing a flourishing general store. His family’s business activities were to become the largest in Braidwood, with tentacles stretching across the Southern Tablelands and to the South Coast. His fourteen adult children, whether male or female, were nearly all involved in the family businesses, although some also started their own.\textsuperscript{107} All his business premises remain largely intact in Braidwood today.

As the photos reveal, Chee Dock and his Chinese employees all publicly adopted Western-style clothes and hairstyles, and as the children moved into adulthood they participated in typically European past-times such as rabbiting and picnicking. (See Figure 11 over page) All the Nomchong children were given Christian names and attended St Bede’s convent school, with the eldest daughter, Maude, progressing to St Scolastica’s in Sydney. At the local convent school they

\textsuperscript{107} ‘Nomchong family re-union’, pp. 1-6. There were fifteen children, including George, but one died in infancy.
mixed equally with other Chinese and with European children. For Chee Dock there were no Masonic lodges, whether Chinese or European; his status as an independent self-funded immigrant and, in particular, his conversion to the Roman Catholic faith ensured that. His family was very inclusive, however, and would become even more so with the new generation in the 1920s. The Nomchong family’s friendship with Quong Tart has been mentioned and, like Quong Tart, the family associated with and befriended other Chinese people in the town, whether Catholic or not. For them, and probably for a few Europeans as well, Chee Dock became over time a respected father or grandfather figure, in keeping with the hierarchical pattern of most Chinese families. Other Chinese men, including his brother, Shong Foon, married European women—perhaps they could afford neither the time nor money to do otherwise.

Another but less prominent Chinese family, the Chuchin, predated the Nomchong’s presence in the Braidwood district. The patriarch, Joseph Chuchin, arrived in the 1850s and married a European woman, Ellen Daley, sometime in that decade. His death certificate states that he was a gardener but this may simply...
reflect the fact that he was living with his son-in-law, a market gardener, at the time. His son, Thomas John Chuchin (senior), married Catherine Herbert in 1880, at which time his occupation was given as a miner in the Araluen area. He was also a member of the local militia. By 1883 the family had moved to Braidwood town, where they lived above their drapery store. In between bearing eleven children, Catherine helped Tom in the shop. Tom also worked for a time as a mailman and later again in the office of his son-in-law, Bill Whittaker. In the 1890s he was an interpreter for Chinese people appearing in the local courts. For a time the couple also ran market gardens on several properties. Braidwood rates data indicate that the family had a number of business and residential premises in Braidwood from the 1890s through to the late 1940s. The Chuchins, like the Nomchongs, were also Roman Catholic adherents, and their children attended the local convent school.

The last example was the Ah You family. The patriarch James Ah You (James Chen Ahyou) arrived in Australia in 1856. He lived at Jembaicumbene until 1874 and then moved to Braidwood town, where he was a storekeeper. He married Annie Elizabeth Lathan (Lillie) and they had ten children. Lillie worked in Nam You's store until the latter's death in 1890. One of their sons, William Cecil Ah You, worked in various jobs, including as a coach driver and assistant storekeeper for the Nomchong family in the early 1900s. Although at least one of his children attended the local convent, he was an adherent of the Church of England and also a treasurer of one of the Lodges, suggesting that he too successfully straddled both racial and religious divides. He married Sarah Jane Bell, a domestic servant in Braidwood, in 1901 and his son, William Charles Ah You, maintained the Nomchong connection by renting his home from them and working as an assistant storekeeper, almost certainly for the Nomchong family.

For all four family groups the transition to accepted membership of the dominant European community was complete by the time of Federation in 1901, and their networks differed little in character to those of White Australians—family, church, personal or business relationships and occasionally civil institutions such as lodges or sporting clubs. The Chinese families were well known and reports of their activities were not unusual in the local press. Accidents to Thomas Chuchin and his family were sympathetically reported, for instance, and the performances of the Nomchong, Chuchin and Ah You children at convent functions were often recounted. By 1900, most remained, like their mining forebears, members of a middling class, although the Nomchongs’ business activities would have probably placed the family in the middle class, akin to the Chinese merchants of Sydney and other capital cities.

Consistent with these transitional developments from restless and anonymous groups to known individuals and settled families was the enhancement of the already benign state of race relations in the Braidwood district. Two instances illustrate this theme. On the occasion of the death of Nam You, a gold miner turned storekeeper, the local press commented in 1890 that he had “won the respect and esteem of everyone for his thoroughly upright dealings and his charitable actions. Whenever there was a case of distress and a subscription was sent round Nam You never failed to respond to the appeal in a most liberal manner”. In his obituary (possibly written by his friend, Quong Tart) the writer referred to an incident which bore testimony to his “meek, patient, faithful character”. His engagement to be
married to a girl from China was “cruelly broken off” by the imposition of colonial immigration restrictions. The writer concluded that it was “a great pity ... that the authorities could not have been induced to stretch a point under the circumstances and allow the young lady to land on our, to the Chinese at any rate, inhospitable shores”. Nam You was buried in the Braidwood cemetery, rather than one of the Chinese cemeteries on the goldfields.  

The final word on the state of race relations in the district comes from an incident surrounding the burial of Shong Foon Nomchong in 1889. A local correspondent decried the alleged disturbance of Shong Foon’s coffin and the removal of money which had been buried with him. He was aghast, proclaiming: “A more barbarous proceeding cannot well be imagined and it is to be sincerely hoped that the wretches who would commit such a horrible act in a Christian community will be brought to justice and made an example.” It was with some relief that the account was found to be exaggerated. The coffin had been lifted and the lid unscrewed, but the money had not been taken. Apparently the coffin was removed because a European had read the Wesleyan burial service over it, supplemented with a soliloquy and prayers. Chee Dock removed and then reburied his brother. The incident may seem trivial; but elsewhere in Australia Chinese burials were rarely commented upon and the degree of empathy expressed for the deceased is very apparent.

The incident is also interesting because it could only have happened to Shong Foon, the sole non-Christian member among the four families discussed. For the others, Christian churches were central in their transition from outsiders to locals. All were either Christian or, in Shong Foon’s case, included a Christian parent in the founding generation, and their children went to religious schools, as far as can be ascertained. Christianity was a universal religion that welcomed all, despite any falling away from the ideal by clergy, missionaries or parishioners. Where Catholic and high Anglican churches were concerned, the emphasis on symbolism, ceremony, incense and religious paraphernalia would have been comfortingly similar to that found in the Chinese temples, just as would have been the ceremonial and mutual aid aspects of the lodges, in the few instances where they were frequented. Local churches and, to a lesser extent, the lodges, were thus open to Chinese settlers and, as noted above, most of those who later prospered in Braidwood took advantage of them.

Religious adherence, in particular, played an important role in facilitating the wider acceptance of these Chinese townsfolk: it allowed them to meet other Braidwood people socially on an equal footing and encouraged them to join in church-sanctioned behaviour like education and charitable work. Chinese people have traditionally regarded education as a source of valuable life skills; while Buddhist charitable work has a long history in China—one actively embraced by fraternal associations as mentioned earlier. The Catholic and, to a lesser extent, Anglican churches in Braidwood provided a way of bridging the cultural divide, and in their educational and charitable activities Braidwood Chinese found a ready means of crossing that bridge by acting in ways well accepted in both Chinese and White Australian society (although educational participation was probably less important for most rural European Australians at the time than the philanthropic gestures by Chinese settlers so often acclaimed in the local press). Finally, the churches also provided their Chinese members with one of the most important services previously offered by the temples and fraternities, a service that helped smooth the multi-generational transition from immigrant outsiders to Chinese

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111 Braidwood Dispatch, 29 Nov 1890. In 1893 the editor railed against the lack of even-handedness by the law in dealing with Chinese and European gamblers in Sydney. Braidwood Dispatch, 18 Oct 1893.

Australians. Christian cemeteries allowed believers to be buried with full ceremony in consecrated ground. (See Figure 12 below) With locally-settled descendants available to care for forebears' graves, the old cultural imperative for the exhumation and repatriation of those who had died in the diaspora, one of the main reasons for membership in fraternal associations in previous decades, lost much of its force.

**Figure 12. The Nomchong Family Vault in Braidwood Cemetery (author's image)**

**Conclusion**

Chinese miners in Australia in the mid-to-late nineteenth century were highly organised and their degree of organisation contributed markedly to their success. The broad outlines of these arrangements are well known to historians. Less evident until recently has been the detail of these arrangements and the role of the various fraternal associations. From elsewhere in the Chinese southern diaspora, we know that three main types of organisations were important for the overseas Chinese, secret societies or hui, district associations and kongsis. My research suggests that the organisation of the Chinese miners in Australia had much in common with the latter, but that in the case of NSW’s regional goldfields its role was subsumed by the Hung Men hui, the Heaven and Earth Society. Recent scholarship shows that the hui was very important in regional NSW and probably of more relevance than district associations in the daily lives of Chinese people. The problem for historians is the lack of explicit primary sources on these organisations. That they existed is, however, clear; and the task of deconstructing Chinese society on specific goldfields to further identify their presence, if only through inference as in many of my examples, still awaits the curious historian.

Where Braidwood is concerned, its long involvement with Chinese people is now obvious. From the late 1850s to the early 1870, Chinese miners, merchants and market gardeners played a central role in the economic life of the area. By the late 1870s falling gold yields, drought and dwindling Chinese population were
combining to destroy the former functional basis of local Chinese society, the fraternal organisation. However, by then a growing number of Chinese men were starting to show how locally-settled Chinese might straddle the two cultures, by taking European or Catholic wives and identifying themselves or their children with the local Christian establishment. In so doing they paved the way for others to follow. Chinese people increasingly moved into the European settlements, where their active engagement in local life, from mounting court cases to attending race meetings through to supporting school functions, caused most European residents to see them as individuals rather than as part of an anonymous and amorphous mass. Family relations and personal networks centred on the patriarchs became the organising structure for Chinese life, along with membership of religious and civic institutions that either contained European members or, like Masonic lodges, had direct European equivalents. As my article has shown, Braidwood and its goldfields provide an excellent example of how Chinese could make the transition in rural NSW from restless outsiders to settled locals, in effect to Chinese Australians.

In 2004 I queried how well we really understood the Chinese experience on the Australian goldfields and referred to Andrew Markus’s comment from over twenty years ago—that we need to be more curious and to allow for alternate interpretations.113 This curiosity can be usefully channelled into a closer look at the role of the Chinese fraternal organisations on the goldfields; but equally, this focus should not lead us to imagine that Chinese experience in later-nineteenth-century rural NSW can be simply summed up by reference to economic activities like gold mining, commerce and market gardening alone. Rather, it is better to take a wider view and to see their lives in terms of a transition from one mode of social and economic organisation to another, a transition in which relationships with Europeans and European institutions played a vital role. The lives of Quong Tart, the Nomchongs and other local Chinese families, who collectively played such an integral and significant role in Braidwood’s past over nearly a century, reveal that a far greater and more nuanced range of experiences occurred. The recent heritage study has shed new light on the lives of these people, and I hope this article has helped illuminate their stories.

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113 McGowan, “Chinese on the Braidwood Goldfields”: 58.