Sojourners & Birds of Passage: Chinese and Italian Migrants in Australia and the United States in Comparative Perspective, 1871-1914

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Abstract
Research of migration and diasporas has usually been done on a national or ethnic basis in isolation. This is especially so for that by Chinese and Italian people to the U.S. and Australia. This paper explores the possible benefits of historical comparison using as an example the return migration links in the histories of the movements of people from China and Italy to the two white settler nations of the U.S. and Australia in the late 19th and early 20th century. The development of patterns of organisation and communication linking families and homelands are compared along family, social, legal, economic, and cultural avenues that include such elements as remittances, chain migration, agents, loans, donations, publications, trade, border restrictions, regular home visits and even the return of the bones of the dead. Impacts on the home villages, the role of those left behind, and inter-generational divergences are also considered. This comparison also leads to considerations of differences in how these two white settler nations treated those on each side of a nominally white/non-white or European/non-European divide. A difference, it is argued, that continues today in how historians of Australia and the United States treat these two diasporas, and which can be better understood, this paper concludes, through comparative analysis.

Introduction

While concepts such as diaspora, transnationalism and mobilities have impacted greatly on migration studies, they tend to encourage a focus on the general, the legal and the political, as opposed to promoting conclusions based on individual lived experiences. This is not to say there are not plenty of histories and other studies based on lived experience but simply that those based on diaspora and transnational concepts have this focus (see Basch 3-9; Curthoys and Lake 5-13; Hui 66-82). Such emphases can lead, among other things, to a neglect of the role of the villages of origins and of those very much involved in the histories (such as families) that did not in fact go anywhere. Those who employ broad concepts such as diaspora often neglect to look at origins in detail, if at all, preferring to begin with those links and movements already established, and with those most prominent in maintaining these links, the minority who are usually merchants or businessmen. Motivations beyond money making or building business networks regularly go unrecognised and much of potential interest overlooked in the emphasis on transnational movement and the connections themselves, rather than on local and family origins and motivations. This can result in 'transnationalism' and 'diasporas' appearing as ends in themselves rather than means to ends that, too often, remain neglected and unexamined (see McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas" 306–337). This article argues that comparative studies are needed to help identify limitations in these otherwise excellent and important conceptualisations. By teasing out similarities and differences, origins and motivations that very often develop into transnational flows and imaginaries, foundational narratives of value can perhaps be found within the family or the village rather than only within

business or entrepreneurial histories. They can do this by highlighting, among other things, those who do not enter such flows, as well as those who do, those who enter more reluctantly as time and circumstance dictate, and even those who remain (happily) within their national or non-transnational context.

This article is a unique comparison of the Chinese and Italian Diasporas in the age of High Imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as they relate to both Australia (or its pre-federation colonies) and the United States.[1] One difficulty and of course also an explanation for the scarcity of such comparatives is that few scholars have expertise in two fields. The author's expertise is in Chinese diasporas (Australian and North American) and draws necessarily on secondary sources for the Italian.[2] Such a comparison serves to bring out many similarities and themes for discussion that, despite the obvious geographic and cultural divisions, are of interest in themselves, such as the role of prestige and regional/dialect identity, or the differing mechanisms for maintaining village links, which will be discussed later. In addition, this comparative history also considers differences in how the two white settler nations treated those on each side of a nominally white/non-white or European/non-European divide, a difference that perhaps continues today in how historians of Australia and the United States view these two diasporas.

One white settler nation was an independent republic with imperial ambitions, the other firmly part of the British Empire; one diaspora originated in the declining Qing Empire, the other from a recently united nation with ancient memories of Empire. Such characterisations are significant in providing an overall context for transnational flows, mechanisms of movement and relative political power that help understanding much of their diasporic history. Nevertheless, these characterisations, embedded as they are in concepts of imperialism and global diasporas, can only provide us with an external context of imperial states and global barriers that shape a diaspora but are not themselves motivations or first causes. A comparative view enables a more foundational and motivational perspective to be developed to not only see the obvious (that both diasporas at this time consisted in the main of males from relatively poor and isolated villages traveling to earn income), but also the less obvious. Those remaining in the villages and the continuing links—emotional, psychological and material—with those villages are also essential to understanding how diasporas evolve along with the racist, legal, economic and other influences.

A focus on family and villages is significant because many analyses of diasporas and transnationalisms focus on flows and networks, skirting or neglecting the origins of diasporas and the personal or family motivations for the transnational flows they describe (see Hui 66-82; McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas" 306–337).[3] These are origins found geographically in villages of the originating regions and, it is suggested here, even more importantly in what can be termed the psychological aspect—motivations. Too often diasporas and transnationalisms are seemingly assumed to be ends in themselves, the intentional result of a history that is not fully articulated or even understood (see Basch 3-9; Curthoys and Lake 5-13). By contrast, a comparative approach can be said to consider "specific exchanges, interactions, and connections that cut across national borders without ignoring what state actors

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[1] An early study of Italian migration describes Italians as the "Chinese of Europe" (Foerster 422).
[2] Here the analysis of Chinese-Australian history is intentionally limited to balance the unavoidable limitations of the Italian-Australian. Justified I argue by the value of the comparative itself as opposed to another in-depth analysis of either field seeking to add something new to each separately.
[3] Of course, family histories generally neglect the flows.

do and what matters about what they say" while helping "identify unexpected points of congruence and similarities of discourse in seemingly disparate sites" (Stoler 40).

It is suggested here that diasporas and transnationalisms are, from the perspective of their founding motivations and origins, results, and very often unintended results. It can further be argued that from a family or village motivational perspective, settling (the focus of national historians), can be seen as a failure of original intent, and that it is a change of original intention that creates a diaspora or establishes transnational links. It is the change of mind by a gradually increasing number by which a diaspora evolves. This is an evolution whose historical origins can only be understood with an adequate foundational narrative, so often missing from accounts that regard transnationalism itself as an adequate historical framework. This drilling down to discern the essential foundations of a diaspora enabled by comparative analysis allows a more thorough understanding of motivations and origins to be achieved. Individuals, families, and villages involved in the first movement of peoples can be viewed on their own terms rather than through the lens of a subsequent evolution of a diaspora or identification of an historic flow of transnational linkages. A comparison of diasporas helps to bring out their essential features, allowing what is unique to each to be better distinguished. In addition, it may be possible to better understand what we mean by the term diaspora or transnationalism, and perhaps work towards definitions that do not only seem to fit the specific group one happens to be investigating. Regarding the migration histories of the Chinese and Italians, one reason these two in particular make for an interesting comparison is, at least in the period under discussion, that they can be said to represent an extreme example of 'return migration' which best allows these aspects to be discerned.[4]

This paper is arranged in three parts. The first section is a comparative overview of Chinese and Italian return migration to Australia and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This is followed by an analysis of how these two white settler nations responded to these two migrating groups. The final section discusses how the histories have been responded to in modern times.

Chinese/Italian (Zhongshan/Valtellina) peoples: Australia/United States
In Australia, the basic figures for Chinese and Italian peoples are clear. In the period from roughly 1876 through to 1918 some 35,000 people from China and some 18,200 from Italy came to either the various colonies on the Australian continent or to the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia after 1901 (Cecilia 65; Choi 42, Table 3.1). In the case of both groups the majority came from very specific areas of their respective nation or empire. For the Chinese nearly all came from the Pearl River Delta region near Hong Kong, and in fact from just a handful of counties (eight of 100) of the province of Guangdong. Slightly more diverse regionally, though not perhaps in terms of dialects, more than half of the Italians before 1900 nevertheless came from the small northern region of Valtellina (Templeton 2-3).

In the case of both groups these post-1870 arrivals had been preceded by significant groups that set up the largely chain migration that followed, and which kept the focus on those regions of origin already mentioned. Thus, in the years leading up to 1870 a number of features in the migration of Chinese and Italians to the then Australian colonies are apparent. These are their beginnings in the gold rushes of the 1850s and a close link with shipping, resulting in the first

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[4] Also 'circular migration' in which people travel back and forth between locations. Though the consistent pressure to label locations 'destinations' and 'origins' is one reason why terminology here is kept vague to allow the history and those who lived it to voice their own choices, if any.

movement of peoples from a relatively small region. The Pearl River Delta counties of Zhongshan and Taishan for those of China due to their proximity to the newly established British port on Hong Kong island. In the case of Italy, Sondrio province of Lombardy, also known as Valtellina, due to their close connections with Switzerland and through this to the port of Hamburg (Williams, *Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta Qiaoxiang* 257-282; Cecilia 49). A major difference at this time, however, was scale, with the Chinese numbering in the tens of thousands coming to the various Australian goldfields in the 1850s and 1860s, while the Italians numbered in the hundreds at most.

After 1870 the numbers from Italy began to climb, with family and chain migration ensuring that most of those arriving to Australia continued to be from the Valtellina, but from a broader range to the United States. Those migrating to San Francisco came largely from Genoa, Lucca, Cosenza, and Palermo, as well as, in smaller part, from Valtellina. Like those from Valtellina, their movement began as an internal migration (the Italian peninsula, or internal to Europe at least) before becoming a mass overseas migration in the 1880s with earning the capacity to buy land a key motivating factor. The family was the vehicle of decision-making, with some members remaining in the village, some returning, and in the next generation some being required to migrate again. In this period the shipping companies advertised San Francisco as the 'Italy of the West,' with 1,600 in 1870; 2,500 in 1880; 5,200 in 1890; 8,000 in 1900; and from 1900 to 1924 with 20,000 Italians moving to this city on the west coast of the American continent. While the general Italian immigration to the United States began as one from northern Italy, it was predominantly from southern part by 1910, though in San Francisco, the northern predominance remained at 60%. As with those in Australia, returns to the villages were high and in 1904, 9 out of 10 migrants were reported to have returned, while in 1908, there were more returned than arrived, and from 1912 to 1915, 60% returned (Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco* 47).

Those Italians who settled in Australia did so mostly in northern Queensland and Western Australia. Meanwhile a final gold rush on the Palmer River in northern Queensland in 1877 ensured that large numbers of Chinese people also arrived around this time, many of whom settled in Queensland and New South Wales once this short-lived gold rush ended. Similarly, in the United States, Chinese arrivals in California from the 1850s were greater than Italian migrants to the east coast, though numbers there were beginning to increase by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1891 the then still separate colony of Queensland sponsored 300 Italians to settle on the north Queensland sugar cane fields and this spurred Italian migration into this area even further (see Douglas 51-59).

Restriction acts of the 1880s in both the United States and the main Australian colonies specifically targeting Chinese migrants reduced the numbers of Chinese arrivals, with the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act of the newly federated Australia limiting new arrivals more (Williams, "Anglo-Saxonizing Machines" 22-33). In the United States, Italian arrivals by 1900 reached the hundreds of thousands, largely from southern Italy, though numbers to Australia remained modest. By 1914 the numbers of Chinese people in Australia had passed their peak and were soon to commence a rapid decline, while Italian numbers continued to grow, though in Australia they did not match those of Chinese people in the nineteenth century until after the Second World War.

While people from small Chinese or Italian villages of the nineteenth century would appear to be widely differing groups, in fact there are a great many similarities in both their origins, intentions and behaviour once they have left their villages, including their tendency to return to

those villages and their reasons for doing so. The tendency of immigration officials to focus on inward numbers and to neglect outward makes indirect calculations necessary, but the high rate of return among Italians in the early twentieth century can be seen in figures showing that the overall Italian population in Australia increased by only 1,000 despite the entry of 8,000 people in the period from 1901 to 1911. Chinese returns were also high and can be calculated as at least 60% (Borrie 50; Williams, *Returning Home with Glory* 44).

At this period both groups can be characterized as the return labour migration of peasants from small, cash poor villages for whom land and family were of prime importance (Borrie 50-52; Williams, "Brief Sojourn" 11-23). This overall situation meant that for both groups this was a migration of largely working age males who were sent out by their families to travel with the intention of earning an income not otherwise available and of sending any money thus earned home to families. Families who in turn would use it to survive in the first instance, and then if possible, to expand the family fortunes, most often in the purchase of land connected with the village of origin (Cecilia 50; Templeton 17-18; Chen Ta, *Chinese Migrations* 82-85). Australia and the United States were largely seen by both groups initially as a source of income only, from which the majority would return to re-join their families in the villages.

Women, despite few coming in this period to Australia or the United States, played a significant role in this movement, becoming *de facto* heads of families and controllers of land and money, with many family and social ramifications. The ratio of men to women in 1911 among Italians in Australia for example was 4.7 to 1, while some 75% of Chinese men were married to women who remained in the Pearl River Delta villages (Borrie 52; Williams, "Brief Sojourn" 16). The men, sons, husbands, and fathers would communicate via letters in which instructions as to how to spend the money they were earning dominated over other information (Templeton ix; Williams, "In the Tang Mountains" 92-93). Letter writing was the prime means of communication, something which Chinese people developed over time into a sophisticated system of scribes, interlinked businesses, and local delivery. On the other hand, in 1911 it was reported that for Italians it was difficult to find someone to write a letter (Cresciani, "Italian Immigrants in Australia" 40; Williams, "Brief Sojourn" 15). For both groups after several years, perhaps from 5 to 10, a first return would be made to the villages, but rarely would this be the last, with a number of trips to work again for a period of years likely (Templeton 17; Williams, *Returning Home with Glory* 99). A significant difference existed for many Italians on the east coast of the United States, whose relative proximity to Europe allowed for much quicker returns. Some workers even returned seasonally between summers working in New York and winters at home.[5] This naturally was not the case for those travelling to San Francisco who, like those in Australia, returned to their home villages only after a period of years.

An important context of the travels and return migrations of both Chinese and Italian groups to keep in mind is that trips to Queensland, San Francisco or elsewhere were usually part of a wider network of travels, travellers and transmitted earnings that extended family members and fellow villagers all participated in. Thus, Italian fellow villagers and family members would also likely be away or returning from destinations in Europe and the Americas, while the Chinese would travel from many locations around the Pacific, such as San Francisco, Hawaii, Mexico or Peru, as well as throughout South-East Asia (Baldassar and Pesman, *From Paesani to Global Italians* 23-24; Williams, "Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta Qiaoxiang" 257-282). The villages of the Valtellina, the *mezzogiorno* or the Pearl River Delta were therefore part of global networks of income and labour migration that included many parts of the globe

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[5] It is these Italians particularly to whom the phrase 'Birds of Passage' was applied.

and which also had a history dating from well before the period discussed here—often well before the modern era.[6]

As time and generations passed, the villages of origin in both Italy and China evolved into centres of consumerism with local families becoming dependent upon the remittances they received while generally failing to use them to generate incomes in the villages, which remained poor agricultural centres. As dependence on distant vulnerable incomes grew and the purchasing of land failed to transform the economic circumstances of most, family tension was another common outcome. Such family tensions were often increased by such aspects as fathers and sons, or wives and husbands, failing to come to terms with the very changes their patterns of movement and income generated while separated once they were again together (Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration* 206-212; Williams, "In the Tang Mountains" 106-107; Liu, "Sex Scandals" 145-158).

These similarities outlined above between peoples from cultures as distinctive and unconnected as the Chinese and Italian help to illustrate what can be described as characteristic or generic to labour migration. As useful as this is, it is perhaps from the differences that we can learn even more. One such difference was in the simple scale of the movement. Until the great increase in Italian movement to the United States in the late nineteenth century, the greater numbers of Chinese people were sufficiently high to allow a business elite to develop that sustained commercial networks not only around Australia but also back in Hong Kong and China, as well as in other Pacific locations, such as Hawaii and San Francisco (Loy-Wilson 407-424). Similarly, in North America Chinese business networks developed with San Francisco as the largest centre, also with similar links through Hong Kong back to the Pearl River Delta villages. One illustration of this commercial and business success is newspapers. Chinese language newspapers were successfully established and ran from the 1890s through to the 1930s, filled with advertisements from both Chinese and non-Chinese businesses (Kuo 257-284).[7] Italian language newspapers were also established but with their much smaller readership bases and lacking commercial links with the wider community these were short-lived, inspired by the political ideals of a minority and unable to become economically viable (Cresciani, *Australia, the Australians and the Italian Migration* 42).

The political dimension of the Chinese in both Australia and North America was also very much greater than among the Italian migrants in either location until the beginning of the First World War. Anti-Qing sentiment, always stronger in the Cantonese-speaking south of China, and a growing sense that the weakness of the corrupt and tradition bound Imperial government was preventing their development as businessmen in the modern world, led to support for revolutionary leaders such as Sun Yat-sen, himself a member of the Overseas Chinese diaspora (see Fitzgerald). The majority of Italians, on the other hand, were uninterested in the politics of Italy right up until Italy entered the First World War, which saw a return of those willing to volunteer in Italy's armed forces.

On a more individual level a much greater divergence between the Chinese and Italian return migrants seems to have existed in the style and degree of reintegration into village life on a person's permanent return or retirement. Generally speaking, most Chinese returnees seem to have retired to their villages successfully on the basis of community contributions and

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[6] That of the Pearl River Delta can be dated back to the 12th century.

[7] Although published in Sydney and Melbourne, these papers would have been received and read in the Queensland Chinese communities and elsewhere.

willingness to assist in modernisation with minimal resistance from either the traditional elites or those who had remained in the villages. Wealthy returnees often did favour residence in the county capital or even Hong Kong, partly due to fear of bandits and kidnapping (more prevalent at a later period). But even in these locations strong ties were usually maintained with the home villages (Williams, "In the Tang Mountains" 106-107). The return of Italian migrants by contrast seems to have consisted of much more fraught relations, often marked by hostility, suspicion and jealously. The building of show homes to demonstrate wealth rather than community contributions, and a frequent removal of the immediate family to a distant city seems to have prevailed. How accurate this generalisation is to a specific area such as the Valtellina, however, would require further investigation (Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration* 229; Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco* 83-96).

It was essential to the whole enterprise of migration and return carried out by these Chinese and Italian families that they had the capacity to shift significant amounts of money from where it was earned to the villages where their families often anxiously waited. Beginning at an earlier date during the gold rushes of the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese people in Australia and California began with an insecure use of "friends" as couriers before developing an integrated system centred on businesses that developed linked to specific dialects and districts. By the late nineteenth century such businesses, often referred to as Gold Mountain Firms, would carry letters and money to the villages through branches maintained in Queensland, Sydney, San Francisco or Hawaii as well as Hong Kong, county capitals and even in some villages (Sinn 33). In fact, the very success of many businesses around the diaspora was founded on the fees charged to carry remittances (Williams, "In the Tang Mountains" 102).

While Chinese people of the Pearl River Delta developed a self-contained system of their own, Italian people did not or did not have to. Instead, Italian migrants relied at first on friends or specialist agents—*banchista*. These agents ran United States-based banks that linked with the private Italian banking system to send money to the families in the villages as well as utilising the official postal services. After a period of trouble caused by many of these agents' unreliability, the international banking system, which had greatly developed by this period, was used to remit money along with the international postal system to send letters. In fact, it appears the United States government was instrumental in insisting that the Italian government ensure the Bank of Napoli provides this service to its Italian diaspora (Foerster 448; Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration* 130; Choate 78).

To further add to these differences, the Chinese of the Pearl River Delta not only developed their own money and communications system funnelled through Hong Kong to return letters and money, but even to facilitate the bones of their fellows who had died in foreign lands (Williams, "In the Tang Mountains" 93). Further, the Chinese communications system in the early twentieth century also established numerous *qiaokan*, or overseas Chinese magazines, as part of a method of keeping village members while overseas linked and contributing to their community at home (Williams, "In the Tang Mountains" 104). In contrast, Italians, it seems, rarely moved beyond family connections and word-of-mouth in communicating through their networks.

In many ways what has been discussed thus far represents a standard labour migration comparable to later Pilipino, Turkish or many other groups, albeit with some unique features. As with all groups a key feature is that the movement was not designed to establish a diaspora but rather to support family in the village of origin, any resulting diaspora or transnational flows being a result brought about by a change in or even failure of this initial aim. A diaspora, from

this perspective, begins with individuals who choose not to return or who perhaps cannot return or no longer have a reason to return. As time passes, to these are added those who increasingly make the choice to establish families in the various parts of the now growing diaspora, either by bringing wives or by marrying locally. Final decisions not to return are in part generated by a failure to achieve, though return and remittances, the prosperity of the family and villages. This was always an ambivalent endeavour, with the very strategy of maintaining traditional lifestyles through outside resources conflicting with changes to traditional family and social structures inevitably generated through the very outside contacts thus necessitated, as well as by income dependence, consumerism, improved education, and other factors.

Overall, the Chinese of the Pearl River Delta villages can be seen to have organised their return migration enterprise bigger, better, and more intensely than either the Italians or perhaps anyone else. This was a circumstance that was perhaps the result of their greater isolation within the destination societies they were interacting with, along with the fact that at this period the diaspora was a very regional phenomena within China, creating a 'Cantonese Pacific' at this time (see Yu 393-414.). While for the Italians of the Valtellina and other Italian regions it was possible, despite their dialect and regional loyalties, to link into Italian-wide and even European-wide networks rather than needing to invent and develop their own.

Reactions of the White Settler Nations
In this period the two groups, Italian and Chinese, were generating reactions in the two white settler nations that were their destinations. The racist and discriminatory environment of the white settler nations is a well-researched field, but one usually dealt with from either a 'white' perspective or a 'victim' one in isolation, while comparisons of cultural groups as widely separated as the Italian and Chinese are even rarer. In this case, Chinese people found themselves increasingly restricted by a growing sense in each nation-state of being 'European' or 'White' while the Italians, in the period discussed here at least, also found resistance and hostility but to a lesser extent due to their being perceived as sharing European origins to a degree. Having characterised Australia, its constituent colonies, and the United States as white settler states, the distinction between Italian or Chinese as European or non-European is unsurprisingly of some significance. Their distinction as white and non-white, however, is more problematic. It is also important to remember that labels such as 'Chinese' and 'Italian' were not necessarily ones used or recognised by the people given such labels either then or now.

For the Australian colonies and the new Commonwealth, efforts to control entry was hampered and manipulated by a British government intent on free trade within the Empire, including the free movement of people. In 1883, for example, a commercial treaty between Britain and Italy was signed, allowing Italian subjects freedom of entry, travel and residence; the right to acquire and own property; and to carry on business activities. Similar agreements with the Chinese Empire and Japan led to pressure on the colonial and the new Australian government after 1901 that resulted in immigration restrictions being based upon an 'Education Test' (a legal fraud designed to be impassable, later referred to as the Dictation Test) that avoided naming any race or nationality. It was this failure to mention any group (the Labor Party wished to specify 'an aboriginal native of Asia, Africa, or of the Pacific islands') that brought all Europeans, including Italians and even the British within the possibility of being restricted entry for the first time (see York 27-36).

Chinese people represented not merely a non-white element in a developing white settler image within Australia but also a perceived threat from low-waged labour to a developing ideal of a workingman's paradise. For this reason, the new trade union based in the Labour Party, which

held the balance of power in the first Australian Parliament in 1901, was keen to ensure only the 'right' kind of workers arrived. This resulted in a no-contracts provision also being included in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, a provision that not only could but did impact on workers of European background, including Italian and even British workers on occasions (see Layman 25-52).

In the United States the situation for Chinese people was more complex, with California playing a similar role to Australia within the British Empire as a distant province to the 'imperial' authorities on the East Coast. Chinese people largely impacted only on the West coast around San Francisco, and so, broadly speaking, the Californian response was similar to that of the white settlers of the Australian colonies. Also, just as the Australians needed to compromise with the British Imperial Government to achieve its restrictions, so too did the Californians need to compromise with its Federal Government, a government also more interested in trade and intergovernmental links than in local population control. The compromise in the United States was a nominal restriction specifically aimed at and naming Chinese people, but one that distinguished on the basis of occupation. That is, it restricted 'labourers' while allowing those classed as 'merchants' entry rights. These accompanying loopholes, along with differing definitions of inherited citizenship made for a very different interaction than in Australia in the early years of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, in both Australia and the United States, Chinese numbers declined in the early years of the twentieth century (see Williams, "Anglo-Saxonizing Machines" 23-33).

While seemingly purely racial restrictions, in both the United States and Australia the element of labour competition was also a strong part of the mix. Chinese people had increasingly represented not merely a non-white element in a developing white settler image but also a perceived cheap labour threat. However, while both Chinese and Italian peoples represent a return migration in this period, this was only recognised (and condemned) in the case of the Chinese at the time. Instead, hostility or acceptance of Italians was based mainly on their perception as workers: cheap and contracted, or free and equal. However, despite always being seen as Europeans, they were not always seen as 'white,' with Italians from Calabria and Sicily providing the stereotype of the 'dark' Italian, despite people from the north actually predominating in this period. With the threat from Chinese workers seemingly taken care of, Italians began to replace them as the least desirable of worker immigrants in Australian eyes. Though a similar attitude was taken with other Europeans such as Greeks, Italians in this period were the more visible (see Piperoglou).

As Italians in Australia became the least desirable of a narrower, European-only migration, in the United States Italians arrived in much larger numbers, along with peoples from a wider variety of Eastern European countries which the white settlers of the United States found even more unsettling. Nevertheless, despite discrimination, it was not until 1924 that the United States began to impose major restrictions on European migration, including that from Italy. In San Francisco, the Italian population was not large and was part of an ethnic mix that often saw Irish people the target of prejudice and discrimination, especially over labour issues.

In Australia, the overlap of racial and labour issues occurred early under the new 'non-discriminatory' Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. Although not on contracts, Italian workers were perceived as cheaper and harder workers, and with the threat from Chinese workers seemingly taken care of, Italians began to be targeted as the least desirable of worker immigrants. When 20 Italian workers attempted to land at Perth, officials desired to restrict their entry due to the perception of these workers as cheap labour and found that their best or

perhaps only instrument for doing so was the new Dictation Test. The Dictation Test was not applied, however, on the basis of a telegram from Prime Minister Barton stating it was not the intention that the test be used on Europeans, as "the Prime Minister had stated in the House on Friday that he did not think it was intended by Parliament or desired by the country that persons of European races should be subject to the test unless there was some specific reason for their exclusion" (*The Advertiser* 5). Despite Barton's words, the Dictation Test was applied to Italians and other Europeans on occasions, and in the 1920s Britain negotiated a limiting arrangement with Italy, in part through fear that United States quota restrictions begun in 1924 would see a shifting of people to Australia who otherwise would have gone to the United States.

Thus, members of the Chinese and Italian diasporas received differing treatments from the two white settler nations, though not as different as their white or non-white characterisations might lead one to expect. In Australia, the efforts to restrict Chinese people were more thorough, while Chinese people in the United States were treated in some ways less harshly due to merchant exemptions and the existence of more loopholes. The Italians, while subject to some hostility, were generally present in smaller numbers in Australia and California, and more subsumed in a southern European migration debate on the east coast of America.

Reactions by Historians

Just as reactions to Chinese and Italian people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Australia and the United States varied, so too clear distinctions can be discerned in their treatment by historians. Most obvious is the tendency to ignore or discount return migration as an element in the history. This failure to see return as a core element is common in 'nation-state' historians' focus on white settler nations as final destinations in one-way immigration, often incorporating 'from poverty to riches' or 'from oppression to freedom' themes. Even such excellent histories as those by Fitzgerald (*Big White Lie*, 2007) and Kuo (*The Making of Chinese Australia* 2013), which do acknowledge ongoing connections with China locations, nevertheless focus entirely on activities within Australia. To some extent, the transnational and diaspora perspectives that developed in the late twentieth century have helped break down these limited views, but general migrant histories and popular histories in Australia and the United States remain wedded to themes of migration struggles and acceptance.

The issue is not that the histories of Chinese and Italians in Australia or America are not excellent histories that contribute much to our understanding. It is rather the fact that the overwhelming focus is on the Chinese or Italians in Australia or America and this, as has been argued here, potentially leaves out a great deal. An endless list of studies that do not address these questions could be cited. Some illustrative examples include Stephen Castles writing on Italians in Australia for a journal of transnational studies, who nevertheless discusses his subject entirely in terms of how Italians are impacting on and being impacted by multiculturalism in Australia (see Castles 45-66). Similarly, Gianfranco Cresdani declares that "to write about migration history means to span over the history of two countries," yet he makes little or no mention of villages, dialects, regions or, in fact, return, as his "two countries" is sufficiently encompassed at the nation-state level (see Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*). In a final example from Australia from a history focusing on the same period discussed here and especially mentioning "Italian Imperialism" only talks in terms of national governments and policies with no individual voices, motivations or distinctions given beyond that at the level of the nation-state (see Dewhirst 23–47).

Similar examples can be even more readily found coming from the United States. Thus, the grandly named *The Italian American Experience an Encyclopedia* (2000) edited by LaGumina

et al. manages to mention "return migration" in only two pages out of some 600. Even oral history cannot save the situation as in both Italian American and Chinese American examples it is mostly about the questions asked (see Del Giudice; see Lai, Lim and Yung).[8] Him Mark Lai is an outstanding historian of the Chinese in America and his *Becoming Chinese American: A History of Communities and Institutions* (2004) is full of accurate references to the Guangdong origins of most pre-1949 Chinese and the importance of their dialect- and district-based organisations. Nevertheless, the purposes of these organisations in terms of maintaining links with the districts in Guangdong are almost entirely subsumed by their role in dealing with matters in America itself. Perhaps the nationalistic constraints under which American-based scholars operate is best illustrated by Yong Chen who provides an almost desperate balancing act between being Chinese and being American, one which leaves little room for personal or family choices, declaring that it was "reinforced Chineseness that assisted them to reclaim their political rights in the United States as Americans" (Chen Y. 36).

Recent developments in migrantion studies have focused historical research on highlighting (and condemning) past racism and discrimination.[9] But such studies, with a few exceptions, have continued the nation state focus on the past with reactions, attitudes and laws of the dominant group assumed to determine mostly everything, while the motivations of the migrant community once arrived in a destination have been largely neglected (see Balint and Simic). Two exceptions in Chinese Australian historiography are Sophie Loy-Wilson's "Rural Geographies and Chinese Empires: Chinese Shopkeepers and Shop-Life in Australia" (2014) and Christopher Cheng's "Looking Beyond Ruins" (2019). Recent Italian Australian histories do not seem to have any such exceptions. Balint and Simic, while calling for more research on "the diverse ways migrants themselves self-identified and travelled," nevertheless devote most of their paper to bemoaning the difficulty of combing the migrant and the national (Balint and Simic 384).

Assumptions that the response made by the white settler nations of Australia (and its pre-Federation colonies) and the United States to the arrival of people from Italy and China determined much, if not all the development must remain mere assumptions without adequate comparative work both between groups and within groups across locations. One example of how such research can help refine such neglect can be illustrated by an assumption that the relative isolation of the Pearl River Delta Chinese within Australia resulted in more intense inter-community organisations. However, historical analysis of Cantonese sojourner migration going back 200 years before the white settler gold rushes indicates that similar activities had in fact been characteristic of people from this area of China: "… many diasporic or transnational practices that scholars of overseas Chinese identify for the modern era seem closely related to the practises of Cantonese West River migrants in the preceding three centuries" (Miles 242-243).

Despite these changes, in modern migration histories of both the United States and Australia, it is still common to see the migration period characterised as one that comes only well after a colonial or convict period, so that these two national histories continue to tell a story of non-whites or non-English-speaking migrants being allowed entry into an already established 'white' nation, whose originators are rarely or never characterised as migrants themselves.

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[8] For an analysis of the difference between the text constructed via the editors' purposes and the voices of those whose history it was, see Williams, *Returning Home with Glory*, 26-28.
[9] Such as the Australian Migration History Network.

Within this broad context, Chinese Australian, Chinese American, as well as Italian American and Italian Australian histories have often been dealt with quite differently.

In Australia, the history of Italian migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been largely forgotten, overwhelmed by the much larger Italian migration after the Second World War. The earlier migration is sometimes mentioned in passing as a preface to this later migration, or it takes on a minor role in helping illustrate some of the struggles the white settler nation had in defining what it meant to be 'white.' More often this history is left to local or family historians who provide much excellent material, though usually of limited context. An outstanding exception to this is a history of people from Valtellina based on a rare sourcing of letters in Jacqueline Templeton's *From the Mountains to the Bush: Italian Migrants Write Home from Australia, 1860 to 1962* (2003). In the United States, the larger Italian migration was in fact that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and this plays a more prominent role in a similar story of discrimination, racism and efforts to become proud Americans or Italian Americans. Return migration is more recognised in this story, if for no other reason than that it was both so large and so frequent as to be even seasonal at times. The Italians were not the only group to practise return migration and the history of this has been researched and to a degree has been absorbed by general migration histories of the United States.

Compared to the history of Italian migration, Chinese Australian migration has been dealt with in much greater detail but generally does not escape its role as fodder for questions of immigration policy, the White Australia Policy, nation building, racism and, most recently, 'white guilt.' Some research has begun to place Australia's Chinese history within the context of links with Hong Kong, the home villages and with the Pacific (see Loy-Wilson; Cheng). Bagnall draws on similar material but is so Australia-focused that it gives only token acknowledgement to the significance of continuing links with the villages of origin that motivated the travel in the first place (see Bagnall 203–239). Even so, such studies continue to stand in isolation from general migrant histories and national histories that strive to demonstrate how far 'we,' that is, 'white' Australians have come or not come depending on the perspective.

For Chinese American history, a strong Asian American theme continues to emphasise the struggle to become American against racist and immigration barriers. Such themes make it difficult to incorporate any sense of motivation into this migrant history other than that of striving to become 'American.' Not only is return migration little discussed but the very term 'sojourner' continues to be seen as problematic, unlike the equivalent in Italian American history of 'birds of passage.' The most explicit example of this is George Peffer's *If They Don't Bring their Women Here* (1999) where the aims of Chinese people are seen as an "unusually persistent cultural impediment" (Peffer 109). In a more detailed discussion, McKeown argues that this perspective sees all migrants as the same and rejects cultural origins (McKeown, Chinese Migrants Among Ghosts 35-40).

In general, European return migration has received wider acceptance compared to Chinese return migration in the historical discourse of both the United States and Australia. Perhaps this is due to the ease with which 'white' has been able to incorporate all Europeans despite some initial hesitation historically. Links to the home villages become then mere curiosities that do not threaten the national story of struggling masses achieving their freedom in a free land.

Conclusion

This paper has employed a comparative history approach in order to bring out core features of return or labour migration and to distinguish cultural features, as well as to focus better on motivation in understanding the origins of diasporas. The Chinese and Italian diasporas are two examples of a village- and family-oriented people who endeavoured to earn income in localities very distant from their origins. This comparison has begun to assist in understanding and distinguishing what might be characteristic of labour migration in general and what is specific to the circumstances and cultures of those involved. While bones returns and the extensive use of internationally circulated magazines can be seen to be unique to the Chinese diaspora, a varying capacity to reintegrate into the village of origin is also worthy of further consideration and research. Perhaps the most outstanding difference is that greater Chinese isolation and self-reliance seems to have led to a more intense development of the mechanisms of return migration. This aspect is of course related to the variations in treatment of the two migrant groups by these two white settler nations around what was nominally a white/non-white or European/non-European divide. This is a difference that not only continued in the years afterwards but is one that can be seen today in how historians of Australia and the United States treat the Chinese and Italian diasporas. The identification of variations in responses to specific cultural groups, both by host societies and their subsequent historians is one that is also worthy of further research. In general, it can be said that comparative exercises such as this one are useful in challenging certain perspectives. The perception that a diaspora or transnational flows are the result of change, or even of a failure of initial plans, is one that, as has been argued, is of some significance.

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