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Maxine Darnell

THE CHINESE LABOUR TRADE TO NEW SOUTH WALES, 1783-1853

AN EXPOSITION OF MOTIVES AND OUTCOMES

ABSTRACT

In the early history of New South Wales the theme of labour supply was perhaps the crucial issue in the political economy of the colony's development. With the cessation of transportation to the colony in 1840 the pastoralists again cast their sights on China as a potential source of bonded labour. In 1847 a ship arrived in Sydney harbour carrying 4 indentured Chinese labourers from Hong Kong, the first of a number of experimental importations. The arrival of this ship heralded the beginning of a trade in Chinese labourers to the colony that was to peak with the arrival of 1430 labourers during the first four months of 1852. The proposals and commercial connections necessary for the importations to succeed have a heritage that stretches back to when plans were being formulated in Britain to determine what form the settlement in New South Wales was to assume. The question of introducing Chinese labourers into the colony continued to be promulgated as a solution during periods of labour shortage, at approximately ten year intervals. However, economic and political factors continued to undermine the plans of the importers until 1847. In that year a series of actions and interests converged to present to the pastoralists for the first time in the history of the colony, economic, political and legal power to bring to fruition the earlier plans for the importation of indentured Chinese labourers.

This thesis examines how and why indentured Chinese labourers were suggested for, and then imported into the colony of New South Wales, from when the first suggestions were made, until the trade finished in 1853, stressing the mercantile and familial networks that underlay the whole process. These networks had been important in the establishment and expansion of the pastoral industry in New South Wales and were to prove vital to the successful operation of the trade in Chinese labour. A shift in the political balance within the colony was to undermine the strength of these networks and connections, one result of which was to lead to the cessation of the trade in Chinese labourers as the squatters in the Northern Districts of the colony fought for political and economic independence. Once this independence was gained the same networks were again utilised to acquire another form of servile labour to staff the Northern squatter's vast holdings.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ADB</i>	Australian Dictionary of Biography
<i>AE</i>	Armidale Express
<i>Arm. Bench</i>	Armidale Bench of Magistrates, 30th August 1847-7th November 1854, (UNE A872; original at NSW State Archives 4/5489).
<i>Aust</i>	The Australian
<i>BPP</i>	British Parliamentary Papers.
<i>CO</i>	Colonial Office Records.
<i>CSRVA</i>	Colonial Secretary, Reports of Vessels Arriving, (AO Reels 1274-1280).
<i>DNB</i>	Dictionary of National Biography
<i>Empire</i>	The Empire
<i>GG</i>	New South Wales Government Gazette
<i>HS</i>	Historical Studies (of Australia and New Zealand/ Australia)
<i>HRA</i>	Historical Records of Australia
<i>HRNSW</i>	Historical Records of New South Wales
<i>JLC</i>	Journal of the Legislative Council of New South Wales
<i>JRAHS</i>	Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society
<i>Maitland Court</i>	Maitland Court of Petty Sessions, 22 July 1853-58 March 1854, (NSW State Archives, 4/5541)
<i>MBC</i>	Moreton Bay Courier
<i>MBFP</i>	Moreton Bay Free Press
<i>MJ</i>	Maryland Journal and Cash and Stores Book, May 1850-April 1851, (UNE A1352).
<i>ML</i>	Mitchell Library, Sydney.
<i>ML-Ac</i>	Agricultural Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
<i>MM</i>	Maitland Mercury
<i>NEHRC</i>	New England Historical Resources Centre- University of New England.
<i>NSWLA V&P</i>	New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Votes and Proceedings
<i>NSWLC V&P</i>	New South Wales Legislative Council, Votes and Proceedings
<i>Ollera Papers</i>	Account and Stores Books. Ollera Station, New England, (UNE A103)
<i>PA</i>	The Peoples Advocate and New South Wales Vindicator
<i>PRO</i>	Public Records Office
<i>RTC</i>	Robert Towns and Company Correspondence, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
<i>SMH</i>	Sydney Morning Herald
<i>Tent. Bench</i>	Tenterfield Bench of Magistrates Bench Books, 15th November 1847- 13th June 1856, (UNE A872; original at NSW State Archives 7/73).
<i>UNE</i>	University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales.
<i>Well. Bench</i>	Wellingrove Bench Book, 1st March 1847-20th May 1856, & 6 May 1856-24 July 1860, (NSW State Archives, 4/5555 & 4/5556, Reel No. 2743).

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